Theorizing Unpredictability in International Politics: A New Approach to Trump and the Trump Doctrine

Journal:	*Cambridge Review of International Affairs*
Manuscript ID	CCAM-2020-0105.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	IR theory, methodology, US Foreign Policy, philosophy of science

Theorizing Unpredictability in International Politics: A New Approach to Trump and the Trump Doctrine

Abstract

On the campaign trail, then-candidate Donald Trump expressed a desire to pioneer an unpredictable US foreign policy that would both deceive opponents and disrupt the status quo. Academic and media commentators readily labelled this Trump's 'Unpredictability Doctrine' and have since debated its merits and demerits. Beyond inevitable partisan divides, however, these responses also revealed enormous disagreement over conceptualizations of unpredictability and its impacts, raising fundamental questions for the IR discipline and the foreign policy analysis it informs. What are the ontological and epistemological roots of unpredictability in international politics? How can scholars simultaneously grapple with the conundrums posed by erratic actors and the larger, ever-changing systems they shape? This article unravels the philosophy of science (PoS) issues inherent in theorizing unpredictability, offering a novel, synthesized typology. Recognizing that PoS assumptions both frame accounts of unpredictability and represent a *source* of uncertainty, this article instead advocates epistemological humility, offering a new typology that transcends assumptions and facilitates dialogue between camps. This typology includes three 'buckets' of unpredictability—risk, uncertainty and complexity—that can be interpreted according to varying philosophy of science traditions. When applied empirically, this terminology helps contextualize analysis and expose oftentimes overlooked contours of US foreign policymaking.

Introduction

On April 27, 2016, when the last half-decade's political developments would have seemed like a pessimist's fever dream, then-candidate Donald Trump gave his first major foreign policy speech in Washington, DC, at an event held by the Center for the National Interest. Trump (2016) began by signalling his intention to "develop a new foreign policy direction for our country – one that replaces randomness with purpose, ideology with strategy, and chaos with peace." The remainder of the speech, however, largely failed to achieve this goal. Indeed, in the speech's wake, pundits across the political spectrum debated vigorously the key takeaways of a Trumpian foreign policy. While numerous outlets downplayed policy pronouncements and simply highlighted Trump's incoherence (The Editorial Board 2016; Heilbrunn 2016; Applebaum 2016), others emphasized his xenophobic 'Clash of Civilizations' narrative (Tharoor 2016), as well as his straw-manning of 'globalism' (Miller 2016). However, as a former political journalist transitioning to an academic career, I gravitated to his remarks on fighting the Islamic State (ISIS).

> I have a simple message for [ISIS]. Their days are numbered. I won't tell them where and I won't tell them how. We must as a nation be more unpredictable. We are totally predictable. We tell everything. We're sending troops. We tell them. We're sending something else. We have a news conference. We have to be unpredictable. And we have to be unpredictable starting now.

Though Trump had previously offered rambling remarks on the virtues of his own unpredictability (see, for example, Trump, Haberman, and Sanger 2016), this speech—prepared by his team and read off a teleprompter—was perhaps the campaign's first formal declaration of how Trump would translate his personal erraticism into foreign policymaking. I was not alone in having my interest piqued. In the coming weeks, numerous commentators began referring to it as a declaration of an "unpredictability doctrine" (Saletan 2016; Alderman and Schweitzer 2016), inspiring a debate on the costs and benefits of 'unpredictable' foreign policymaking. Those opposed to Trump's candidacy wrote that unpredictability would betray allies and squander American power, while supporters compared the doctrine favourably to Nixon's Machiavellian "Madman Theory", which sought to strategically convince adversaries that the president was impulsive and unpredictable as part of a larger strategic manipulation (Swaim 2016; Krauthammer 2017). However, inspiring this false belief in adversaries is quite different from actually *being* unpredictable—Trump's stated goal and a frequent description of his personal behaviour by those who know him best (see McManus 2019a). Commentators were left wondering whether Trump was playing political chess by *feigning* unpredictability, or whether his foreign policy advisers had simply crafted a *post hoc* rationalization for a candidate prone to flipping over the board and swallowing the pieces.

Beyond the wide array of related policy-oriented questions, the tension apparent in initial debates over Trump's unpredictability highlights lingering confusion surrounding the term unpredictability. Indeed, beyond partisan disagreements over the unpredictability doctrine's merits, popular media descriptions of Trump as unpredictable often exist in tension with more philosophically informed reflections on prediction and predictability in the International Relations (IR) discipline. For this reason, before turning to empirical investigations of Trump's foreign policymaking, I argue that scholarship must wrestle with the numerous questions implicit in *theorizing* unpredictability in international politics. A few stand out as particularly relevant to this debate. First, is a foreign policy *doctrine* of unpredictability not analogous to worrying about being less anxious or putting a reminder in one's calendar to be more spontaneous? Presidential doctrines are, after all, expressions of grand strategy that guide policymaking (Colucci 2018)—can one impose unpredictability on policymaking processes or does unpredictability necessarily stem from a lack of planning? Second, and relatedly, does an unpredictability doctrine *necessarily* diminish in efficacy over time as data accumulates? As an unpredictable president provides more evidence of his or her erraticism, would he or she then become more predictable? Third, can pundits and scholars truly debate the merits and demerits of unpredictability generally, or must they restrict their analyses to actors' perceptions? Though unpredictability may preclude nomothetic causal explanations, can scholars nonetheless *understand* its roots? Theorizing unpredictability poses unique challenges for the IR discipline, which remains divided over key philosophical assumptions that frame how scholars view prediction and predictability (Jackson 2011). How can scholars cogently theorize unpredictability and Trump's unpredictability doctrine without succumbing to foolhardy certainty regarding foundational assumptions (Monteiro and Ruby 2009)?

This article addresses these questions and, in so doing, offers two fundamental contributions. Recognizing that different philosophy of science (PoS) traditions inform differing outlooks on unpredictability, this article first crafts a novel, unifying typology of unpredictability in international politics. Instead of committing to uncertain ontological and epistemological assumptions about unpredictability's roots, this typology categorizes

unpredictability via three 'buckets'—risk, uncertainty, and complexity—that are adaptable across the IR disciplines' dominant PoS perspectives. Second, to demonstrate the utility of this typology not only in theoretical reflection, but also in empirical analysis, it applies it to an analysis of Trump's 'unpredictability doctrine', as it has been articulated by the president and understood by leading foreign policy commentators. This analysis serves as a critical case demonstrating the typology's ability to address an impasse in existing literature. These buckets prove useful in unravelling outstanding confusion and illuminating frequently overlooked aspects of both Trump's unpredictability and the unpredictability of a world shaped by such an erratic and impulsive world leader.

The following two sections offer what may seem a lengthy (but, hopefully, warranted) philosophical detour on unpredictability. In the first, I demonstrate how the application of different PoS traditions to IR implies different visions of both prediction's limitations and the nature of unpredictability. In the second, I outline my new, unifying typology of risk, uncertainty and complexity, demonstrating how it can prove a prudent conceptual framework for even the most ardent partisans of differing approaches. In the third section, I return to Trump's unpredictability doctrine. Drawing on the three buckets typology, I demonstrate that, though commentators often describe Trump's unpredictability by implicitly fitting it into the deterministic risk-uncertainty spectrum, these interpretations are liable to break down as time horizons increase and the scope of analysis widens. Alternatively, the non-deterministic paradigm of complexity may offer a richer, more complete understanding of Trump's unpredictability for scholarship interested in increasing its vantage or lengthening its timeframe. I conclude by reflecting on how thinking about unpredictability should promote epistemic humility both among scholars and policymakers (despite the unlikeliness of humility of any sort ever emerging in Donald Trump).

What is Unpredictability? Putting the Philosophy of Science Horse Before the Cart of Predictive Modelling

Part of the initial difficulty of defining and investigating unpredictability stems from the varied conceptualizations and terminology scholars of differing orientations use to refer to overlapping conceptual terrain. For example, while statistically oriented disciplines typically describe unpredictable realms via the language of variance, stochastic processes, error terms and uncertainty, philosophers may alternatively refer to epistemological limits on prediction posed by longstanding dilemmas like the problem of induction or the problem of other minds. In the social sciences, these issues are often compounded by the unique nonlinear dynamics of social systems (Kiel and Elliott 2009; Jervis 1998; Hoffmann and Riley 2002) and the practical limitations sensitive subject matter place on data collection. Each of these different angles alludes to underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, yet oftentimes these assumptions go unstated and thus differing approaches remain siloed. For the purposes of this article, I begin with the general umbrella term 'unpredictability' that links them together for two reasons. First, it is of immediate and practical import in theorizing Trump's 'unpredictability doctrine' and, second, because prediction carries a vaunted status in debates on IR's scientific status that, I believe, is in need of further critical re-examination. Problematizing unpredictability via a critical typology thus helps bring epistemological humility to 'science war' debates stuck in deeply entrenched stalemates.

To be sure, select IR literature on uncertainty and strategic unpredictability has already outlined various approaches and typologies, but this work's lack of explicit

engagement with PoS often limits its conclusions' robustness. For example, Rathbun (2007) theorizes what he sees as prevailing conceptualizations of "uncertainty" in four key IR theoretical paradigms—political realism, rationalism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Yet, his omission of these paradigms' roots in different PoS assumptions creates significant confusion, inhibiting this analysis' durability as these paradigms develop. For example, Rathbun argues a vision of uncertainty as stemming from fear is quintessentially realist, neglecting how fear, like all emotions, is subject to *interpretation*, and thus equally vital to the subjectivity emphasized by cognitivist, constructivist and critical accounts (see Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Bar-Tal 2001; Crawford 2014). Similarly, his division between individually-oriented cognitivist approaches and constructivist approaches that focus on a reified intersubjective realm neglects significant constructivist work into the interpersonal micro-foundations of ambiguity and uncertainty (see, for example, Crawford 2000; Ross 2006), as well as work dissecting how individual emotions spread, forming macro-level group properties (Sasley 2011; Mercer 2014). Though different paradigms may frequently employ different terminology, incompatibilities oftentimes allude to underlying PoS assumptions rather than empirical focus.

Alternatively, a significant, separate IR literature on the strategic utility of *feigned* unpredictability (often labelled "Madman Theory" à la Nixon) has analysed how certain decision-makers deceive adversaries by deliberately offering misleading signals or defying expectations (McManus 2019; Vinci 2005; Roy 1994). This literature is correct in its implicit view that unpredictability always involves a subject and an object and thus implicates processes of perception and interpretation. Yet, it's also important to delineate *second-order* questions about who specifically can predict what and when from the *first-order* ontological and epistemological questions about what things are predictable in the abstract and why. Assessing the former is impossible without first theorizing the latter. Indeed, the necessity of separating such questions is only heightened in the case of Donald Trump, since pundits and scholars continually debate whether he is *truly* unpredictable or whether his unpredictability is a political act used to deceive opponents (Nedal and Nexon 2017; Patrick 2017). In the final section, returning to Trump and his interpreters, I demonstrate how, though distinct, these questions can fruitfully be brought into conversation with a clarified typology.

Given this theoretical confusion over unpredictability's meaning, roots and impacts, I argue that conceptual clarity must begin by returning to the PoS traditions that frame how scholars understand prediction and its limitations. In this section, I thus outline how three PoS traditions popular in IR—neopositivism, social constructivism and critical realism—conceive of unpredictability's ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Though certainly not a comprehensive overview of the diverse PoS positions invoked and defended by IR scholars, this section does offer a broad overview of what many IR scholars imply when they invoke the term and its cognates in their analysis, paving the way for a unified approach. Such an approach, I argue, must recognize how assumptions wedded to PoS traditions shape notions of unpredictability, but also build bridges between camps via a clarified vocabulary.

Unpredictability in Three Philosophy of Science Traditions

A good starting point for understanding views on unpredictability from neopositivism, the first tradition, comes from *Designing Social Inquiry*—King, Keohane and

Verba's (1994, hereafter 'KKV') methodological 'bible', taught in methods courses across the globe. KKV outline two extremes on a continuum of perspectives regarding "random variation"—a term that they use relatively interchangeably with "high variance" and "unpredictability" (KKV 1994, 59).

> *Perspective 1: A Probabilistic World.* Random variation exists in nature and the social and political worlds and can never be eliminated. Even if we measured all variables without error, collected a census (rather than only a sample) of data, and included every conceivable explanatory variable, our analyses would still never generate perfect predictions. A researcher can divide the world into apparently systematic and apparently nonsystematic components and often improve on predictions, but nothing a researcher does to analyze data can have any effect on reducing the fundamental amount of nonsystematic variation existing in various parts of the empirical world.
>
> *Perspective 2: A Deterministic World.* Random variation is only that portion of the world for which we have no explanation. The division between systematic and stochastic variation is imposed by the analyst and depends on what explanatory variables are available and included in the analysis. Given the right explanatory variables, the world is entirely predictable. (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 59)

These two perspectives differ in their fundamental views of contingency—perspective 1 sees unpredictability as an ontological condition for researchers to confront in certain (limited) systems in the world, whereas perspective 2 sees it as merely an epistemological condition, driven by the inevitable incompleteness of researchers' data and models. Yet, despite this subtle divide, the authors' emphasis on significant regions of social systematicity and predictability that should guide social science (as well as, potentially, policymaking) in many ways creates a distinction without a difference. KKV (1994, 59–60, emphasis original) argue that the two perspectives are "*observationally equivalent,*" problematically insinuating that the unidimensional spectrum they create encompasses the views of "most political scientists." This is hardly the case, as the two extremes share multiple contentious commonalities contested by numerous scholars. For example, both perspectives regard social science as the hunt for those extensive portions of the social world amenable to prediction and both are broadly dualist in the sense that they base notions of unpredictability in a division between the mental world of predictive analysis and the material world to be predicted (Jackson 2009; Lerner 2020a). Further, both are relatively agnostic about the fundamental limitations placed on prediction by a Humean conceptualization of causation that omits inquiry into underlying mechanisms (Gerring 2010, 1520). Finally, both views neglect how the presence of non-linear, complex system can potentially confound such a sharp division between systematic and non-systematic components of the world under study.

An emphasis on the limitations of KKV's spectrum provides a suitable segue to another key set of views in IR best understood via a PoS known as social constructivism (Jackson 2009). Though scholars within the IR paradigm 'constructivism' may be neopositivists or critical realists (Jackson 2011, 201–7; 2009), the PoS social constructivism best applies to *critical* constructivists and poststructuralists who believe that knowledge claims are irreducibly shaped by subjectivity. This perspective entails the belief that theory and knowledge are deeply intertwined in any research programme (see, for example, Zehfuss 2002) and, further, often encourages a scientific ontology that emphasizes intersubjective 'social facts' as vital forces shaping international politics (Pouliot 2004). Because social facts are continually interpreted and rearticulated, social constructivists emphasize they are ill-suited to the sort of systematic analysis championed by KKV. This

belief adds a new dimension of unpredictability beyond the problems of inference motivating neopositivists. In essence, it relates to the epistemological limitations of subjectivity. If intersubjective realms of social facts can only be accessed via subjectively biased researchers, then scholarship will *necessarily* face epistemological limits on both their analyses and, in turn, their predictions. Subjectivity limits access to the hypothetical pristine objective realm that would be necessary for reliable determinations of what the future may hold. Thus, social constructivists accept an indeterminacy in the social world that prevents robust predictive scholarship.

The critical realist paradigm brings a third, distinct realm of unpredictability into IR scholarship, stemming from its commitment to unobservable realms of causal properties and its rejection of neopositivism's closed models (Patomaki and Wight 2000; Wight 2006, 51–52). In this sense, the thickness of critical realists' scientific ontology entails yet *another* variant of unpredictability, beyond those previously discussed. This unpredictability stems from the gap between the 'real' world of unobservable causal properties and the empirical world of observed causal actualization. For critical realists, analysis recognizing unactualized causal properties must grapple with contingency—the world of what could have or would have been due to real, underlying causal potential—in addition to the world of what actually did occur. Unlike in neopositivists' Humean account of causation, which is defined by the observation of constant conjunction, causes in critical realism are only sometimes actualized and, even when actualized, only sometimes observed or observable. Much of causes' potential remains inaccessible, limiting prediction. Further inhibiting prediction, critical realists believe in multiple interacting layers of reality, from the material to the biological to the social, each with its own emergent causal properties. While material and biological realms' causal properties can be probed via scientific experimentation, social systems are fundamentally *open* with actors "capable of communication and creativity and resistance" (Gorski 2013, 662). Thus, social sciences' inability to conduct controlled, closed experiments into fundamentally open systems inhibits their capacity to probe and *predict* social causation. At best, a critical realist's explanation can provide "an account of what *did* happen," but it will be ill-suited to decontextualized predictions of what will happen across time and space (Jackson 2011, 111; Wight 2006, 51–52). Unpredictability in this vision thus stems not only from the limitations emphasized by neopositivists and social constructivists, but also from the powerful, yet unobservable realm of causal mechanisms.

Though not comprehensive, this typology of three PoS traditions' implied views of unpredictability helps reveal just how nebulous the concept of unpredictability is for social scientists. Oftentimes, scholars interpret it as referring to philosophical ontology, whereas other times it refers to scientific ontology (Jackson 2008). Still, in other cases, unpredictability refers to epistemological limitations or a simple information deficit. While widespread, unstated assumptions in given research communities oftentimes allow scholars to write cogently about unpredictability and even offer quantitative assessments, a more complete picture of the discipline's debates reveals the contentious PoS grounds upon which such conclusions often sit. Unpredictability lurks alongside Cartesian anxiety behind much of the scholarly enterprise, undermining conclusions no matter how internally robust the analysis or how complete the dataset. To help overcome these limitations, in the next section I advocate a new, unified typology of unpredictability. Though it does not aspire to answer intractable philosophical dilemmas, it proves adaptable to all three of the paradigms outlined here and thus can help facilitate debates between scholars.

A Unifying Typology: Three 'Buckets' of Unpredictability

The prior section's discussion highlights how notions of unpredictability have been delineated and analysed within various PoS traditions. While neopositivists tend to describe unpredictability as solely the result of incomplete data or stemming from isolatable non-systematic pockets of the world, social constructivists add to this unpredictability's roots in the epistemological limitations of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Critical realists often accept these two paradigms' insights in context, but add a further, more profound layer of unpredictability stemming from the unbridgeable gap between the real and the actual.

Yet, despite these paradigms' expansiveness, I argue that, even when their insights into unpredictability are summed, they will *still* inevitably be incomplete. A further source of unpredictability comes not just *within* these traditions but also *between* them. Though each seeks to cordon off unpredictability into manageable categories, further unpredictability also stems from uncertainty regarding the philosophical foundations that ground their accounts of knowledge production and its limitations. Presuming no scholars have access to the universe's fundamental truths, the wagers that shape these PoS traditions remain "leap[s] of faith" (Monteiro and Ruby 2009, 32). While such assumptions might be necessary for constructing empirical agendas, framing vital questions of research design and methods selection, scholars must always temper their conclusions with the knowledge that the universe could contain further unknown and unknowable realms or that their characterizations of such realms are wildly off base, with flaws that will emerge only in the future. No matter how internally consistent PoS traditions' cordoning off of unpredictability may be, Cartesian anxiety looms. Any division between predictable and unpredictable thus rests on shaky, tendentious grounds.

Given these limitations, I argue for imposing epistemological humility on theorizing unpredictability by synthesizing multiple perspectives' insights into a unifying, flexible typology. Such a typology must contain descriptive categories adaptable to a variety of PoS underpinnings, bringing together insight from scholars addressing similar conceptual terrain with differing philosophical assumptions. Yet, it must also remain sensitive to how precisely it would be interpreted by differing PoS traditions, lest it foster incompatibilities or further confusion beyond that which characterizes existing debates. Employing this terminology would help add nuance to discussions of unpredictability in international politics bogged down by unclear terminology and substantive foci, while also fostering dialogue across camps whose differing assumptions oftentimes inhibit meaningful debate.

This section begins this endeavour by outlining three 'buckets' of unpredictability as risk, uncertainty and complexity, grouped together by whether they imply deterministic or non-deterministic modes of analysis. Though these buckets adapt from scholarship with distinct PoS assumptions, for the purposes of this article's unifying typology, they are best understood as descriptive categories used to orient and focus empirical debates, rather than firm theoretical accounts of unpredictability's ontological and epistemological roots. As this section will demonstrate, treating them as descriptive allows them each to appeal, in varying ways, to all three of the PoS traditions I've outlined, making them suitable for bridging their divides. Indeed, I have selected the unscholarly term 'buckets' *precisely* because it is not wedded to any philosophical underpinnings. In the following section, I demonstrate how they can orient analysis that illuminates an otherwise confused academic and media debate on Trump's unpredictability doctrine.

Unpredictability in Deterministic Systems: The Risk-Uncertainty Spectrum

The first two buckets of unpredictability adapt Chicago school economist Frank H. Knight's (1921) oft-cited distinction between risk and uncertainty. Originally, Knight theorized a distinction between what he viewed as objective risks (for example, flipping a fair coin) stemming from systems with known probability distributions and uncertainty, stemming from systems of unknown probability distributions (Jarvis 2011). However, this distinction has been significantly problematized for numerous reasons, pointing to a need for its adaptation. Two issues stand out for the purposes of this analysis. First, even according to Knight's philosophical foundations, any sharp dichotomy between risk and uncertainty is untenable, as between these ideal-typical extremes of perfect or imperfect knowledge of probability distributions exists a dense spectrum stemming from mixed or incomplete knowledge. Second, as Hirshleifer and Riley (1992, 10–12; see also Nelson and Katzenstein 2014, 364–65) point out, a coin toss is a stylized example of perfect systematicity discordant with the systems most researchers analyse. Indeed, even a coin toss is only ever *truly* a fifty-fifty prospect if the coin is perfectly fair and verifying that objectively raises questions that necessitate uncertain philosophical assumptions, undermining the dichotomy's sharp delineation and this article's unifying typology.

To remedy this conundrum, Hirshleifer and Riley favour a Bayesian focus on subjective degree of belief and thus reformulate Knight's distinction. On one end, they identify 'hard' probabilities about which one has a strong belief in his or her own knowledge of the probability distribution and, on the other, soft ones about which this degree of belief is far lower, non-existent or (worse) misleading. For example, the authors point out that if one has observed a coin land an approximately equal number of times on both faces after numerous flips[1], he or she will likely assign a 'hard' probability of 0.5 that it lands on heads the next flip, based on strong subjective belief. However, if one is not able to examine the coin in advance and has no way of knowing whether it is double-headed or double-tailed, he or she may *still* assign a subjective probability of it landing heads of 0.5, but have far less confidence in the belief.

Though adhering to a traditional Bayesian view of rationally updating predictions based on concrete data implies philosophical assumptions that may alienate some PoS partisans, an alternative reading of Hirshleifer and Riley's hard and soft probabilities that emphasizes subjectivity helps overcome these limitations. Such an interpretation would skirt thorny ontological questions about 'true' underlying probability distributions and epistemological questions about researchers access to them, instead favouring an emphasis on beliefs and their evolution over time. Indeed, this transition from focusing on systems themselves to efforts to understand them helps contextualize the next section's exploration of Trump's unpredictability's relationship to Nixon's Madman doctrine. However, for such an outlook to apply to the macro-social realms of IR, it would need to transition from emphasizing solely individual subjectivity to also accepting realms of *intersubjectivity*. Though a notable IR literature does interrogate such first-image individual decision-making under risk and uncertainty (Byman and Pollack 2001; Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012), far more is interested in *collective* decision-making, particularly decisions taken by the state as a corporate person that synthesises diverse inputs (Wendt 2004; Lerner 2020b). For this reason, I argue for

[1] Though based in different philosophical foundations, this hard versus soft distinction based in observation rhymes with Blyth's (2006) distinction between observable, risky "generators" and unobservable, uncertain ones.

adapting Knight's terminology and system-level focus but retaining Hirshleifer and Riley's prioritization of subjective belief. I therefore argue for conceptualizing the first two buckets as the ends of a spectrum between risk and uncertainty, defined as extreme intersubjective agreement or disagreement on systems' probability distributions.

Risky systems (eg, coin flips or rolls of the dice) are those where overwhelming intersubjective agreement exists as to a presumed probability distribution, whereas uncertain ones (eg, determining what poetry might be written next year) are those where, despite significant intersubjective agreement on the parameters of the system in question, none exists on its probability distribution. Describing risk and uncertainty via this language of intersubjective agreement has multiple advantages over traditional understandings, in line with this article's unifying typology. First, this emphasis circumvents ontological and epistemological questions about whether systems *thought* to be risky are actually uncertain due to consequential yet unlikely 'black swan' events lurking on their distributions' tails (Taleb 2010). Such systems may be intersubjectively regarded as risky, but new events or compelling arguments may transition this agreement to uncertainty. Second, it avoids epistemological debates over the technical possibility of predicting deterministic chaotic systems subject to sensitivity to initial conditions.[2] Given the practical impossibility of measuring initial conditions with infinite precision, intersubjectively these chaotic systems are typically simply *treated* as random and, thus, an extreme example of uncertainty. In theory, however, chaotic systems with initial conditions understood to an infinite degree of precision would be entirely predictable (Kiel and Elliott 2009; Rickles, Hawe, and Shiell 2007; Gleick 1987). Third and finally, this spectrum facilitates a discussion of change over time due to social and scientific progress, as systems once assumed to be risky or uncertain are analysed and understood, with communication facilitating the formation of intersubjective agreement or its dissolution. However, it's worth noting that both extremes of this spectrum share in common broad intersubjective agreement over the system's parameters—in other words, they are understood to be *deterministic*, stemming from fixed initial constraints. This differentiates them from the non-deterministic systems discussed in the next section.

Though perhaps not the ideal formulation of this dichotomy for any of the PoS traditions outlined in the prior section, this compromise does help craft a useful détente between them that can facilitate dialogue when partisans can agree upon systems' parameters. Though researchers will still inevitably disagree over the extent of intersubjective agreement about risk and uncertainty, this new focus involves transitioning dogmatic philosophical debates on unpredictability's roots to potentially more tractable empirical ones about social knowledge of systems in question. Further, this spectrum is potentially adaptable and appealing to all three PoS traditions discussed in the prior section—it can be made compatible with their philosophical assumptions without undermining its specificity. Though neopositivists typically express their primary interest in the underlying properties of systems themselves, they have good reason to believe that intersubjective ideas about risky systems with *truly* fixed probability distribution will converge to their true values over time. Indeed, this convergence assumption is the basis of most rational actor models in the social sciences. Accepting this language for neopositivists will be akin to accepting lingering anxiety created by the problem of induction. Similarly, though critical realists believe in the

[2] Paradigmatic examples of such deterministic chaotic systems include predicting weather into the future or the logistic map predicting population growth under certain constraints.

ontological primacy of underlying causal mechanisms, they also recognize that access to these mechanisms is incomplete, as causes so often go unactualized. Thus, an emphasis on the evolution of intersubjective agreement regarding probability distribution reflects the epistemological limitations actors face in accessing reality, as well as the complex influence of this lower-order underlying reality on the higher-order, emergent social systems in which prediction occurs. Finally, though social constructivists may highlight the subjective bias inherent to individuals' perceptions of intersubjective agreement, this formulation should appeal to them based on the primacy it grants to subjectivity in framing knowledge production. So long as scholars from different paradigms can delineate systems under investigation and their parameters, they can debate social knowledge about their relative riskiness and uncertainty.

Unpredictability in Non-Deterministic Systems: Varieties of Complexity

Part of the problem with Knight's dichotomy (as well as, to some degree, the Bayesian reformulation of Hirshleifer and Riley) is that it assumes all systems are intersubjectively understood as deterministic and thus that their unpredictability falls somewhere along the spectrum of risk and uncertainty. But this is not always the case—systems' parameters can shift and adapt over time and, thus, so too do intersubjective understandings of their probability distributions. If all systems are gumball machines with multiple colours, then the spectrum between risk and uncertainty represents the extent of intersubjective agreement or disagreement over the relative quantities of the colours. Some chaotic systems might constantly produce new colours, never repeating the same patterns, leading to ever-changing probability distributions—the language of intersubjective disagreement or uncertainty, I argue, still applies. However, a further set of gumball machines may best be understood as complex adaptive systems, prone to changes over time depending on shifting user preferences. Initially, these machines may seem to produce regular spurts of red, yellow and blue, then they may realize their users prefer green gumballs and start stocking them. In some instances, the system may report back that new users actually prefer a soda machine, leading to a shift not captured by the initial probability distribution of gumball colours. In such cases of intersubjective agreement that a system's parameters are open, subject to responsive changes over time, the risk/unpredictability spectrum ceases to be descriptive. Given initial conditions, the idea that a gumball machine would someday spit out soda seems utterly unpredictable, but, given knowledge of changing user requests, the result seems far more likely. To better classify such systems and their unpredictability, I employ the term complexity and draw on the ideas of complexity theory, which analyses the open, non-deterministic complex adaptive systems that permeate the natural and social worlds.

The term complexity has been invoked across the social sciences to denote various theories, ontologies and epistemologies—indeed, oftentimes the deterministic chaotic equations described in the previous section are housed under the larger complexity umbrella. However, drawing on prominent interpretations of complexity in IR (Kavalski 2007; Bousquet and Curtis 2011; Orsini et al. 2019; Jervis 1998), as well as the work of Betuglia and Vaio (2005), in this article I treat complexity as a term that describes a variety of non-linear adaptive, *open* (i.e., non-deterministic) systems, thus *excluding* the chaotic systems described in the previous section. Still, chaotic systems and complex systems share certain key qualities in common and understanding this overlap helps begin orienting

researchers to complexity's unpredictability. Both complex and chaotic systems are non-linear, meaning they cannot be "decomposed into [their] parts and each part solved separately to construct the full solution" (Rickles, Hawe, and Shiell 2007, 934). Further, many complex systems share with chaotic systems sensitivity to initial conditions, meaning that slight changes in initial inputs or relationships will, over time, produce drastically different observable outcomes (oftentimes labelled the 'butterfly effect'). Such sensitivity magnifies the import of contingency and measurement issues, creating a significant barrier to prediction, even when certain adaptations are anticipated. Researchers typically face issues in measuring initial conditions with sufficiently high levels of accuracy in complex systems (especially social ones) to predict their development.

Within the paradigm of complexity research, IR scholars have paid particular attention to complex adaptive systems—those that "evolve and adapt to the[ir] environment" (Bertuglia and Vaio 2005, 276). Indeed, numerous scholars have argued for understanding durable social structures like states, financial markets, and international organisations as complex adaptive systems due to their responsive changes over time (Gunitsky 2013; Oatley 2019; Hoffmann and Riley 2002). Complex adaptive systems differ from chaotic ones in multiple ways that can make their unpredictability even more contingent and complicated. First, complex adaptive systems are fundamentally *open* to their environment, exchanging information with external sources and allowing for the entrance of new actors and the construction of new relationships. Thus, deterministic approximations of their initial parameters will *inevitably* be incomplete over longer time frames, as no catalogue of variables and relationships, no matter how thorough, will account for all potential changes that may arise. Second, beyond this openness, complex systems demonstrate a high density of interconnections between their parts, leading to self-organising and self-reproducing structures. Indeed, these properties stem from the co-evolution of complex adaptive systems' components, defying the "unit homogeneity" and "conditional independence" assumptions of most deterministic models (see Hoffmann and Riley 2002, 307). Third, oftentimes complex adaptive systems' structures exhibit emergent properties that are 'more than the sum of their parts.' Such properties, in turn, can exert downward causation on constituent parts, undermining traditional social science predictive models based in linear causation. Indeed, recognition of emergent properties' causal importance and the related feedback loops of complex adaptive systems implies treating endogeneity as a "fact" of international life, rather than a bug in certain models (Johnston 2005, 1040). Fourth and finally, given the contingency, contextual embeddedness, equifinality and non-additivity of action within complex adaptive systems, determining "discrete causality" is often impossible, confounding efforts at precise long-term prediction (Hoffmann and Riley 2002, 316; Jervis 1998, 91).

Though scholars of a variety of philosophical orientations agree about the challenges complex adaptive systems pose and their potential *ubiquity* in macro-social sciences like IR, few PoS traditions or IR paradigms have fully addressed their contours and attempted to build explanatory (let alone *predictive*) models (see Orsini et al. 2019). For this reason, I argue that recognition of complexity, whether it is caused by dense material or social relations, should further the epistemological humility this article emphasizes, entailing a further type of long-term unpredictability, appealing to scholars across PoS divides. Complex unpredictability, accordingly, would describe cases of intersubjective agreement over changing parameters and, relatedly, the limited long-term relevance of any sort of linear predictive modelling.

Though foreign to traditional social science models, this articulation of complexity is compatible with different PoS traditions' assumptions. Neopositivists, for example, cannot deny the non-systematic data resulting from complex adaptive systems, nor can they defend their closed linear predictive models as adequate over the long-term in the face of openness and adaptation. Indeed, complexity has encouraged acknowledgment of fundamental unpredictability even in purely natural sciences like genetics, that do not face the added complications due to agency and social exchange (Mitchell 2011). On the other hand, critical realists, whose philosophical ontology depends upon notions of emergence, contingency and nonlinear causation, prove especially receptive to the insights of complexity theory (Gerrits and Verweij 2013). Indeed, as John Mingers (2011) has demonstrated, the ideas of critical realism's originator Roy Bhaskar overlap substantially with those of complexity theory, despite limited scholarship exploring these connections. Finally, even social constructivists that emphasize the epistemological limitations on understanding dense connections in the natural world's complex systems can appreciate the resonance of complexity theory with the dense social connections and indeterminacy emphasized by poststructuralism and postmodernism. In this vein, Paul Cilliers (2005; 1998) has offered substantial contributions demonstrating the resonance of complexity theory with leading postmodernist theorists like Derrida and Lyotard.

Theorizing Trump's Unpredictability: Accounting for Risk, Uncertainty and Complexity in Foreign Policymaking

As I now turn to theorizing Trump's specific unpredictability doctrine, employing the typology of risk, uncertainty and complexity offers three noteworthy benefits. First (and most straightforwardly) the critical reflection on PoS that frames them offers more philosophically informed ground for theorizing Trump's unpredictability and the unpredictability doctrine without committing to uncertain assumptions. This allows them to assist analysis of media commentary, while also serving as a bridge between PoS camps and other disciplinary siloes. Second, these buckets all contain within them accounts for how predictability may change over time—either by moving along the risk-uncertainty spectrum with new data or, if parameters shift, via the adaptation of complex systems. Thus, this terminology helps foster a fruitful, organized debate about unpredictability, its impacts *and* the potential feedback of such changes, without conflating these processes or committing to a single dogmatic PoS vision. Third and relatedly, because these terms can apply in different ways to first- and second-order questions of unpredictability discussed previously, they help facilitate a dialogue between Nixon's Madman doctrine, Trump's personal erraticism and any other relevant empirical examples.

To evaluate Trump's unpredictability doctrine, in this section I examine both Trump's statements and their interpretation by commentators in the media, policy world, and academia. Recognizing that presidential doctrines are not simply an account of a president or his/her administration's actions, but rather a discursive product of commentariat interpretation alongside presidential statements articulating these actions' rationales, I examine these sources together as comprising a larger discourse that has theorized the 'unpredictability doctrine.' Indeed, given Trump's rambling and ambiguous past statements on the virtues of unpredictability and its application to foreign policy, this approach proves the only plausible empirical path forward for scholars interested in what has since been labelled the 'unpredictability doctrine.' This approach emphasizes the unpredictability

doctrine's articulation during the campaign and early years of the Trump presidency, as well as its transformation into an interpretive lens for media commentators, foregrounding this special issue's empirical focuses on policy decisions and their impacts.

The three buckets of the prior section help reveal how interpretations of the unpredictability doctrine tend to employ implicitly deterministic models, whether their causal linkages are social or material, Humean or mechanistic. Further, such determinism persists no matter how long the timeframe under consideration extends or how many relevant factors may change. This is unsurprising given the linear cause-and-effect thinking that dominate both academic literature and the popular imagination. Yet, relying too heavily on deterministic models poses limitations on understanding Trump's unpredictability as a foreign policy doctrine, guiding decision-making throughout the course of his presidency, even in the face of a vast array of changing global circumstances. Commentary sympathetic to Trump's goals is likely to describe the doctrine as the strategic imposition of calculable risk on adversaries—a tactic used to intimidate and coerce. Critics, on the other hand, are more likely to describe it as chaotic uncertainty. However, while these analyses are insightful in those contexts where relevant parameters can be held constant, they tend to understate their analyses' limitations as parameters change either over time or as they adapt to changing global contexts. For this reason, I argue that the addition of the complexity bucket can help contextualize media commentary and inform longer-term meditations on both the adaptations Trump's personal erraticism imposes upon well-trodden systems and the general adaptability of American foreign policymaking. Though the term complexity may seem counterintuitive given Trump's impulsiveness and limited vocabulary, as scholars expand beyond limited scenarios, I argue that complexity provides a broader lens for integrating analysis of Trump's personal erraticism, reactions to it and subsequent adaptations over longer timeframes.

Understanding Trump's unpredictability doctrine requires returning to its earliest articulation on the campaign trail. Unfortunately for the purposes of this article, Trump never offered a formal outline of his foreign policy doctrine beyond scattered references in speeches and interviews. Given these invocations' informality, they require further contextualization. Throughout 2015 and 2016, then-candidate Trump maintained an intense interview schedule that garnered him, according to one analysis, over 50 percent more free media coverage than his rival Hillary Clinton (Bump 2017). He thus continually exposed himself to pointed interview questions with little preparation and required a means of parrying them, while concealing his ignorance of numerous policy areas. A viable tactic in this effort came from the news media itself—as early as the summer of 2015, political reporters began using the ostensibly neutral and journalistic terminology of unpredictability to describe Trump's personally bombastic and erratic style and behaviour, rather than speculating on his ignorance (see, for example, Haberman and Barbaro 2015). Trump, in turn, appropriated this ambiguous language, transforming unpredictability from a veiled negative into a strategic positive—a premeditated approach that burnished his reputation as a negotiator while simultaneously allowing him to dodge questions (Gitlin 2016; Saletan 2016).

Early on the campaign trail, Trump invoked unpredictability in response to questions well beyond foreign policy. In an October 2015 interview on *Fox News*, for example, in response to a question on whether he would raise the debt limit, Trump responded "I don't want to say – I want to be unpredictable, because, you know, we need unpredictability. Everything is so predictable with our country" (Wallace 2015). He gave similar responses to

questions on whether he would employ nuclear weapons (Dickerson 2016), whether he would shut down the government to defund Planned Parenthood (Wallace 2015), how he would confront China in the South China Sea (Post Opinions Staff 2016; Fisher 2015), how he would deal with instability in Pakistan (Hewitt 2015) and even whether he carries a weapon to the office (CNBC News Releases 2015). When pressured to elaborate on his advocacy of unpredictability in multiple interviews in March 2016, Trump frequently leaned on the example of President Obama alerting the world about troop movements, saying that these statements "put targets on their back" (Post Opinions Staff 2016; see also Heilemann and Halperin 2016; Trump, Haberman, and Sanger 2016). Still, he did not elaborate on the differences between secrecy and unpredictability or on unpredictability's larger place in US grand strategy. Only in April 2016, months after Trump began touting the virtues of unpredictability, did he formally articulate its virtues as a more abstract foreign policy doctrine in his speech to the Center for the National Interest. Shortly after, unpredictability faded away from Trump's public statements and it has not appeared once in presidential speeches, news conferences or other documents since Trump took office (see Woolley and Peters 2019). To this day, it remains unclear whether this articulation of the unpredictability doctrine has been incorporated into administration policymaking or whether it simply remains a prominent and convenient defence for Trump's personal inconsistency. This has been especially potent as Trump's personal Twitter account continues to contradict longstanding, official policy statements.

Yet, despite inconsistency in the unpredictability doctrine's articulation during the campaign, academic and media commentators have come to describe it as a cohesive doctrine, creating the pretence of either a coherent foreign policy or a "predictably unpredictable" status quo (Hohmann 2019). As expected, responses have split largely along partisan lines. Republican and other right-leaning commentators have tended to interpret Trump's invocation of unpredictability as the intellectual descendant of Machiavelli's *Prince* or Nixon's Madman doctrine—a form of strategic risk-taking unrelated to personal capriciousness. Commentators including the late Charles Krauthammer (2017), Barton Swaim (2016), Victor Davis Hanson (2018), and Ben Shapiro (2017), have all defended Trump's flip-flops, mood swings, erratic insults and disproportional threats as strategically imposing high variance on an exchange and capitalizing on the president's risk tolerance relative to opponents. Krauthammer, for example, touted unpredictability by noting how Trump played off the alleged reasonableness of certain former cabinet members (Mike Pence, James Mattis, John Kelly and Rex Tillerson, foremost among them) in a game of good cop-bad cop to deliberately pressure Germany into committing more troops to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Shapiro, likewise, described Trump's inconsistencies as a form of deliberate trolling. According to this line of thinking, Trump strategically varies his behaviour, knowing that, whether opponents respond to his hypocrisy or not, he will have a suitable response that will both please his base and help him evade negative consequences. What these favourable interpretations share is seeing Trump's unpredictability as a *deliberate* effect of calculated decision-making that will consistently have the same effects even as the parameters of foreign policymaking shift. According to this paradigm, Trump tactically varies inputs to heighten the variance of possible outcomes, exploiting adversaries' aversion to risk. No matter how Trump's opponents respond, their behaviour comes from a distribution upon which he and his confidants agree and along which he is willing to take calculated risks.

On the other hand, more critical commentators (including left- and Democratic-leaning ones) have tended to describe Trump as personally volatile and this volatility as imposing uncertainty on foreign policy exchanges. Dani Nedal and Daniel Nexon (2017) have argued that, unlike Nixon in his 'Madman' days, Trump is *personally* unpredictable and that this first-order personal erraticism, when translated to foreign policy, becomes "a recipe for instability, confusion, and self-inflicted harm to U.S. interests abroad." William Saletan (2016), alternatively, argued that Trump's invocations of unpredictability simply masked personal ignorance and that, ultimately, such an uninformed approach would prove "reckless," leading to cascades of uncertainty as Trump refuses to disclose his thinking and allies "freak out" in response. Keren Yarhi-Milo (2018, 69), drawing on existing linear models from political science and economics literature, wrote that Trump's personal unpredictability increases the "risks of deadly miscalculation" that may force the US "to take more costly and extreme actions." Alternatively, Miklos Haraszti (2016) has compared Trump's "purposeful randomness" (a hybrid of the two poles) with that of Hungarian Premier Victor Orban, concluding that such first-order erraticism is designed deliberately to polarize and provoke conflict. What these critics and numerous others (see, for example, Fuchs 2017; Patrick 2017; Sullivan and Tumulty 2017) tend to share is the coupling of Trump's randomness, defying coherent known probability distributions, with relatively deterministic outcomes over significant time frames, even as relevant actors and contextual factors shift. While some believe uncertainty around Trump's behaviour will lead to specific heightened risks, others believe it will, in the aggregate, harm US interests, create unpredictable responses, or provoke conflict. Nonetheless, all similarly adopt deterministic models in which the input of Trump's unpredictable behaviour leads to some direct output, with little attention to feedback, adaptation and other features of complexity.

These analyses of Trumpian unpredictability and the unpredictability doctrine are understandable given the typical limitations of editorial and policy-analysis writing for popular sources. In these fora, authors typically have limited space to tease out multiple potential long-term interacting systems, contingencies and adaptations. Further, oftentimes in these popular outlets, authors deliberately endeavour to isolate limited interactive dynamics over delineated timescales, crafting constrained closed models to break off pieces of an otherwise unreasonably vast subject matter. Yet, too often these assumptions go unstated, created a false sense of certainty regarding analytical models' potential adaptability to longer timeframes and shifting parameters. Unfortunately, given the slow pace of academic publishing, such preliminary arguments have not yet been adapted to peer-reviewed publications that can more fully debate their advantages and disadvantages across a wider array of empirical examples. For this reason, I argue that adding in the bucket of complexity to varying types of analysis provides deeper insight into not only how Trump's erratic behaviour transforms into a longer term foreign policy doctrine, but also frames discussions regarding the timescales over which the linear models that prevail in much social science inquiry might break down due to complex adaptations. In this sense, treating complexity as yet another bucket of unpredictability, best suited to describing the limitations of linear modelling, can help add epistemological humility to varying types of analyses.

When applied specifically to Trump and the Trump doctrine, the complexity bucket is best suited to describing how predictions about the interaction of Trump's personal unpredictability and that of other actors' responses shift over longer time periods and in relation to changing circumstances. Whereas deterministic analysis proves insightful in

those circumstances where parameters can be held constant, complexity-informed analysis emphasizes that even consistently erratic inputs from Trump can alternatively lead to differing results over time as domestic toadies and rivals, as well as foreign allies and adversaries, adapt to his behaviour. Though a complexity-informed account of how systems have adapt to Trump's unpredictability has yet to be written, Parag Khanna (2016) offers some insight into what this might look like. In his wide-ranging (and sometimes rambling) essay on complexity in geopolitics he advocates a shift in geopolitical thinking from "antiquated, Newtonian logic" to the complexity-based paradigm of quantum mechanics. This approach emphasizes that "the nature of change changes" over time due to the adaptation of different actors and systems, including both the systems involved in foreign policy implementation and the international system itself. Thus, longer-term prediction is increasingly speculative and can oftentimes fruitfully be eschewed in favour of context-dependent hunts for patterns and insight into changing relationships. Khanna offers numerous brief examples of the linkages such context-dependent analysis may uncover. For example, he outlines how a Russian drought combined with American commodity market speculation led to a spike in food prices in Egypt and Syria that helped fuel Arab Spring protests—a contingent causal chain unlikely to be replicated precisely in the future. Complexity-based analysis would necessarily avoid speculative nomothetic generalizations about foreign policy inputs and outputs, recognizing how an open system in which actors are liable to adjust necessitates either constrained models or more context-based analysis that accepts changing parameters.

Though complexity has not been specifically invoked in much analysis of Trump's foreign policy, this perspective rhymes with certain aspects of a 2019 article by the Brookings Institution's Thomas Wright (2019) arguing that "Trump's Foreign Policy is No Longer Unpredictable." According to Wright, Trump's unpredictability never stemmed from erratic shifts in his foreign policy—though simplistic and vague, many of Trump's core beliefs have been consistent since the 1980s. Instead, Wright argues that Trump's unpredictability stemmed from tensions between the president and the more professionalized national security establishment of the Republican Party and the US government not wedded to his political cult. Over time, as Trump consolidated power in his party, he came to replace establishment players able to check his impulses and thus the administration's foreign policy unpredictability diminished. Instead of leaning on problematic generalizations about the impacts of falsely parsimonious linear relationships between the US and other states over the course of Trump's administration, Wright keeps such speculation to a minimum. Instead, he offers a historical narrative of Trump administration foreign policy keenly aware of contextual-shifts and adaptation. Indeed, the crafting of such historical narratives provides a means of coping with complexity, recognizing the limitations it places on prediction on larger scales and instead focusing on in-depth analysis of the relationships that shape an evolving system. Though no analyst of Trump's unpredictability doctrine during the 2016 campaign season could have possibly foreseen his later expressed desire to purchase the Danish territory of Greenland (Salama et al. 2019), equipped with this knowledge and supplementary contextual information, Trump's decision to cancel a state visit to Copenhagen in response to such an offer being mocked seems far more likely (*BBC News* 2019).

Finally, the addition of the complexity bucket also promotes epistemological humility as scholars envision and attempt to predict a post-Trumpian world. At the time of my writing, former Vice President Joe Biden is running ahead of Trump in most leading polls, promising

to replace Trump's erraticism with personal consistency and return the US to normalcy (Jaffe and Wootson Jr. 2019). But scholarship would be naïve to think that shifting from an erratic president to a measured, predictable one will necessarily return the US to a pre-Trump era or world order over the long-term. Indeed, systems and norms of US foreign policymaking might have adapted under Trump such that this shift does not lead to a more predictable US role in the international arena, no matter how predictable Biden or his administration may be. Further, other international actors may have adapted to account for Trump in ways that confound any Biden attempts at returning to consistency. For this reason, even if a post-Trumpian world is not coloured by erraticism from the US president, it remains unpredictable on larger scales due to complexity. Indeed, the bucket of complexity entails continually grappling with contextual constraints on analysis. In realms of thick, extensive and adaptive international political connections, deterministic models and mindsets necessarily have limitations—recognition of complexity thus tempers unreasonably grandiose conclusions, adding greater nuance to analysis.

Conclusion

This article has deconstructed the notion of unpredictability in international politics, providing a new typology suitable for application across various research programs. While different PoS paradigms isolate unpredictability according to their assumptions, Cartesian anxiety means embracing unpredictability's uncertain philosophical roots. For this reason, I argue for a unifying, descriptive typology of unpredictability according to intersubjective agreement about the determinism of a given system and the probability distributions of its output. This typology helps elucidate shortcomings and over-extensions of existing analysis, as well as the complex adaptive interplay of Trump's personal erraticism, the presumed unpredictability of the larger Trump administration, and the relationship between these factors and international political outcomes. Ultimately, while deterministic models can be useful in scenarios where parameters can reasonably be held constant, complexity best describes the unpredictability that occurs over larger, more dynamic scales, as adaptations occur.

While the other contributions to this special issue turn to the empirical outcomes of Trump's foreign policy, this article's theoretical insights help contextualize the unpredictability doctrine, providing a typology adaptable to other empirical agendas and even alternative disciplines. Unpredictability looms over all social science analysis, especially as they reconcile agent and structure, regularities and dynamism. Though scholars may reasonably continue to advocate their chosen philosophical wagers based on confidence in their leaps of faith or a desire to push forward empirical applications without undermining their approaches, this article's call for epistemological humility can help facilitate dialogue across camps. Ultimately, no scholar possesses pure, unvarnished insight into the nature of the universe. Oftentimes, formulating a unifying descriptive typology that facilitates dialogue provides the only viable path forward.

References

Alderman, Mark L., and Howard Schweitzer. 2016. “Donald Trump’s Incoherent Policies Are Part of His Strategy.” Fortune. May 13, 2016. https://fortune.com/2016/05/13/donald-trump-policies-unpredictability/.

Applebaum, Anne. 2016. “Don’t Be Fooled by Trump’s Foreign Policy Speech.” *The Washington Post*, April 28, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/04/28/dont-be-fooled-by-trumps-foreign-policy-speech/.

Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2001. “Why Does Fear Override Hope in Societies Engulfed by Intractable Conflict, as It Does in the Israeli Society?” *Political Psychology* 22 (3): 601–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00255.

BBC News. 2019. “Trump Lashes out at ‘nasty’ Denmark over Greenland,” August 21, 2019, sec. US & Canada. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49423968.

Bertuglia, Cristoforo Sergio, and Franco Vaio. 2005. *Nonlinearity, Chaos, and Complexity: The Dynamics of Natural and Social Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bleiker, Roland, and Emma Hutchison. 2008. “Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics.” *Review of International Studies* 34 (S1): 115–35.

Blyth, Mark. 2006. “Great Punctuations: Prediction, Randomness, and the Evolution of Comparative Political Science.” *The American Political Science Review* 100 (4): 493–98.

Bousquet, Antoine, and Simon Curtis. 2011. “Beyond Models and Metaphors: Complexity Theory, Systems Thinking and International Relations.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24 (1): 43–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2011.558054.

Bump, Philip. 2017. “Assessing a Clinton Argument That the Media Helped to Elect Trump.” The Washington Post. September 12, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/09/12/assessing-a-clinton-argument-that-the-media-helped-to-elect-trump/.

Byman, Daniel L., and Kenneth M. Pollack. 2001. “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In.” *International Security* 25 (4): 107–46.

Cilliers, Paul. 1998. *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*. London: Routledge.

———. 2005. “Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (5): 255–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276405058052.

CNBC News Releases. 2015. “Your Money, Your Vote: The Republican Presidential Debate".” CNBC. October 29, 2015. https://www.cnbc.com/2015/10/29/cnbc-full-transcript-cnbcs-your-money-your-vote-the-republican-presidential-debate-part-2.html.

Colucci, Lamont. 2018. “American Doctrine: The Foundation of Grand Strategy.” *World Affairs* 181 (2): 133–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820018790793.

Crawford, Neta. 2000. “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships.” *International Security* 24 (4): 116–56.

Crawford, Neta C. 2014. “Institutionalizing Passion in World Politics: Fear and Empathy.” *International Theory* 6 (03): 535–557. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000256.

Dickerson, John. 2016. “Face the Nation Transcripts January 3, 2016: Trump, Morell & Donilon.” CBS News. January 3, 2016. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/face-the-nation-transcripts-january-3-2016-trump-morell-donilon/.

Fisher, Max. 2015. “We Painstakingly Annotated Donald Trump’s Strange and Revealing Foreign Policy Interview.” Vox. September 4, 2015. https://www.vox.com/2015/9/4/9260463/donald-trump-foreign-policy-hugh-hewitt.

Fuchs, Michael H. 2017. “Trump’s Doctrine of Unpredictability.” Democracy: A Journal of Ideas. January 26, 2017. https://democracyjournal.org/arguments/trumps-doctrine-of-unpredictability/.

Gerring, John. 2010. “Causal Mechanisms: Yes, But….” *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (11): 1499–1526. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010376911.

Gerrits, Lasse, and Stefan Verweij. 2013. “Critical Realism as a Meta-Framework for Understanding the Relationships between Complexity and Qualitative Comparative Analysis.” *Journal of Critical Realism* 12 (2): 166–82. https://doi.org/10.1179/rea.12.2.p663527490513071.

Gitlin, Todd. 2016. “Donald Trump’s Secret for Avoiding Hard Questions.” *The Washington Post*, May 12, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/05/12/trump-cracked-the-tv-interviewers-code-its-time-to-change-tactics-before-its-too-late/.

Gleick, James. 1987. *Chaos: Making a New Science*. New York, NY: Viking.

Gorski, Philip S. 2013. “What Is Critical Realism? And Why Should You Care?” *Contemporary Sociology* 42 (5): 658–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306113499533.

Gunitsky, Seva. 2013. “Complexity and Theories of Change in International Politics.” *International Theory* 5 (1): 35–63. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971913000110.

Haberman, Maggie, and Michael Barbaro. 2015. “Who Advises Candidate Trump? (Hint: His Name Is Donald).” *The New York Times*, July 19, 2015, sec. U.S. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/20/us/politics/trump-refuses-to-apologize-for-comments-on-mccains-service.html.

Hall, Todd H., and Keren Yarhi-Milo. 2012. “The Personal Touch: Leaders’ Impressions, Costly Signaling, and Assessments of Sincerity in International Affairs.” *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (3): 560–73.

Hanson, Victor Davis. 2018. “Is Trump Now Bad Cop or Good Cop?” *National Review* (blog). May 3, 2018. https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/donald-trump-good-cop-bad-cop-foreign-policy/.

Haraszti, Miklos. 2016. “I Watched a Populist Leader Rise in My Country. That’s Why I’m Genuinely Worried for America.” *The Washington Post*, December 28, 2016, sec. Opinions. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/i-watched-a-populist-leader-rise-in-my-country-and-that-is-why-i-am-genuinely-worried-for-america/2016/12/27/6b4cf632-cc65-11e6-b8a2-8c2a61b0436f_story.html.

Heilbrunn, Jacob. 2016. “Why I Hosted Trump’s Foreign-Policy Speech.” POLITICO Magazine. April 27, 2016. https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/04/trump-foreign-policy-speech-why-i-hosted-it-213858.

Heilemann, John, and Mark Halperin. 2016. “Complete Donald Trump Interview: NATO, Nukes, Muslim World, and Clinton.” *With All Due Respect*. Bloomberg News. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2016-03-23/complete-trump-interview-nato-nukes-muslims-and-hillary.

Hewitt, Hugh. 2015. “Donald Trump Returns.” The Hugh Hewitt Show. September 21, 2015. https://www.hughhewitt.com/donald-trump-returns/.

Hirshleifer, Jack, and John G. Riley. 1992. *The Analytics of Uncertainty and Information*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoffmann, Matthew J., and John Riley. 2002. “The Science of Political Science: Linearity or Complexity in Designing Social Inquiry.” *New Political Science* 24 (2): 303–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140220145289.

Hohmann, James. 2019. "The Daily 202: 'Do Not Write Him off.' Five Savvy Observations about Trump from the British Ambassador's Cables." *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2019, sec. PowerPost. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2019/07/08/daily-202-do-not-write-him-off-five-savvy-observations-about-trump-from-the-british-ambassador-s-cables/5d22670ca7a0a47d87c5703d/.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. 2008. "Back-To-Back Review: Ontological Investigations." *Cooperation and Conflict* 43 (3): 341–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836708092840.

———. 2009. "A Faulty Solution to a False(Ly Characterized) Problem: A Comment on Monteiro and Ruby." *International Theory* 1 (3): 455–65. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971909990145.

———. 2011. *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics*. London: Routledge.

Jaffe, Greg, and Cleve R. Wootson Jr. 2019. "Biden Attacks Trump's Foreign Policy as an Embarrassment." *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-attacks-trump-doctrine-on-foreign-policy-as-an-embarrassment/2019/07/11/985febb4-a347-11e9-bd56-eac6bb02d01d_story.html.

Jarvis, Darryl S. L. 2011. "Theorising Risk and Uncertainty in International Relations: The Contributions of Frank Knight." *International Relations* 25 (3): 296–312. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117811415485.

Jervis, Robert. 1998. *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Johnston, Alastair Iain. 2005. "Conclusions and Extensions: Toward Mid-Range Theorizing and Beyond Europe." *International Organization* 59 (04). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050344.

Kavalski, Emilian. 2007. "The Fifth Debate and the Emergence of Complex International Relations Theory: Notes on the Application of Complexity Theory to the Study of International Life." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20 (3): 435–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570701574154.

Khanna, Parag. 2016. "Want to Understand How Trump Happened? Study Quantum Physics." Quartz. November 11, 2016. https://qz.com/834735/want-to-understand-how-trump-happened-study-quantum-physics/.

Kiel, L. Douglas, and Euel W. Elliott. 2009. *Chaos Theory in the Social Sciences: Foundations and Applications*. University of Michigan Press. https://books.google.com/books?id=nJNFDwAAQBAJ.

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Knight, Frank H. 1921. *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Krauthammer, Charles. 2017. "Trump and the 'Madman Theory.'" *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2017, sec. Opinions. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-and-the-madman-theory/2017/02/23/d4f10f30-f9f4-11e6-be05-1a3817ac21a5_story.html.

Lerner, Adam B. 2020a. "Social Science and the Problem of Interpretation: A Pragmatic Dual(Ist) Approach." *Critical Review*.

———. 2020b. “What’s It like to Be a State? An Argument for State Consciousness.” *International Theory*, January, 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971919000277.

McManus, Roseanne W. 2019. “Revisiting the Madman Theory: Evaluating the Impact of Different Forms of Perceived Madness in Coercive Bargaining.” *Security Studies* 28 (5): 976–1009. https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1662482.

Mercer, Jonathan. 2014. “Feeling Like a State: Social Emotion and Identity.” *International Theory* 6 (3): 515–35.

Miller, Paul D. 2016. “Trump Defeats Straw Man.” *Foreign Policy Magazine*, April 28, 2016. https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/28/trump-defeats-straw-man/.

Mingers, John. 2011. “The Contribution of Systemic Thought to Critical Realism.” *Journal of Critical Realism* 10 (3): 303–30. https://doi.org/10.1558/jcr.v10i3.303.

Mitchell, Melanie. 2011. *Complexity: A Guided Tour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Monteiro, Nuno P., and Keven G. Ruby. 2009. “IR and the False Promise of Philosophical Foundations.” *International Theory* 1 (1): 15–48. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971909000050.

Nedal, Dani, and Daniel H. Nexon. 2017. “Trump’s ‘Madman Theory’ Isn’t Strategic Unpredictability. It’s Just Crazy.” *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2017. sa.

Nelson, Stephen C., and Peter J. Katzenstein. 2014. “Uncertainty, Risk, and the Financial Crisis of 2008.” *International Organization* 68 (2): 361–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818313000416.

Oatley, Thomas. 2019. “Toward a Political Economy of Complex Interdependence.” *European Journal of International Relations* 25 (4): 957–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119846553.

Orsini, Amandine, Philippe Le Prestre, Peter M Haas, Malte Brosig, Philipp Pattberg, Oscar Widerberg, Laura Gomez-Mera, et al. 2019. “Forum: Complex Systems and International Governance.” *International Studies Review*, February. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz005.

Patomaki, Heikki, and Colin Wight. 2000. “After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism.” *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2): 213–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00156.

Patrick, Stewart M. 2017. “Trump and World Order: The Return of Self-Help.” *Foreign Affairs* 96 (2): 52–59.

Post Opinions Staff. 2016. “A Transcript of Donald Trump’s Meeting with The Washington Post Editorial Board.” The Washington Post. March 21, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/03/21/a-transcript-of-donald-trumps-meeting-with-the-washington-post-editorial-board/.

Pouliot, Vincent. 2004. “The Essence of Constructivism.” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7 (3): 319–36. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800022.

Rathbun, Brian C. 2007. “Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory.” *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (3): 533–57.

Rickles, D., P. Hawe, and A. Shiell. 2007. “A Simple Guide to Chaos and Complexity.” *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 61 (11): 933–37. https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2006.054254.

Ross, Andrew A. G. 2006. “Coming in from the Cold: Constructivism and Emotions.” *European Journal of International Relations* 12 (2): 197–222.

Roy, Denny. 1994. "North Korea and the 'Madman' Theory." *Security Dialogue* 25 (3): 307–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010694025003006.

Salama, Vivian, Rebecca Balhaus, Andrew Restuccia, and Michael C. Bender. 2019. "President Trump Eyes a New Real-Estate Purchase: Greenland." *The Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2019, sec. Politics. https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-eyes-a-new-real-estate-purchase-greenland-11565904223.

Saletan, William. 2016. "Trump's Moronic Unpredictability Doctrine." Slate. May 3, 2016. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/05/trumps-moronic-unpredictability-doctrine.html.

Sasley, Brent E. 2011. "Theorizing States' Emotions." *International Studies Review* 13 (3): 452–76.

Shapiro, Ben. 2017. "The Right Has Learned to Love Trolling." *National Review* (blog). January 4, 2017. https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/01/trump-and-right-love-trolling-and-tweeting-what-happened-truth/.

Sullivan, Kevin, and Karen Tumulty. 2017. "Trump Promised an 'Unpredictable' Foreign Policy. To Allies, It Looks Incoherent." *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2017, sec. Politics. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-promised-an-unpredictable-foreign-policy-to-allies-it-looks-incoherent/2017/04/11/21acde5e-1a3d-11e7-9887-1a5314b56a08_story.html.

Swaim, Barton. 2016. "How Might Nixon's 'Madman Theory' Apply to Trump?" *The Washington Post*, December 15, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/12/15/how-might-nixons-madman-theory-apply-to-trump/.

Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. 2010. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. 2nd ed. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Tharoor, Ishaan. 2016. "Donald Trump's Real Foreign Policy: A Clash of Civilizations." *The Washington Post*, April 28, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/04/28/donald-trumps-real-foreign-policy-a-clash-of-civilizations/.

The Editorial Board. 2016. "Donald Trump's Strange Worldview." *The New York Times*, April 27, 2016, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/opinion/donald-trump-to-world-im-willing-to-walk.html.

Trump, Donald J. 2016. "Transcript: Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Speech." *The New York Times*, April 27, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html.

Trump, Donald J., Maggie Haberman, and David E. Sanger. 2016. "Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views." *The New York Times*, March 26, 2016, sec. U.S. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html.

Vinci, Anthony. 2005. "The Strategic Use of Fear by the Lord's Resistance Army." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 16 (3): 360–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310500221336.

Wallace, Chris. 2015. "Interview with Donald J. Trump." *Fox News Sunday*. Fox News.

Wendt, Alexander. 2004. "The State as Person in International Theory." *Review of International Studies* 30 (02). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210504006084.

Wight, Colin. 2006. *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Woolley, John T, and Gerhard Peters. 2019. “The American Presidency Project.” Database. 2019. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/.

Wright, Thomas. 2019. “Trump’s Foreign Policy Is No Longer Unpredictable.” *Foreign Affairs*, January 18, 2019. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-01-18/trumps-foreign-policy-no-longer-unpredictable.

Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2018. “After Credibility: American Foreign Policy in the Trump Era.” *Foreign Affairs* 97 (1): 68–77.

Zehfuss, Maja. 2002. *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.