

Personality and Brexit: Using leadership traits to predict negotiation dynamics

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Introduction

Britain's vote to leave the European Union shocked political elites. A referendum called to satisfy internal Conservative Party tensions triggered an unexpected spasm of activity from less educated, less engaged voters, and delivered the unexpected result that Britain should leave the European Union (Jensen and Snaith 2016, Goodwin and Heath 2016). After a short leadership contest, arguments at the Supreme Court and a string of parliamentary debates, the task of negotiating "Brexit" fell to new Prime Minister Theresa May and her Secretary of State for Exiting the EU David Davis. On the other side sat German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in fact if not in theory the key political leader within the EU, and the European Commission's chosen chief negotiator, Michel Barnier. With no state having previously voted to leave the EU, it was unclear how exactly the process would work. Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty remarked simply that states had the right to withdraw, and that exit negotiations should conclude within two years of a state giving notice that it planned to leave.

By adopting an innovative application of Margaret Hermann's 'leadership trait analysis' approach (Hermann 1980a), this paper investigates one specific aspect of the Brexit negotiations. It considers how far the particular personal characteristics of the key individuals involved are likely to facilitate a smooth, successful negotiation. The Brexit negotiations are often described by focusing on the individuals taking the lead role in the discussions. This is inevitable given the

prominence of those individuals and their pivotal role in such debates, but little is known of their individual attributes or their personal preoccupations beyond the repeated soundbites so often heard in the run-up to negotiations. The ‘Brexit means Brexit’-type language tells us little about how individuals will interact or deal with difficult opponents.

Having analyzed some 850 unscripted public statements by the four actors identified, we identify their respective personality traits and highlight potential complementarities and conflicts between them. On this basis we reach tentative predictive conclusions about how the negotiation process will play out.

In the process we make two advances. First, we build upon existing research on individual leadership traits as possible influences on foreign policy by adopting a two-sided, interactive framework. Though there is some precedent for such an approach, this is to our knowledge the first time a study using leadership trait analysis has actively considered how the personalities of actors on both sides of foreign policy interaction might relate to each other. Second, we attempt to predict future events rather than simply explaining past developments. There is something of a tendency in the literature on leadership traits to favour *ex post facto* explanations. The problem with such explanations is simple; it is difficult to show that the behaviors associated with particular personality traits actually flowed from them, rather than being retro-fitted with hindsight. Our approach is riskier, but even if our conclusions are ultimately incorrect, our method and results will provide a useful insight into the behavior and attitudes of the key leadership figures in the Brexit negotiations, and their ultimate desires for the Brexit negotiations and process.

The following sections proceed as follows. We begin by discussing our conceptual approach. Employing Fred Greenstein’s (1967) criteria, we argue that the Brexit negotiations offer fertile empirical grounds for the study of personality. Following the path of other academics within the

field of personality analysis, we use the work of Margaret Hermann to analyze personality traits amongst the key decision makers in the Brexit process. We set out how, at an abstract level, different arrangements of personality traits between the four key players in the negotiations might lead either to greater conflict or cooperation over the course of the two-year bargaining period Article 50 stipulates. We go on to explain the particular merits of our two-sided approach, before setting out our method, which makes use of a software system co-designed by Hermann herself. We then present our results, which were striking and, we argue, sufficiently reliable to warrant serious consideration. Finally, we offer some conclusions, and make our tentative predictions clear.

Studying personality and foreign policy

Personal relationships are vitally important in international relations. While the literature in some political fields is dominated by political psychology and a focus on the pivotal relationships which have shaped and framed decision making, in others the focus remains firmly on the structural elements of decision making. In British politics generally, the last decade has seen a greater acceptance of the importance of political agency within decision making, and political psychology has developed within the field to add greater subtlety to the literature.

In this section, we consider firstly whether a personality-based approach is appropriate given our interest in predicting the smoothness of the Brexit process; we argue that it is. We ask, secondly, how specifically personality traits might make the negotiations more or less conflictual. Finally, we present our methodological stance.

A personality approach makes sense

Our goal is to predict, at least in part, how smoothly the negotiating process surrounding Brexit will play out. As with any negotiation, the balance between structure and agency is pushed in favour of the agent, as the individual will inevitably bring their own attributes and prejudices to the table,

shaping the decision making process and the decisions reached. Over the last thirty years, the role of the individual leader in politics has been explored in much greater depth. Greenstein, a leading figure in the study of the personality attributes and flaws of US Presidents, argued that individuals affect political outcomes in conditions of “action dispensability” and “actor dispensability”. In essence, some political circumstances offer more scope for individual influence than others, and in those circumstances different individuals will behave differently. We argue that the Brexit negotiations exhibit both action and actor dispensability. By definition, this is an “environment which admits of restructuring”, the key criterion for action dispensability. There is no precedent for a state leaving the EU and no clear roadmap for either the negotiations themselves or what should follow. Political leaders thus have considerable scope to shape both. They are engaged, furthermore, in an especially demanding political balancing act, in conditions of considerable ambiguity, against a background of heightened emotional tension. These characteristics, according to Greenstein, should make their particular personalities especially significant (Greenstein 1967, 633-641). Influential authors such as Juliet Kaarbo and Stephen Benedict Dyson have utilized and developed the seminal work of Margaret Hermann in their own work on personality analysis. Hermann developed the field of psychological politics, helping to create a framework for analysis of discourse to evaluate the capabilities and assumptions of individual leaders and politicians. Our stance echoes that adopted by Stephen Benedict Dyson in his work on personality and UK foreign policy. Dyson argued that “high-level, nonroutine policy making tasks” offered the most scope for leadership traits to affect policymaking (Dyson 2006, 290). Britain’s Brexit negotiations clearly meet both Dyson’s criteria. They involve officials at the highest levels in both Britain and the rest of the EU, and they are some way from routine.

We recognize that the picture looks more complicated than this. One example would be that we deliberately say nothing about the substance of the issues under consideration, nor the broader politics each participant has to face. The claims we make assume these conditions would pertain

whoever was in power. Our goal is to advance our knowledge at the margins, to identify in Greenstein's terms where 'actor dispensability' is at work. The non-routine nature of the Brexit negotiations arguably reinforces the value of our approach. Winter et al notes that high level diplomacy is often shaped heavily by officials, but also that individuals at the cutting edge can have a decisive role (Winter, et al. 1991). Lacking a clear set of criteria for how to structure these unprecedented negotiations, the officials involved will likely lean more heavily on their ultimate superiors than would be the case in more routine circumstances. There is evidence, after all, that the relationship between the situation in which an individual finds themselves, and their peculiar personality traits, interact with each other. Schechter noted that some personal characteristics might prove effective in one organizational setting and problematic in another (Schechter 1987). Preston and t'Hart meanwhile found, using Hermann's methods, that different leadership traits were associated with different levels of bureaucratic conflict or co-operation. Leaders with high need for control tend to be more actively involved in policymaking, while those with high cognitive complexity are more likely to focus on gathering information and to listen to advisors compared to those with lower levels of complexity (Preston and t'Hart 1999). We are conscious of the scope for iteration in our analysis. Indeed, our arguments rely on it. After all, we seek to predict not the outcome of the negotiations, but the process. It is therefore significant that the individual actors we have identified are likely to determine what the process looks like.

Linking Greenstein and Hermann's work, we argue that personality should prove especially significant when the "ultimate decision unit", the place at the apex of the decision-making system where ultimate authority lies – which Hermann later renamed the "authoritative decision unit" (Hermann 2001, 48), consists of a single individual or a small number of individuals (Hermann, Hermann and Hagan 1987, 309, Hermann and Hermann 1989, 361). Kaarbo (1997) argued that Prime Ministers, though not necessarily the ultimate decision unit given their formal role as 'first among equals' in Cabinet, do shape critically how British governing processes work, and that some

of the ideas applied to Presidents can also apply to Prime Ministers. This seems especially likely to be true of Theresa May's government, given her widely-reported authoritarianism and her personal selection of David Davis as Brexit Secretary. Similarly, at a lower level it seems appropriate to focus our attention on Davis and Barnier as the key actors shaping the negotiating process, and on Merkel as the de facto leader of the EU political response.

How leadership traits might cause conflict

There is extensive evidence from the literature on international negotiations to suggest that individual leaders' personality traits affect the respective likelihood that any given interaction will end in either conflict or co-operation. Suedfeld and Tetlock, for example, found that crises led to conflict more frequently when the leaders involved displayed low levels of "integrative complexity"; the capacity to make nuanced judgements and to identify complex connections among the different characteristics of a situation (Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977). More sophisticated thinkers made for more conciliatory leaders, in other words. Stephen Walker placed empirical flesh on these theoretical bones in his work on Henry Kissinger's behavior during the Vietnam War. Walker noted that Kissinger's position at the apex of the decision-making hierarchy combined with the existence of competing policy camps within the bureaucracy made his personal beliefs especially salient. He noted in particular that Kissinger's philosophical belief in the commensurability of multiple national interests and ideologies facilitated his belief in negotiation at the proper juncture in a conflict (Walker 1977). More recent work has echoed these early findings. Dyson's study of US-UK military co-operation found that personal characteristics affected how willing leaders were to subordinate domestic concerns to strategic calculations (Dyson 2007). Shannon and Keller showed that a leader's propensity to violate international norms varied in line with their leadership traits (Shannon and Keller 2007). Gallagher and Allen found that personality traits affected not only choices but also the internal consistency and over-time coherence of an individual's behavior (Gallagher and Allen 2014).

We base our analysis on Margaret Hermann's "leadership trait analysis" approach because it offers a holistic framework for considering the effect of personality on policymaking. Hermann found that a high need for power, low conceptual complexity, high distrust of others and belief in one's own ability to control events were associated with aggressive behavior, while low need for affiliation, high conceptual complexity, high trust of others and limited belief in one's own ability to control events were associated with more conciliatory behavior (Hermann 1980a, 8). She went on to identify four continuums along which individual behavior could vary depending on leadership traits. Need for power and belief in ability to control events affect how leaders approach constraints. Conceptual complexity and self-confidence affect how leaders interpret contextual information. Task focus affects why leaders pursue office. Ingroup bias and distrust of others affect leaders' orientations towards international politics (Hermann 2002). A range of research findings make good use of these traits and their hypothesized relation to each other. Dyson found that Thatcher's low cognitive complexity led her to a black-and-white view of the world that made compromise difficult and caused her to have low tolerance for dissonant information and arguments (Dyson 2009). Foster and Keller found that leaders low in conceptual complexity "prefer action to deliberation and highly visible diversionary uses of force to alternative policies" (Foster and Keller 2014). Brummer shows that certain personality traits are more associated with foreign policy fiascoes (Brummer 2016).

Recent work has attempted to identify a neuroscientific basis for leadership traits, for example McDermott's work on emotional regulation and aggression (McDermott 2014, see also Hatemi and McDermott 2012). Though we make use of some aspects of this research, we do not adopt the same angle. We are less interested in where leadership traits come from than we are in what they do, and the neuroscientific approach is better at the former sort of explanation than it is at the latter.

Looking at leaders' personality traits should, in other words, allow us to predict how conflictual or cooperative their behavior is likely to be. Given the novelty of the Brexit negotiations, furthermore, we argue that individual behavior should have an outsized impact on events. Lacking clear precedents, officials will be less able to structure discussions between key leaders to minimize personality effects. We hypothesize that, if the personalities of May, Davis, Barnier and Merkel turn out to conflict with each other, the Brexit negotiations will prove difficult and may well fail even if substantial common ground can in fact be found. If these four actors' personalities prove more compatible, the negotiations, while not easy, will at least proceed on schedule, without interruption or significant acrimony.

A two-sided approach

Most of the literature on leadership traits adopts what we call a 'one-sided approach'. It considers the personality attributes of a particular leader and attempts to show how these affected the outcome of a given decision-making process. Given that every diplomatic interaction involves individuals on both sides, we believe this focus is problematic. Given the especially two-sided nature of the question we consider, it looks all the more inadequate. That is not to say that two-sided approaches do not exist; far from it. Winter et al, for example, studied how complementarities between the characters of George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev facilitated co-operation between them. They argued that the two leaders' shared high need for achievement and affiliation, and low need for power, lead them to pursue rational co-operation and inter-dependence. They noted also that a high need for affiliation was associated with less cooperative behavior under conditions of stress or political tension (Winter, et al. 1991). Another two-sided account from Marfleet and Miller found that the clash between the US and France over UNSCR 1441 followed in part from the two leaders' excessive belief in their own ability to control events, despite the fact both preferred most alternative possible outcomes to the actual acrimony (Marfleet and Miller 2005). Schafer and Walker added a comparison of Blair and Clinton's

operational codes, though struggled to distinguish between individual factors and elements derived from shared democratic culture (Schafer and Walker 2006).

More recent work on negotiations adds additional background context for this study. Hall and Yarhi-Milo talked about how leaders' perceptions of other leaders' personalities affect their calculations about credibility (Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012). Holmes described how "mirror neurons" in the brain facilitate trust judgements in the context of face-to-face interactions, making the key point that direct personal interaction really does matter (Holmes 2013). Yarhi-Milo developed a "selective attention" model in which the perceptual biases and organizational practices to which an individual is prone affect the indicators they pick up on in dealing with others, with the result that in some cases more emotionally affecting information gets privileged over alternative, perhaps more reliable, signals (Yarhi-Milo 2013). Holmes and Yarhi-Milo found that empathy is important to successful negotiations, and that it can be signaled both verbally and non-verbally, as well as built up by a skilled mediator (Holmes and Yarhi-Milo 2016). Wong concluded that diplomatic exchanges play a unique role in enabling individuals to exchange non-verbal emotional cues – through "choice of words, tone of speech, and hand and body gestures" (Wong 2016, 145).

Even though most of the literature on personality and foreign policy adopts a one-sided approach, in other words, there is precedent for the two-sided stance that we employ. There is also considerable ground for thinking that the way specific individuals relate to each other in face-to-face settings can have broader implications, especially for the success or failure of international negotiations. We therefore argue that our proposed two-sided approach, looking at both the UK and the EU's key negotiators and political leaders, should enable us to draw conclusions about the likely shape of the process itself.

The results of the Brexit referendum were not expected by many within the academic world and therefore academic research on the causes of the Brexit result and the likely outcome of negotiations is only now beginning to be completed and published. For the purposes of this essay, the vast majority of that literature is not relevant, as it focuses on the causes of the ‘leave’ vote rather than the ramification of that decision and the people having to implement the results of the referendum. Much research is now being focused on the ever changing issues surrounding Brexit, the triggering of Article 50 and the looming negotiations, but little appears to have been published on the individual figures involved in negotiations.

Method

We employed a two-step approach in order to gain maximum insight into the individual personalities involved in the Brexit negotiations, and their capacity to interact smoothly together. The first step involved automated content analysis using the ProfilerPlus software package, while the second step involved a more qualitative, interpretative reading of our actual source texts. ProfilerPlus has been applied effectively in a series of similar studies looking at the effect of leadership traits, including those by Dyson (2006) and Shannon and Keller (2007). ProfilerPlus applies coding rules developed in line with Hermann’s Leadership Trait Analysis approach to identify the extent to which a passage of text taken from statements by a particular actor suggest particular traits on the part of the speaker (Levine and Young 2014).

We undertook a number of preparatory steps necessary to use ProfilerPlus effectively. To begin with, we gathered a corpus of unscripted statements by the four actors of interest. Our sources included press conferences, parliamentary debates, media interviews and public Q&A sessions, for example of the sort Michel Barnier regularly gave following public speeches while serving as EU

Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services. Using unscripted statements is an accepted way of mitigating the risk that the words leaders use might not be their own; the expectation is that even when an actor has pre-prepared answers in front of them to anticipated questions, they will put their response into their own words rather than reading from the page (Hermann 1980a, 14). In addition, they will often face either unexpected questions or those that differ in form from what may have been anticipated. Given Leadership Trait Analysis works on the assumption that the words actors use tell us something about the way they think, this focus on unscripted statements is necessary. Schafer pointed out that public statements constrain actions, so are worth studying for their policy effects even if they are drafted by others and so provide a less effective guide to the actual personality of a leader. Similarly, Schafer observed that while personality traits are immutable, cognitions change over time – so constructed texts might be more useful for measuring cognitive structures (Schafer 2000). Our focus on personality traits rather than cognitive structures thus points us back towards Hermann’s approach. Walker et al. similarly argued that an operational code approach might be more useful than a leadership trait approach in studying two-sided interactions (Walker, Schafer and Young 1998). We have set this argument aside because we are especially interested in the range of characteristics leadership trait analysis encompasses, and in part because we are interested in personality specifically – meaning those aspects of an individual’s approach to policymaking that are immutable rather than those affected by experience and context.

Hermann’s summary of how to use an LTA approach argues that it should be based on at least 50 interview responses of at least 100 words, ideally drawn from across a time period and covering different settings and issues (Hermann 2002). We did not attempt to restrict our corpus-building to sources dealing directly with the issue of Brexit. Though in some cases a more narrow focus is useful, our broad interest in the personality traits exhibited by the actors we are studying meant a wide-angle approach better suited our purposes. For David Davis and Theresa May we focused

on the time period since the UK's vote to leave the European Union in June 2016. Disregarding earlier time periods allows us to eliminate the possibility that the actors of interest adopted different approaches in different organizational and diplomatic situations. Prior to June 2016 David Davis was not a member of the UK government and Theresa May was Home Secretary rather than Prime Minister. Unfortunately it was not possible to adopt a similarly narrow chronological focus when studying Michel Barnier and Angela Merkel. Barnier gave just one press conference between June 2016 and the end of the year, a cut-off point we adopted to manage the potential volume of material involved. To gain sufficient source material we broadened our search to encompass his period as an EU Commissioner between February 2010 and November 2014. We found a reasonable amount of material for Angela Merkel in the period after June 2016, but in order to increase how robust our findings were overall we added some material dating back to 2009.

We divided the resulting corpus files chronologically. Doing so allows us to identify the degree of over-time variation within the text samples analyzed for each actor, an important validity check in itself, but also a necessary prerequisite for gauging the absolute significance of our findings. We then passed each file through ProfilerPlus, gathering the resulting output for each actor and analyzing it first against an international comparator group and second against the other three actors.

There are a number of potential shortcomings with this approach worth noting. To begin with, we were unable to analyze our source materials in the original languages in which they were produced. Though both Angela Merkel and Michel Barnier speak English, both prefer to speak their native tongue when conducting the sort of unscripted exchanges we are interested in. ProfilerPlus only supports Leadership Trait Analysis in English and Spanish, so it was necessary to translate source materials gathered for the two non-UK actors. In some cases that meant using

documents translated at source, for example where the speaker addressed a predominantly English-speaking audience with simultaneous translation provided. In others it meant running the source materials through automated translation software, specifically Google Translate. We used this latter approach for 154 of the 210 unscripted statements made by Angela Merkel. Comparison between texts that were translated at source and those we subjected to automated translation suggests this approach is reasonably valid but not without problems. For some traits – ‘need for power’, ‘self-confidence’, ‘cognitive complexity’ and ‘task orientation’ we found little difference between the two types of text. For others – ‘belief in ability to control events’, ‘ingroup bias’ and ‘distrust of others’ the differences were greater. Margaret Hermann has previously found little difference between using texts in their original language and using those translated by automated translation software (Hermann 2002). This makes sense; while automated translation occasionally mangles syntax, it is generally able to translate individual words accurately. Since the LTA coding approach focuses on individual words over whole sentences, the results for even imperfectly translated text should nevertheless hold up. Given the relatively low size of our sample groups, it is entirely possible that the differences we witnessed were caused by actual variation between Chancellor Merkel’s statements rather than by the translation process.

This latter possibility however points towards a further potential shortcoming of our approach. Rasler et al complained that at-a-distance personality trait scores based on interview data prove insufficiently consistent over time to be considered truly reliable (Rasler, Thompson and Chester 1980). Herman responded that the psychological literature identifies conditions under which personality traits do indeed vary – for example, depending on an individual’s sensitivity to circumstances (Herman 1980b). Winter, Hermmann, Weintraub and Walker later found that a series of distinct ‘at a distance’ methods produced consistent results when applied to the same leaders in similar circumstances (Winter, et al. 1991). The approach does, in other words, have reasonable evidence behind it. But it is not beyond criticism. Ultimately we have to work with the sources

available to us, and that points toward an at-a-distance approach. Using ProfilerPlus at least ensures our analyses are internally consistent and reliable. Because a software program applied a consistent set of rules to each block of text assessed, it is not necessary to compute inter-coder reliability measures.

For Michel Barnier we identified sufficient source materials for an effective analysis without using automated translation, but at the cost of focusing predominantly on his period as European Commissioner between February 2010 and November 2014 rather than, as for the other actors, on the period following the UK's vote to leave the EU. Given Barnier gave just one press conference between June and December 2016, we believe this approach is the only viable route to generating meaningful data about Barnier. It does however negatively affect our confidence in our results. In general, however, we believe our results are reasonably robust.

Results

Automated stage

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 set out in detail the findings from the automated stage of our analysis. The results suggest scope for agreement between David Davis and Michel Barnier. Davis is perhaps too thrusting in his approach to political constraints, given his relatively high scores on the 'belief in ability to control events' and 'need for power' traits, but Barnier's lower scores suggest he will be able to strike more of a balance between challenging and respecting constraints. Both appear relatively open to contextual information and so capable of dealing with nuanced arguments, with Davis more clearly so given his higher relative score on 'cognitive complexity'. Barnier is more focused on problem-solving compared to Davis, but both men are relatively task-orientated compared to the international comparison group. Finally, both believe that international co-operation is possible, with Davis again somewhat more likely to believe in the prospects for

successful deal-making given his very low scores on the ‘in-group bias’ and ‘distrust’ traits. It is worth noting that we have the most confidence in our findings on the ‘motivation for seeking office’ and ‘motivation towards the world’ orientations for Barnier and Davis. Though the data underpinning the other categories do show differences between scores derived for both men and the international comparator group, these are not statistically significant. We should therefore be cautious in treating our findings about how willing these actors are to challenge political constraints and how open they are to contextual information.

Table 1: Leadership trait analysis of individual actors compared to international comparator group and each other (* = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$).

Actor	Trait	Value	SD	Int Comp	Davis	May	Barnier	Merkel
David Davis	Belief	0.415	0.044	Very High	-	Very High	Very High	High
	Power	0.265	0.031	Average	-	Very High	High	High
	Confidence	0.402	0.042	High*	-	Low	Average	Very Low**
	Complexity	0.627	0.057	High	-	Very High**	Very High	Average
	Task	0.710	0.008	Very High***	-	Very High***	Very Low***	Very Low***
	Bias	0.078	0.019	Very Low***	-	Low	Low*	Very Low**
	Distrust	0.072	0.025	Very Low***	-	Low	Average	Very Low
Theresa May	Belief	0.376	0.031	High*	Low	-	Very High	Low
	Power	0.235	0.016	Low***	Low	-	Low	High
	Confidence	0.452	0.053	High***	Very High	-	Very High	Very Low
	Complexity	0.520	0.003	Very Low***	Very Low**	-	Very Low***	Very Low***
	Task	0.611	0.027	Low	Very Low***	-	Very Low***	Very Low**
	Bias	0.113	0.034	Low**	Very High	-	Low	Low
	Distrust	0.077	0.032	Low***	High	-	Very High	Very Low
Michel Barnier	Belief	0.357	0.006	Average	Very low	Low	-	Low
	Power	0.249	0.017	Low	Low	High	-	High
	Confidence	0.393	0.041	High	Average	Very Low	-	Very Low**
	Complexity	0.606	0.011	High*	Low	Very High***	-	Very Low*
	Task	0.748	0.006	Very High***	Very High***	Very High***	-	Very High***
	Bias	0.116	0.009	Low***	High*	High	-	Low
	Distrust	0.072	0.004	Low***	Average	Low	-	Very Low*
Angela Merkel	Belief	0.384	0.037	High*	Low	High	Very High	-
	Power	0.223	0.052	Low	Very Low	Low	Very Low	-
	Confidence	0.505	0.028	Very High***	Very High**	High	Very High**	-
	Complexity	0.629	0.012	High***	Average	Very High***	Very High*	-
	Task	0.656	0.014	High***	Very High***	Very High**	Very Low***	-
	Bias	0.125	0.015	Low***	Very High**	High	Very High	-
	Distrust	0.113	0.031	Low	Very High	Very High	Very High*	-

Nevertheless, on the basis of our findings, which suggest both Davis and Barnier are open to contextual information, more interested in solving problems than in building political capital, and reasonably optimistic about the prospects for international co-operation, we predict a relatively smooth negotiating process to the extent the two men are given the freedom to proceed as they see fit.

Should Prime Minister Theresa May and Chancellor Angela Merkel become more directly involved in negotiations, however, our findings suggest the prospects for a smooth process will decrease. Both are identified as having a tendency to challenge political constraints too directly, which might lead them to pursue goals that are unacceptable for the other side. Though Merkel is relatively open to contextual information – more so than Barnier, in fact, though comparable on this measure to Davis – May is closed, thanks to very low scores on conceptual complexity. Similarly, while Merkel has a more task-orientated approach than May or even Davis, she is less task-focused than Barnier. Again, May’s clear preference for building relationships (which we should interpret in terms of British domestic politics rather than international relations) makes her less likely to focus on doing a deal and more likely to use the negotiations to gain political capital at home. Finally, though both leaders appear more optimistic about the prospects for international cooperation than the comparator group, May is less so than Davis while Merkel is less so than Davis, Barnier or May.

Table 2: Leadership trait analysis translated into components of leadership style.

Actor	Orientation	Int Comp	Davis	May	Barnier	Merkel
David Davis	Approach to constraints	Challenge somewhat too directly	-	More direct	More direct	More direct
	Openness to context	Open	-	More open	More open	More closed
	Motivation for office	Solving problems	-	More problem-oriented	Less problem-oriented	Less problem-oriented
	Motivation towards world	Cooperation is possible	-	More cooperative	More cooperative	More co-operative
Theresa May	Approach to constraints	Challenge too directly	Less direct	-	Too direct	Indirect
	Openness to context	Closed	More closed	-	More closed	More closed
	Motivation for office	Building relationships	Less problem-oriented	-	Less problem oriented	Less problem oriented
	Motivation towards world	Cooperation is possible	Unco-operative	-	More co-operative	More co-operative
Michel Barnier	Approach to constraints	Balance between challenging and respecting constraints	Compromising	Indirect	-	More indirect
	Openness to context	Fairly open	More closed	More open	-	More closed
	Motivation for office	Solving problems	More problem oriented	More problem oriented	-	More problem oriented
	Motivation towards world	Cooperation is possible	Less cooperative	Less co-operative	-	Co-operative
Angela Merkel	Approach to constraints	Challenge too directly	Compromising	Too direct	Too direct	-
	Openness to context	Open	Similar	More open	More open	-
	Motivation for office	Solving problems	More problem oriented	More problem oriented	Less problem oriented	-
	Motivation towards world	Cooperation is possible	Un co-operative	Un co-operative	Un co-operative	-

Again, our confidence in these findings varies according to whether the differences we identified between the actors' trait scores and the international comparator group reached the threshold of statistical significance. For Theresa May, that was the case for all traits except 'task orientation', meaning we are less confident in our finding that the British Prime Minister is likely to put building political capital ahead of doing a deal than we are in our other conclusions about her likely negotiating approach. Similarly, our findings for Angela Merkel fell short of the threshold for statistical significance on the 'need for power' and 'distrust of others' traits. That makes us less confident in our findings that the Chancellor is likely to challenge international constraints too directly (we are more confident in the assertion that she will adopt a direct approach), and that she is likely to believe international cooperation is possible (we are confident in the basic premise but less on how threatening she considers the broader international environment, which has implications for how cautious she is likely to be in approaching negotiations).

Qualitative stage

<results pending>

Conclusion

What we offer here is a necessarily partial analysis. We do not get into the complex structural, material, social and political pressures likely to shape the Brexit negotiations. Nor do we attempt to predict what their outcome might be. Our goal is narrower. We look at the personalities of the key individuals involved in the negotiating process, namely on the UK side Prime Minister Theresa May and Brexit Secretary David Davies, and on the EU side German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Commission negotiator Michel Barnier. We identify their respective leadership traits and, through comparing them to a larger dataset looking at world leaders, identify where they stand

out from the norm. We then assess the prospects for a smooth negotiating process given the complementarities and potential conflicts revealed.

Our key conclusion is simple. To the extent that David Davis and Michel Barnier are left to get on with negotiations amongst themselves, we predict a smooth process. To the extent that Theresa May and Angela Merkel intervene, the process should get much more difficult. Neither outcome necessarily means there will be a successful deal, nor that one will elude the two sides. But the more smoothly the process runs – the fewer public arguments there are, the fewer interruptions and delays, and the more general goodwill – the more likely it seems that a deal will emerge within the tight timetable set.

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