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 or globalization, bolstering support for populism within Western countries. 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 in a given context. Actors form emotional attachments to social groups, which elites attempt to mobilize in connection with political issues. 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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The contemporary international order faces important challenges from within its core.[1] 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 campaigns to the presidency 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 unilateral and isolationist policies—from closing national borders to withdrawing from international agreements in areas like climate change and nuclear proliferation—whose implementation undermined the foundations of the contemporary international order. Far from unique, Trump's rise in the United States 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.

A growing body of research shows that resentment toward out-groups drives opposition to international cooperation within the West. In the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, for example, negative attitudes toward groups like women, racial minorities, immigrants, or foreign countries increased support for Trump.[2] In European countries, populist appeals (and their accompanying anti-liberal policies) also tend to resonate with citizens who resent minorities and immigrants.[3] Skepticism toward European integration likewise depends on negative attitudes toward out-groups.[4] In 2016, British citizens with negative attitudes toward out-groups and immigration were more likely to vote for leaving the European Union.[5] Moreover, existing research consistently finds that opposition to immigration often stems from concerns about its cultural, rather than economic, impacts.[6] Similarly, citizens with negative attitudes toward out-groups are more likely to oppose globalization and

[1] Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021.
[2] Mutz 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018.
[3] Berman 2021; Noury and Roland 2020.
[4] Hobolt and de Vries 2016.
[5] Hobolt 2016; Iakhnis, Rathbun, Reifler et al. 2018.
[6] Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014.

free trade,[7] two important pillars of the post-1945 international order.

But how can scholars theorize about phenomena like these? Taken together, these studies demonstrate that political behavior involves a crucial expressive or symbolic dimension. As prominent scholars of public opinion note, people navigate the political world based on their social identities: they choose candidates during elections and take positions on important political issues based on the sympathies and resentments they feel toward social groups.[8] And yet, these empirical patterns contrast with the logics of action—based on material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—that International Relations (IR) scholars use to develop theory. To theorize about political behavior, IR scholars traditionally rely on a logic of consequences or appropriateness;[9] or, more recently, on a logic of practicality[10] or habit.[11] But 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 offer a limited vocabulary to account for group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features.

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. 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

[7] Mansfield and Mutz 2009, 2013; Mutz and Kim 2017.
[8] Achen and Bartels 2016; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Kinder 1998; Sears 1993.
[9] March and Olsen 1998, 2011.
[10] Pouliot 2008.
[11] Hopf 2010.

a result, an important dimension of political behavior remains under-theorized. Following either of these approaches, IR scholars thus remain ill equipped to develop theory about a consequential class of phenomena in international politics.

In this paper, I address this problem by drawing on an interdisciplinary body of research to develop a logic of action that focuses on the expressive dimension of political behavior. Based on an expressive logic, 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, based on how elites frame this issue in a given context. An expressive logic departs from existing logics by assuming 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 information and make decisions on political issues; and (3) symbolic factors—how actors and political issues are framed in the political discourse—play a fundamental role in organizing group activity.

This paper contributes to existing research by developing a logic of action that focuses on the distinctive features of expressive behavior. An expressive logic unifies and organizes disparate findings under a single framework, paving the way for theory development and refinement across domains. On the one hand, 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. On the other hand, the proposed logic provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. This 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: who belongs in the group (or not), and who is a friend (or not)? To be sure, expressive elements appear in previous research; this is far from the first paper to discuss aspects like identity, symbols, culture, or social influence. This paper does not aim to develop theory to explain a specific phenomenon or to assess the empirical validity of existing theories; rather, it aims to develop a framework that unifies and organizes existing findings. While expressive elements appear in previous research, these elements are not coherently integrated into a distinctive logic of action, and neither has there been an attempt to specify the mechanisms behind an expressive logic of action and to analytically distinguish these mechanisms from those of existing logics. These are precisely my aims in this paper.

The argument is advanced in three parts. To begin, the first section reviews the existing logics of action in IR and discusses why each logic offers a limited framework to account for phenomena like the eroding support, within the West, for the liberal democratic practices that once defined the post-1945 international order. Next, the second section draws on an interdisciplinary body of research to develop an expressive logic of action, specify its mechanisms both at the actor level and the social level of analysis, and analytically distinguish the proposed logic from traditional logics of action. The third section then considers how an expressive logic could improve our understanding of a class of phenomena in international politics, ranging from international cooperation to conflict, that sit uneasily with traditional logics of action.

Existing Logics of Action

Explanations of political behavior usually rely, either implicitly or explicitly, on a logic of action—a framework that provides a set of assumptions about the actor's reasons for action, or "a perspective on how human action is to be interpreted."[12] To explain action, social scientists make assumptions about what drives decision-making at the actor level. As I discuss below, these assumptions typically involve some form of material self-interest, normative considerations, or social practices. These as-

[12] March and Olsen 2011, 478.

sumptions apply not only to individuals as actors, but also to corporate (or aggregate) actors like the state. Moreover, these assumptions are present not only in bottom-up explanations, which place causation at the level of the actor, but also in top-down explanations, which place causation at the level of the system. Even Waltz's third-image theory of international politics, for example, assumes that states "are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. States, or those who act for them, try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view."[13] According to this explanation, balances of power emerge because, in a self-help system characterized by the absence of supranational authority, states seek to achieve the goal of self-preservation. Based on an instrumental logic of action, Waltz specifies theory about how states respond to their environment.

Logics of action differ from theories in that they are more general and abstract than theories. On the one hand, a theory aims to explain a particular phenomenon—such as why balances of power emerge or why countries adopt liberal or protectionist trade policies. On the other hand, a logic of action provides a general framework or a set of assumptions to explain human action. We can therefore think of logics of action as meta-theoretical frameworks that offer a vocabulary for theory development. Based on a given logic of action, a scholar develops a theory to explain a specific phenomenon, and then derives observable implications from that theory for empirical assessment. What defines a logic of action is the set of building blocks it provides for theory development. As I demonstrate below using the example of public attitudes toward political issues like immigration or free trade, different logics of action highlight distinct dimensions of human behavior, thus providing the foundation for different kinds of theories of political behavior.

While it may be tempting to treat logics of action as true or accurate representations of human action, it is more fruitful to understand them as analytical tools that may be more or less useful depending on the research problem at hand.[14] 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—or attempting to reduce a given logic to another—it is more productive to examine whether a given

[13] Waltz 1979, 118.

[14] See Elster 1989; Fearon and Wendt 2002, 60, 52-53; Ruggie 1998, 860-61; March and Olsen 1998, 953-54.

logic of action serves as a useful tool to explain a specific phenomenon of interest. 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.

In what follows, I consider the usefulness of existing logics of action to theorize about the eroding support, within the West, to the liberal democratic policies that once defined the post-1945 international order. A growing body of research shows that people navigate the political world based on their social identities, choosing political candidates and taking positions on foreign policy issues based on the sympathies and resentments they feel toward social groups. As such, this research consistently departs from the assumptions that define existing logics of action. While the existing logics provide useful frameworks to theorize about certain dimensions of political behavior—those that involve material self-interest, shared norms, practices, or habit—they provide limited traction to theorize about the expressive dimension of political behavior, which involves group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features. For the sake of clarity, my review of the existing logics focuses on the clearest, foundational statements of each logic of action—rather than on theoretical applications of a given logic, which may apply a given logic only implicitly, slightly deviate from a given logic, or even blend more than one logic to explain a specific phenomenon.

A Logic of Consequences

To begin, the logic of action most commonly used for theory development in IR is a logic of consequences, which assumes that actors have a set of well-behaved preferences and choose as best they can the means to realize those preferences.[15] A logic of consequences conceives of action as

[15] Lake and Powell 1999; Snidal 2002.

instrumental or outcome-oriented: what motivates action is the desire to achieve a goal, typically defined based on the actor's material self-interest. According to this 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 either through coercion (the use of force or its threat to use force) or inducement (the manipulation of incentives).[16] As such, conformity takes the form of compliance—behavior motivated by a desire to obtain rewards or avoid punishments.[17]

Based on a logic of consequences, one would argue that material self-interest shapes citizens' attitudes toward foreign policy issues. According to explanations of this kind, individuals form attitudes toward a given policy based on its expected distributional consequences. Within economically developed countries, for example, free trade has different distributional consequences depending on whether worker is highly skilled versus low skilled, or whether they works in an export-oriented versus import-competing sector of the economy. Therefore, high-skilled workers or workers from export-oriented sectors should 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 to individuals within developed countries. According to explanations of this kind, if immigrants have a skill level similar to that of a given citizen, we would expect the citizen to oppose immigration out of concerns about competition in the labor market. Similarly, we would expect that the more taxes a given citizen pays, the more they should oppose low-skilled immigration out of concerns about public spending, especially in those areas that provide immigrants with more access to public services.

However, a cumulative body of research on political attitudes departs from the expectations derived from a logic of consequences in two crucial ways. To begin, existing research reveals that cit-

[16] In Weber's framework of social order, this type of influence corresponds to "domination by virtue of a constellation of interests," whereby a calculative alignment of interests regulates social interactions. See Weber 1978, 943-46; Scott 1996, 25-30.

[17] See Kelman 1961, 62-63.

izens often form attitudes toward issues like free trade and immigration based on perceived group interest—or sociotropic concerns—rather than based on individual self-interest. In the U.S., for example, repeated studies find that citizens' attitudes toward free trade depend less on material self-interest than on perceptions of how trade would affect the U.S. economy as a whole.[18] And importantly, these perceptions do not stem from an objective assessment of the national impact of free trade. As a long tradition of economics research demonstrates, the national impact of free trade is on balance beneficial; as such, if a citizen objectively considered the economic welfare of the country as a whole, they should support free trade. By contrast, sociotropic concerns depend on the existing political discourse about free trade, especially as framed by political leaders and the mass media, rather than directly on the objective impact of free trade policies.[19]

In addition, existing research departs from the expectations derived from an instrumental logic in a second way: It reveals that concerns over intangible social constructs—remote and abstract symbols like national identity or culture—shape public attitudes toward political issues. For example, repeated studies find that attitudes toward immigration depend on concerns about its cultural, rather than economic, impacts.[20] 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 social constructs like national identity or culture cannot be directly traced back to competition over material interests; neither do these concerns derive from an objective assessment of the situation. Rather, perceived threats to national identity and culture tend to be imagined and inflated, involving a central affective component.[21] Opposition to immigration, for example, often stems either from negative affect toward specific groups of immigrants, grounded in negative stereotypes or negative media portrayals of these groups; or from more general psychological predispositions, such as ethnocentrism (a generalized prejudice toward out-groups), that become activated in a given socio-political context.[22]

[18] Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Mutz and Kim 2017.
[19] Guisinger and Saunders 2017.
[20] Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014.
[21] Kinder 1998, 805-807.
[22] Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 230-34.

Based on a logic of consequences, IR scholars can adopt one of two approaches in the face of these empirical patterns, neither of which is satisfactory. On the one hand, scholars might dismiss these patterns as anomalies that cannot be explained systematically—claiming that citizens form attitudes toward issues like 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 theoretical frameworks, rather than reformulating existing theoretical frameworks based on the empirical evidence available. Alternatively, scholars might try to subsume the anomalous cases into a logic of consequences by bringing in certain auxiliary assumptions. But as I discuss next, this approach ultimately relies on ad hoc assumptions that are not directly grounded in a logic of consequences, resulting in inconsistent explanatory frameworks. At the same time, 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.

In particular, 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 interest, 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.

A Logic of Appropriateness

Another logic of action commonly used for theory development in IR is a logic of appropriateness, which assumes that actors share norms that delimit appropriate behavior within a community.[23] This logic 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.[24] When ambiguities arise, actors engage in principled argument to find the norm most congruent with a situation.[25] As March and Olsen note, norm-guided action 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.[26] Originally developed in organizational studies, this logic 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."[27] Based on this logic, influence depends on legitimation, as actors draw upon a system of shared norms to justify their positions;[28] and conformity depends on internalization—or the integration of a belief into one's system of values, usually as a result of a process of socialization.[29]

Like a logic of consequences, a logic of appropriateness provides a limited vocabulary to theorize about the contemporary challenges to the post-1945 international order from within its core. Following a logic of appropriateness, one would argue that citizens form attitudes toward political issues based on shared norms and the good of the community as a whole. However, a logic of appropriateness is not commonly used to theorize about public attitudes toward issues like immi-

[23] 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.

[24] Sending 2002, 447-50.

[25] March and Olsen 2011, 483; Risse 2000, 6-7.

[26] March and Olsen 1998, 951-52.

[27] March and Olsen 2011, 481.

[28] In Weber's framework of social order, this type of influence corresponds to "domination by virtue of authority," which is present in relations of authority. See Weber 1978, 943-46, 954; Scott 1996, 31.

[29] See Kelman 1961, 65-66.

gration or free trade. To the contrary, existing research in this area consistently departs from a logic of appropriateness in important ways. Time and again, this research paints a picture of the actor not as the ideal citizen who places the common good above particularistic interests and engages in principled debate, as one would expect based on a logic of appropriateness; but rather as a group member motivated to defend the group.

While one could attempt to account for these empirical patterns using a logic of appropriateness, such a move would also result in an inconsistent explanatory framework. Doing so 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 would result in important limitations. To begin, this assumption bypasses the theoretically interesting question of how social groups are defined in the first place. Moreover, this assumption cannot be traced backed to either the ethical or the cognitive components that define a logic of appropriateness. On the contrary, the assumption that actors prioritize the good of a narrowly-defined community goes against both of these components. 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 discrimination, or the notion that some actors are more deserving than others simply on account of their group affiliation. As such, in-group favoritism does not fit into the category of appropriate or exemplary behavior. Based on a logic of appropriateness, an important dimension of political behavior would thus remain under-theorized.

Other Logics

Like a logic of consequences or a logic of appropriateness, other logics of action offer limited frameworks to account for the current challenges to the post-1945 international order from within its core. Based on a logic of practicality, for example, an actor's practical sense guides action;[30] based

[30] Pouliot 2008.

on a logic of habit, actors respond habitually to circumstances.[31] But while public attitudes toward political issues like free trade or globalization may involve either a practical or a habitual components, explanations based solely on practices or habit would neglect fundamental questions that emerge from the existing research in this area. 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)? By neglecting questions like these, existing logics of action provide indeterminate vocabularies to theorize about phenomena such as the contemporary backlash against international cooperation observed within Western countries.

An Expressive Logic of Action

An interdisciplinary body of research indicates that political behavior involves a crucial expressive dimension: People navigate the political world based on their social identities, choosing candidates during elections and taking positions on political issues based on the sympathies and resentments they feel toward social groups.[32] This research contrasts with existing logics of action in two important ways. First, actors make decisions based on perceived group interest, which 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—remote and abstract symbols like national identity or culture—that are often imagined and inflated, rather than objectively derived from a given situation. Existing research indicates, for example, that opposition to free trade and globalization often stems either from negative affect toward specific groups, grounded in stereotypes and media portrayals of these groups; or from psychological predispositions that become activated in connection with a given political issue. To effectively capture the expressive dimension of political behavior, we thus need a logic of action that accounts for group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features.

[31] Hopf 2010.

[32] Achen and Bartels 2016; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Kinder 1998; Sears 1993.

In this section, I draw on this interdisciplinary body of research to develop a logic of action that focuses on the expressive dimension of political behavior. Compared to existing logics of action, the proposed logic offers two important advantages. First, an expressive logic provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about political behavior that involves group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. Whereas existing logics yield inconsistent explanatory frameworks to account for the expressive dimension of political behavior, an expressive logic unifies and organizes disparate empirical findings into a coherent meta-theoretical framework, promoting theory development and refinement across domains. Second, the proposed logic offers another important advantage: it is built on solid empirical foundations. As will become clear in the next pages, the assumptions that define an expressive logic are supported by decades of empirical research, across disciplinary boundaries, on (inter)group processes and political behavior.

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 for theory building. In the future, 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.

Based on this logic, behavior is expressive: it expresses an actor's social identification. What motivates action is the desire to attach oneself to a collective category. People have a powerful tendency 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 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, based on how elites frame this issue in a given socio-political context. According to this logic, actors exercise influence via persuasion and example;[33] and conformity depends on group identification.[34]

An expressive logic involves social and psychological processes that systematically depart from the assumptions made in existing logics. In particular, an expressive 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 information and make decisions on political issues; and (3) symbolic factors—how actors and political issues are framed in the political discourse—play a fundamental role in organizing group activity. As I discuss next, an expressive logic involves distinctive assumptions not only at the level of the actor, but also at the social levels of analysis.

The Actor Level: Group Identification

To begin, an expressive logic of action involves a distinctive set of assumptions at the level of the actor. This logic conceives of behavior as *expressive*: What motivates action is the desire to attach oneself to a social category. People have a powerful tendency, well documented across contexts, to categorize themselves into social groups—based for example on dimensions like gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. Expressive behavior differs from outcome-oriented behavior, on the one hand, in that it expresses the actor's identity attachments, rather than serving as a means to obtain rewards or avoid punishments. By adopting a pattern of behavior associated with a social group, an actor expresses their identification with the group to themselves and to others. 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 either on compli-

[33] In Weber's framework of social order, this type of influence corresponds to "domination by virtue of prestige," which is present in diffuse social relations. See Weber 1978, 950-52, 954.

[34] See Kelman 1961, 63-65.

ance or internalization.[35] As Kelman notes, identification differs from compliance on the one hand, and from internalization on the other hand. As a conformity mechanism, identification is more stable and enduring than compliance, since it does not rely on external enforcement. At the same time, identification is less stable and enduring than internalization, since it hinges on the actor's identity attachments rather than on their intrinsic beliefs. Based on an expressive logic, behavior tends to persist as long as (1) the group remains important to the actor, (2) the actor's beliefs about the group persist, and (3) no alternative source of identification challenges the behavior.[36] As I discuss next, an interdisciplinary body of research demonstrates that group identification involves distinctive psychological processes, which systematically depart from the assumptions made in existing logics of action. In addition, group identification shapes behavior through distinctive pathways that likewise depart from the assumptions made in existing logics.

The Affective Foundations of Group Identification

To begin, group identification involves a crucial affective component that sets it apart from the cognitive processes assumed in traditional logics of action. As Spears notes, group 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."[37] Crucially, group 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.[38] As Tajfel 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."[39] As such, identification cannot be reduced to an actor's material self-interest. On the contrary, research on optimal distinctiveness theory indicates that social identification involves a compromise between two psychological—rather than material—needs,

[35] See Kelman 1961 for a comparison among these mechanisms.
[36] Kelman 1961, 63-65.
[37] Spears 2011, 220.
[38] Spears 2011; Tajfel and Turner 1979.
[39] Tajfel 1974, 69.

assimilation and differentiation.[40] Each of us has two opposing needs: the need to be validated and similar to others, which we satisfy by belonging to social groups; and the need to be unique or different from others, which we satisfy by comparing ourselves to out-groups.

Moreover, social identification implies a psychological sense of belonging to a group, more than "objective" group membership.[41] 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.[42] And 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. What is more, group attachments often depend on ascriptive or involuntary traits beyond an individual's choice. In fact, common sense typically associates nationality, for example, with a person's place of birth or family descent—two attributes ascribed at birth rather than chosen by individuals during their lifetime. Finally, 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, around the world, people who perceive that their ethnic group is discriminated against (or lacks representation at national government) report lower levels of national attachment and pride.[43]

How Group Identification Shapes Behavior

In addition, group 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 tied to the group—such that they experience whatever happens to the group as if it had happened to them. Because social identity extends the self

[40] Brewer 1991.
[41] Huddy 2001.
[42] Huddy and Khatib 2007; Theiss-Morse 2009.
[43] Schildkraut 2011, 854-55; Wimmer 2018, Ch. 6.

beyond the individual, it provides a powerful mechanism for collective behavior.[44] In particular, group identification may shape 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 will tend to accept influence from the group and to adopt the attitudes and behaviors associated with the group.[45] By enacting the attitudes and behaviors associated with a group, an actor attaches themselves to the group, affirming their identity as group member not only to themselves but also to others.

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 members of their group, even when such actions provide no personal gain to the actor. For example, 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.[46] 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.[47] In other words, social identification implies an increased tendency to cooperate with members of the in-group.

Third, group identification shapes behavior in intergroup contexts: The more an actor identifies with a group, the more they develop in-group bias, favoring the in-group over out-groups. The tendency toward in-group favoritism was first detected in the minimal group studies conducted by Tajfel and colleagues.[48] 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 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

[44] Brewer 1991.
[45] Spears 2011, 211-14.
[46] Huddy and Khatib 2007, 72-74.
[47] Theiss-Morse 2009, Ch. 4.
[48] Tajfel, Billig, Bundy et al. 1971.

resources.[49] In other words, social identification entails a tendency to favor one's own group over other groups, especially when the group is perceived to be under threat.

Taken together, these pathways imply two crucial departures from the existing logics of action. First, an expressive logic assumes that group identification serves as a lens through which individuals interpret politically relevant information, providing a motive for directional or biased reasoning.[50] Rather than considering information evenhandedly, as assumed by traditional logics of action, actors in an expressive logic are motivated to defend the group. In an expressive logic, decision-making involves not only cognitive processes, but also a central affective component. In addition, an expressive logic departs from existing logics in a second way: symbolic factors—how actors and their interactions are categorized—play a key role in this logic. 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: who belongs in the group (or not), and who is a friend (or not)?[51] I address this aspect next.

The Social Level: Group Boundaries

An expressive logic involves distinctive assumptions not only at the actor level, but also at the social level of analysis. Based on this logic, group identification involves distinctive symbolic factors, whose meaning depends on the social context. As discussed above, people have a powerful tendency to categorize themselves into social groups. While in principle any combination of traits could provide a basis for social categorization, which traits become relevant for social distinctions depends on the social 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 com-

[49] Spears 2011, 204-205.

[50] See Herrmann 2017; Kunda 1990.

[51] An expressive logic of action may be used to account for cooperative or conflictual behavior, depending on how intergroup relations are framed in a given context. Based on an expressive logic, actors will tend to cooperate with one another if they perceive one another as members of the same group or as friends. Conversely, actors will refrain from cooperation if they perceive one another as members of different groups or as enemies. This paper places more emphasis on the latter possibility by virtue of its research question (the eroding support to international cooperation within the West), rather than because an expressive logic inherently leads to conflictual behavior.

monly categorize individuals based on nationality. Yet, nationality would not be a meaningful social category a few centuries ago, when people relied instead on dimensions like geographic region to categorize themselves. Nationality only became a meaningful social category after the institution of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, especially as a result of continued nation-building efforts on the part of state elites.[52] Political elites played a fundamental role in the institution of national identities: As Risorgimento leader Massimo d'Azeglio famously proclaimed in 1861, "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians."[53]

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 people define national identity based on ethnocultural ancestry, others consider as typical Americans those who respect liberal principles, are active and engaged citizens, or share in the immigration experience.[54] There are different ways to define what national identity means, which range from most exclusionary (e.g., those based on ethnocultural ancestry) to most inclusionary (e.g., those based on civic engagement). In addition, there are different ways to define a country's role in the world, which likewise range from most exclusionary (e.g., those that emphasize a global hierarchy between the West and the "rest") to most inclusionary (e.g., those that emphasize sovereign equality). Given the contested nature of group boundaries, Brubaker 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.[55] 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? I address this question next.

[52] Smith 1986, 2003.
[53] Hobsbawm 1992, 44.
[54] Schildkraut 2011, 858-61.
[55] Brubaker 2002.

The Politicization of Group Identities

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 hand.[56] That is, actors need to perceive a given political issue through the lens of group membership. 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 economics research, or instead as a threat to the U.S. national industry, as claimed by Trump during his presidential campaigns.

In particular, the politicization of group attachments hinges on a combination of three factors: the socio-political context, elite framing, and psychological predispositions. 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 be salient. Dramatic events—such as a terrorist attack or an economic crisis—can serve to galvanize group identifiers into collective action.[57] 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. And importantly, 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,[58] 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*—how political

[56] Kinder 1998, 807.
[57] Brubaker 2002, 171.
[58] Sears 1993.

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. Contested definitions of group boundaries inform political debates, especially on issues that pertain to relations with other groups. 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.[59] In addition, elites also shape perceptions of group salience and group threat. As Brubaker notes, elites may frame issues as "primordial conflicts between groups," evoking group identity to motivate members to defend the group.[60] 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 predispositions*—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,[61] free trade,[62] and supranational integration.[63] In sum, elite mobilization attempts succeed when issue framing

[59] Huddy 2001, 147-49.
[60] Brubaker 2002, 166.
[61] Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014.
[62] Mansfield and Mutz 2009, 2013; Mutz and Kim 2017.
[63] Hobolt 2016; Hobolt and de Vries 2016; Iakhnis, Rathbun, Reifler et al. 2018.

taps into deeply felt attachments among the public in a given context. Following an expressive logic, the politicization of group identities thus depends on an interaction among three factors: the socio-political context, elite framing, and psychological predispositions.

Putting It All Together

By focusing on the distinctive features of expressive behavior, an expressive logic improves our understanding of consequential phenomena in international politics—such as the current challenges to the post-1945 international order from within its core—that sit uneasily with existing logics of action. Because existing research consistently departs from the assumptions that define existing logics of action, existing logics yield inconsistent explanatory frameworks to account for phenomena like these. By contrast, an expressive logic provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about the expressive dimension of political behavior, which involves group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. Based an expressive logic, group attachments provide a powerful mechanism for political behavior, whose activation depends on an interaction between issue framing and psychological dispositions in a given context. And in fact, the mechanisms that define an expressive logic are consistent with a cumulative body of research about the eroding support for liberal democratic practices within the West.

For example, existing research indicates that Trump's election as U.S. president hinged on a combination of socio-political context, elite framing, and psychological predispositions.[64] In 2016, Trump rose to Republican nomination in a socio-political context marked by 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 of socio-political transformation, 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 did not invent this exclusionary rhetoric out of thin air; rather, he drew

[64] Mutz 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018.

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 changes brought about by globalization. To make the nation great again, Trump proposed policies of high symbolic (rather than material) impact, such as building a wall in the border with Mexico or increasing taxes on Chinese imports. Accordingly, Trump's rhetoric resonated the most with those citizens who held negative affect toward out-groups such as women, racial minorities, immigrants, or foreign countries. In other words, Trump successively mobilized a segment of the public based on their identity attachments.

More broadly, existing research indicates that the rise of right-wing populism within Western countries likewise results from a combination of socio-political context, elite framing, and psychological predispositions.[65] In the last decades, rising immigration and the political mobilization of minority groups have challenged the primacy of white men in longstanding social hierarchies within the West. At the same time, 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. Leveraging this context, right-wing populist leaders have mobilized voters based on issues like 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 immigrant and minority groups, right-wing populist leaders define the nation in ethnocultural terms. To restore the imagined glory of the nation's past, they 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 immigrants or minority groups. Across the West, populist leaders mobilize previously majoritarian segments of the population based on their identity attachments.

An expressive logic helps us understand phenomena like these not as empirical anomalies, as

[65] Berman 2021; Bonikowski 2017; Golder 2016; Noury and Roland 2020.

we are wont to do based on existing logics of action, but rather as expressive action—that is, as part of a distinctive class of phenomena. On the one hand, an expressive 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. On the other hand, an expressive logic provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about group processes with crucial symbolic and affective features. This 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: who belongs in the group (or not), and who is a friend (or not)?

Expressive Action in International Politics

This paper draws on an interdisciplinary body of research to develop an expressive logic of action—a new set of building blocks to theorize about the expressive dimension of political behavior, which involves group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. Based on this logic, group attachments provide a powerful mechanism for political behavior, whose activation depends on an interaction between issue framing and psychological dispositions in a given context. Focusing on social and psychological processes, an expressive logic departs from traditional logics by assuming that: (1) group identification, rather than material self-interest or the common good, is a driving force behind political behavior; (2) affect, rather than cost-benefit calculations or purely cognitive processes, shapes political reasoning; and (3) symbolic factors—how actors and political issues are framed—play a fundamental role in organizing group activity.

Besides the examples above, an expressive logic could be a useful tool to theorize about several instances of state behavior that sit uneasily with existing logics of action. As I discuss next, existing explanations of state behavior in different areas, ranging from international cooperation to conflict, involve expressive elements. Multiple studies suggest that important foreign policy decisions depend on how key domestic actors conceive of national identity in relation to relevant others. However, these disparate instances of state behavior are not recognized yet as expressive action—that is,

as part of a class of phenomena whose study requires a distinctive set of building blocks. The recognition of these phenomena as expressive action would open new avenues for research, promoting theory development across domains. For each of the cases below, an expressive logic invites us to ask: How do elites construe the nation, its friends, and its enemies? How do elites frame foreign policy issues, and what affective responses do they evoke as a result?

My purpose here is not to assess the empirical validity of the existing explanations that involve expressive elements. Such an endeavor would require a different kind of paper, with a specific empirical model and an adequate research design. Future research could use the set of building blocks provided in this paper to theorize about specific phenomena, derive observable implications from such theories, and then assess the empirical validity of these observable implications. A mixed-methods approach would be especially useful to that end.[66] Researchers could, for example, 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 or interdependent aspects of expressive behavior.

Neither is my purpose to formulate new explanations for the phenomena mentioned in this section. Rather, I argue that it would be fruitful analytically to recognize these instances of state behavior as expressive action. While existing explanations of these phenomena involve expressive elements, an expressive logic differs in scope from these explanations—it unifies and organizes much evidence on political behavior with a limited set of assumptions, focusing our attention on the distinctive mechanisms behind expressive behavior. As discussed above, logics of action are more general and abstract than theories: While a theory aims to explain a particular phenomenon, a logic of action provides a general framework or a set of assumptions to explain human action. By offering a distinctive vocabulary to theorize about group-based politics, an expressive logic paves the way for theory development and refinement across domains.

[66] See Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston et al. 2009.

Future Areas of Research

An expressive logic could improve our understanding state behavior in different areas, ranging from international cooperation to conflict, that sit uneasily with traditional logics of action. To begin, existing studies suggest that state decisions on whether or not to join intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) involve an important expressive dimension. Immediately after the Cold War, for example, both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) offered material incentives for Central and Eastern European states to join them, conditional on the adoption of liberal-democratic policies. And yet, not all potential candidate states sought accession. Material inducements only promoted liberalization among pro-Western states; by contrast, anti-liberal countries like Belarus or Serbia defied Westernization.[67] As Subotic demonstrates, candidate states like Serbia eschewed EU accession, despite the material inducements offered to members, because key domestic actors did not identify with Europe. Conversely, candidate states like Croatia sought accession, even though they perceived the EU requirements as intrusive, because they strongly identified with Europe.[68] Likewise, Gheciu notes that countries like the Czech Republic and Romania were open to adopting liberal-democratic practices because they identified with the Western community that NATO purported to embody.[69] In each of these cases, group identification—or whether domestic actors understood their country as part of a social group like Europe or the West—played an important role in states' decisions to pursue accession.

Similarly, existing studies indicate that state decisions on whether or not to adopt international norms also involve an important expressive dimension. As Zarakol argues, countries often adopt norms they do not accept as legitimate, and even when they do not intend to enforce these norms.[70] In the past century, countries like Turkey, Japan, and Russia adopted Western policies in an effort to assimilate into the society of European states—sometimes only for the sake of appearances, rather than because Western powers had imposed these policies by force or domestic actors had

[67] Schimmelfennig 2005.
[68] Subotic 2011.
[69] Gheciu 2005.
[70] Zarakol 2014.

internalized the corresponding norms.[71] Although many countries join human rights treaties, for example, treaty ratification rarely improves human rights practices. As Hathaway argues, states may 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 subscribe to the values embodied in the treaty.[72] Similar factors seemed to influence state decisions to join the nonproliferation regime after the Cold War. In the 1990s, Ukraine relinquished the nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union, despite the history of Russian territorial expansionism in its region, because it sought recognition from Western powers of its national sovereignty and good standing.[73] Likewise, Brazil gave up its nuclear program 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.[74] In each of these cases, identification with the West influenced states' decisions to adopt international norms.

Finally, multiple studies suggest that state decisions to acquire military equipment involve an important expressive dimension. According to these studies, countries sometimes acquire modern military equipment, such as aircraft carriers or fighter jets, because this equipment carries symbolic meaning, even though it provides little functional or strategic value. As Pu and Schweller argue, countries may acquire weapons for expressive or symbolic reasons—that is, "to express who they are or who they want to be."[75] For example, China directed vast resources into aircraft carriers, despite their limited strategic use, following a "to have is to be" logic, whereby a country expresses its identification through its weapons consumption.[76] Similarly, Eyre and Suchman argue that advanced weapons symbolize qualities associated with sovereign statehood, such as modernity and independence. Therefore, when faced with the choice of buying F-20 fighter jets in the 1980s, developing countries preferred instead to acquire smaller sets of more expensive fighter jets—which

[71] Zarakol 2011, 32-38. See also Okagaki 2013.
[72] Hathaway 2002, 2002-2020. See also Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, and Meyer 2008.
[73] Budjeryn 2022; Chafetz, Abramson, and Grillot 1996; Sagan 1997, 80-82.
[74] Patti 2021, 157-90; Spektor 2016.
[75] Pu and Schweller 2014, 148.
[76] Pu and Schweller 2014, 143; see also Dittmar 1992; Gilady 2018.

make for an acceptable air show, but fall short of providing strategic advantage.[77] In addition, Hironaka argues that the weapons consumed by the winners of the last war become attractive not only for their strategic value, which is uncertain, but also because they symbolize power.[78] Similarly, Murray posits that Wilhelmine Germany diverted resources from the army to build its naval capability, even though security threats came from the continent rather than the sea, because large navies symbolized Germany's identification as a great power.[79] These studies suggest that group identification (or how key domestic actors categorize their country) may play an important role in states' decisions to acquire military equipment.

The recognition of these phenomena as expressive action—that is, as part of a class of phenomena that follows a distinctive logic—opens new avenues of research. As myriad examples suggest, important foreign policy decisions depend on how key domestic actors conceive of national identity in relation to relevant others. However, these cases sit uneasily with traditional logics of action, which provide a limited vocabulary to theorize about the expressive dimension of political behavior. Based on traditional logics, scholars may dismiss these cases as anomalies or use ad hoc assumptions to theorize about them. By contrast, an expressive logic provides a coherent set of building blocks to theorize about group processes with crucial affective and symbolic features. This logic invites us to ask: How do elites construe the nation, its friends, and its enemies? How do elites 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. While existing explanations of these phenomena involve expressive elements, an expressive logic differs in scope from existing theories—it unifies and organizes much evidence on political behavior with a limited set of assumptions, focusing our attention on the distinctive mechanisms behind expressive behavior. By offering a distinctive vocabulary to theorize about group-based politics, an expressive logic promotes theory development and refinement across domains.

[77] Eyre and Suchman 1996, 93. See also Martin and Schmidt 1987.
[78] Hironaka 2017.
[79] Murray 2010, 672, 675.

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