Coalitional Bargaining in Stationary Markets

Eduard Talamàs

September 15, 2017

Abstract

I study a new model of coalitional bargaining in stationary markets featuring strategic choice of bargaining partners. The set of coalitions that form in the unique stationary equilibrium has a tier structure, with payoffs determined from the top tier down: Shocks propagate from higher to lower tiers, but not vice versa. In the limit as bargaining frictions vanish, the equilibrium payoff profile is the only one that gives each player her maximum Nash bargaining payoff—over all coalitions—subject to the other players’ participation constraints. A player is made better off when she becomes less risk averse or the coalitions that she belongs to become more productive. But she may be made worse off when other players become more risk averse or some coalitions that she is not part of become less productive. Some players may be worse off after a uniform increase in the productivity of each coalition. In the special case of bilateral matching markets, independent tier structures—or submarkets—emerge in equilibrium, each with exactly one top-tier match: Shocks propagate within submarkets but not across them.

1 Introduction

Many economic activities involve coalitions of individuals who cooperate to achieve goals that they could not achieve separately. Different coalitions typically include similar individuals, which creates interconnections among them: For example, similar college graduates join investing, consulting and non-profit organizations, which links the wages paid by these
This paper seeks to understand the nature of these interconnections, and their implications for how microeconomic shocks propagate through the economy.

This article is organized as follows: section 2 describes the model, section 3 describes the sense in which this model admits an essentially-unique stationary equilibrium, section characterizes this equilibrium, and section 4 describes the tier structure of this equilibrium and its comparative statics. Finally, section 5 puts this article in the context of the related literature, and section 6 concludes.

2 Model

2.1 Primitives

The finite set of players is denoted by $N$. The output function $y : 2^N \to \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$ specifies the amount of output each coalition of players can produce. Each player $i$ has vN-M utility function $u_i$, normalized so that $u_i(y(i)) = 0$.

2.2 The Game $\Gamma$

$\Gamma$ denotes the following infinite-horizon bargaining game. At the beginning of each period $t = 0, 1, \ldots$, one player is selected uniformly at random to be the proposer.

The proposer chooses one coalition $S$ that she is a member of, and proposes a split of the output $y(S)$. The members in $S$ respond sequentially in (a pre-specified) order until one of them rejects or all of them accept. In the former case, no trade occurs this period and all players stay in the market for the next period. In the latter case, the coalition $S$ forms, its members exit the market with the agreed shares, and are immediately replaced by replicas. Formally, there exists a sequence $i_0, i_1, \ldots, i_\tau, \ldots$ of players of type $i \in N$. The game starts with player set $\{i_0\}_{i \in N}$. For any $\tau \geq 0$ and any $i \in N$, if player $i_\tau$ exits the game, player $i_{\tau+1}$ immediately replaces her.

At the end of each period, the market breaks down with probability $q$, in which case the game ends, and all the players of type $i$ that have not yet formed a coalition obtain $y(i)$ (their outside option).

All players have common knowledge of the game and perfect information about all the events preceding any of their decision nodes in the game.
2.3 Histories, Strategies and Equilibrium

There are two types of histories at which some player must take an action. Let $h_t$ be a history of the game up to (but not including) period $t$, which is a sequence of $t$ pairs of proposers and set of responders with corresponding proposals and responses. First, $(h_t, i)$ consists of $h_t$ followed by no breakdown in period $t$ and player $i$ being selected to be the proposer in period $t$. Second, $(h_t, i \rightarrow S, z, j)$ consists of $(h_t, i)$ followed by player $i$ proposing that coalition $S$ shares its output according to the profile $z \in \mathbb{R}^S_{\geq 0}$, and all players preceding $j \in S$ in the response order having accepted.

A strategy $\sigma_i$ for player $i$ specifies, for all possible histories $h_t$, the offer $\sigma_i(h_t, i)$ that she makes following history $(h_t, i)$ and her response $\sigma_i(h_t, j \rightarrow S, z, i)$ following history $(h_t, j \rightarrow S, z, i)$. I allow for mixed strategies, so $\sigma_i(h_t, i)$ and $\sigma_i(h_t, j \rightarrow S, z, i)$ are probability distributions over $2^N \times \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}$ and \{Yes, No\}, respectively.

The strategy profile $(\sigma_i)_{i \in N}$ is a stationary (Markovian-perfect) equilibrium of the game $\Gamma(N, y, u, q)$ if it induces a Nash equilibrium in the subgame following every history, and if no player’s strategy conditions behavior on the history of the game except—in the case of a response—on the going proposal and the identity of the proposer. I often refer to a stationary equilibrium simply as an equilibrium.

3 Essentially-Unique Equilibrium

3.1 Equilibrium Threshold Profile

**Proposition 3.1.** Each player $i \in N$ has a threshold $t_i$ such that, in every stationary subgame-perfect equilibrium of $\Gamma$,

1. she always accepts offers that give her strictly more than $t_i$, and
2. she always rejects offers that give her strictly less than $t_i$.

**Proof.** Fix a stationary equilibrium of $\Gamma$. Let $v_i$ denote player $i$’s expected utility in any given period conditional on not trading in that period, and let $w_i$ denote player $i$’s expected utility when she is the proposer in any given period. Similarly, let $x_i$ and $p_i(x_i)$, respectively, be the amount of output that give player $i$ the same utility as her expected utility of not trading and of being the proposer in a given period; that is, $v_i = u_i(x_i)$ and $w_i = u_i(a_i(x_i))$. 

We have that
\[u_i(x_i) = \chi u_i(p_i(x_i))\] where \(\chi := \frac{1 - q}{1 + (n - 1)q}\)

The maximum amount of output that player \(i\) can obtain when she is the proposer is
\[
\max_{C \subseteq N; i \in C} \left( y(C) - \sum_{j \in C - i} x_j \right).
\]

since each player \(j\) rejects every offer that gives her strictly less than \(x_j\). Player \(i\) can secure a share of output arbitrarily close to (2) when she is the proposer, since each player \(j\) accepts every offer that gives her strictly more than a share \(x_j\) of output.

Together, these observations imply that
\[
p_i(x_i) = \max_{C \subseteq N; i \in C} \left( y(C) - \sum_{j \in C - i} x_j \right)\] for all \(i \in N\),

The proof now follows from the fact that, by Proposition 3.2, there is a unique solution to the system (3); player \(i\)'s equilibrium threshold \(t_i\) is \(x_i\).

\[\square\]

3.2 Rubinstein Bargaining under Participation Constraints (RBPC)

**Definition 3.1.** For each profile \(\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}\), each coalition \(C\) and each player \(i \in C\), let \(i\)'s \(\theta\)-(Rubinstein) share in \(C\) be the \(i\)th element of the profile \(x \in \mathbb{R}^C\) that solves
\[
p_i(x_k) = y(C) - \sum_{j \in C - k} x_j \quad \forall k \in C.
\]
subject to \(x_j \geq \theta_j \quad \forall j \in C \setminus \{i\}\).

when (4) is well defined, and 0 otherwise (and where the function \(p_i\) is defined by Equation 1). Player \(i\)'s \(\theta\)-best share is her maximum \(\theta\)-share over all coalitions that include her, and her \(\theta\)-best coalitions are those coalitions \(C\) for which her \(\theta\)-share in \(C\) is her \(\theta\)-best share.

**Definition 3.2.** An RBPC is a profile \(\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N\) such that, \(\forall i \in N\), \(\theta_i\) is \(i\)'s \(\theta\)-best share; that is,
\[
p_i(\theta_i) = \max_{C \subseteq N; i \in C} \left( y(C) - \sum_{j \in C - i} \theta_j \right)\] for all \(i \in N\)

\[\text{To see this, note that } v_i = qu_i(y(i)) + (1 - q) \left( \frac{1}{n} w_i + \frac{n - 1}{n} v_i \right) = (1 - q) \left( \frac{1}{n} w_i + \frac{n - 1}{n} v_i \right)\text{ since equilibrium offers leave the responders indifferent between accepting and rejecting them, and } u_i(y(i))\text{ is normalized to 0. Hence, } v_i = \chi w_i\text{, with } \chi \text{ as defined in Equation 1.}\]
3.3 Computation of the RBPC

Proposition 3.2 shows that the following algorithm computes the unique RBPC.

Definition 3.3 (Algorithm $\mathcal{A}$). Let $x^0 = 0 \in \mathbb{R}^N$ and $X^0 = \emptyset$. Proceed inductively as follows: In step $k \geq 1$, let $X^k$ be the union of $X^{k-1}$ and the set of all players in $N - X^{k-1}$ that are members of an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition—that is, an $x^{k-1}$-best coalition of all its members in $N - X^{k-1}$. For each such player $i$, let $x^k_i$ be her $x^{k-1}$-best share; for each other player $j$, let $x^k_j = x^{k-1}_j$. End in the first step $K$ for which $X^K = X^{K-1}$, and let $\chi := x^K$.

Note 3.1. $X^0 \subset X^1 \subset \cdots \subset X^K \subseteq N$, so algorithm $\mathcal{A}$ ends in at most $|N|$ steps. Its running time is bounded above by $|N|$ times $m$, where $m$ denotes the number of productive coalitions. When every coalition is productive, the running time of the algorithm grows exponentially with the number of players—as does the number of different coalitions.

Proposition 3.2. The profile $\chi$ defined by algorithm $\mathcal{A}$ is the unique RBPC.

Proof. I prove by induction in $k$ that $X^k$ is a strict superset of $X^{k-1}$ unless $X^{k-1} = N$ (so $X^K = N$ at the step $K$ at which algorithm $\mathcal{A}$ ends) and that every RBPC gives $x^k_i = \chi_i$ to each player $i \in X^k$ (so $\chi$ is the only possible RBPC). The fact that $\chi$ is an RBPC then follows from the observation that, for every $k \leq K$ and for each player $i$ in $X^k$, $x^k_i$ is $i$’s $\chi$-best share.\footnote{To see this, let $i$ be in $X^k - X^{k-1}$, and let $C$ be $i$’s $k$-best coalition. On the one hand, $x^k_i$ is a lower bound on $i$’s $\chi$-best share because her $\chi$-share in $C$ is $x^k_i$. On the other hand, $x^k_i$ is an upper bound on $i$’s $\chi$-best share because $i$’s $x^l$-share in any coalition $C$ is not increasing in $l$ (because the set of relevant constraints in the computation of $x^l$-shares only expands with $l$).}

Let $k = 1, 2 \ldots$ be such that $X^{k-1} \neq N$, and suppose that every RBPC gives $x^{k-1}_i$ to each player $i \in X^{k-1}$ (note that this induction hypothesis is vacuously true when $k = 1$, so there’s no need to prove the base step separately). By Lemma 3.3 below, $X^k$ is a strict superset of $X^{k-1}$. It only remains to prove that every RBPC gives each of the members of an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition her $x^{k-1}$-best payoff. The key observation is Lemma 3.4:

Let $\theta$ be an RBPC (and hence, by the induction hypothesis, $\theta_i = x^{k-1}_i$ for all $i \in X^{k-1}$), let $C$ be an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition, and suppose for contradiction that, for some $i$ in $C - X^{k-1}$, $\theta_i$ is strictly smaller than $i$’s $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$.$\footnote{The alternative case in which $\theta_i$ is strictly larger than $i$’s $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$ immediately contradicts Lemma 3.4.}$ This implies that $i$’s $\theta$-share in $C$ is strictly smaller than $i$’s $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$, which in turn implies that, for some $j$ in $C - X^{k-1}$, $\theta_j$ is strictly bigger than $j$’s $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$ (that is, $j$’s $x^{k-1}$-best share) which contradicts Lemma 3.4.\hfill $\square$

Lemma 3.3. For each $k$ for which $X^{k-1} \subset N$, there is at least one $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition.
Proof. Denoting, for each coalition $C$, player $i$’s $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$ by $x_i(C, k-1)$, by definition we have that
\[ \mu_i(C, k-1) := p_i(x_i(C, k-1)) - x_i(C, k-1) \]
is the same for every player $i \in C \cap X^{k-1}$; denote by $\mu(C, k-1)$ this common value. A coalition $C$ with maximum $\mu(C, k-1)$ is an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition, since, by the concavity of $u_i$, $p_i(x_i) - x_i$ is increasing in $x_i$. \qed

Lemma 3.4. For each $k = 0, 1, \ldots$, and for all $\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}$ such that $\theta_i = x_i^{k-1}$ when $i \in X^{k-1}$, each player’s $x^{k-1}$-best share is an upper bound on her $\theta$-best share.

Proof. Let $k = 0, 1, \ldots$, and let $\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}$ be such that $\theta_i = x_i^{k-1}$ when $i \in X^{k-1}$. Let $C \subseteq N$ and $i \in C$. Player $i$’s $\theta$-share in $C$ is equal to her $x^{k-1}$-share in $C$ if none of the participation constraints in (4) of players in $C - X^{k-1}$ bind, and smaller than that otherwise. \qed

3.4 Equivalence between the Equilibrium Threshold Profile and the RBPC

Corollary 3.5. The equilibrium threshold profile $t$ in $\Gamma$ is the unique RBPC.

Proof. Equation 5 is equivalent to Equation 3, so it follows from the proof of Proposition 3.1 that a profile $x$ is an equilibrium threshold profile of $\Gamma$ if and only if it is the RBPC. \qed

3.5 Nash Bargaining under Participation Constraints

Definition 3.4. For each $\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}$, each coalition $C$ and each player $i \in C$, let $i$’s $\theta$-Nash share in $C$ be\(^4\)

\[
\text{Feasibility: } \sum_{i \in C} s_i \leq y(C), \quad \argmax_{s \in \mathbb{R}^C_{\geq 0}} \prod_{i \in C} u_i(s_i) \quad \text{s.t.} \quad \text{Participation: } \forall j \in C - \{i\}, s_j \geq \theta_j.
\]

when (4) is well defined, and $0$ otherwise. Player $i$’s $\theta$-Nash best share is her maximum $\theta$-Nash share over all coalitions that include her, and her $\theta$-Nash best coalitions are those coalitions $C$ for which her $\theta$-Nash share in $C$ is her $\theta$-Nash best share.

Definition 3.5. An NBPC is a profile $\theta \in \mathbb{R}^N_{\geq 0}$ such that, $\forall i \in N$, $\theta_i$ is $i$’s $\theta$-Nash best share.

\(^4\)Without the participation constraints, (4) is the definition of the Nash Bargaining solution, where player $i$’s disagreement (or threat) point is $u_i(y(i)) = 0$. 

6
Corollary 3.6. As the breakdown probability $q$ goes to 0, the RBPC converges to the unique NBPC.

Proof. The fact that there exists a unique NBPC follows from the argument analogous to that in Proposition 3.2 when we use algorithm $\mathcal{A}$ (Definition 3.3) after replacing—in its definition—the Rubinstein shares (Definition 3.1) with the Nash shares (Definition 3.4).\footnote{The only part of the argument that is different in this limit is the proof of the statement analogous to Lemma 3.3. The following proof of this statement is essentially the same as that in Pycia (2012, pages 330-331): Denoting, for each coalition $C$, player $i$'s $x^{k-1}$-Nash share by $x_i(C,k-1)$, we have that
\[
\chi_i(C,k-1) := \frac{u_i(x_i(C,k-1))}{u'_i(x_i(C,k-1))}
\]
is the same for every player $i \in C \cap X^{k-1}$; denote by $\chi(C,k-1)$ this common value. A coalition $C$ with maximum $\chi(C,k-1)$ is an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition, since each player’s $x^{k-1}$-Nash share in $C$ is increasing in $\chi(C,k-1)$.}

The fact that the RBPC converges to the NBPC follows from the observation that, for each profile $\theta$, each coalition $C$ and each player $i \in C$, $i$’s $\theta$-Rubinstein share in $C$ converges to $i$’s $\theta$-Nash share in $C$. This is only a slight generalization of the observation—first made by Binmore (1987)—that $i$’s 0-Rubinstein share in $C$ converges to $i$’s 0-Nash share in $C$. \qed

4 Tier Structure and Comparative Statics

4.1 Tier Structure

An important property of the equilibrium threshold profile $t$ of $\Gamma$ that comes out directly from the characterization of the RBPC (Proposition 3.2) is that both the players and the coalitions that form in equilibrium can be organized into tiers, as follows:

The tier-1 coalitions are those that are a preferred coalition of all its members. The tier-1 players are those that are members of any tier-1 coalition. Proceeding inductively, after having defined tiers $1, 2, \ldots, k-1$, a coalition is in tier-$k$ if and only if it contains at least one player in tier $k-1$ and is a preferred coalition of all its members who are not in any of the tiers above $(1, 2, \ldots, k-1)$. Tier-$k$ players are those that are in a tier-$k$ coalition and are not in any tier-$k'$ coalition, for any $k' < k$.\footnote{The only part of the argument that is different in this limit is the proof of the statement analogous to Lemma 3.3. The following proof of this statement is essentially the same as that in Pycia (2012, pages 330-331): Denoting, for each coalition $C$, player $i$’s $x^{k-1}$-Nash share by $x_i(C,k-1)$, we have that
\[
\chi_i(C,k-1) := \frac{u_i(x_i(C,k-1))}{u'_i(x_i(C,k-1))}
\]
is the same for every player $i \in C \cap X^{k-1}$; denote by $\chi(C,k-1)$ this common value. A coalition $C$ with maximum $\chi(C,k-1)$ is an $x^{k-1}$-perfect coalition, since each player’s $x^{k-1}$-Nash share in $C$ is increasing in $\chi(C,k-1)$.}
4.2 Comparative Statics

4.2.1 Marginal Shocks

The tier structure of the equilibrium implies that—in the generic case in which each player has a unique preferred coalition—a player’s equilibrium threshold is not affected by marginal shocks that only hit coalitions and players in lower tiers. Moreover, when a tier only contains one coalition, any marginal shock that affects it (directly or indirectly) also affects the share of every player in every tier below it.

Note that a marginal increase in the output of a coalition in tier $k$ can only decrease the equilibrium payoffs of players in tier $k + 1$, but has ambiguous effects on players in tiers $k' > k + 1$. Moreover, a uniform increase of $\Delta > 0$ units in the output of each coalition can decrease some players equilibrium payoffs, because the sum of the relevant participation constraints in a coalition can increase by more than $\Delta$.

In the limit as the breakdown probability vanishes, the output in each coalition that forms in equilibrium is shared according to the Nash bargaining solution subject to the participation constraint of the players in higher tiers.

In the special case of bilateral matching markets, we can visualize the equilibrium by depicting the preferred-neighbor network, which has a link from player $i$ to player $j$ if player $i$ makes offers to player $j$ in equilibrium. Combining the observation that, generically, each player has exactly one preferred neighbor with the fact that each component of the preferred-neighbor network—or submarket—has at least two mutually-preferred neighbors, we conclude that only one pair of players in each submarket are in the top tier. In other words, independent tier structures—one for each submarket—emerge in equilibrium, each with exactly one top tier match. Marginal shocks propagate within submarkets, but not across them, and marginal shocks to the preferences of the top-tier players or the productivity of the top-tier match of a submarket affect all terms of trade in their submarket.

4.2.2 Arbitrarily Large Shocks

**Definition 4.1.** Player $i$ is more risk averse than player $j$ if there exists an increasing and concave function $g$ such that $u_i = g \circ u_j$.

**Proposition 4.1.** Player $i$’s equilibrium threshold is nondecreasing in $y(C)$ for all $C \ni i$, and non-increasing in her own risk aversion.

**Proof.** Let $C \subseteq N$ and $i \in C$. An increase in $y(C)$ cannot generate more stringent participa-
tion constraints at the step of algorithm \( A \) at which any player \( i \)'s RBPC share is defined. It follows that player \( i \)'s RBPC share can only increase after such a change.

Even though an increase in \( i \)'s risk aversion can generate less stringent participation constraints at the step of algorithm \( A \) at which player \( i \)'s RBPC share is defined, player \( i \)'s RBPC share cannot increase after such a change. To see this, let \( C \) be \( i \)'s \( x^k \)-best coalition at the step \( k \) in which her RBPC share is defined. Note that the only relevant less stringent participation constraint can be that of another player \( j \in C \) whose RBPC share before the shock was defined at some step before \( i \)'s RBPC share was defined, and whose RBPC share after the shock is defined at step \( k \). But this implies that \( j \)'s \( x^k \)-best share is larger than \( j \)'s RBPC share before the shock, which, together with the fact that \( p_i(x_i) - x_i \) is increasing in both \( x_i \) and \( i \)'s risk aversion, implies that player \( i \)'s RBPC share cannot increase after such a change. \( \square \)

## 5 Related Literature

This paper contributes to the literature on bargaining in stationary markets started by Rubinstein and Wolinsky (1985) and that includes Gale (1987), De Fraja and Sakovics (2001), Manea (2011), Nguyen (2015) and Polanski and Vega-Redondo (forthcoming).

The three main differences with respect to Manea (2011) are that he uses a *random-match bargaining protocol* (where in each period, bargaining is restricted to occur among two players that are matched at random), that he assumes that each pair of players can generate the same surplus, and that he focuses on the limit as bargaining frictions vanish. In contrast, I use a *strategic-match bargaining protocol* (where in each period, one randomly selected player can choose whom to bargain with), I allow trade between different players to generate different surpluses, and I study both the case of arbitrary bargaining frictions and the limit as bargaining frictions vanish.

The model that is closest to the one I study here is that of Nguyen (2015): The two main differences are that I don’t restrict attention to the case of transferable utility, and that I allow players to strategically choose which coalitions to make offers to.

The structure of the equilibrium of the game \( \Gamma \) is similar to the no-delay equilibrium of a similar non-stationary model characterized by Chatterjee et al. (1993) in the case of transferable utility (see also Ray, 2007). This is natural, since in a stationary market no player can benefit by delaying trade, and players have a degree of bargaining power similar to that conferred by the rejector-proposes protocol of Chatterjee et al. (1993).

The equilibrium payoff profile in the limit as bargaining frictions vanish coincides with
the *Nash Bargaining solution under Participation Constraints*: The unique payoff profile that gives each player her maximum Nash Bargaining payoff—over all coalitions—subject to the participation constraints of the other players.

The NBPC can be regarded as a cooperative solution concept for the stationary environment considered in this paper. A natural way to build such a solution concept is to assume that output within each coalition is shared according to a fixed sharing rule; see for example Farrell and Scotchmer (1988), Banerjee et al. (2001) and Pycia (2012), who study the conditions under which different such fixed rules lead to stable outcomes. However, this does not allow coalitions to make exceptions in their sharing rules in order to meet the participation constraints of their members. This leads to well-known holdup problems (see e.g. Pycia, 2012): Players with strong bargaining positions cannot commit to adequately reward others, making it difficult for them to find coalitional partners.

To overcome these problems, the sharing rule in each coalition must be allowed to depend on the sharing rule in other teams. In particular, the problem has to be solved for all possible coalitions simultaneously, in such a way that the surplus in each coalition is shared respecting the endogenous participation constraints of its members. But this has its own challenges. Most importantly, participation constraints can lose connection with the economic fundamentals. For example, a player can get a certain share of output in coalition $C_1$ because she gets it in coalition $C_2$, when the only reason that she gets it in coalition $C_2$ is because she gets it in coalition $C_1$. Hence, a satisfactory solution must impose additional requirements that rule out this type of circular reasoning in the determination of participation constraints.

The NBPC imposes a *credibility* requirement on participation constraints. Similar credibility requirements play important roles throughout game theory: For example, *subgame perfection* in the theory of non-cooperative games rules out threats that cannot be justified by equilibrium play, and *farsighted stability* in the theory of cooperative games rules out blocks by coalitions that cannot be justified with stable allocations; see for example Dutta and Ray (1989), Chwe (1994), and Ray and Vohra (2014, 2015).

Other solutions based on Nash Bargaining under core-like constraints—albeit in a framework in which at most one coalition can form and utility is perfectly transferable—include Serrano and Shimomura (1998), Okada (2010), Compte and Jehiel (2010) and Burguet and Caminal (2016). The NBPC is closest in spirit to the SCOOP of Burguet and Caminal (2016): The main difference—on top of the two just mentioned—is that the SCOOP requires that *disagreement* (or *threat*) *points* in each coalition reflect the payoffs that players can obtain in
other coalitions, whereas outside options in the NBPC act instead as *participation constraints*; that is, as lower bounds on players’ payoffs.

6 Conclusion

The classical theory of bargaining, as exemplified by the Nash Bargaining solution (Nash, 1950) and Rubinstein’s alternating offers model (Rubinstein, 1982), explores the determinants of how surplus is shared in the absence of market forces. As expressed by Abreu and Gul (2000, page 86):

> In its *purest* form, [bargaining theory] is precisely about explaining a division of *residual* surplus that remains after one has accounted for market forces, outside options, and so on.

But, ultimately, market forces and outside options come from somewhere, so an important challenge for bargaining theory it to illuminate the source of these forces and their interaction with the pure bargaining problem as well.⁶

In this article, I characterize the equilibrium of a new model of coalitional bargaining in stationary markets. This characterization provides insight into the source of each player’s bargaining power: Each player’s payoff is determined by “pure bargaining” in a certain coalition subject to the participation constraints of the other players (“market forces”). The tier structure of this equilibrium illuminates how productivity and preference shocks propagate through the market.

The equilibrium payoff profile in the limit as bargaining frictions vanish coincide with the *Nash Bargaining solution under Participation Constraints*: The unique payoff profile that gives each player her maximum Nash bargaining payoff—over all coalitions—subject to the participation constraint of the other players. I leave the investigation of the axiomatic properties of the NBPC for future research.

---

⁶Chatterjee et al. (1993) is the pioneer in this regard. More recent contributions along these lines include Manea (2011), and Elliott and Nava (2016), among many others.
References


