

Rise of Economic Nationalist Tendencies in Fisheries Policies: The Cases of the United Kingdom and Norway Amidst Their Shifting Dynamics with the European Union

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Research Question

To what extent has economic nationalism shaped the trajectory of the UK's fisheries policy before and after Brexit, in comparison to Norway's approach to fisheries policy through its long-standing cooperation with the European Union?

Background

The approach to fishery policies by the UK, Norway, and the EU has changed significantly over recent years. After the UK left the EU through Brexit, the UK government also started to lean towards economic nationalism, a trend that many other states were beginning to lean towards. The impact of Brexit through economic nationalism reshaped the UK government's approach to maritime policies. After Brexit, the UK sought greater national control over its fishing grounds. On the other hand, even though Norway was not a member of the EU, the Norwegian government continued to maintain a balance between national sovereignty and cooperation regarding fishery policies, as the Norwegian government had done before Brexit.

Theoretical Framework

This study stands on the concept of economic nationalism in order to explain diverging fisheries policies in the aftermath of Brexit in the UK and non-EU member Norway. Economic nationalism refers to state-led strategies that prioritize sovereign control over economic resources, promoting trade protectionism and the promotion of domestic industries over foreign ones (Fetzer, 2021). As Ikenberry (2018) claims, this long-term transition from open trade, multilateralism, and security cooperation has fostered a resurgence of protectionist policies. This shift reflects a broader transformation of the global economic order, as seen in events like Brexit and the trade wars between the US and China. A key driver of economic nationalism is its cause-and-effect-based connection to the concept of national sovereignty. Such policies often emerge as responses to perceived threats to a nation's ability to control its economic assets; in this case, fisheries (Fetzer, 2021).

Methodology

A mixed methodology was used to build the paper. Quantitative analysis is primarily conducted through descriptive statistics and visualizations of global fishery capture data from FAOSTAT. Qualitative analysis is used to assess policy and discourse dimensions. Governmental reports and fishing agreements are analyzed to gain a better understanding of countries' approach towards seafood policy, with a particular focus on the recent tripartite agreement between the EU, the UK, and Norway (2024). Lastly, a discussion from a game-theoretic perspective is presented by drawing on existing game theory literature on fisheries. Specifically, we examined the potential consequences of the EU's entry into the game as an independent coastal state. Accordingly, we discussed the resilience of the long-standing cooperation between the EU and Norway in response to both the structural change in the game and the political shift towards economic nationalism.

Discussion

In the early 20th century, the UK was a leader in demersal fisheries; however, the Common Fisheries Policy and subsequent changes in the distribution of fishing rights under EU regulations led to a decline in British fishing fleets in specific waters. This situation contributed to a long-standing grievance that became relevant during the Brexit negotiations. In contrast, Norway's ability to effectively manage regulatory oversight alongside international trade not only bolsters its seafood industry but also influences its diplomatic stance on fisheries governance. This strategic equilibrium is exemplified by Norway's fisheries agreement with the EU, which highlights its ability to foster cooperative relations while safeguarding its national sovereignty. A welfare-improving equilibrium appears to be the trilateral agreement between the three aforementioned parties regarding the sustainability of fishing in the shared seas so as to refrain from the tragedy of the commons.

Conclusion

Economic nationalism has paved the way for the UK to exit the EU in order to pursue policies that are heavily influenced by national sovereignty. Following the Brexit process, the UK initially implemented economic nationalist policies in its fisheries sector. However, these efforts did not result in the intended efficiency and apparently slightly triggered a shift away from a purely nationalist approach. As a result, the UK began prioritizing cooperation through tripartite agreements with partners in the region, such as the EU and Norway. Similarly, in the case of Norway, which had consistently conducted its fisheries policies with an emphasis on national sovereignty, it also moved towards a more collaborative framework by engaging in tripartite agreements with both the EU and the UK, which reflects a shared trend towards much more cooperative policy-making in the region. This can be interpreted as stability of the fishery game in the North Atlantic, that the deviation of the UK towards a unilateral stance does not seem to have a profound impact on the long-term cooperation starting in 1980, the Norway-EU agreement. Yet, the UK's step back from large quota demands might be explained by gains in other areas since the fishery deal is just one part of a wider Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. We leave this analysis for future research.

