

Two-Level Games in Foreign Policy Analysis

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This is a preprint version of a chapter published in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. The definitive, publisher-authenticated version is available at:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.496>

Citation:

da Conceição-Heldt, Eugénia and Patrick A. Mello (2017) Two-Level Games in Foreign Policy Analysis, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press (DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.496).

Summary: Whether in multilateral negotiations or bilateral meetings, government leaders regularly engage in “two-level games” played simultaneously at the domestic and the international level. From the two-level-games perspective, executives are seen as “chief negotiators” that are involved in some form of international negotiations for which they ultimately need to gain domestic approval at the ratification stage. This ratification requirement provides the critical link between the international and domestic level but it can be based on formal voting requirements (for instance, mandatory legislative approval in a certain policy area) or more informal ways of ratification such as measures of public opinion and public approval ratings. With its focus on government leaders as “gatekeepers” and central actors in international negotiations, the two-level games perspective constitutes a distinct approach in foreign policy analysis and serves to reintegrate the subfields of comparative politics and international relations. While there are similarities to a liberal perspective, two-level games emphasize that executives hold a certain degree of autonomy in their decision-making, which cannot be purely derived from their constituencies. Unlike realism, however, the approach recognizes the importance of domestic veto players and institutional constraints. Since its inception in the late 1980s, a vast literature on two-level games has evolved including refinements of its theoretical foundation and applications in various policy areas. Against this background, this essay engages with key controversies in two-level games and foreign policy analysis throughout the last three decades. The discussion is organized along six debates concerning the levels of analysis, domestic political institutions, the interaction between the domestic and international level, relevant actors, their interests and preferences, and the relationship between comparative politics and international relations. The essay concludes with some thoughts on possible future research agendas.

Keywords: bargaining, domestic politics, two-level games, interests, levels of analysis, negotiation analysis, ratification, veto players, win sets

Introduction

In 2013, David Cameron announced that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government would hold a referendum on Britain's continued membership in the European Union (EU). What was initially intended to strengthen his domestic political position and his support from within the Conservative party, ended with Cameron's resignation as Prime Minister when 52% of British voters cast their ballot in favor of leaving the EU in the June 23, 2016 referendum. In 1950, the ratification of the treaty on the International Trade Organization (ITO) failed because President Truman realized that he would not be able to gain legislative approval from the US Congress after several failed attempts at ratification of the ITO Charter. Congressional opposition largely stemmed from what was perceived as the ITO meddling with domestic economic policy. Hence no other country ratified the treaty and the ITO never came into being. When President Obama came to office in 2009, one of his main priorities was to quickly sign an environmental treaty. However, a Republican majority in Congress opposed it, hindering ratification at that point in time.

These examples illustrate the close linkage between domestic politics and international relations, which is particularly pronounced on economic and trade-related issues, environmental policy, or membership in international organizations. However, the influence of domestic factors also extends to issues traditionally understood to be outside the area of domestic political contestation. For instance, when chemical weapons were used in the Syrian civil war, several Western governments pondered to respond with military force against the Assad regime. Recalling members of parliament out of recess, David Cameron held a parliamentary vote on August 29, 2013 to prepare the ground for a military strike. However, the motion was defeated because dozens of Conservative MPs voted against their own government. As a consequence, Britain refrained from intervention in Syria and a motion submitted to the US Congress on the same matter was withdrawn on short

notice because the Obama Administration realized that it would face an uphill battle in securing a majority in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

Against this backdrop, a range of essential questions come up on the relationship between domestic politics, on the one hand, and international relations, on the other. When do we need to examine the domestic level in order to explain cooperation and defection at the international level? Which domestic actors are relevant for analyzing foreign policy? Where do the interests and preferences of these actors come from? To which extent does the domestic level shape foreign policy outcomes and global governance at large? Finally, how does the interaction between domestic and international politics work in practice?

These questions demonstrate the multitude of facets that motivate research and dominate discussions in foreign policy analysis. This research field at the intersection between comparative politics and international relations is particularly complex due to a plethora of actors, institutions and interactions at the international, domestic, and transnational level. But why should one increase complexity by analyzing multiple levels of analysis when one of the most important aims of theory is to simplify reality? Moreover, what is the added value of bringing domestic politics into the analysis of foreign policy? The simple answer is that foreign policy cannot be understood without recurring to the domestic level.

Whether in multilateral negotiations, interstate cooperation, or bilateral meetings, executives frequently engage in what Putnam (1988) termed “two-level games” played simultaneously at the domestic and the international level. From the two-level-games perspective, government leaders are seen as “chief negotiators” that are engaged in some form of international negotiations for which they ultimately need to gain domestic approval (ratification). While this ratification requirement provides the “crucial theoretical link” between the domestic and international level it can be based on formal voting requirements (for instance, mandatory legislative approval in a certain policy area) or more informal ways of ratification, such as

measures of public opinion and public approval ratings that are taken into consideration by policy-makers. Together, the possible outcomes of international negotiations on the one hand, and the set of negotiation agreements that could win domestic approval on the other hand define a leader's "win-set" (Putnam, 1988, pp. 435-437). Based on the size of the win-set, theoretical expectations for the likelihood of certain negotiation outcomes can be formulated (Moravcsik, 1993a; Putnam, 1988).

At the *international level*, national government representatives with different interests and preferences bargain with one another to solve collective action problems, to increase the welfare of their citizens, to institutionalize cooperation through the creation of international institutions, or to find modes of conflict resolution for war-torn societies. As such, cooperation can take place in diverse areas including trade, finance, security, development, environment, or health care. Interactions understood as bargaining processes between actors at the global level occur in an institutionalized framework at the United Nations (UN) and its subsidiary organizations, and the Bretton Woods institutions – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank – but also in informal (and more flexible) governance contexts, such as the G-8 or the G-20. The creation of a myriad of international organizations (IOs) means that not only national governments but also international bureaucrats have become important actors in global governance. Moreover, with the politicization of the authority of IOs (Zürn, Binder, & Ecker-Erhardt, 2012), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have entered the stage as relevant actors and IOs opened up to consult them and rely on their expertise (Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito, & Jönsson, 2013).

Globalization processes and the increased contestation of IOs have placed national government representatives under severe pressure from parliaments, courts, business and labor groups, and NGOs to justify concessions made when bargaining with other countries in international negotiations without creating tangible welfare

gains for their own citizens. This means that the domestic ratification of international agreements can involve high uncertainty for negotiating parties, depending on the power-sharing mechanisms and the number of veto players at the national level. An example is the “cliffhanger” story of the trade agreement between Canada and the EU (CETA) where in 2016 the regional parliament of Wallonia held the Belgian national government as hostage until its demands had been met and a four-page amendment was added into the 1,600-page treaty.

At the *domestic level*, a multitude of actors with different interests – including politicians, bureaucrats, organized interests, think tanks, NGOs, and voters – interact within domestic political institutions like parliaments and ministries to deliberate and determine a country’s foreign policy choices. Meanwhile, at the *transnational level*, actors that span across borders – such as multi-national firms, transnational advocacy groups, and even terrorist organizations – seek to influence countries’ domestic and foreign policies. Research in this subfield of international relations looks back to vigorous discussions over the appropriate level of analysis (Frieden, Lake, & Schultz, 2013; Gourevitch, 1978, 2002; Moravcsik, 1993a; Singer, 1961; Waltz, 1959).

As in most areas of the social sciences, there is no easy answer to the question on which level of analysis one should focus to better understand and explain foreign policy. As useful shorthand, the customary levels of analysis (international, domestic, and individual) can be linked to the major theoretical perspectives in international relations (realism, liberalism, and constructivism). Moreover, relevant actors (e.g. politicians, firms, industries or business associations, national bureaucracies, IOs, NGOs, and terrorist networks) also change depending on the choice of a level of analysis or theoretical perspective.

This essay engages with key controversies and debates in two-level games and foreign policy analysis throughout the last three decades. Therefore, the following sections are organized around levels of analysis, domestic political institutions, the interaction between the domestic and international level, relevant actors, their

interests and preferences, and the relationship between comparative politics and international relations, whereas the final section sketches a research agenda for future studies.

Key Controversies and Debates

International studies have long been divided into several perspectives or research traditions. These perspectives include, among others, realism, liberalism, neoliberal institutionalism, Marxism, constructivism, postmodernism and feminism (Frieden et al., 2013; Reus-Smit & Snidal, 2008). Depending on the perspective one takes, foreign policy can be disaggregated into several basic concepts that explain cooperation at the international level: power (realism), interests (liberalism), institutions (neoliberal institutionalism), ideas and identity (constructivism), and interactions (bargaining). In analogy to this proliferation of perspectives, levels of analysis focus on the origin of a cause, at the individual, domestic or international level (Nau, 2017). Accordingly, two-level games scholarship has extensively engaged in several controversies and debates over the past decades (Brummer & Oppermann, 2014; Conceição-Heldt, 2013b). Since the publication of Putnam's seminal study, a vast and dynamic literature has evolved around the following overarching questions:

- *Level of analysis*: Which level is most adequate to explain foreign policy?
- *Domestic political institutions*: Which domestic institutions affect the formulation of foreign policy and bargaining strategies at the international level?
- *Interaction between domestic and international level*: How does the interaction between the different levels work in practice?
- *Relevant actors*: Who are the relevant actors in foreign policy?
- *Interests and preferences*: Where do actors' interests come from and which preferences prevail during negotiations?

- *Integrating theories of domestic and international politics*: How can insights from comparative politics be brought into international relations?

Level of Analysis

The first controversy deals with the question on which *level of analysis* one should focus to explain foreign policy. Following the publication of Waltz's (1959) study, in which he developed a taxonomy of international relations made up of three levels of analysis (individual, domestic, and international), Singer (1961) counter argued that it were not possible to elaborate a single model that combines two or more levels. This led to a debate on the (dis)advantages of each approach. Gourevitch (1978) brought this research forward by studying the impact of international pressures on domestic politics and their consequences for foreign policy, the so-called "second image reversed". Ten years later with the publication of Putnam's article (1988), domestic politics finally found its place in international relations scholarship as an important explanatory variable of foreign policy. Putnam was the first to demonstrate that foreign policy is a two-level game, in which government representatives are "sandwiched" (Nau, 2017) between the domestic and the international level. Chief negotiators have to deal simultaneously and interactively with their counterparts at the international level and with their constituents at the domestic level. Agreement at the international level is only possible when the win-sets of involved actors overlap. Thereby, the size of the win-set is basically shaped by three factors: preferences and possible coalitions, political institutions at the domestic level, and chief negotiators' bargaining strategies at the international level (Putnam, 1988).

Even though two-level games in foreign policy have since then experienced vigorous debates over the most adequate level of analysis and the caveats of trying to investigate the interaction between the two levels over time for several countries, the vast literature in this field attests that no single level is always superior to the

others when explaining foreign policy (Evans, Jacobson, & Putnam, 1993; Gourevitch, 1978; Milner, 1997; Singer, 1961; Waltz, 1959). Depending on the field of research, it might be useful to build explanations from the bottom up, in a two-step process, in which domestic political institutions and interactions at the international level are equally important. In other cases, one can simply examine the international level and the positions of actors in world politics, such as the relative distribution of power (e.g. multipolarity vs. unipolarity; established vs. rising powers; great, middle, or small powers) and geopolitical considerations to explain outcomes in foreign policy. If students opt for the domestic level, then the central question that arises is which institutions to analyze in order to explain foreign policy and the bargaining strategies of actors that interact at the international level. This leads to the second controversy in this academic field, namely the role played by domestic political institutions in foreign policy.

Domestic Political Institutions

It goes without saying that domestic political institutions are an important variable to explain foreign policy. But how does domestic politics affect actors' interaction at the international level? And what do we know about which domestic variables shape a country's foreign policy? Domestic politics can lead governments to pursue suboptimal outcomes due to agency problems and because different political institutions, culture, economic structure, and leadership goals can hinder international cooperation (Fearon, 1998). Domestic political institutions include the role played by interest groups and their capacity to influence government representatives, power-sharing mechanisms between the executive and the legislature, and the number of veto players (Henisz & Zelner, 2006; Tsebelis, 2002). Apart from these institutions, domestic public opinion and "audience costs" constitute another important political constraint on national government representatives when involved in negotiations at the international level (Fearon, 1994). Thus, studies focusing on the domestic level can be subdivided into three

general categories: society-centered, state-centered, and public opinion approaches.

In particular, *society-centered approaches* go back to the competition among societal groups to explain a state's global political economy (Moravcsik, 1997). International trade cooperation is a field in which the winners and losers can be easily quantified; unsurprisingly a vast majority of studies comes from this academic field. Several scholars have investigated how competition between coalitions of business and labor groups shape trade policy (Frieden, 1988; Gourevitch, 1986) and how this is affected by class cleavages (Hiscox, 2002; Midford, 1993; Rogowski, 1989). Other scholars, in turn, have underlined that protectionist interest groups are more likely to prevail over free traders due to the organizational bias in society, that is to say those who lose from trade liberalization (e.g. farmers) are more likely to organize than those who benefit from it (Bailey, Goldstein, & Weingast, 1997; Goldstein, 1998). More recently, scholars have underlined that interest groups equally represent free-trade interests (Dür, 2010; Moravcsik, 1997; Woll, 2008). For example, Dür (2010) investigates how EU export-oriented firms were able to mobilize, making it more difficult that a government of an excluded country will adopt trade policies to protect exporter interests. Other scholars explore how business and labor groups use campaign funds as "carrot and stick" for influencing Congressional votes on trade agreements (Bardwell, 2000; Conceição-Heldt, 2011a; Engel & Jackson, 1998). Finally, Milner and Tingley (2015) show that domestic factors like the legislative branch, bureaucracy, organized interests, and public opinion all affect the making of US foreign policy. However, because some policy areas are more contested ideologically than others there is a bias towards certain policy instruments in US foreign policy, favoring military means, coercion, or sanctions, rather than less coercive alternatives like economic aid, trade, or immigration policy. This helps explain, for instance, why President Obama made

extensive use of military and coercive measures despite his stated policy preference not to use these instruments (Milner & Tingley, 2015, p. 256).

While a vast number of two-level-game applications exist in the fields of economic and trade policy, there is also a sizable literature in the security field that adopts Putnam's model. For example, Risse-Kappen (1995) shows that European leaders regularly pointed to domestic pressures when negotiating with their US counterparts over security issues like the Korean armistice negotiations, the Suez crisis, or the nuclear arms control agreement. The study demonstrates that, throughout these cases, engaging in two-level games turned out to be much more successful than a negotiating strategy of coercive bargaining backed by material resources (Risse-Kappen, 1995, p. 208). With regard to NATO's intermediate nuclear force (INF) posture, Eichenberg (1993) applies the two-level framework to four phases of US-German negotiations 1977-1988. Contrary to intuition, Eichenberg shows that in three of four episodes international agreement was actually the result of shrinking domestic win-sets. Baum and Potter (2015, p. 225) find evidence that suggests that US military threats were not taken seriously by Iraq and Syria because US leaders were unable to send credible signals due to domestic weaknesses. Focusing on "reverberation" in two-level games – understood as the effect of foreign leaders' statements and actions on domestic politics – Strong (2017) shows how hierarchical relations between negotiating partners can distort the two-level game. His study compares American and British media coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq vis-à-vis US-UK negotiations. It shows that due to its hierarchical position, the US can play a "three-level game" at the domestic, international, and foreign domestic table whereas British government representative were relegated to two levels only, without leverage on US domestic politics (Strong, 2017, p. 19).

As this overview illustrates, most studies focus on the established trade powers (the EU and US) or military powers (the US and Russia) and thus fail to analyze the role of interest groups in rising powers (Conceição-Heldt, 2013a). Considering the current

power shift in global governance with Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the so-called BRICs) playing a more proactive role, expanding the analysis of two-level games to rising powers remains one of the most challenging issues for future research. This research field promises to be particularly fruitful because it comprises democracies (Brazil, India, and South Africa), but also “defective democracies” (Russia) and autocracies (China) – which prods the question to which extent regime type affects the BRICs’ win-sets and their respective foreign policies.

State-centered approaches direct our attention to the domestic institutional structure of the state and are the second central category to explain a country’s foreign policy (see also Rosenau, 1967). This strand of literature has been mainly developed to analyze trade cooperation but institutional structures and their variance across democracies have also been the focus of security-related work. In contrast to neorealist approaches, Milner (1997) argues that relative gains and cheating are not the central categories to explain international cooperation, but rather domestic distributional consequences of cooperation. For situations characterized by high divergence of preferences between the executive, the legislature, and societal interest groups Milner shows that the more the information is distributed among these three types of actors, and the more institutions have a say in trade policy, the more likely it is that each player can veto a trade agreement. In the same vein, using a game-theoretic model, Milner and Rosendorff (1997) investigate how elections and divided government shape international trade negotiations. Pahre’s (2001) historical study on bilateral trade treaties in Europe demonstrates that when treaties require legislative ratification, this will make it more difficult for executives to liberalize tariff rates through international agreements. At the same time, treaties signed in the past will affect countries’ tariff rates indirectly, as these treaties function as a constrain on states’ ability to change their tariffs autonomously.

Rogowski (1999) studies the impact of domestic institutions in a country's foreign policy by focusing on the franchise ("peak" interest groups), representational mechanisms, and decision rules. By now, a new strand of quantitative and qualitative studies applies Tsebelis' (1995, 2002) veto players approach to foreign policy. For example, Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse (2007) in a study covering 194 countries from 1950 to 1999 demonstrate that the probability of signing a trade agreement decreases as the number of veto players increase. More recently, Conceição-Heldt (2011b) explains the causes of impasse at the current deadlocked Doha round by focusing on domestic political institutions, which she operationalizes through power-sharing mechanisms between executive and legislature, the number of veto players, the link between parties in government and interest groups of four major trade powers (the US, the EU, Brazil, and Australia), and the missing time dimension of negotiations – which includes time pressure, best alternatives to a negotiated agreement, repetitive bargaining games, and bargaining strategies.

Unlike trade and economic policy, the security field has been slow to adopt the veto player framework, partly because there is less legislative activity. Moreover, executives traditionally enjoy greater autonomy in security affairs due to a smaller number of potential veto players in this policy area (Mello, 2014). However, recent trends indicate increased challenges of executive dominance in foreign and security policy (Raunio & Wagner, 2017). Specifically, some security-related studies have employed the veto player concept. For example, Reiter and Tillman (2002) analyze various domestic constraints on executive conflict initiation, measuring whether the legislature is required to ratify international treaties. Among other results, Reiter and Tillman find that in states with this form of legislative power, conflict initiation does indeed become less likely, which resonates with a traditional view of institutional constraints. Choi (2010) investigates the effect of veto players on executive conflict behavior in democratic, non-democratic, and mixed dyads. Overall, the study finds confirmative evidence for a restricting effect of legislative constraints and the veto

player argument. Despite these advances in the extension of veto player approaches to conflict studies, the prevailing measures of institutional constraints remain abstract and removed from actual processes of foreign policy decision-making. These shortcomings are tackled by recent studies on “parliamentary war powers” that specifically investigate veto rights in security matters (Dieterich et al., 2010; Peters and Wagner, 2011). This literature shows that parliaments with war powers can stop executives from controversial military engagements (Dieterich, Hummel, & Marschall, 2015), and that even traditionally weak parliaments in security matters, like the UK House of Commons, have become “informal veto players” (Mello, 2017).

Domestic public opinion is the third important category for analyzing foreign policy, particularly for consolidated democracies. The notion that ordinary citizens act as a constraint on belligerent governments is an important feature of democratic theory and has prominently been employed in explanations of the democratic peace phenomenon (Mello, 2016). Kant’s well-known proposition that if citizens would have to approve war, a rational weighting of costs and benefits would lead them to decide against it (2007 [1795]), has served as the foundation for a range of arguments on public constraints. Rational choice studies have operationalized Kant’s argument as a fixed cost that democratic leaders face when contemplating the use of military force (Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992). Others also address public constraints, but emphasize that public opinion does not comprise a fixed cost and should rather be treated as a variable that can influence government decisions if support or opposition becomes particularly pronounced. According to the liberal view, democratic governments are constrained by the requirement to take into account the will of the people (Russett & Oneal, 2001) and to gather citizens’ support for decisions on war and peace, because democracies will only fight wars for popular, liberal reasons (Doyle, 1983).

These and similar arguments in the democratic peace literature assume a citizen-policy link that, whether directly or indirectly, constrains democratic leaders. By

implication, this means that public support is a prerequisite for most foreign policy endeavors, especially for high-salience decisions like war involvement. However, it has also been pointed out that public opinion, on its own, rarely alters a decision in favor or against military operations and might sometimes even be ignored by policymakers. For example, Barry Buzan refers to the British government's involvement in the Suez invasion of 1956, which took place despite the fact that a plurality among the British public was not in favor of using military force (Buzan, 1974). Hence, based on the Suez crisis and similar historical episodes where public opinion was effectively ignored by democratic governments, Buzan highlights the importance of considering the interplay between public opinion and additional influences, which also have to be directed against a policy to constitute a constraint on the government (Buzan, 1974).

Others question the logic of the public constraint hypothesis or argue that its effect is weaker than usually assumed. Since few people are directly affected by war, citizens' cost-benefit calculations, by-and-large, should not result in substantial opposition to military operations (Rosato, 2003). This could be one of the reasons why there has long been evidence of a "permissive mood" among the public towards foreign engagements (Caspary, 1970, p. 546). Also, while studies suggest that the public is generally able to form sensible collective policy preferences and to change these if necessary, the quality of public opinion ultimately depends on the availability of unbiased and correct information (Shapiro & Page, 1988).

All these studies attest that domestic political institutions are a crucial part of a country's foreign policy and can be a constraint depending on the power-sharing mechanisms between the executive and the legislature, the number of veto players within a political system, public opinion (think for example of the demonstrations in Belgium and other parts of Europe against TTIP and CETA), and audience costs that might affect the likelihood of a successful treaty ratification. In the same vein, a government's decision to engage in military intervention is likely to be influenced by

public opinion, especially when there's vocal opposition to war. The decision of the German government in 2002 to distance itself from the looming Iraq war illustrates this. In an election year with large groups of German voters opposing the war, it was too risky for the government to engage in this military enterprise, not to speak of constitutional restrictions. What these two examples from trade and war have in common is that in democratic systems, voters and citizens can, in principle, influence foreign policy by removing elected politicians who make unpopular decisions.

Interaction Between the Domestic and the International Level

Systemic level studies hold domestic politics constant and explore variance by focusing on the position of states in the international system, which is defined by the relative distribution of power. Putnam (1988) was the first scholar to systematically explore the question of when and how domestic politics determine international relations. When bargaining at the international level, national government representatives are playing a negotiating game simultaneously at the international and domestic levels. Whereas at the international level the challenge consists in finding a compromise agreement that is acceptable to all negotiating parties, at the domestic level the main challenge is to find a deal that is acceptable to domestic constituents and legislators so that it can be ratified. When chief negotiators renege on a domestic commitment in the absence of enforceable contracts they go beyond their win-set, making voluntary defection more likely to happen at the ratification stage. By contrast, involuntary defection reflects the behavior of a chief negotiator who is unable to deliver on a signed agreement because of failed ratification. As Putnam underlines, "the smaller the win sets, the greater the risk of involuntary defection" (1988, p. 439). Going back to the study by Schelling (1960) on the paradox of weakness, Putnam also shows with regards to the strategies of negotiators that the larger a negotiator's win-set, the easier it should be to successfully conclude a negotiation. At the same time, however, a large win-set weakens the bargaining position of negotiators. Putnam hypothesizes that

domestically constrained negotiators, implying a smaller win-set, can exploit their domestic weakness to obtain a favorable deal at the international level. This allows them to bargain with their counterparties from a position of strength.

Following the publication of Putnam's study, a systemic-level approach has been used by some scholars to study how international negotiations shape domestic politics. Some studies (Larsén, 2007; Paarlberg, 1997; Patterson, 1997) even refer to the EU trade policy as a three-level game made up of the international, European, and domestic levels. Due to the complexity of comparing the negotiating positions and domestic levels of 28 states, several studies either opt to compare the positions of three major EU states on European integration (Moravcsik, 1993b) or to aggregate member states' preferences into liberal, protectionist or swing positions related to trade policy liberalization (Conceição-Heldt, 2011a; Elsig, 2010).

Another strand of literature uses a bargaining-centered approach by investigating how negotiating strategies shape outcomes (Conceição-Heldt, 2004; Dür & Mateo, 2010; Odell, 2009). A wide range of studies focusing on the current Doha round of trade liberalization at the WTO are at the intersection of international and domestic politics (Conceição-Heldt, 2011a; Ghosn, 2010; Narlikar, 2010; Simonelli, 2011). Scholars of global economic governance have moved to study how rising powers contest or accept the rules and institutions of the old liberal world order. This new and emerging strand of literature contributes to the systemic structural level of analysis and with its focus on rising powers as rule-takers or rule-makers (Hopewell, 2015; Schirm, 2010) constitutes an excellent complement to the literature on incumbent powers (Kahler, 2013; Narlikar, 2013). For example, Zangl, Heussner, Kruck, and Lanzendörfer (2016) develop an institutionalist power shift theory which holds that the success of institutional adaptation depends on rising powers' ability to undermine international institutions and to make credible threats to this effect.

Actors in Foreign Policy

Another controversy in two-level games concerns the actors that exercise power and influence over foreign policy. This issue reflects the divide in the existing perspectives and the focus on different levels of analysis in international relations. Actors are then identified depending on whether they operate primarily at the domestic, international or transnational level.

At the *domestic level*, we have a vast array of actors including powerful states like the permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) or rising powers – like Brazil, China, and India – but also politicians (prime ministers, presidents, foreign, security, or finance ministers, and secretaries of state), parliaments – in which, depending on the political system, one or two chambers have to ratify international agreements –, and bureaucracies (to name just a few: Department of Defense in the US, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany, or the Directorate-General Trade of the European Union). These actors have different interests in foreign policy. States are primarily concerned with their (perceived) national interests. Accordingly, national government representatives see foreign policy as a way of achieving welfare (e.g. through free trade), security, or the provision of public goods. Politicians' interests can have a reelection, ideology, or policy goals dimension. By contrast, interest groups are concerned with wealth and profit for the groups they represent (Frieden et al., 2013). As we know from Max Weber and William Niskanen (1971) budget maximization, influence and policy preferences are the commonly ascribed interests to this specific group of actors.

At the *international level*, government representatives, a group that can include politicians and bureaucrats, interact with their counterparts, with IOs and transnational NGOs and networks. Not only IOs – such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Central Bank or the European Commission (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, & Tierney, 2006; Keohane, 2002; Koremenos, Lipson, & Snidal, 2001) – but also NGOs – such as Amnesty

International, Human Rights Watch, and Greenpeace – or multinational enterprises – such as Nike, Google, or Bombardier – are powerful actors in world politics today.

Even though scholars assume in some cases that IOs reflect the interests of member states according to their voting power (Mearsheimer, 1994), more recent studies in this field persuasively demonstrate that bureaucracies of IOs are actors in their own right with preferences that can conflict with the interests and preferences of the more powerful states in the system (Conceição-Heldt, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2006). This literature engages in the study of how IOs open up to transnational actors (Tallberg et al., 2013), which accountability mechanisms hinder abuses of power (Grant & Keohane, 2005), the politicization of IOs (Zürn et al., 2012), and how states are losing control of their bureaucracies (Johnson, 2013).

Moreover, at the *transnational level*, new actors such as transnational advocacy networks (TANs) have become relevant forces in international relations that shape foreign policy and exert pressure on states (Kahler, 2009; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Raustiala, 1997; Smith-Cannoy, 2012). TANs include, for example, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), but also transnational terrorist networks, such as Al Qaeda or Da'esh. One can say that TANs are made of individuals and NGOs acting in pursuit of a normative objective. TANs can alter interactions between states by mobilizing social pressure for policy change. At the same time, they can facilitate cooperation by providing information about international agreements and monitoring compliance (for example, see Raustiala, 1997). However, transnational terrorist networks use threats and violence to bargain with and extract concessions from states and to spread insecurity and fight against Western values (see Frieden et al., 2013).

In recent years, terrorist groups have committed atrocities in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, Berlin, and many other places, killing and wounding scores of people, indicating a new form of transnational terrorism that coincides with a transformation of warfare (Mello, 2010). Even though terrorist TANs interact with states in a variety of ways, we

still know little about their structure, material resources, and interests. Exceptions include Sageman (2004), which explores network structures of terrorist organizations and, more recently, Rabasa and Benard (2014) who describe the methods and evolution of terrorist networks in Europe.

What we know from the literature and evidence is that IOs, national bureaucracies, or TANs are unlikely to replace states as the central actors of world politics anytime in the near future. Nevertheless, these different actors play important roles in global relations and that is why their interests have to be taken into account when studying two-level games and foreign policy. Having mapped key actors, this essay now turns to the debate relating to interests and preferences in foreign policy.

Interests and Preferences

A further controversy in the literature relates to the discussion on actors' interests and preferences and is closely related to the previous section. Because definitions of interests and preferences vary greatly within the study of international relations, first these terms need to be defined. Frieden et al. (2013) define interests as "what actors want to achieve through political action", linking the concept with preferences, as they equate interests with "[actors'] preferences over the outcomes that might result from their political choices" (2013, p. 42). Others refer to actors' preferences as a ranking that orders the possible outcomes of an interaction (Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 1999). Accordingly, preferences are transitive and exogenously given. In any given setting actors prefer some outcomes to others and pursue strategies to achieve their most preferred possible outcomes (Frieden, 1999, p. 41).

Generally speaking, scholars specify preferences in one of three ways: by assumption, by observation or by deduction. Treating states like firms or individuals who are perceived a utility maximizers, many international relations and political economy scholars simply assume that countries attempt to maximize the national

welfare of their citizens. However, this assumption has several limitations. First of all because international relations involves a wide array of actors, including firms, labor groups, NGOs, bureaucracies, IOs, and TANS. And these actors are likely to have heterogeneous preferences. At the same time, international relations deal with a multiplicity of issues, beyond economic matters, like national defense or environmental cooperation. This has led to a contentious debate in IR between rational choice and constructivist scholars (Frieden, 1999). Whereas the former assume that preferences are exogenously given, the latter perceive them as endogenous and open to change (Risse, 2003). A second way of defining preferences of states is by observation. In this case, scholars identify national preferences by examining a country's behavior. These preferences are then used to analyze interaction among states or between state and non-state actors (Frieden, 1999, p. 58). Trade students widely agree that interest groups play a central role in explaining the origin of states' trade policy preferences (Dür, 2010; Frieden, 1999; Goldstein, 2012; Milner, 1997; Moravcsik, 1993b, 1997). Moravcsik (1993b) goes a step further by assuming that the greater the economic benefits for powerful interest groups, the greater their incentives to lobby national government representatives to ensure that their preferences are taken into consideration during trade negotiations. By contrast, the costlier the adjustments, the more likely interest groups are to oppose a trade agreement.

More recently, EU trade policy scholars have distinguished between net importers and net exporters, goods and services traders, and protectionists and free traders (Dür, 2007; Elsig, 2010). Similar to a three-level game approach, mentioned before, in EU governance, interest groups not only try to influence their governments at the national level. In order to be effective, interest groups must also organize themselves at the European level to establish themselves vis-à-vis three institutions: national permanent representations in Brussels, the Commission, and the EP. Whether they are able to influence trade agreements depends on their ability to

organize, to formulate their preferred policy position and to communicate that position within the context of interest group competition (see for example Klüver, 2013).

Debates about interests and preferences have also been central to the security field. Mainstream IR approaches have long bracketed “national interests” and merely assumed that all states in the international system strive for security, as expected by Waltz’ (1979) formulation of neorealism. Other neorealists, like Mearsheimer (2001), have argued that states are rather power-maximizers, assuming that this defines their national interest. By contrast, institutionalist scholars have emphasized welfare maximization (Keohane, 1984) as a legitimate goal of state policy. However, none of these approaches investigated where, exactly, interests and preferences come from. This changed with the “constructivist turn” (Checkel, 1998) in international relations where scholars began to question widely-held assumptions about state interests. For example, Finnemore (1996) demonstrates how the conduct of armed conflict and state interests change because of the normative influence of transnational actors like the International Committee of the Red Cross. Similarly, she also documents how norms of “humanitarian military intervention” change over time and how these affect the definition of national interests (Finnemore, 2003). Others have shown that historical learning and individual socialization were more decisive than material factors in explaining Soviet military interventions and leaders’ reluctance to use military force at the end of the Cold War (Bennett, 1999, 2005) and that political ideology affects the way governments define national interests in the security realm (Rathbun, 2004).

Integrating Comparative and International Politics

Many authors have lamented the “great divide” (Caporaso, 1997) that continues to separate the fields of comparative politics and international relations (see also Rathbun, 2006; Russett, 2003). As evidenced throughout this essay, studies in

international relations typically focus on the systemic or the state level to explain international outcomes or individual states' foreign policies. Comparativists, on the other hand, usually employ differentiated theories of politics inside the state, or specific groups of states, but rarely take into account inter-state relations or the international system as contextual variables.

While systemic theories tend to be abstract and parsimonious, many of them fail to account for specific outcomes, meaning that they cannot explain why a certain state chose a particular foreign policy at a precise point in time. For example, partly due to its level of generality, the seminal neorealist work, Waltz (1979), remains underspecified to account for many phenomena of interest. Even realist scholars thus concluded that "any foreign policy and its opposite can sometimes be deduced from Waltz's theory" (Christensen & Snyder, 1990, p. 138). Waltz famously replied to critics of his formulation of neorealism that his theory was never intended to explain foreign policy because it rested on a higher level of generality (Waltz, 1996). This generated a debate about the proper domain for neorealist theory with Elman (1996a, 1996b) taking the position that neorealism is indeed suited to explain foreign policy outcomes but that a lack of specification and inherent ambiguity in some prominent formulations of neorealism undermine the theory's explanatory power (for a similar argument see Fearon, 1998).

When mainstream IR theories failed to explain the end of the Cold War and the change of the international system from a bipolar to a unipolar and multipolar world order, scholars began to realize that domestic politics and actor-specific explanations, many of which were to be found in foreign policy analysis, had to be brought into IR theories to account for these developments (Hudson, 2005). While IR studies long neglected the link between domestic and international politics in favor of systemic variables, a consensus emerged around the position that the domestic and the international sphere are strongly interconnected and that a focus on the former enhances the understanding of the latter (Gourevitch, 2002).

Moreover, recent trends indicate that the subfield divide might be narrowing. For instance, scholars have noted a “democratic turn” in security studies, moving towards differentiated understandings of democracy (Geis & Wagner, 2011). This resulted in a broadening of the democratic peace research program, beyond the mere distinction between democracies and non-democracies, to explore the conditions under which democracies use military force, inherent ambiguities of democracy, and a variety of differences among democracies concerning their constitutional structure, political culture, domestic institutions, and party politics (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith, 2012; Geis, Müller, & Schörnig, 2013; Mello, 2014; Peters & Wagner, 2011; Rathbun, 2004). Furthermore, as Russett (2003) points out, many of the data sets that have seen increased usage by IR researchers in past decades were compiled by scholars in comparative politics. Examples include measures of regime type and institutional quality, government composition, political ideology, and many others.

What Remains to Be Done?

As shown throughout this essay, the two-level games approach remains a vibrant field of research. Moreover, Putnam’s metaphor and subsequent theoretical refinements of the two-level games approach are well suited to span the chasm that divides comparative and international politics. That being said, some questions have not been fully addressed by previous studies and several areas warrant more intensive exploration. Specifically, we identify five areas future research could focus on. First, despite its popularity and theoretical appeal, the empirical evidence for the widely-cited “Schelling paradox” has been decidedly mixed (Caporaso, 1997; Schultz, 2013). Future studies should explore systematically the conditions under which leaders as chief negotiators willingly “tie their own hands” domestically to exploit this circumstance in international negotiations. Second, while the two-level games perspective enriches IR and foreign policy analysis by bringing in domestic politics, we still know very little about the interaction between the international and

domestic levels. In this regard, Strong's (2017) focus on hierarchy in two-level games is a step in the right direction that should be built upon in future work. Third, two-level games applications could profit from adding a temporal dimension to replace static analyses with historical, process-oriented perspectives (Caporaso, 1997; Thies, 2001). Even though a few studies have engaged in embedding negotiations in a temporal dimension (Büthe, 2002; Conceição-Heldt, 2011a; Narlikar, 2010), most of the theoretical assumptions of these studies have not yet been confronted with empirical evidence to back the plausibility of their arguments. Fourth, another promising avenue for further research lies in the combination of two-level games and principal-agent theory, as suggested by Oppermann (2008). This framework allows for the assessment of governments' win-sets by conceptualizing them as collective agents with the parliamentary majority and the electorate as principals. Finally, considering the ongoing power shift in global governance with the BRIC states playing a more proactive role in world politics, expanding the two-level games perspective to rising powers will remain a challenge for future research. A field that requires further analysis is in particular which strategies of formal and informal influence incumbent and rising powers use and whether and how rising powers are able to shape global governance rules.

The vibrant research in this field testifies that the study of interactions at the domestic, international, and transnational levels is now an indispensable part of the story to understand state's foreign policy. Nevertheless, future studies should aim to further (re-)integrate the subfields of international relations and comparative politics. With fundamental transformations taking place at the domestic level, citizens questioning the European integration process, and a general shift towards nationalism and populism, today more than ever scholars need to take into account two-level games to explain foreign policy outcomes.

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