Gov 50.08: Motivation & Images in IR

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1

Learning objectives

- Explain why leaders form images of other actors, using both the cognitive and motivational explanations for image theory.
- Explain the three dimensions that define ideal types in image theory.
- Explain how these three dimensions combine to form images.
- Connect images to strategic policy prescriptions.
- Make an informed argument about the conditions under which images are likely to change.

2

Image Theory

- Why study images?
- "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." (Merton 1957, qtd in Holsti 1967 p. 16).
- Herrmann & Fischerkeller are responding to three camps:
  - Realists, who care only (or mostly) about structure.
  - Other IR scholars who incorporate perceptions & images without knowing it.
  - Other IR scholars, including political psychologists, who only study threat perceptions & the **enemy** image.

3

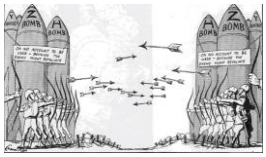
Image Theory

- Three questions:
  - What do images do?
  - Where do images come from (what are the psychological origins)?
  - How do images shape foreign policy prespcriptions?
  - How/when do images change?

4

The Enemy Image & Spiral Model

- How do images affect signals (and their interpretation)?
- States must signal intentions (and interpret other actors' signals).
- But this is tricky.
- E.g., the security dilemma & spiral model
  - The USSR "had **no need to worry**" about U.S. plans because "**they know perfectly well** that we will never launch a first strike on the Soviet Union" (Caspar Weinberger, 1983, qtd in Wheeler 2018, p. 92).



5

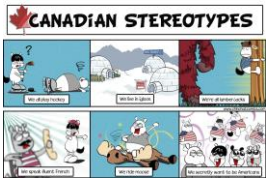
What do images do?

- National images are information-enhancing schemas that categorize other political actors.
  - Perceptions of other actors, which are associated with strategic scripts.
- Experimental evidence:
  - Herrmann et al. (1997): Give people one piece of information (e.g., "motives are evil and unlimited," ask about a) capabilities & b) culture
    - Participants are more likely to select options with image-consistent information, and more likely to choose policies consistent with the strategic script.
- Case evidence:
  - John Foster Dulles & the USSR (Holsti 1967)
    - Aggression by USSR = confirmation of evil, power-hungry other
    - Cooperation by USSR = successful deterrence or weakening adversary
    - Commitment to containment

6

Where do images come from?

- Cognitive
  - Images provide categories that help leaders (and us) to make sense of the world.
  - They filter & fill-in information; cognitive simplification.



7

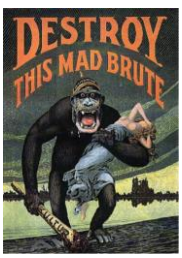
Psychological Foundations of Image Theory

- Cognitive
  - Images provide categories that help leaders (and us) to make sense of the world.
  - They filter & fill-in information; cognitive simplification.
  - "… the perceiver is likely to lose track of which pieces of information about the other actor emanate from empirical evidence and which pieces are schematic fill-ins."

8

Psychological Foundations of Image Theory

- Motivational
  - "Whereas unmotivated biases generate perceptions based on expectations, motivated biases generate perceptions based on needs, desires, or interests." (Levy 2003, 268).
  - Balance theory (Heider 1958)
    - "People seek a harmonious balance between their sentiments about another actor and the attributes they attach to that actor in their cognitive representation." (Herrmann 2003, 295).
    - Threat/opportunity



9

Image Content

- National images are information-enhancing schemas that categorize other political actors.
  - Perceptions of other actors, which are associated with strategic scripts.
- Three dimensions:
  - Threat vs. opportunity (goal compatibility)
  - Capabilities
  - Cultural status

10

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  - Cultural status: Comparable/organized

11

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  - Threat vs. opportunity: Threat
  - Capabilities: Comparable
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12

Image Content & Ideal Types

	Threat vs. Opportunity	Relative Capability	"Culture"	Policy?
Enemy	High threat	Comparable	Comparable	Containment/deterrence
Ally	Opportunity (mutual interest)	Comparable	Comparable	Cooperation
Degenerate	Opportunity to dominate	Comparable/ declining	Comparable/ declining	Revisionism
Imperialist	Threat	Superior	Comparable	Fortress (reduce target's involvement)
Colony/ Dependent	Opportunity to exploit	Inferior	Inferior	Intervention

Adapted from Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995, p. 430

13

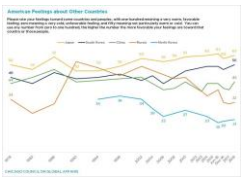
Image Content & Strategies

- What images of the EU did Russians hold before and after the Ukrainian revolution?
- What does this imply about their former and current foreign policy vis-à-vis the EU?
- How can we identify the image(s) that a leader holds of another actor? Compare and contrast the Herrmann & Fischerkeller (1995) vs. Chaban, Elgstrom, and Gulyaeva (2017) approaches.

14

Image Content & Ideal Types

- How, when, and why do leaders alter their images of other states?
- To what extent can prospect theory and image theory inform one another?
- Are there current issues in international politics that could be informed by image theory?



15

Fin.

Next time: Bringing it all together + Overcoming Biases face to face

16