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LEADERS"**

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INTRODUCTION

The political world has always had to deal with popular needs.

For as long as the competitive electoral system has existed, the approval of the citizens has been indispensable for those seeking political office. This was as true in the fifth century BC in Athens of Pericles as it is in the presidential elections held in the US in 2020. The popular consensus expressed through voting preferences is therefore a key to this system (Ashworth, 2012).

It is also true for a CEO of a large corporation who needs the approval of shareholders to be able to perform her duties to the best of her ability.

In an ideal world, the candidate with the most expertise and who makes the best proposals would prevail in an electoral contest. The choice of this ideal figure is in the best interest of the voters (Gratton, 2014).

However, this is not always the case. Different candidates for leadership tend to behave disingenuously. They conceal their competences and personal preferences. To try to get elected, they make proposals in line with the wishes of the voters (Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001).

In other words, even if a political candidate knows the ideal political choice to be made in the interest of the citizens, she does not always apply it. Instead, she prefers to propose what is popular among the citizens. The latter possessing limited information are unable to select the optimal policies, but this is ignored by the leader. This strategy is called pandering (Ashworth, 2012).

In this paper we will analyse the elective competitive system and try to understand why it provides different possibilities for using pandering.

We will then see the theoretical models that various authors have used to explain this phenomenon. We will also see the role played by the media and other third parties (as well as voters and candidates) in this dynamic (Chapter 1).

Subsequently we will study empirical cases that show us the use of pandering by an incumbent leader, by one who seeks to be elected and the application of this strategy in a very different context from that of political competition (Chapter 2-3-4).

We will try to grasp and define the incentives that lead to such a widespread use of this strategy, but we will also highlight its serious problems.

Finally, taking up the proposals of various authors with references to empirical cases, we will try to show how this strategy guarantees only temporary advantages, causes serious negative externalities, and overall does not represent a winning strategy (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 1 – PANDERING IN COMPETITIVE ELECTION SYSTEMS

In this first chapter, we firstly introduce the system within which our analysis will move: the competitive electoral system. We look at the proposed models describing its functioning and the problems arising from it. To this end, we present the main contributions of the literature on the subject, also dwelling on their limitations. We analyse how the widely used agency theory describes the dynamics of such an electoral system very well.

We therefore highlight how pandering constitutes one of the main obstacles to the maximum efficiency of this kind of election. We proceed to look at the main academic contributions to the phenomenon of pandering and begin to understand its danger to the success of a good democratic system.

Following the various contributions in the academic literature, we see what the role of the media and of other third parties in pandering dynamics is. Here again, limitations and inefficiencies emerge.

This chapter therefore provide the necessary theoretical basis for the subsequent cases that will be analysed in the following sections.

1.1 Competitive Elections Systems

In politics and economics, there has always been an issue concerning the ideal method of selecting a leader. A large company needs a competent and profit-generating CEO. The members of a trade union want to choose a representative who will best defend their interests. Citizens want a politician who will work for their well-being and bring economic and social prosperity to the country and so on. For these goals, systems based on competitive elections have come to be preferred.

This system creates a formal accountability relationship between voters and elected representatives, i.e., between those who delegate the protection of their interests and those who take responsibility for them. Theoretically, the accountability created between leaders and voters should ensure optimal governance. However, this does not always correspond to real dynamics (Ashworth, 2012).

The seminal literature on the elective system sometimes failed to fully capture its problems and contradictions. In the early work realized, identical candidates were initially envisaged. However, these models do not give to voter a choice, because he is considered indifferent since the possible elected representatives are the same. In these models, equilibrium is achieved with

any rational re-election rule and the incumbent simply responds to this rule in the best possible way (Barro, 1973; Ferejohn, 1986). This embryonic model has been largely surpassed by the later literature.

In subsequent models, different assumptions regarding the heterogeneity of candidates were made. One of the first is based on spatial policy making. In this model, policy choices are positioned in a one-dimensional space. The ideal point on the policy space differs between voters and between different candidates. Both want their choice to fall on their ideal point, however, voters do not know whether the elected leader's choice corresponds to theirs (Fearon, 1999).

A later model describes the incumbent as a legislator who decides how to allocate his efforts between constituency service and other activities. The electorate only observes the interactions between the leader and the various agencies. The quality of these exchanges is determined by the incumbent's supervisory effort, her competence and independent factors that can be defined as 'luck'. Voters know that the leader would like to devote less effort to supervision, yet they do not know her competence. Consequently, different candidates have different skill levels and allocate their efforts differently (Ashworth, Bueno de Mesquita, 2006).

To further explain the heterogeneity between different leaders to choose from, a model based on corruption in programme implementation was constructed. In this context, the incumbent is seen as a mayor who must use central government funds to develop a new programme. The success of the project is determined by the mayor's choice. She may opt for a cost-effective strategy or an ineffective one that allows the development of fraud. The voter wants the cost-efficient strategy to be used but does not know whether the incumbent shares this preference or prefers to reduce the efficiency of the programme in exchange for rents. The incumbent, however, knows her preference (de Janvry, Finan, Sadoulet, 2012).

The theory of agency applied to the political context provides another indication of the problems of the electoral system and about candidates' differences. A leader is incentivised in her actions by the desire to be elected. To do this, a politician needs to win the approval of the voters and thus impress them positively. However, this incentive is often in sharp conflict with the normative imperative of the elected. She has to defend the interests of her constituents, yet in order to try to make a good impression she might opt for decisions against their interest but popular nonetheless. It should be noted that the incumbent's attempt to impress voters by acting against their interests manifests itself even in the case of perfectly rational voters (Ashworth, 2012).

The models described so far have had the merit of effectively describing the incentives that determine the behaviour of a leader in a competitive electoral system. The conclusions they

have reached have then transcended the initial scope for which they were designed (Ashworth, 2012). However, this type of analysis has been enriched and developed by the so-called multitasking models. This model has its roots in the work of Holmström and Milgrom who first highlighted the limitations of the principal-agent model. Indeed, multitasking models are based on the reasonable assumption that the incumbent implements multiple actions in different areas. The incumbent will then direct more efforts in certain areas determined by her own preferences (Holmström, Milgrom, 1991).

The multitasking model has since been applied to electoral competition by various authors (see Lohmann, 1998; Ashworth, 2005; Ashworth & Bueno de Mesquita, 2006; Gehlbach, 2007). The normative conclusions of these works were further enriched in the 'pandering model'. The latter is extremely effective in explaining distortions in the behaviour of the incumbent, i.e., the leader competing to get elected (Ashworth, 2012).

1.2 Pandering Model

The paradox in the competitive electoral system lies in the incumbent leader's desire to be re-elected. The pandering model, echoing the theory of multitasking, explains that the incumbent seeking to win the competition will take the actions that have the greatest impact on the electorate. These choices, however, do not always correspond to what is best for the voters who nevertheless possess much less information than the incumbent. In the competitive electoral system, the leader of a country or political party generally has more information than the voters about the best policy choices. However, since the voters cannot evaluate them ex-ante, the choices made are the ones that impress them the most. In this way, the incumbent manipulates voters by exploiting information asymmetry (Campos, Giovannoni, 2006). This leads to a serious inefficiency of the system: to try to win the election the leader will take actions that impress the voters but that will not always be in their best interest.

If you want to give a precise definition of pandering, it is the choice of a leader, who has all the relevant information, to opt for an ex-ante policy that is popular with the voters even though she knows it is not the optimal one (Ashworth, 2012).

As mentioned, the paradox arising from the desire for re-election causes serious inefficiencies in the electoral system as it leads to the decision-maker's choice of sub-optimal policies. This reverses the main virtue of representative democracy. Indeed, the electoral system should ensure that informed decision-makers make the best possible decisions for uninformed voters.

However, instead of choosing policies that are unacceptable to the voters, the incumbent ends up going along with what they think is best (Gratton, 2014).

The result of this situation is that it is up to the leader to decide how to act. She can act as what Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts call a true leader and thus opts for unpopular policies that she knows are in the true interest of the people. Alternatively, she can choose pandering by opting for sub-optimal policies. The choice of one behaviour over the other depends on several factors. Depending on the strength of the opponent and the voters' ability to learn whether she has made optimal choices then the incumbent may be led to exercise true leadership. However, the situation can also arise where the incumbent chooses fake leadership. In this case she opts for unpopular and even sub-optimal policies. This choice stems from a desire to prove herself as a strong decision-maker or signal her political independence. The problem lies in the voters' inability to distinguish her from the real leadership and causing further systemic inefficiencies. (Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001).

All the inefficiencies and problems that have arisen so far depend mainly on the willingness of the incumbent to seek voter approval. As mentioned, the agency theory partly explains the problem. However, it can only be applied with certain limitations.

Wilson describes the differences in government agency in detail. In particular, he highlights the different role of monetary incentives. They play very little if any role in political competition compared to the corporate environment. Their role can be taken over by votes that constitute a kind of compensation for the incumbent. Compared to the agency dynamic between principal and agent in the case of the political context, the objectives are less precise. A leader does not pursue simple profit maximisation as a CEO might. She is confronted with broader and more imprecise targets such as the welfare and security of citizens. In addition, a government leader has much less freedom of action than a business executive. She is constantly confronted with political forces and her decisions do not always have direct and immediate effects (Wilson, 1989).

The lack of clear and easily assessable objectives ex-ante causes the difficulty for a voter to evaluate a candidate (Wilson, 1989). In addition, the lack of a broad scope for the governing agent encourages the latter's use of pandering. Having no other means, she resorts to this instrument to pursue re-election.

Alesina and Tabellini note how an optimal situation could be achieved, thus eliminating pandering, by clearly dividing policy decisions and their implementation. In an ideal situation a politician, who, as we know, aims to be re-elected, would have to choose which policies to apply. Bureaucrats should then take care of the actual implementation of these policies. The latter having career concerns will act in the desire to achieve their organisation's goals to get

promotions. Bureaucrats should only be involved in choices that require specific technical expertise to ensure more informed choices. However, it has been widely observed that these ideal conditions are unlikely to occur and the boundaries between the roles of decision-maker and implementer are very blurred (Alesina, Tabellini, 2007).

The lack of opportunities to signal the goodness of one's choices and actions leads the incumbent to change its communication towards the electorate. According to the model developed by Morris, a speaker's concern for the impact of her words on the listener can lead to a modification of the message. The model assumes that when a speaker communicates, the listener simultaneously learns something about what is being said but also about who is saying it. Thus, a group of voters listening to statements they dislike from a leader might think she is biased even if she is acting in their interest. Consequently, if a candidate who communicates to voters is sufficiently concerned about her reputation, she might decide to omit some information. In other words, she might pander to try to express herself with more popular statements even if they are not really optimal (Morris, 2001).

Besides being able to lie before an election, a politician could also use pandering only once elected. The model proposed by Huang includes an electoral competition with two candidates. These may have personal preferences regarding current policies but conceal them in favour of more popular choices among the electorate. Alternatively, the candidates may also have no preferences and once elected will simply use pandering in favour of the choices that are most popular with voters. This behaviour is also carried out in an attempt by the incumbent to be re-elected (Huang, 2010).

A further inefficiency that occurs in the presence of pandering is when the incumbent chooses to pander to the interests of only part of the electorate through partisan policies that are potentially harmful to the rest of the country. Maskin and Tirole highlight this dynamic well by describing the pork-barrel politics. In their model, a politician decides to focus expenditure on specific interest groups. This choice serves to increase her chances of re-election. The spending decisions serve to signal that the leader shares the group's concerns and identifies with them. In this situation, pandering further demonstrates its usefulness for an opaque politician and the dangerousness of its consequences (Maskin, Tirole, 2019).

1.3 The Media's Role and Others Third Parties

One of the elements most considered in pandering models besides the role of incumbents and voters is the media. We have observed and analysed how the competitive electoral system often

pushes candidates to pander and thus to implement a policy that voters think is in their interest, even if the politician knows that a different choice is better for voters. The media could reduce the incentive to pander or to increase it depending on their behaviour. That is, letting voters know whether the politician has made good decisions (Ashworth, Shotts, 2010). In other words, the media can reduce the information asymmetry that exists between voters and candidates by enabling the former to assess different political choices ex-ante (Ashworth, 2012).

Snyder and Strömberg come to conclusions in line with this media behaviour. Increased media coverage causes candidates to be more responsive to re-election concerns. More newspaper and other media criticism increases voters' knowledge of the candidates and their policies. The incumbent is also incentivised to behave more consistently as it is under the media's attention. The presence of this third party therefore increases the incumbent's accountability (Snyder, Strömberg, 2010).

The model proposed by Ashworth and Shotts comes to similar conclusions. In their case, the media are seen as a third actor whose task is to comment on the policies chosen by the leader but without having veto power. With their commentary, they enable voters to make a more informed choice at the next vote. However, having to observe the policy choices before commenting on them, in the case of little evidence that the leader has made wrong decisions, the media may not criticise. This encourages further inefficient decisions, negating the usefulness of the media (Ashworth, Shotts, 2010).

The “yes-men” behaviour of the media seems to encourage pandering on the part of the incumbent. Indeed, a media that never criticises a leader's actions leads the latter to implement riskier strategies. Without the threat of being exposed when pandering to voters, the incumbent has more incentive to do so. However, counterintuitively, this reasoning is not entirely correct. If one considers the case of a politician who opts for an unpopular policy, she will only be re-elected if it is proven, for instance by the media, that her choice is right. In the case of an unclear outcome of the choice made by the incumbent, voters will always prefer the politician who has implemented popular policies. If the media are not able to pass judgement on the choice made by the leader, it will be more convenient for them and for the common welfare to act as yes-men. In this way, by not criticising the decisions made by the incumbent they will give her the same chance of being re-elected as a candidate who only implements popular policies (Ashworth, 2012).

As an alternative to the media, some pandering models have introduced different third parties. In the model proposed by Fox and Stephenson, they introduce a third actor that can block decisions made by the incumbent. This third party is appointed for life and therefore has no career concerns. Theoretically, the veto power of a judge with no career concerns should favour

anti-pandering since even by making unpopular choices the incumbent could be saved (Fox, Stephenson, 2011).

However, this also incentivises low quality candidates to imitate high quality ones by worsening the political level and causing democratic failure. The effects of judicial review on the choices made by a leader are therefore ambiguous. This is also because in equilibrium there is no single strategy for the court and consequently its behaviour will be unpredictable. Unpredictability generates long-term uncertainty that is usually associated with poor political control. This leads to the paradox whereby a third party that is supposed to supervise by reducing the incentives for pandering ends up worsening the quality of the democratic system in any case (Ashworth, 2012).

Further limitations of the third actor emerge in the work of Fox and Van Weelden. In their model, the veto player in charge of judging the incumbent may be biased. He might wish to appear more competent than he is, or he might also have personal preferences that would lead him to sympathise with one candidate over another. This leads to further inefficiencies and casts doubt on (Fox, Van Weelden, 2010).

As seen in this section, the role of the media is often considered ambiguous in an electoral competition context. Even the presence of other third parties does not have a clear and unambiguous effect on anti-pandering. For these reasons, we will not particularly dwell on these actors in our analysis as they may deflect the focus from the actual understanding of the pandering mechanisms at play.

CHAPTER 2 - PANDERING IN THE IRAQ WAR

This chapter analyses the behaviour of leaders who exploit their position to defend lobbies' interests. Pandering is used to convince the electorate that the decision maker is acting in their interest. Yet, the leader is favouring the corporations to which she is connected.

The leader may receive financial compensation from the corporations. Moreover, voters will be inclined to support the leader convinced that she is acting in their interests. As a result, the leader benefits from more support from the electorate and compensation from the lobby. However, the policies chosen will influence negatively public opinion. Policy choices in fact hurt the population and produce negative externalities. The leader's electoral base may also find that it has been damaged in favour of the lobbies. As a result, it may replace the existing leader with a new one through elections. A case that represents this situation is the US leadership during the Iraq War in 2003. The chapter analyses the role played by lobbies in American politics and how they pushed for military intervention in Iraq in the aftermath of 9/11. It will then present the consequences of these actions and how the attempts by the US government to convince the public opinion that it was acting in their interests.

2.1 Lobbies and Politicians

A lobby is defined as "a group of people who try to persuade the government or an official group to do something".¹ Their persuasion efforts may target political leaders, parties, or other institutions. Lobbies are a valuable resource for a government: they provide political and economic support, and they receive favours of various kinds in exchange. The nature of these favours varies: it ranges from policy choices in the lobbies' interest, to tax exemptions or regulation advantages. The extent of economic support a party can receive from these organizations is well represented by the US According to OpenSecrets (a non-profit organization that collects data on campaign finance and lobbying), in 2022 the Democratic and Republican Parties together received more than half a billion dollars from the 10 largest donor organizations alone. This firms include various investment companies, IT businesses, and logistic and shipping firms.²

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/lobby>

² <https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/top-organizations>

In addition to the major donors mentioned, in 2021, other companies, trade unions and various organisations spent USD 3.7 billion to lobby Congress and other US federal agencies.³ Pharmaceutical, investment, electronics companies, together with oil and gas industries represents the largest lobbying sectors in America. Particularly, oil and gas companies increase their spending on lobbying from about 50 million a year in 2000 to more than 125 million a year in 2022.⁴ These figures showcase growing interests in lobbying within the US political system (de Figueiredo, Kelleher Richter, 2014).

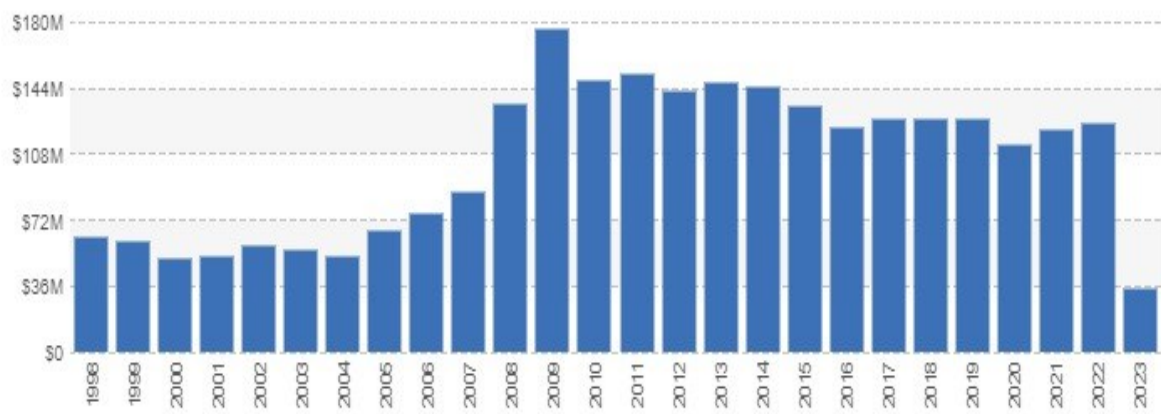


Chart 1 - Oil and Gas companies annual lobbying spending.⁵

There is ample evidence that it is mainly large corporations with important macroeconomic interests that invest heavily in lobbying. When a leader depends on lobbies' interests, she often risks a major loss in popular support. Much of the electorate regards lobbies in a negative way and been responsible for them altering policy choices to their own advantage (Campos, Giovannoni, 2006). Despite the suspicion with which lobbying is viewed by the media and by academics, lobbies are active beyond the American context. The United Kingdom and the European Union are other political system in which lobbies are present and powerful. Estimates suggest that more than 15000 lobbyists are active in Brussels only (McGrath, 2006).

The scale of the phenomenon suggests that politicians generally try to defend the interests of lobbies. But do the risks they incur not make them desist from letting these organisations increasingly penetrate the political fabric?

Leaders can try to realign the feelings of the electorate with the interests of the lobbies through pandering. To succeed in this, the leader must come up with policies that are perceived positively by the population, while hiding their true beneficiaries. A leader may attempt to

³ <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying>

⁴ <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/industries/summary?cycle=2022&id=E01>

⁵ <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/industries/summary?cycle=2022&id=E01>

exploit the information asymmetry between herself and the voters to manipulate their opinion. By communicating partial or false information, the decision maker can channel popular sentiment to where it is most convenient for her. Through this mechanism a leader can increase her own consensus, while gaining personal advantages from lobbies. Interest groups for instance, reward the leader with political and economic support in exchange of its support (Campos, Giovannoni, 2006). However, an elected official who engages in pandering and pursues personal interests incurs serious risks. If detected, she can lose the consensus of the electorate and she could face serious political and legal consequences. In what follows, we show how American politicians exploited sentiment after 9/11 to favour certain lobbies and secure popular support.

2.2 9/11 and “War on Terror”

On the morning of Tuesday 11 September 2001, four airplanes belonging to two major US airlines (United Airlines and American Airlines) were hijacked by nineteen terrorists belonging to the Al Qaeda organisation. Two planes crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York's Lower Manhattan. Within 1 hour and 42 minutes, both towers collapsed. Debris and fires then caused the partial or total collapse of other buildings in the World Trade Center complex. A third plane crashed into the Pentagon, headquarter of the Department of Defence, in Arlington County, Virginia. The attack caused the west side of the building to collapse. A fourth plane was initially directed towards Washington to hit the White House, but it crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, following the heroic uprising by passengers. The death toll of the attack was huge: 2977 people died and over 6000 were injured. These events are often regarded by the public as the most serious terrorist attacks of the contemporary ages (Plumer, 2013)⁶.

Following 9/11, incumbent US President George W. Bush and his government faced a critical situation. The attacks deeply shock the American public opinion. The search for a culprit immediately started. The Bush administration then implemented a decisive course of action. In response to the attacks, the US embarked into an aggressive foreign policy. The series of military operations subsequently undertaken by the Bush administration were labelled “War on Terror”. With this slogan, the president and other important political figures were showing a

⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/09/11/nine-facts-about-terrorism-in-the-united-states-since-911/>

concrete response to the widespread anger among citizens (Schmitt, Shanker, 2005).⁷ A strong response was what public opinion wanted. In particular, the US government pandered to the neo-conservative sentiment. This political vision pushes for a strong American state willing to use force to defend its interests. In addition, it promoted patriotism, militarism, aggressive foreign policy and often identified the American mission as a new crusade by also emphasising religion as a founding element. These hence were among the main advocates of the need to attack countries deemed responsible for supporting terrorist groups that threatened the US. Important figures in the American administration of those years such as Vice President Dick Cheney or Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld were linked to neo-conservative. According to the neo-conservative doctrine, military action would also have proven American military power and reaffirmed its supremacy (Brown, 2006; Record, 2008).

In the strong domestic crisis that has arisen, it can be observed that the presidency has opted to pander to the feelings of a part of the conservative electorate. Using the pork-barrel strategy model of Maskin and Tirole (2019), one can consider that President Bush wanted to signal his adherence to the values of neo-conservatism. Instead of spending policies in this case, strong action in foreign policy played the role of a signal. Moreover, the president's choice took advantage of the spread of resentment and anger among voters by intercepting large swathes of consensus through his action.

In quick succession Afghanistan and Iraq were invaded by US forces. The former had been identified as the base of al Qaida operations, the second was accused of providing support to terrorist groups and possessing weapons of mass destruction as stated by a 2002 US National Intelligence Estimate.⁸ According to the Bush administration, the Iraqi regime's possession of these weapons posed a very serious threat to US security. Neo-conservatives argued, consequently, the US government had to take serious action.

An important role during the process that led to the attack to Iraq was played by the US Secretary of State Colin Powell. On Feb. 5th, 2003, Colin Powell appeared at the UN assembly to present evidence that Saddam Hussein, Iraq's leader, possessed weapons of mass destruction and supported terrorist groups. Powell's presentation was instrumental to influence leaders and public opinion of several countries that subsequently supported the US. The evidence Powell provided would turn out to be unreliable and, in some cases, even false. Following the invasion of Iraq, weapons of mass destruction were never found. The links between Saddam and the terrorist groups that posed a threat to the US were greatly diminished (Ferran, 2011).⁹

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/26/politics/us-officials-retool-slogan-for-terror-war.html>

⁸ <https://irp.fas.org/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html>

⁹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/iraqi-defector-al-janabi-codenamed-curveball-admits-wmd/story?id=12922213>

In Powell's conduct, the theory proposed by Morris (2001) can be reviewed. Being the Secretary of State, he was concerned about expressing himself in a way that would gain public support. Presenting Iraq not as an actual threat would have cast him and the entire government in a bad light in the eyes of the furious public. Powell in this situation was probably more concerned about not antagonising the public than providing an honest and realistic picture of the situation. In addition to Powell presentation, several documents were produced to support the thesis that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. One of the most known and subsequently controversial pieces of evidence was the *Iraq Dossier*. This document emphasised the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It was used by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair to justify his country's intervention in the 2003 invasion. In the years following the war, the document was severely criticised as it exaggerated the real threat represented by the country ruled by Saddam (Humphereys, 2005).

2.3 Iraq's Invasion

The attack on the Twin Towers shocked the world. Subsequent statements by politicians supported by documents such as the *Iraq Dossier* prompted voters in the US and elsewhere to demand a strong military response. Governments pandered to public opinion making Iraq the main enemy of world peace. The media supported this line and contributed to increasing popular support for military intervention (Musser, 2007).

Most of the citizens were indeed angry and wanted a reaction to the attacks from the government, yet they did not fully understand why Iraq was being attacked, especially without the consent of the United Nations. The latter had not approved the attack on Iraq in view of the scant evidence produced by the weapons of mass destruction inspections. Through persuasion, however, the Bush administration changed the situation also because of the poor critical role played by the media. In fact, only a small part of the media had an audience with lower levels of misperception about the conflict. Instead, much of the public maintained erroneous beliefs and perceptions, highlighting the media's lack of commitment to questioning presidential conduct (Kull, Ramsay, Lewis, 2004).

As described by Ashworth and Shotts (2010), the lack of clear evidence on the actual good intentions of political leaders may also have compromised media's role as critical observers.

The United States supported by a coalition of states including the UK, Poland, and Australia began the invasion of Iraq on March 20th, 2003. The land attack was preceded by extensive bombing of major Iraqi cities. This was intended to demoralise the Iraqis and cause desertions

within the army. In addition, it also weakened the country's defence systems. The air superiority of the Allies would be a key asset for the short duration of the conflict. The bulk of the Anglo-American forces penetrated the country from the south, coming from Kuwait. At the same time, Kurdish militias in the north rose up thanks to the support provided by the US Army. The resistance of the demoralised and ill-equipped Iraqi troops concentrated on the urban centres. On April 9th, only three weeks after the start of the military operations, the US Army took the control of the capital Baghdad. Thanks to its overwhelming military superiority, the coalition annihilated the Iraqi army, and on May 1st President Bush announced the conclusion of full-scale operations. By the end of the year, Saddam was captured. The former Iraqi leader was subsequently sentenced to death by an Iraqi court (Dec. 30th, 2006) (Bassil, 2012; Augustyn, 2022¹⁰).

The war had the stated objective of ensuring the safety of the American people and preventing future attacks. The US government's intention to quickly find a concrete target for public anger was also highly plausible. Presidential approval polls suggest a correlation between the start of the conflict and approval of the leadership. In fact, during 2003, support for Bush fell consistently by 1.9 percentage points per month, except for the period of the war with Iraq. This suggests a strong advantage in terms of approval obtained by the administration during the war (Franklin, 2005).

The war destabilized Iraq both economically and politically with consequences for the entire region. Numerous terrorist groups began to infiltrate Iraq, causing a civil war. The conflict that ensued between the occupiers and rebel forces within the Iraqi territory caused its economic weakening and political instability.

2.4 Oil Lobby's Role

The Iraq war posed opportunities for some US firms, especially oil ones (Spillius, 2007).¹¹ A key figure in this respect was Vice President Dick Cheney, one of the main promoters of a more aggressive American foreign policy. Cheney also identified himself as a member of the oil lobby, the economic group with probably the greatest interest in an American intervention in Iraq given the country's conspicuous deposits (Cheney 1999; Hayes 2007). The Persian Gulf countries hold two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. For large American oil corporations, like Chevron and Exxon, it was crucial to secure access to these deposits. Besides securing oil

¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War>

¹¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/markets/2815918/Iraq-war-was-about-oil-says-Greenspan.html>

supplies and reserves, the military operation impeded the possibility of Iraq flooding the market with oil. Doing so would have caused the price of petroleum to drop hurting the financial interests of oil companies (Bryce, 2004; Juhasz, 2008). In the post-Cold War globalised world, oil has been a key driver of the US economy. Oil is a commodity that can be exchanged for money, but it also constitutes the energy that enables the development of industries (Jhaveri, 2004).

Cheney is often portrayed as a manipulator of presidential decisions (Mearsheimer, Walt, 2007). However, the role of President Bush himself should not be underestimated. The wealth of the Bush family that enabled their subsequent political rise came from oil. George W. Bush's father built his fortune by founding countless companies engaged in the oil business. He himself became president and then launched his son into the same political career (Lind, 2003). Bush was therefore probably aware of the importance of Iraqi reserves. His actions can thus be interpreted as an attempt to protect the economic interests of American oil corporations and not so much the security of his country's population.

A further question mark over the American conduct is the situation in Saudi Arabia. The main organiser of the attack and responsible for many others, Osama bin Laden, was Saudi (Baker, Cooper, and Mazzetti, 2011)¹². 15 of the 19 9/11 suicide bombers were Saudis. Moreover, the Persian Gulf kingdom has never been very cooperative with US government investigations. Despite the many elements that could have led to doubts about Saudi Arabian loyalty to the US, they were essentially set aside. Here again, the interests of US oil companies may have played a key role. In 2002, Aramco, the Saudi national oil company, was the largest supplier of crude oil to the US. It supplied almost 17% of total oil imports. Iraq had weak links to the attacks yet was estimated to possess the second largest oil reserves in the world. The behaviour of the US government in maintaining good relations with a key oil partner is therefore suspicious to say the least (Jhaveri, 2004).

By reporting unverified information and exploiting misperceptions, the Bush administration has made Iraq a very serious danger in the eyes of its electorate. However, the choice to attack a country rich in oil resources but also poorly connected to international terrorism suggests that American corporate interests may have favoured what would have been a disastrous war for the Middle Eastern country (Helguero, 2011).¹³ The poor critical perception of American citizens is also evident in polls among Arab populations during the conflict. The latter, not being influenced by the pandering of the American leadership, suspected links between the ongoing war and American oil interests. A poll conducted in Jordan at the time of the invasion reported

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html>

¹³ <https://www.ibtimes.com/little-evidence-iraq-wmds-ahead-2003-war-us-declassified-report-264519>

that 83% of the respondents believed that oil was at the centre of the real American plans (Banerjee, 2003)¹⁴.

However, international criticism did not worry the American government. Through pandering he had managed to obtain the approval of the citizens, indulging in the desire for justice for the attacks suffered. At the same time, American oil companies interested in maintaining good relations with partners such as Saudi Arabia and entering new markets such as Iraqi were also most likely favoured.

2.5 Manipulation Mechanisms

Powell's speech has already been cited as one of the defining moments in the operation to persuade public opinion. Together with many other statements backed by often inaccurate documents, it was the driving forces that prompted the American public and others to support the invasion of Iraq.

Bush, Powell, and many other political leaders used deception and organised persuasive communication (OPC) regarding the Iraq war and Western foreign policy during the post-9/11 “War on Terror” (Robinson, 2017). In the context in which it was used, OPC represented a true form of propaganda used for manipulative persuasion towards citizens (Robinson, 2017). The political leadership used a strategy of deception. Regarding weapons of mass destruction, the public was given misleading and deceptive information that went far beyond the knowledge of the intelligence community. The danger of such weapons was thus exaggerated and made imminent for the public (Herring, Robinson, 2014a and 2014b).

The same system of misleading communication was adopted regarding a possible peaceful solution involving UN intervention. Instead of being offered as a real attempt to resolve the Iraqi issue peacefully, it was intended to mobilise support for the war and gain legal legitimacy for military action (Herring, Robinson, 2014a and 2014b).

The persuasion of public opinion was therefore a process of deception by omission, distortion and/or exaggeration. It misled citizens who were led to pay attention only to threats and dangers, ignoring the real intentions of the leaders (Robinson, 2017).

The communication on the previously mentioned “War on Terror” presented similar problems. The 9/11 attacks were the perfect opportunity for the US and others to remove Saddam by deceiving the electorate. Through the OPC's propaganda strategies, weapons of mass

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/06/weekinreview/the-world-arabs-have-a-litmus-test-for-us-handling-of-iraqi-oil.html>

destruction were made salient in the mind of the public (Robinson, 2017). The 'War on Terror' was thus a useful slogan through which the war could be better sold.

Media played an important role in this strategy. Observing how the presidency succeeded in entrenching false or distorted information in the public demonstrates how poorly the information systems and independent media reacted to these attempts. Although media were better equipped than the general public to detect misinformation, they did not play an effective critical role against the Bush administration (Kull, Ramsay and Lewis, 2004). As a result, the public was less able to detect lies and politicians had greater incentives to use pandering and to deceive the public (Ashworth, Shotts, 2010).

The processes described so far can be interpreted as a sophisticated form of pandering. The policymaker implements policies that are in her own interest. However, she simultaneously adopts rhetoric and deceptive communication strategies to convince the public that these policies are in the public general interest.

2.6 Chilcot Report

A serious hit to the persuasion effort of the US towards its citizens came unexpectedly in an “indirect” manner. On June 15th, 2009, six years after the start of the invasion, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for an inquiry into his country's intervention in the Iraq war. The UK had been a major ally of the US and an investigation could cast serious doubts on the actions of the US as well. The so-called Chilcot Report, named after the chairman of the commission, investigated the lies, mistakes and abuses committed by the British government before, during, and after the conflict (Baldwin, 2009).¹⁵

On July 6th, 2016, the investigation was published. The Report took seven years to be completed and it costed £10 million. The results were collected in 12 volumes highlighting the amount of work required. The Chilcot Report’s findings can be summarized as follow:

- Armed intervention was not the only possible approach. The UK government deliberately ignored other diplomatic solutions.
- Former Prime Minister Tony Blair exaggerated the extent of the threat posed by Saddam's regime. The Prime Minister in his speech to Parliament concerning the threats posed by Iraqi regime relied on personal feelings more than actual evidence. His choices

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/aug/14/british-army-abuses-iraq-chilcot-inquiry>

were guided by his desire to follow the US ally more than by the information coming from the British intelligence.

- The intelligence services had no evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Other countries like North Korea or Iran were much more dangerous in terms of proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Despite this, the Prime Minister was decided to attack Iraq.
- The decision to enter the war was based on incorrect information and was taken without a solid legal basis.
- Due to the rushed decision to participate in the invasion, the UK army came unprepared in terms of equipment and training.
- The consequences of the conflict were largely underestimated. In addition, the US administration ignored the advice of the British government on the management of post-war troop withdrawal.
- Overall, the British government failed in the objectives set before the invasion: to establish peace and reduce terrorist attacks. The war resulted in 179 deaths among British troops and thousands of deaths, both military and civilian, among Iraqis. The Middle East region was heavily destabilised preparing the path to the formation of the Islamic State (Guardian staff, 2016)¹⁶.

Long before 2016 people had already questioned the actions of the British government during the war. Yet, the Chilcot Report summarized all these critics within a unique document and provided evidence in support of these critique. Politicians convinced the public that Iraq represented an imminent danger. They portrayed the voters a war that was unnecessary and caused immense damage to the Iraqi people and to the United Kingdom (Ross, 2016)¹⁷.

Clearly, many of the accusations made by the Chilcot Report against the British government can also be extended to the American one. The two countries were allies and their motivations to go to war were strongly aligned.

2.7 War's Consequences

The publication of the Chilcot Report and numerous other journalistic investigations made the public question whether the true objectives of the war had been altered or concealed. Over time the US experienced other serious consequences of such policy choices. The protracted

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/06/iraq-inquiry-key-points-from-the-chilcot-report>

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/opinion/chilcot-report-how-tony-blair-sold-the-war.html>

occupation of the country (2003-2011) caused massive human casualties (Tapp et al., 2008). From the start of the invasion to the withdrawal of troops (March 20th, 2003 – November 7th, 2011), more than 4000 American soldiers died. Several hundred soldiers from the countries in the coalition died as well. Furthermore 36000 soldiers suffered injuries. In addition to the human losses, the consumption of materials and resources has been immense. 1,300 helicopters, 490 tanks, 4,500 light vehicles and around 30000 other ground vehicles were destroyed. An equally considerable number were damaged. The overall expenditure for the conflict summed up to \$3 trillion. To give a measure in 2008, the war in Iraq had already cost the US more than 12 years of conflict in Vietnam, even considering the inflation adjustment (Bassil, 2012). Iraqi casualties are estimated at around 20000 military dead. The number of civilian casualties has no accurate estimate. They vary from 30000 casualties (according to US leaning sources) to over one million civilians killed. Due to the war, there have also been 2.5 million refugees among the Iraqi population (Bassil, 2012). These numbers showcase the devastating impact the conflict had on the country.

While it is true that the war achieved its stated goal of overthrowing Saddam, its devastating effects cannot be denied. In addition to the humanitarian disaster that the conflict caused, it also led to an increase in Islamic terrorism (Bassil, 2012).

In the early 2000s, fewer than 30 bombings were registered annually in the US. However, with the definitive American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the consequent destabilization of the area, the situation has worsened. In the following years, even if with numbers of victims not comparable to 9/11, terrorist attacks increased in the US. In 2017, nearly 100 victims were touched, the highest number since the attack on the World Trade Centre. In 2020 there were over 100 bombings on US soil, numbers that are unprecedented in American history. The data is shown in Chart 2 (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2022).¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

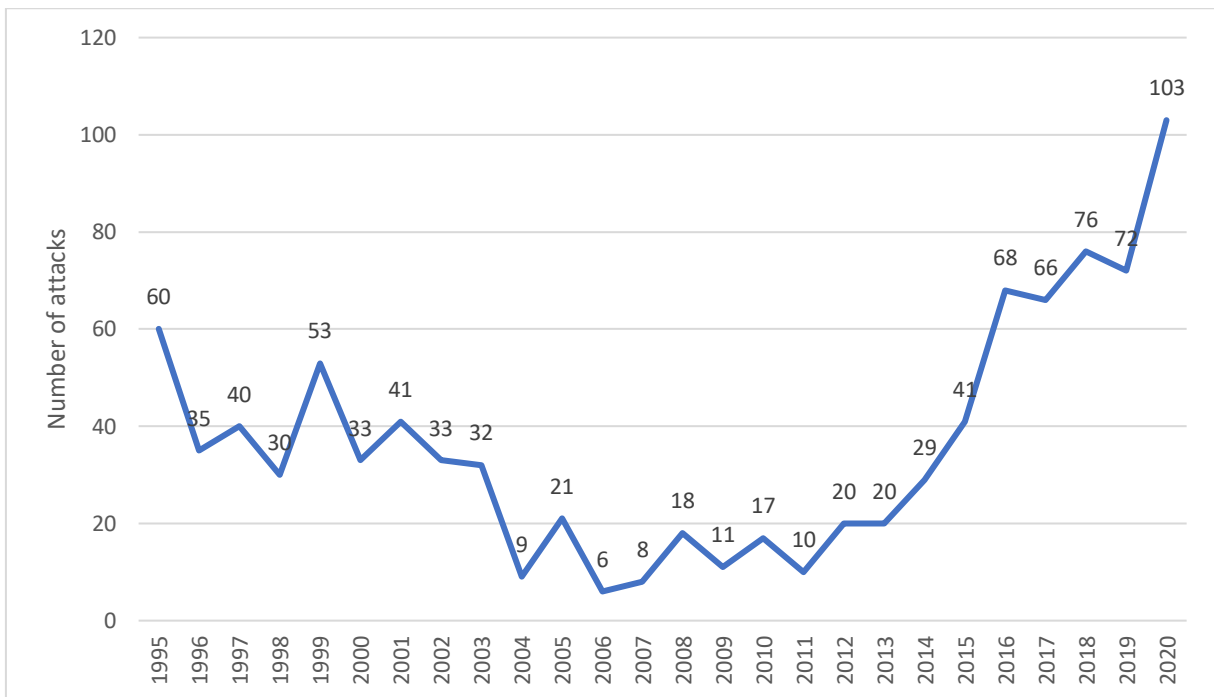


Chart 2 - Number of terrorist attacks annually in the United States from 1995 to 2020.¹⁹

The paradoxical outcome highlighted by the data is in contrast with the declared goal of the conflict, namely curb terrorism. This shows the extent of the failure of the American military operation and its leadership.

Various Non-governmental organizations and newspapers also denounced a general decline in human rights in Iraq during the war. Freedom of the press was restricted, and some journalists were even expelled from the country, others were prevented from entering (Bassil, 2012).

A further effect of the Iraq war was the weakening of international institution and the deterioration of American relations with several countries. Indeed, the decision to launch the invasion had not been approved by the UN Security Council. Even within NATO, several countries strongly disapproved of the American action, including France and Germany. As a result, European countries split between those allied with the US during the invasion (UK, Spain, and others) and those opposed to the invasion. Russia was strongly hostile to the military action and deemed the American attack an act of aggression that was not justified by any real need for self-defence (Schmitt, 2004).

These events seriously eroded support for President Bush and the Republican Party over time. In 2008 the Democrat candidate Barack Obama was elected and withdrew American soldiers within 2011 (Augustyn, 2022)²⁰.

¹⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/591079/number-of-terrorist-attacks-in-united-states/>

²⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War>

At the end of the conflict in 2011, only 25% of Americans said they were completely satisfied with their government's response to the 9/11 attacks. The majority was only partially satisfied (46%). Finally, 23% expressed total or partial dissatisfaction with the conduct of their government (PSB Research, 2011).²¹

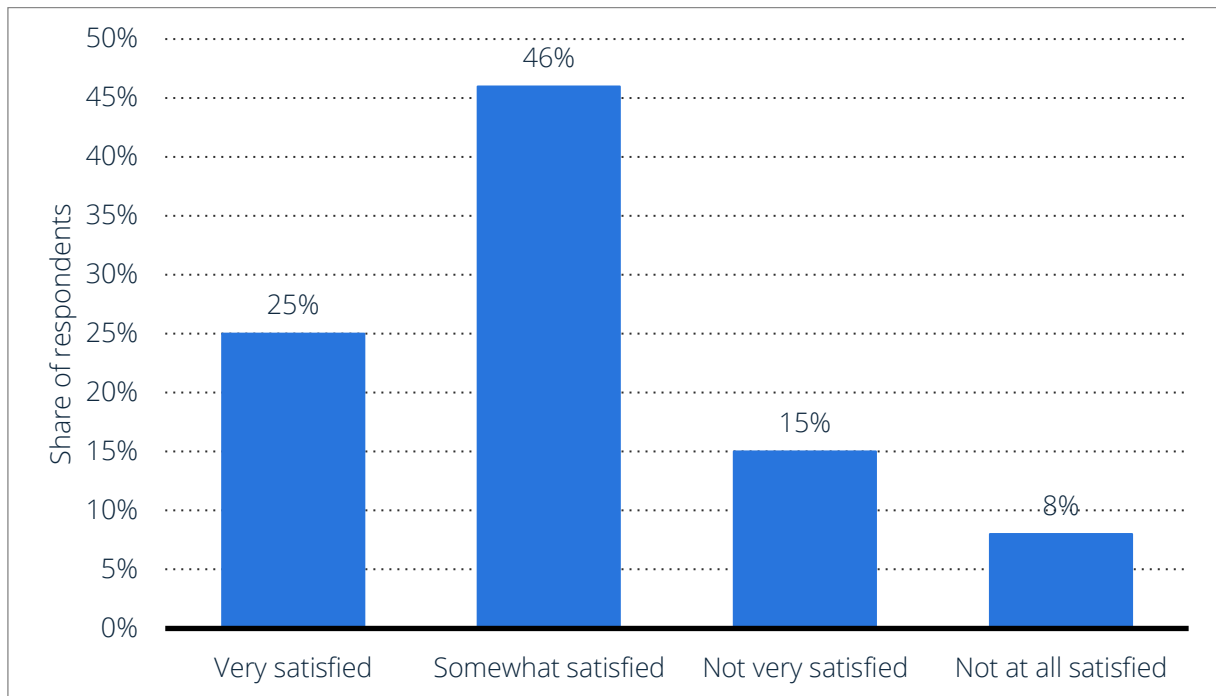


Chart 3 - *How satisfied are you with the US government's response to 9/11?*²²

Obama's victory was favoured by the 2008 economic crisis and by the discontent with Bush's choice to invade Iraq. Gradually, public opposition to the war led to very negative judgements concerning president's actions. The pandering strategy backfired against the leader who had implemented it. In addition to Bush, the very image of the Republican Party was damaged because of the conflict. To sum up although Bush's actions and pandering were not the only reason behind Obama's victory, they contributed to it (Jacobson, 2010).

The behaviour of the US presidency and the consequences of its conduct demonstrate how the exploitation of pandering for consensus building does not guarantee satisfactory results in the long run. Pandering can achieve only temporary success: the political and social costs that ill-conceived choices generate eventual reveal to voters the misbehaviour of leaders. In addition, the distortion of information and the protection of interests different from stated ones are

²¹ <https://www.psbinsights.com/>

²² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195847/how-satisfied-are-you-with-the-us-governments-response-to-9-11/>

severely punished by the electorate. The latter turns out to be very sensitive to being deceived and expressed its assessment by voting out of office the party accountable for such disaster.

2.8 Presidential Conduct Analysis

The behaviour of President Bush, the US administration, and the governments of allied countries during the Iraqi conflict led to catastrophic outcomes. It was the result of a subtle operation of persuasion through lies, propaganda, and opportunism. Bush behaviour however partially stemmed by the very nature of the president's role.

In the US system of government, the President is the only official elected at the federal level. Consequently, he should represent the interests of the nation as a whole. Therefore, the President should primarily act as to protect and favour the interests of the electorate (Wood, Lee, 2009). In the case of the 9/11 attack and the subsequent invasion of Iraq, Bush appeared as a guardian of American citizens protecting them from the threat of future attacks. However, as has been demonstrated and analysed, this did not exactly correspond to reality. This is because the President is elected to represent but also has a second, equally important role. He has the task of leading the nation. This implies that the president must make decisions that express a preference on certain issues. These choices may reflect both the preferences of the president himself and those of his party (Wood, Lee, 2009). In our case it is true that Bush presented himself as a defender of his citizens. However, following his own preferences and those of his party, he opted to invade a country that had very few ties to the attacks that had hit the US, but which represented a significant economic interest for American companies. The tendency to act as a protector of citizens while defending private interests can be seen as aspects both belonging to democratic representation.

The apparent conflict related to the figure of the President and his functions explains well the dynamic we analysed. President Bush in response to the terrorist attacks had to prove that he could protect his citizens. As their elected representative, he had to defeat the enemy of the Americans. This triggered the start of the so-called “War on Terror” and the subsequent invasions. However, we pointed out that the aggressive foreign policy undertaken by the president was not only focused on countries with close links to terrorism or with actual arsenals capable of threatening the US. At the same time, we also observed how the hostile actions against Iraq concealed much more. They were the result of the second aspect mentioned above. Bush, his associates and the American companies linked to them had their own foreign policy

interests and preferences. They probably intended to pursue personal profits by exploiting the oil resources of the country ruled by Saddam.

To reconcile these 2 objectives, pandering was an ideal tool for the American leadership. Indeed, it could ensure that presidents gain popular approval for their preferences and policies (Wood, Lee, 2009). By concealing his real preferences and being the voice of the people, the presidency was able to obtain popular support. Propaganda amplified by the media channelled popular anger towards Bush's real target. By persuading the Americans that Iraq posed a threat, the President was able to gain his own advantages and thus follow his initial preferences. The disastrous outcome of the war eventually led to the loss of support and the unmasking of the President's real intentions.

The behaviour of the highest US officials is the result of the relationship they have with public opinion. In the past, the expansion of the White House's public opinion apparatus led to a greater tendency for the president to bend to mass preferences (Geer, 1996). However, the continued expansion of this apparatus made the President less responsive. Indeed, a more sophisticated understanding of public opinion combined with other factors led to the development of mechanisms to manipulate public opinion (Jacobs, Shapiro, 2000). In our case, through pandering and propaganda, the US administration managed to “shift” public opinion towards its own interests. The President and his aides by understanding the widespread fear in the citizens have managed to channel it and to manipulate the preferences of the population accordingly.

Bush's conduct is then not different to the one of other presidents in contemporary times. They polarised towards their own interests and those of their party (Wood, Lee, 2009). Through gradually more sophisticated mechanisms, including pandering, they managed to conduct policy by following these preferences. However, the policies they adopted were presented in such a way as to gain public support. The latter was systematically misled, persuaded, and manipulated into approving the actions of leaders who were acting in disguise of their true intentions. The case analysed here of the Iraqi conflict fully illustrates the negative evolution that the American and Western democratic system in general has had.

CHAPTER 3 - PANDERING AND BREXIT

The main reason a leader uses pandering is to increase her consensus. More consensus equals more electoral support and thus more solid power. However, pandering to the feelings of the electorate is risky. Often the average voter has less information than the decision maker, and his preferences may be based on biased knowledge. Even more risky is the choice to follow the electorate by ignoring the advice of experts and technical figures. The latter possess specific knowledge and have the expertise to suggest the most appropriate policies. Leaders may choose to deliberately ignore such suggestions. This is either because the decision maker prefers to pander to the voters or because she may doubt the goodness of the advice received. Indeed, she may think that the experts have their own preferences and that through their advice they seek to gain advantage. As a result, the leader will come to choose policies that are potentially harmful at the socioeconomic level for the country and the voters. The latter will find itself quickly changing its mind. Having ex-post knowledge of the best policies to be used, they will be able to evaluate the behaviour of the incumbent. As a result, the leader will soon see her consensus decline precisely because of her choice to pander to the electorate.

A similar dynamic to what has just been described can be found in the process that led to the UK's exit from the EU.

Through historical analysis, the main causes that led political figures to pander to the British electorate with the promise of an EU exit referendum will be identified. The main economic and political consequences of the outcome of that vote will then be presented. Finally, the marked change of opinion within the public and the serious political and economic condition that has arisen in the United Kingdom will be highlighted.

3.1 History of United Kingdom-Europe Relations (up to 1945)

The adversarial relationship between the UK and continental Europe has its roots in history. Over the centuries, the British Isles have repeatedly found themselves at odds with other European nations and have ended up developing a very strong identity that is quite separate from that of mainland Europe.

The first relevant relations between the British Isles and the continent date back to the Roman invasion. In 55 B.C. Julius Caesar decided to invade Britannia (the Roman name for present-day England) but this first expedition was not very successful. In 43 A.D. Emperor Claudius succeeded in subduing a large part of the island. From then on Britannia would remain under

the Roman orbit until the beginning of the fifth century. With the fall of the Western Roman Empire the continental domination of the island also came to an end (Frere, 2023)²³.

After several centuries of virtual isolation in the 14th century, the clash between England and a power on the European continent - France - was reignited. During the Hundred Years' War, the respective ruling houses clashed for control of the French throne. The clash lasted until 1453 with the final French victory. Consequently, England renounced all claim to the European continent (Hastings, Prestwich, 2023)²⁴.

A further fact that reinforced the political and other separation between England and Europe was the birth of the Anglican Church. In 1534 King Henry VIII placed himself at the head of the Church of England and declared the separation of the latter from the Roman Catholic Church. This accentuated not only the political but also the cultural diversity between the British people and other Europeans (Elton, 2023)²⁵.

In 1588, England repelled an attempted invasion by Spain, consolidating its political and military strength (Tikkanen, 2023)²⁶.

During the 1700s, Great Britain (the name it assumed in 1707 when the kingdoms of England and Scotland were united) engaged in numerous wars and clashes with various continental powers. France, Spain, and the Dutch Republic contested the island nation's dominance of the seas and political hegemony. The climax of the clashes was reached in the early 19th century with the Napoleonic Wars. At the height of his power, the French emperor controlled the entire European continent and imposed a blockade on British goods to weaken the country. However, although isolated from the other European nations, Britain resisted and managed to lead a coalition that finally defeated Napoleon in 1815 (Colley, 2023)²⁷.

After Napoleon's defeat, the United Kingdom consolidated its position as a world power. The development of a vast colonial empire spanning all continents further distanced British interests from Europe (Webster, 2023)²⁸.

With the First World War, the UK once again became significantly involved in the politics of the European continent and simultaneously saw its role as a world hegemonic power begin to wane in favour of the US (Showalter, Royde-Smith, 2023)²⁹.

During the Second World War, a situation like a few centuries earlier arose again. The entire European continent was under the control of Hitler's Germany. Even in this contest the United

²³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Roman-Britain>

²⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Edward-III-1327-77>

²⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VIII-king-of-England/The-breach-with-Rome>

²⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Armada-Spanish-naval-fleet>

²⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/18th-century-Britain-1714-1815>

²⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism/European-expansion-since-1763>

²⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I>

Kingdom managed to stand alone and avert an invasion. The epilogue of the conflict is then well known (Hughes, Royde-Smith, 2023)³⁰.

During the Second World War, as in the Napoleonic Wars, the British country showed great resilience. Although isolated from the rest of the continent, the country has always been able to resist and maintain its autonomy.

The gradual disintegration of its colonial empire and economic supremacy has presented the UK with the challenge of confronting its own identity. This led to the emergence of the first nationalist sentiments in a nation that reached its zenith thanks to globalisation (Kumar, 2000). Such sentiments, as we shall see, recur frequently in the speeches and statements of leaders, such as Boris Johnson, intent on pandering to the growing popularity of British nationalism (Honeyman, 2022).

These all are factors that have affected and still affect the UK's economic and political integration processes with Europe.

3.2 UK and European Integration

The history of the United Kingdom and its relations with other European states can be seen as another key factor in the development of a strong autonomist identity on the island. This deep identity in the population then strongly influenced the integration process with European countries after the Second World War. Consequently, many political choices also took these trends aspects into account.

Eurosceptic sentiments have become increasingly widespread in the UK in recent years (Vasilopoulou, 2016). Over time, the various political leaders have therefore sought to increase their electoral base by pandering to this kind of movement. Former Prime Minister Liz Truss herself has repeatedly changed her position on the issue of her country's stay within the EU (Chambre, 2017).³¹

Over the 47 years of its tenure, political and economic ties with the EU have become increasingly important to the UK. As mentioned above, however, there has always existed some internal opposition within the country to the extent that Harold Wilson's pro-European Communities Labour government held a referendum on remaining in the EC in 1975. On that occasion 67.2 percent voted in favour of permanence. Thereafter, no further referendums were held as the integration process progressed (Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon Treaties).

³⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II#ref53531>

³¹ <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/liz-truss-says-she-would-now-back-brexite>

During the 1980s, Labour and Conservatives returned to clash over the European issue. In the '83 election, Labour, which promised a withdrawal without a referendum from the EC, was defeated by the Conservatives. However, disputes did not end even within the governing party itself. After an initial rapprochement in 1990 Margaret Thatcher resigned from her third term as prime minister. Her increasingly Eurosceptic views were incompatible with the party's position in favour of greater integration into the European system.

In the following years, the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown represented a relaxation in UK-European relations (Wilson, 2014).³²

In recent years, the main political force towards which the Eurosceptic sentiments of the British people have been focused has been the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). Since its foundation in 1993, this political formation did not achieve much at the electoral level. With the advent of Nigel Farage at the helm of the party, however, the situation changed. Presenting himself as a defender of the popular demands of the British people and against the European constitutional system, he managed to gain good support. In the 2009 European elections his party won 13 seats. At the local level between 2013 and 2014, UKIP won several seats in local councils. In 2014, thanks to the growing popularity of its leader, Farage's party won its first seat in Parliament with one representative (Kellner, 2023; ³³Ray, 2023³⁴; Kelsey, 2015).

The growing popularity of this political force and the electoral support it moved made Eurosceptic sentiments increasingly central to the British political debate.

In 2015 Conservative David Cameron (previously elected in 2010) was facing a very close political contest. To prevail and be elected for a second term, the prime minister targeted the Eurosceptic electorate. Indeed, Cameron promised a new referendum on remaining in the EU should he be re-elected. The inclusion of the referendum as one of the new government's priorities allowed Cameron to gain a lot of support. On the eve of the vote in May 2015, Cameron was the political leader best viewed by voters. The election victory on 7 May confirmed this. The pandering strategy adopted by the premier thus proved to be very effective at first, but also produced unexpected consequences (Dahlgreen, 2015³⁵; Kellner, 2016³⁶).

In 2016 surprisingly 51.9 percent chose for "leave" leading to the resignation of Cameron himself, as a supporter of remain, and opening to a period of serious political instability in the UK. Indeed, from 2016 to 2022 there have been as many as 4 different governments (May,

³² <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-26515129>

³³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nigel-Farage>

³⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Kingdom-Independence-Party>

³⁵ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/05/01/cameron-most-liked>

³⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Cameron>

Johnson, Truss, and Sunak) trying to carry out the difficult negotiations to define the new relationship between the EU and the UK (Belam, 2022).³⁷

The debate on the so-called Brexit involved all political forces. Over time, as we have seen, Labour and Conservative leaders have alternately questioned the UK's membership of the union. This suggests that effective criticism of Europe is not so much a central theme in the majority parties as an attempt to increase their electoral support. Due to historical factors and, as we shall see, the current socio-economic situation in the United Kingdom, Eurosceptic sentiments have gradually encompassed wider sections of the population. To gain the support of such voters, British leaders resorted to pandering to anti-European positions.

Cameron followed the behaviour described by Huang (2010) in his model. Although he had pro-European preferences and was therefore not in favour of the referendum, he decided to go along with what the voters demanded. Cameron's decision also reflects what is illustrated by Downs and Roche (1994). A leader facing strong electoral competition has a greater incentive to adopt policies with uncertain output (Downs, Roche, 1994). The outcome of the referendum represented a risk to the political and economic solidity of the United Kingdom. However, the popularity of this proposal among voters convinced Cameron to grant it anyway. The success of the 2015 election demonstrates the usefulness of pandering in gaining rapid support, yet subsequent outcomes also highlight its extreme harmfulness.

3.3 Brexit Causes

The historical dynamics of the relationship between the UK and the European Union underpin the country's strong national identity. This translates into a strong desire for autonomy that is present in a large part of the population and constitutes one of the main arguments in favour of Brexit. For supporters of the campaign to leave, the superiority of European law over British law is unacceptable and undermines national autonomy (Arnorsson, Zoega, 2018).

An equally clashing element between the leave and stay faction is the issue of immigration. Those in favour of Brexit argue that the UK is unable to manage migration flows from other European states to the detriment of British workers. However, it must be emphasised that the free labour market is one of the four pillars, along with goods, services, and capital, of the Single Market enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty of 1993. Supporters of remaining argue that it would be impossible for Britain to withdraw from the labour market alone and then risk losing

³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/oct/20/uk-crisis-a-beginners-guide-to-the-political-turmoil-as-liz-truss-quits>

all the benefits of the others (Arnorsson, Zoega, 2018). Despite this, the fear of immigration, which in some cases has escalated into outright xenophobia, has intensified in recent years in the UK. Since 2015 with the Arab Spring, flows from the Middle East and North Africa have increased considerably. Fear for national security and economic stability has brought far-right parties including the UKIP to the fore. It should be remembered that this dynamic is common in many European states where immigration has experienced significant growth since 2015 (Day, 2018).

Exacerbating the British population's hostility towards immigration from North African and Middle Eastern countries were the series of terrorist attacks in 2017. Over the course of the year, five different Islamic and jihadist attacks occurred in London, Manchester, and other locations, killing 36 people, and injuring several hundred.³⁸ These events severely scarred public opinion, making it increasingly hostile towards the large Arab minority in the country (Day, 2018).

A further cause of the British electorate's estrangement from the remaining positions was the European debt crisis of 2009. In that context it was argued by the party of Leave that the EU had been unable to cope with the crisis. Consequently, those in favour of Brexit argued that more economic independence would provide the UK with greater economic stability and solidity (Day, 2018).

In recent decades, the United Kingdom has substantially seen a reduction in its geopolitical importance and has faced difficult economic and humanitarian crises. In this context, the EU has often been perceived by voters more as an obstacle and a limitation for the country. The result of the Brexit vote can therefore be read as a reaction and a reassertion of independence. The British are strongly attached to their own history, which has seen them as masters of much of the world and are now trying to reassert their role by distancing themselves from the EU authorities (Bachmann, Sidaway, 2016).

A further aspect that strongly influenced the Brexit vote was the socio-economic characteristics of the electorate. It was observed that voters in favour of leaving largely presented similar traits. Those latter were characterised by lower wages and scholastic education, greater seniority, and lower public services than the pro-staying electorate (Becker, Fetzer and Novy, 2017). These characteristics suggest that the pandering of politicians has been directed towards a segment of the population more likely to be manipulated. What emerges from the statistical studies suggests that certain sections of the pro-Brexit population were essentially the most distressed (Becker, Fetzer and Novy, 2017). Economic crisis and beyond made them feel abandoned and

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2017-terror-attacks-review-2018-report>

entrenched feelings of resentment towards Europe. The possibility of abandoning the European institutions and reasserting the centrality of the British people against immigrants was a very attractive idea for citizens. So, Cameron's choice to gain the support of these voters by promising the referendum highlights the leader's attempt at pandering to an electorate that is easier to persuade.

The result of the vote also manifested a trend in the British electorate that is becoming increasingly widespread in the Western world. It can be read as a further reason for the victory of the leave in the referendum. The population is becoming hostile toward the "experts." The remain campaign mobilised numerous experts and authoritative figures who warned of the serious risks of a possible exit. Whether these are economists, statesmen or whatever else in recent years voters have shown distrust of them. Although most showed concern about a UK exit, they were not listened to. In particular, the already mentioned economic crisis that has marked the continent in recent years has contributed to this general distrust. The majority vote of the British people can also be read as a reassertion of their sovereignty over leaders and "experts". Exacerbating the situation was the conduct of many parties to pander to voters. Ignoring experts and professionals, they have pursued increased support at all costs. The Brexit referendum can be seen as the latest result of these kinds of policies (Clarke, Newman, 2017; Witte, 2016³⁹).

The preferences of the British vote on Brexit reflect the growing approval of populism among the citizens of Europe and beyond. Anti-establishment messages from right-wing populist parties such as UKIP have proved increasingly popular. The motivation is also to be found in the authoritarian and anti-immigration sentiments typical of the right-wing electorate, which has consequently embraced the entire political proposal of such fringes (Bakker, Schumacher, Rooduijn, 2021).

As in the case of Cameron, the growing popularity of such parties has often forced various governments to confront their claims.

3.4 Brexit Economic Consequences

At the end of January 2020, the United Kingdom officially left the European Union. However, in the following eleven months its access to the single European market was not restricted. From 1 January 2021 with the end of the transition period, the economic relationship between

³⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/9-out-of-10-experts-agree-britain-doesnt-trust-the-experts-on-brex/2016/06/21/2ccc134a-34a6-11e6-ab9d-1da2b0f24f93_story.html

the UK and the EU is effectively governed by the new Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) (Clark, 2022)⁴⁰. Assessing the real effects of this new arrangement will take time. Short-term considerations and forecasts for the future can be made. However, the real economic effects of Brexit are also difficult to identify as in recent years Britain, like the rest of Europe, has faced both a Covid-19 crisis and an energy crisis. The health emergency and the rises in gas and oil prices have severely tested all world economies. This makes an objective analysis of the economic effects attributable solely to Brexit even more complex (Dharshini, 2023)⁴¹.

In January 2021 the UK economy contracted by 2.9% after a slight growth in September. As mentioned, this figure is partially significant due to the effect on the economy of the Coronavirus. Suffice it to say that the current size of the UK economy corresponds to that of 2015. Covid-19 in one year wiped out 5 years of growth (Clark, 2022)⁴².

Indicators such as the unemployment rate are equally insignificant. In fact, the British government has put in place various welfare measures for the workers hardest hit by the crisis, going so far as to pay the salaries of almost 5 million people (Clark, 2022)⁴³.

One economic aspect most directly affected by Brexit can be considered trade. Confronted with December 2020, British exports to the EU contracted by £6.6 billion. At the same time, UK imports from the European Union fell by £5.6 billion. Although in this case the effect of the pandemic crisis cannot be totally excluded, the significant increase in red tape is probably the main factor that has reduced trade (Clark, 2022)⁴⁴. The negative effects of the bureaucratic increases are also visible in the rising cost of importing food from the EU. Between 2020 and 2021, they rose by 6% according to the London School of Economics (Dharshini, 2023)⁴⁵.

As mentioned, the pandemic has affected all major world economies. However, the resumption of business activities has rebounded growth in most affected countries in the post-pandemic period. When compared to the other G7 countries, however, Britain experienced lower growth. In this case, it is most likely the negative effects caused by the exit from trade agreements with the EU (Dharshini, 2023)⁴⁶.

One sector further affected by Brexit is the investment sector. Since the referendum, uncertainty about economic developments in the country has stalled investment. Analysts claim that under the previous arrangements they would have been 25% higher. This obviously has a strong impact on current economic growth (Dharshini, 2023)⁴⁷.

⁴⁰ <https://www.statista.com/topics/3154/brexit-and-the-uk-economy/#topicOverview>

⁴¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64450882#comments>

⁴² <https://www.statista.com/topics/3154/brexit-and-the-uk-economy/#topicOverview>

⁴³ <https://www.statista.com/topics/3154/brexit-and-the-uk-economy/#topicOverview>

⁴⁴ <https://www.statista.com/topics/3154/brexit-and-the-uk-economy/#topicOverview>

⁴⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64450882#comments>

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64450882#comments>

⁴⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64450882#comments>

Equally negative estimates were made by the Centre for European Reform. These are based on the *doppelgänger* method in which an algorithm selects economies that performed similarly to the UK before Brexit to compare the two situations. The data presented goes up to June 2022, that is, 18 months after the new UK-EU trade agreements come into effect (1st January 2022). The study reports that compared to being in the EU, the UK's current GDP is 5.5 per cent (£33 billion) lower, investment is 11 per cent (£12 billion) minor and total goods traded (exports plus imports) is 7 per cent (£15 billion) lower (Springford, 2022)⁴⁸.

The effects of increased bureaucratic costs are also clearly visible in the estimates made for the UK economy. Most studies as of 2018 predicted a sharp contraction of Great Britain's situation post Brexit. The most pessimistic estimates went as far as predicting an 18 percent reduction in the economy's output. This contraction was mainly caused by the staggering increase in the cost of trade between the UK and other European countries, not to mention additional issues related to investment and raw material supplies (Tetlow, Stojanovic, 2018).⁴⁹

An additional problem stems from the lack of workers for roles with low-to-medium required skills. Indeed, if previously workers from all over Europe were happy to perform such tasks now the UK is facing a labour market crisis (Guerrera, 2022).⁵⁰ In addition, labour shortages translate into higher costs for consumers (Dharshini, 2023)⁵¹.

The difficult economic combination of Brexit, the pandemic and the energy crisis put Britain in a complex situation. The economic difficulties also have serious repercussions in the political sphere. British leaders are demonstrating serious difficulties in being able to resolve this situation and stabilise the nation's socio-economic situation.

The behaviour of Cameron and subsequent premiers has clearly mirrored that described by Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001). Although they knew the danger of pandering to the Eurosceptic sentiments of the population, the political leaders did not behave like true leaders. Rather than implementing unpopular policies and proceeding along the path of European integration, they preferred to gain support by following the most popular preferences. The consequences of these choices are now producing their damage economically and beyond.

⁴⁸ <https://www.cer.eu/insights/cost-brexit-june-2022>

⁴⁹

[https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/2018%20IfG%20%20Brexit%20impact%20\[final%20for%20web\].pdf](https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/2018%20IfG%20%20Brexit%20impact%20[final%20for%20web].pdf)

⁵⁰ https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/12/01/news/brexit_problemi_ammissioni_londra-377023880/

⁵¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-64450882#comments>

3.5 Political Crisis

In addition to the severe economic effects, the Brexit generated not a few problems at the political level. Firstly, Prime Minister David Cameron, who promoted the referendum, had to resign. He thought he would use the vote to consolidate his own power, yet he had not taken the unexpected result into account. By pandering to the Eurosceptic electorate, he managed to increase his own support. He, however, by supporting remain campaign found himself having to resign in the light of the result of the vote (Manganaro, 2020)⁵².

Following Cameron's resignation, the Conservatives elected Theresa May as their new leader and prime minister. She tries to call her party to unity to succeed in the negotiation process for leaving the EU. However, her proposed agreements are rejected three times by the British Parliament. This results in her resignation in May 2019 (Guerrera, 2019)⁵³.

Prior to the referendum, Theresa May had supported Cameron's positions by coming out against the country's exit from the EU (Wallenfeldt, 2023c)⁵⁴. These positions may have undermined the success of her negotiations and compromised her authority in the eyes of public opinion. It is therefore logical that the Conservatives chose Boris Johnson as their new leader and prime minister. He had been one of the main supporters of the leave faction and thus represented a very influential figure in this regard. By mediating between the political forces and with the European institutions, the new premier eventually completes the formal withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 31st January 2020 (Wallenfeldt, 2023a)⁵⁵.

As mentioned, from January 2021 the first economic effects of Brexit began to manifest themselves. They combined with the damage caused by the health crisis that broke out in 2019 due to the Coronavirus put the British nation in serious difficult. Although the country had been among the first to emerge from the most severe phase of the pandemic thanks to a more rapid deployment of vaccines, it has not yet fully recovered. As analysed in the previous section, the socio-economic situation remained complex. To exacerbate the precarious situation, a series of scandals between November 2021 and January 2022 engulfed the Johnson government. The most famous is probably *Partygate*. Photos were revealed showing several members of the government, including Johnson himself, gathering in large groups for dinners or social events during the nationwide lockdown, November - December 2020. The violation of health security

⁵² https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/brexit-chi-come-quando-tutta-storia-grande-divorzio-ACI09dEB?refresh_ce

⁵³ https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/05/24/news/may_si_dimette_lascio_il_7_giugno_-227061039/

⁵⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theresa-May>

⁵⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Johnson>

regulations occurred on a recurring basis as reported by the Cabinet Office investigation⁵⁶. In these situations, they were breaking the rules they themselves had imposed on the country and were severely criticised for it. In January 2022, polls recorded that 72% of the public had a negative view of Boris Johnson. This negative result even surpassed the lowest point of popularity recorded by the previous PM Theresa May, 70% unfavourable view in May 2019 (Kirk, 2022)⁵⁷.

The complicated situation that had arisen forced Johnson to resign in July 2022 (Wallenfeldt, 2023a)⁵⁸.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss was chosen by the Conservative Party as successor. However, this government was very short-lived due to the attempted economic manoeuvre undertaken by Truss. The mini budget she promoted included a substantial tax cut mainly for the highest incomes. The markets reacted very negatively to the manoeuvre to the point of forcing the government to retrace its steps. The loss of credibility and the difficult economic situation forced Liz Truss to resign on 20 October 2022, becoming the shortest serving prime minister in British history, just 50 days (Eardley, 2022)⁵⁹. In her intentions, the manoeuvre had the probable aim of ingratiating herself with the wealthier sections of British society. However, the lack of solid public support and the severity of the markets' reaction caused her premiership to fail.

On 25 October, Rishi Sunak was elected as the new leader of the Conservative Party and consequently appointed Prime Minister. He was a cabinet member of the Johnson government and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer between 2020 and 2022 (Wallenfeldt, 2023b)⁶⁰. He now faces a serious situation both economically and politically, which mainly originated from the 2016 referendum. Sunak himself supported leaving but now much of the British population regrets that choice.

3.6 Popular Reactions

The combination of government crisis and economic difficulties soon made Brexit less and less popular. Indeed, the British population began to express doubts and second thoughts about their

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigation-into-alleged-gatherings-on-government-premises-during-covid-restrictions-update>

⁵⁷ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/01/14/boris-johnsons-net-favourability-drops-another-all>

⁵⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Johnson>

⁵⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-63335671>

⁶⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rishi-Sunak>

vote. As reported by the British platform YouGov, which specializes in market research and opinion polling, in 2022 only 17 percent of the population thinks the Brexit has had a positive effect. Most respondents have a "badly" or "very badly" opinion of the choice made in 2016.⁶¹ Poll results show the rapid loss of favour for Eurosceptic policies.

On 23 June 2016, the leave victory in Britain had surprised many analysts. In several areas of the country, the percentage in favour of leaving had turned out to be higher than expected. Precisely, leave obtained 51.9% and remain 48.1%. However, the preferences expressed by voters in that referendum changed rapidly.

Boris Johnson himself, who first finally succeeded in concluding an agreement with the EU for the country's exit, was not spared the public's criticism. In October 2019, 48% of respondents were dissatisfied with his approach to Brexit and only 38% supported him. Despite this, the leaders of the other main parties were performing even worse in the eyes of the citizens. Nigel Farage had been one of the founders of UKIP and among the most ardent supporters of the exit. 51% of respondents were also dissatisfied with his approach and only 28% were in favour. As for the leaders of other parties opposed to Brexit, the situation gets even worse. Jo Swinson at the time leader of the Liberal Democrats is also judged to be so negative in her approach to Brexit (53%) that she resigned at the end of 2019 from the party leadership. Even worse are the ratings on Jeremy Corbyn as head of the Labour Party and leader of the opposition. Against him 72% of the poll respondents were negative with only 15% in favour. He too will resign in 2020, confirming the serious situation of distrust in the UK towards all political forces (Armstrong, 2019⁶²; Wallenfeldt, 2020⁶³; Webb, 2019⁶⁴).

As mentioned, the official year of exit from the EU is 2020, so the real effects of the vote, both economic and political, have been more visible since that year. Consequently, voter preferences are also more significant from January 2020. From this time onwards, the percentage of citizens over the age of 18 who think it was wrong to leave has been steadily above the still favourable percentage. The only exception is the period in the Spring of 2021 when the vaccination campaign deployed by the UK to tackle Covid 19 was very successful. The greater British speed and efficiency compared to the situation in the EU countries meant that for 2 months (April and May) the pro-Brexit percentage was higher than the unfavourable one. It should also be noted that only a difference of 2 to 3 per cent is reported. In the following months, the percentage with a negative opinion on the exit again outnumbered the other, stabilising at the beginning of 2023 at over 50%. Those in favour of Brexit fell to just over 30%. The percentage of people

⁶¹ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2022/05/10/6f966/2>

⁶² <https://www.statista.com/chart/19691/opinion-on-party-leader-approaches-to-brexit/>

⁶³ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jeremy-Corbyn>

⁶⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Liberal-Democrats>

with a neutral opinion on the question remained around 11-13% throughout the period (Statista Research Department, 2023a)⁶⁵.

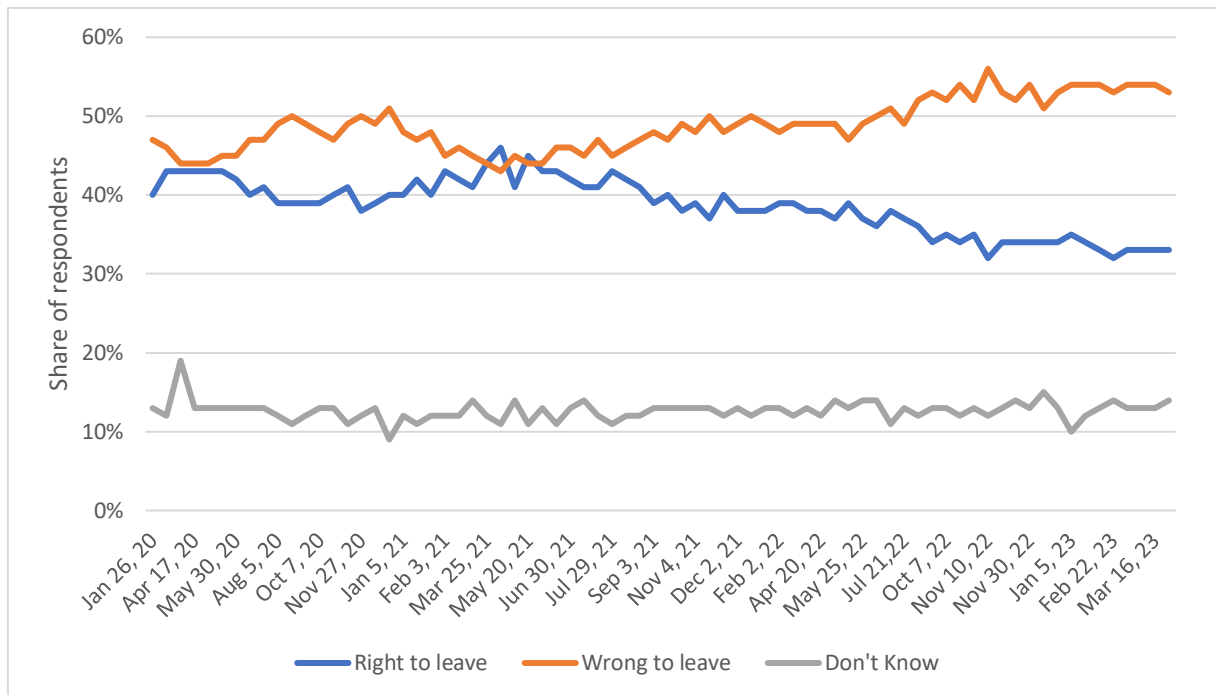


Chart 1 - *In hindsight, do you think Britain was right or wrong to leave the European Union? (January 2020 to March 2023).*⁶⁶

The population's disapproval of Brexit, which we can describe as “repentance”, has also translated into a general disapproval of the governments that have succeeded one another at the helm of the country. Again, considering the period from January 2020, the percentage of Britons unfavourable to the incumbent government was steadily higher than the percentage in favour. An exception was the period between April and May 2020 when the British government chose to adopt a softer pandemic containment policy, allowing the country's economy not to come to a complete standstill. Subsequently, the British nation was also forced to employ measures like those of other European countries. However, voter disapproval of the government is currently even deeper than on the Brexit issue. In March 2023, the percentage unfavourable to the government is at 65%. Only 15% of respondents are in favour of it, while 20% maintain a neutral position (Clark, 2023)⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/987347/brexit-opinion-poll/?locale=en>

⁶⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/987347/brexit-opinion-poll/?locale=en>

⁶⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1167064/uk-government-approval-rating/?locale=en>

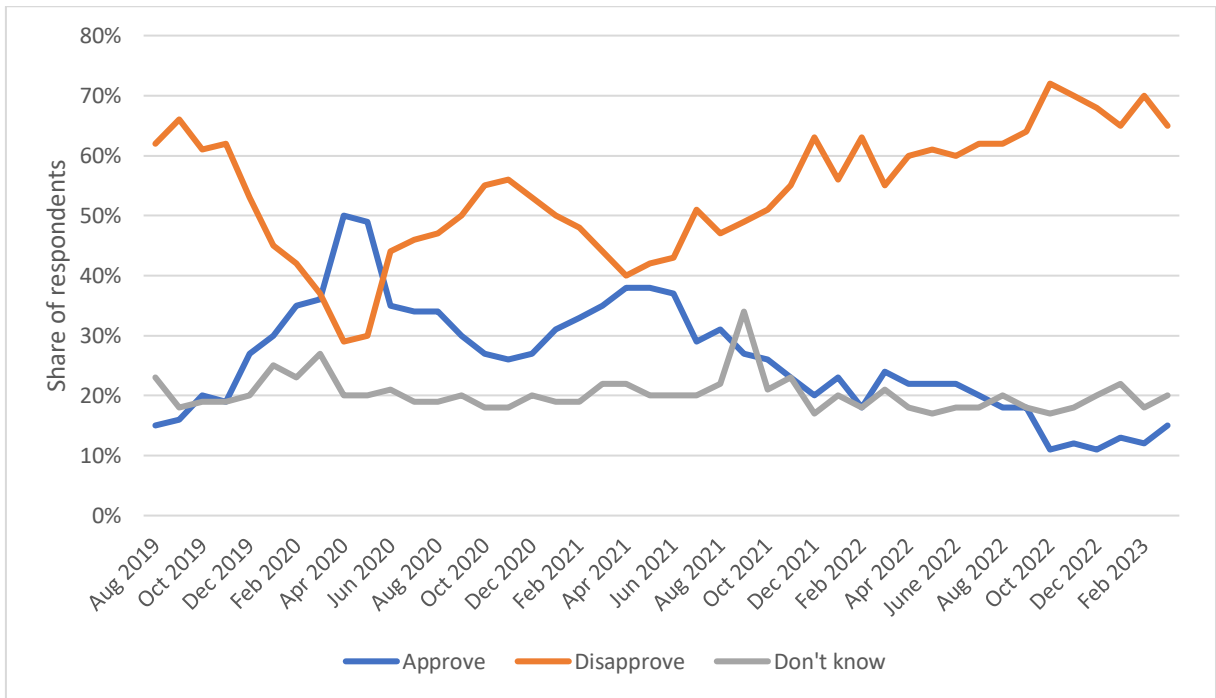


Chart 2 - Do you approve or disapprove of the Government's record to date? (August 2019 to March 2023)⁶⁸

In general, the different political leaders, whether they were in favour or in opposition to Brexit, registered increasingly lower approval ratings.

The current prime minister Rishi Sunak must convince many voters that he is the best choice. In fact, only 25 per cent of Brits over 18 think he is, while 31 per cent prefer Keir Starmer, the current Labour and opposition leader. Sunak has, however, shown an improvement for the Conservatives compared to his predecessor Liz Truss who, before her resignation, had registered preferences of only 14% against 43% of Brits who preferred Starmer. The current premier is currently at similar preference levels to Johnson's on the eve of his resignation (28%). Even the latter, however, had seen his supporters drop from 40% to less than 30% of the electorate after his peak during the successful campaign against Covid 19 in 2021 Spring (Statista Research Department, 2023b)⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1167064/uk-government-approval-rating/?locale=en>

⁶⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/710316/prime-minister-voting-intention-in-great-britain/?locale=en>

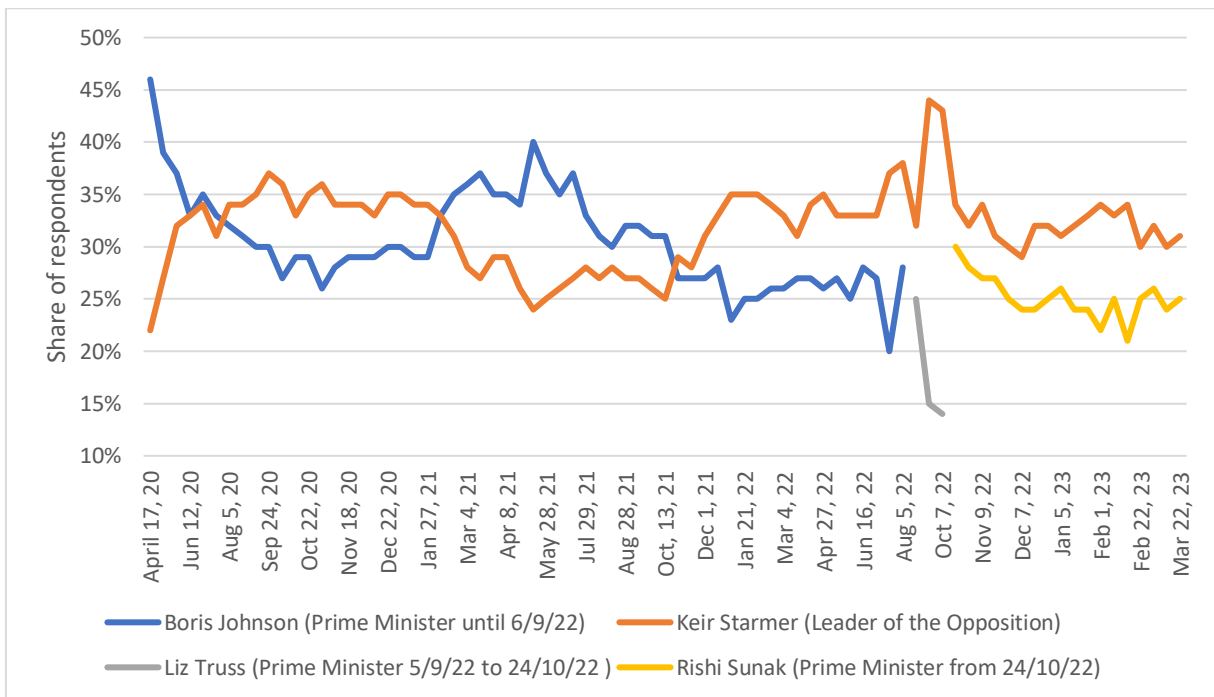


Chart 3 - Which of the following do you think would make the best Prime Minister?⁷⁰

The graphs and statistics analysed highlight the serious political situation in Britain. The choice of several leaders to rely on pandering to exploit the popular Eurosceptic sentiment in the country has proved unsuccessful. Britain is now grappling with a very delicate economic situation. The governments that have rapidly succeeded one another in recent years do not enjoy the support of the electorate. Not even Johnson, who managed to complete the agreement with the EU and deal effectively with the pandemic crisis, was able to preserve his leadership. The series of scandals that have engulfed him and his associates (*Partygate*) have undermined his credibility and initiated a political crisis that is still not completely resolved.

3.7 United Kingdom After Brexit

The UK is currently in a delicate transition phase. Politically, new relations with the European Union are being normalised and the current government is trying to establish after turbulent years. The economy is struggling to fully recover after the Covid 19 crisis also due to the direct effects of Brexit that have started to be felt. As has been described, the choice of various politicians to pander stems from the rise of increasingly Eurosceptic sentiments and historical factors that have probably influenced the views of the British. This choice, as seen, did not fully

⁷⁰ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/710316/prime-minister-voting-intention-in-great-britain/?locale=en>

pay-off, as it allowed some leaders to gain great support as in the case of Johnson but at the same time opened the way for a serious political and economic crisis.

However, the dominant issue on which the referendum was played out was immigration. Indeed, the British vote was often presented as a trade-off between increased bureaucratic friction between the UK and the EU and greater control over migration flows (Curtice, 2016)⁷¹. The new rules introduced on immigration were intended to make it more restrictive and selective. The direct effects of these new policies are still difficult to estimate with certainty. Looking at the situation from a macroeconomic perspective, however, it is recognised that the market is the best mechanism for selecting and directing migration flows. In this case bureaucracy and politics have taken its place with the intention of favouring British workers and their salaries. Here too the effects have been minimal in terms of both employment and wages (Portes, 2022).

On the one hand, we therefore have tighter immigration control, but overall, it has produced uncertain or even negative results. On the other hand, we have an economy that is struggling to recover.

As already mentioned, the UK is the only G7 country (Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, and the USA) with a smaller economy than pre-pandemic. One indicator of the difficulties the British economy is going through is the situation of the pound. The British currency has lost 19% against the US dollar since the vote in favour of Brexit. On 23 June 2016, one pound was exchanged for \$1.49. In December 2022 it fell to \$1.26 signalling the current difficulties (Ziady, 2022)⁷².

The trade sector remains among the most affected by Brexit. In the first year after the new agreements came into force, the variety of British products exported to the EU fell by 30% (Freeman et al., 2022)⁷³. These declines are attributable, as already highlighted, to bureaucratic problems. Especially small businesses find it very difficult to deal with the mass of documents and permits required even for minor shipments. A survey conducted by the British Chamber of Commerce reported that out of 1168 businesses surveyed, 77% said they would find it more difficult to grow and develop after Brexit (Ziady, 2022)⁷⁴.

The series of data reported so far amply suggest how policy choices dictated by a desire to pander to part of the British electorate have done serious damage to the country. The extent of

⁷¹ <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Brexit-Six-months-on.pdf>

⁷² <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/24/economy/brexit-uk-economy/index.html>

⁷³ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2022/04/26/brexit-the-major-trade-disruption-came-after-the-uk-eu-agreement-took-effect-in-2021/>

⁷⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/24/economy/brexit-uk-economy/index.html>

the socio-economic effects of that vote will become clearer in the coming years, but actually UK remains in a delicate economic and even more so political phase.

CHAPTER 4 - PANDERING IN ORGANIZED ARMED GROUPS

In many parts of the world where civil wars are ongoing or where the institutional government lacks a firm leadership on the country, rebel organisations and armed movements proliferate. In this chapter, we will analyse the main factors that determine the success of such organisations and their spread around the world. We will observe how mobilisation and recruitment represent the main challenge for these organisations and their leaders. Finally, we will analyse the usefulness that pandering can have in a complex context such as that of a civil war. Such formations often resort to pandering to expand their support and gain power. In these contexts, pandering demonstrates its great effectiveness and danger. With it, violent and logically unpopular armed groups manage to overturn this perception. We will see how pandering is used to deceive the civilian population and conceal the real intentions of the armed groups and those who command them.

Until here we analysed the role of pandering in competitive electoral democracy. In such contexts, leaders of different political parties used pandering to increase their consensus and gain votes. In civil wars instead pandering can be used in a more radical manner

4.1 NIACs and Organised Armed Groups

The Geneva Academy is an institution founded in 2007 by the Law Faculty of the University of Geneva. It provides excellent postgraduate education and specialises in international law studies. In particular, the institution conducts research on armed conflicts and the protection of human rights.⁷⁵

The Academy monitors all situations of violence due to armed conflicts. Worldwide, more than 110 conflicts are currently ongoing. Some of them are very recent while others have been going on for more than 50 years. Only a small proportion of these conflicts can be classified as international armed conflicts (IACs), namely as conflicts that involve two or more countries and their armed forces. A large proportion of ongoing conflicts are non-international armed conflicts (NIACs). In this latter type of conflict, several non-state armed groups clash, and, in some cases, there is also the involvement of foreign countries.

Particularly important for the purposes of this research is the very high number of ongoing NIACs. As mentioned above, these conflicts do not involve two separate equipped with their

⁷⁵ <https://geneva-academy.ch/the-academy/about-us/mission>

own army and military apparatus. A non-intentional (or internal) armed conflict is a violent situation with an armed confrontation conducted between government forces and one or more organised armed groups occurring within a state (Lawand, 2012).⁷⁶

Considering all types of conflicts, the most affected regions are the Middle East and Africa with more than 80 clashes in total. Most conflicts involve NIACs. In Asia there are 19 NIACs and 2 IACs. In Latin America, 6 NIACs. Europe constitutes a special case because of the 7 ongoing armed conflicts, most concern military occupations. This category includes the Russian occupation of Transnistria in Moldova and the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Also, the takeover by Armenia of Nagorno Karabakh, which is part of Azerbaijan, belongs to this category. In addition to these conflict situations, it must be added the well-known ongoing IAC between Ukraine and Russia.⁷⁷

The number of ongoing conflicts provides a picture of the violent situation in many parts of the world and highlights the relevance of rebel groups in such contexts.

The International Committee of the Red Cross defines an “organised armed group” as the armed wing of a non-state party involved in a NIAC. They may include dissident armed forces (e.g., a fringe group in the regular national army) or consist of civilians recruited among the population. These group can conduct military actions on behalf of a party into the conflict. The term “organised armed group” refers exclusively to non-state military formations engaged in a non-international conflict. The term does not apply to civilians who support a rebel group but who do not take part in military actions and whose support is limited to the political area.⁷⁸ The different groups may also conflict with each other.

The Geneva Conventions in Additional Protocol II of 1977, Article 1.1, specifies that to be considered parties in a conflict, these groups must meet certain requirements. They must be under the control of a commander, they must exercise control over part of the territory, and they must be capable of conducting sustained military action and of enforcing Geneva Conventions.⁷⁹ The previous definition emphasises the necessary presence of a leader who assumes command and guidance of the armed group and can gather enough supporters. This will be discussed in more detail later.

The spread of organised armed groups has become a dominant feature of many civil wars around the world. Between 1946 and 2013, only half of the civil wars featured the presence of a single organized armed group. The remaining half features two or more organized armed

⁷⁶ <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/interview/2012/12-10-niac-non-international-armed-conflict.htm>

⁷⁷ <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>

⁷⁸ https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/armed-groups

⁷⁹ <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/apii-1977>

groups (Walter, Phillips, 2019)⁸⁰. However, the high number does not result from the fragmentation of different groups, in fact between 1946 and 2013 only 12% were formed by splitting (Walter, Phillips, 2019)⁸¹. Factors that determine the proliferation of different armed groups in a civil war are the presence of a very large population of discontent citizens, the existence of many identity groups, and a long period of low military capacity from the central government (Walter, Phillips, 2019)⁸². These features are widespread in regions like Africa and the Middle East, regions where conflicts and organized armed groups proliferates.

4.2 Extent of the Phenomenon

Conflicts between organised armed groups are a widespread phenomenon that poses a considerable danger to the stability of various regions. For more than 40 years, Uppsala University has developed a Conflict Data Program (UCDP) that collects and studies data on organised violence and civil wars.⁸³

Considering only conflicts that do not involve state forces, i.e., between organised armed groups, the UCDP reports 72 ongoing clashes. Data are reported in Chart 1. This number has almost doubled since the early 2000s, marking a significant increase in recorded violence. Most of these clashes take place on the African continent (48), while the Middle East, after a peak around 2014 (coinciding with the Islamic State's maximum expansion in Syria and Iraq) has seen this type of violence gradually decrease. In Americas, 16 conflicts are recorded, another figure that has risen sharply since the beginning of the millennium, while very few cases are reported in Europe, Asia, and Oceania (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, 2022; Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz, 2012)⁸⁴.

⁸⁰ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3477573

⁸¹ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3477573

⁸² https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3477573

⁸³ <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/>

⁸⁴ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#nonstate>

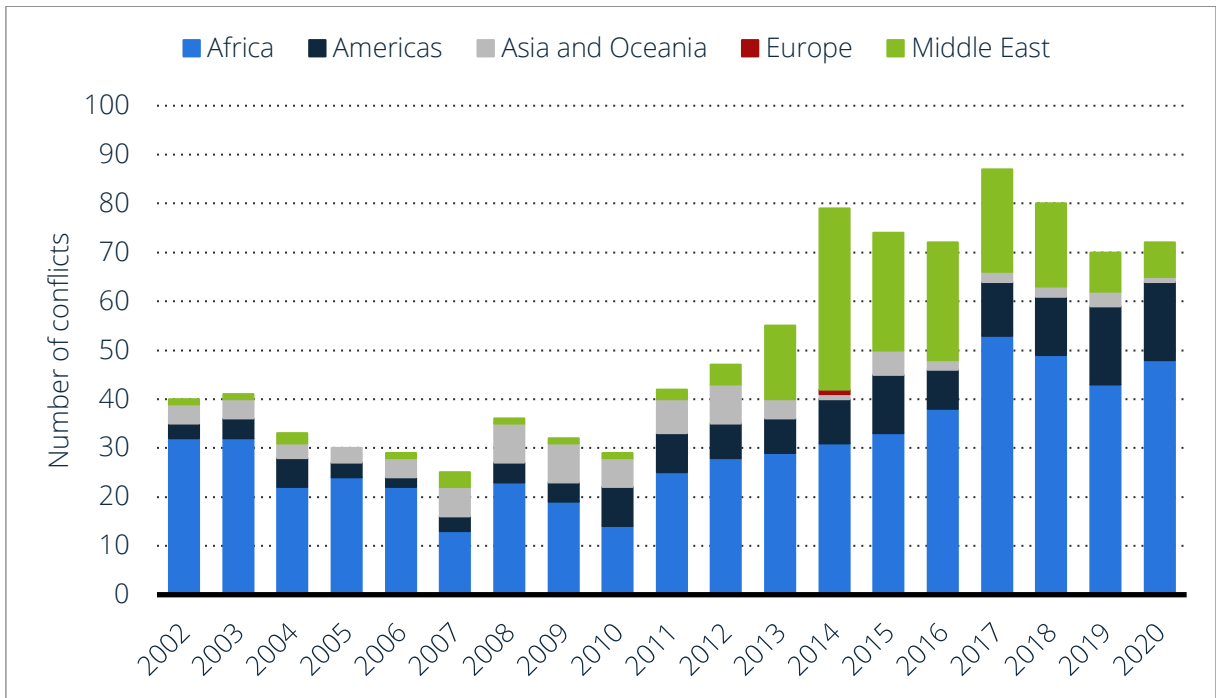


Chart 1 - Number of non-state conflicts worldwide from 2002 to 2020, by region.⁸⁵

Africa is the continent most affected by these conflicts. It also has a considerable number of casualties caused by clashes between rebel groups and government forces.

In 2021 alone, clashes between the Ethiopian government and the armed group TPLF in the Tigray region resulted in more than 8600 deaths. In Somalia, the war between government forces and al-Shabaab rebels caused more than 2000 deaths. Clashes between Islamic State forces and Nigeria's regular army resulted in more than 1500 deaths. Many hundreds more deaths were reported from similar conflicts in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Mali, and many other states (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, 2022)⁸⁶.

⁸⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/298157/number-of-non-state-conflicts-worldwide-by-region/>

⁸⁶ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#battlerelated>

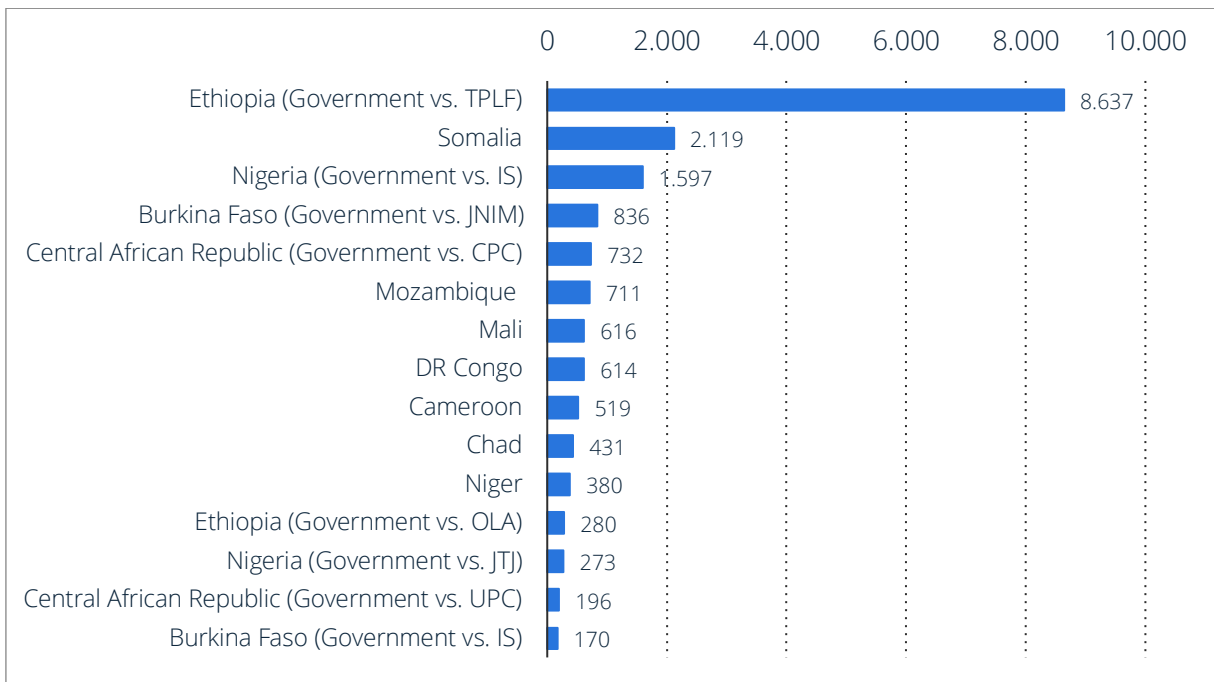


Chart 2 - Fatalities in the principal state-based conflicts in Africa in 2021, by country (if a government is fighting against several groups, the casualties for each conflict are specified).⁸⁷

Many more hundreds of deaths were recorded during 2021 in clashes involving only organised armed groups. The worst affected countries are Sudan with more than 400 deaths, Nigeria with almost 300 and Mali with more than 200 deaths, but the phenomenon is sadly widespread across much of the continent. Statistics are reported in Chart 2 and 3 (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, 2022; Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz, 2012)⁸⁸.

The beginning of 2023 shows no signs of improvement for the African context. In Sudan at the beginning of April, 185 dead and more than 1800 people injured were reported in the violent clashes in the capital Khartoum and other cities in the country in just three days. Again, the conflict involved Sudanese government troops and the organised armed group Rapid Support Forces (Al Jazeera, 2023)⁸⁹.

As already mentioned, the situation in the Middle East has improved in recent years, however, the ongoing harsh conflict in Yemen between the government and the Forces of Hadi has resulted in more than 20000 deaths in 2021. Significantly more than all other conflicts in the area, which have nevertheless resulted in hundreds of deaths both in clashes between armed groups and in those involving government troops (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg, 2022; Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz, 2012)^{90 91}.

⁸⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/298013/fatalities-in-state-based-conflicts-in-africa/>

⁸⁸ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#nonstate>

⁸⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/18/mapping-the-heavy-fighting-in-sudan>

⁹⁰ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#battlerelated>

⁹¹ <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#nonstate>

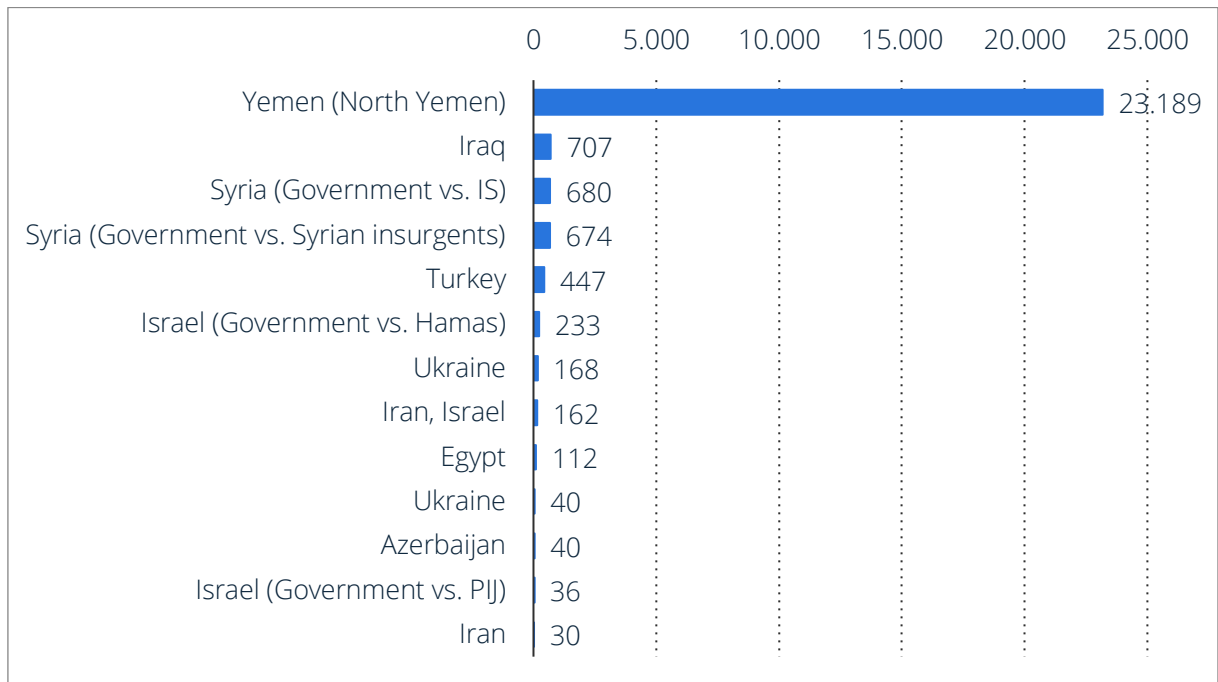


Chart 3 - Fatalities in the principal state-based conflicts in Europe and the Middle East in 2021, by country (if a government is fighting against several groups, the casualties for each conflict are specified).⁹²

The data suggest the existence of a widespread and expanding phenomenon. Of particular interest, however, is the ability of the groups participating in these clashes to constitute a military force capable of sustaining hostilities for so long. That is, the ability of their leaders to persuade numerous individuals to espouse their cause. In this regard, we will observe how pandering constitutes an extremely useful means in the process of recruiting and strengthening organised armed groups.

4.3 Recruitment in Organised Armed Groups

The current extent of the phenomenon of conflicts involving armed groups and their continuation over time raises some questions. One wonders how these paramilitary formations manage to constitute a serious threat to the stability of certain states. To constitute such a threat, groups must have a sufficiently large military force to prolong a conflict. For this reason, one of the key elements in the formation, development, resilience, and success of an organised armed group is the recruitment process.

⁹² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/298129/fatalities-in-state-based-conflicts-in-europe-and-the-middle-east/>

One of the factors often mentioned in the literature as being decisive in enabling a more effective recruitment process by rebel groups is the presence of natural resources in the country. Diamonds, gold, or other precious resources give a greater economic availability to fighters. Economic wealth allows an organised armed group to maintain constant supplies of weapons and ammunition. Possession of deposits allows the establishment of links with foreign countries that can provide support. Finally, as mentioned, the availability of natural wealth provides economic prospects that can attract and retain new recruits. For these reasons, the presence of certain resources is often linked to a greater likelihood of civil war breaking out and a longer duration of it (Elbadawi, Sambanis, 2000; Collier, Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon, 2004).

Although natural resources are overall a useful source of support for organised armed groups, they also have their limitations. On the one hand, short-term economic rewards for fighters make it possible to quickly build up a military force of adequate size. However, fighters attracted by these economic prospects will not constitute a reliable force and their loyalty to the leader will not be guaranteed. This is why relying solely on economic rewards for fighters is a risky strategy for the leader of an armed group. Instead, building a politically motivated force through realistic promises is a more difficult process but one that guarantees more loyal followers (Weinstein, 2005).

A key element for the success of a recruitment strategy based on monetary compensation is the cost of buying out new recruits. The stronger an organisation is and thus demonstrates a greater chance of winning, the more willing a citizen will be to join them. In this case, less compensation will be required. In the case of a fledgling group, the cost is considerably higher. An armed group with few affiliates has little chance of success so a new recruit weighs the possibility of joining them much riskier. Consequently, more money will be needed for compensation (Weinstein, 2006).

A further alternative for armed groups to gather new recruits and secure the support of the population is the use of violence. Brutality is a viable alternative as it is significantly persuasive and provides a clear signal of the cost of defection (Kalyvas, 2000). In addition, in situations of great difficulty for a rebel group, forced recruitment allows a sufficient armed force to be reconstituted quickly to continue the fighting (Eck, 2014).

Forced recruitment through violence (coercion) is a phenomenon that is well established on the African continent. One third of the organised armed groups in the area employ coercion to recruit new fighters (Beber, Blattman, 2013).

Although coercion is useful in some phases of a conflict, organised armed groups tend to use it to a limited extent. Especially in the case of long-lasting conflicts, violence to promote recruitment tends to be abandoned. This strategy is sub-optimal overall as it produces recruits

who are poorly motivated and poorly committed to the group. In addition, such recruits often tend to take advantage of moments of greatest confusion during the conflict to desert, thus drastically reducing the group's military effectiveness. This strategy is also risky because it may lead to alienating the sympathies of civilians. The latter would then be inclined to collaborate with government forces, further reducing the rebel group's chances of success (Eck, 2014). One of the main limitations of the recruitment strategies used and seen so far is the motivational aspect. In the case of economic rewards, recruits join the group and follow the leader out of opportunism. In the situation of coercion, on the other hand, fighters join the group because of threats. In both these situations, the leader faces a usually better trained and armed government army relying on poorly motivated and reliable fighters. Hence, the need emerges for an organised armed group to be able to establish an armed force with individuals actively committed to the cause and determined to fight. For these reasons, it is possible to relate the situation of the leader of an armed group to a principal-agent problem. These leaders need to mobilise adequate forces to pursue their own goals or those of their group and to select recruits to attract the best motivated (Thaler, 2022).

4.4 Agency Problem in Organised Armed Groups

Recruitment and retention are fundamental requirements for any type of organisation whether it is a company, a trade union or, as in our case, an armed rebel group. To continue to operate and pursue their goals, such groups constantly need new employees, associates or indeed fighters. A key step is therefore to persuade individuals to join the group and commit themselves to its interests. For an organised armed group, maintaining sufficient armed forces is an essential challenge. If the leader of such a group is unable to attract, retain and motivate his men, he is bound to face fatal consequences (Gates, Nordås, 2010).

As already mentioned, this series of elements lead to the situation of the rebel group being traced back to that of a company and the consequent problem of agency.

The rebel leaders (“principal”) leaders must be able to recruit fighters (“agents”) who will carry out their orders and whom they can rely on (Thaler, 2022).

Despite the similarities, however, some distinctions must be pointed out. Unlike a company, the activities in which armed groups operate involve life or death. A recruit who joins a rebel group knows that he runs the risk of being killed, so his motivation cannot be completely traced back to pecuniary rewards. Compensation which, as we have already seen, does not allow for the establishment of an effective and reliable armed force. In addition, these groups represent

extra-legal and extra-state organisations. The contracts concluded between principals and agents (leaders and soldiers) are not guaranteed by the state, which on the contrary often represents the group's main enemy. Instead, the contract is guaranteed against brutal punishment of insubordinates or deserters. For these reasons, the leader-soldier relationship is not entirely comparable to the transitions that take place in the labour market (Gates, Nordås, 2010).

Despite the differences and limitations in the application of agency theory to the context of an armed group, it nevertheless remains a useful tool for understanding its functioning. One of the elements best described by this theory and most problematic for an armed rebel force is the lack of a strong motivation to fight for the group and the lack of loyalty to the leader. These elements are very similar to the agent-leader dynamic.

To overcome ineffective recruitment systems and succeed in building an adequate armed force, organised armed groups resort to ideology. An ideology is defined as a set of systematic ideas that identify a group of people, the goals pursued on that group's behalf and a (maybe only broadly defined) program of action (Sanín, Wood, 2014). This allows armed groups to gain numerous advantages. Firstly, it solves the problem of the heterogeneity of fighters and their lack of motivation by allowing the creation of a cohesive force towards a common goal. The reference of a group to a certain ideology also allows fighters to be selected according to their adherence to certain values. Individuals who are actively convinced in the cause and thus demonstrate greater reliability and combativeness will tend to join the group. This selection therefore also solves the principal-agent problem, as the leader can rely on loyal and non-opportunistic recruits. An ideology then clarifies the group's objectives, which allows for easier socialisation with civilians who can understand its intentions and sympathise if necessary. The recognition of a certain ideology in the programme of a rebel group may also arouse the sympathy of external actors such as foreign states that may provide support of various kinds to the organisation (Sanín, Wood, 2014).

The use of ideology and a value system seems to be able to solve the problems of recruitment for an organised armed group, however, the reality does not totally correspond to this.

4.5 Leaders of Rebel Groups

One of the main issues concerning the ideology and goals of a rebel group is their goodness. That is, how far the declared ideals and intentions of the group leader correspond to her real preferences. Very often these tend to differ or even to be the opposite (Thaler, 2022).

At this point, it is useful for the purposes of our analysis to dwell on the figure of the leaders of organised armed groups. This will provide a better understanding of the dynamics between the leader of a rebel group and his followers and how pandering proves to be a useful strategy for the group's success.

The biographical characteristics of a head of state have always been considered important in influencing the course of conflicts between states and diplomacy. Similarly, the personal background and experiences of a rebel leader can be studied to understand the conduct of the group they lead. Lived experiences, dispositional traits and personal beliefs determine each choice of leader. These choices consequently have an impact on the organisation of the groups, their origin, objectives, the size of the forces, who finances and supports them, the use they make of violence and in general on the course the conflict might take (Acosta, Huang, Silverman, 2022).

As an example, many groups tend to structure themselves with a political and a military wing. Each of the two then has specialised men. It has been observed that it is the experience of the leader before taking over the leadership of the group that determines this specialisation or otherwise. In the case of a leader with previous military experience, the rebel forces will tend to be specialised in one political wing and one for military operations. Whereas in the case of a leader with a political background, this specialisation will not be there. Clearly these group characteristics will have a strong impact on the course of the conflict and the organisation's chances of success (Doctor, 2021).

Collecting the biographical data of the main leaders of organised armed groups involved in NIACs between 1980 and 2011, some common characteristics emerged. The leaders of rebel movements are beyond well-educated. Over 70 per cent have a higher education degree and even 21 per cent have earned a doctorate or master's degree. Most had a career in the military (16%), or academia (13%) or even politics (10%) before taking the lead (Acosta, Huang, Silverman, 2022; Morris, Staggenborg, 2004). This together with the high level of education confirms that these leaders come from upper-middle class backgrounds. Moreover, 38% have also studied abroad and 60% have spent extended periods abroad for work or other reasons (Acosta, Huang, Silverman, 2022; Morris, Staggenborg, 2004).

A further aspect that characterises the leader of a rebel group is the way he comes to leadership. This aspect is particularly important as it proves to be strongly correlated with whether a group is prepared to open peace negotiations. The change of leadership usually suggests to the state party that there may be a greater likelihood of dialogue. However, this only happens if the leader is chosen through an elective process of the group. In contrast, leaders who establish the group

themselves or who manage to unite several fragmented groups around their figure tend to have little predisposition to initiate peace negotiations (Cunningham, Sawyer, 2019).

The data listed shows that the typical leader of an armed group is a middle-aged male, married with children, well-educated and with experience abroad. Overall, this is a profile not dissimilar to that of any other leader of an organisation, be it a company or a political party. This suggests that leadership requires skills, experience and credibility derived from social status, education, and previous experience. Clearly, the figure of a rebel leader should not be completely superimposed on that of any other politician. The use of violence and terror is a tool widely used by leaders of armed movements, especially those with a military background (Acosta, Huang, Silverman, 2022).

The similarities with any political leader suggest that even the leader of a rebel movement might use tools to pander to his followers. Even more than a candidate eager to gain votes, the leader of an armed group must be able to gain support not only to obtain power but also to ensure his own security by averting betrayals and defections. This also highlights the difference in the use of pandering between a political candidate and the leader of a rebel movement. As described by Campos and Giovannoni (2006), a simple candidate exploits information asymmetry by concealing his or her real preferences and pandering to popular demands. In this way he obtains votes and consequently can win an electoral competition. The leader of a rebel movement, on the other hand, does not need votes but an armed force capable of subverting a democratic order. To establish it, as we shall see, he therefore resorts to pandering by promising reforms in favour of the people (Thaler, 2022).

4.6 Use of Pandering for Rebel Mobilisation

Having fully understood how the figure of the leader of an organised armed group is not very dissimilar to that of any other political leader, we can analyse how pandering is a useful tool for them as well.

In the early stages of the development of an armed rebel movement, a leader may rely on a few followers who are nevertheless strongly attached to him and motivated by a common cause (Lewis, 2016). The moment the armed group is confronted by government forces, however, the difficulties increase. Sufficient recruits are therefore needed to sustain a conflict of considerable magnitude.

This initial phase is particularly delicate for the emerging organisation. If, in the first confrontation with government troops, the disparity in strength is too great, the armed group

could be annihilated immediately. In addition, even if it survives, if the rebel armed force proves to be in serious difficulty in the initial confrontation, it will encounter increasing difficulties. It will be perceived by civilians as weak and new recruits are unlikely to join it as the risk is too high (McCormick, Giordano, 2007).

Pandering can be a winning tool for a rebel leader because it allows him to create a large, motivated, and loyal armed force. By espousing the demands of the population, a leader of an armed group solves the problem of agency inherent in recruitment. His new followers will fight for the group because they are motivated to protect their own interests. In this way, the troops will also be more motivated and more loyal as they are not forced to fight by coercion and not incentivised only by economic factors (Thaler, 2022).

Equally important is the role of the state. It must be able to take care of and satisfy its citizens. A government that neglects a section of the population or behaves unjustly provides useful terrain for the rebels. A leader who succeeds in intercepting civil discontent will be facilitated in increasing his own following. A disgruntled population is therefore fertile ground for the pandering of rebel groups (Polo, González, 2020).

Compared to economic compensation, pandering is also a more economically sustainable choice for a leader. Even if the leader of the armed struggle only uses persuasion as a means for personal interests, pandering allows him to enjoy the necessary support more efficiently from a resource-consuming perspective (Brenner, 2017).

Compared to coercion, persuasion is still a less costly solution. The presence of a common enemy can provide sufficient unity for the group to continue the fight. Shared demands and a common reference system catalyse the population towards support of the rebel group at a very low cost (Eck, 2014).

Pandering allows the advantageous position of the armed group to be exploited against civilians. An unarmed population in peacetime can punish its leader through voting and dissent. In a context of civil war, a rebel leader who does not keep his promises is less likely to pay the price. A disgruntled recruit can only resort to desertion, which is still a highly costly choice in terms of risk (Walter, 2009).

The choice to support certain instances also allows an armed group to gain other advantages. The use of pandering reverses the issue of violence and conflict of interest between rebel group and population. Indeed, a rebel force often resorts to brutal methods and tends to antagonise the civilian population who perceive them as an alien and dangerous group. By using persuasive methods instead, civilians are led to believe that the group is working in their interests and end up providing them with aid and support (Thaler, 2022).

Besides improving the perception of the civilian population towards itself, the group can increase international support for it. Foreign countries might in fact sympathise with the group, seeing the official government as the oppressor instead. This would enable the rebel forces to benefit from aid and further strengthen their position in the conflict (Thaler, 2022).

Using pandering, an unpopular organisation such as an armed group can gain legitimacy and sympathy within the country and abroad. In addition to this, as mentioned above, the group can increase its size by attracting more recruits. By reaching a sufficiently large size and gaining enough legitimacy a rebel force can present itself as a veto player within a conflict. One only must think of wars where a multitude of divided groups are involved and in turn fighting. The leader who can attract and channel sufficient support can present himself as a negotiator and greatly increase a favourable outcome of the conflict for him and his followers. In addition, it signals that the group after the negotiations may evolve into an institutional political force (Thaler, 2022).

If the pandering is discovered or in the situation where the recruit realises the real intentions of the leader of the armed group, he is nevertheless forced to stay. Although, as mentioned, violence is not an optimal recruitment system if the group reaches sufficient size and strength, this situation changes. In a group that is strong and cohesive towards its leader there is more control and repression towards internal dissent. The risk of desertion or the manifestation of disagreement could cost the persuaded person his life. For this reason, in many cases, new fighters are inclined to behave as if they agreed with the group even though they have realised that they have been deceived by insincere promises (Manning, 1998).

4.7 Limits of Pandering in Rebel Mobilisation

Up to this point, we have observed the great advantages of using pandering for an armed group. However, the choice of this strategy also presents several limitations as well as issues to be explored.

A first problem concerns communication. Armed groups tend to be born and develop in predominantly rural, poorly literate, and uninformed areas. The regions most affected by this phenomenon are indeed the most backward areas of Africa. While this favours the insurgent leader who may be subject to less critical judgement, it can also be a limitation and a risk. The insurgent leader must be able to clearly and simply communicate his intention to defend the interests of civilians. The latter, however, being poorly educated, struggle to understand ideals or articulate political agendas. Therefore, if communication is not effective enough, the

message does not get through. As a result, the population remains hostile to the group. Therefore, while pandering is more likely to be used towards a less educated and critical population, excessive backwardness could compromise the effective passing of the armed group's message (Thaler, 2022; Larson, Lewis, 2018).

It is difficult for an armed group to achieve full success from pandering even when in competition. In fact, when a group operates in an area where other rebels are active, pandering is much less effective. Indeed, the other armed groups may also be pandering to the civilian population who will then perceive the different forces on the ground as indifferent (Thaler, 2022).

Another risk is the fulfilment of promises made. A leader who is unable to keep his commitment to his militiamen risks losing their support. Particularly in the early stages of an uprising, when the rebel forces are not yet very cohesive, failure to honour commitments made can irreparably harm the development of the group and the success of the leader (Simmons, 2018).

A leader who is found to be insincere causes severe feelings of resentment towards her. This causes a significant increase in defections, fragmentation in the group and the risk of revenge against the leader (Thaler, 2022).

Should the leader then enter peace talks not meeting the expectations of his followers, he risks the rapid loss of the benefits of pandering. The group could quickly demobilise, causing its leader to lose political weight and legitimacy (Oppenheim et al., 2015).

Maintaining consensus among one's own forces and in the civilian population even using pandering is further complicated by some factors.

The moment the government decides to use less repressive methods, the population may be inclined to sympathise less with the rebels. The reduction in the use of violence by government troops also makes that of the armed group less tolerated (Wood, 2010). In this context, it is difficult to maintain consensus among civilians even with pandering.

Pandering can also be risky because it could attract a harmful component into the group. Should the new recruits' demand clash with those of the old members, the group's military strength and cohesion may suffer. The choice of those to be addressed is a delicate aspect that cannot always be controlled by the leader, especially in contexts such as an armed conflict (Thaler, 2022).

Finally, pandering may not be the preferred strategy of a rebel leader for economic reasons. If the group is operating in an area sufficiently rich in resources and with potential recruits with low enough recruitment costs, the strategy changes. In that case, it may be preferred to compensate followers economically for their work. In this situation, pandering is deemed sub-optimal and excessively risky (Weinstein, 2006).

Relying on pandering for recruitment is clearly risky for the leader also because it does not guarantee a truly secure support. In a study that took into consideration the leaders of rebel groups between 1946 and 2010 when there was a change of leadership, only 6.5% occurred due to the natural death of the leader. The majority was replaced through an election (33.1%) denoting the changeability of preferences within the group. In addition, a sizable 12.9% were assassinated while 7.2% surrendered. The remaining percentage were killed in combat or removed under other circumstances (Lutmar, Terris, 2019).

These data show how little real strength a leader is able to acquire with strategies that deceive followers.

4.8 Insincere Rebel Leader and Foreign Support

Pandering although very useful and effective in many contexts is not without its limitations. In addition to its limitations, this strategy is also very dangerous and harmful. As a result, armed groups will be able to continue clashes among themselves and with government forces, counting on the recruits obtained from pandering. This is obviously all to the detriment of the population forced to live in a situation of permanent violence and political and economic uncertainty. The population may in fact be led to support and join armed groups that claim to be working in their interests but are in fact lying. Pandering precisely serves the function of disguising the real preferences of an organised armed group that can thus proclaim itself as defender of the interests of civilians.

A first aspect to consider is that generally the civilian population and rebel groups have different or even openly conflicting interests. A leader of a rebel armed force is interested in understanding the needs of citizens not to be able to help them but to exploit this knowledge. By complying with the promises that civilians want, greater mobilization can be achieved and a consequent reinforcement of the position of the rioters (Shesterinina, 2016).

There are exceptions where a leader of a rebel group might be aligned with the interests of the population. It is the citizens who must try to distinguish between an honest boss and one who is deceiving them. However, the limitations related to the contexts in which these groups develop, illiteracy and lack of information media, make the distinction very difficult (Larson, Lewis, 2018; Sanín, Wood, 2014).

The use of pandering allows a rebel leader acting even out of self-interest to convince citizens to join him. By supporting civilian grievances, the leader of the armed group persuades the population to act and even risking death against their own interests (Thaler, 2022).

As described by Fearon's (1999) model, the leader and followers have preferences that are placed on different points of a one-dimensional space. In the case of a rebel leader with pandering parts of the disgruntled population may sympathise with him proposing the deposition of a government. If the government is disliked by sections of the population, they may be led to believe that the leader's preferences are very close to their own. However, the leader of the armed group is intent on deposing the established government to gain power and enrich himself. As described by Campos and Giovannoni (2006) voters, or in this case armed group recruits, cannot assess ex-ante the leader they choose and end up being deceived.

Besides being interested in enrichment or other personal gain, the leader of a rebel movement might have other goals. He might be connected to foreign countries interested in destabilising another. Again, he might have an interest in improving his image abroad. In both cases, foreign countries play a key role.

We have already discussed throughout the chapter how an organized armed group can bind itself to a foreign country. This may be because rebels control tradable natural resources, or because a nation sympathizes with their cause and their concerns (Elbadawi, Sambanis, 2000; Collier, Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon, 2004; Sanín, Wood, 2014).

Other times the ties between armed groups and states can be less about simple ideals and again pandering proves to be useful in relation to foreign states. Indeed, a rebel leader can present himself positively in the eyes of international public opinion by concealing his real preferences. In this way it increases its consensus and its international legitimacy (Huang, 2016).

In other situations, however, foreign powers may decide to support certain groups because they are acting in their interests. In fact, some rebel groups are financed and helped by countries that are enemies of those in which the conflict is in progress. The interest in these cases is to destabilize the enemy nation by weakening it with a prolonged civil conflict. In this circumstance, pandering is even more useful for hiding this type of operation, allowing rebel leaders to present themselves as protectors of the population's needs. In these circumstances, the armed groups are acting in favour of a foreign power and hiding this is the only way they must be able to collect recruits and help from civilians who would otherwise be convicted only with coercive methods (Thaler, 2022).

The direct intervention of a foreign power in a civil war is an extremely influential element on the outcome of the same. The extent and nature of the aid to one or the other party significantly upsets the balance. They modify the duration, intensity, and outcome of an armed conflict (Lockyer, 2011). For these reasons, the support of a foreign country, although it requires great manipulative skill in order not to be disclosed, is a recurring pattern in NIACs.

In the light of what we have seen, pandering proves to be a useful strategy even in contexts of armed conflict. The information asymmetry between organised armed groups and civilians is exploited, putting the stability of many countries at serious risk. As mentioned, it is also used to consolidate or conceal ties with foreign countries. We have seen the high death toll that clashes between these groups generate in different parts of the world. This is why it becomes crucial for foreign countries or humanitarian organisations to be able to identify an insincere leader so that they can effectively curb the spread of such violence.

CHAPTER 5 - PANDERING: ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In this last chapter, we will review the main incentives for pandering that emerged during the analysis of the different cases. We will then understand why pandering occurs frequently in even very different contexts. We will highlight the benefits and risks for the leader. Finally, we will summarise the negative effects produced by these strategies. We will therefore see how the externalities produced and the benefits limited only to a short time horizon make pandering a sub-optimal strategy.

With reference to the academic literature, we will also try to understand what the solutions and remedies to the inefficiencies that pandering generates in the competitive electoral system might be. To this end, we will review the results of the theoretical models of various authors, also dwelling on empirical cases. The latter will highlight the preferability of honest communication by leaders and show possible practical solutions.

5.1 Why Pandering?

During the analyses carried out on the 3 case studied, we have shown how pandering enables leaders to gain several advantages. They are able to conceal their own real preferences by pandering to those of the population. Often incumbents take advantage of popular support to pursue personal goals concealed by dishonest communication. Through the elimination of those messages that might adversely affect voters, the leader only expresses herself in a way that is popular with his listeners. As a result, listeners will be led to have a positive opinion of the speaker because she expresses in line with their preferences (Gratton, 2014; Morris, 2001). The cases dealt with fully reflected the behaviour just described.

Bush and the government he presided over used pandering to influence public opinion and gain popular approval. The attack on Iraq had the declared aim of deposing Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi leader was described as a financier of international terrorism and thus indirectly also of 9/11. In addition, the Middle Eastern country was accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction, as declared by US Secretary of State Colin Powell. These weapons in the statements of American leaders constituted a threat to world security.⁹³

⁹³ <https://irp.fas.org/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html>

The American public was greatly shocked and angered by the 9/11 attacks. Therefore, attacking a country accused of supporting terrorism was fully in line with the need to please its citizens. Iraq represented the enemy to be defeated for the Americans (Schmitt, Shanker, 2005).⁹⁴

Bush's aggressive foreign policy also pleased the neo-conservative current that was very present among his staff and the electorate. In this way, the president could also secure new electoral support (Brown, 2006; Record, 2008)

In addition, as we have seen, the Bush family has always been strongly linked to the oil companies (Lind, 2003). Iraq possessing large crude oil reserves constituted an interesting market of expansion for American oil corporations. The war unleashed by the president could also have been used to mask the economic interests of American oil companies (Spillius, 2007).⁹⁵

By declaring that he wanted to protect his citizens, President Bush was thus able to attack a country that would later reveal little or no links to terrorism and that possessed no weapons of mass destruction. The pay-off of the pandering strategy was electoral consensus for Bush and profits for American companies close to the president and his associates.

In the case of President Bush and the Iraq war, we observed the use of pandering by a leader already in office and eager to gain support and approval. In this case as described by Huang (2010) the incumbent leader uses pandering to secure popularity.

In the second case we analysed the context changes.

British Prime Minister David Cameron was on the eve of the election. Facing a very close electoral competition, he decided to pander to the Eurosceptic electorate. Although he was against his country leaving the EU, he hid his real preferences. By pandering he won the support of the electorate most critical of Europe. By promising the referendum he gave the impression that he wanted to give the citizens the chance to express themselves on an issue that has always been much debated in the United Kingdom: the so-called Brexit (Dahlgreen, 2015⁹⁶; Kellner, 2016⁹⁷).

As a result of his choice, the outgoing premier managed to get re-elected despite great uncertainty on the eve of the vote. Pandering to the more populist currents of the British electorate thus proved to be a winning strategy (Bakker, Schumacher, Rooduijn, 2021).

Cameron as said was not in favour of Brexit and the referendum was probably not in his plans either. However, an increased risk of losing the election was sufficient incentive to adopt the

⁹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/26/politics/us-officials-retool-slogan-for-terror-war.html>

⁹⁵ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/markets/2815918/Iraq-war-was-about-oil-says-Greenspan.html>

⁹⁶ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2015/05/01/cameron-most-liked>

⁹⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Cameron>

pandering strategy. Following the model described by Gratton (2014), in this circumstance the leader preferred to ignore the optimal policy opting for an inefficient but popular one.

In addition to the use of pandering in competitive electoral systems we also analysed its use in non-international armed conflicts (NIACs).

In the third case, we observed how the strategy of hiding one's real preferences to obtain support is also adopted in contexts of armed conflict (Sanín, Wood, 2014). In these contexts, armed rebel groups comply with the requests of part of the population disgruntled and resentful towards the government. They present themselves as the force capable of overthrowing the institutions in charge by promising reforms to the citizens. The population is therefore led to support them by providing aid and new recruits to these armed groups (Gates, Nordås, 2010).

Using pandering, therefore, the leader of a rebel group obtains greater support and strength (Thaler, 2022). These elements are the key factors that can subsequently allow him to obtain power by winning the conflict (Weinstein, 2005).

The real interest of these paramilitary formations is hidden by pandering. The victory of the rebels is perceived by citizens as a success of their interests (Sanín, Wood, 2014).

The leader of the group speaks in their favour by eliminating unpopular messages as also described in the model of Morris (2001). In particular, the leader of the group hides his desire for personal enrichment. He may also conceal that he is acting on behalf of foreign countries that support him and are hostile to the current government (Thaler, 2022; Lockyer, 2011).

In the last case we have seen how the behaviour of the leader of an organized armed group can in some ways be associated with that of a political candidate. In fact, we have observed how the characteristics of these 2 figures present different similarities (Acosta, Huang, Silverman, 2022). However, we have also highlighted the substantial differences between the contexts in which they operate. Despite this, pandering has proven its effective utility. It is therefore not surprising that this strategy is so successful given the excellent results it allows to obtain in the most different contexts. However initially success can be turned in serious problems.

5.2 Pandering Consequences

As we have just seen, the pandering strategy can prove extremely useful in various situations. However, it leads to a preference for inefficient and sub-optimal policy choices. This generates negative externalities that then affect citizens. The latter should be guided by a true leader who, being better informed, takes responsibility for unpopular but optimal decisions. Instead, this

type of choice is preferred to pandering to popular preferences to obtain more immediate consensus (Ashworth, 2012; Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001).

In the case of US President Bush, he achieved an initial surge in popularity thanks to the strong foreign policy he adopted (Franklin, 2005). As seen, however, the prolonged conflict undermined his leadership.

When it came to light that Iraq did not possess any weapons of mass destruction, the president's position was further questioned (Ferran, 2011)⁹⁸. Hence, doubts arose about the rightness of Bush's choices. Why had the US attacked Iraq if it had no arsenals that could threaten America and was not even closely connected to international terrorism? Given the large Iraqi reserves, had oil lobby interests played a key role in that decision?

Popular doubts and grievances resulted in electoral retribution. In the following election in 2009, the outgoing president was defeated by the Democratic candidate Barack Obama (Augustyn, 2022)⁹⁹. The choice of pandering to the neo-conservative current not only damaged the president but also the entire Republican Party (Jacobson, 2010), which only regained the presidency in 2012.

It was precisely in 2012 that candidate Donald Trump triumphed. The latter's success was repeatedly attributed to his choice to pander to the more populist currents in the electorate. The tendency to pander to these currents is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in the western democratic world (Bakker, Schumacher, Rooduijn, 2021).

An example of the spread of this phenomenon is the case, which we have studied, of Brexit.

The decision to leave the EU was recognised by most economists and experts as a major risk for the UK (Clarke, Newman, 2017; Witte, 2016¹⁰⁰).

However, Cameron and subsequent politicians decided to pander to the Eurosceptics as their numbers grew. Cameron won the election but was immediately forced to resign as he did not expect a favourable referendum result for the exit. He himself was against it (Manganaro, 2020)¹⁰¹.

Successive leaders struggled to complete negotiations to define the new relationship with the European institutions. Finally, Boris Johnson, who had always been a supporter of exit, succeeded in concluding the procedure and gained a certain popularity (Wallenfeldt, 2023a).¹⁰²

However, the economic crisis generated by the pandemic accelerated the arrival of the first problems.

⁹⁸ <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/iraqi-defector-al-janabi-codenamed-curveball-admits-wmd/story?id=12922213>

⁹⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Iraq-War>

¹⁰⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/9-out-of-10-experts-agree-britain-doesnt-trust-the-experts-on-brexit/2016/06/21/2ccc134a-34a6-11e6-ab9d-1da2b0f24f93_story.html

¹⁰¹ https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/brexit-chi-come-quando-tutta-storia-grande-divorzio-ACI09dEB?refresh_ce

¹⁰² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Johnson>

We have seen how the British economy is still struggling to recover from the effects of Covid. The disproportionate increase in bureaucracy has also significantly damaged trade. The effects on immigration that were one of the key points of the pro-Brexit complaints are marginal (Portes, 2022).

The combination of these consequences finally generated a serious political crisis with no less than 5 different governments succeeding each other between 2019 and 2022.

Brexit case underlines how pandering can also have positive effects in terms of consensus. However, not choosing optimal policies generates repercussions on the electorate, which then rapidly changes preferences. Therefore, the support gained by pandering is quickly dissipated. (Gratton, 2014).

The instability of the leadership opting for pandering can also be seen in the third case of analysis. Indeed, the leaders of armed groups manage to strengthen their group by concealing their preferences (Thaler, 2022). However, in these contexts, which are already very unstable by nature, pandering does not solve this problem. In fact, we have observed that a multitude of groups can be found in the many ongoing NIACs (Walter, Phillips, 2019)¹⁰³. This can be explained by the spread of pandering strategies. It can be adopted by numerous leaders within a conflict. As a result, all can gather sufficient strength to perpetrate the clashes (Thaler, 2022). However, no one can prevail. A true leader with sincere statements could instead build a more solid and motivated basis, probably managing to win the conflict.

All the cases analysed have led to the observation that pandering generates very unstable leadership (Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001). As an indirect consequence, the choice of non-optimal but popular policies generates damage at a social, economic, and political level. Citizens worsen their condition when the best political choices are not implemented. In the American case, terrorism has not actually been reduced. Brexit has substantially worsened the conditions of many workers. Rebel groups exploit citizens for personal interests.

Economically, the negative effects of pandering are visible in the current situation in the UK. But even the huge expenses for the war in Iraq highlight the inefficiencies produced by this system.

Finally, the political level is damaged because the most competent candidates do not prevail (Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001). The winners are the populist leaders, insincere and with their own interests at odds with those of the citizens (Bakker, Schumacher, Rooduijn, 2021).

This picture outlines a very disheartening situation; however, the literature has tried in more than one work to highlight possible ways out.

¹⁰³ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3477573

5.3 Why Not Pandering

Observing the widespread use and application of the pandering strategy, one wonders whether it is now the best choice for a candidate. From the cases analysed, we have observed that for immediate consensus-building, it is a viable alternative. Regarding the effects produced, we have considered how negative they are and how they harm voters.

The literature has over time tried to show how pandering is not the optimal choice even for a candidate eager to be elected.

Gratton (2014) notes that in an ideal world, the competitive democratic electoral system should ensure that the elected candidate is the one who proposes the best policies. However, pandering undermines this dynamic. A candidate who wishes to be elected might opt for sub-optimal but popular choices (Ashworth, 2012).

Gratton (2014) proposes a model with voting strategies that ensure that the candidate always makes optimal proposals. Furthermore, by implementing signalling strategies it is possible to make voters more informed. Moreover, voters can exercise strategic voting and thus coordinate their action according to the signals they receive. In this way, the candidate will have more incentive to express herself honestly. With a candidate even minimally interested in telling the truth, the only balancing act is to propose the optimal policy (Gratton, 2014).

Laslier and Van der Straeten (2004) are in line with the results Gratton further emphasised that only if voters have enough information, then optimal proposals are made. For the democratic institution to be effective, parties must send out truthful messages. In this way, voters can have a complete picture of the information available and vote consciously. In this case, one speaks of fully informed voters (Laslier, Van der Straeten, 2004).

Even in a situation where the electorate is incompletely informed, candidates must still make the optimal proposal. This is because when candidates send out a signal at least part of the electorate receives it correctly. That is, by comparing two proposals, voters choose the one that is optimal for them. In equilibrium with different messages, voters who receive signal 1 vote for that one while those who receive the signal 0 prefer the latter. This incentivizes leaders to always make optimal proposals (Laslier, Van der Straeten, 2004).

In achieving a balance where candidates always propose optimal choices, however, voters need to be informed. In this way, the information asymmetry between leaders and voters is reduced both on the actual preferences of the candidate and on her competencies (Campos, Giovannoni, 2006).

In the first chapter, we precisely addressed the media's ability to play a critical role by informing voters. Ashworth and Shotts (2010) argue that especially when the incumbent faces a weak opponent, a critical behaviour towards them plays to the advantage of the better candidate. However, we have observed that the best behaviour that the media can adopt is ambiguous. In fact, with tighter electoral competition, the optimal strategy for the media is to behave like a yes-man. By doing so, they ensure that even if a candidate makes unpopular proposals, he receives the same public opinion as one who adopts pandering (Ashworth, Shotts, 2010).

Therefore, in the presence of media that can sufficiently inform citizens, the best strategy for the incumbent is true leadership. This is because voters will be able to objectively evaluate the candidate's proposals and choices.

Canes-Wrone, Herron and Shotts (2001) argue that in the presence of a weak opponent and with voters able to recognize who is acting in their interest, true leadership is again the winning strategy. In support of this, they cite the case of the American president Abraham Lincoln.

In 1864 the Republican National Committee exerted pressure on the president to grant a truce to the Confederacy. The civil war that broke out following the abolition of slavery had lasted for the past 3 years and Lincoln's electorate was pressing for an end to hostilities. However, a truce would have required the president to make concessions on the slavery issue to the southern states. Despite this, Lincoln was convinced that victory in the war would come shortly and that questioning the abolition of slavery would further weaken the morale of his troops, including several African American contingents. The president therefore exercised true leadership by ignoring popular preferences. He opted for the most unpopular choice but which he knew was in the greatest interest of the citizens. As a result, the United States prevailed over the seceding southern states in 1865, ending the conflict (Canes-Wrone, Herron, Shotts, 2001).

Lincoln's case shows that to evaluate the best proposals made by different candidates it is necessary to be able to observe the output they produce. Especially in the circumstance in which it is impossible for voters to have ex-ante information.

Prat (2005) argues that an agent concerned that his action is observed and judged ends up acting in a conformist manner. In other words, a leader who fears that the result of her actions will be negatively evaluated opts for pandering. She therefore chooses to do what citizens expect and therefore prefer. This generates inefficiencies as an agent should act to maximize output even going against the conformist action. As a remedy several countries have implemented systems which grant some degree of secrecy to the government. An example is Sweden, one of the countries with the oldest and most consolidated tradition of free information. Here too, however, the right of citizens to know a public decision is not recognized until it is

implemented. This choice follows the logic according to which transparency in decisions should reflect transparency in the consequences produced (Prat, 2005).

Through this system, citizens can objectively evaluate a political proposal based on the effects it produces. Therefore, the problem of ex-ante uninformed voters is eliminated and consequently the incentives for pandering are reduced.

A further alternative to the secrecy system to reduce pandering incentives is proposed by Alesina and Tabellini (2007). We have already observed in chapter one how the ideal division between those who choose policies and those who implement them can lead to greater efficiency. Since a politician is primarily incentivised to get votes, she will be inclined to make optimal choices. She thus expects to obtain the best outputs. These effects are produced because policies are implemented by bureaucrats. They have monetary incentives and career concerns that lead them to seek maximum efficiency by maximising output. The pursuit of maximising output provides incentives for bureaucrats to acquire more and more technical skills. Consequently, as is often the case, highly technically competent bureaucrats must be asked to perform monetary policy and, in general, public expenditure management tasks (Alesina, Tabellini, 2007). This delegation of tasks helps prevent pandering by blocking what Maskin and Tirole (2019) describe as pork-barrel strategies.

As seen above, pork-barrel politics occurs when a leader tries to adopt spending policies favourable to a certain group of voters. Consequently, these voters will be incentivised to vote for her.

To curb this form of pandering, several American states and even the European Union have adopted spending caps. This limit partially solves the problem. On the one hand, it reduces arbitrary spending policies, but on the other hand, it provides an incentive for leaders to move spending outside the budget. As a result, total spending increases (Maskin, Tirole, 2019).

Maskin and Tirole (2019) point out that it might be an optimal choice to lower spending ceilings in the proximity of elections to limit pandering attempts.

Generally, a transparent public finance management system and Stability Pacts such as those in force in the EU also severely limit such pandering (Maskin, Tirole, 2019).

The contribution of the theoretical models proposed by the various authors combined with the virtuous examples offered outline how the optimal strategy for a candidate is almost never pandering.

If one considers the cases we have analysed, the serious negative effects and inefficiencies generated by these strategies are then evident.

Pandering within a narrow time horizon undoubtedly offers advantages of a certain level. It can enable a leader to win elections, increase consensus and, in general, the support she can enjoy.

However, a closer look at the dynamics involved reveals that it is not an optimal strategy. This is both from the point of view of the incumbent who applies it, but also from that of the electorate. The latter, as we have amply seen, are the most affected by opportunistic political choices.

Pandering is not only a sub-optimal strategic choice but also causes economic and social damage as well as a deterioration of the democratic system.

CONCLUSIONS

In a society increasingly oriented towards immediacy, pandering may find increasing application and popularity (Kelsey, 2015). In the short term, it generally produces an increase in support for the leader.

In this paper, we have tried to highlight how both academic literature and concrete reality have shown all the limitations of these strategies.

They create unstable political leaderships. In addition, they make leaders to prefer sub-optimal policies simply because they are popular among citizens. This system causes serious damage to society and degenerates the democratic system (Ashworth, 2012).

Ideally, electoral competition should reward candidates who are best prepared and who make the best possible decisions for citizens (Gratton, 2014).

In this work, we have tried to understand the mechanisms of pandering phenomenon and observed how it recurs in many different contexts and situations. We have extensively emphasised the negative effects it generates and finally provided some suggestions for remedying it.

As seen, a key role should be played by institutions through appropriate regulation. Political leaders themselves should prefer choices that may be unpopular but meet the real needs of a community. Finally, the media should also behave appropriately by objectively informing citizens and creating the conditions for an effective development of the democratic system.

Recent events, like Brexit case and the current British economic situation, have shown all the risks of pandering to popular trends at any cost. However, only time will show us which direction the political debate will take and which leaders the future will hold.

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