

Causes of War

Signaling

March 17, 2015

Today's Agenda

- 1. Signaling in international crises.**
- 2. Presentation on "Known Unknowns."**
- 3. Presentation on "Does Private Information Lead to Delay or War in Crisis Bargaining?"**

Uncertainty and the Need to Signal

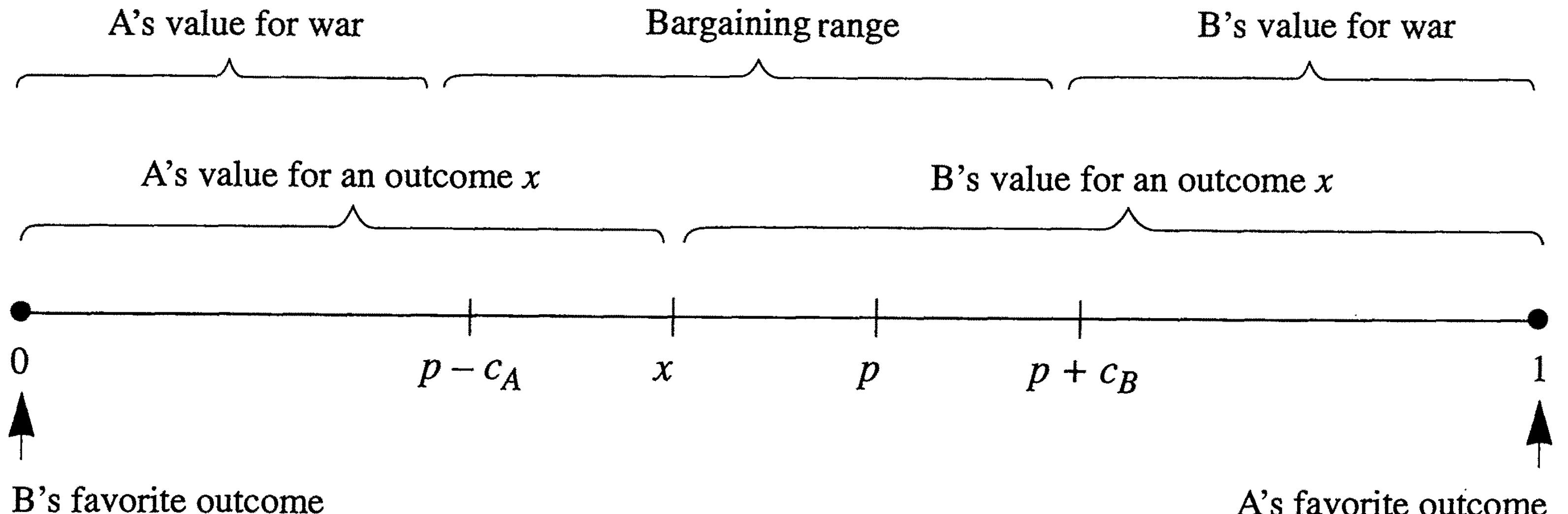


FIGURE 1. *The bargaining range*

Principles of Signaling

An easily mimicked signal is not informative.

**To convince others that you have an advantage—
strength, intelligence, wealth—you must do
something you couldn't do without it.**

International Crises

- How they can end**
 - 1. Settlement**
 - 2. War**
- Importance of signaling**
 - Avoid war**
 - Get better settlement**

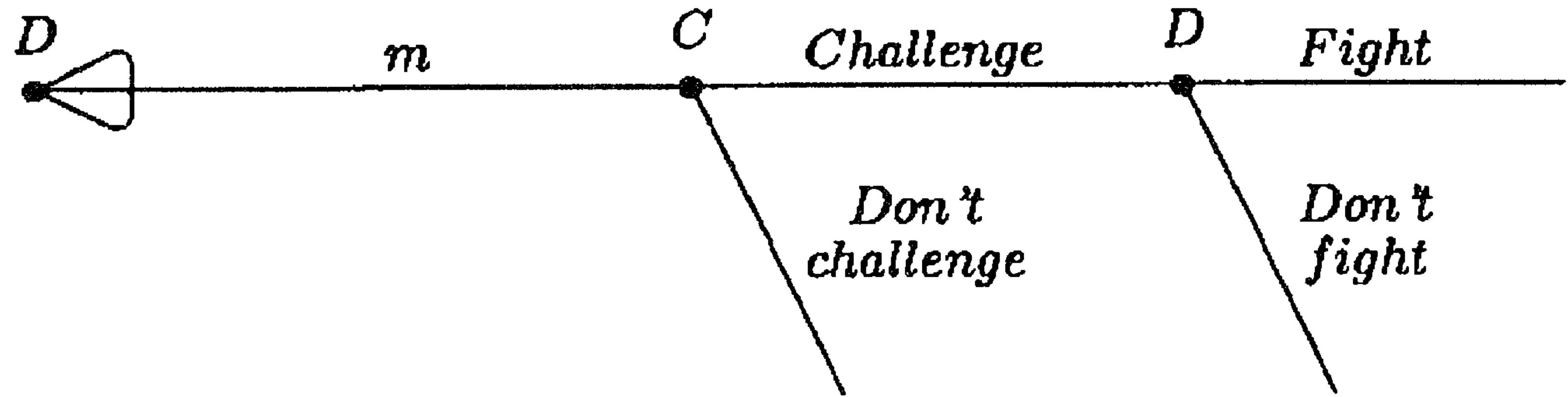
Signaling in Crises

- Strength
 - War-fighting ability
- Resolve
 - Willingness to fight
 - Value of stakes

A Basic Model of Crisis

- 1. Defender sends signals**
- 2. Challenger decides whether to challenge**
 - No challenge → Status Quo**
 - Challenge → (move to next step)**
- 3. Defender decides whether to fight**
 - No fight → Back Down**
 - Fight → War**

A Basic Model of Crisis



Two Ways to Signal

1. Sinking costs

- Incur losses up front

2. Tying hands

- Make backing down unattractive

Sinking Costs: How It Works

"If I weren't willing to spend \$1,000 to get my way, then I wouldn't have just lit \$1,000 on fire!"



Sinking Costs in Crises

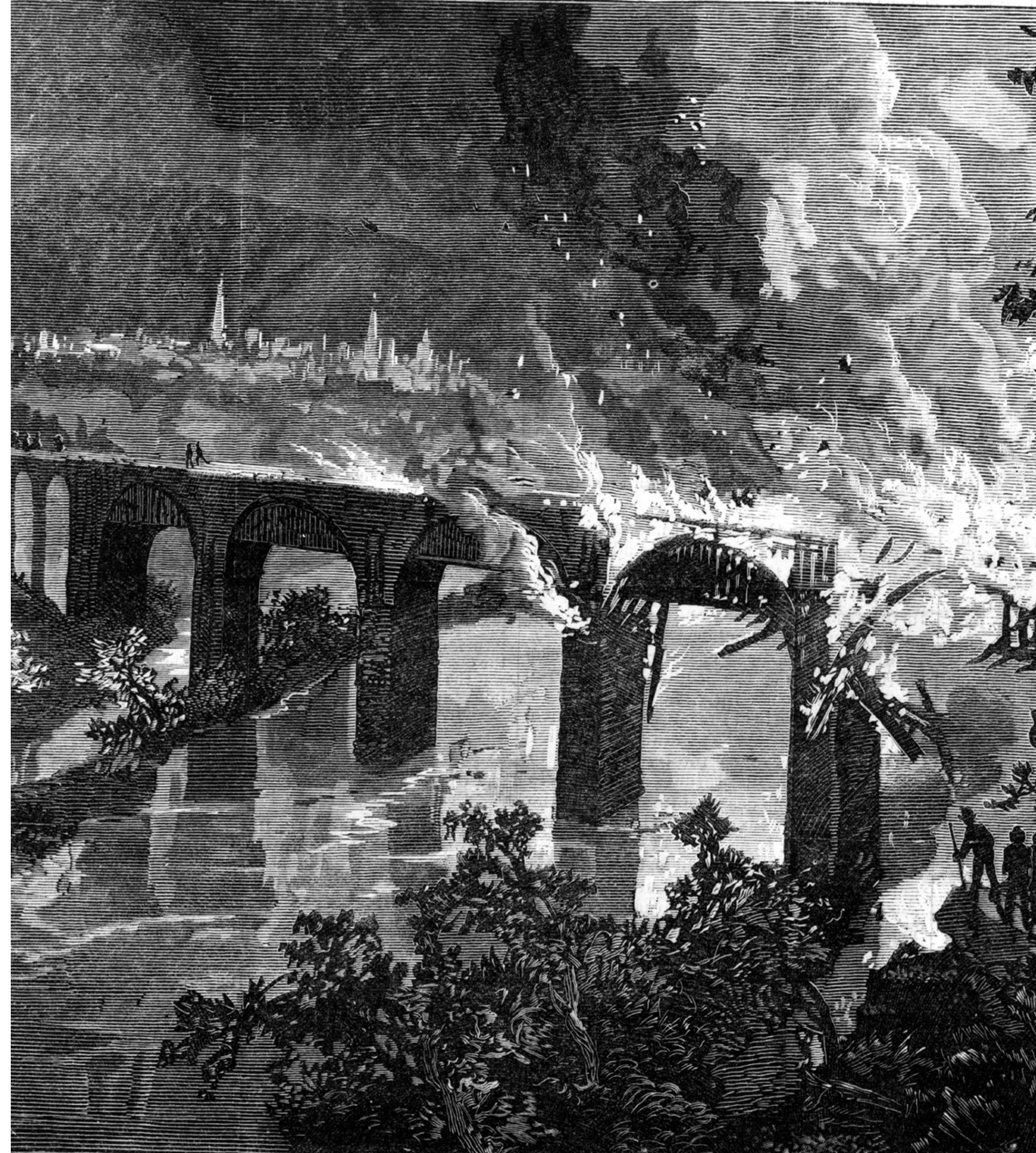
Benefits:

- Never end up in unwanted war
- Always possible

Downside: Expensive.

Tying Hands: How It Works

**"You know I won't back down,
because I just made sure I'll be
miserable if I do!"**



Tying Hands in Crises

Benefit: Cheap (if it works).

Downsides:

- To work, must increase risk of war!
- May end up in previously unwanted wars
- May not be feasible to generate high costs

Mobilization and Signaling

Military mobilization *both* sinks costs and ties a country's hands.

For Next Time

- Read Slantchev, "Military Coercion in Interstate Crises" (JSTOR)
- Presentation on "Inventing the Railroad and Rifle Revolution"
- Presentation on "Surprise Attack and Disarmament"

Image Sources

- Burning bridge: *Harper's Weekly*, August 11, 1877
- Bargaining range: Fearon (1995)
- Crisis model: Fearon (1997)
- Burning Monopoly money: Daniela Hartmann, via
[Flickr](#)