Towards a dual process model of foreign policy ideology

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Research on foreign policy ideology indicates a two-dimensional structure with clear parallels to numerous dual-process psychological frameworks. In foreign affairs, as in domestic affairs, individual differ in their underlying motivation to both provide and protect, captured by the constructs of cooperative internationalism (CI) and militant internationalism (MI), respectively. Recent studies indicate that the former is associated with the values of self-transcendence (universalism in particular) and individualizing moral foundations, the latter with conservation values and binding moral foundations. CI and MI serve as foreign policy orientations that allow ordinary individuals to develop attitudes about specific foreign policy questions even without significant knowledge but also bias the interpretation of incoming information.

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The systematic study of ideology's impact on foreign policy views has long lagged behind its role in domestic politics. Indeed until relatively recently the 'Almond-Lippmann' consensus prevailed, the view that foreign policy beliefs of the mass public, at least in the United States, were shapeless and incoherent and therefore undeserving of much thought [1,2••]. Subsequent research, however, demonstrates that there is indeed a pattern to public opinion on foreign affairs, a structure that resembles that found in 'dual-process' models of ideology. This article presents a dual-process model of foreign policy opinion, reviews the evidence so far for such an account, explains how these foreign policy dispositions affect the interpretation of information about foreign affairs in ways that indicate a departure from rationality and explores how the discovery of this structure helps solve puzzles about how relatively uninformed individuals can nevertheless demonstrate organized foreign policy beliefs. It ends with an agenda for future research.

The analysis of American foreign policy attitudes consistently reveals a two-dimensional structure that is common to both masses and the elites. Largely inductively derived through factor analysis of survey responses in the United States, these dimensions are called 'cooperative internationalism' (CI) and 'militant internationalism' (MI) and have been found to organize the beliefs of those in other countries as well, both developed and lesser developed [3–8]. CI and MI are general orientations, predispositions, or postures that allow ordinary individuals, but also elites, to formulate their attitudes on more specific policy questions. In psychological terms, they act as schemas and heuristics [9].

The most recent research indicates that these two factors are the foreign policy manifestation of the same two underlying dimensions identified in a number of frameworks accounting for the structure of ideology and which, despite their differences, seem to be capturing similar phenomena. CI emerges from a motivational goal of providing for others and creating equality and is undergirded by the 'individualizing' foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity the self-transcendence values. MI emerges from a motivational goal of protecting the group from harm, particularly physical threats, and is undergirded by the 'binding' foundations of authority and loyalty and conservation values of conformity, tradition and security. Foreign policy scholars cannot resolve which of these frameworks best accounts for ideological structure, but this article reviews the evidence both direct and indirect for a dual-process account of foreign policy ideology that should be relatively unaffected by debates among their advocates.

Dual process models of political psychology and the structure of foreign policy beliefs

A number of frameworks identify a two-dimensional, dual-process model of ideology: 'One dimension has been labeled authoritarianism, social conservatism, or traditionalism, at one pole, versus openness, autonomy, liberalism or personal freedom at the other pole. The second dimension has been labeled economic conservatism, power, or belief in hierarchy or inequality at its one pole versus egalitarianism, humanitarianism, social welfare or concern at its other pole' ([10: 46]). The first dimension captures a motivation to *protect* from threats [11]. Associated with a narrower ingroup identity, the motivational goal of protection is associated with moral foundations that bind groups together in order to meet challenges from inside

and outside. If individuals subordinate their personal desires, authority figures can police threats both symbolic and physical. The values of conformity and tradition, by reducing change over time and diversity across individuals, promote cohesion and stability. This 'existential' motivation [12] is critical to conservativism and the political right.

The second dimension captures a motivation to *provide* for others' welfare [11]. It is associated with the 'individualizing' moral foundations of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity [13] and the values of self-transcendence [14], defining virtue as taking care of others. Those driven by the goal of providing for others indicate greater egalitarianism and are committed to caring for the most vulnerable so as to level social, economic and political inequities. Providing for others is most often associated with the left since the right consistently endorses a more hierarchical vision for society [12]. As a motivation, it is more universalist and tolerant than group-centric and exclusive.

Each motivational goal is accompanied by ideological beliefs activated by the chronic accessibility of corresponding sociocultural schemas [10]. Positions on the first, protection dimension, are a product of 'dangerous world beliefs.' If the world is a precarious place, individuals must bind together in tight groups to face common enemies. For those who perceive the world as safer and more secure, more leeway can be given to individuals to define their own destinies. Positions on the second, provision dimension, are a function of 'competitive world beliefs'. If the world is a dog-eat-dog place where everyone is on their own, little attention can be given to caring for others or creating social equality. Instead individuals all jockey for position in social hierarchies.

The CI and MI dimensions of foreign policy attitudes are inductively derived, yet their components indicate a strong prima facie case that they are the expressions of more fundamental motivational goals and schemas thought to structure ideology across situations, ranging from interpersonal to international. Cooperative internationalism is defined by its multilateralism and its humanitarianism [2••,15,16]. Individuals systematically vary in their concern for others beyond their borders but also their beliefs that international cooperation is the best way by which the country should pursue its interests. The same individuals who identify as being on the left, support the social welfare state and egalitarianism at home also support greater concern for CI [4,16].

Militant internationalism, essentially what international relations scholars call hawkishness, is marked by a belief that force is an effective tool of foreign policy but also a schema previously labeled the 'deterrence model' [17] in international relations theory in which dangerous threats in the international environment must be dealt with decisively lest they fester and undermine state security. This indicates more than a surface similarity with the right-wing authoritarian (RWA) belief that strong law-and-order and strict adherence to moral norms are necessary to generate social stability [18]. Those high in MI tend to identify as more conservative and favor authoritarian policies that restrict individual choice at home [16,2••,15].

Recent research offers explicit tests of this dual-process model and indicates that CI and MI are the foreign policy manifestations of fundamental motivational goals identified in previous dual-process models. Among Americans CI is highly predicted by individuals' commitment to the individualizing foundations, harm/care in particular [15]. MI, in contrast, is predicted strongly by the binding foundations of ingroup, authority and purity. CI indicates a negative association with the binding foundations, MI a negative association with the individualizing foundations. However, much of these effect are mediated by self-identified political ideology, whereas the impacts suggested by a dual-process model are more direct.

More evidence for the dual-process model is evident in the effect of the Schwartz values on foreign policy attitudes [2••]. Among Americans, MI is highly predicted by commitment to conservation values of conformity, tradition and security. CI is associated with the self-transcendence value of universalism in particular. Benevolence, although generally encompassed under self-transcendence, generates support for MI. However, since benevolence measures concern for others in one's immediate surroundings, this is consistent with a dual-process model, since narrower ingroup identification accompanies the motivational goal of stability and threat neutralization. Figure 1 presents a summary of the model.

Convergent evidence for the dual-process model of foreign policy

There is also substantial convergent evidence for the dual-process model in studies not explicitly designed for the purpose, both at the mass level and in the actual foreign policy practice of nation-states. Generalized trust, a core dispositional trait marked by a belief that others are generally good, has a strong effect on support for international aid [19]. Generalized trust indicates a schema that the world is neither competitive nor dangerous, opening up the possibility for other-regarding behavior in foreign affairs.

RWA and social dominance orientation (SDO) have effects on foreign policy beliefs consistent with the dual-process model of foreign policy. In dual-process models, RWA is positively associated with a motivational goal of protection, SDO negatively with a motivational

Figure 1

	Cooperative Internationalism	Militant Internationalism
Motivational Goal	Provide	Protect
Associated Moral Foundations	Individualizing	Binding
Associated Values	Self-Transcendence	Conservation
Relevant Schema	Competitive World Beliefs (-)	Dangerous World Beliefs
Relevant Socio-Political Ideology	Social Dominance Orientation (-)	Right-Wing Authoritarianism
Foreign Policy Manifestations	Multilateralism and Humanitariaism	Hawkishness and Deterrence

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goal of provision. Americans in general prefer trade deals that benefit the United States in absolute terms, but Americans high in social dominance orientation favor outcomes that maximize the difference between Americans' gain and those of foreign countries [20•]. SDO is negatively associated with concern for equality at home in dual-process models [10], indicating that social denominators apply their general schema of a competitive world in both domestic and international politics. Both RWA and SDO are negatively associated with supranationalism [21]. It seems likely that the former perceive other countries to be threatening whereas the latter are hostile to other-concern in general, of which CI is just the foreign policy manifestation. In attitudes about the use of force in Iraq, the positive effect of RWA is mediated by a sense of threat whereas the positive effect of SDO is mediated by a lack of concern for the humanitarian costs for the civilian population [22].

Moral values predict not just foreign policy orientations but also specific foreign policy attitudes in predictable ways. German public opposition to debt bailouts of Greece are grounded in dispositional variation in the moral foundation of authority since states must practice tough love to discourage bad behavior, just as fathers do [23]. Harm/care commitment lessens opposition. Commitment to fairness interacts with national attachment, increasing the opposition of those with tighter ingroup boundaries. Binding moral foundations are also strong predictors of support for the hypothetical use of nuclear weapons due to their symbolic value in demonstrating

resolve *vis-à-vis* bad actors but also by reducing sensitivity to civilian casualties [24].

Another source of convergent evidence is consistent evidence that the left and right think fundamentally differently about international politics [25–27] and when in power act very differently in actual foreign affairs. The left should prefer more cooperation and less hawkishness in foreign policy than the right (although studies do not differentiate between the two underlying motivational goals). Right-wing governments are more likely to engage in military action [28•]. Left-wing governments are more likely to form alliances with greater voice-opportunities for all members, whereas right-wing governments prefer institutional forms that maintain decision-making authority by either imposing control over junior members when they can or avoiding institutionalization all together when they are weak [29,30]. Liberal governments in five Anglophone democracies tend to vote more in line with the rest of the world than conservative governments at the United Nations General Assembly, differences that are more pronounced for more militarily powerful countries [31•]. The presence of social democratic parties is strongly associated with both greater aid but also funds distributed without ties to export purchasing and through the intermediary of multilateral organizations [32]. All of this indicates greater cooperative internationalism on the part of those more likely driven by motivations to provide and more commitment to MI on the part of those more likely driven by motivations to protect.

The effect of foreign policy beliefs on information processing

The dual-process model of foreign policy expects that since attitudes on foreign policy rest on motivational goals and are associated with schemas that help individuals make sense of the world, they will have a strong impact on perception and likely lead to bias in information-processing. Just as conservatives and liberals do not change their beliefs in light of objective, disconfirming information as rationalist, Bayesian models would expect [33–35], Americans low in cooperative internationalism do not respond to 'costly signals' of reassurance offered by Iran [36••]. There is substantial evidence instead of 'asymmetric updating,' [37] in which individuals tend to believe more strongly what they already believed when given reason to do so but do not adjust when new information challenges their underlying motivational goals. In a study of Israeli elites and the mass public, those who score higher on militant internationalism are unimpressed by 'cheap talk' – protestations by adversaries that they will do whatever it takes to prevail in a crisis – whereas doves take it seriously. These hawks are more affected than doves by military mobilization [38••]. Operating under the schema of the deterrence model, hawks would be expected to be more attentive to credible signals of resolve.

Elite cues and the mass public

There is still substantial skepticism in the field of political science that the mass public is capable, or inclined, to develop attitudes on foreign affairs. Many draw on cue theories, arguing that boundedly rational members of the mass public ape the foreign policy views of elites, usually leaders of their political party, to ease their decision-making burden [39,40]. This is part of a broader tradition emphasizing heuristics in foreign policy attitude formation [41]. Non-partisan expert opinion can only change mass attitudes on issues in which a high proportion of the public is not aligned with elite opinion and partisan mobilization is low [42•]. For more polarized issues, citizens listen only to those who share their partisan affiliation.

As indicated above, however, the public seems to be able to formulate foreign policy attitudes through reference to the motivational goals and values highlighted by the dual-process model without the help of elites and indeed might choose cue givers based on shared values in the first place. By consulting their most basic attitudes, they are able to develop opinions on specific issues by treating them as part of a general class [9]. Bounded rationality does not imply helplessness. In one of the few tests of elite cue theory on foreign policy, militant internationalism is a much better predictor of attitudes than co-partisan elite cue givers, and, to the extent that individuals look for outside help, peer social networks are more important [43••]. Political ideology mediates more of the causal pathway between core values and foreign policy dispositions on the part of those well-informed about politics than those who know less [2••]. Nevertheless, the latter are able, without the help of ideology, to form judgments about foreign affairs through the direct application of values, whose substantive effect is actually identical for the two populations.

Future research agenda

Progress aside, there are still a number of substantial questions that have not been addressed in the literature. First, whereas dual-process models generally develop frameworks whose motivational goals are ultimately rooted in personality and social environment, there has not been much of an effort to work backwards in the causal chain when it comes to foreign affairs, save a few studies on the personality antecedents of foreign policy views [44]. Second, where the dual-process model expects close associations between domestic and foreign policy attitudes since both emerge as manifestations of underlying values, schemas, goals or moral codes, it is likely that structural factors lead to tighter associations within some countries than others. For instance, it is unlikely that individuals residing in foreign countries without substantial political power will develop highly militant and hawkish foreign policy attitudes, regardless of how dangerous they believe the world is. One might expect a stronger association in countries with more agency in the international environment. Third, and related, most research uses American samples, which are likely unrepresentative when it comes to foreign affairs. Validation in other national contexts is urgently needed. Fourth, there is a strong association between substantive motivational goals of security that underlie one of the dimensions of the dual-process model and epistemic differences such as need for cognition and closure [45,46]. These suggest that conservatives will be particularly likely to resist changing their mind when it comes to foreign affairs. However, we do not know if it is the case that updating is more common among those high in CI and low in MI than vice versa, as would be implied. Fifth, while CI and MI are the most important dimensions of foreign policy thinking, research has uncovered other orientations that indicate less of an association with underlying motivational goals identified in the psychological literature. For instance, just where isolationism comes from is something of a psychological mystery [47].

Conclusion

These remaining issues notwithstanding, evidence for the dual-process model indicates that foreign policy is hardly a separate domain of belief formation than domestic politics. Both exhibit similar structures suggesting that individuals use the same organizing principles and values when it comes to internal or external politics.

Credit author statement

I am responsible for all aspects of the writing of this document.

Conflict of interest statement

Nothing declared.

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