

# PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY B

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

## Modeling social norms: an integration of the norm-utility approach with beliefs dynamics

Journal:	<i>Philosophical Transactions B</i>
Manuscript ID	RSTB-2023-0027.R1
Article Type:	Review
Date Submitted by the Author:	n/a
Complete List of Authors:	Gavrilets, Sergey; The University of Tennessee Knoxville, Ecol and evol biol plus mathematics Tverskoi, Denis; The University of Tennessee Knoxville, NIMBioS Sánchez, Angel; Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Mathematics
Issue Code (this should have already been entered and appear below the blue box, but please contact the Editorial Office if it is not present):	NORM
Subject:	Behaviour < BIOLOGY, Theoretical Biology < BIOLOGY
Keywords:	behavior, beliefs, mathematical modeling, game theory, social evolution, cultural evolution

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# Modeling social norms: an integration of the norm-utility approach with beliefs dynamics

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September 7, 2023

**Abstract.** We review theoretical approaches for modeling the origin, persistence and change of social norms. The most comprehensive models describe the coevolution of behaviors, personal, descriptive, and injunctive norms while considering influences of various authorities and accounting for cognitive processes and between-individual differences. Models show that social norms can improve individual and group well-being. Under some conditions though deleterious norms can persist in the population through conformity, preference falsification, and pluralistic ignorance. Polarization in behavior and beliefs can be maintained, even when societal advantages of particular behaviors or belief systems over alternatives are clear. Attempts to change social norms can backfire through cognitive processes including cognitive dissonance and psychological reactance. Under some conditions social norms can change rapidly via tipping point dynamics. Norms can be highly susceptible to manipulation, and network structure influences their propagation. Future models should incorporate network structure more thoroughly, explicitly study online norms, consider cultural variations, and be applied to real-world processes.

## 1. Background

In social sciences, most definitions of social norms involve beliefs about what others do and about what they should or should not do. The former are called descriptive norms [1], empirical expectations [2], or folkways (emerging out of routines, such as waiting in line). The latter are termed injunctive norms [1], normative expectations [2], mores (specifying what is moral or unethical), taboos (prohibition of behaviors so strict it results in disgust), prescriptive norms (encouraging positive behavior) and proscriptive norms (discouraging negative behavior) [3]. Such norms exist because of the collective belief in their existence, something akin to self-fulfilling prophecies [4].

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3 Norms vary among families, cultural, ethnic, or religious groups, regions, and countries, and are in-  
4 fluenced by exposure to different situations, leading to different degrees of adherence often described  
5 in terms of societal tightness-looseness [5–8]. Specifically, “tight” cultures display strong norms,  
6 low tolerance for deviance, resistance to innovations, and uniform social conduct, while “loose”  
7 cultures demonstrate more relaxed norms, are more tolerant, and exhibit more diverse conducts.  
8 Importantly, people can incorrectly perceive others’ beliefs, leading to pluralistic ignorance: people  
9 may believe their private thoughts and feelings differ from those of others when in fact they are  
10 not [9–11]. While the two types of norms mentioned above focus on beliefs about others’ actions  
11 and beliefs, personal norms (normative beliefs) describe what individuals believe they themselves  
12 should do. Personal norms can be shaped by an individual’s moral values, often stemming from  
13 considerations about the welfare of others [2, 12, 13], or from their sense of what actions and beliefs  
14 are most appropriate [14, 15]. These norms can also evolve from internalized social norms [16].  
15 Here, we adopt a broad interpretation of personal norms, acknowledging that they can change  
16 over time. Independently of all these details, the ultimate factors explaining the origin, mainte-  
17 nance and diversity of norms are human susceptibility to social influence [17], payoff differences  
18 between behaviors in different environments, and stochasticity involved in the appearance, spread,  
19 and disappearance of behaviors in populations.  
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### 24 (a) Why people follow the norms

25 There are multiple reasons for people to follow social norms [2, 18–22]. Social norms enable indi-  
26 viduals to anticipate others’ behaviors, thus leading to smoother social interactions. In uncertain  
27 situations, people infer latent norms via observation (“when in Rome, do as the Romans do”),  
28 a self-reinforcing process perpetuating these norms. Various factors such as mimicry, desire for  
29 approval, and group identity contribute to norm adherence [23–25]. Individuals may also conform  
30 with others’ perceived beliefs due to perceptual and behavioral constraints or to avoid punishment  
31 of norm violators [2, 19, 21, 26–29]. Norm internalization, where norms are adopted as personal  
32 beliefs and values, also enhances adherence [30–35]. Violation of these internalized norms can cause  
33 psychological discomfort, even when associated with material benefits [36]. Norm internalization  
34 can reduce costs related to information processing and decision-making [35], and help ensure coop-  
35 eration [33, 35]. While the inclination to follow norms is partly innate, specific norms are culturally  
36 influenced [37, 38]. However, personal norms may be disregarded under conditions like high com-  
37 pliance costs. Overall, following social norms is a multifaceted process influenced by individual  
38 cognition, group dynamics, and broader societal factors.  
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### 43 (b) How norms change

44 New norms can emerge in younger generations, driven by a desire for a distinct social identity or  
45 competition for resources with older generations [39–44]. Changes in norms can also be triggered  
46 by fresh information about costs, benefits, or others’ behaviors and beliefs, and by alignment with  
47 authoritative or influential individuals. Normative beliefs can be recalibrated by correcting misper-  
48 ceptions about group behavior and approval. Structural, ecological, historical, economic changes  
49 or specific policies that incentivize or regulate behaviors can impact norms and normative systems  
50 [45]. Education campaigns and communications by cultural or institutional actors can significantly  
51 influence norm changes [46–48]. Social norms can be changed by relatively small groups. As Mar-  
52 garet Mead said, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the  
53 world,” reflecting the potential impact of trendsetters [46] and committed minorities [47, 48] on  
54 norm evolution. Conversely, norms may persist despite environmental shifts, leading to a cultural  
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mismatch [49].

Below, we discuss the forces and factors essential for modeling norm dynamics realistically. Next, we evaluate existing approaches based on how they incorporate these factors. We identify an emerging integrative approach optimal for modeling norm dynamics and review related work. We conclude by outlining general norm dynamics patterns identified by mathematical models.

## 2. Perspectives on modeling social norms

### (a) Forces and factors to account for in models of norm dynamics

There are several crucial factors that must be accounted for in any realistic theory attempting to describe and predict norm dynamics.

#### (i) Decision-making and beliefs

Human beliefs are crucial in decision-making [50, 51] as reflected in what is known in social psychology as the “Thomas’ theorem”: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” [52]. Regarding social norms, there are four elements of decision-making where human beliefs are very important. Firstly, empirical expectations influence our decision-making by affecting our anticipated material payoffs. Secondly, our decisions are also influenced by the psychological well-being derived from conformity, where our behavior is aligned with perceived norms leading to feelings of belonging and acceptance. Therefore, we are more likely to engage in a behavior expected in our group even if it contradicts our personal beliefs or interests. Thirdly, normative expectations can significantly influence decision-making: we avoid actions we think will be disapproved to maintain our social standing. Conversely, we may behave in a way we believe will earn approval, even at personal cost. Lastly, personal norms impact our behavior because they align with our values and self-image. Following them reinforces our self-concept as moral and good individuals, improving our psychological well-being.

#### (ii) Beliefs and attitudes changes

Changes in social norms occur simultaneously with changes in our beliefs about what others do, what others think, and what is right or wrong in different situations [53–59]. Some changes occur gradually over generations, such as the norm regarding gender roles in many societies [60]. Other norms can change relatively quickly [61]. Norm change velocity can also be influenced by the level of consensus about a norm and the connectivity in a society or group [62]. Sometimes, the formation of our beliefs is not driven by conscious reasoning but by subconscious anticipation of their potential effects on others. These others can either reward or chastise us — occasionally promoting baseless beliefs, while sometimes penalizing justified ones [29, 63]. Thus, integrating belief dynamics into theories of social norms is crucial.

#### (iii) Cognitive and psychological processes

Various psychological and cognitive processes influence decision-making and belief dynamics [64]. Cognitive dissonance, the mental discomfort experienced when holding contradictory beliefs, values, or attitudes, can be lessened through behavior changes, new beliefs, or selective memory [65–69]. Social projection, where individuals attribute their own thoughts and feelings to others [70–72], equips individuals with a “theory of mind,” the ability to attribute mental states to oneself

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3 and others [73–76]. Another important process is psychological reactance, where individuals resist  
4 threats to their freedom, leading to oppositional behavior or belief reinforcement [77–79]. Emotions  
5 also influence decision-making: fear promotes avoidance and conformity, and happiness drives be-  
6 haviors with immediate rewards [80–84]. Emotions can both stem from and contribute to cognitive  
7 dissonance, and assist in understanding others’ mental states.  
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#### 10 **(iv) Between-individual differences**

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12 Unique personality traits, cognitive styles, emotional reactions, and social experiences can result in  
13 between-individual differences crucial in decision-making and belief dynamics. For instance, Social  
14 Identity Theory shows that group identification can influence decisions [23, 85], while cognitive  
15 dissonance theory highlights different strategies for resolving conflicting beliefs [65]. The theory  
16 of mind depends on diverse abilities to understand others’ perspectives [73], and social projection  
17 underlines individual tendencies to assume shared beliefs, affecting interpretations of social norms  
18 [72]. Variations in conformity, anticonformity [86], and psychological reactance [77] affect behavior  
19 in the context of social norms. Neglecting these differences leads to inaccurate predictions of  
20 behavior and ineffective behavior promotion. Cultural differences also play a significant role [87].  
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#### 23 **(b) Theoretical approaches for modeling social norms**

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25 There is a very large number of different theories of behavioral change [88] many of which have been  
26 studied using mathematical models. Here we evaluate several approaches most fitting for modeling  
27 social norms dynamics in light of their ability to capture the factors discussed above.  
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#### 30 **(i) Classical and evolutionary game theory models**

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32 Classical non-cooperative game theory relies on utility maximization under perfect rationality of  
33 players [89]. In contrast, evolutionary game theory considers bounded rationality through processes  
34 like myopic best responses or imitation [90]. Social norms are often seen as equilibria in this con-  
35 text [39, 45, 91, 92]. According to North [91, p.821], a norm is “an established and self-reinforcing  
36 pattern of behavior: everyone wants to play their part given the expectation that everyone else  
37 will continue to play theirs. It is, in short, an equilibrium of a game.” Social norms emerge from  
38 interactions impacting individual payoffs and are reinforced by reduced payoffs for deviating behav-  
39 iors, such as miscoordination costs or punishment by peers or institutions [39, 90]. In evolutionary  
40 game theory, norms can undergo abrupt shifts (tipping) rather than gradual changes. Multiple  
41 equilibria are common, resulting in local populations conforming to different norms, maintaining  
42 global diversity [39]. Both classical and evolutionary game theories offer valuable frameworks for  
43 understanding how payoff structures can influence behavior across various scenarios. However,  
44 these theories often overlook normative considerations and psychological factors. Evolutionary  
45 game theory focuses instead on pre-programmed behavioral responses/strategies like cooperation,  
46 defection, or punishment of defectors. Individuals in these models are typically assumed to either  
47 execute specific actions or imitate those with higher payoffs, subject to occasional errors. While  
48 these approaches excel at capturing descriptive norms, they are less adept at addressing injunctive  
49 norms although some models that include punishment mechanisms for free-riders [32, 93, 94] can  
50 be seen as touching on injunctive norms as well.  
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## (ii) Psychological game theory models

Psychological game theory integrates beliefs, emotions, and cognitive biases, improving our understanding of human behavior in strategic situations by recognizing imperfect information and deviations from strict rationality [95–101]. Psychological game theory aims to account for the fact that what you believe others will do or think can actually make you happier or unhappier. For example, a player may experience guilt when he believes that the payoff of his partner is lower than what the partner expected [101]. These beliefs can then influence the player's decision-making. Psychological game theory can indirectly model norms by incorporating psychological factors that can be influenced by them, capturing how social norms shape individual expectations about others and how guilt resulting from norm violations affects behavior. However, existing models focus on anticipated behavior rather than on normative expectations, making injunctive social norms challenging to model [101–103].

## (iii) Social influence models

Social influence mechanisms, such as imitation and conformity with peers, authority figures, or high-status individuals can lead to convergence on shared behaviors, even without precise information about costs and benefits [104, 105]. Convergence can lead to a consensus or to polarized states where multiple norms coexist within a population [48, 104–108]. Norm transmission occurs through imitation and copying within the same generation or across generations. Recent research focuses on how social network structures impact norm dynamics [109–111]. Persistence, tipping, local convergence, and global diversity, observed in evolutionary game theory, are present in social influence models. However, they often oversimplify by neglecting strategic behavior and norm-adherence costs and benefits.

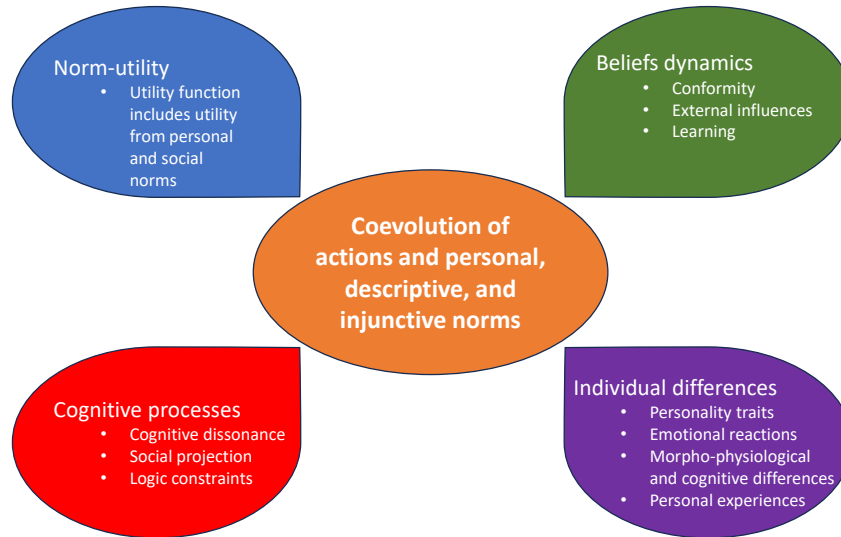
## (iv) Norm-utility models

Norm-utility models, a term not widely used (but see [103]), incorporate adherence to or deviation from social norms into individuals' utility functions [2, 103, 112–114]. Thus, people's decisions are not purely based on material considerations, but also on perceptions of what is appropriate or acceptable in a social group. These models usually represent social norms as rules or expectations about appropriate behavior whose violation leads to a decrease in utility. Thus, behavior that appear irrational in terms of material payoffs becomes rational when the utility from norm adherence is considered. They are particularly useful for analyzing social dilemmas, cooperation, and phenomena where social norms are relevant. However, norm-utility models usually do not consider the changing nature of personal norms or normative expectations.

## (v) The role of beliefs and between-individual differences in models of norm dynamics

The above approaches differ in the role of individual beliefs. Evolutionary game theory embodies beliefs based on expectations about others' behavior, and individuals adopt successful or expected-to-be-successful strategies without having explicit beliefs. In psychological game theory, individuals have beliefs about other players' strategies, intentions, and mental states, influencing their decisions and responses. In social influence models, beliefs refer to individuals' opinions or attitudes influenced by others and are updated based on received information, leading to collective behaviors like consensus or polarization. In norm-utility models, individuals' beliefs about normative behaviors shape their utility from different actions, so changes in beliefs about norms can drive changes in

norm adherence. Regarding between-individual differences, game theoretic models often neglect them except for strategies, while social influence models ignore them except for opinions and positions in the social network. In contrast, between-individual differences are a crucial component of many norm-utility models.



**Figure 1:** An integrative approach to modeling social norms.

Importantly, as we discussed above, beliefs coevolve with actions. Therefore adequately modeling social norms requires considering jointly the dynamics of actions, attitudes (personal norms), and beliefs about others while accounting for cognitive processes and between-individual differences (see Figure 1). This can be achieved by integrating norm-utility approaches with social influence models, as we show in the next section.

### 3. Some specific models of norm dynamics

In this section, we look into the details of specific norm-utility models in some of which decision-making coevolves with norms. Along our discussion, we might occasionally simplify these models, omitting certain components for clarity. We will also modify and streamline notations for ease of understanding and comparison. Even if the original models did not explicitly center on social norms, we aim to interpret their implications and conclusions in that context. In all models we consider, individuals choose the action maximizing the utility function. If belief dynamics are considered, they are usually described by simple linear equations that extend the classical DeGroot model of opinion change [107, 115]. These extended models account for additional factors that influence individual beliefs (e.g., cognitive dissonance, social projection, or authority's messaging), beyond just the opinions of peers. In a few cases, the changes in both actions and beliefs are found by a joint maximization of the utility function with respect to variables describing beliefs dynamics. We will organize the models based on the variables that undergo dynamic changes — whether these are merely actions or also personal norms and beliefs about others. We will discuss modeling



assumptions about factors controlling decision-making (via utility function) and belief dynamics as well as main conclusions. For the purpose of our discussion, we will adopt the following notations:  $x$  for action (behavior),  $y$  for personal norm (intrinsic preference or attitude),  $\tilde{x}$  for first-order belief (empirical expectation),  $\tilde{y}$  for second-order belief (normative expectation),  $\bar{x}$  for (average) observed behavior of peers,  $\pi$  for material payoffs,  $u$  for the utility function. Coefficients  $A_0$ ,  $A_1$ ,  $A_2$ ,  $A_3$ , and  $A_4$  will capture the effects of material factors, personal, descriptive, injunctive norms, and authorities, respectively, on individual decision-making. We will use this notation throughout the paper irrespective of the ones used in the original papers so all models can be meaningfully compared with each other.

The relationships between our main variables  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $\tilde{x}$ ,  $\tilde{y}$  in social dilemmas have been extensively studied through behavioral experiments and heuristic regression models. For example, Fischbacher and Gächter [116] used multiple-round public goods experiments to study the effects of empirical expectations on actions and of observed behavior on normative expectations (see also [117–119]). Bicchieri and Xiao [120] contrasted the effects of empirical and normative expectations in the Dictator game. Other types of social interactions have also been studied [114, 121–124]. Decisions to cooperate strongly depend on whether others are expected to do so [28]. Informing subjects about both peers' actions and beliefs lead to synergistic effects [125]. Empirical and normative expectations can interact with personal norms [126–128]. The effort of authorities can change perceived norms [129]. People can strategically distort their beliefs, including those about norms, to justify self-serving behavior [130–132]. All these findings highlight further the necessity of explicitly modeling the co-evolution of beliefs and decision-making to understand behavior in social dilemmas.

### (a) Early norm-utility models in economics

Early norm-utility models had a significant impact on subsequent research in economics. The pioneering paper by Akerlof [112] modeled complex interactions between laborers and capitalists incorporating consumption, reputation, and action-belief alignment into the utility function. Individuals adhered ( $x = 1$ ) or not ( $x = 0$ ) to a norm, believing ( $y = 1$ ) or not ( $y = 0$ ) in it. A reputational loss proportional to norm supporter frequency ( $\bar{y}$ ) occurs upon norm-breaking. These assumptions lead to the utility function

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_1(1-x)y}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} - \underbrace{A_2(1-x)\bar{y}}_{\text{reputational loss}}, \quad (1)$$

where  $\pi(x)$  is the material payoff resulting from action  $x$  and constant parameters  $A_i$  measure the relative weights of the corresponding factors. Akerlof focused on norms that decrease individual payoffs ( $\pi(1) < \pi(0)$ ). The model predicts heterogeneity in both actions and beliefs with disadvantageous norms persisting because breaking them results in reputation loss. The model also predicts that individuals may adhere to norms even if they personally disagree with them (preference falsification [133]).

Follow-up papers applied this approach to several cases. A model on workplace safety beliefs [134] incorporates fear-induced mental costs into economic modeling, providing insights into the spread of innovations, advertisement influences, social security necessity, and aspects of crime. A crime model [135] showed that cognitive dissonance can influence individuals to choose criminal activities under harsh penalties but dissuades them when penalties are lenient. Akerlof and Kranton [136, 137] modeled situations where individuals optimize utility by selecting effort levels ( $x$ ) and identities ( $y$ ), looking at students who exert effort in academic pursuits and classify themselves into

“leading crowd,” “nerds,” and “burnouts,” each with distinct behavioral norms.

Rabin [138] models the impact of cognitive dissonance on immoral behavior, such as wearing fur, allowing continuous variation in actions ( $x$ ) and moral beliefs ( $y$ ). Individual payoffs  $\pi(x)$  increase with engagement level  $x$ , but excessive levels may be morally unacceptable. If  $x > y$ , cognitive dissonance induced a utility loss  $d(x - y)$ . Maintaining morally wrong beliefs ( $y$ ) also led to a psychic cost ( $c(y)$ ). With these assumptions we have:

$$u(x, y) = \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_1d(x - y)}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} - \underbrace{A_2c(y)}_{\text{cost of holding belief}}. \quad (2)$$

Maximizing the utility function  $u$  by considering simultaneously actions ( $x$ ) and beliefs ( $y$ ), Rabin showed that amplifying aversion to immorality (raising costs  $c$ ) can paradoxically increase immoral behaviors due to cognitive dissonance, where individuals attempt to rationalize immoral behaviors as morally acceptable. When individuals’ beliefs influence one another, heightened immorality discomfort can unwittingly encourage collective rationalization of questionable activities, escalating their prevalence. If individuals are primarily influenced by observable behaviors of others rather than by expressed beliefs, increasing the perceived cost of immorality would lead to a decline in immoral activities.

Bernheim [139] modeled individuals who receive material benefits and utility from the prestige granted to them by others, with actions represented by a continuous variable  $x$ . Individuals differ in the type  $\theta$  specifying the action that produces the highest material payoff. Social interactions are implicit rather than explicit, with the assumption of a universally recognized most prestigious type set at  $\theta = 1$ . Then, we have

$$u(x) = \underbrace{-A_0(x - \theta)^2}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_2(1 - x)^2}_{\text{prestige loss}}. \quad (3)$$

The model reveals that when societal status outweighs individual preferences (large  $A_2$ ), many individuals conform to a uniform behavioral standard, disregarding their own preferences. However, groups with significant variation in individual preferences ( $\theta$ ) can resist conformity. The model clarifies why some activities follow behavioral standards while others do not, provides insights into norm evolution due to preference shifts, and can explain both enduring customs and transient fads. Bénabou and Tirole [140] explored a similar model, limited to two actions, where the prestige of an action increased with its frequency. They identified conditions for two equilibrium states, each represented by the unanimous selection of one action or the other by all individuals involved. A later paper by the same authors [141] allowed for variation between individuals in intrinsic motivation  $y$  to perform a particular action. They used the model to explore the effects of norm-based interventions (such as making descriptive and injunctive norms more salient) aiming to increase the group’s welfare.

## (b) The Rashevsky model

Next we describe two classical models which initially were formulated without a consideration of utility function but nevertheless can be viewed as examples of the norm-utility approach. In contrast to the models discussed above, these two models are dynamic, directly capture conformity with peer behavior, and explicitly account for the difference between individuals in characteristics controlling decision-making. The model developed by Rashevsky [106] was the very first attempt to model the effects of social influences on behavior. [Nicolas Rashevsky is also viewed as the founder

of mathematical biology [142] and cliodynamics [143].] Consider a population of  $N$  individuals who can take two actions:  $x = 0$  and  $x = 1$ . The probability  $P$  of taking action 1 is monotonically increasing with the latent “position” of the individual with regards to these two actions, written as a sum  $y + z$ , where  $y$  is a constant personal attitude which may depend on expected material or immaterial values associated with the actions. The term  $z$  is the net effect of social influence, assumed to be equal for all individuals. Building on a model of neural discrimination between stimuli ([144]), Rashevsky [106] described the dynamics of social influence  $z$  by a differential equation

$$\frac{dz}{dt} = \underbrace{\alpha N[2p(z) - 1]}_{\text{effect of conformity}} - \underbrace{\beta z}_{\text{decay of social influence}}, \quad (4)$$

where  $p(z)$  is the frequencies of behavior 1 in the population. If behavior 1 is more common (i.e.  $p(z) > 0.5$ ), the first term describes an increase in  $z$ , otherwise it describes a decrease in  $z$ . The second term describes the decay of social influence to zero. Constant parameters  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  scale the corresponding rates of change in social influence. The model is completed by specifying the density function of the distribution  $f(y)$  of personal attitudes  $y$  in the population and the function  $P$  converting  $y + z$  into the probability of choosing action  $x = 1$ . Given these two functions,  $p(z) = \int P(y + z)f(y)dy$ .

Rashevsky [106] demonstrated that  $z$  evolves towards an equilibrium, but also that there can be multiple equilibria, hence the final outcome may depend on initial conditions. The population can become “stuck” in a state where a non-preferred behavior or norm is maintained. Rashevsky’s findings underscore the significance of heterogeneity in attitude  $y$  as characterized by function  $f(y)$ . Small parameter changes can induce tipping-point dynamics and sudden shifts in population behavior. Recent studies have utilized this model to examine interactions between identity groups and the effects of identity salience and propaganda on group behavior [145–147].

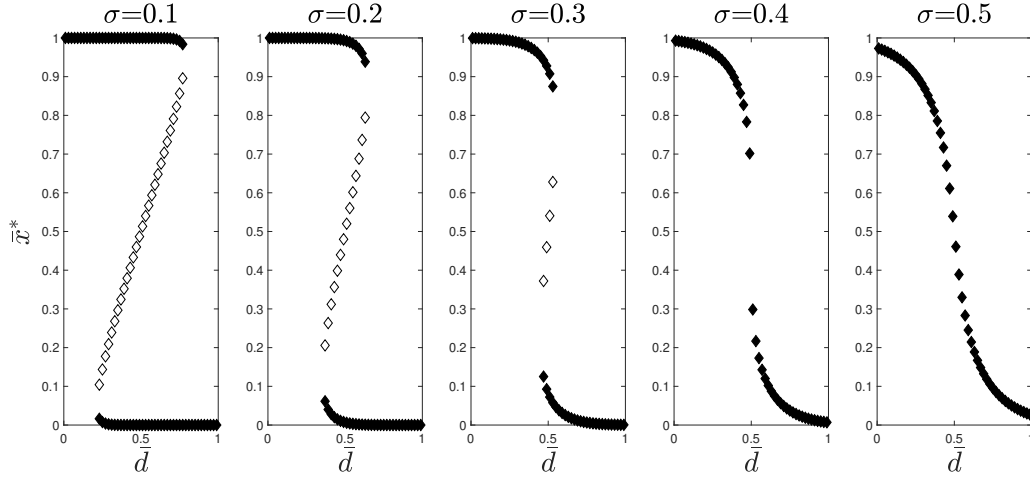
### (c) Granovetter-type models

The model formulated by Granovetter [48] is a generalization of models of spatial segregation developed by [148, 149]. The beauty of Granovetter’s formulation is in its simplicity. The model was introduced within the context of riots or social protests which each individual can join ( $x = 1$ ) or not ( $x = 0$ ) but we can also think about it in terms of other behaviors and norms. Each individual is characterized by a threshold  $d$  such that if the frequency  $\bar{x}$  of others choosing action 1 is larger than  $d$ , the individual does the same. The actual value of  $d$  may depend on the perceived costs and benefits of possible actions, on personality, etc. The cumulative distribution of thresholds  $F$  in the population is assumed to be constant in time. Then if the current frequency of people choosing action 1 is  $\bar{x}_t$ , then for the proportion  $F(\bar{x}_t)$  of the population  $\bar{x}_t$  is larger than their thresholds, so they will choose action 1 as well. This immediately leads to a recurrence equation describing the dynamics of  $\bar{x}$ :

$$\bar{x}_{t+1} = F(\bar{x}_t). \quad (5)$$

It can be shown that, as time increases,  $\bar{x}_t$  converges to an equilibrium. There can be several equilibria  $\bar{x}^*$ , which are given by solutions of the algebraic equation  $\bar{x}^* = F(\bar{x}^*)$ . The Granovetter model can also be formulated in continuous time [150].

To analyse the model in more detail we must specify the cumulative distribution function  $F(d)$ . Figure 2, shows the equilibria when the distribution of thresholds is truncated normal with mean  $\bar{d}$  and variance  $\sigma^2$ . When  $\sigma$  is small while  $\bar{d}$  is intermediate, there are two stable equilibria (close to  $\bar{x} = 0$  and  $\bar{x} = 1$ ) and an unstable equilibrium with intermediate  $\bar{x}$ . In this case, there is



**Figure 2:** Equilibrium values of frequency  $\bar{x}^*$  for the Granovetter model (5) assuming a truncated normal distribution of thresholds with mean  $\bar{d}$  and variance  $\sigma^2$ . Stable equilibria are shown with solid circles; unstable equilibria are shown with open circles.

possibility for a tipping point dynamic when a small change in parameters can cause a dramatic change in the equilibrium frequency of behavior. For example, in the left most figure increasing  $\bar{d}$  beyond approximately 0.77 will cause  $\bar{x}$  to drop from about 1 to about 0 while decreasing  $\bar{d}$  beyond approximately 0.23 will cause  $\bar{x}$  to increase from about 0 to about 1.

Yin [151] contrasted the cases where  $F$  is unimodal or bimodal, with equal or unequal peak values, to assess the effectiveness of interventions in promoting or suppressing mass protests. Efferson et al. [152] considered the effects of changing the distribution from a unimodal to bimodal (e.g., by educating a certain proportion of the population) to eliminate harmful social norms, such as female genital cutting.

Neither Rashevsky nor Granovetter had much to say about the nature of attitudes/thresholds  $y$  which were rather abstract in their models, but they can be linked to psychological factors and forces involved in decision-making. For example, in the model introduced by Kuran [153] individuals suffer moral integrity costs based on the discrepancy between their private attitude  $y$  and the action  $x$  taken, but receive reputational benefits proportional to the frequency of those exhibiting the same behavior. Then the utility function becomes:

$$u(x) = - \underbrace{A_1|x - y|}_{\text{moral integrity cost}} - \underbrace{A_3|x - \bar{x}|}_{\text{reputational benefit}}, \quad (6)$$

In this model, the threshold value of  $\bar{x}$  at which the utility of action ( $x = 1$ ) becomes larger than that of non-action ( $x = 0$ ) is  $d = \frac{A_1 + A_2}{2A_2} - \frac{A_1}{A_2}y$ , so that a larger attitude  $y$  means a smaller threshold  $d$ . Now one can use Eq. (5) to describe the dynamics of the frequency  $\bar{x}_t$  of people participating in mass protest. All conclusions from the original Granovetter model apply here.

Centola et al. [154] studied why people publicly enforce a norm that they secretly wish would go away. In their model, people can privately support ( $y = 1$ ) or oppose ( $y = -1$ ) the norm, comply ( $x = 1$ ) or not ( $x = -1$ ) with the norm, and punish ( $z = 1$ ) norm violators, punish norm-followers ( $z = -1$ ) or do not punish anybody ( $z = 0$ ). Mean values  $\bar{x}$  and  $\bar{z}$  measure the extent of compliance and punishment in the population. At the first step of each round, each individual decides whether

to comply or not with the norm by choosing an action  $x$  maximizing

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_1xy}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} + \underbrace{A_2x\bar{z}}_{\text{social pressure}}. \quad (7a)$$

The first term is maximized if action  $x$  and belief  $y$  match, while the second is maximized when the action complies with the prevailing punishment in the population (i.e. the sign of  $x$  matches that of  $\bar{z}$ ).

At the second step, individuals who acted according to their beliefs at the first stage (i.e. those with  $x = y$ ) can punish people with deviating behavior if the need for enforcement (measured by  $w = (1 - y\bar{x})/2$ ) is sufficiently large. Those who acted against their beliefs because of social pressure, can follow with a “false enforcement”, that is, punish people whose behavior they privately approve if social pressure is strong enough. These assumptions lead to two separate utility functions

$$u(z|x = y) = - \underbrace{cyz}_{\text{cost of punishing}} + \underbrace{A_1wyz}_{\text{personal norm}}, \quad (7b)$$

$$u(z|x = -y) = - \underbrace{(A_1 + c)yz}_{\text{cost of punishing}} + \underbrace{\bar{z}z}_{\text{social pressure}}, \quad (7c)$$

where  $c$  measures the cost of punishing others. Strong conviction (larger  $A_1$ ) promotes true enforcement (equation 7b) and inhibits false enforcement (equation 7c). Centola et al. [154] numerically studied this model on social networks, showing that when interactions between small neighborhoods are limited, a small group can ignite cascades leading to almost universal norm adherence and enforcement. Converting false enforcers into true believers does not stabilize high-compliance equilibrium, but instead can trigger its collapse. Certain network features known for promoting the spread of information, innovations, rumors, and diseases [155], hinder cascades of false enforcement.

Gavrilets [156] examined a model where individuals can adopt traditional or new behaviors. The traditional behavior persists due to its normative status, despite costs. Individuals gain approval or face disapproval based on behavioral alignment with others. Norm-followers have the option to punish norm-violators at a personal cost. The model’s dynamics are defined by two Granovetter-type equations for the frequencies of norm-followers and punishers. The model shows that unpopular norms can persist due to preference falsification, emphasizing the impact of parameters and initial conditions. Changes in the distribution of personal norms can significantly alter norm adherence frequency. Minor parameter adjustments can cause significant societal shifts, and behavior modifications can be achieved by altering costs, normative values, societal expectations, and strategic information dissemination. Gavrilets [156] discusses policy implications in abolishing norms such as footbinding and female genital cutting, reducing college students’ drinking, and promoting pro-environmental behaviors.

McCullen et al. [157] proposed a Granovetter-type model with thresholds being a weighted combination of behavior frequencies across the entire system and the local neighborhood. Their findings emphasize two crucial elements influencing the dynamics: the number of connections a node has with its neighbors, and the network’s transitivity or clustering, that correlates with the neighborhoods of interconnected individuals.

#### (d) Other models of the dynamics of descriptive norms

Norm-utility models in which personal norms/attitudes do not change, predict changes in the average behavior that can be interpreted as a descriptive norm. In the model of Brock and Durlauf

[158], a choice between two competing scientific theories ( $x = 0$ ) or ( $x = 1$ ) is influenced by existing evidence but also by social factors captured by the mean choice  $\bar{x}$  in the population. The utility function is:

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{evidence-based utility}} - \underbrace{A_3(x - \bar{x})^2}_{\text{conformity}} \quad (8)$$

The authors showed that social interactions can lead a community consensus away from that theory which is superior by scientific criteria (i.e., the one that has the highest value of  $\pi$ ).

With two actions, norm following ( $x = 1$ ) and norm-breaking ( $x = 0$ ), López-Pérez [102] defined the utility function as

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_3\bar{x}(1-x)}_{\text{cost of norm-breaking}}, \quad (9)$$

He used his model to offer a norm-based explanation for why many subjects in experimental games cooperate contrary to their material interest, cooperate in a reciprocal manner, and are willing to punish those who behave unkindly.

Azar [159] modeled tipping. Let  $x$  be the tip in percentage of the bill and  $\bar{x}$  the average tip in the previous period. The value of  $\bar{x}$  is viewed as a descriptive norm. Then the utility function is

$$u(x) = \underbrace{-cx}_{\text{material payoff}} + \underbrace{yx}_{\text{moral satisfaction}} - \underbrace{A_3(x - \bar{x})^2}_{\text{social disapproval}}, \quad (10)$$

where  $c$  is the bill size and  $y$  the strength of internalization of the tipping norm. The term  $yx$  captures the positive feelings obtained from tipping. Azar shows that if there are consumers with  $y > 0$  who get moral satisfaction from tipping, tipping norms could stabilize (or even grow infinitely under specific extreme parameter conditions).

Azar [160] modeled workplace norms such as the refereeing time in economics journal. Let  $y$  be the reviewer's personally preferred time given their personal characteristic, how busy they are, their interest in the paper, etc. The utility function is

$$u(x) = - \underbrace{A_1(x - y)^2}_{\text{cost of deviating from } y} - \underbrace{A_2(x - \bar{x})^2}_{\text{conformity with existing norm}}, \quad (11a)$$

where  $\bar{x}$  is the an existing (descriptive) norm. Azar postulated that the norm is given by a weighted average of the norm in the previous period and the average refereeing delay in the previous period

$$\tilde{x}_t = \tilde{x}_{t-1} + \underbrace{\alpha(\bar{x}_{t-1} - \tilde{x}_{t-1})}_{\text{learning from observations}}, \quad (11b)$$

where  $\alpha$  measures the weight of observations in the norm dynamics. Azar showed that the norm that gets established can be larger or smaller than the average preference  $\bar{y}$  of individuals depending on the heterogeneity in the population.

te Velde [161] modeled the effects of social image motivations on decision-making when the population is divided as to what is right. There are two possible meanings of social image: people may signal their adherence to their personal norm, or they may wish for others to approve their choices. Individuals differ in actions  $x$  and personal norms  $y$  and the utility function is

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_1(x - y)^2}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} + \underbrace{A_2F(x, \bar{y})}_{\text{social image utility}}, \quad (12)$$

where the social image term  $F$  depends on the action chosen  $x$  and the distribution of types in the population. te Velde shows how distinct motives for maintaining social image lead to different outcomes in terms of consensus, hypocrisy, compromise, polarization, and destructive posturing. Besides, using social incentives to change behavior may easily backfire if heterogeneous norms, or approval and respect, are conflated. Earlier Brekke et al. [162] studied a similar model but without the last term in equation 12.

Houle et al. [163] studied cooperation and conflict in a society with multiple factions engaged in economic and political interactions. The model considers two interrelated games: an “economic game”, in which agents of identity-based factions and with different political power can cooperate ( $x = 1$ ) or not ( $x = 0$ ) in the production of a resource, and a “political game”, in which individuals devote a fixed proportion of their resources to a competition the results of which establish the rules of the economic game. The utility function is

$$u(x) = - \underbrace{A_0\pi(x)}_{\text{material benefit}} + \underbrace{A_3(2\bar{x} - 1)x}_{\text{conformity with peers}} + \underbrace{A_4x_sx}_{\text{conformity with state}} \quad (13)$$

where  $x_s$  is the action of the most powerful faction (the state). Houle et al. showed that high conformity with the state (large  $A_1$ ) will stabilize cooperation, while high conformity with peers (large  $A_2$ ), can counter-intuitively, destabilize cooperation, because once a majority of low-power factions are defecting, the other factions are ‘pulled’ to defect as well. Houle et al. tested various modeling predictions using social unrest as a proxy for the breakdown of cooperation in society and data covering 75 countries worldwide between 1991 and 2016.

Yang et al. [164] used a game-theoretic model to explore the socio-cultural factors influencing mask-wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The utility of mask-wearing depended on perceived infection risk, strength of the descriptive social norm, institutional signals promoting mask-wearing, and individual sensitivity to these signals. The mask-wearing benefit correlated with the SEIRS infection model’s frequency of infected people. They found that increased pathogen spread or stricter policies could trigger a behavioral cascade, leading to full mask adoption. While cultural tightness can slow initial adoption (because people are more reluctant to modify their behavior), it accelerates adoption once a tipping point is reached, helping establish mask-wearing as a norm. The tighter the culture, the more likely it is that collective mask-wearing will continue, even when the risk of infection decreases and policies are relaxed.

### (e) Dynamics of descriptive and personal norms

An important limitation of most models considered above is that they assume attitudes  $y$  remain constant. Next we discuss models explicitly accounting for the dynamics of attitudes.

Kuran and Sandholm [165] introduced a model of “cultural integration”, in which individuals have personal norms  $y$ , potentially related to their social identity, regarding behavioral acts  $x$ . However, they also benefit from coordinating their actions with others. We can capture these assumptions by an utility function

$$u(x) = - \underbrace{A_0(x - \bar{x})^2}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_1(x - y)^2}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} \quad (14a)$$

With constant personal norms, Kuran and Sandholm [165] show that the equilibrium behaviours of individuals reflect compromises between their own preferences and the need to coordinate with others. Kuran and Sandholm [165] also studied the case when personal norms change, by adapting

the DeGroot model [107] of opinion change:

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = \underbrace{\alpha(x_i^* - y)}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}}. \quad (14b)$$

That is, each agent's personal preference changes over time towards his current "action" to reduce cognitive dissonance. In this case, preferences ( $y$ ) and actions ( $x$ ) converge to the initial mean preference  $\bar{y}_0$ . This convergence can be interpreted as the emergence of a single "melting pot" scenario. Kuran and Sandholm [165] have extended the model to two partially segregated communities, where members have limited interactions with members from the other community. Their analysis focused on the extent of cultural segregation and the efficiency of policies aimed at preserving cultural distinctness or promoting cultural integration. Della Lena and Dindo [166] study different generalizations of the Kuran and Sandholm model.

Martins [167] considered a model in which individuals have a discrete set of alternative actions. Individual attitude/preference is specified by a probability distribution defined over this set. Each individual chooses the action with highest value, which means the utility function coincides with the personal norm. After choosing an action and observing groupmates' behavior, individuals update their personal norm using the Bayes rule. Numerical simulations on a network demonstrated the emergence of extreme personal norms, where individuals believe that one alternative is significantly superior to all others. Clusters consisting of individuals with similar attitudes arose, with central nodes in these clusters representing individuals with extreme personal norms.

Acharya et al. [168] considered strategic interactions between two agents. Utility function accounted for cognitive dissonance, conformity, and a loss of utility due to the deviation of the current personal norm from its initial value. They showed that at the equilibrium, personal norms match actions, and that stronger conformity leads to large deviations from initial personal norms. Their results highlight that interactions between individuals expressing diverse perspectives can facilitate empathetic changes in actions.

Calabuig et al. [169–171] studied the coevolution of actions and personal norms in a linear public goods game with quadratic costs in heterogeneous groups. Both actions ( $x$ ) and personal norms ( $y$ ) are continuous variables. Individuals differ in the efficiencies of their efforts  $s$  and the shares  $v$  of the reward they secure from the good produced. These differences lead to differences in the efforts  $\theta = vs$  maximizing individual material payoff. Individuals are motivated by material payoffs but also prefer to follow their personal norms  $y$ . The utility function is

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0\pi}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{A_1(x - y)^2}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}}. \quad (15a)$$

After choosing an action maximizing utility and observing groupmates' choices, individuals update their personal norms, driven by cognitive dissonance and conformity with groupmates. It is described by a DeGroot-type recurrence equation analogous to equation (14b) above:

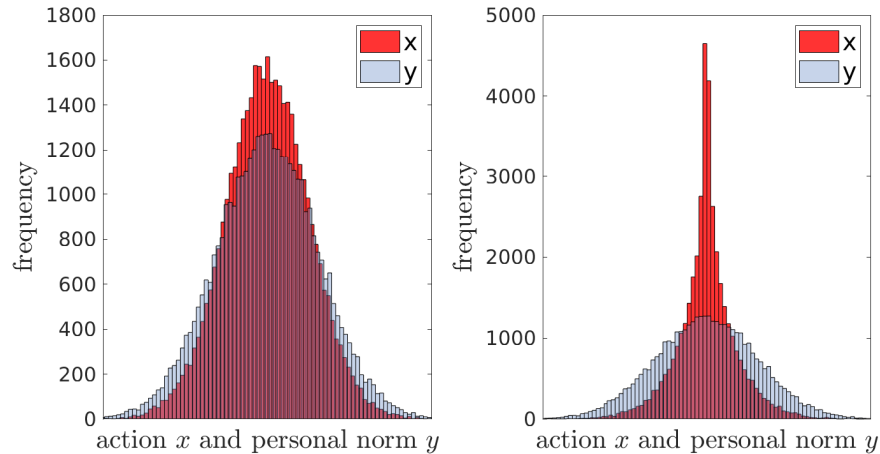
$$y' = y + \underbrace{\alpha(x - y)}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} + \underbrace{\beta(\bar{x} - y)}_{\text{conformity}}, \quad (15b)$$

where  $\bar{x}$  is the average action and  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  measure the weight of the corresponding factors. The model allows for variation in all parameters.

Calabuig et al. [169] show that the population evolves to an equilibrium with the average action  $\bar{x}$  and the average personal norm  $\bar{y}$  matching  $\bar{\theta}$ . At the same time, individuals deviate from the



values  $\theta$  maximizing their payoffs. At equilibrium, the observed variances satisfy the inequalities:  $\text{var}(y) \leq \text{var}(x) \leq \text{var}(\theta)$ . Their results predict that (cultural) variation in personal norms and behavior increases with the variance of skills ( $\text{var}(s)$ ), the average group skill level  $\bar{s}$ , and the variance of the income sharing rule ( $\text{var}(v)$ ). Increasing conformity (i.e. larger  $\beta$ ) decreases this variation while increasing cognitive dissonance (i.e. larger  $\alpha$ ) or the weight of material factors (larger  $A_0$ ) have opposite effects. Figure 3 illustrates that ignoring the fact that personal norms can change can lead to very different predictions about the equilibrium distributions of actions and beliefs.



**Figure 3:** An example of equilibrium distributions of actions and personal norms in the model of [171] without (left) and with (right) evolution in personal norms. All averages are close to  $\bar{\theta}$  but the variance in  $y$  is larger than that in  $x$  on the left but smaller on the right. The distribution of  $\theta$  and the initial distribution of  $y$  are normal with same mean and standard deviations. The distributions of  $A_i, \alpha_i, \beta_i$  are uniform on  $[0, 1]$ . The population size is 40,000.

Calabuig et al. [171] used the above model to study the effects of culture on group productivity. They demonstrated that individualism increases the equilibrium efforts of individuals with above-average revenue and decreases them for those with lower revenues. Conversely, collectivism raises the equilibrium effort of individuals with below-average revenue and reduces it for high earners. In teams with diverse skills, individualism can affect both team revenue and costs depending on specific team parameters. In homogeneous teams, individualism only increases costs, but with unequal revenue sharing, full collectivism maximizes team production. The optimal balance between individualism and collectivism depends on the team's income distribution and skill diversity. Lastly, the team's culture can either amplify or mitigate the changes in skill or income distribution within the team.

Building on earlier work [172], Zino et al. [173] considered two possible actions ( $x = \pm 1$ ), with the attitude  $y$  which can take any value within the range  $[-1, 1]$ . Individuals update their actions and opinions after interacting on a two-layer network. The utility function includes the terms for cognitive dissonance and for material payoffs from coordination with neighbors in the so-called “influence layer”. Attitudes are updated according to a DeGroot-type model weighting communications and observations on the “communication layer”. The model exhibits a range of dynamics: rapid shifts to new sets of beliefs, where the majority adopts an innovation, or development and maintenance of an unpopular norm, where despite overwhelming support for an innovation, individuals fail to embrace it. Under some conditions the community favors the status quo over any innovation.

Mo and Sun [174] extend the above model by introducing an “opinion regulator”, an agent who can communicate with some nodes/individuals affecting their opinions, and “impulsive stimulation”, a periodic reward or punishment for a specific behavior administered to some individuals to promote or inhibit choosing this behavior. Mo and Sun discuss optimal strategies of opinion regulating and impulsive stimulation for shifting behaviors in the population.

Aghbolagh et al. [175] used a similar model but with additional utility function components describing individual prejudices (unchangeable personal norms) and an external influence source. They identify the conditions necessary for the emergence and stability of polarized equilibria, in which the population divides into two factions endorsing and pursuing different courses of action. They also study conditions for pluralistic ignorance, when a social group mistakenly infers the opinions of others based on observed actions.

### (f) Dynamics of actions and descriptive, personal, and injunctive norms

We are aware of only one paper jointly modeling the dynamics of normative ( $\tilde{y}$ ) and empirical ( $\tilde{x}$ ) expectations in addition to actions ( $x$ ) and personal ( $y$ ) norms [176]. Inspired by recent behavioral experiments [119, 123, 126–128, 132], Gavrilets [176] described quantitatively the dynamics of these variables in social dilemmas. Besides social influences by peers, Gavrilets’ model also accounted for the influence by an external authority promoting a particular action  $G$ . Each individual chooses an action  $x$  to maximize the subjective utility function

$$u(x) = \underbrace{A_0 \pi(x, \tilde{x})}_{\text{material payoff}} - \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} A_1 (x - y)^2}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} - \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} A_2 (x - \tilde{y})^2}_{\text{disapproval by peers}} - \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} A_3 (x - \tilde{x})^2}_{\text{conformity w/ peers}} - \underbrace{\frac{1}{2} A_4 (x - G)^2}_{\text{compliance w/ authority}}. \quad (16a)$$

After taking actions and observing groupmates’ behavior, the attitude and beliefs of the individual change as described by the linear deGroot-type recurrence equations:

$$y' = y + \underbrace{\alpha_1 (x - y)}_{\text{cognitive dissonance}} + \underbrace{\beta_1 (X - y)}_{\text{conformity w/ peers}} + \underbrace{\gamma_1 (G - y)}_{\text{compliance w/ authority}}, \quad (16b)$$

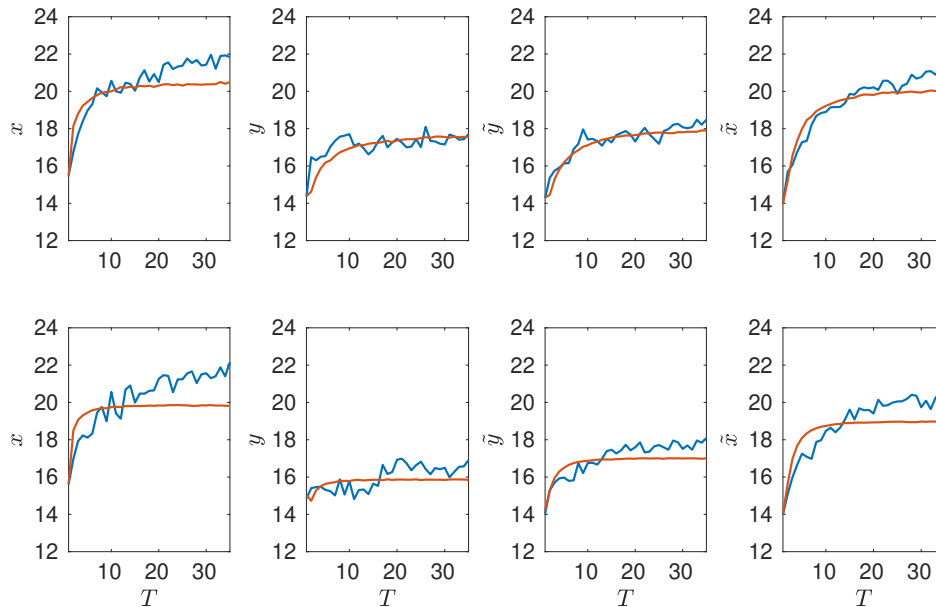
$$\tilde{y}' = \tilde{y} + \underbrace{\alpha_2 (y - \tilde{y})}_{\text{social projection}} + \underbrace{\beta_2 (X - \tilde{y})}_{\text{learning about others}} + \underbrace{\gamma_2 (G - \tilde{y})}_{\text{compliance w/ authority}}, \quad (16c)$$

$$\tilde{x}' = \tilde{x} + \underbrace{\alpha_3 (\tilde{y} - \tilde{x})}_{\text{logic constraints}} + \underbrace{\beta_3 (X - \tilde{x})}_{\text{learning about others}} + \underbrace{\gamma_3 (G - \tilde{x})}_{\text{compliance w/ authority}}, \quad (16d)$$

where prime indicates the next time step,  $X$  is the average action of groupmates observed by the focal individual (so different individuals can have different  $X$ ), and  $\alpha_i, \beta_i, \gamma_i$  are non-negative constant coefficients measuring the strength of the corresponding forces.

Gavrilets [176] examined social interactions characterized by quadratic payoff functions. With no messaging and in the absence of “stubborn” individuals who refuse to change, the population progresses towards a state where the average behavior aligns with behavior maximizing individual material payoffs, in agreement with standard game-theoretic models. On average, individuals develop attitudes and beliefs justifying (or matching) their behaviours. In equilibrium, substantial inter-individual variability exists in all variables, reflecting individual psychological traits. With messaging by an external authority, long-term equilibrium encapsulates a balance of diverse forces, often deviating from game-theoretic predictions. Attempts by an external authority to direct group behavior can trigger an opposing behavior (backfiring effect). Gavrilets [176] also studied

how various factors can affect differences in tightness/looseness of social norms between groups and societies, highlighting societal heterogeneity, societal threats, authority effects, cultural variations in collectivism versus individualism, population size, and subsistence style as significant factors. Tverskoi et al. [177] tested this model using data from a long-term Common Pool Resources experiment without and with messaging promoting group beneficial actions. Figures 4 shows that the match between model-based predictions and observed data is good.



**Figure 4:** Observed (blue) and simulated (red) mean trajectories. The “simulated trajectories” were obtained by repeatedly iterating dynamic equations describing the model using the obtained estimates of parameters and the actual individual data in the first round. Shown are at top: the results with no messaging; shown are at bottom: the results with messaging (after Figure S6 in [177].)

Tverskoi et al. [178] adopted the model developed in [176] to investigate new technology diffusion using a model encompassing individual proficiency in the technology, shifts in attitudes ( $y$ ), and adoption decisions ( $x$ ). The model predicts that early adopters exhibit low dissonance and peer conformity, but are swayed by authority. Also, individualistic societies fare better in early technology adoption, societies with strong normative factors and conformity with authorities promoting new technology achieve high adoption rates, those with high cognitive dissonance resist new technologies, and future-oriented cultures embrace innovations. The dynamic nature of personal norms is crucial for these predictions.

Gavrilets and Richerson [179] simplified the model in [176] to analyze evolution of food sharing in small-scale societies, involvement in political protests, and the impact of priming social identity in behavioral experiments. For each application, their approach provides different (or simpler) explanations of human behavior compared to other methods. Moreover, they precisely determined and characterized the extent of discrepancy between individual actions and attitudes.

### (g) Evolutionary emergence of norm-utility

The various norm-utility models discussed above presume specific non-material utility function components. The emergence of norm-utility has been explored in several studies. Alger and Weibull [180] demonstrated that assortative interaction based on chosen strategies can lead to the evolution of individual utility functions, turning socially optimal behavior into personal norms. Gavrilets and

1  
2  
3 Richerson [181] explored the genetic evolution of the capacity to internalize social norms within  
4 populations undertaking collective actions. This model was expanded by Lozano et al. [182] for  
5 competitive within-group dynamics. Akcay and van Cleve [183] showed that populations engaging  
6 in social interactions could evolve to internalize the necessity to conform to majority behavior.  
7 Kimbrough and colleagues [184, 185] studied the origin of personal norms and normative expect-  
8 tations, accounting for individual differences in consumption utility. They found that injunctive  
9 norms could arise from minimizing overall consumption-related dissatisfaction as agents interact.  
10 If consumption utilities are unknown, personal norms could emerge from minimizing perceived dis-  
11 satisfaction based on beliefs about others' consumption utilities. Normative expectations emerge  
12 as individuals' perceptions of others' personal norms based on current information.  
13  
14  
15

## 16 4. Discussion

17  
18 By integrating norm-utility approaches with belief dynamics, recognizing cognitive forces, account-  
19 ing for individual differences, and considering the role of authority influences, we can effectively  
20 and flexibly model the emergence, persistence, and evolution of social norms. Such models allow  
21 for a rich, multifaceted exploration of the complex coevolution of norms and beliefs over time and  
22 across different spheres of human life.  
23

24 Several general patterns arise from the models discussed above. First, certain behavioral pat-  
25 terns can persist within populations for a long time. These could be some advantageous behaviors,  
26 like cooperation [102, 103, 163, 176, 179], but also behaviors detrimental for individuals' material  
27 well-being or privately disapproved of [112, 139, 154–156]. Mechanisms contributing to the stabil-  
28 ity of such norms include preference falsification (publicly expressing preferences disagreeing with  
29 their true private ones, [133]), pluralistic ignorance (mistakenly believing that one's private beliefs  
30 are in the minority even if they are widely shared, [9–11]), false enforcement (enforcing a norm  
31 privately disapproved of, [154]), or the “spirals of silence” (hesitating to voice dissenting opinions  
32 or divergent behavior, [186]).  
33

34 Psychological and cognitive processes play crucial roles in maintaining and transforming social  
35 norms. Among these processes, cognitive dissonance (and its consequences for behavior and beliefs),  
36 having being widely modeled [112, 135, 138, 154, 161, 165, 168–171, 173, 175, 176, 178], stands  
37 out as a significant factor that can give rise to backfiring effects. Models show that imposing  
38 stricter penalties may surprisingly lead to an increase rather than a decrease in criminal behavior  
39 [135]. Similarly, a heightened public shaming and disapproval of amoral conduct can unexpectedly  
40 contribute to an upsurge of such behavior [138]. People's reactions to messaging and nudging may  
41 steer them in the opposite direction of the intended one, and variations in social projection and  
42 cognitive constraints on beliefs can result in diverse dynamics of actions and preferences [176].  
43

44 Models focusing on descriptive norms assume that people correctly identify them from ob-  
45 servations, i.e., beliefs are correct [106, 158, 160, 163, 169–171, 178]. When interactions happen  
46 on social networks, people have information only about the average behavior among their social  
47 partners [175]. Only a few papers considered that people's empirical expectations can differ from  
48 observed behaviors, and even less models look at the dynamics of injunctive norms [176]. Nev-  
49 ertheless, the models show that incorrect perception of norms will strongly affect group behavior  
50 and belief dynamics. For example, one consequence are self-fulfilling prophecies -predictions that,  
51 by being made, directly or indirectly make themselves true [4]: if it is collectively believed that  
52 some behavior is the norm, individuals are likely to conform to that behavior, thereby making the  
53 prediction true [156, 176].  
54

55 Mathematical models depict dynamics leading to tipping points, where infrequent behavior  
56  
57  
58

1  
2  
3 suddenly becomes widespread. This can happen after a significant shift in external circumstances  
4 (e.g., environmental or political) making a different behavior more advantageous compared to  
5 previous practices. Alternatively, there may be a mass realization that long-held beliefs about  
6 personal circumstances, identity, or perceptions of others are flawed. More intriguingly, situations  
7 leading to tipping points can arise from minute changes. In mathematical models, this requires  
8 the existence of multiple equilibria such as those shown in Figure 2. Alternative behaviors yielding  
9 higher payoffs, strong conformity, or mismatches between high-payoff strategies and authority-  
10 promoted norms promote multiple stable states. The exact conditions for tipping point dynamics  
11 largely depend on model specifics, parameters, and belief distributions within the population.

12  
13 Models predict that polarization in behavior and beliefs can be sustained by differing behavior  
14 payoffs, allowing disparate belief systems to remain stable in the population despite varied societal  
15 advantages [112, 161, 162]. These models highlight how norms and beliefs are susceptible to ma-  
16 nipulation by those with specific agendas. Models also suggest that norms and beliefs are highly  
17 susceptible to manipulation. Individuals or groups with particular agendas may exploit this vulner-  
18 ability, significantly altering shared norms and collective beliefs. Individual and cultural differences  
19 can greatly impact social change dynamics and outcomes [164–166, 169, 171, 176, 178]. Addi-  
20 tionally, the structure of social networks, including individual connections and information flow,  
21 significantly influences the spread of new behaviors and beliefs. Models also stress the importance  
22 of initial conditions, particularly the location of behavior emergence, with some suggesting that  
23 innovations arising on a network’s periphery have a higher success rate.

24  
25 Mathematical models of social norms dynamics provide an invaluable foundation for under-  
26 standing how norms develop and evolve. Extending these approaches is crucial to more accurately  
27 reflect key factors shaping our societies. While cooperation and coordination have been success-  
28 fully modeled using norm-utility approaches, other types of norms may require different methods.  
29 For example, the signaling norm [187] is described by a sequential game for which the norm-  
30 utility approach would not be practical to apply. Punishment of norm violators is pivotal for both  
31 the establishment and preservation of social norms [2, 19, 21, 26–29]. Despite its importance,  
32 there has been relatively scant effort to integrate punishment mechanisms into norm-utility mod-  
33 els [154, 156, 181]. Much of the modeling work on punishment has been conducted within the  
34 framework of evolutionary game theory, where individuals are generally pre-programmed to either  
35 penalize defectors or emulate those with the highest payoffs [32, 93, 94]. Enhancing norm-utility  
36 models to more comprehensively include punishment mechanisms would substantially elevate both  
37 their realism and applicability. We also need to better incorporate network structure, the intricate  
38 web of relationships that influence the propagation of norms [62, 188–190]. We need to address the  
39 emergence of social norms online, and the rise of new cultural authorities in digital spaces [191].  
40 Also, we should account for the evolutionary emergence of differences in the parameters of utility  
41 functions and belief dynamics, considering how different cultural contexts shape individual and  
42 collective values, preferences, and beliefs, and how these differences play out in social norm dynam-  
43 ics. Beyond network structure, intra- and inter-individual forces, and culture, attention should be  
44 paid to how groups, their identities, and between-group relationships are formed and change. In  
45 particular, the feedback loops between identity-linked social norms and forces changing the group  
46 boundaries may also be very important. Finally, we need more detailed and realistic models linked  
47 to tangible real-world processes, such as ecological and environmental shifts, economic fluctuations,  
48 or epidemiological trends. This would enrich our understanding of how rewards and penalties as-  
49 sociated with different behaviors can shape the formation, persistence, and change of social norms.  
50 Such enhanced models of social norm dynamics, if properly validated, parameterized and tested  
51 (e.g. [177]), could more accurately reflect the nuanced and complex reality of human social behavior  
52 and be applied for mitigating various challenges faced by our society [192].

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4 *Competing interests.* The authors declare no competing interests.

5 *Acknowledgments.* We thank D. Garber, M. Lipatov, W. Przepiorka and a reviewer for com-  
6 ments and suggestions.

7  
8 *Funding.* AS was supported by grants PGC2018-098186-B-I00 (BASIC, FEDER/MICINN-  
9 AEI) funded by MCIN/AEI/ 10.13039/501100011033 and by “ERDF A way of making Europe”  
10 and PRACTICO-CM (Comunidad de Madrid). SG was supported by the Office of Naval Research  
11 grant W911NF-17-1-0150, the Air Force Office of Scientific Research grants FA9550-21-1-0217 and  
12 FA9550-22-1-025, and the John Templeton Foundation.

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