

Rethinking Democracy 110: When the Country Loses but the Ruler Wins: The Rationality of Policy Under Temporary Authoritarianism

By

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Abstract

Many policies associated with temporary authoritarianism appear difficult to understand when evaluated through the assumptions of normal liberal democracy. This does not necessarily mean that democratic thinkers lack information or political understanding. It may instead indicate that a structural change in the political environment that has taken place since 2016 BREXIT and USEXIT has created a gap between the rationality assumed by normal democracy and the rationality operating within temporary authoritarianism, which reflects structural political change and that their rationality differs. In fact, they operate under inverse rationality as the welfare maximizing target has changed. Recognizing this distinction may help explain why some apparently irrational policies can remain rational from the perspective of those who adopt them. Therefore, apparently irrational policies to normal liberal democracy actors may be rational to the ruler/movement. For example addressing tariff based trade wars initiated by temporary authoritarianism under temporary authoritarianism paradigm shift knowledge gaps creates economic rationality knowledge gap, and proper response gaps, which may lead normal liberal democracies to employ to tit for tat responses which are normal when normal liberal democracies compete with normal liberal democracies; however, when facing temporary authoritarianism policy threats then Traditional democratic responses should be of the form no tit-for-tat as if they are of the form tit for tat then they , playing under the temporary authoritarianism playbook instead of acting in inverse opposite ways as the expected harm from temporary authoritarianism policies. The tit for tat tariff policies implemented by liberal democracies against temporary authoritarianism policy such as in the European Union and Canada highlights the knowledge gaps indicated above, directly or indirectly. And this is because in liberal democracies if the majority loses the government loses, but in temporary authoritarianism even when the true majority or the country loses it is a win if the temporary authoritarianism leader or movement wins. So a policy response to temporary authoritarianism's policy should be the inverse opposite but it has not been. In other words, the country can lose, the true majority can lose, and yet the policy can still be rational—if the political system is maximizing the welfare of the ruler or ruling minority rather than the welfare of the country or true majority as it is the case under temporary authoritarianism. And understanding that means understanding the proper policy response. And this makes the following topic interesting: When the Country Loses but the Ruler Wins: The Rationality of Policy Under Temporary Authoritarianism. Among the goals of this paper is to show that if looked from the point of view of inverse policy rationality that temporary

authoritarianism flourishes even when the country or the true majority loses as it is maximizing the welfare of the leader or the true minority, not the welfare of the true majority or country.

Relevant concepts and merging tools and merging force

a) Concepts

- 1) Normal liberal democracy**, *the one where the majorities view wins the democratic contest.*
- 2) Normal democratic outcome**, *the one that reflects the best interest of the true majority and loyalty to the country.*
- 3) Normal democratic chaos**, *the random chaos that takes place under competition for power between deferent normal democratic outcomes.*
- 4) Extreme liberal democracy**, *the one where the minorities view wins the democratic contest.*
- 5) Extreme democratic outcome**, *the one that reflects the best interest of the true minority and loyalty to the extreme movement's leader.*
- 6) Targeted chaos**, *the type of chaos aimed at inducing true majority complacency during competition for power between normal democratic outcomes and extreme democratic outcomes.*
- 7) Effective targeted chaos**, *the one that leads to full true majority complacency so the true minority view wins the democratic contest.*
- 8) No effective targeted chaos**, *the one that does not lead to full true majority complacency so the true majority view wins the democratic contest.*
- 9) Normal populism**, *when the majority view wins the democratic contest, the common good is the target.*
- 10) Populism with a mask**, *when the minority view wins the democratic contest, the private good is the target.*
- 11) Democratic normalism**, *the tendency of normal democratic outcomes to move towards more stable or balance democratic conditions through time as they seek responsible majority rule.*
- 12) Democratic extremism**, *the tendency of extreme democratic outcomes to move towards more unstable or unequal democratic conditions as they flourish under irresponsible minority rule.*

The concepts above are consistent with my ideas on democratic thinking and voting complacency theory such as the ones shared in article Sustainability Thoughts 132 (Muñoz 2021).

b) Merging tools

$$AA = A$$

$$Aa = Aa$$

$$BB = B$$

$$Bb = Bb$$

$$aa = a$$

$$bb = b$$

$$ab = ab$$

$$(AA)(BB) = AB$$

$$(AA)(Bb) = A(Bb)$$

$$(Aa)(BB) = (Aa)B$$

$$(Aa)(Bb) = (AB)(ab)$$

c) Merging forces

i) If the force A is present, then

$$A(Ab) = A \text{ as } Ab \rightarrow A \text{ since then } A(Ab) = AA = A$$

so A wins/

ii) If the force B is present, then

$$B(Ab) = B \text{ as } Ab \rightarrow B \text{ since then } B(Ab) = BB = B$$

So B wins

iii) If the force A is present, then

$$A(aB) = A \text{ as } aB \rightarrow A \text{ since then } A(aB) = AA = A$$

so A wins/

iv) If the force B is present, then

$$B(aB) = B \text{ as } aB \rightarrow B \text{ since then } B(aB) = BB = B$$

So B wins

Merging tools and merging trends above are consistent with the ones used in all articles on Rethinking Democracy such as in Rethinking Democracy 106 (Muñoz 2025).

A view of normal liberal democracies and temporary authoritarianism from outside the box

A) The 2016 paradigm shift from normal liberal democracy to temporary authoritarianism

It has been pointed that in 2016 with BREXIT and 2016 USEXIT there was a shift from normal democratic thinking to extreme democratic thinking (Munoz 2024), where i) competition for power within majority rule based liberal democracies is no longer between different normal democratic outcomes under a fully independent rule of law system and normal democratic chaos, but it is now a competition between normal democratic outcomes and extreme democratic outcomes under an independent rule of law system and effective targeted chaos and non-effective targeted chaos; and ii) where the fully independent rule of law system ratifies only the legal winner, be it normal liberal democracy or temporary authoritarianism, as claims of electoral fraud without actual evidence of fraud are simply dismissed right away by the courts regardless

of their source. Understanding the nature and the competition dynamics in this new liberal world paradigm where democracies are in conflict with temporary authoritarianism internally (the survival of local normal liberal democracy though internal policy means such as in the case of electoral wars) and externally (the survival of global normal liberal democracy though external policy means such as in the case of trade wars) is essential to figure out proper policy responses in the case of internal and external threats to normal liberal democracy as tit for tat works only when dealing with opposing forces that have the same rational way of looking at things, and it may not work when dealing with opponents using inverse rationality. Below the main characteristics of normal liberal democracies and of extreme liberal democracies and the implications of their clashes and proper responses are described in detail, but in simple terms.

B) The link access to power and no effective targeted chaos under normal liberal democracy vrs temporary authoritarianism

The idea that we can simplify access to power in majority rule based normal liberal democratic dynamics under an independent rule of laws system using only the existence of effective targeted chaos (E) or not (e) has been recently shared (Muñoz 2024). The structure of normal liberal democracy (NLD) competing with temporary authoritarianism (TA) for power consistent with the idea above is summarized in Figure 1 below:

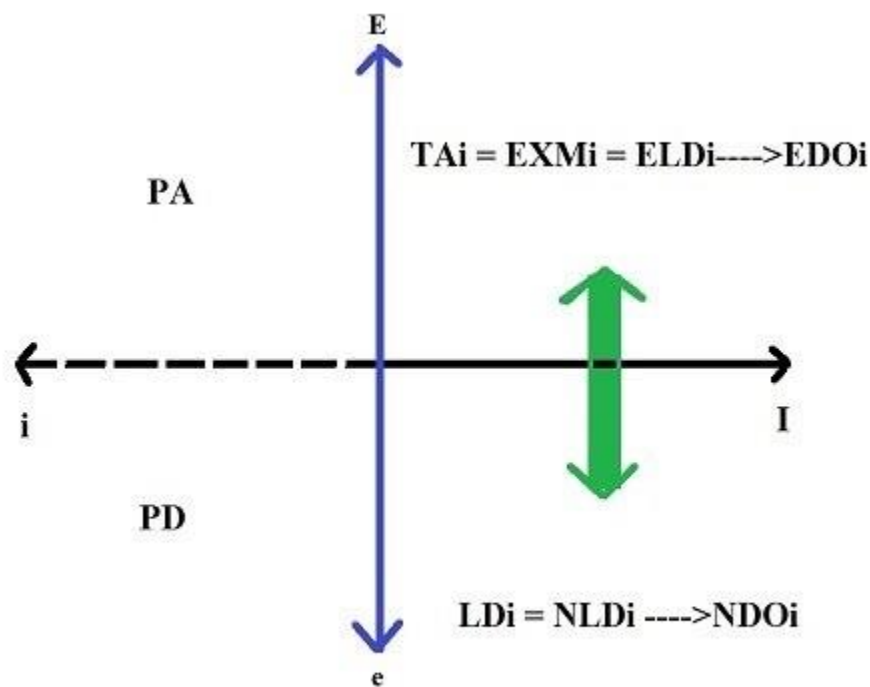


Figure 1 The general liberal democracy landscape after 2016 Brexit and Uxexit

We can appreciate two main aspects based on the information in Table 1 above, in the effective targeted chaos (E) and the fully independent rule of law system (I) quadrant we have temporary authoritarianism (TAi); and in the no effective targeted chaos (e) and the fully independent rule of law system (I) quadrant we have normal liberal democracies (NLDi). If

temporary authoritarianism is in power and runs for re-election against normal liberal democracy and there is no effective targeted chaos (e) it will lose power and flip towards normal liberal democracy (NLD) as it can be appreciated in Figure 1 above. If a normal liberal democracy (NLD) is in power and runs for re-election against temporary authoritarianism (TA) and there is effective targeted chaos (E), then the normal liberal democracy (NLD) loses power and flips toward temporary authoritarianism (TA).

Based on the information in Figure 1 above we can state the structure of normal liberal democracy (NLD) and of temporary authoritarianism (TA) and their competition for power as follows:

1) The structure of normal liberal democracy

$$\text{NLD} = eI$$

The expression above tells us that under a fully independent rule of law system (I) when there is no effective targeted chaos (e) we have a normal liberal democracy.

2) The structure of temporary authoritarianism

$$\text{TA} = \text{ELD} = EI$$

The expression above indicates that under a fully independent rule of law system (I) when there is effective targeted chaos (E) we have a temporary authoritarianism (TA) or an extreme liberal democracy (ELD).

3) The power access competition structure

The dynamics of the competition for power or of the power access competition structure (PACS) between normal liberal democracy (NLD) and temporary authoritarianism (TA) can be summarized as follows:

$$\text{PACS} = (\text{NLD})(\text{TA}) = (eI)(EI) = (eE)(II) = (eE)I$$

Since $II = I$, therefore:

$$\text{PACS} = (eE)I$$

The expression above indicates that access to power depends only on whether there is effective targeted chaos (E) or there is not effective targeted chaos (e).

4) Access to power when there is no effective targeted chaos (e) affecting the voting and vote counting process

$$e[\text{PACS}] = e[(eE)I] = e[(e)I] = (ee)I = eI = \text{NLD wins}$$

since $e(eE) \rightarrow e$ as there is no effective targeted chaos and $ee = e$

Therefore, if there is no effective targeted chaos (e) the normal liberal democracy (NLD) has access to power.

5) Access to power when there is effective targeted chaos (E) affecting the voting and vote counting process

$E[PACS)] = E[(eE)I] = E[(E)I] = (EE)I = EI = TA$ wins

Since $E(eE) \rightarrow E$ as there is effective targeted chaos and $EE = E$

Therefore, if there is effective targeted chaos (E) the extreme liberal democracy (ELD) or temporary authoritarianism (TA) has access to power.

C) The rationality behind government policy under normal liberal democracy (NLD)

As normal liberal democracy reflects the best interest of the country and hence of the true majority, then the theoretical rationality of government policy can be stated as follows:

Government $\rightarrow$ Country's best interest $\rightarrow$ Majority welfare

The goal is to maximize majority welfare

Therefore, a policy that harms the country appears irrational from the traditional rationality point of view because the expected objective is:

Maximize the welfare of the true majority.

From this perspective: **Country loses $\neq$ ruler loses.**

And therefore:

Country wins + ruler losses = rational policy under normal liberal democracies.

And since ruler losses = true minority losses, then:

Country wins + true minority losses = rational policy under normal liberal democracies.

Implications

1) The assumption that governments seek the country's best interest works only under normal liberal democracy based rationality, not under temporary authoritarianism based rationality as when normal liberal rationality wins, temporary authoritarianism based rationality loses; **2)** An inverse welfare maximizing expectation emerges here: Normal liberal democracy governments seek to maximize the true majority welfare, not that of the true minority. Temporary authoritarianism seeks the inverse opposite; and **3)** Conflicts between normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism need to take this inverse expectation into account to identify proper policy responses to effectively counteract threats, otherwise, there will be policy response inconsistency that may affect negatively the welfare of the true majority in normal liberal democracies, negative impacts that could have been avoided or minimized when responding to threats in an inverse fashion.

D) The rationality behind government policy under temporary authoritarianism (TA)

As extreme liberal democracy or temporary authoritarianism reflects the best interest of the leader or minority leading movement and hence of the true minority, then the theoretical rationality of government policy in this case can be summarized as follows:

Government → Regime/ruler's interest → True minority welfare

The goal is to maximize the ruler / true minority welfare

Therefore, a policy that harms the country is rational from the temporary authoritarianism's rationality point of view because the expected objective is:

Maximize the welfare of the true minority.

From this perspective: **Country wins $\neq$ ruler wins**

And therefore:

Country loses + ruler wins = rational policy under temporary authoritarianism.

And since ruler gains = true minority gains, then:

Country loses + true minority gains = rational policy under temporary authoritarianism.

Implications

1) The assumption that governments seek the leader's best interest works only extreme liberal democracy or temporary authoritarianism's based rationality, not under normal liberal democracy based rationality as when temporary authoritarianism's rationality wins, normal liberal democracy based rationality loses; 2) An inverse welfare maximizing expectation emerges here: Temporary authoritarianism governments seek to maximize the true minority welfare, not that of the true majority. Normal liberal democracy seeks the inverse opposite; and 3) Conflicts between normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism need to take this inverse expectation into account to identify proper policy responses to effectively counteract threats, otherwise, there will be policy response inconsistency that may affect negatively the welfare of the true majority in normal liberal democracies, negative impacts that could have been avoided or minimized when responding to threats in an inverse fashion.

E) Formalizing the policy rationality of normal liberal democracy (NLD) vrs temporary authoritarianism (TA)

1) The case of normal liberal democracy

NLD Policy Rationality = f(Country's Best Interest)

2) The case of temporary authoritarianism

TA Policy Rationality = f(Ruler's/Regime's Best Interest)

Therefore:

Normal liberal democratic policy

Country gains + ruler losses → Government succeeds

Temporary authoritarian policy

Ruler gains + country losses → Government succeeds

Hence, even when country as a whole loses or when the true majority loses, the government succeeds under temporary authoritarianism. In other words, under liberal democracy, the government should win when the country wins. Under temporary authoritarianism, the ruler can win even when the country loses.

F) The inverse opposite relationship between the nature and policy of normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism in simple terms

Analyzing policy responses to temporary authoritarianism based actions or threats using normal liberal democracy based rationality turns out to be inappropriate as you are then assuming or starting with the wrong expectation or with the inverse opposite expectation leading to inconsistent policy responses. The nature of the components of inverse rationality affecting normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism policy dynamics is summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1

The components of inverse rationality	
Normal liberal democracy	Temporary authoritarianism
Loyalty to country/the constitution	Loyalty to the leader/movement
True majority welfare matter	The leader welfare matters

The best interest of the majority matters	The best interest of the true minority matters
Political survival is secondary	Political survival is paramount
Democratic institutional constraints are respected and solidified by leaders.	Leader/true minority seeks to weaken and control all democratic institutions
Political loyalty is to country	Political loyalty is to leader
Development based on Policy legitimacy	Development based on political legitimacy
Actions reflect the national interest	Actions reflect the regime interest
Welcomes electoral competition, Encourages everybody and every vote counts	Seeks dominance over electoral competition, Encourages not everybody votes and not every vote counts
Works under shared political space	Works under us and them antagonism space
Works under no effective Targeted chaos or normal democratic chaos	Works under effective Targeted chaos or extreme democratic chaos

Therefore, based on Table 1 above what appears to be irrational policy under the liberal-democratic framework may actually be rational authoritarian policy or vice a verse. And therefore, when the country loses, but the ruler wins is rational for temporary authoritarianism, and it is irrational for normal liberal democratic thinkers or politicians; and this in rationality is explained by the inverse maximization goal each system seeks, one seeks to maximize the welfare of the ruler and the other seeks to maximize the welfare of the country as a whole.

G) The possible mismatched of tit for tat reactions to temporary authoritarianism threats

If you understand the implications of Table 1 above, then it is possible to see that inverse opposite rationality may require the inverse opposite response based rationality to policy threats not parallel rationality responses. In the context of conflict between normal liberal democratic leaders, within a country or between countries, then the traditional tit for tat approach works as they have parallel rational points of view, but in a conflict between normal liberal democratic leaders and temporary authoritarian leaders that may not work as they are following the inverse rationality playbook, and failure to see this or knowledge gaps with respect to this, may bring unnecessary pain to the true majority in normal liberal democracies. Notice that the true majority pain in temporary authoritarianism ruled countries is acceptable if the leader wins, but it should not be acceptable in normal liberal democracies if ways to minimize them or avoid them exist. Tariff wars can help us to see the emergence of possible mismatches in responses if the characteristics in Table 1 are not understood or known and you start with the wrong assumptions: For example facing tariffs from a temporary authoritarianism leader the opposition politician or country thinking the traditional tit for tat way may ask "Why would a government impose tariffs that increase prices, disrupt trade, hurt domestic businesses, provoke retaliation, and potentially damage the national economy?" and it may think that temporary authoritarianism is trying to maximize national welfare, when it is trying to maximize the leader's or true minority's welfare by expanding its power reach, hence he may arrive to a tit for tat response when he needs a no tit for tat response. In other words, when a temporary authoritarianism leaders imposes policy tools like tariffs we should know that he is not maximizing national welfare in his country, he is simply expanding its power reach by maximizing effective targeted chaos abroad through different ways like i) creating visible external enemies; ii) reinforcing nationalist identity; iii) creating a simple political narrative; iv) demonstrating political power; v) rewarding politically important constituencies; vi) forcing businesses and groups to become politically dependent; vii) producing conflict that mobilizes supporters; viii) allowing the government to blame outsiders for domestic problems; ix) creating a permanent political crisis that benefits the regime; and x) distract from social, economic, environmental and political failures at home.

Therefore, the relevant calculation for the response may not be based on the question: Does the tariff maximize national welfare for the temporary authoritarianism leader? but instead, it may be on the question: Does the tariff maximize political power, political loyalty, mobilization, and regime survival for the temporary authoritarianism leader? And If the answer is yes, then the tariff may be politically rational for the temporary authoritarianism leader even when it is nationally irrational for his country; and knowing this a tit for tat may not be an appropriate response as it is following the inverse rationality playbook the temporary authoritarian leader is following, albeit without knowing academically, but by instinct.

H) Formalizing the nature of the not tit for tat and the tit for tat reaction mismatch to policy threats from temporary authoritarianism

1) The conventional reciprocity theory

The conventional mainstream analysis remains inside the box of traditional reciprocity:

They do X → We do X back.

You assume that the temporary authoritarian that imposes the policy X is a rational decision maker of the same type X you are, but what if the policy X is based on inverse rationality expectations as the ones you have? That is from where the policy response to X may become a mismatch and actually help maximize the welfare function of the ruler/leader in the temporary authoritarianism based country. For example, what if X does not mean the same thing or expectation in two structurally different systems? If X = Tariff, then A tariff may be economically similar in its immediate form, but its structural political meaning and welfare objective may differ. Therefore: identical policies do not necessarily have identical rationalities. And consequently: identical actions do not necessarily require identical responses. And the winner when everyone loses may be the temporary authoritarianism leader specially when facing parallel or tit for tat responses, creating a paradox possibility of a negative-sum national outcome with a positive outcome for the ruler in temporary authoritarianism if the opponents does not follow a no tit for tat approach, and follows the traditional tit for tat approach by the book. For example if policy responses to policy X = Tariff leads to the following conditions in temporary authoritarianism country:

Country: -10 Population: -8 Economy: -7

Society - 20 Political institutions: -9 and Ruler/regime: +5

Then from a national perspective in temporary authoritarianism country: Everyone loses, but from the regime's perspective: There is a winner as the winner is the actor whose objective function is being maximized. And this means that whether a policy is rational or irrational depends first on identifying who is being maximized by policy X and the inverse response is aimed at making policy X a loser using no tit for tat response.

2) The non-conventional reciprocity theory

The non-conventional analysis from outside the box of traditional reciprocity:

They do X → We do Y back.

You know that the temporary authoritarian that imposes the policy X is a rational decision maker of a different type Y you are, and the policy X is based on inverse rationality expectations as the ones you have. That is from where the policy response to X may become a perfect inverse match and actually help minimize or derail the welfare function of the ruler/leader in the temporary authoritarianism based country. For example, we know X does not mean the same thing or expectation in two structurally different systems. If X = Tariff, then a tariff may be economically similar in its immediate form to either countries or parties, but we know that their structural political meaning and welfare objective differ. Therefore: identical policies with identical response rationalities or tit for tat would not work in this case; inverse rationality would work in order to minimize the leader's welfare and maximize the leader's losses. And the winner when the leader loses is the normal liberal democracy inducing either a i) inducing a negative-sum national outcome with a negative outcome for the ruler in temporary

authoritarianism or ii) inducing a positive-sum national outcome with a negative outcome for the ruler in temporary authoritarianism.

For example if policy responses Y to policy X = Tariff leads to the following conditions in temporary authoritarianism country:

Country: -10 Population: -8 Economy: -7

Society – 20 Political institutions: -9 (Rule of law + 10)

and Ruler/ regime: -5

Then from a national perspective in temporary authoritarianism country: Everyone loses or some components win like the rule of law. but in both cases the ruler loses, and then there is a loser: The loser is the actor whose objective function is being derailed or minimized. And this means that since we know that the policy X is rational from the temporary authoritarianism point of view, then the response Y is also rational from the point of view of normal liberal democracy, with the goal of maximizing the welfare function's losses of the ruler in temporary authoritarianism while minimizing the welfare function's losses of the true majority in normal liberal democracies.

I) The factors behind the tit for tat response instead of the no tit for tat one to temporary authoritarianism's policy threats by normal liberal democracies

There are several factors, which may lead to a response mismatch by normal liberal democracies when facing policy X from temporary authoritarianism, which are listed below in simple terms:

1) The temporary authoritarianism paradigm shift knowledge gap

Normal democratic opposition thinkers and politician do not seem to recognize yet that the political structure for competition for power in liberal democracies has changed since 2016. They continue to analyze temporary authoritarian policies through the rationality assumptions of normal liberal democracy, they see ". This policy makes no economic sense." or "This damages the country." or "This hurts workers." or "This increases prices." or "This weakens national institutions." or "all the above" apparently without realizing that the temporary authoritarian leaders is not attempting to maximize its nation welfare, but its own welfare or that of its exism movement or the true minority of that country.

The normal opposition party because of the paradigm shift knowledge gap in terms of paradigm structure may see in the case of tariffs a tit for tat:

Tariff → economic aggression → retaliate with tariff.

Instead of seeing an additional structural layer:

Tariff → identify the political system → identify the rationality → identify the actual winner → determine the structurally appropriate response.

2) The policy rationality gap

Normal democratic opposition leaders and politicians evaluate temporary-authoritarian policy using liberal-democratic rationality of the need for maximizing social welfare to gather the response, when they should be looking at it from the inverse point of view of rationality to respond. In other words, the opposition evaluates policy according to Country-centered rationality while the temporary authoritarian government is using regime-centered policy rationality. Therefore, they are effectively playing different games, yet democratic opposition thinkers and politicians fail to see this because of the policy rationality gap.

3) The proper response gap

Since normal democratic opposition thinkers and politicians are not thinking in terms of inverse rationality they create a policy response gap. In other words because they misunderstand the rationality, they may choose a symmetrical response when an inverse structural response is required. And therefore, normal democratic thinkers and politicians cannot respond appropriately because they cannot see the structure of the system they are fighting against; they cannot see the structure because they continue to think inside the old paradigm where the tit for tat is the appropriate response.

For example, the proper response to policy threats for example in the case of tariffs:

The issue is not simply:

Tariff → counter-tariff.

The appropriate response depends on the structural relationship between the two political systems under competition.

1. The case of democracy dealing with democracy

If two normal liberal democracies are interacting within the same general political framework, then a reciprocal response can be understandable:

Democracy A → Tariff → Democracy B → Counter-tariff

This is the familiar one-to-one reciprocal logic of traditional economic and political thinking. Both actors are assumed to be operating within a comparable rationality framework.

2. The case of democracy dealing with temporary authoritarianism

But the situation changes fundamentally when the two systems are inverse opposites as normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism are:

Then the logic cannot automatically be:

Temporary authoritarianism → Tariffs → Normal liberal democracy → Counter-tariff

because this assumes that the same action has the same structural meaning and that the appropriate response is symmetrical, when we know that the appropriate response is the inverse opposite.

Instead, the normal liberal democracy thinker or leader should ask: Why is the temporary authoritarian government imposing the tariff? What objective is that action serving within its own political structure? Is the leader attempting to maximize his own welfare function? How can this be counteracted? Only after identifying that rationality can the normal liberal democracy determine the appropriate response. And if the systems are inverse opposites, then the inverse opposite framework introduced here suggests the possibility that: The structurally appropriate response may itself have to be the inverse opposite rather than a mirror image.

J) The Principle of Structural Response

The principle of structural response can be stated as “a rational response to an action should not be determined solely by the observable action itself, but by the structural rationality that produced it.”

The following holds true:

Same structure → potentially reciprocal response

but:

Inverse-opposite structure → potentially inverse-opposite response

And the view above goes beyond just conventional "retaliation" thinking as it requires the decision-maker first to identify: i) What system produced the policy?; ii) What is the rationality operating within that system?; iii) Who benefits from the policy?; iv) What objective is actually being optimized/maximized?; and v) What response serves the objective of the responding system? Only then should the response be chosen.

K) Relevant implications of the discussion above for normal liberal democracy and its survival

i) It explains why responding only with tit for tat economic arguments may be insufficient; ii) it shows why a policy can be irrational from the perspective of the country while being perfectly rational from the perspective of a temporary authoritarian regime; iii) it explains the idea of the inversion of political rationality; iv) it raises deep questions such as when a government repeatedly adopts policies that appear to harm the country, should we automatically conclude that the government is irrational—or should we first ask whether we have incorrectly identified the actor whose interests the policy is rationally serving?; v) it advances the idea that

changing the structure of the system, from normal liberal democracy to temporary authoritarianism changes what counts as rational behavior; vi) it highlights the idea that there may be a structural element that becomes difficult to see when we continue to analyze a new political reality through assumptions that worked under the previous paradigm; vii) it helps to see that when we move from normal liberal democracy to temporary authoritarianism we create a paradigm shift knowledge gap, a rationality gap and a proper response gap; viii) it raises and answer relevant questions such as how normal liberal democracies should understand policy rationality and policy responses when the opposing system is maximizing a fundamentally different welfare objective; and ix) the discussion makes it clear that under normal liberal democracy, policy rationality is evaluated in relation to the welfare of the country and true majority; under temporary authoritarianism, the relevant maximizing target shifts toward the ruler/ regime or true minority, information that if not considered may lead to inappropriate policy responses to policy threats. For example in the case where the policy X imposed by temporary authoritarianism in the USA on normal liberal democracies (Clarke 2026), we see that normal liberal democracy based countries reacted in the conventional tit for tat way to the facing of those tariffs (Starcevic and Gus 2025; Boynton et al 2026; SN 2026), a reaction that according to the discussion above may not be the appropriate response to ensure that the welfare of temporary authoritarianism ruler is minimized or faces a loss while ensuring at the same time that the welfare losses of the true majority in normal liberal democracies are minimized too so normal liberal democracies win in the long term at the lowest social welfare loss possible.

Conclusions

The article explains why what appears irrational under the assumptions of normal liberal democracy may be rational under a structurally different political environment because the object being maximized has changed. In normal liberal democracy, if the majority/country loses, the government loses. Under temporary authoritarianism, the country or true majority may lose while the ruler, movement, or true minority wins—and therefore the policy can remain rational from the perspective of the ruling structure as there is still a winner. The concept of inverse rationality introduced here as at the heart of the proper response from the normal true majority welfare point of view to an inverse opposite threat from temporary authoritarianism as it is a fact that normal liberal democracy and temporary authoritarianism operate under inverse rationality, which means that if they respond in a conventional manner they may be aiding the maximization of the welfare function of temporary authoritarianism as we are treating rational attacks from the point of view of temporary authoritarianism as irrational without realizing that policy actions may be rational—but rational relative to a different objective function or beneficiary structure. In other words, the paper shows that when the true majority welfare increases in normal liberal democracies, then there is political success while when the welfare of the leader/movement increases, they have political success, even when the true majority losses. It was pointed out that conventional policy reciprocity such in the case of tariffs works tit for tat when you have competition between two different normal liberal democracies, but it may not work when

competition for power is between a normal liberal democracy and a temporary authoritarianism based system. It was stressed that automatically responding according to the same reciprocal logic when facing temporary authoritarianism threats may mean that the liberal democracy is adopting the strategic playbook generated by the other political rationality (e.g. responding with policy X to policy X, and hence it may backfire and work to the benefit of the authoritarian leader/movement. And inverse respond would use policy Y policy X with the goal to minimize or decrease the welfare function of the leader/the movement/the true minority.

In general the paper describes why temporary authoritarianism flourishes even when the country or the true majority loses as it is maximizing the welfare of the leader or the true minority, not the welfare of the true majority or country. It shows that even when the country loses, but the ruler or movement wins there is a winner. But this fact appears irrational from the point of view of normal liberal democracy leading to policy response mismatch as conventional tit for tat is used to counteract an inverse opposite policy from the point of view of the welfare function of the temporary authoritarianism leader, the welfare function that is actually being maximized, which means that the welfare of the ruler is not the same as the welfare of the true majority, and maximizing the welfare of the true majority is not the goal. It was pointed out that a policy that damages the country or the true majority may nevertheless be rational policy for the ruler. It was indicated that evaluating a policy and policy threat according to the country's best interest, but the policy and policy threat is being evaluated by its originator according to a different political objective, then we may have been addressing the wrong question and implemented an inappropriate response, which is a dilemma that arises when normal liberal democracy response in conventional ways to temporary authoritarianism based agendas. And therefore, it was stressed that the rationality of policy under temporary authoritarianism is the inverse opposite as that of normal liberal democracy making it possible for the country to lose while the ruler wins, and this fact needs to be taking into account by normal liberal democracies if they want to respond appropriately to temporary authoritarianism threats including tariffs based threats while minimizing the impacts on true majorities, a response that diminishes the welfare function of the leader, the movement, and the true minority supporting it is the inverse opposite response to the leaders policy.

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