The Case for an Expressive Logic of Action

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How can scholars theorize about phenomena like the eroding support, within the West, for the liberal democratic practices that once defined the post-1945 international order? Cumulative evidence shows that resentment toward out-groups shapes citizens' attitudes on issues like immigration and globalization, bolstering support for isolationist foreign policies in Western democracies. Yet, these findings contrast with the logics of action—based on material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—that IR scholars use to develop theory. Because existing logics provide a limited vocabulary to theorize about group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features, an important dimension of political behavior remains under-theorized. In this paper, I draw on interdisciplinary research to develop an expressive logic of action, whereby political behavior expresses an actor's social identification. Based on this logic, group attachment provides a compelling motivation for political behavior, whose activation depends on an interaction between issue framing and psychological dispositions. By focusing on the distinctive features of expressive behavior and specifying the mechanisms behind this behavior, an expressive logic encourages theory development and refinement across domains.

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Explanations of political behavior usually rely, either implicitly or explicitly, on a logic of action—or "a perspective on how human action is to be interpreted" (March and Olsen, 2011, 478). Logics of action differ from theories in that they are more general and abstract than theories. While a logic of action provides a set of assumptions about what drives human behavior, a theory aims to explain a particular phenomenon. We can therefore think of logics of action as meta-theoretical frameworks: Based on a logic of action, a scholar develops a theory to explain a given phenomenon. What defines a logic of action is the set of building blocks (or the vocabulary) it provides for theory development. Because different logics highlight distinct dimensions of human behavior, they provide the foundation for different kinds of theories of political behavior.

In International Relations (IR), two logics of action are most commonly used to develop theory.[1] First, the most popular logic of action is a logic of consequences (March and Olsen, 1998, 2011). This logic assumes that actors have a set of well-behaved preferences and choose as best they can the means to realize those preferences (Lake and Powell, 1999; Snidal, 2002). It conceives of action as instrumental: what motivates action is the desire to achieve a goal, typically defined based on the actor's material self-interest. According to an instrumental logic, actors make decisions based on means-ends calculations in pursuit of a goal. To select among the alternatives for action, actors apply a decision rule, such as goal maximization or satisficing. Originally developed in economics, a logic of consequences conceives of interactions in a stylized market, where actors have different endowments of material resources. Based on this logic, actors exercise influence through coercion (the use of force or its threat) or inducement (the manipulation of incentives) (Weber 1978, 943-46; Scott 1996, 25-30). As such, conformity takes the form of compliance—that is, behavior motivated by a desire to obtain rewards or avoid punishments (Kelman, 1961, 62-63).

Second, another logic commonly used in IR is a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1998, 2011). This logic assumes that actors share norms that delimit appropriate behavior within a

[1] For the sake of clarity, my discussion of existing logics focuses on the foundational statements of each logic—which clearly define it and explicitly lay out its mechanisms—rather than on theoretical applications aimed at explaining a specific phenomenon, which often refer to a given logic of action only implicitly, slightly deviate from that logic, or blend more than one logic to explain a given phenomenon.

community.[2] It conceives of action as norm-guided: to make decisions, actors search for the norm that most closely applies to a situation, then follow its prescriptions (Sending, 2002, 447-50). When ambiguities arise, actors engage in principled argument to find the norm most congruent with a situation (March and Olsen 2011, 483; Risse 2000, 6-7). Norm-guided action thus involves two key components: (1) a cognitive component, as actors reason by analogy to find the norm that fits a given situation; and (2) an ethical component, as appropriate action implies a sense of virtue or moral obligation (March and Olsen, 1998, 951-52). Originally developed in organizational studies, a logic of appropriateness conceives of interactions within a stylized polity founded on the rule of law and on a spirit of citizenship, whereby actors "think and act as members of the community as a whole, not solely as self-interested individuals or as members of particular interest groups" (March and Olsen, 2011, 481). Based on this logic, influence depends on normative legitimation, as actors draw upon a system of shared norms to justify their positions (see Weber 1978, 943-46, 954; Scott 1996, 31); while conformity depends on internalization—that is, the integration of a belief into one's system of values, typically as a result of socialization (Kelman, 1961, 65-66).

In addition to these traditional logics of action, two other logics developed in IR emphasize the practical or habitual dimension of human behavior. On the one hand, a logic of practicality assumes that an actor's practical sense guides action (Pouliot, 2008). Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, this logic focuses on what people do rather than on what goes on in their heads. It posits that action depends on practical knowledge that is learned tacitly and taken for granted, thus remaining unconscious and inarticulate. On the other hand, a logic of habit assumes that actors respond habitually to circumstances (Hopf, 2010). Drawing on cognitive neuroscience, this logic posits that the automatic system in the brain leads actors to have unreflective perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. As such, actors enjoy less agency, rationality, and uncertainty than assumed in traditional logics; moreover, action ultimately tends to perpetuate the status quo.

[2] Since a logic of appropriateness was formulated, research on norm contestation has questioned the extent to which international norms are shared, suggesting that this logic applies only under specific conditions (Dixon, 2017; Wiener, 2018). Other research argues that actors can use norms strategically, to achieve their goals—suggesting that, in practice, a logic of appropriateness is often mixed with a logic of consequences (Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Terman and Byun, 2022). But while research on norms has advanced in IR, existing research has not proposed an explicit reformulation of a logic of appropriateness to replace the one discussed here.

While it may be tempting to treat logics of action as accurate representations of human action, it is more fruitful to understand them as analytical tools, which may be more or less useful depending on the research problem at hand (see Elster 1989; Fearon and Wendt 2002, 60, 52-53; Ruggie 1998, 860-61; March and Olsen 1998, 953-54.) As the old aphorism reminds us, all models are wrong, but some are useful. Rather than promulgating a given logic as inherently better than the others, it is more productive to examine whether a given logic of action serves as a useful tool to explain a specific phenomenon. As analytical lenses, logics of action offer inexact representations of the complexities of reality, which serve as more or less useful foundations for theory building depending on the research question at hand. Each logic of action provides a different map for theory building, or a simplified representation of reality that focuses on certain aspects of action and leaves out the details it considers inessential. As such, whether a certain logic of action offers a useful framework to theorize about a given phenomenon is ultimately a matter of empirical investigation, rather than a question that may be answered a priori or in absolute terms.

I argue in this paper that, while existing logics provide useful frameworks to account for certain dimensions of political behavior—those that directly involve material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—they neglect an important dimension. As an interdisciplinary body of research demonstrates, political behavior involves a crucial *expressive* dimension: People navigate the political world based on their social identities, taking positions on key political issues based on the sympathies and resentments they feel toward social groups (Achen and Bartels, 2016; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Kinder, 1998; Sears, 1993). This dimension shapes central trends in contemporary international politics, such as the backlash against globalization that challenges the liberal international order from within its core (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 2021). Within the West, voters who hold negative attitudes toward out-groups tend to support right-wing populism and its anti-liberal policies (Berman, 2021; Mutz, 2018; Noury and Roland, 2020), while opposing European integration (Hobolt, 2016; Iakhnis, Rathbun, Reifler et al., 2018), immigration (Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), globalization and free trade (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009, 2013; Mutz and Kim, 2017). The cumulative findings from this research contrast with

existing logics of action in two fundamental ways. First, actors make decisions based on perceived group interest, which depends primarily on the existing political discourse rather than on the facts on the ground. Second, actors make decisions based on concerns over intangible social constructs—that is, remote and abstract symbols like national identity or culture—that are often imagined and inflated, rather than objectively derived from a given situation.

In the absence of a logic of action that adequately captures the expressive dimension of political behavior, IR scholars can adopt one of two approaches, neither of which is satisfactory (see Boudon, 1998; Elster, 1989). On the one hand, scholars might dismiss the empirical patterns above as anomalies that cannot be explained systematically, claiming that countries adopt policies on issues like immigration or free trade based on unpredictable passions beyond our understanding. However, this approach rules out by fiat the empirical evidence that does not comport with existing theory, rather than reformulating existing theoretical frameworks based on the empirical evidence available. Alternatively, scholars might try to subsume the anomalous cases into one of the existing logics of action by adding certain auxiliary assumptions. But because this approach ultimately relies on ad hoc assumptions that are not directly grounded in existing logics, it leads to inconsistent explanatory frameworks. In addition, this approach neglects to specify theory about the distinctive features of the anomalous cases. As a result, an important dimension of political behavior remains under-theorized. Following either approach, scholars thus remain ill equipped to develop theory about a consequential class of phenomena in international politics.

To effectively capture the expressive dimension of political behavior, we need a logic of action that accounts for group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features. In this paper, I draw on interdisciplinary research to develop such a logic. Based on an expressive logic of action, political behavior expresses an actor's social identification. What motivates action is the desire to attach oneself to a collective category. People have a powerful tendency, well documented across contexts, to categorize themselves into social groups. At the social level, group identification involves shared understandings about group boundaries—or who belongs in a group (or not), and who is a friend (or not). At the actor level, group attachment provides a compelling mechanism for behavior: the

more an actor identifies with a group, the more they accept influence from the group, care about the group, and favor its members over outsiders. In particular, group attachment motivates behavior when actors see a connection between a group and a political issue, usually as a result of elite framing. An expressive logic departs from existing logics by assuming that: (1) group identification is a driving force behind political behavior; (2) affect shapes how actors process political information and make decisions; and (3) symbolic factors—how actors and political issues are framed in the political discourse—play a fundamental role in organizing group activity.

Rather than supersede existing logics, an expressive logic contributes to a fuller picture of human behavior. In particular, an expressive logic offers two payoffs to researchers. First, the proposed logic removes expressive behavior from the "error term," revealing that this kind of behavior follows systematic patterns and is therefore amenable to theorization and empirical research. Second, an expressive logic focuses on the distinctive features of expressive behavior. In doing so, it provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about group-based politics. An expressive logic implies that explanations of political behavior should look beyond norms or incentive structures to examine how identity attachments are construed in a given context. To be sure, expressive elements—such as identity, symbols, or culture—appear in previous research. However, these elements are not coherently integrated into a distinctive logic of action; neither has there been an attempt to specify the mechanisms behind this logic and to analytically distinguish them from those of existing logics. By contrast, an expressive logic unifies and organizes disparate findings under a single framework, paving the way for theory development and refinement across domains.

In the first section below, I review existing evidence of expressive behavior in international politics and explain why existing logics of action provide inconsistent frameworks to theorize about this kind of phenomenon. In the second section, I draw on research across disciplines—including social psychology, sociology, and political science—to develop an expressive logic of action. In particular, I explain what social identification is, how it shapes behavior, and how it depends on the social context. Throughout, I consider how an expressive logic relates to existing logics of action, distinguishing its key assumptions from those of existing logics.

The Expressive Dimension of Foreign Policy

Existing explanations of state behavior in different areas, ranging from international conflict to cooperation, involve expressive elements. As existing studies demonstrate, for example, countries' decisions on whether to join intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) involve an important expressive dimension. In particular, countries make decisions about becoming IGO members based on how domestic actors conceive of national identity at home and abroad. Perhaps in no example is this clearer than immediately after the Cold War, when both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) offered material incentives for Central and Eastern European states to join each organization, conditional on the adoption of liberal-democratic policies. Based on a logic of consequences, we would expect potential candidate states to at least seek accession to each organization, with a view to gaining access to material benefits as substantial as economic aid or military protection against foreign aggression. And yet, not all potential candidate states sought accession to the EU or NATO to begin with. Against expectations from an instrumental logic, certain countries eschewed accession despite its material benefits.

As different studies suggest, countries' decisions to seek accession to each organization depended on social identification—that is, on whether decision-makers identified with Europe or the West, entities they perceived each organization as representing. In both the EU and NATO cases, material inducements only promoted liberalization among pro-Western states; by contrast, anti-liberal countries like Belarus or Serbia defied Westernization, despite its material benefits (Schimmelfennig, 2005). As Subotic (2011) demonstrates in the EU case, countries' decisions to seek accession depended on whether decision-makers identified with Europe to begin with. On the one hand, candidate states like Croatia sought accession, even though they perceived the EU requirements as intrusive, because domestic actors strongly identified with Europe. But in candidate states where key domestic actors did not identify with Europe, such as Serbia, material inducements were not enough to make accession an appealing option. Likewise, Gheciu (2005) reaches a similar conclusion in the NATO case. Although countries like the Czech Republic and Romania did not embrace liberal-democratic norms, they were open to adopting the liberal-democratic policies necessary for

accession because they identified with the Western community NATO purported to embody. Social identification—that is, whether domestic actors understood their country as part of the West—thus played an important role in countries' decisions to pursue accession.

Related to these cases, other studies suggest that countries' decisions to adopt international norms more broadly also depend on social identification. Based on traditional logics of action, we would expect countries to adopt norms because decision-makers expect to increase their chances of remaining in power or to obtain material benefits; or because decision-makers perceive the norms as appropriate or legitimate. But as Zarakol (2014) notes, countries often adopt norms their decision-makers do not accept as legitimate and do not intend to enforce; as such, norm adoption does little to increase the odds of implementing a desired policy. In the past century, countries like Turkey, Japan, and Russia adopted Western policies even though domestic actors had not internalized Western norms, and even though Western powers did not impose these policies by force. We also observe this pattern when it comes to human rights treaties. Since the end of the Second World War, an increasing number of countries have joined an increasing number of human rights treaties. In fact, repressive governments ratify human rights treaties at least as frequently as do non-repressive ones (Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, and Meyer, 2008). Yet, treaty ratification often fails to improve human rights practices (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui, 2007; Hathaway, 2002).

As multiple studies indicate, non-Western countries have adopted Western norms in the past century in an effort to assimilate into the European society of states, sometimes only for the sake of appearances (Zarakol 2011, 32-38; Okagaki 2013). As Hathaway (2002, 2002-2020) argues in the case of human rights treaties, countries sometimes ratify treaties for expressive reasons: by joining a human rights treaty, a country takes a position as member of the liberal international order, even if it does not accept the treaty's values. In addition, similar factors influenced countries' decisions to join the nonproliferation regime after the Cold War. In the 1990s, Ukraine relinquished the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union, despite the history of Russian territorial expansionism in its region. As existing studies indicate, Ukraine did so in part because it sought recognition from Western powers of its national sovereignty and good standing (Budjeryn 2022; Chafetz, Abramson,

and Grillot 1996; Sagan 1997, 80-82). Likewise, Brazil gave up its nuclear program in the 1990s as it sought integration into the liberal international order, even though key domestic actors considered the nonproliferation regime inherently unfair for institutionalizing the inequality between nuclear haves and have-nots (Patti 2021, 157-90; Spektor 2016). In both cases, identification with the West thus influenced states' decisions to join the nonproliferation regime.

While social identification may motivate countries to cooperate, it may also become an obstacle to international cooperation. We can observe this trend in contemporary international politics, when the liberal international order faces important challenges from within its core (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 2021). Within the West, the past decade has witnessed eroding support for the liberal democratic practices that once defined the post-1945 international order. In the United States, a resurgent nationalist discourse has resonated with large swaths of the public, including the 74 million citizens who voted for Donald Trump's reelection in 2020. In 2016 and 2020 alike, Trump's presidential campaigns articulated the image of a nation threatened by immigrants, minorities, and their alleged accomplices among the elites. To make the nation great again, Trump proposed a set of isolationist policies—from closing national borders to withdrawing from international agreements in key areas such as climate change and nuclear proliferation. What is more, Trump's rise in the U.S. echoed long-term trends observed in other Western democracies. In European countries, right-wing populism has typically involved leaders' appeals to restore the glory of a nation's past by scaling back international cooperation and supranational integration.

On both sides of the Atlantic, right-wing populist leaders have leveraged the socio-political context to mobilize voters based on their identity attachments. In the United States, Trump first rose to Republican nomination in 2016 in a context marked by socio-political transformations such as China's economic rise, civil rights protests against police violence, and changing demographics—as the percentage of white Christians shrank and the first Black American president finished his second term. Leveraging this context, Trump's campaign articulated the image of a nation threatened by immigrants and minorities. Trump infused his campaign with exclusionary rhetoric, from questioning whether Barack Obama was a native-born citizen to calling all Mexican immigrants

"rapists." Trump's rhetoric drew heavily from existing stereotypes about minority groups, earning himself the reputation of saying the quiet parts out loud. Defining the nation in ethnocultural terms, Trump's campaign laid out a set of isolationist policies meant to revert the effects of globalization. To make the nation great again, Trump proposed policies of high symbolic (rather than material) impact, from building a wall in the border with Mexico to increasing taxes on Chinese imports. Accordingly, Trump's rhetoric resonated the most with those citizens who held negative attitudes toward groups like women, racial minorities, immigrants, or foreign countries (Mutz, 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta, 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, 2018).

More broadly, we observe the same trend across the West, as right-wing populist leaders leverage the socio-political context to mobilize majoritarian segments of the population based on their identity attachments (Berman, 2021; Bonikowski, 2017; Golder, 2016; Noury and Roland, 2020). In the last decades, two factors have challenged the primacy of white men in longstanding social hierarchies within Western countries: rising immigration and the political mobilization of minority groups. In addition, wealth and income inequality have dramatically increased, as the wealthy or highly educated have disproportionately reaped the economic benefits from technological advances and globalization. And yet, mainstream leaders and established democratic institutions have done little to address the problem of inequality at home. Leveraging this context of socio-political transformation, right-wing populist leaders have mobilized voters based on wedge issues such as immigration and Euro-skepticism—portraying themselves as political outsiders and true representatives of the people against the symbolic threats posed by immigrants, minorities, and their alleged accomplices among the elites. Drawing from negative stereotypes about immigrants and minority groups, right-wing populist leaders define the nation in ethnocultural terms. To restore the imagined glory of the nation's past, populist leaders propose isolationist policies, such as Brexit, of high symbolic (rather than redistributive) impact. Accordingly, populist appeals tend to resonate with those citizens who hold negative affect toward minority groups.

As a growing body of research shows, resentment toward out-groups drives opposition to international cooperation across Western countries. Right-wing populist appeals tend to resonate

with citizens who resent minority groups both in the U.S. (Mutz, 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta, 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, 2018) and Europe (Berman, 2021; Noury and Roland, 2020). Similarly, citizens with negative attitudes toward out-groups are more likely to oppose globalization and free trade (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009, 2013; Mutz and Kim, 2017), two important pillars of the post-1945 international order. In Europe, skepticism toward European integration depends on negative attitudes toward out-groups (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). Crucially, this tendency accounts for a consequential event: in 2016, British citizens with negative attitudes toward out-groups and immigration were more likely to vote for leaving the European Union (Hobolt, 2016; Iakhnis, Rathbun, Reifler et al., 2018). In addition, existing research consistently finds that opposition to immigration often stems from concerns about its cultural— rather than economic—impacts (Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Across the West, citizens are less concerned about competition in the job market or an increasing tax burden than with the imagined impact of immigration on national identity and culture.

How Do These Patterns Relate to Existing Logics?

Taken together, these empirical patterns contrast in important ways with the expectations derived from existing logics of action. To begin, based on a logic of consequences, one would argue that material self-interest shapes citizens' attitudes toward foreign policy issues. That is, individuals form attitudes toward a given policy based on its expected distributional consequences. Within high-income countries, for example, free trade has different distributional consequences depending on whether a worker is highly skilled versus low skilled, or whether they work in an export-oriented versus import-competing sector of the economy. Based on an instrumental logic, we should therefore expect high-skilled workers (or workers from export-oriented sectors) to be more likely to favor free trade, whereas low-skilled workers (or workers from import-oriented sectors) should be more likely to oppose free trade. Likewise, immigration has different distributional consequences depending on whether a citizen pays more taxes or has a skill level similar to that of immigrants. Based on an instrumental logic, we should therefore expect citizens to oppose immigration out of

concerns about competition in the labor market—that is, when their skill level is similar to that of immigrants. In addition, immigration has different distributional consequences depending on the skill level of immigrants. Therefore, the more taxes a citizen pays, the more we should expect them to oppose low-skilled immigration out of concerns about public spending, especially in those areas that provide immigrants with more access to public services.

However, existing empirical research departs in two crucial ways from a logic of consequences. First, citizens often form attitudes toward issues like free trade and immigration based on perceived group interest—or sociotropic concerns—rather than based on material self-interest or pocketbook concerns. In the U.S., for example, repeated studies find that citizens' attitudes toward free trade depend less on its expected distributional consequences than on perceptions of how free trade would affect the national economy as a whole (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009; Mutz and Kim, 2017). And importantly, sociotropic concerns do not stem from an objective assessment of the economic situation. As a long tradition of research in economics demonstrates, free trade typically has a beneficial impact on a country's national economy. If a citizen objectively considered the economic welfare of the country as a whole, they should therefore support free trade rather than oppose it. But in practice, sociotropic concerns do not depend directly on the objective impact of free trade policies; rather, they depend on the existing political discourse about free trade, especially as framed by political leaders and the mass media (Guisinger and Saunders, 2017).

Second, existing studies reveal that political attitudes and behavior depend on concerns over intangible social constructs—that is, remote and abstract symbols like national identity or culture—rather than on concerns over material impact, against expectations from an instrumental logic. For example, repeated studies find that attitudes toward immigration depend on concerns about its cultural, rather than economic, impacts (Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). In particular, opposition to immigration increases when prospective immigrants do not speak the national language or are not expected to fit well with the national culture. And importantly, concerns over intangible social constructs cannot be directly traced back to competition over material resources; neither do these concerns derive from an objective assessment of the situ-

ation. Rather, perceived threats to national identity and culture tend to be imagined and inflated, involving a central affective component (Kinder, 1998, 805-807). In fact, opposition to immigration often stems either from negative affect toward specific groups of immigrants, grounded in negative stereotypes about these groups or negative media portrayals of them; or from psychological predispositions that become activated in a given context, such as ethnocentrism (a generalized prejudice toward out-groups) (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014, 230-34).

Similarly, the empirical patterns above depart in important ways from a logic of appropriateness. Following a normative logic, one would argue that citizens form attitudes toward political issues based on normative considerations. Based on this logic, actors place the common good above particularistic interests and engage in principled debate to reach decisions. In other words, a logic of appropriateness emphasizes normative and cognitive aspects in decision-making. By contrast, existing empirical research contrasts with each of these aspects. First, empirical studies reveal that actors often place particularistic interests above the common good when considering issues like free trade and immigration. From an objective standpoint, both free trade and immigration tend to increase the welfare of the community as a whole. But in practice, the current backlash against globalization results from a motivation to defend one's group—narrowly defined based on ethnocultural traits—from symbolic threats. Second, empirical studies reveal that affect, rather than purely cognitive factors, shapes how actors process information and make decisions. Motivated to defend the group against symbolic threats, actors ignore information about the objective impact of free trade and immigration. In sum, normative considerations or pure cognition cannot account for the observed phenomena. Not fortuitously, a logic of appropriateness is not commonly used to theorize about public attitudes toward issues like immigration or free trade.

Finally, the empirical patterns above also depart from a logic of practicality on the one hand, and a logic of habit on the other hand. To begin, a logic of practicality assumes that action depends on practical knowledge that is learned tacitly and taken for granted, thus remaining unconscious and inarticulate. Moreover, this logic focuses on what people do rather than on what goes on in their heads. But in practice, the current backlash against globalization results from a combination

of factors that contrast with each of these core assumptions. In particular, it results from (1) the existing political discourse—that is, from what elites articulate in the public arena, framing issues like free trade and immigration as a matter of identity politics; and (2) psychological factors, such as resentment toward out-groups—that is, from what goes on inside people's heads. On the other hand, a logic of habit assumes that actors respond habitually to circumstances, as the automatic system in the brain leads them to have unreflective perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. As such, action ultimately tends to perpetuate the status quo. While this logic does a better job at capturing the impact of psychological predispositions on political attitudes and behaviors, it neglects the importance of the existing political discourse in mobilizing public resentment. In addition, while a logic of habit emphasizes stability, the backlash against globalization is a relatively recent trend, which results from a set of socio-political transformations. It is therefore no coincidence that neither logic is commonly used to theorize about the phenomena above.

In sum, existing logics of action offer limited analytical leverage over phenomena such as contemporary challenges to the liberal international order from within its core. In particular, existing empirical research in this area contrasts with existing logics in two fundamental ways. First, actors make decisions based on perceived group interest rather than material self-interest or the common good. And importantly, perceived group interest depends primarily on the existing political discourse, rather than on an objective assessment of the situation. Second, actors make decisions based on concerns over intangible social constructs like national identity or culture. Such concerns are typically imagined and inflated, rather than objectively derived from a given situation. Affect, rather than pure cognition, shapes how actors process information and make decisions. While existing logics of action provide useful frameworks to account for certain dimensions of political behavior—those that directly involve material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—they offer a limited vocabulary to theorize about group-based politics.

Why Not Subsume These Patterns into Existing Logics?

In the absence of a logic of action that adequately captures the expressive dimension of political behavior, IR scholars can adopt one of two approaches. On the one hand, scholars might dismiss the empirical patterns above as anomalies that cannot be explained systematically, claiming that countries adopt policies on issues like immigration or free trade based on unpredictable passions beyond our understanding. However, this approach is dissatisfactory because it rules out by fiat the empirical evidence that does not comport with existing theory, rather than reformulating existing theoretical frameworks based on the empirical evidence available (see Boudon, 1998; Elster, 1989). Alternatively, scholars might try to subsume the anomalous cases into one of the existing logics of action by adding certain auxiliary assumptions. But as I discuss next, this approach is also dissatisfactory, for two reasons (see Boudon, 1998; Elster, 1989). First, because this approach ultimately relies on ad hoc assumptions that are not directly grounded in existing logics, it leads to inconsistent explanatory frameworks. Second, this approach neglects to specify theory about the distinctive features of the anomalous cases. As a result, an important dimension of political behavior remains under-theorized. Following either approach, scholars thus remain ill equipped to theorize about a consequential class of phenomena in international politics.

On the one hand, an attempt to explain these empirical patterns based on a logic of consequences would require adding the auxiliary assumptions that (1) actors pursue the group's interest rather than self-interest; or that (2) actors pursue intangible, rather than material, goals. However, either assumption involves a substantial departure from a logic of consequences. To begin, concerns about social constructs differ from concerns about material goals in theoretically important ways: they depend on psychological dispositions and the existing political discourse about a policy, rather than directly on the policy's material impacts. Moreover, group interest differs from self-interest in theoretically important ways. What is best for the group is not necessarily best for every group member. What is more, the mismatch between group interest and self-interest raises theoretically interesting questions. At the actor level, an actor belongs simultaneously to multiple social categories, and group members identify with a group to varying degrees. When does a group's in-

terest, however defined, become important to an actor? At the group level, the group can be defined in different ways, and so can its interests. Why are the group and its interests defined in a certain way? Rather than ignore these crucial questions, it is more fruitful to explore them without prior commitments to an existing logic of action, as I propose below.

On the other hand, an attempt to explain these empirical patterns based on a logic of appropriateness would require adding the auxiliary assumption that actors still prioritize the good of the community, but the community is defined more narrowly—based, for example, on dimensions like race, ethnicity, or nationality. However, such an assumption goes against the spirit of a normative logic, which emphasizes the common good rather than particularistic interests. Whereas a logic of appropriateness presumes actors who adjudicate conflicts by reasoning to find common ground, group loyalty refers to an emotional attachment to a group that implies group-based discrimination. As such, group loyalty does not fit into the category of appropriate or exemplary behavior; neither can it be traced back to the ethical or cognitive components that define a logic of appropriateness. In addition, this auxiliary assumption bypasses the theoretically interesting question of how social groups are defined in the first place. Therefore, while one could attempt to account for the observed patterns using a logic of appropriateness, such a move would also result in an inconsistent explanatory framework that leaves group-based politics under-theorized.

Finally, an attempt to subsume these patterns into a logic of practicality or habit would imply either ignoring what goes on in the political discourse and inside people's heads on the hand, or overemphasizing psychological factors and stability on the other hand. In addition, such a move would neglect fundamental questions that emerge from existing research. For example, a group and its interests can be defined in different ways, and their political relevance varies over time. How are the group and its interests defined? When does a group's interest, however defined, become relevant to an actor (or to a given political issue)? In addition, actors identify with multiple groups and have multiple psychological dispositions. When does a given psychological disposition become mobilized in connection with a political issue? By neglecting questions like these, either logic provides an indeterminate vocabulary to theorize about the phenomena above.

In sum, existing logics of action yield inconsistent frameworks to account for group-based politics. Based on existing logics, an important dimension of political behavior remains under-theorized. To effectively capture the expressive dimension of political behavior, we need a logic of action that accounts for group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features. In the next section, I draw on interdisciplinary research to develop such a logic.

An Expressive Logic of Action

To develop an expressive logic of action, I rely on decades of empirical research, across disciplinary boundaries, on (inter)group processes and political behavior. I start with two empirical observations. First, people have a powerful tendency, well documented across contexts, to categorize themselves into social groups. Humans are hard-wired to connect and form groups, from families to nations. Second, social identification provides a powerful motivation for human behavior. As a long tradition of empirical research demonstrates, people navigate the political world based on their social identities—choosing candidates during elections and taking positions on key political issues based on the sympathies and resentments they feel toward social groups (Achen and Bartels, 2016; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Kinder, 1998; Sears, 1993).

Based on these assumptions, an expressive logic conceives of behavior as *expressive*. According to this logic, what motivates action is the desire to attach oneself to a social category. By adopting a pattern of behavior associated with a social group, an actor expresses their identification with the group to themselves and to others. As such, expressive behavior fundamentally differs from the types of action assumed in existing logics of action. On the one hand, expressive behavior differs from outcome-oriented behavior because it expresses the actor's identity attachments, rather than merely serving as a means to obtain rewards or avoid punishments. On the other hand, expressive behavior differs from norm-guided behavior because the actor needs not integrate certain norms into their value system; rather, expressive behavior depends on the actor's identification with a social group. If the group adopts a new pattern of behavior, so does the actor.

In an expressive logic, conformity thus depends on *identification*, rather than on either compliance or internalization. As Kelman (1961, 63-65) notes, identification differs from compliance on the one hand and internalization on the other hand. On the one hand, identification does not rely on external enforcement. Compared to compliance, identification is therefore more stable and enduring as a conformity mechanism. On the other hand, identification hinges on the actor's identity attachments rather than on their intrinsic beliefs. Compared to internalization, identification is less stable and enduring as a conformity mechanism. Based on identification, behavior tends to persist as long as certain conditions are met: the group remains important to the actor, the actor's beliefs about the group persist, and no alternative source of identification challenges the behavior. As I discuss next, an interdisciplinary body of research demonstrates that social identification involves distinctive psychological processes, which systematically depart from the assumptions made in existing logics of action. In addition, social identification shapes behavior through distinctive pathways that likewise depart from the assumptions made in existing logics.

The Affective Foundations of Social Identification

To begin, identification involves a crucial affective component that sets it apart from the cognitive processes assumed in traditional logics of action. As Spears (2011, 220) notes, social identification is "not just a form of self-definition (the cognitive level of analysis), but also a source of emotional attachment, meaning, and motivation that helps to explain group behavior." Crucially, social identification provides individuals with a meaningful sense of self. As the social identity perspective in social psychology tells us, individuals derive part of their identities from their group attachments (Spears, 2011; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). As Tajfel (1974, 69) puts it, a social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from [their] knowledge of [their] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership." Given its affective foundations, social identification cannot be reduced to an actor's material self-interest. As research on optimal distinctiveness theory indicates, social identification involves a compromise between two psychological—rather than material—needs (Brewer, 1991). Each of us has two op-

posing needs: (1) assimilation (or the need to be validated and similar to others), which we satisfy by belonging to social groups; and (2) differentiation (or the need to be unique or different from others), which we satisfy by comparing ourselves to out-groups.

More than "objective" group membership, social identification implies a psychological sense of belonging to a group (Huddy, 2001). Across contexts, empirical studies find variations in identity strength, or the extent to which people identify with a given social group. For example, research on national identity in the United States finds that Americans report different levels of national attachment and love of country (Huddy and Khatib, 2007; Theiss-Morse, 2009). But importantly, variations in attachment do not imply that social identities are simply a matter of individual choice or utility maximization. On the contrary, group attachments are strongly influenced by early socialization, especially in the family environment, and remain enduring features of an actor's self-conception thereafter. In fact, group attachments often depend on ascriptive or involuntary traits beyond an individual's choice. For example, common sense typically associates nationality with a person's place of birth or family descent—two attributes ascribed at birth rather than chosen by individuals during their lifetime. What is more, an actor's sense of belonging depends in part on the group's recognition, rather than being determined exclusively at the actor level. For example, cross-national research shows that people report lower levels of national attachment and pride when they perceive that their ethnic group is discriminated against, or lacks representation at national government (Schildkraut 2011, 854-55; Wimmer 2018, Ch. 6).

In addition, social identification shapes behavior through distinctive pathways that likewise depart from the assumptions made in existing logics of action. Once people categorize themselves as members of a group, their identity becomes attached to the group—such that they experience whatever happens to the group as if it had happened to them directly. Because social identity extends the self beyond the individual, it provides a powerful mechanism for collective behavior (Brewer, 1991). In particular, existing research indicates that social identification shapes behavior through three different pathways. First, group identification provides an important channel for social influence: The more an actor identifies with a group, the more they tend to accept influence from the

group and to adopt the attitudes and behaviors associated with the group (Spears, 2011, 211-14). By enacting the attitudes and behaviors associated with a group, an actor affirms their identity as a group member not only to others but also to themselves.

Second, group identification shapes behavior toward the in-group: The more an actor identifies with a group, the more they care about the group and are willing to help its members, even when such actions provide no personal gain to the actor. For example, existing research indicates that the more strongly Americans identify with the nation, the more likely they are to demonstrate civic engagement by voting in elections, paying attention to politics, and acquiring knowledge about the political issues of the day (Huddy and Khatib, 2007, 72-74). In addition, the more strongly Americans identify with the nation, the more willing they are to help fellow Americans in a variety of situations, especially when the beneficiaries of this help are prototypical group members—that is, white Americans (Theiss-Morse, 2009, Ch. 4). Overall, social identification thus implies an increased tendency to cooperate with members of the in-group.

Finally, group identification also shapes behavior in intergroup contexts. The more an actor identifies with a group, the more they favor it over other groups, especially when they perceive the in-group to be under threat. The tendency toward in-group favoritism was first detected in the minimal group studies conducted by Tajfel, Billig, Bundy et al. (1971). In these studies, participants assigned to groups based on arbitrary characteristics, like their preference between two abstract painters, tended to allocate more resources to in-group members than to out-group members. As subsequent studies in this tradition consistently show, in-group favoritism is so deeply rooted that it can emerge even without a previous history of group attachment, and even in the absence of a conflict of interest—that is, independently from disputes over material resources (Spears, 2011, 204-205). Social identification thus entails a tendency to favor one's group over others, which becomes exacerbated when one's group is perceived to be under threat.

In sum, social identification shapes behavior through distinctive pathways. Taken together, these pathways imply two crucial departures from the existing logics of action in IR. First, decision-making involves not only cognitive processes, as assumed by existing logics, but also a central affec-

tive component. In particular, social identification serves as a lens through which individuals interpret politically relevant information, providing a motive for directional or biased reasoning (see Herrmann 2017; Kunda 1990). Rather than considering information evenhandedly, as assumed by traditional logics, group members are motivated instead to defend the group, especially if they perceive the group to be under threat. Second, group identification implies another departure from existing logics: symbolic factors—how actors and their interactions are categorized—play a key role in organizing group activity. As such, explanations of political behavior should look beyond norms or incentive structures to examine how identity attachments are construed in a given context: who belongs in the group (or not), and who is a friend (or not)?

The Symbolic Nature of Group Boundaries

Social identification involves fundamental symbolic factors, whose meaning depends on the social context. As discussed above, people tend to categorize themselves into social groups—based for example on dimensions like gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. While in principle any combination of traits could provide a basis for social categorization, which traits become relevant for social distinctions depends on the context. Via socialization in a given context, individuals learn to recognize certain social categories as meaningful. In the current world of nation-states, for example, we commonly categorize individuals based on nationality. Yet, nationality would not be a meaningful category a few centuries ago, when people relied instead on local dimensions, such as geographic region, to categorize themselves. In fact, nationality only became a meaningful category after the institution of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, especially as a result of nation-building efforts on the part of state elites (Smith, 1986, 2003). Elites played a fundamental role in the institution of national identity: As a Risorgimento leader famously proclaimed in 1861, "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians" (Hobsbawm, 1992, 44).

At the social level, social identities involve shared understandings about group boundaries—or who belongs in a group (or not), and who is a friend (or not). Group boundaries are socially constructed and inherently contested. In the United States, for example, people have different ideas of

what it means to be American. While some define national identity based on ethnocultural ancestry, others define national identity based on respect for liberal principles, being active and engaged citizens, or sharing in the immigration experience (Schildkraut, 2011, 858-61). There are different ways to define what national identity means, which range from most exclusionary (e.g., those based on ethnocultural ancestry) to least exclusionary (e.g., those based on civic engagement). Similarly, there are different ways to define a country's role in the world, which range from most exclusionary (e.g., those that emphasize a global hierarchy led by Western countries) to least exclusionary (e.g., those that emphasize sovereign equality among states). Given the contested nature of group boundaries, Brubaker (2002) notes that it is more fruitful analytically to treat groups as schemas or discursive frames—simplifications of reality with important political implications—rather than as discrete, sharply differentiated, or internally homogeneous entities that match commonsense understandings of group boundaries. Drawing on this insight, an expressive logic highlights the process of *group-making*: how are group boundaries construed in connection with political issues, and what kind of affective response do they evoke as a result?

While group attachment provides a powerful mechanism for collective behavior, there is nothing automatic or inevitable about this process. Different groups may be connected to the same political issue. In the United States, for example, free trade may be perceived as an issue that impacts a given social class (the working class), a given geographic region (the Rust Belt), or rather the country as a whole. Likewise, multiple connections (positive or negative) may exist between any given political issue and a given group. For example, free trade may be framed as an opportunity to grow the U.S. national economy, in line with extensive research in economics; or instead as a threat to national industry, as claimed by Trump during his presidential campaigns. For group attachment to motivate attitudes toward a political issue, actors need to see a clear connection between a given social group on the one hand, and a given political issue on the other (Kinder, 1998, 807). That is, actors need to perceive a given political issue through the lens of group membership.

In particular, existing research indicates that the politicization of group attachments hinges on a combination of three factors: the socio-political context, elite framing, and psychological predis-

positions. First, while actors form attachments to multiple social groups, which group attachment becomes relevant for a given issue depends on *the socio-political context*. For group identification to shape behavior, it needs to become salient in a given context. Dramatic events—such as a terrorist attack or an economic crisis—can serve to galvanize group identifiers into collective action (Brubaker, 2002, 171). Contested definitions of group boundaries become especially salient during periods of socio-political transformation, when actors may perceive their group to be under threat. Because identifiers are motivated to defend the group, in-group favoritism becomes especially potent when actors perceive a threat to the group. What is more, perceived threats need not be objective or physical threats in order to trigger a response from group members; rather, they can also be symbolic threats to the group's culture or its way of life (Sears, 1993), as is often the case in political debates about issues like globalization or immigration.

Second, shared perceptions of a given political issue depend on *elite framing*—that is, how political leaders and the mass media discuss the issue in the public debate. Elites often act as identity entrepreneurs, shaping definitions of the group, its friends, and its enemies in connection with political issues. Elites compete in the framing process, offering different interpretations of group boundaries that resonate more or less with the intended audience in a given context. Through their actions and words, elites help define what it means to be a group member, shaping group boundaries via persuasion and example. At the same time, elite framing relies on existing stereotypes about social groups and the affect associated with them. Because shared conceptions of group boundaries are relatively stable over time, elites do not invent these boundaries out of thin air; rather, elite framing is constrained by the existing discursive frames (Huddy, 2001, 147-49). In addition, elites also shape perceptions of group salience and group threat. As Brubaker (2002, 166) notes, elites may frame issues as "primordial conflicts between groups," evoking group identity to motivate members to defend the group. For example, when leaders frame interactions with outsiders as detrimental to the nation's culture or way of life, as right-wing populist leaders often do, they motivate domestic audiences to retreat from these interactions, favoring isolationist foreign policies.

Finally, the impact of elite framing on political behavior depends on *psychological predisposi-*

tions—relatively stable traits that inform how each actor approaches relations with other groups. As extensive research on public opinion demonstrates, individuals exhibit different affective dispositions that inform their reactions to issue framing. Within Western countries, for example, populist appeals (and the policy proposals associated with them) tend to resonate more with those members of the public who hold negative affect toward out-groups. Citizens who resent out-groups are more likely to answer leaders' calls to defend the nation against external threats. The more resentment toward out-groups a citizen harbors, the more likely they are to oppose immigration (Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), free trade (Mansfield and Mutz, 2009, 2013; Mutz and Kim, 2017), and supranational integration (Hobolt, 2016; Hobolt and de Vries, 2016; Iakhnis, Rathbun, Reifler et al., 2018). Overall, elite mobilization attempts succeed when issue framing taps into deeply felt attachments among the public in a given context. According to an expressive logic, actors thus exercise influence via persuasion and example (see Weber, 1978, 950-52, 954), rather than via coercion, inducements, or normative legitimation.

Conclusion

Drawing on multi-disciplinary research, this paper develops an expressive logic of action, which provides a new vocabulary to theorize about group-based politics in international relations. Based on an expressive logic, what motivates action is the desire to belong in a social category. Group identification provides a compelling mechanism for behavior: the more an actor identifies with a group, the more they accept influence from the group, care about the group, and favor its members over outsiders. In particular, group attachment motivates behavior when actors see a connection between a group and a political issue, typically based on how elites frame this issue in a given context. Focusing on social and psychological processes, an expressive logic involves a distinctive set of mechanisms. This logic assumes that: (1) group identification—rather than material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—is a driving force behind political behavior; (2) affect, rather than cost-benefit calculations or purely cognitive processes, shapes how actors process political informa-

tion and make decisions; and (3) symbolic factors—that is, how actors and issues are framed in the political discourse—play a fundamental role in organizing political activity.

An expressive logic improves our understanding of consequential phenomena in international politics, such as the current backlash against globalization across the West. Existing explanations of state behavior in different areas, ranging from international conflict to cooperation, involve expressive elements. However, these disparate instances of state behavior are not recognized yet as expressive action. An expressive logic helps us understand these phenomena not as empirical anomalies, as we are wont to do based on existing logics of action, but rather as part of a distinctive class of phenomena—that is, as cases of expressive behavior. By focusing on the distinctive features of expressive behavior, an expressive logic promotes theory development and refinement across domains. While existing explanations involve expressive elements, an expressive logic differs in scope from existing explanations: it unifies and organizes much evidence on political behavior with a limited set of assumptions, providing a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. For each instance of state behavior, this logic invites us to ask: How do elites construe the nation, its friends, and its enemies? How do they frame foreign policy issues, and what affective responses do they evoke as a result?

Rather than supersede existing logics of action, an expressive logic contributes to a fuller picture of political behavior. There is little reason to expect that any logic of action captures the entirety of human behavior. As analytical tools, logics of action offer inexact representations of reality, which serve as more or less useful foundations for theory building depending on the research question at hand. A flexible approach, devoid of paradigmatic commitments, is therefore more promising in this context. Future research could use the building blocks provided in this paper to theorize about specific phenomena, derive observable implications from theory, and then assess the empirical validity of these observable implications. A mixed-methods approach would be especially useful to that end (see Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston et al., 2009). Researchers could use discourse or content analysis to uncover shared understandings of group boundaries; conduct public opinion surveys to gauge the appeal of different discursive frames among a given population; run survey experiments

to estimate the impact of issue framing on specific political attitudes and behaviors; or use methods such as network analysis and agent-based models to further probe into the emergent aspects of expressive behavior. In addition, IR scholarship would benefit from research that identifies the scope conditions for each logic of action and investigates how different logics interact to produce specific outcomes of interest. This paper takes a first step in that direction by developing an expressive logic of action and analytically distinguishing it from the existing logics.

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