Foreign Policy and Identity Politics:
Trump and Brexit Through Putnam's Two Level Games

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Abstract
In 2016, two major advanced democracies held consequential plebiscites that will impact the conduct of their respective future foreign policies. Putnam observed that foreign policy decisions are invariably affected by the pressures placed on the political executive's international imperatives as a result of domestic agenda concerns. Since the communitarian challenge to liberal philosophy emerged from the 1970s onward, the pre-eminence of identity politics has been well established in academia and partly reflected in the public policies of advanced democracies with respect to minorities and immigrants. However, the logic of identity politics has been transposed beyond application to minorities and migrant populations and has now facilitated the emergence of occidental nativism. We undertake a comparative analysis of the implications of Donald Trump's presidential victory and the UK's referendum on membership of the EU. We contend that both events indicate the adaption of identity politics discourse into the political consciousness of indigenous populations of nations hosting inward migration. Both cases illustrate that emergent nativist reactions to decades of multicultural policies will impact the executive branch's capacity to negotiate and conclude international agreements. The study throws into relief the tension between two competing objectives: the imperative to conclude beneficial agreements with other states while simultaneously maintaining political electability in the face of increasing domestic nativism. The paper concludes with a discussion of these domestic constraints on US and UK foreign policy and the emergent crisis in normative identity politics exposed by them.

Keywords: identity politics, foreign policy, Putnam, Brexit, Trump

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I. Introduction

With the majority decision of the United Kingdom (UK) electorate in the summer of 2016 to leave the European Union (EU), and the subsequent election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States (US) in November, domestic politics have taken a decidedly unambiguous turn towards populism in advanced prosperous democracies. In 2017, there are looming elections across Europe, in particular in France and Germany, where mainstream parties are haunted by the rise of populist right wing parties. Serious questions hang over the inevitable triumph of liberal democratic politics within nation states and the entire premises of the post-war international order. This study undertakes an empirical analysis through a systematic examination of official discourse from two prominent nation states where these questions and concerns are most acutely in evidence. Our key objective is to demonstrate the nascent challenges for both UK and US foreign policy formulation in light of populist nativism.

In 1988, Robert Putnam posited the relationship between domestic pressures and the foreign policy positions of nation states in his seminal paper (Putnam 1988). As he made clear with respect to the intra-national and international spheres:

> *At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among these groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments* (Putnam 1988, pg. 434).

This study draws on Putnam's key insight on this intra/international interplay in order to interrogate the twin pressures of domestic imperatives on the one hand, and the need for a beneficial foreign policy agenda which underpins international stability, on the other. For our purposes, we will concentrate our analysis on the manifestation of domestic pressure on the foreign policy pronouncements of political leaders. In the case of the US, we will examine the campaign rhetoric of principle political actors during the 2016 election, when the avenue for policy capture by domestic interests was most open and visible. For the UK example, we examine the political discourse around the time of the referendum campaign through an analysis of Leave Campaign pronouncements.

Putnam's original analysis focused on the question of concluding trade agreements by locomotive economies in the late 1970s, specifically how the Carter administration-in line with the views of other major powers-agreed to establish a stimulus package to bolster the international economy following the global energy crisis. Putnam drew attention to the fact that, while the agreement had been concluded successfully at the international level, there were significant obstacles to its conclusion at the domestic, level. Respective domestic concerns required inclusion into the calculus of any collective international agreement. Here we bring two key factors into a similar alignment. On the one hand, we draw out the desire by both states to appear broadly

in favor of continuing international cooperation in order to entrench beneficial gains in international trade. On the other hand, it is clear that the eruption of populist nativism in the West has serious implications for the continuation of these policies when they are perceived to be detrimental to domestic voter interests.

Taking Putnam's insight as a starting point, the principle objective of this analysis is to demonstrate the nascent impact of domestic pressures on national foreign policies through a comparison of their official discourses. The specific domestic issue isolated for this study is the tension between the accommodation of minorities on the one hand and the perceived threat to national identity narratives on the other. From the 1970s onwards, the emergence of identity politics within academic debate has infused the policy positions of leftist and liberal political parties in the West.

The emergence of identity politics has its roots in the communitarian critique of Rawlsian political philosophy in the mid-1970s. Rawls attempted to restate and refine the philosophical underpinnings of liberal individualism and the social contract in his landmark book A Theory of Justice (Rawls 1971). However, strains of collectivist thinking, functionally referred to as 'communitarianism', emerged in the aftermath of Rawls's work to challenge the philosophical basis of his thesis. In short, and while accounting for the variations between individual authors in the communitarian tradition, Rawls's conceptualization of social and political organization was too heavily reliant on the atomistic, and putatively 'western' view, of the individual.

Rather than view individuals through a 'veil of ignorance', communitarians sought to situate human self-understanding and identity in the context of social relations. This became known in theoretical shorthand as the 'social constitution thesis' (See Cohen 1999) – individuals were not merely single persons; they were enmeshed in social and cultural relations, which serve to 'constitute' them as individuals. We are, in other words, individuals only in a social and cultural sense, not as humans in a state of nature. The liberal-communitarian split in normative political philosophy resonates to the present, with the communitarian side of the argument apparently emerging the stronger. This was particularly so as advanced democracies began to adapt multicultural policies with respect to minorities and vulnerable groups previously considered oppressed by assimilationist state policies.

However, in the aftermath of the emergence of Islamist terrorism at the start of the 21st century, serious questions began to reverberate within academia and policy circles about the efficacy of multiculturalism. In more recent years, a backlash has surfaced pitting the leftist conceptualization of identity politics and accommodationism against right of center counter narratives of indigenous or 'nativist' national identity tropes. Both the election of Trump and the Brexit vote occurred in close proximity to each other and both have been greeted more widely as significant shifts in established politics, with a direct impact on the likely articulation of foreign policy by the executive branches of both governments. Notwithstanding the more subtle academic contest between the refined arguments of liberals or communitarians, the backlash against multiculturalism in the West has more to do with the appropriation of the core concepts of communitarianism than it does about

the rejection of it. The rise of populism in the West has to do with a fundamental, if inadvertent, agreement with the social constitution thesis, but one that sees multicultural policies and net migration as a dilution of that social and cultural fabric in their specific national contexts.

The cases of the US and UK are opposite comparisons given the often invoked 'special relationship' between both nations. The task of the study is to isolate examples of how the respective pressures of antipathy to economic globalization, unequal wealth distribution and the emerging resistance to multicultural policies have combined to dramatically reshape and alter the established premises of the liberal international order.

II. Methodology

The study is a comparative analysis of the public pronouncements of both UK and US public representatives conducted through a qualitative-interpretive methodology. The study is concerned primarily with naturally occurring data produced by those who occupy executive office within the states concerned. Official discourse is defined as having several key attributes (Burton & Carlen 1979): articulation by a significant role holder in official office and public availability to a wider audience, composed primarily of constituents or potential constituents.

The study will draw on qualitative data available from the executive offices of the US and UK, where a sample of official documents will be analyzed with a view to isolating discursive expressions of domestic imperatives around questions of, for example, national identity, security and relations with foreign citizens, refugees and migrants. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is a growing branch of social research that so far has been applied only to a limited extent in the sphere of international politics. Thus, QDA allows analysts to consider the situated worldview of, for the purpose of this paper, political actors.

While still on the margins of political science approaches, interpretive methodology has gained increasing ascendency in the study of social and political phenomena throughout the 20th century. Once the limitations of positivist and behavioral epistemology became clear relative to the study of social phenomena, qualitative research offered a viable alternative. The roots of qualitative interpretive methodology are multifarious. An amalgamation of research approaches have coalesced into what is now frequently referred to as 'post' positivism. Primarily spearheaded by the Chicago School of Anthropology in the US and through the increasingly important influence of continental philosophy in the social sciences and humanities from the 1970s onwards, interpretivism demurs from offering positive 'laws' of social and political interaction, and instead attends to the question of actor perspectives on the wider social world. Unlike positivism, post-positivism seeks to interpret the worldview of social actors in order to offer analysis of human, as opposed to natural, interaction.

Within this, the focus on language is a cornerstone of the research approach. Drawing on Burton and Carlen (1979), we apply our interpretive approach to the study of

'official' discourse. One of the key questions that the study of official discourse poses is the question of what silent accusations does the public utterance of a politician or political institution seek to refute. Our analysis seeks to trace the inevitable conflicts between the two 'game boards' presumed by Putnam's paper. Our task, therefore, is to examine where competing pressures manifest themselves in the official discourse of political executives.

In the case of the US example, the study will draw from the published Executive Orders (EOs), Presidential Policy Memoranda (PPMs) and presidential speeches available to public audiences. This cross-section of information allows our analysis to focus on the considered – and fully formed – policy position of the Trump Presidency since January 20th, 2017 as opposed to the impromptu and informal remarks made by the Trump campaign team or off the cuff remarks by the President-Elect himself. In the case of the UK, the analysis will draw on UK government documents such as parliamentary White Papers, policy briefs, position statements and speeches or articles authored by the UK Prime Minister and UK Foreign Secretary, as well as the executive office set up to coordinate the Brexit process. Again, the focus is on the articulation of 'official' policy positions by UK public representatives who have an international role.

The data analysis begins with the coding of these texts through 'versus coding' (See Saldana 2006) with an overt focus on the related foreign policy issues of inward migration, trade and security. Versus coding was chosen to allow analysis to focus on components of the various texts that exhibit conflictual patterns relative to the issues outlined. Versus coding determines from segments of texts where dichotomous, oppositional or conflictual relations are established or inferred by the text itself (and through it, its official authors in government). Through this process, we can glean from the primary data how policy makers in both contexts interpret the external reality of the international environment as well as how they shape the necessary national policy response to the perceived challenges of that environment.

This phase of data analysis will in turn permit the generation of key themes common to the policy positions of both states, those that differ from each other or those that are in tension. This second stage draws out the main themes that account for the findings of the coding analysis. In essence, the codes are grouped or 'clustered' into categories that reflect the commonality of the findings. The themes generated by each respective analysis of state actors are then compared.

The study is limited to identifying and examining the presence of domestic pressures on foreign policy articulation. It is not concerned to identify the source of these pressures. The sources are likely to be multiple. A further consideration is the degree to which the executive branches of both states have been 'captured' in the traditional policy making sense and to what extent these policy positions have their origins among the political actors themselves. While certainly interesting, both of these questions fall outside the scope of this analysis.

What will concern the study are the obstacles these domestic pressures will likely create at the level of interstate relations: that is, between the two game boards discussed by Putnam. On the basis of our findings, we discuss the impact either of realizing domestic imperatives at the expense of interstate cooperation or disappointing domestic expectations through compromise at the international level.

III. Analysis & Key Themes

As pointed out by Inglehart and Norris (2016), the issue of cultural backlash has largely assumed primacy in explaining the emergence of populism in the UK and US. The lightening rod issues of inward migration, political sovereignty and income inequality for domestic constituents continue to shape the agenda on both intra- and inter-national game boards. From the analysis of the data drawn from official sources, several key themes emerge from the data. For the purposes of this paper, the authors will discuss the following: border control vs. free trade; sovereignty vs. international commitments; and economic growth vs. protectionism. Conflicting pressures, such as the aforementioned issues, are evident in both the UK and US contexts through a simultaneous pursuit of improved economic performance and strengthening of national identitarian cohesion on the one hand and efforts to demonstrate a constructive international role vis-à-vis the international community on the other.

A. Border Control Vs. Free Trade

Prominent in the official discourse of both states is the question of controlling borders, specifically with respect to inward migration. While the US is focused primarily on combating illegal migration from Mexico specifically and Latin American in a wider context, and the UK its links within the single market, both nations exhibit concerns with migration and its impact on security, especially from Muslim majority countries, and the domestic job market. The fundamental tension at the heart of the official pronouncements of the US and UK is between the need to control immigration and the desire to foster trade. Here the US and the UK diverge in their respective positions. The UK has adopted a more multi-lateral position with respect to free trade, where the idea of free trade as something to be promoted and supported is prominent. However, within the US data, there is actually very little mention of free trade by any of the US official documents. Free trade is invoked in the sample, but the concept is actually mentioned by Japanese Prime Minister Abe in remarks he made while visiting the US following Trump's election. US representative invocation of free trade relations is secondary to questions around security, specifically issues such as North Korea and the South China Sea. President Trump mentioned it once in his opening speech with Premier Abe. The US, therefore, has adopted a much more protectionist position relative to the UK. The UK has formulated the idea of a 'global Britain', which ostensibly widens its multilateral relations beyond its four-decade long relationship with the EU. Even so, the UK is adopting a much tougher stance on the issue of immigration and free movement of people, very much in line with the principle basis of the Brexit vote, halting the perceived influx of migrant workers. In essence, the question of control of borders is

bound up with the issue of immigration. This, in turn, bears ultimately on the question of national identity, beyond the mere economic issues of availability of employment.

B. Sovereignty vs International Commitments

The principle of sovereignty, which includes the right to control borders by a centralized governing entity, also relates directly to the matter of legislative decision-making within a polity. Both countries are considered by their respective political leadership to have 'lost' political authority in the recent past and their efforts now center on its restoration. In particular, the putative 'return' of decision-making from actors considered illegitimate to more legitimate decision-making structures and the restoration of a more democratic basis of politics. Where democratic decision making must be returned from is quite different in both contexts. For the UK, it must be returned from Brussels (synonymous with the EU) to London, where law should be made in the national parliament. In the US, the decision-making system has been taken over by an unaccountable political elite, a political class of career politicians who have forgotten their role as public representatives (the 'swamp'). At the same time, the tension with the inescapable requirement to maintain existing international relations looms large in both contexts. The UK was at pains to stress its position in the world as constructive and cooperative while still retaining a strong emphasis on its distinctiveness, identity and sovereignty. Threading through much of the UK data is a strongly held dichotomy of an 'outward' facing Britain and a 'global' Britain (in the same regard as around the issue of international trade) versus an inward-looking Britain. The US, by contrast, mentions sovereignty explicitly only a few times (by VP Pence, not President Trump), but the question of national ownership looms large. At the same time, as evinced by Trump's remarks to Premier Abe, the US is keen to retain existing relationships. The UK remains, in its rhetoric, steadfastly committed to international alliances and international cooperation, but sees it as vitally important for the putative return of national decision-making to London, juxtaposing it to supposed decision-making in Brussels.

C. Economic Growth Vs. Protectionism

While both the US and UK aim to achieve significant improvements in economic performance nationally, they differ markedly in rhetorical terms about how to achieve that. On the one hand, the UK is clearly in favor of not only engaging in free trade itself, but also of promoting it as a necessary good in international affairs. The US, on the other hand, mentions free trade explicitly only a few times, and the proposed remedial action for reclaiming economic prosperity centers mainly on ideas of ensuring the retention (or re-emergence) of currently struggling or failing sectors of the domestic economy. For the US, this is only achievable through a combination of threat or inducement to corporate America to ensure the retention of jobs for the US middle class. Nevertheless, both national political leaderships see the improvement of their respective economies as fundamental to delivering for the national electorate. For the US and Britain, there is the clear premise of linking inward migration to problem areas in the economy, specifically around employment options for 'indigenous' nationals.

IV. Conclusion

The analysis of the data confirms the veracity of the two-level games outlined by Putnam. The official discourse is riven with tensions between the domestic (or 'intra-national') and international imperatives. Dichotomies are established and both the political discourse and policy agenda it underpins have felt the brunt of populist forces. The UK and US examples offer a revealing insight into the imperatives pushing this discursive and policy-making shift. For the UK, the Tory (Conservative) government has been forced to shift its collective position in relation to EU membership by both factions within its own ranks and also by a perceived threat from more EU skeptical elements outside its party. For the US, however, the embodiment of populism secured a win for the Republican contender that willingly embraced its political implications and logic. The question now, of course, is whether this 'bending' towards populist tropes by both political leaderships can derail established policy in international affairs. Does Trump's populist logic imply a radical renegotiation or even abandonment of NAFTA and an undermining of the economic arrangements in North America? Does the UK's populist imperatives imply limitations on any trade deals with countries like India, where the issue of immigration preferences are likely to be a significant part of the deal? The pressure on both countries to simultaneously perpetuate stabilized multilateral and bilateral relations at the international level, and yet satisfy intra-state pressure for a retreat from globalization and its associated phenomena like inward migration will be enormous.

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