

'Bringing the individual back in' – International Relations and the First Image

Subject: International Relations

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Abstract:

Despite the efforts of rational, psychological as well as constructivist approaches to move beyond the third and second image of international politics, the so-called first image still seems to be disrespected and consequently less researched. This is about to change as more and more empirical studies point out that the individual and its characteristics does have an impact on international relations such as on cooperation and conflict, global decision-making processes or regional integration. This workshop aims to shed some light on how such a re-integration of the first image might succeed. Therefore it wants to bring together researchers from the European community and beyond working on the following questions: What are the psychological as well as social characteristics of individuals involved in international politics? Which factors determine their attitudes and cognitive abilities and how does this affect international relations? What is the role of individuals in shaping international relations?

Why are analyzes on the characteristics and the role of individuals in international relations comparatively less frequent in International Relations Theory? Literature on new bilateralism (e.g. Smith/Tsatsas 2002), for instance, emphasizes the importance of regular contact and personal ties between political actors. These personal relations determine not only effectiveness of bilateral relations but also of multilateral cooperation. The prominent role of individual decision makers in, for instance, adopting or rejecting policy innovations is acknowledged but their role is often treated as a 'black box' for the reason of simplification. Since the early 1990s, foreign policy analysis has paid some attention to individual belief systems (e.g. Goldstein/Keohane 1993). Constructivist research has introduced the social construction of ideas and identities in international relations (e.g. Wendt 1992, 1994), thereby also highlighting the role of individuals. Rational choice theories, too, define the individual as the primary source of preference-building. From a liberal perspective, these individual preferences might eventually become state preferences (Moravcsik 1997). Analyzes on policy networks as well as research addressing the two-level games of foreign policy demonstrated that Individuals and their personal ties not only play a decisive role in government-to-government relations but also in, for instance, transnational advocacy networks and social movements or transnational corporations. These actors impact on international bargaining processes and are an intrinsic part of global governance. Researchers interested in political leadership discuss personal capabilities and skills as determinants of success. Such an approach can help to better understand political change that cannot be explained by traditional analytical approaches excluding the first image. However, there is a strong need for more systematic analytical and conceptual work in this

research area to increase the empirical value of these studies (e.g. Skodvin/Andresen 2006).

Furthermore, researchers focusing on the cognitive abilities of political actors have given us some hints on how decision making in international bargaining is influenced by the limited or elaborated capabilities of such prominent figures like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, leading in the case of Thatcher to Cold War decisions highly affected by her personal friendship to Gorbachev (Dyson 2009). In the aftermath of such results, authors pointed to the influence which the different framing of situations may have for international bargaining and – following that – the outcomes of international decision making. The concept of framing has been a research issue of cognitive and social psychology for decades, both concentrating on individuals. It therefore seems to be obvious that framing effects should primarily be analyzed on the level of individuals. Yet, it is not. In contrast, these effects are examined on the level of states, which again shows the tendency of ‘black boxing’ in international relations theory. To sum up: Individuals matter in international relations. Although a significant amount of research on the role of individuals in decision-making has been done in areas that could be linked to International Relations research agenda, IR scholars have so far tended to avoid theoretical discussions about the first image.

Following that line of argumentation, the workshop aims to provide an opportunity to think about the re-integration of the individual into IR theories and to identify new research agendas. The workshop is interested in both empirical and theoretical research focusing on the role of individuals in international politics. We thereby want to explore the following questions:

- *What are the psychological as well as social characteristics of individuals involved in international politics?*
- *Which factors determine their attitudes and cognitive abilities and how does this affect international relations?*
- *What is the role of individuals in shaping international relations?*

Answering these questions will lead us to a theoretical discussion on the both the empirical and theoretical value of ‘bringing the individual back in’. Moreover, how could such a re-integration be theoretically and conceptually designed?

In its quest to find a theoretical basis for the analysis of the roles of individuals in international relations, this workshop strongly encourages the submission of both theoretical and empirical papers on this topic. This workshop is meant to serve as a stepping stone for the establishment of an issue-specific scientific network.

The workshop convenors will try to fund or co-fund the panel by acquiring grants from the Austrian FWF and the German Research Council (DFG). Special programs supporting joint projects by German, Austrian and/or Swiss researchers will be of particular interest.

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