

Foreign Pol. Decision Making

Sudhan Chitgopkar

March 26, 2021

03.26.21

Groupthink

- Foreign policy is, almost structurally, based on the existence of in-groups and out-groups
- While groupthink is important in many business and decision-making contexts, it is problematic in foreign-policy
- Groupthink can be seen as a decision-making pathology that fundamentally distorts our view of the incentive structure
- The impulse to be accepted creates strong conformity to the group
- Once groupthink starts to take hold, individuals that disagree are ostracized
- Experimental and observational evidence shows that when standing in a group is threatened, that is equated to a diminishing status, which is registered in the brain as physical pain
- When the leader makes a decision, the rest of the group stops debating and doesn't challenge the group consensus
- This lack of debate distorts the incentive structure and leads to improper cost-benefit analysis
- Rather, a strategy is selected and everyone convinces themselves that it is good
- Requires:
 - that the group leader has a strong preference
 - that the group be relatively small
 - the group has some “soliders” or “mind-guards” that police the group
- Given the above requirements, groupthink occurs relatively quickly
- The more criticism the group receives, the less likely they are to change their perspective and seek out alternatives
- Groupthink has nothing to do with intelligence
- Consider Kennedy & The Bay of Pigs
 - Despite having significant experts and experience, the group group-think'd their way to the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Application

03.17.21

Gender and Conflict Tendencies

- Critically, conflict tendencies include more than just going to war. They exist on a spectrum including things like threatening conflict, mobilizing troops, drone strikes, etc.
- Greater gender balance leads to less conflict
 - This may be a result of either gender differences relating to foreign policy
 - This could also be as a result of greater perspectives and broader views by state officials with greater gender balance
- While there are some gender differences, they are not that significant and may be **very** nuanced
- Significant variation in support by issue
- Greater sensitivity to humanitarian concerns by women, but same sensitivity to a lesser extent exists with men
- Some weak evidence that women more sensitive to casualties. As casualties increase and conflict persists, gap is minimized

Gender Gaps over Time

- Gender gap on foreign policy has **not** changed over time
- The degree to which genders respond to foreign policy depends on wording and framing

Gender Gaps on Other Foreign Policy

- Interestingly enough, the literature only investigates the effects of gender differences on conflict scenarios
- Conflict scenarios are a last resort and represent, to an extent, the end of politics
- Gender balance and gender differences may exist to a significant degree in the lead-up to conflict and other aspects of foreign policy decision-making

03.15.21

Gender and Foreign Policy

- Integration of women into the economy and greater gender balance correlates with less conflict within countries. This seems to be correlation, not causation.
- Explaining theories:
 - As women gain more positions of power, the state will become more conflict averse or more passive because women may be biologically less prone to violent conflict

- * This does not consider the history of the state. Regardless of their gender, people will still be affected by the empirical decisions their state has made when considering future decisions
- As diversity increases, there will be more discussion regarding what constitutes a national security threat and the necessary actions needed to stop such threats.
- Consider comparing the same state over time with respect to gender balance. Removes a significant amount of confounding variables with cross-country comparison.
 - Same finding holds: as gender balance increases, a state will be less prone to conflict
 - Critically, women must be politically relevant for the above finding to hold. States that have good gender balance with little political relevance placed on women seem to operate as states that have little gender balance.
- Along with decreased conflict behavior, defense spending also decreases when gender balance increases (maintaining political relevance for women)

03.03.21

Threats & Fear (cont.)

- Removing the feeling of fear can be construed to solving the problem
- This can be applied to foreign policy - consider hawkish policies that focus on direct action/military force vs diplomatic strategies which are time-consuming and slow-acting
- Feeling fearful or threatened causes people to prefer direct, fast-acting policies even when such policies may not be the most beneficial
- When policies are decided upon, it is unlikely that they will be seriously reconsidered/changed

Experiment Review

- In general, audiovisual news contains much more emotional content than print news. This study accordingly considers this in the context of terrorism.
- People that watch TV news will receive more emotional news and will accordingly support more hawkish policies than people that read the news.
- People's preferences for policy are driven by the emotional content of the news or information they consume, not the actual facts
- Our information about foreign policy is taken from media sources with a high emotional context, which creates an incentive structure for our political leaders.
 - Specifically, political leaders will provide us with more policy that is designed to assuage our concerns. Terminally, this leads to more hawkish policy options and support for militarization.
 - This **should not** be equated to solving the problem.

03.01.21

Fear & Threats

- Cortex handles core evaluation
- Cortex consistently receives fear and threat information, responds to threats constantly
- Because fear or threats stimulate emotionally focused decision-making instead of rational decision-making

02.24.21

Analogies (cont.)

- Decision-makers often use analogies to make decisions, but these analogies are often biased towards their personal experiences
- Policy and decision-makers have their own toolkit of experiences which they use for analogical reasoning
- Houghton shows the debate between different advisors to the president that use different analogies based on their separate experiences
- From a policy standpoint, advisors often strategically employ analogies based on their policy prescriptions
- An important characteristic of a strong leader is the ability to properly employ analogies
- The more diverse a president's cabinet, the greater the diversity of analogies. Less diverse cabinets tend to be consistent and rarely differ from their general course of action
 - The more diverse the cabinet, the greater the amount of analogies, which means there can be more debate to find an analogy that fits best
- Analogies must have 2 main characteristics:
 - Analogies must have some overlapping elements with the current problem
 - Analogies must be easy to recall and understand

02.22.21

Analogical Reasoning

- Analogies are, importantly, different than metaphors. Metaphors are simple terms used to describe something. Analogies, on the other hand, define an entire context. Allow for comparison between the unfamiliar and the familiar.
- Analogies map a familiar story to an unfamiliar situation. Elements of the story that sounds similar to the unfamiliar situation allows the **entire** story to be mapped to the afore unfamiliar situation.

- Analogies such as this fill in lots of elements regarding incentive structures and leads to a decision. Different analogies may change the incentive structure and accordingly lead to a different decision.
- Analogies explain the stakes, the context, moral guidance (norms and taboos), and possible policy prescriptions
 - Accordingly constrain the win-set
 - Could be considered like Standard Operating Procedures (An analogy of WWII might incentivize a leader to mobilize the entire country and take the situation very seriously)
- Often, debate will occur regarding the analogy that best fits the situation. Once an analogy is set, behavior can often be understood in the context of that analogy
- Analogies among experts tend to be narrower, but for analogies to work, they don't have to be close to the actual situation (Iran Nuclear Deal = toddler eating vegetables)
- If you want to select an analogy for a situation, you want the analogy to be as close as possible to that situation. Despite this, we tend to rely on analogies more when the problem is more novel.
 - Analogies tend to take hold with situations when those situations are new and unfamiliar with few other overlaps
- World leaders (Obama especially) use many analogies in order to shape public opinion
- Analogies need not be accurate for them to be used as a framework for decision-making
- Analogies are extremely prominent in crisis decision-making

02.15.21

Fairness & Fairness Frames

- Fairness and fairness frames, while stable, are rarely rational
- Culture defines fairness
- The violation of culturally-defined fairness causes people to reject offers that are objectively good for them
- This occurs both in cases where the offers are unfair in favor of them (though the studies here are less robust) and in cases where the offers are unfair against them (this is more common)
- It is not necessarily that we seek fairness so much as we are averse to unfairness
- Because of this, using a fairness frame in foreign and domestic policy is extremely effective

02.10.21

Prospect Theory (cont.)

- It is critical for our leaders to be aware of:
 - How they frame issues as they make decisions
 - How they frame issues when they talk to us
 - The frame our adversaries use when we are in conflict with them
- Loss-framing is a critical part of negative campaigning
- Democratic institutions create multiple frames, which is not necessarily the case in non-democratic regimes
- In non-democratic regimes, leaders and the public may settle into a frame (generally loss framing), which leads them to make riskier decisions
- One significant benefit of democratic systems is that they are less likely to settle into a particular frame, which may be bad

02.08.21

Prospect Theory

- When we frame outcomes in terms of gains, we tend to be risk-averse, even when the gambles are objectively better
- When we frame outcomes in terms of losses, we tend to be risk-acceptant in order to avoid larger losses, even when the gambles are objectively worse for us
- This can often be seen in stock market crashes and stock behavior, wherein people sell during a stock downturn when the rational decision is to hold on to the stock
 - This can further be seen with (1) Carter and the Iranian Hostage Crisis, (2) The 2016 election of Trump, the 2020 election of Biden
- To remove yourself from a frame (regardless of whether it is risk-averse or risk-acceptant), it is critical to consider both benefits and losses
- Risk aversion and prospect theory is applicable in multiple scenarios:
 - Leaders, themselves, have risk-averse tendencies and follow prospect theories in their decision-making
 - The public can constrain the win-set of the leaders through their risk-averse tendencies and tendency to follow prospect theory
 - Leaders can change the public's perspective on a topic through framing it in a different way and playing on prospect theory and loss aversion

02.05.21

Loss Aversion & Policy

- Argues that policies are either loss averting or gain seeking
 - Berejikian argues against this
 - Any policy can be reframed to be either loss avoiding or gain seeking
- Public is more favorable towards policies that are loss avoiding

02.03.21

Concession Aversion

- Because of loss aversion, anything given up in a negotiation has an inflated value.
- Because this is true for both sides of a negotiation, there is a permanent hurdle to achieving a negotiated settlement
- Also known as the endowment effect
- concession aversion and loss aversion is stronger when bad behavior has started
 - It is harder to stop behavior that has already been started than it is to pre-empt bad behavior
- Due to loss aversion, states often double down on their failed policies and don't correct course
- Empirically, great powers always decline and hasten that decline by trying to hold fast to their previous status
 - Great powers can either try harder to hold on to their power and influence
 - or great powers can accept their declining status and recalibrate their policies accordingly

02.01.21

Loss Aversion

- Consider a simple dilemma, wherein an actor chooses whether to play a game.
 - A fair coin is flipped
 - If the coin is heads, the actor receives \$125
 - If the coin is tails, the actor loses \$125
- This dilemma has an EV of $(0.5 * 125) + (0.5 * -125) = 0$
- Despite an EV of 0, the vast majority of people would not play this game
- This is a result of loss aversion, people cognitively weigh losses and harms more than they would weigh wins and benefits

- When compared to gains, equivalent losses hurt more
- Pain and loss aversion is a more intense feeling than gain seeking
- This phenomenon is consistent across regions and cultures
- To take advantage of this, framing each decision as loss aversion (loss framing) instead of gain seeking makes it more likely to be accepted
- Under time pressure, individuals will be more resolved to avoid losses

01.29.21

Sagan Review

- If nuclear weapons were a norm,
 - conventional weapons would be preferred to nuclear weapons
 - this preference would not change even if the utility of nuclear weapons, when compared to conventional weapons, increased
- Crucially, Sagan finds that although Americans prefer conventional weapons when presented a choice, a large proportion are willing to approve of a nuclear strike after the fact
- The fraction of people that approved a nuclear strike grew with its effectiveness, indicating that perceptions towards nuclear use is based on nuclear utility
- There is no significant domestic political constraint on nuclear weapon usage
- Vast majority of people focused on utility to make their decision on nuclear weapons, with few focusing on moral factors

01.27.21

Norms & Nukes

- Norms and taboos have been critical in nuclear policy
- Norms and taboos have changed our definition of nuclear weapons as solely a means of deterrence to something that is more feasible in small-scale war (through more tactical nuclear weapons)

Norms & Taboos

- Cognitive constructs designed to guide our behavior
- Generally exist in the context of societal interaction and behavior

Norms

- Do's and Dont's
 - prescribe some behavior and deter other behaviors
- Context-specific
 - e.g killing is generally considered something that is horrible to do, but is just
- Large cultural variation in norms
- Consequences for violation of norms can vary significantly

Taboos

- Dont's - never explain things you should do, only address things you shouldn't
- Tend to be universal, with limited exception
- Significantly more limited variation, easier to translate across cultures
- There tend to be very severe consequences to taboo violations

Norms, Taboos, and Decision-Making

- Generally, norms and taboos take certain strategies off the table and constrain the incentive structure
- Taboos and Norms also change our win-sets because of norms and taboos that exist in their own societies
- When the government needs to violate taboos or norms, they (1) argue that they aren't, through some loophole, and (2) argue that the benefits outweigh the harms
- To erode a norm, infuse it with consequentialist logic

01.21.21

Public Opinion & Decision-Making

- domestic decision-making has significant foreign policy effects
- domestic public opinion has an effect on foreign policy decisions
 - public opinions can help shape the incentive structure that a decision-maker has when faced with a decision
 - public opinion can either be an opportunity or a constraint
- who we listen to and what they say can intrinsically change our incentive structure

Putnam Review

- For any foreign policy issue, there is a chief of government (CoG)
 - CoG has ultimate decision-making authority on the issue
 - e.g, president on war, secretary for commerce on tariffs, etc.
- CoG's job is to find a way to align their international goals with what's possible domestically
 - This is the two-level game, domestic and international balances
- "Win-Set" defines the set of acceptable outcomes that is affected by the policy
 - "Win-Set" defined by war and peace is the entire US population
 - "Win-Set" defined by shoe-lace imports is extremely small
- Veto power must be considered
- Assumes a rational actor analysis
- While this applies largely to democratic states, the same general principles can also apply to authoritarian regimes

Putnam

Domestic-International Entanglements

- Current literature lists domestic influences on foreign policy and theorizes about links between the two
- Deutsch and Haas theorize about the impact of parties and interest groups on spillover from domestic policy to international objectives
- Recent work has focused on structural factors such as state strength causing an effect on foreign economic policy
 - central decision-makers must be concerned with domestic and international factors simultaneously
 - theory does not properly explain differences in state foreign policy occurring despite static state structures

Two-level Games

- Politics of international negotiations can often be considered a two-level game
 - At the national level, domestic groups pressure government, politicians seek power through the the favor of those organizations
 - At the international level, governments seek to minimize harms, maximize ability to solve domestic pressures
- Creates a very complex, sometimes contradictory situation for actors at both boards (decision-makers)

Win-Sets

- Negotiation occurs at a 2-stage process:
 - Level 1: bargaining between negotiators leading to tentative agreement
 - Level 2: Separate discussions within each group about ratification
- In reality, process is not always linear - generally happens multiple times in multiple stages at multiple levels
- Larger win-sets make Level 1 agreement more likely
- The relative size of the respective level 2 win-sets will affect the distribution of the joint gains from the international bargain (the larger the win-set of actor 1, the more he can be pushed around by other actors)

Win-Set Determinants

- Three factors critical to win-set size
 - Level 2 preferences and coalitions
 - Level 2 institutions
 - Level 1 negotiation strategies

Uncertainty and Bargaining

- Level 1 negotiators are often badly misinformed about level 2 politics, especially on the opposing side
- Uncertainty about win set size can be both good and bad in 2 level negotiations
- Each bargainer has an incentive to understate his own win-sets
- Uncertainty about opponent's win set increases concern about risk of involuntary defection by the other side

Role of the Chief Negotiator

- Chief negotiator is the only formal link between level 1 and 2 of negotiation
- Assumed that chief negotiator has no independent policy views, acts merely as an honest broker on behalf of his constituents
- Motives of the chief negotiator:
 - enhancing level 2 game by having benefits outweigh harms as much as possible
 - shifting balance of power at level 2 in favor of his own personal domestic policies
 - pursuing his own conception of national interest in the international sense
- Also assumed that the chief negotiator has some sort of veto power to outright reject anything that wholly contradicts his personal beliefs

Fearon

Introduction

- Three reasons war may occur
 - People are sometimes irrational and don't consider the costs of war due to this irrationality or their biases
 - Leaders may enjoy benefits of war but not pay the costs
 - People are rational and consider the risks but fight anyway (Rationalist explanation)
- Flaws with contemporary rationalist arguments are that they don't address prewar bargains
- Contemporary Rationalist reasons for war:
 - Anarchy
 - Benefits o/w costs
 - Rational preventive war
 - Rational miscalculation due to lack of info
 - Rational miscalculation due to disagreement about relative power
- Fearon's reasons for war
 - private or misrepresented info about relative capabilities
 - relationships are not possible because at least one party has an incentive to cheat
 - Despite being able to compromise, one or more party does not want to because of their beliefs on the issue

The Puzzle

- People often see war as something nobody wants though wars can often simply be costly but worthwhile gambles
- Wars are always ex post inefficient because no matter how small, the costs of fighting still exist

Anarchy

- War occurs because there is nothing to prevent it
- Does not explain why wars still occur due to their inefficiency, therefore does not explain war completely
- Anarchy may lead to arms races and insecurity, but little war outside of preemptive war

Preventive War

- If a declining power suspects that it may be attacked in the future by a rising power, it will find a preventive war rational
- Theory does not consider diplomacy and timeframe
- Why should the declining power fear an attack if it's inefficient, even for the rising power

Positive Expected Utility

- Argues that war is rational when both sides have a positive expected utility from it
- While often presented, this argument doesn't explain specific condition in which both parties fighting a war have positive expected utility

Utility and Rationality

- Positive expected utility alone is not enough to provide a rationalist explanation for war
- Indivisibility of factors of war can also be a rational explanation of war

War and Private information

- War is often the product of rational miscalculation
- Leaders overestimate their chance of military victory
- State lack information about other side's willingness to fight
- Truly rational agents will make the same prediction about the outcome of an uncertain event when given the same set of facts
 - This does not happen when miscalculation occurs, which leads to war
- There also exist incentives to misrepresent in bargaining
- Combination of private info about relative power or will to fight and strategic incentive to misrepresent positions in bargaining constitute a rational explanation of war

War & Commitment Problems

- With anarchy, states become suspicious of one another and build weapons and engage in attacks
- Anarchy matters when it seems as if a states preferences and opportunities for action imply that one or both sides in a dispute have incentives to renege on peaceful bargains which would be mutually preferable to war
- Preemptive war is one such case where if one wants to go to war, doing so stealthily would be the most safe. While both parties would prefer to live in peace, they are constantly afraid of doing so because of the anarchic state of international affairs
 - Seems to work similar to the prisoner's dilemma
- The same principle can be applied to preventive war, lack of trust is not the driving factor behind war in these instances. Rather, circumstances that give one party an incentive to renege are

Conclusion

- Because fighting is costly and risky, rational actors should prefer negotiations to war
- Rational actors may be unable to agree on these negotiations because
 - private information about resolve and capability, and the incentives that exist to misrepresent these
 - inability to commit to hold up a deal
- Not arguing irrelevance for empirical studies concluding that war is based on irrationality

01.22.21

Calculating Costs of War

Constants

- Fight occurs over \$100
- Cost of war: \$20
- P(Winning): 50%

Expected Value

- $(\text{Gains Winning}) + (\text{Gains Fighting}) - (\text{Cost of War})$
- $(0.5 \times 100) + (0) - (1 \times 20) = 50 - 20 = \30
- Because each side could negotiate in order to get an expected value of 31 <, it is not a rational decision to go to war

Miscalculation

- When both sides overestimate the probability of winning, their expected value goes up, thereby making their minimum threshold for negotiation too high for the other side.
- Consider miscalculation wherein both sides believe they have an 80% probability of winning:
 - $EV_{\text{war}} = (0.8 \times 100) + (0) - (1 \times 20) = 80 - 20 = 60.$
 - Both sides therefore want an expected value of > 60, which is impossible given the limited value of the thing being fought over

01.20.21

Rational Decision-Making

- Rational decision-making defines how we make decisions
- A person's or institutions goal is not relevant, the process of pursuing that goal is the factor driving decision-making

- This allows us to generalize decision-making significantly more
- Critical to consider the probabilistic nature of benefits and harms when considering rational decision-making
- Expected Value = “weighted value” for all costs and benefits
 - Same thing as “average payoff”

Incentive Structures

- Incentive structures are the expected values for each of the strategies considered
- Incentive structures impose a certain course of action upon us, given that we are rational actors

Expected Profit Khan

- Expected value can be calculated as the sum of all the outcome probabilities multiplied by their corresponding profits.
- Considering all outcome probabilities should yeild a total probability sum of 1 (100%), with profits being positive (gains) or negative (losses)

01.15.21

- Brain has a complex set of structures that work together to do both really important, and fundamentally flawed actions

Brain Stem

- The reptilian brain
- Really just an extensino of the spinal cord
- Controls automatic actions, no effect on decision-making

Middle Brain (Limbic System)

- Body’s monitoring system to identify important elements of the environment
- Discriminates things of importance constantly and ambiently

Brain Cortex

- Controls higher-level thinking
- Moral decision-making, learning, conscious awareness

Hierarchy of the brain

- Information goes from the brain stem, to the limbic system, to the brain cortex
- Critically, the limbic system was never designed to collect all the information around you - that incomplete information is used for decision-making
- Understanding the interplay and potential biases of the limbic system can help us understand decision-making and prevent bad decision making
- Fear and the triggering of fear prevents higher-level decision making and can prevent the intake of new information
- Sources of information can also have a significant effect on the processing of that information
 - can be seen through in-group/out-group bias

Rational Decision-Making

1. Pick a goal
2. Evaluate all strategies
 - Analyze costs
 - Analyze benefits
3. Select strategy with best cost/benefit ratio
4. Bias often occurs at stage 2 because of filtration of information through the limbic system

Notes Config