

The role of inequity aversion in microloan defaults

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Abstract:

Microcredit—joint liability loans to the poorest of the poor—has been touted as a powerful approach for combatting global poverty. But sustainability varies dramatically across banks. Efforts to improve the sustainability of microcredit have assumed defaults are caused by free-riding. Here, we point out that the *response* of other group members to delinquent groupmates also plays an important role in defaults. Even in the absence of any free-rider problem, some people will be unable to make their payments due to bad luck. It is other group members' unwillingness to pitch in extra – due to, among other things, not wanting to have less than other group members – that leads to default. To support this argument, we utilize the Ultimatum Game (UG), a standard paradigm from behavioral economics for measuring one's aversion to inequitable outcomes. First, we show that country-level variation in microloan default rates is strongly correlated (overall $r = 0.81$) with country-level UG rejection rates, but not free-riding measures. We then introduce a laboratory model “Microloan Game,” and present evidence that defaults arise from inequity averse individuals refusing to make up the difference when others fail to pay their fair share. This perspective suggests a suite of new approaches for combatting defaults that leverage findings on reducing UG rejections.

37 **Introduction**

38

39 Microcredit, the offering of small uncollateralized loans, has become a popular tool for fighting
40 poverty in recent years, particularly in the developing world. In recent years, Microfinance
41 Institutions (MFIs) have loaned over \$100 billion annually to low-income households in at least
42 119 countries (MIX Market 2008). These loans—largely directed at women living on less than
43 \$2 a day—are often offered to solidarity groups (Hermes & Lensink 2007). Solidarity groups are
44 a form of joint liability, in which a group of borrowers agree to mutually insure each other’s
45 loans (Besley & Coate 1995; Armendáriz de Aghion 1999; Ghatak & Guinnane 1999). If one
46 member of the group cannot make a payment on her loan, the other members of the solidarity
47 group are responsible for pitching in to help her make that payment. The consequences of the
48 group failing to bail out the delinquent member are severe: if one member defaults, the entire
49 group is considered in default and all group members are excluded from the possibility of future
50 loans.

51

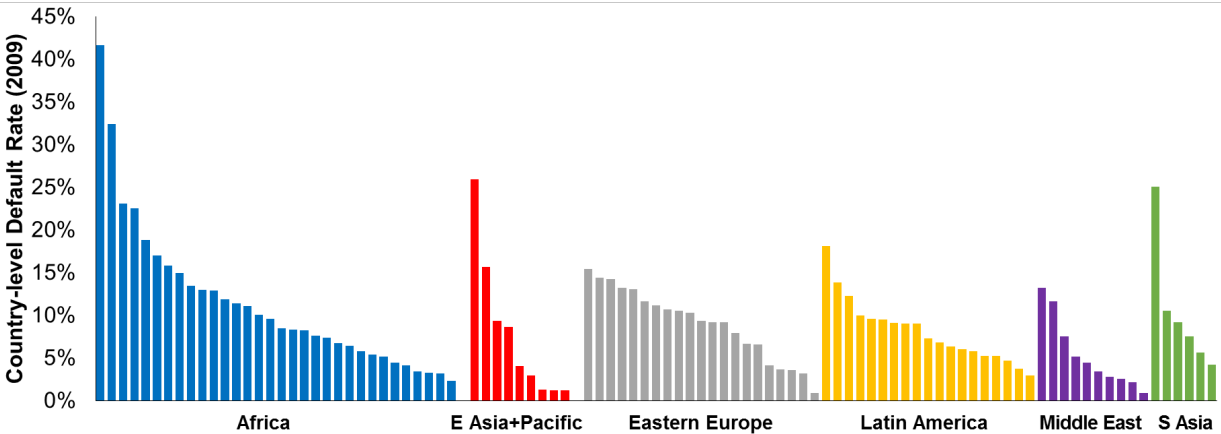
52 The solidarity group model of microlending has been very successful in Bangladesh and other
53 South Asian countries where it originated (Yunus 2007). However, as solidarity group lending
54 became the modal microlending method across the world—nearly 2/3 of microcredit borrowers
55 receive loans structured in this way (Hermes & Lensink 2007)—it became clear that the success
56 of solidarity groups in South Asia was due to more than just the lending model.

57

58 Of course, which outcomes ought to be emphasized as indexing success—e.g., poverty
59 reduction, savings, well-being broadly construed, women’s empowerment, education, etc.
60 (Karlan & Zinman 2011; Banerjee, Duflo, et al. 2015)—and how to measure those outcomes, are
61 topics of debate (Awaworyi Churchill & Nuhu 2016; Odell 2010). Further, evidence that
62 microloans have a positive impact on such local outcomes is quite mixed, both within and
63 between studies (Pitt & Khandker 1998; Khandker 2005; Morduch & Haley 2002; Banerjee,
64 Duflo, et al. 2015; Banerjee, Karlan, et al. 2015; Karlan & Zinman 2009; Chemin 2008;
65 Duvendack & Palmer-Jones 2012; Attanasio et al. 2015). Looking beyond local impact, others
66 have examined the effects of microlending on macroeconomic outcomes, like inequality, and
67 found favorable effects (Hisako & Shigeyuki 2009). One outcome MFIs and policy makers

68 attend to is default rates, because achieving sufficiently low default rates is important for
69 financial sustainability. Here, we will examine the psychology that underlies microloan default
70 and the high variation in default rates across countries that has been observed. An understanding
71 of such variation in default rates, and their underlying psychology, could aid MFIs and policy
72 makers as they decide how to structure loans (e.g., joint versus individual liability loans) across
73 borrower pools.

74
75 There is significant country-level variation, $F(118, 11601) = 12.15, p < 0.001$, and region-level
76 variation, $F(5, 11601) = 63.11, p < 0.001$, in default rates (see Figure 1 below), with banks in
77 many countries facing default rates high enough to keep microlending from being self-sustaining
78 (i.e. functioning without reliance on charitable donations; Hermes & Lensink 2011).



82
83 **Figure 1.** There is clear variation across countries in microloan default rates, and default rates
84 can be extremely high. Each bar represents the mean default rates of banks in a given country
85 during 2009, which range from 0% to over 40%. Countries are grouped into five regions,
86 represented by different colored bars (Middle East includes North Africa).

87
88 **Repayment theories**

89
90 What causes defaults, and how can lenders and policy makers reduce defaults where they are
91 prevalent? Most research on microcredit has tried to explain why individuals make any

92 contributions to repay the microloan at all—since loans to solidarity groups are both
93 uncollateralized and susceptible to free-riding, why do individuals not shirk on their payments,
94 leading to high default rates across the board (Stiglitz 1990; Besley & Coate 1995; Armendáriz
95 de Aghion 1999; Armendáriz de Aghion & Morduch 2000; Morduch 1999; Wydick 2001; Field
96 & Pande 2008)?

97
98 One set of answers propose that the collateralization and free-rider problems can both be
99 addressed by collateralizing the social capital that exists within and outside borrower groups. For
100 example, borrowers who would face external sanctions in the event of a default are incentivized
101 to repay their microloans (Besley & Coate 1995), as are those who face within group peer
102 pressure and sanctioning (Paxton, Graham, & Thraen 2000). Others, however, have emphasized
103 the role of harmonious social relationships, both internal and external to borrower groups, in
104 fostering (rather than coercing) repayment (Griffin & Husted 2015). Another set of repayment
105 theories suggest that peer monitoring and screening (e.g., requiring character references for
106 prospective borrowers) can allow solidarity groups to exclude unreliable borrowers who take on
107 too much risk (Stiglitz 1990) or who are characteristically unlikely to repay their loans
108 (Armendáriz de Aghion & Morduch 2005), and thus achieve better outcomes (Banerjee et al.
109 1994). Similarly, borrowers may learn useful business strategies from peers who are already
110 successful through mentorship programs, thereby reducing defaults that may be caused by
111 inexperienced entrepreneurs who learn by trial and error (Barboza & Barreto 2006).

112

113 **Inequity aversion in microloans**

114

115 Many of the repayment theories described above provide compelling solutions to the free-rider
116 problem: both social capital and peer monitoring create incentives to cooperate, as does the
117 “shadow of the future” (Bó 2005) cast by the basic repeated interaction structure of microloans
118 and the possibility of peer punishment (Czura 2015).

119

120 Here, we propose that there is another factor that can drive default rates, even in contexts where
121 the free-rider problem has been resolved by social capital, peer monitoring, and repeated game
122 effects: how people respond when *others* are unable to make their payments. That is, what

123 determines if people are willing or unwilling to pitch in extra when someone else in their
124 solidarity group cannot afford to pay his or her full installment? Given that borrowers are
125 typically living under conditions of extreme poverty, they are highly susceptible to income
126 shocks (Morduch 1994). Thus, even in the absence of free-riding, people will sometimes fail to
127 make their full payments just due to chance and misfortune, and it is essential for a solitary
128 group's survival that others are willing to chip in to cover these shortfalls.

129
130 Put differently, in solidarity group lending, groups don't simply default because a group member
131 can't make her payment; groups default when the rest of the group cannot, or will not, bail out
132 those members who are unable to make their full payments. From this perspective, an important
133 question is therefore: what makes a borrower refuse to pay a small cost to bail out another group
134 member, even when doing so causes her to incur the much larger cost of foregoing all future
135 loans?

136
137 Here, we shed light on microfinance defaults by leveraging the fact that this question, in a
138 slightly different form, has received a great deal of attention in the behavioral economics
139 literature using the Ultimatum Game (UG). In the UG, a "proposer" makes an offer of how to
140 split a sum of money with a "responder". The responder can either accept, or reject in which case
141 neither player receives anything. When a responder rejects a low (but non-zero) offer, she is
142 forgoing the offered amount in order to reduce the proposer's payoff. Although this behavior is
143 inconsistent with rational self-interest, a large body of empirical evidence shows that many
144 people do indeed reject low offers in 1-shot anonymous UGs (Camerer 2003), even when the
145 stakes are quite high (e.g. 1 month's salary; Andersen et al. 2011). This evidence suggests that
146 people derive disutility from receiving less than a normative "fair share" from an exchange (i.e.
147 show "disadvantageous inequity aversion" (Fehr & Schmidt 1999)), and thus are willing to pay
148 costs to obtain a result that is considered more fair – even when doing so reduces everyone's
149 earnings.

150
151 Our key argument is that inequity aversion – the same psychology that causes UG rejections –
152 leads borrowers to refuse to bail out delinquent members of their solidarity group, despite the
153 long-run individual costs of allowing the group to default. To see why, consider the differences

154 between a money-maximizing and an inequity averse decision-maker in a stylized conceptual
155 model of the microloan interaction among the members of a solidarity group.

156

157 We consider a stochastically repeated game. In each period of the microloan interaction, each
158 member of the solidarity group receives an endowment, and decides how much to contribute to
159 the group's repayment effort. The group must reach a total level of contribution of at least T in
160 order to avoid default. If the group defaults, all members are excluded from any future loans, and
161 thus earn payoff 0 in all subsequent periods. If the group does not default, they can continue on
162 in the next period, and each group member i earns expected payoff b_i , which is a function of the
163 continuation probability (i.e. the likelihood that the group does not disband for reasons other than
164 default), the income distribution across the group members, the default threshold T , and the
165 strategies of the other group members. Our argument will hold regardless of the functional form
166 of b . We will assume that if a group member fails to make the full payment on her loan, falling
167 short by C units, the game enters the "pitching in" stage. In this stage, each of the non-delinquent
168 group members in turn are given the opportunity to pitch in C units to make the group compliant.
169 If the first non-delinquent group member pitches in enough that the threshold is met, the game
170 continues to the next period. If not, the choice passes to the next non-delinquent member. If the
171 non-delinquent group members fail to pitch in enough, the group defaults.

172

173 A player's strategy in this game therefore constitutes their choice of how much to contribute in
174 the contribution stage, and whether to pitch in the required units in the pitching in stage. Given
175 that the game is repeated, conditional strategies are possible in which choices in each stage
176 depend on the outcome of previous rounds. For simplicity, however, we focus on a single
177 decision (unconditional strategy) in the pitching in stage, facing the final non-delinquent group
178 member in the case where all other non-delinquent group members have elected not to pitch in.
179 A money maximizing player will pitch in C as long as $b_i > C$; that is, if the individual benefits
180 to that player of the group persisting are greater than the cost of pitching in.

181

182 Those who show disadvantageous inequity aversion, however, incur a psychological cost when
183 others earn more than them – and pitching in necessarily causes one to earn less than the other
184 non-delinquent group members who do not pitch in, as well as the delinquent player in the case

185 that delinquency is due to free-riding rather than an inability to contribute¹. Let α_i be the
186 inequity-aversion-related disutility that pitching in C units causes for group member i . Thus, an
187 inequity averse group member will contribute if $b_i > C + \alpha_i$ holds. As a result, the more
188 inequity averse a player is, the larger the expected monetary benefit from the group avoiding
189 default must be in order for her to prefer pitching in to letting the group fail. Thus, just as
190 inequity averse decision-makers are less likely to accept unfair offers in the UG than money-
191 maximizers, inequity averse decision-makers are also less likely to pitch in when their microloan
192 group falls short of its repayment threshold, leading to greater likelihood of default in groups of
193 inequity averse players.

194

195 In this paper, we provide empirical and experimental support for this proposed connection
196 between inequity aversion as indicated by UG rejections and microloan default. In doing so, we
197 aim to shed new light on why solidarity group microloans fail, what explains cross-country
198 variation in such failures, and what approaches might be employed to reduce such failures.

199

200

201 **Empirical data**

202

203 *Methods*

204

205 To provide initial empirical support for the argument that inequity aversion plays a role in
206 determining solidarity group success, and in explaining cross-country variation in default rates,
207 we used several publicly available data sources to compile our dataset for the microcredit
208 outcomes analyses. These sources include the Microfinance Information Exchange (MIX) (MIX
209 Market 2008), the World Values Survey trust index (World Values Survey Association 2009),
210 the Global Barometer Survey (Global Barometer 2009), economic games data from dozens of
211 countries compiled in two meta-analyses one for Ultimatum Game (UG) (Oosterbeek et al. 2004)
212 and one for Trust Game (TG) (Johnson & Mislin 2008), and the World Bank database for GDP,
213 GDP per capita, GDP growth, Gini index and poverty data (World Bank Group 2012). For any

¹ We note that how borrowers form beliefs about whether others are free-riding is relevant to the decision-making process, but it is beyond the scope of this model.

214 given analysis, we included all countries for which we had microfinance outcomes during the
215 relevant time span and the corresponding predictor variables.

216
217 All the data regarding the performance and makeup of MFIs were obtained through the MIX
218 (MIX Market 2008). The MIX is an online database founded in 2002, which makes available a
219 variety of data from thousands of MFIs in most of the world's developing nations. Through the
220 MIX, we procured rates of at-risk portfolios, loan portfolio yields, percentage of women
221 borrowers and a number of other indicators relevant to these and other analyses. Most notably,
222 the percentage of women borrowers is of interest as a predicting variable based on fieldwork
223 done by D'Espallier and colleagues (D'espallier et al. 2011), which showed that homogeneity of
224 group gender composition predicted lower default rates².

225
226 Because MFIs have varying accounting practices when dealing with unpaid loans, the MIX
227 reports the value of loans that are at risk, meaning having at least one installment past due for
228 more than 30 days³. This includes the value of unpaid principle, both past and future, but not
229 accrued interest, and is standardized by dividing the at-risk loan value by the MFI's gross
230 portfolio value. This is the standard proxy used for default rates in microlending. The 'real yield
231 on gross portfolio' indicator is the ratio of interest and fees on the loan portfolio to the average
232 gross loan portfolio, controlling for inflation, and so acts as a proxy for interest rates. The
233 percentage of borrowers who are female is calculated by dividing the number of female
234 borrowers by the total number of borrowers.

235
236 Over the last 30 years, there have been six waves of World Values Survey collected in almost
237 100 countries. The full survey captures many attitudes, but our primary interest were those
238 pertaining to trustworthiness and civic cooperation. The trust question of interest is: "Generally
239 speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in
240 dealing with people?". Participants then choose between "Most people can be trusted" and "You

² Although none of the MFIs in our sample had less than 50% female borrowers, making it impossible to determine the effect of having male dominated groups, we do find a relationship between the percentage of borrowers who are female and default rates that is consistent with D'Espallier et al.

³ Here we use portfolios at risk at 30 days because this is the most commonly reported measure in the MIX, and therefore has the most reliable and robust data. Unfortunately, complete default data is not available.

241 can never be too careful when dealing with others”. The Trust Index is calculated as: Trust Index
242 = 100 + (% Most people can be trusted) - (% Can't be too careful). For the regressions presented
243 in Table S3, we augmented the World Values Survey trust index data with data from the Global
244 Barometer Survey, which asks, among other questions, the exact trust index question asked by
245 the World Values Survey. We added trust index values from a few countries for which we had
246 UG and MIX data, but no World Values Survey trust index data in order to keep our sample at
247 the maximum possible size. Beyond the trust index, we also used three questions from the World
248 Values Survey to determine what other researchers (Herrmann et al. 2008) have called ‘civic
249 cooperation’. Civic cooperation measure attitudes towards tax evasion, abuse of social welfare
250 programs, and dodging fares on public transportation (literal free-riding). This composite has
251 been shown to be strongly predictive of cooperation (anti-free-riding) behavior (Herrmann et al.
252 2008).

253

254 Although surveys yield important information about how people expect themselves and others to
255 behave, they do not always reveal strategies in the way economic games do. In order to
256 distinguish between attitudinal and behavioral trust, trustworthiness, and tendency to punish, we
257 use cross-cultural economic games data. UG and TG data were taken from the meta-analyses
258 mentioned above that were designed to be sensitive to cross-cultural differences in the playing of
259 these games, and so the criteria for inclusion between the meta-analyses were similar.

260

261 We also pulled democracy ranking and corruption ranking data from the World Audit (World
262 Audit 2016) as well as rule of law data from the World Justice Project (Agrast 2013). Lastly,
263 Gini index, GDP per capita, GDP and GDP growth were gathered from the World Bank database
264 which collects a number of developmental indicators dating from 1960.

265

266 We restrict our analyses to 2007 and after, because prior to that year there is little data on which
267 loan structures are most prevalent. The MIX does not collect data on loan structure, but an
268 empirical survey from 2007 (Hermes & Lensink 2007) found that approximately 2/3 of
269 borrowers at that time received solidarity group loans. So, for that reason, we have restricted our
270 analyses to after 2007 in order to be sure that we are looking at microlending outcomes that
271 reflect the relevant loan structure of solidarity groups.

272

273 *Results*

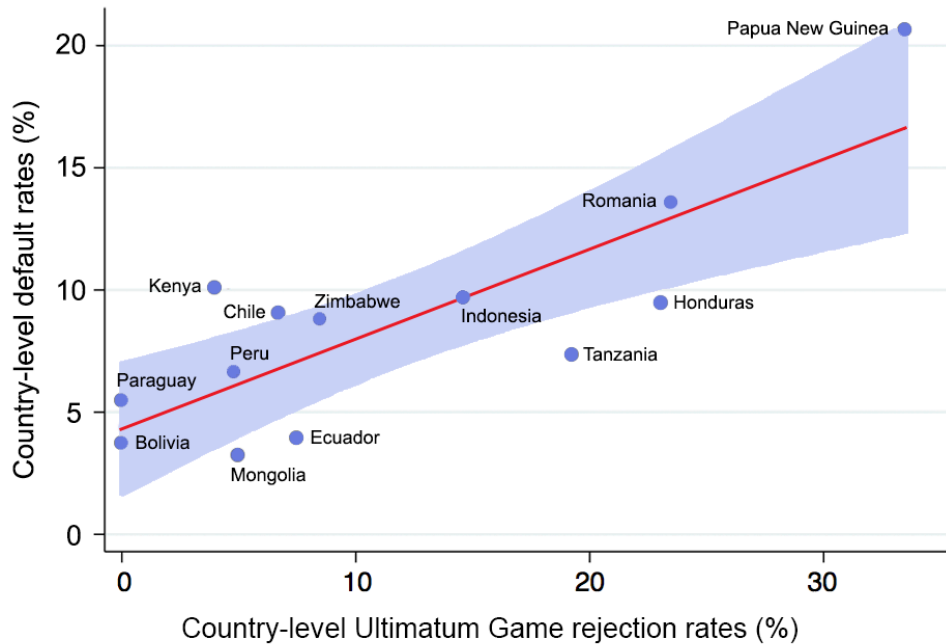
274

275 We find that the UG rejection rate in a given country is strongly correlated with that country's
276 microloan default rate ($r = 0.81, p < 0.001$; Figure 2; averaging default rates across the period
277 2007-2014). This relationship held for all but one of the individual years in that eight-year range,
278 and was robust to (i) controlling for UG offers (to partially address the fact that we are analyzing
279 overall rejection rates and not minimum acceptable offers); (ii) controlling for a set of economic
280 development indicators including GDP, GDP growth, GDP per capita, and Gini; (iii) analyzing
281 the data at the bank level rather than the country level data; and (iv) excluding Papua New
282 Guinea (an extreme value). See supplement for details and further analyses using additional
283 indicators mentioned above.

284

285 Conversely, we found no evidence that defaults were negatively related to prosociality (i.e.
286 associated with free-riding), using various different measures (Peysakhovich et al. 2014). First,
287 we combined default rate data with a different cross-cultural dataset of Trust Game play in 18
288 countries (Johnson & Mislin 2008), and found a non-robust association in the *opposite* direction,
289 with default rates being (if anything) *positively* correlated with trust, $r = 0.559, p = 0.016$, and
290 trustworthiness, $r = 0.392, p = 0.107$, but these relationships failed to reach conventional
291 significance levels when including economic controls, $p > 0.05$ for both. Second, we combined
292 default rate data with the World Values Survey (56 countries in both World Values Survey and
293 default rate dataset), and found no correlation between default rates and trust, $r = -0.154, p =$
294 0.245 , or strength of civic norms of cooperation, $r = 0.056, p = 0.682$, both of which are often
295 used as proxies for prosociality (Herrmann et al. 2008; Peysakhovich et al. 2014). See
296 supplement for additional analyses.

297



298

299 **Figure 2.** Microloan default rates are strongly correlated with Ultimatum Game rejection rates
 300 across countries. Shown are country-level default rates averaged across an 8-year span (2007-
 301 2014). UG rejection rates are highly correlated with default rates, $r = 0.812$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 =$
 302 66%. 95% confidence intervals are shown for the regression line.

303

304

305 The fact that UG rejections predict cross-cultural variation in microcredit default rates, while
 306 prosociality does not, supports our emphasis on borrowers' *responses* to others' behavior above
 307 any beyond borrowers' *own* inclination towards cooperation versus free-riding. Of course, these
 308 kinds of cross-sectional analyses must be taken with a grain of salt because they suffer from all
 309 the typical limitations inherent in correlational analyses and borrower populations may differ
 310 from the populations surveyed on relevant dimensions. However, we do take these results as
 311 suggestive of a mechanism—inequity aversion—that is not typically discussed in the
 312 microlending context (but see Griffin & Husted 2015 for some hints of this).

313

314 **Experimental Data**

315

316 *Methods*

317

318 To provide further evidence for this interpretation of microloan defaults, we complement this
319 field data with an individual-level, online laboratory experiment. In this experiment, we place
320 participants into groups and examine the relationship between Ultimatum Game Minimum
321 Acceptable Offers (UG MAOs; the lowest offer someone would be willing to accept) within the
322 group, and the group's behavior in a novel economic game, the Microloan Game, that we
323 developed. In the game theoretic tradition, the Microloan Game is an abstraction that, while it
324 omits many elements of real-world solidarity group-based microcredit, aims to capture the key
325 strategic features of such interactions: that (i) players are engaged in a repeated, potentially
326 lucrative group endeavor that requires regular financial investment (i.e. loan repayment) to
327 continue; (ii) that some group members are either unable or unwilling to make that investment in
328 any given period, leading to shortfalls; and (iii) that when such shortfalls occur, other group
329 members can pitch in more money to make up the shortfall.

330

331 Specifically, in the Microloan Game, participants played a repeated game in groups of three.
332 Each round of the Microloan Game consisted of two stages. (Although we herein describe the
333 game in terms related to microcredit loan payments, the game was presented to participants in
334 neutral language without any mention of loans, debt, or repayment.)

335

336 Upon entering the study, participants were randomly assigned to a group, and each group was
337 randomly assigned to a condition. In Stage 1, each of the three group members was given a
338 random initial endowment representing their income in a given loan period (between 20 and 500
339 monetary units, MUs, with an average of 340 MUs; the random endowment allocation procedure
340 is described in more detail below). Each group member then decided how much of that
341 endowment to keep for themselves versus contribute to the group, representing their decision
342 regarding repayment of their microloan debt. Participants were informed that each of the three
343 group members was required to contribute 200 MUs per round in order to avoid group default. If
344 fewer than 600 MUs in total (200 MUs per member) were contributed, the contribution threshold
345 was not met and the game entered Stage 2.

346

347 In Stage 2, all players were told the number of additional MUs required to meet the contribution
348 threshold, and they were given the opportunity (in random order) to "pitch in" more units if they

349 chose to do so. Participants could not waste MUs by over-contributing, and were aware of this
350 fact because pitching in was done sequentially and the remaining balance due was displayed, and
351 participants could not use earnings from past rounds to cover the shortfall of the current round.

352
353 If the 600 MU goal was not reached by the end of Stage 2, the game ended and no further
354 earnings were possible (i.e. the group defaulted on their loan). If at least 600 MUs were
355 contributed (either directly in Stage 1, or by the end of Stage 2), the game had the chance to
356 continue on for another round (in the absence of default, the game lasted 8 rounds for certain,
357 and then transitioned to a stochastically repeated game with 50% continuation probability; as per
358 a randomization scheme presented in (Bó & Fréchette 2011)). The order in which participants
359 pitched in was randomized and participants were not informed of the order in which group
360 members were given the opportunity to pitch in (although they did always know the outstanding
361 amount needed to reach the continuation threshold), and thus the only way of given player could
362 be certain that the group would avoid default would be to pitch in the full amount required
363 themselves. As a result, players had some personal incentive to make sure the group met its 600
364 MU contribution goal, in order to be able to earn more units in future rounds⁴; but also had the
365 opportunity to free-ride by contributing less than 200 MUs with the hope that others would make
366 up the difference. Critically, however, participants did not know whether lack of contribution by
367 other players was due to the inability to contribute (because of a small endowment), or just due
368 to free-riding.

369
370 Solidarity groups are often faced with the situation in which one or more members are unable to
371 pay, as income for the typical participant is highly variable (Dercon 2002; Morduch 1994). To
372 incorporate this into our lab Microloan Game, we forced incomes to differ between players and
373 across rounds of the game: while each participant received an average of 340 MUs each round,
374 each received a different randomly-sampled amount. In particular, the sampling was designed
375 such that one player each round received fewer than 200 MUs, and thus was unable to repay their
376 share of the 600 MU contribution goal. Players were informed only that in each round they

⁴ The Microloan Game has a similar strategic structure to a multiplayer snowdrift/anti-coordination game, or step-level public goods game (Croson & Marks 2000). These games include equilibria with non-zero contribution levels, and it is in this sense that we mean that a personal incentive may exist for money-maximizers to contribute.

377 would receive a randomly determined endowment of between 0 and 500 MUs, and were given
378 no information about the endowments of the other players or the manner in which endowments
379 were generated (modeling the real-world ambiguity regarding others' incomes). Thus, even in
380 the absence of any free-riding, avoiding default in the Microloan Game depended on (at least)
381 one of the two higher-endowment players contributing more than 200 MUs each round, despite
382 not knowing how many MUs the other participants received – and thus having uncertainty about
383 whether others' non-contribution was driven by free-riding or bad luck. In keeping with common
384 practice in experimental economics, and in order to have a unidimensional focus on inequity, we
385 shuffled participant IDs between each round. That is, because we shuffled participant IDs
386 between each round, we allowed participants to act on a motivation to avoid disadvantageous
387 inequity without introducing complexities that arise from the presence of reputation. Of course,
388 this reduces the ecological validity of the game, but makes it more straightforward to make
389 inferences about the role of disadvantageous inequity aversion in microlending. See supplement
390 for experimental instructions.

391
392 We hypothesized that, as with real-world solidarity groups, there would be substantial variance
393 in default rates across our experimental groups in the Microloan Game, and that the psychology
394 of inequity aversion would play a major role in explaining this variation. To test this hypothesis,
395 we had participants play a UG prior to the beginning of the Microloan Game. In the UG,
396 participants made decisions in both roles (specifying an offer as Player 1, and a minimal
397 acceptable offer, MAO, below which they would reject as Player 2). Players did not receive
398 feedback on the UG's outcome until the experiment was complete to prevent contamination
399 effects; half of participants were assigned to be Player 1, the other half Player 2, and payment
400 was determined on random pairings after the fact.

401
402 We predicted that a group's likelihood of defaulting in the Microloan Game would be
403 determined by the UG MAOs of its members. In particular, because the group's shortfall could
404 typically be made up (and default avoided) by just one group member chipping in the extra
405 amount, what matters for preventing defaults is the least inequity averse group member – or, put
406 differently, the failure of a group in the Microloan Game should be predicted by the lowest MAO
407 among its members. The higher the lowest MAO in a group is, the less likely someone will be

408 willing to chip in, and the less likely the group will be to succeed (predicting a positive
409 relationship between Microloan Game default and minimum MAO in the group).

410

411 Recall that above, when we compared how money-maximizing and inequity averse decision-
412 makers treat the solidarity group interaction, we showed that money-maximizers ought to be
413 more likely to both accept low offers in the UG (i.e., have low MAOs) and more likely to pitch
414 in to meet a threshold in a game like the Microloan Game than inequity averse decision-makers.
415 This allows us to predict Microloan Game outcomes at the group level using individual level
416 preferences elicited using the UG.

417

418 Finally, we assessed the robustness of this prediction regarding the importance of inequity
419 aversion for Microloan Game default with a second experimental condition designed to
420 accomplish two goals. First, we wanted to “stack the deck” in favor of the importance of free-
421 riding by emphasizing the social dilemma dimension of the Microloan Game. Second, we
422 wanted to show that, because inequity averse decision-makers *already* view the Microloan Game
423 as a social dilemma (and money-maximizers are already prepared to pitch in when the value of
424 the game continuing is greater than the cost of pitching in), framing the game as a social
425 dilemma should not affect the relationship between inequity aversion and game play. In this
426 “Social Dilemma” condition, the game was expressly framed as a *collective* goods problem:
427 players were told that the *group as a whole* was required to contribute 600 MUs per round (and
428 the group could, one member at a time, pitch in to cover short-falls), in contrast to the baseline
429 condition where players were told they were *individually* responsible for contributing 200 MUs
430 each (and could individually pitch in).

431

432 To test these predictions, we recruited 360 U.S. participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk
433 ($M_{age} = 34.99$, 71% female; Mechanical Turk offers a subject pool that is much more diverse
434 than just college undergraduates; Horton et al. 2011) to play the UG and the Microloan Game. In
435 line with standard MTurk wages, participants were paid a show-up fee plus a bonus based on
436 their earnings in the game, using an exchange rate of 10 MUs per cent. A randomization check
437 indicated that UG MAOs did not differ significantly between participants randomized into the
438 Baseline versus Social Dilemma condition in the Microloan game (Ranksum, $z = 1.303$, $p =$

439 .193). The mean UG MAO was 67 MUs, and the distribution had modes at 100 and 50, and 20%
440 of MAOs were at or below 40.

441
442 All analyses are conducted at the level of the 3-player Microloan Game group, with one
443 observation per group. We consider three different measures of a group's (lack of) success:
444 whether the group defaulted at any point in the game, whether the group defaulted in the very
445 first round, and the fraction of total rounds in which the group was in default which was
446 determined by dividing the number of completed rounds by the number of possible rounds
447 determined by the stopping algorithm described above. We then predict these measures using the
448 level of inequity aversion of the least inequity averse group member (i.e. the lowest UG MAO of
449 the three group members): as described above, because it only takes one person to pitch in to the
450 save the group from default, what matters is the unwillingness of the least unwilling group
451 member. For the binary Microloan Game failure measures, we use logistic regression, and for the
452 continuous failure measure we use OLS regression with robust standard errors; all coefficients
453 for continuous variables are standardized.

454

455 *Results*

456

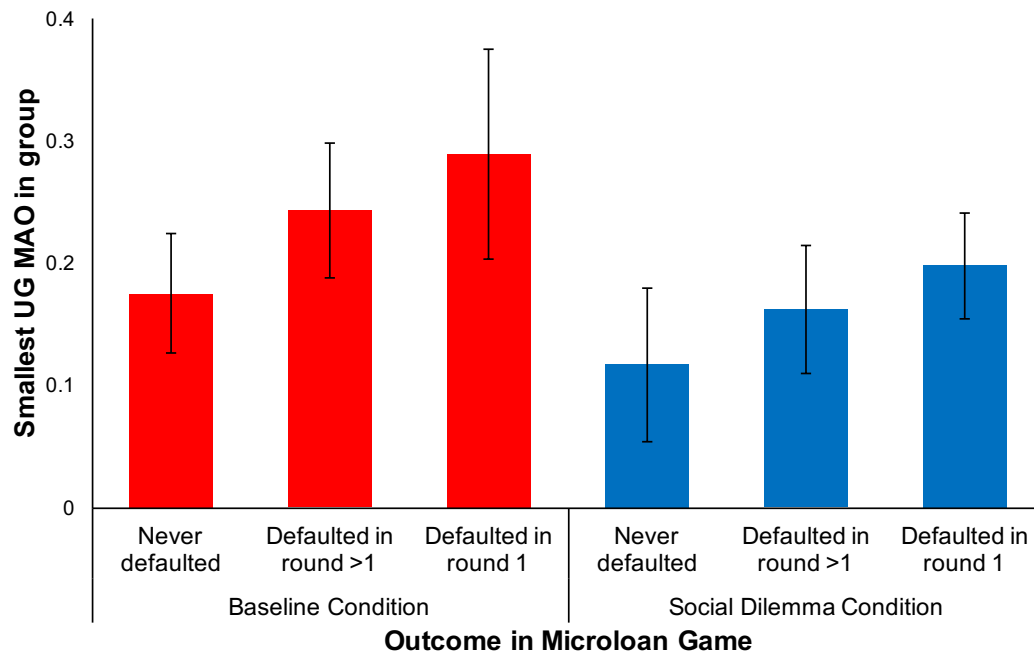
457 As expected, we observed a positive relationship between a group's failure in the Microloan
458 Game and the group's minimum UG MAO (whether the group defaulted at any point in the
459 game, $\beta = 0.64$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = 0.008$; whether the group defaulted in the very first round, $\beta =$
460 0.61 , $SE = 0.22$, $p = 0.006$; fraction of total rounds in which the group was in default, $\beta = 0.09$,
461 $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.028$). See Table 1 and Figure 3. This suggests that a group defaults when the
462 least inequity averse group member's willingness to incur costly punishment is sufficiently high
463 – that is, when no group members are willing to pitch in because they are all too inequity averse.
464 We also observed a significant effect of the Social Dilemma frame on Microloan Game group
465 failure (whether the group defaulted at any point, $\beta = 1.59$, $SE = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$, whether the
466 group defaulted in the first round, $\beta = 1.31$, $SE = 0.44$, $p = 0.003$; fraction of total rounds in
467 which the group was in default, $\beta = 0.28$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$). This serves as a manipulation
468 check confirming that our Social Dilemma frame successfully induced greater free-riding.
469 Critically, however, there was no significant interaction between minimum UG MAO and

470 condition (whether the group defaulted at any point, $\beta = 0.03$, $SE = 0.54$, $p = 0.951$; whether the
 471 group defaulted in the very first round, $\beta = 0.06$, $SE = 0.45$, $p = 0.888$; fraction of total rounds in
 472 which the group was not in default, $\beta = 0.04$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = 0.639$). This shows that the MAO
 473 relationship was robust to emphasizing the social dilemma component of the Microloan Game.
 474

475 **Table 1.** Regression results from the experimental data. Participants were more likely to default
 476 at some point (specifications 1 and 2) and in the first round (specifications 3 and 4) if their
 477 group minimum MAO was higher. Similarly, groups with higher minimum MAOs failed to
 478 complete more rounds. Specifications 1-4 were fit using logistic regression; specifications 5-6
 479 were fit using OLS regression. Coefficients are standardized and group-clustered standard
 480 errors are shown in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
 481

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Defaulted at any point		Defaulted in first round		Fraction of rounds foregone	
Group minimum MAO	0.64*** (0.24)	0.63** (0.28)	0.61*** (0.22)	0.57* (0.34)	0.09** (0.04)	0.10* (0.06)
Condition (Social dilemma=1)	1.59*** (0.48)	1.60*** (0.53)	1.31*** (0.44)	1.29*** (0.44)	0.28*** (0.07)	0.27** (0.07)
Group minimum MAO x Condition		0.03 (0.54)		0.06 (0.45)		0.04 (0.08)
Constant	0.39 (0.28)	0.39 (0.28)	1.32*** (0.33)	1.30*** (0.35)	0.54*** (0.06)	0.54*** (0.06)
Observations	120	120	120	120	120	120
R-squared/Pseudo R-squared	11.8%	11.9%	9.2%	9.2%	12.2%	12.4%

482
 483 Thus, our Microloan Game results demonstrate that the positive relationship between UG MAO
 484 and microcredit defaults shown in the cross-cultural data extends to the much more controlled
 485 environment of a laboratory game using just American participants, and applies at the level of
 486 individual psychology (rather than, for example, just tracking some other group-level cultural
 487 trait in the cross-cultural dataset). That is, although there are clear identification issues with the
 488 model we fit to the cross-cultural data in the previous section, the fact that we observe the same
 489 pattern in the lab at the individual level supports our theoretical claim regarding inequity
 490 aversion and microloan default.



491
 492 **Figure 3.** *Ultimatum Game MAOs are positively related to failure in the laboratory Microloan*
 493 *Game, both in the baseline and social dilemma conditions. Shown is the MAO of the least*
 494 *inequity averse group member (i.e. group member with the lowest MAO) average across all*
 495 *groups who either never default, did not default in the first round but eventually defaulted in a*
 496 *later round, or defaulted in the first round; groups from the baseline condition are shown in red,*
 497 *and from the social dilemma condition in blue. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.*
 498

499 While the results from this individual-level experiment are what we expected based on our
 500 inequity aversion model of the microloan interaction, there are limitations of the experiments that
 501 are important to acknowledge. We noted above that we stripped away some important features of
 502 solidarity group lending in an effort to isolate the role of inequity aversion in the microloan
 503 interaction. In particular, we did not allow participants to track the behavior of specific
 504 individuals (which would have made negative reciprocity possible), and we did not allow
 505 communication. By removing these features from the interaction, we were able to isolate the role
 506 of inequity aversion, but removing such features also has the potential to reduce the external
 507 validity of the experiment. Furthermore, our main goal in this experiment (and in the model
 508 described above) was to compare the behavior of money-maximizers and those who are inequity

509 averse, but other motivators are likely to also play a role (e.g. altruism). Furthermore, the
510 subjects used in our experiment (Americans on MTurk) are quite different in many ways from
511 typical participants in microloans. Future work should explore how inequity aversion interacts
512 with reciprocity and communication in microloans, the role of other motivations for default, and
513 the generalizability of results beyond our particular subject pool.

514
515 We would also like to note some other limitations of this work raised during the review process.
516 For example, because the MIX does not contain loan methodology, our microfinance outcomes
517 come from banks that use a variety of loan types, some of which do not use joint liability. While
518 this should only make our estimates of the relationship between inequity aversion and default
519 more conservative, it is worth noting nonetheless. It is also the case that many of the variables
520 we pulled from the WVS include responses from demographics that are not the target for
521 microloans; namely the rural and working poor. Similarly, while our measure of default (PAR
522 30) is a useful proxy, having a longer-term at-risk measure would be helpful to test the longevity
523 of inequity aversion (i.e., given sufficient time, do inequity averse individuals cool-off and
524 eventually pitch in?).

525

526 **Discussion**

527

528 Here we have provided evidence that a key determinant of the success of solidarity group
529 lending—the predominant model of microlending—is people’s willingness to overcome inequity
530 aversion and pitch in when other group members fail to make their payments. As such, we find
531 that variation in inequity aversion (as measured by UG rejections) and not variation in
532 cooperativeness (captured by a variety of measures) is strongly predictive of default rates across
533 countries. In addition, this relationship is also evident in the psychology of individuals: in a
534 laboratory model of microcredit, groups with individuals having higher UG MAOs (i.e., more
535 inequity averse) are more likely to default.

536

537 Our observation that the psychology of inequity aversion plays such an important role in driving
538 defaults rates has important policy implications. With this perspective, it becomes possible to

539 leverage the large body of work in behavioral economics regarding the motivations of UG
540 rejection to design default-reduction interventions.

541
542 For example, there is considerable evidence that “cool-off” periods, in which responders are
543 asked to wait for several minutes or overnight before responding to offers, dramatically reduce
544 rejections in the UG (Oechssler et al. 2013; Grimm & Mengel 2011; Neo et al. 2013; Oechssler
545 et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2011). Instituting an analogous cool-off period for borrowers at risk of
546 defaulting would be easy to do and free to implement: in the event that a borrower cannot make
547 her payment, either during the course of repayment or at the end of the loan period, the loan
548 officer would leave and return the next day once the group has had a chance to cool-off and
549 consider the consequences of not pitching in. If such an intervention were to be successful in
550 reducing avoidable defaults, microfinance institutions would stand a better chance of becoming
551 self-sustaining.

552
553 Secondly, it has been shown that reputation concerns can provide a rationale for rejecting in the
554 UG, in order to induce others to offer more in the future (Fehr & Fischbacher 2003). Thus, it
555 may be advantageous for microfinance institutions to minimize the opportunity for such
556 incentives. For example, to the extent that borrowers who refuse to pitch in do so because they
557 don’t want to be seen as the kind of person who can be taken advantage of (Thaler 1988),
558 allowing borrowers to pitch in for others’ loans anonymously would allow for those who want to
559 help others to do so without any reputational repercussions. In general, any procedural change
560 that removes cues to reputation for the pitching in phase (but not the initial contribution phase)
561 should retain the feature necessary for avoiding free-riding while reducing the motivation to hold
562 out when pitching in is possible.

563
564 In the decades since the solidarity group model of microlending came into existence, it has
565 spread to many millions of borrowers in most of the world’s developing nations. But this
566 spreading didn’t take into account the psychological variation across societies, and the one-size-
567 fits-all approach to microlending has run into sustainability issues (Hermes & Lensink 2011).
568 Microfinance institutions, and therefore their borrowers, stand to benefit from a deeper

569 understanding of the psychology that makes microcredit work where it works and fail where it
570 fails.

571

572 **Human subjects approval**

573 These studies complied with all ethical regulations for the use of human subjects, and approval
574 for the study was provided by the Human Subject Committee at Yale University.

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Supplementary Information

Additional analyses: empirics

Yearly country-level analyses

Table S1. Ultimatum Game rejection rates, not offers, predict defaults

VARIABLES	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	Portfolios at risk							
Offers	0.112 (0.217)	0.206 (0.158)	0.130 (0.133)	0.114 (0.259)	0.120 (0.142)	0.0684 (0.173)	-0.0668 (0.357)	-0.164 (0.278)
Rejections	0.282* (0.137)	0.215* (0.100)	0.507*** (0.0841)	0.432** (0.165)	0.318*** (0.0899)	0.0530 (0.111)	0.683** (0.228)	0.426** (0.176)
Constant	-0.00650 (0.0857)	-0.0277 (0.0624)	-0.000869 (0.0524)	-0.00600 (0.103)	-0.000738 (0.0560)	0.0331 (0.0689)	0.0422 (0.142)	0.106 (0.110)
Observations	12	12	12	13	12	13	13	12
R-squared	34.8%	44.2%	81.4%	42.3%	61.2%	4.1%	47.3%	39.9%

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table S1 above shows that in each year (except 2012), UG rejection rates are highly predictive of default rates while offers are not. When we excluded Papua New Guinea, rejection rates were still predictive, $\beta = 0.238$, $SE = 0.092$, $p = 0.030$, $R^2 = 43\%$, and offers remained unresponsive, $\beta = 0.074$, $SE = 0.130$, $p = 0.605$, $R^2 = 5\%$. Further, there is no World Values Survey trust index data for Papua New Guinea, which means that specifications 2-10 of Table S2 all exclude Papua New Guinea, yet still replicate the relationship between UG rejection rates and default rates. Further, for those concerned that including both offers and rejection rates in the same model is problematic, our results hold when we examine either independent variable on its own. In particular, collapsing across the 8-year period, we find no effect of UG offers on default rates, $\beta = 0.128$, $SE = 0.210$, $p = 0.555$, $R^2 = 3\%$, but a strong effect of UG rejection rates, $\beta = 0.367$, $SE = 0.130$, $p = 0.080$, $R^2 = 66\%$.

Bank-level analyses

Table S2. Bank-level analysis predicting defaults using Ultimatum Game play

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
VARIABLES	Portfolios at risk									
Offer	0.0962 (0.104)	0.0517 (0.0938)	0.0465 (0.102)	0.0801 (0.0941)	0.0582 (0.0999)	0.0296 (0.0972)	0.0756 (0.0886)	-0.0343 (0.0949)	0.0787 (0.0905)	0.0593 (0.0365)
Rejections	0.433** (0.134)	0.232** (0.0870)	0.257*** (0.0707)	0.236** (0.0816)	0.252*** (0.0655)	0.228*** (0.0651)	0.251*** (0.0652)	0.321**** (0.0759)	0.198** (0.0633)	0.233**** (0.0280)
WVS trust		0.0417 (0.0217)	0.0327 (0.0222)	0.0265 (0.0195)	0.0205 (0.0236)	0.0353 (0.0205)	0.0317 (0.0212)	0.0849*** (0.0229)	0.00897 (0.0316)	-0.0351 (0.0549)
% female			-0.0902** (0.0311)	-0.0959* (0.0399)	-0.0905** (0.0315)	-0.0900** (0.0308)	-0.0896** (0.0313)	-0.0912** (0.0282)	-0.0971* (0.0399)	-0.0982* (0.0390)
Yield				0.0252 (0.0405)					0.0274 (0.0411)	0.0352 (0.0565)
GDP (trillions)					0.0163 (0.0132)				0.0323 (0.0231)	0.206** (0.0720)
GDP growth (%)						-0.00307* (0.00124)			-0.00295* (0.00125)	-0.00310* (0.00149)
GDP/cap (millions)							1.369 (2.247)		-0.176 (1.619)	-1.692 (1.935)
Gini								0.000173 (0.00116)		0.000636 (0.000996)
Constant	0.00209 (0.0436)	0.0212 (0.0343)	0.0735 (0.0440)	0.0582 (0.0406)	0.0710 (0.0433)	0.0983* (0.0427)	0.0571 (0.0389)	0.0738 (0.0622)	0.0797* (0.0392)	0.0529 (0.0515)
# of MFIs	1,553	1,531	1,247	1,180	1,247	1,247	1,247	913	1,180	883
# of Countries	13	12	12	12	12	12	12	10	12	10
R-squared	8.3%	7.1%	11.9%	14.6%	12.1%	12.5%	12.0%	16.8%	15.8%	21.2%

Country-clustered robust standard errors in parentheses

**** p<0.0001, *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table S2 above shows that UG rejection rates, at the country level, are robustly predictive of bank-level defaults rates. The fact that the UG rejection rate in each country is importantly predictive of default rates at the bank level suggests that it is the resident psychology of the borrowers, not administrative quirks of MFIs, that is driving defaults. This pattern of results hold if we omit UG offers, as was the case in the last set of regressions.

There are a few main results to note in this regression table. First, UG rejection rates are robustly predictive after controlling for economic development indicators (specifications 9 and 10).

Second, by and large, the developmental indicators are not strong predictors of default, which suggests that there is something other than economic conditions that is driving defaults. Third, loan yield—a proxy for interest rates—is not predictive of default rates over and above the controls in specification 4. (Interestingly, loan yields are not predictive of default rates within a given MFI, $\beta = -0.005$, $SE = 0.007$, $p = 0.419$.) Fourth, the next best predictor of defaults after Ultimatum Game rejection rates is the percentage of borrowers that are female. This is a nice replication of one of the early studies done trying to understand default rates and how group dynamics promote or avoid defaults.

Cross-cultural surveys, game play, defaults, and economic controls

Using a separate meta-analysis of cross-cultural differences in Trust Game behavior, in addition to Ultimatum Game behavior we were able to look at the relationship between trust, trustworthiness, and default rates. In Table S3 below, we show the relationships between behavior in the Ultimatum Game, Trust Game, WVS trust, WVS civic cooperation, democracy, corruption, and rule of law after controlling for the economic development status of the country. The analysis in Table S3 reflects country-level outcomes and is restricted to 2007 to 2014.

Table S3. Game play and survey variables predicting default rates with economic controls

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	Portfolios at risk								
UG rejection rate	0.4610** (0.0958)								
UG offers		0.1660 (0.3753)							
TG % sent			0.1189 (0.0629)						
TG % returned				0.1195 (0.0552)					
WVS trust					-0.0328 (0.0442)				
WVS civic cooperation						0.0059 (0.0083)			
Democracy rank							-0.0000 (0.0003)		
Corruption rank								0.0004 (0.0003)	
Rule of law									-0.0192 (0.0166)
GDP growth (%)	0.0058 (0.0061)	-0.0021 (0.0140)	-0.0048 (0.0071)	-0.0125 (0.0057)	-0.0019 (0.0050)	-0.0013 (0.0057)	-0.0084* (0.0042)	-0.0078 (0.0042)	-0.0059 (0.0039)
GDP (trillions)	0.0282 (0.0495)	-0.0132 (0.1200)	0.0049 (0.0120)	0.0004 (0.0116)	-0.0007 (0.0225)	-0.0065 (0.0229)	-0.0124 (0.0244)	-0.0148 (0.0242)	-0.0120 (0.0239)
GDP per capita (millions)	4.6645 (3.2669)	1.5217 (8.4529)	-2.5720 (2.1887)	-4.2209 (2.0655)	4.8308 (2.6649)	5.1265 (2.8815)	0.1022 (2.9732)	2.4505 (3.0689)	2.5760 (2.9128)
Gini	0.0011 (0.0014)	-0.0016 (0.0030)	0.0001 (0.0010)	0.0008 (0.0010)	-0.0010 (0.0011)	-0.0009 (0.0011)	0.0013 (0.0009)	0.0014 (0.0009)	0.0013 (0.0009)
Constant	-0.0760 (0.0946)	0.0981 (0.2499)	0.0448 (0.0748)	0.0771 (0.0624)	0.1063 (0.0548)	0.0737 (0.0489)	0.0660 (0.0548)	0.0182 (0.0566)	0.0340 (0.0431)
Observations	11	11	15	15	45	42	71	71	76
R-squared	83.4%	10.0%	49.0%	53.2%	14.6%	14.9%	9.5%	11.7%	8.6%

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

The only variable that is robustly predictive of default rates after controlling for economic development status are Ultimatum Game rejection rates, which is positively related to defaults. On the social capital account of repayment, trustworthiness should be negatively related to default rates. Note that GDP is in trillions for ease of interpreting coefficients, but using the raw GDP does not change the result.

Experiment

Recruiting and Ultimatum Game

Participants for the experiment were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. We recruited only participants from the US. Participants first learned about the Ultimatum Game from the instructions below:

In this interaction you are matched with one other person. One of you will be person A, one of you will be person B. Person A starts with 200 units and person B starts with 0. For this interaction, and those that follow, units will be converted at the end of the study to real dollars. Specifically, for every 10 units you earn you will receive 1 cent.

First person A makes a choice, then person B responds.

1) Person A will make an offer on how to split the 200 units with person B.

2) Person B will either *accept* or *reject* this offer.

If person B accepts, then B will get the offered amount and A will keep the rest.

If B rejects the offer then both individuals will get 0 units.

Participants then answered a set of comprehension questions about the Ultimatum Game while they still had access to the instructions. The comprehension questions are below:

1. What choice by Player A will result in Player A earning the most money?

[Player A offering Player B nothing, Player A offering Player B everything, It depends on what the receiver is willing to accept]

2. Which choice by Player B will result in Player B earning the most money?

[Player B deciding to accept the offer, Player B deciding to reject the offer]

3. If Player B decides to accept Player A's offer, what happens?

[Each Player's bonus is determined by Player A's offer, Each Player gets a random bonus, Both Players get no bonus]

4. If Player B decides to reject Player A's offer, what happens?

[Each Player's bonus is determined by Player A's offer, Each Player gets a random bonus, Both Players get no bonus]

Once participants had passed the comprehension test, we elicited their MAO. They could choose in 10-unit increments between 0 and 200. After they had reported their MAO, they reported what they would offer, using the same increments as the MAO.

Baseline and Social Dilemma Interactions

After the Ultimatum Game, participants moved onto the main portion of the experiment. They were randomly assigned to a group with 2 other people and each group was randomly assigned to either the Baseline condition or the Social Dilemma condition.

Below are the instructions and comprehension questions for the Baseline condition:

You have been assigned to a group with 2 other people. You each will have the opportunity to earn units over a series of rounds of play, which will be converted to real money at a rate of 10 units per cent.

Each of you will be assigned an identifier, but these identifiers are randomly shuffled each round. Thus you will not be able to track the behavior of the other people from round to round.

Each round works as follows:

- 1) Each of you receives a randomly determined number of units, between 0 and 500. Each of you may receive a different amount. You do not know the amounts received by the other group members, and they do not know the amount you receive.
- 2) You each choose how many of these units to keep toward your bonus, and how many to contribute to the group. In order to continue to the next round, each person must contribute 200 units to the group. Otherwise, the game ends and none of you have a chance to earn additional money, unless a group member 'pitches in' in stage 3.
- 3) If anyone in your group contributes *less* than 200 units, the group is told how many additional units are needed to meet the 200-unit-per-person threshold. Then each of you in turn can choose whether (or to what extent) to 'pitch in' and make up the difference by contributing more than 200 units yourself.
- 4) If the threshold is met, your group will continue to the next round. Your group will play at least 8 rounds. After the 8th round, there is a 50% probability that there will be another round, and another, and so on. If the threshold is not met, the game ends immediately and none of you have a chance to earn any further bonus money.

Participants then answered the following comprehension questions and if they failed one or more (in either condition) they were excluded from the remainder of the study.

- 1) Might you receive a different amount of starting money in each round than other people in your group? [Yes / No]
- 2) How many units are you responsible for contributing each round? [100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600]
- 3) If you or someone in your group does not make their full contribution, what happens? [the game ends immediately; nothing happens and the game continues to the next round; other group members can 'pitch in' and make up the difference in that player's contribution]
- 4) After the 'pitching in' phase is over, if you or someone in your group has failed to contribute enough units to get over the 200 unit threshold, what happens? [the game ends immediately; nothing happens and the game continues to the next round; everyone gets a bonus unit]

Below are the instructions and comprehension questions for the Social Dilemma condition:

You have been assigned to a group with 2 other people. You each will have the opportunity to earn units over a series of rounds of play, which will be converted to real money at a rate of 10 units per cent.

Each of you will be assigned an identifier, but these identifiers are randomly shuffled each round. Thus you will not be able to track the behavior of the other people from round to round.

Each round works as follows:

- 1) Each of you receives a randomly determined number of units, between 0 and 500. Each of you may receive a different amount. You do not know the amounts received by the other group members, and they do not know the amount you receive.
- 2) You each choose how many of these units to keep toward your bonus, and how many to contribute to the group. In order to continue to the next round, a total of at least 600 units must be contributed to the group. Otherwise, the game ends and none of you have a chance to earn additional money.
- 3) If less than 600 units are contributed, the group is told how many additional units are needed to meet the 600-unit threshold. Then each of you in turn can choose whether to 'pitch in' and make up the difference by contributing more, unless a group member 'pitches in' in stage 3.
- 4) If the threshold is met, your group will continue to the next round. Your group will play at least 8 rounds. After the 8th round, there is a 50% probability that there will be another round, and another, and so on. If the threshold is not met, the game ends immediately and none of you have a chance to earn any further bonus money.

After reading the instructions, participants in the threshold condition answered the following comprehension questions.

- 1) Might you receive a different amount of starting money in each round than other people in your group? [Yes / No]
- 2) How many units is your group responsible for contributing each round? [100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600]
- 3) If your group does not make its full contribution, what happens? [the game ends immediately; nothing happens and the game continues to the next round; the group members can 'pitch in' and make up the difference]
- 4) After the 'pitching in' is done, if your group failed to contribute enough units to get over the 600 unit threshold, what happens? [the game ends immediately; nothing happens and the game continues to the next round; everyone gets a bonus unit]

Regression table

Below is a regression table that shows the regression results from the three sets of statistical models we fit. Specifications 1-4 are fit using logistic regression, while specifications 5 and 6 are fit using OLS regression. For each specification, we use the lowest MAO in the group in order to capture the how inequity averse the group's least inequity averse member was. Groups with lower minimum MAOs have at least one member who will be more willing to pitch in, while groups with high minimum MAOs are less likely to have a member who will be willing to pitch in.

Table S4. Regression results from the experimental data

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Defaulted at any point		Defaulted in first round		Fraction of rounds foregone	
Group minimum MAO	4.719*** (1.766)	4.655** (2.057)	3.952*** (1.451)	3.713* (2.219)	0.636** (0.286)	0.747** (0.361)
Condition (Social dilemma=1)	1.590*** (0.484)	1.554** (0.763)	1.305*** (0.437)	1.194 (0.898)	0.276*** (0.074)	0.327** (0.132)
Group minimum MAO x Condition		0.245 (4.017)		-0.412 (2.929)		0.264 (0.558)
Constant	0.553 (0.462)	0.539 (0.512)	2.261*** (0.551)	2.186*** (0.759)	0.665*** (0.081)	0.690*** (0.0972)
Observations	120	120	120	120	120	120
R-squared/Pseudo R-squared	11.8%	11.9%	9.2%	9.2%	12.2%	12.4%

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1