

# **Identity and Threat Perception: An Experimental Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

How do individuals assess threats? Realists such as Waltz (1979) focus on material factors such as power. States possessing greater power represent an inherent threat because nothing in the anarchic international system prevents them from using the power advantage to coerce weaker neighbors. While subsequent realists such as Walt (1987) have slightly expanded the list of factors contributing to threat (e.g., geographic proximity and offensive capability), constructivists have challenged the deterministic relationship between power and threat. Constructivists argue that ideas are a crucial variable in the threat assessment equation. We develop and experimentally test a model of identity formation and threat perception. The results indicate that shared identity decreases threat perception and that shared identity is a social constructed relationship that is both variable and manipulable.

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## ***Introduction***

Why are individuals willing to support cooperation with other states? Realists argue that states should be very reluctant to cooperate with others because any gain by the other state could ultimately be used against the state in future disputes. Realism predicts that state leaders will only cooperate with others if the exchange preserves the preexisting balance of power or increases the state's power relative to the other party (Grieco 1988, 1990; Waltz 1979).

A less extreme view of realism argues that states should cooperate with allies in order to balance against threats. While these more moderate realists recognize that today's allies can in theory become tomorrow's enemies, the threat posed by the current adversary coupled with the luxury of time to adjust should relations between allies deteriorate implies that cooperation has tangible and certain short run benefits and remote and uncertain long run costs (Werner 1997).

Although the realpolitik paradigm (including both extreme and moderate realists) has dominated the discussion of foreign policy in the post World War II era, recent work on the causes and consequences of identity formation has challenged the paradigm. Wendt (1992) has argued that anarchy is what we make of it --- i.e., the level of hostility in the anarchical environment depends on the beliefs of individuals entering the relationship and the history of their subsequent interactions. While the "harsh" anarchic world assumed by realists is a distinct possibility, it is not the only possible outcome. In theory, the perception of shared identity (rather than a perception of mutual threat) could be the source of cooperation in anarchy.

Ideally, these two competing explanations for the emergence of conflict and cooperation could be tested in a head-to-head manner with a simple, well-conceived research design. Unfortunately, developing such a design is extremely difficult given the complex relationship between identity, threats, and cooperation. The difficulty stems, in part, from the fact that there is a reciprocal relationship between shared identity and threat perception. The more two states believe they share a common identity, the less they perceive the other as a threat. However, as the perception of threat increases, the sense of shared identity between the two states begins to evaporate.

Ido Oren's (1995) analysis of German and British relations prior to World War I highlights the reciprocal effect. For a time, the British believed that the two governments shared a common political structure – constitutionalism – in which rule of law protected certain rights and prevented an abuse of power. Political leaders and the press repeatedly emphasized how much the two states had in common; the implicit assumption was that two states with so many things in common must also share a preference for avoiding military conflict. However, as security conflicts such as the Anglo-German arms race and the Bosnia Crisis emerged, the perception of the German threat began to grow in Britain. The growing threat eroded the sense of shared identity as the British public and political elite began to focus on differences rather than similarities. The yardstick used to compare political systems shifted from "constitutionalism" to "democracy." While both countries may have had rule of law, the British increasingly believed that only their system was truly accountable to the people.

Figure 1 illustrates the reciprocal nature and complexity of the relationship between identity, threat, and cooperation. Ultimately, we want to explain the cooperation: why do states cooperate in international relations? Perhaps the most obvious impediment to cooperation is the perception of threat. The more another state appears to be a threat, the less likely you are to cooperate with it.

Waltz (1979) argues that states tend to balance against threatening states rather than bandwagoning with them. While the argument may be empirically correct under most conditions, it leaves open the question of the source of threat perceptions. Waltz himself focused on power. The existence of more powerful states represent an inherent threat to the weaker state because nothing in the anarchic system prevents this powerful state from extorting or crushing the weaker state. States must balance against the powerful through domestic defense spending or external alliances.

(Insert Figure 1 About Here)

Walt (1987) argues that states balance against threats rather than against power. In the post World War II period, Canada has not balanced against its more powerful southern neighbor. The last military plans for dealing with an American invasion were scrapped in 1931 (Keohane and Nye 1977: 167). Why? Despite the asymmetry of power, the Canadians do not perceive the United States as a threat. Walt argues that a threat is a function of four elements: military power, offensive capability, geographic proximity, and aggressive intentions. While the United States may possess power, offensive capability and proximity, it has not indicated that it had aggressive intentions toward its northern neighbor.

While the Walt renovations clearly improve on Waltz's original structure, they remain only a partial explanation of threat perception.<sup>1</sup> The problem is the broad and highly subjective category of "aggressive intentions." As Walt himself demonstrates, while the other components of threat change very slowly across time, the perception of aggressive intentions fluctuates wildly in the Middle East from 1955-1979. Walt's analysis, therefore, raises an even deeper question: what factors contribute to the perception of aggressive intentions?

The lower portion of Figure 1 highlights several factors contributing to the perception of aggressive intentions. First, a realist belief system predisposes one to view the world in zero sum terms and expect a clash of interests. Individuals with realist belief systems are more likely to view other states as potentially threatening (Rousseau 1999). Second, the other state's general reputation for aggressiveness influences a state's assessment of threat. Although German behavior in the Moroccan and Bosnian Crises did not directly threaten the United Kingdom, it did raise concern among British decision makers that Germany was willing to use military force to achieve political goals. Third, the history of conflict between the two states influences the perception of threat. The Anglo-German arms race raised concerns that Germany was increasingly willing to, and capable of, directly undermining Britain's global empire.

The final source of the perception of aggressive intentions is shared identity. According to Brewer, identity is like an onion in that there are many layers (Brewer 1991; Brewer and Gardner 1996). At the core is the individual's "self" identity. Immediately beyond this core is a layer of identities which emerges out of *personal* interactions with individuals and groups. Beyond this layer of identities is an even more remote layer in which we imagine a sense of community or similarity with individuals we have probably never met. One of these abstract and impersonal identities is "state identity".<sup>2</sup>

A state identity is a subjective assessment of the defining characteristics of the state, one's affective attachment to the state, and legitimate policies that must be pursued by the state. An American may believe their country is a democracy (or a capitalist oligarchy), good (or bad), and a defender (or exploiter) of the weak. It is subjective in that it is based on the individual's assessment rather than some objective and measurable criteria. Whether or not the United States *is* a democracy is irrelevant from an identity perspective. If the individual believes that the United States government has been captured by a capitalist oligarchy, this becomes an integral part of *their* conception of state identity.

Individuals construct identities for their state; they also construct subjective identities for other countries in the international system. The degree to which the two identities are similar, the

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<sup>1</sup> While Walt views his work as an extension of Waltz's argument, Waltz disagrees. Waltz claims that neo-realism is a systemic level theory which does not make predictions about foreign policy (Waltz 1997:916). My own view falls closer to Walt because Waltz makes state level predictions (e.g., states balance against more powerful states) in order to derive his systemic level predictions (e.g., bipolarity is more peaceful than multipolarity).

<sup>2</sup> For a similar argument focusing on nationalism, see Anderson (1983).

individual has a sense of “shared identity” with the target country. As the lower right-hand corner of Figure 1 indicates, if the individual believes that the two states share a common religion, economic structure, political structure, ethnicity, value system, and/or history, the individual is more likely to believe that the two states share an identity. This sense of shared identity decreases the perception that the other state is a threat. However, the relationship is dynamic and mutually constitutive. Threatening behavior by the other state, either generally or directly, leads to an erosion of the sense of shared identity (depicted by a dotted line in Figure 1).

### ***Construction of Identity***

But how are identities constructed and how stable are these constructions across time? We hypothesize that the construction of shared identity is very similar to the process by which individuals construct opinions in response to survey questions. While on occasion individuals have prefabricated opinions that they simply report to the interviewer, in most cases individuals construct an opinion by retrieving accessible information, using information from prior questions, assessing the context of the current question, and examining the nature of the interviewer-subject relationship (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996).

(Insert Figure 2 About Here)

A similar process, which is graphically displayed in Figure 2, takes place in the construction of state identity and shared identity. Suppose an individual is asked the following question: “Should Japan become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council?” Immediately, the individual must construct some image of Japan. If we were able to ask the person this question repeatedly across time, we would find that he or she relied on a handful of dimensions to evaluate the other state. In the case of “Jane Doe”, she tends to use 13 different elements to evaluate Japan. However, these dimensions are latent. On any given day, only a subset will be salient. In the figure, we see that three dimensions are salient: regime type, economic structure, and external orientation. Jane Doe evaluates both her own country and the other country using these salient dimensions. She concludes that both countries are democratic and capitalist but that the United States is more internationalist than Japan. Her net assessment is that the two states are pretty similar.<sup>3</sup>

The more the individual believes Japan shares a common identity with the United States, the less likely he or she is to view Japan as a threat. While other considerations will influence the final response to this question (e.g., is Japan a great power? or is Japan willing to participate in Security Council military operations?), the assessment of identity is an important element of the final response. If you remain skeptical, ask your next door neighbor this question with one minor change – replace Japan with Libya.

Using this theoretical framework for the construction of identity, we can construct a number of potentially testable propositions.

**H1:** The more individuals believe that their country and the target country share a common identity, the less likely they are to view the target country as a threat.

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<sup>3</sup> The process is iterative in that the individual's self assessment may make certain dimensions more salient for the construction of the “other” and vice versa (Hopf 1999). So when Jane Doe thinks of the United States certain dimensions come to mind and when she thinks of Japan other dimensions come to mind. Ultimately, a comparison will be made on each dimension because both countries are salient.

- H2:** Individuals primed to perceive two states as increasingly *similar* will view the target state as *less* threatening. Conversely, individuals primed to perceive two states as increasingly *dissimilar* will view the target state as *more* threatening.
- H3:** The more knowledgeable the individual, the more complex the construction of identity
- H4:** The more knowledgeable the individual, the less receptive the individual is to priming.
- H5:** The more complex the identity, the more receptive the individual is to priming.

Hypothesis 1 is derived directly from the preceding discussion: shared identity decreases threat perception. Hypothesis 2 is derived from our discussion of identity formation. In keeping with much of the social psychological literature (Berger and Luckman 1966; Cialdini and Trost 1998), we view identity formation as a continual process. Our identities are fluid rather than fixed and interactions with others can reinforce or undermine our current identity. We suspect that the stability of identity declines as you move from the inner core to the outer layers of identity. Moreover, while one's subjective assessment of one's own national identity might be relatively stable across time, we suspect that the subjective construction of the identity of other countries that one has little knowledge of, or experience with, is likely to be much less stable.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that priming can alter the subjective assessment of other states. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) have demonstrated that priming subjects to think about "defense" issues by inserting defense stories into television news segments causes the subject to alter their assessment of presidential performance. By making defense salient, the subjects weigh this dimension more heavily in their assessment of the president. Domke, Shah and Vackman (1998a, 1998b) replicate the findings using simulated newspaper articles rather than television news segments. We predict that priming people to view two countries as more similar will lead them to view the other country as less threatening. Conversely, priming people to view the two countries as very dissimilar will increase the perception of threat.

Finally, Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 derive from the work of Zaller (1992). Although Zaller is concerned with survey responses rather than identity formation, he deduces and tests a cluster of hypotheses relating knowledge, beliefs, and attitude change. Specifically, he argues there is a curilinear relationship between political awareness and attitude change. Individuals with very low awareness are unlikely to receive messages and, therefore, unlikely to change views. Individuals with very high awareness are likely to have relatively fixed beliefs that are unlikely to be altered by a political message. In the end, it is the moderately aware who are likely to change because they pay enough attention to receive message but they are not so wedded to their views that they are very likely to reject all messages.

(Insert Figure 3 About Here)

We suspect that a similar process occurs during identity formation. The triangular relationship, which is depicted in Figure 3, links knowledge, belief complexity, and susceptibility to priming. Knowledge refers to domain specific knowledge (i.e., the subjects knowledge of international affairs measured through a series of survey questions). Complexity refers to the number of dimensions used in the evaluation process. Individuals vary in the number of latent dimensions and active dimensions they use to construct the identity of other countries. As illustrated in Figure 4, Jane Doe may draw three active dimensions from seven latent dimensions. In contrast, John Ray may draw one active dimension from two latent dimensions. Moreover, we view this process as probabilistic. While Jane Doe may have three active dimensions on average, on any given day the number of active dimensions vary due to changes in salience.

(Insert Figure 4 About Here)

What makes a particular dimension salient at any given moment? Salience can be influenced by discussions with family, arguments with neighbors, newspaper articles, television programs, fictional books, personal experience, memory, etc. The power of the news media and the political elite stems from the fact that they can make certain dimensions particularly salient. The authors of the Congressional "Cox Report," which investigated alleged Chinese spying at U.S. weapons labs, begin their report with the damning sentence: "The People's Republic of China (PRC) has stolen design information on the United States' most advanced thermonuclear weapons" (Cox 1999: ii). This message, which was repeated in newspapers and television news programs for weeks, primed individuals to view China as untrustworthy and a military threat.

The final element in Figure 3 is susceptibility to priming. Susceptibility to priming refers to how easily an individual is influenced by a natural or artificial stimulus. Survey researchers have long known that susceptibility can vary from issue to issue and individual to individual. On some issues, such as abortion, many individuals often hold deeply rooted beliefs that are invulnerable to persuasive arguments. Similarly, individuals vary with respect to the stability of views across time (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwartz 1996).

The theoretical relationships in Figure 3 suggest three testable propositions. Hypothesis 3 predicts that those with less knowledge about international affairs will have less complex identity assessments. Individuals with extensive knowledge of particular countries such as China or Japan are likely to evaluate the target country on more dimensions.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that individuals with extensive knowledge of the international system will be less susceptible to priming. That is, they will be less likely to change their views about the identity of the target country and the threat it poses based on exposure to a message. For example, a member of the House of Representatives serving on the International Relations Committee or a State Department official assigned to the China Desk are likely to have very fixed views concerning "What is China?" and "Is China a threat?" In contrast, individuals with less knowledge are likely to be influenced by information that portrays China as either similar or dissimilar to the home country.

Hypothesis 5 predicts that individuals with more complex identity assessments are more susceptible to priming. If an individual uses a single dimension to define identity (e.g., communist or not communist), it will be very difficult to prime them. Messages about Chinese crack downs on religious freedoms or Chinese progress toward democracy are likely to fall on deaf ears. In contrast, if an individual has many latent dimensions (regime type, economy, religion, wealth, great power status, etc.), messages about these dimensions can increase the probability of reception and opinion change.

While this relationship between knowledge and complexity appears straightforward, it makes the triangular relationship between knowledge, complexity, and priming unclear because knowledge has a negative direct impact on susceptibility to priming and a positive indirect impact on susceptibility through the complexity variable. We predict a curvilinear relationship: priming should be most effective for individuals with moderate knowledge because they have sufficient complexity without having deeply entrenched views.

### ***Research Design***

The experiment was conducted during the Spring 2001 semester at the University of Pennsylvania with a sample of 292 undergraduates enrolled in introductory political science classes. One week into the semester students were offered extra credit for participating in a one-hour experiment exploring the role of news coverage in international affairs. Each subject read a series of newspaper articles, responded to questions about sources of news (a "distracter" activity used in part to justify the cover story), evaluated how similar pairs of countries are in an open-ended manner; and answered questions about threats and their knowledge of international affairs. The experimental instruments can be viewed at [www.ssc.upenn.edu/~rousseau/identity.htm](http://www.ssc.upenn.edu/~rousseau/identity.htm).

The stimulus was a package of 5 news stories drawn from major English language newspapers (see Iyengar and Kinder (1987) and Domke, Shah and Vackman (1998a, 1998b) for similar designs). As Table 1 indicates, there were three versions of the newspaper package. One-third of the subjects (Group A) read articles indicating that China was becoming **more** democratic and **more** market oriented; one-third (Group B) read articles indicating that China was becoming **less** democratic and **less** market oriented; and one-third of the subjects (Group C) had no articles about China in their packages. We hypothesize that those reading the converging package are more likely to describe China and the United States as similar and less likely to evaluate China as a threat. Conversely, those reading the diverging package should view the two countries as less similar and China as a greater threat.

The major English language newspapers included the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *South China Morning Post*. With the exception of one article, only minor editing (i.e., the removal of a sentence or two) was required for inclusion of the packages. In the sole exception, we merged two *New York Times* articles in order to highlight how economic changes in China were leading to the development of a middle class which might demand more political rights. Although we could have created a more powerful stimulus with fictitious articles, we chose to use real news stories in order to ensure the generalizability of the findings outside the laboratory. Similarly, we restricted the number of articles about China to just 2 of 5 in the diverging and converging packages. While a large number of articles would have increased the power of the stimulus, it seems unlikely that individuals observe such intensive coverage outside of crisis situations.

(Insert Table 1 About Here)

After completing distracter questions about their primary sources of news, subjects were presented pairs of countries (Russia and the United States; the United Kingdom and the United States; Cuba and the United States; China and the United States; Brazil and the United States; and Japan and the United States). Subjects answered the question "How similar are these two countries?" using a nine point scale from "Very Similar" to "Very Dissimilar." They then were instructed to identify important similarities and dissimilarities in the open-ended fashion.

While the use of an open-ended question makes analyzing the dimensions more difficult, it eliminates the imposition of structure by the researcher on the subject. For example, a standard multi-dimensional scaling approach would require that each subject answer a series of close-ended questions (e.g., "How democratic is Russia? What religion is Russia? How developed is Russia?) for *every* country in the survey. Then factor analysis would be used to isolate the dimensions of similarity and dissimilarity by identifying clusters of states and subjectively labeling the dimensions. The problem with this approach is that subjects might never think of the U.S.-Russia relationship in terms of "regime type" or "religion". Moreover, the subject, eager to complete the test and/or please the researcher, may provide responses despite the fact they have no idea what religion is practiced in Japan or the level of democracy in Brazil. The central problem is that the researcher is inevitably making certain dimensions salient for the subject. In contrast, our approach allows the subject to determine which dimensions are important.<sup>4</sup> In future analysis, we hope to use the most common inductively derived dimensions in a more systematic multi-dimensional scaling analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> Both approaches suffer from contamination between dyadic comparisons. Answering the questions for Russia inevitably influences answers for subsequent countries. The only solution to this problem would be to ask the subjects one country at a time over several weeks or months. This solution was not practical for this experiment.

Complexity was measured by averaging the number of dimensions used by the subject in the open-ended portion of the similarity/dissimilarity task. In our data set, this variable ranges from 1 to 7. Finally, the knowledge index was created from the factual questions in the last part of the survey. In our data, this index ranges from 2 to 12. A list of the questions used to develop the knowledge index is in Appendix A.

### **Results**

Before turning to the specific hypotheses, it is important to provide an overview of the subject responses. Table 2 presents the average number of similarities and dissimilarities identified by the subjects by country. For Russia, the subjects identified an average of 2.2 similarities and 3.9 dissimilarities. Only in the cases of the United Kingdom and Japan do the number of similarities outnumber the number of dissimilarities. In the case of Cuba, subjects were able to identify many dissimilarities (mean of 4.1) but very few similarities (mean of 0.7). Overall, we see that subjects could identify more dissimilarities (3.2) than similarities (2.2). It appears to be easier for subjects to identify boundaries that emphasize "them" than boundaries that emphasize "us."

(Insert Table 2 About Here)

Table 3 presents the frequency in which specific dimensions were used by the subjects to categorize states. The Table clearly indicates that subjects use a wide variety of dimensions. For instance, no single category accounts for more than 14 percent of the total. This wide variance validates the use of open-ended questions. Survey research has demonstrated that restricting the number of categories in closed-ended questions can drastically alter the distribution of responses by making some dimensions more salient than others (Schwarz 1999). The most common dimensions used were *Size*, *Ideology*, *Political Structure* (e.g., both have a presidential system), *Economic Strength*, *Economic Structure*, and *Common Language/Religion/Culture*.

(Insert Table 3 About Here)

Table 4 displays the subjects assessment of the military threat (top) and economic threat (bottom) posed by three countries: Russia, China, and Japan. In terms of military threat, China is viewed as most threatening: 79.45 percent of the subjects view China as a high (35.27%) or a medium (44.18%) military threat. Russia is seen as the second most militarily threatening and Japan the least. In terms of economic threat, the tables are turned. While Russia is seen as an economic basket case, both China and Japan are viewed as important economic threats. In the case of Japan, 90.73 percent view the Japanese as a high (50.52%) or medium (40.21%) economic threat. Overall, China is viewed as a threat from both an economic and a military perspective. This makes China a very difficult case from a priming perspective because it is clear that the subjects view China as an important threat and are therefore less likely to perceive a shared identity.

(Insert Table 4 About Here)

Hypothesis 1 predicts individuals perceiving a common identity between their country and another should view the other as less threatening. The results for the perception of a military threat presented in Table 5 strongly support the hypothesis. Of those perceiving the opposing state as dissimilar, 27.42% viewed the state as a high military threat and only 4.71 % viewed the state as no threat. Of those viewing the two states as similar, only 12.40% viewed the state as a threat and 32.56% viewed the state as no threat at all. The results are statistically significant at better than the .001 level. The pattern of results does not hold for economic threat (not shown)



because Japan is viewed as similar but an economic threat and Russia is viewed as dissimilar but not an economic threat.

(Insert Table 5 About Here)

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the relationship between identity and threat is constructed by the subject and, therefore, susceptible to priming by the personal communication (e.g., water cooler discussion) and impersonal communication (e.g., mass media). Specifically, we predict that the individuals primed by newspaper articles to view the states as becoming more (less) similar will view the target country as less (more) threatening. The findings, presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8, provide partial support for the hypothesis.

Table 6 highlights the impact of the newspaper package stimuli. The stimuli worked as anticipated for the subjects viewing the diverging package. As we expected, subjects reading the diverging newspaper package viewed China as more dissimilar than the control group (77.66% compared to 59.79%). The diverging group also viewed China as less similar than the control group (1.06% compared to 4.12%). In sharp contrast to these findings, the impact of the stimulus for the converging group was much weaker. Those reading the converging newspaper package viewed China as only slightly more similar than the control group (5.15% compared to 4.12%). Moreover, contrary to expectations, the converging group viewed China as more dissimilar than the control group (72.16% compared to 59.79%).

Given that an earlier version of the experiment revealed a similar pattern of findings, the results cannot be dismissed as the product of the particular sample of subjects or the particular selection of articles. Rather, the pattern of results appears to emerge for four reasons. First, in contrast to the control group, subjects given either the "converging" or "diverging" packages were required to read two articles about China. The articles, which have an average length of approximately 1100 words, inevitably raised the salience of a broad number of dimensions for the subjects. Moreover, while the converging package clearly emphasizes the marketization and democratization of China, it does so by highlighting changes from a communist and autocratic past. Second, it is simply more difficult to encourage subjects to think about similarities than differences. In every experiment, subjects identified significantly more differences than similarities. Third, the selection of China for the "other" country is theoretically interesting but empirically problematic. While the rise of China may well be the most significant event of this century, the fact that so few subjects view China as similar even in the control group (4.12%) implies that dramatically increasing this figure may be difficult. Finally, the creation of fictitious articles could have been used to more precisely manipulate the converging package. However, we remain convinced that using real newspaper articles is vital to ensuring the generalizability of the results outside the laboratory.

(Insert Table 6 About Here)

Table 7 displays the relationship between the experimental stimulus and the perception of threat measured following the review of the articles. We expected the distribution of responses for the diverging group to be shifted to the "high" endpoint at the left of the table and the distribution of responses for the converging group to be shifted to the "none" endpoint at the right of the table. As expected, we do observe a slight increase in the number of "high" responses for the diverging group and a moderate increase in the number of "low" responses for the converging group. However, the shifts are weak and fail to achieve statistical significance. A comparison of means (diverging=1.84, control=1.84, and converging=1.92) reveals that the diverging package failed to raise the perception of threat and the converging package only moderately lowered the perception of threat. The differences among the means were not statistically significant.

(Insert Table 7 About Here)

Our experimental work has demonstrated the difficulty in altering threat perception when employing a simple four-point threat scale and relatively small stimulus. However, it is possible that the stimulus may have important policy implications by making a subject more or less willing to cooperate with the other country. Hurwitz and Peffley (1987) contend that foreign policy beliefs are structured hierarchically; this structure allows a relatively ignorant public to locate and express a foreign policy position. The hierarchy, which consists of *broad core values* (e.g., the morality of warfare) and general postures (e.g., militarism and anti-communism), is strongly correlated with *specific policy positions*. Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson (1993) extend this analysis into a cross-national setting and suggest that general beliefs (images of other countries in particular) constrain foreign policy belief systems and play a role in citizens' evaluation of foreign affairs. "We have learned that attitudinal structure is quite likely to be functional in the sense that it develops to meet the particular needs of a particular citizenry. Citizens of the United States have had to deal...with a variety of national security and military issues, thanks in large part to the prominent global role played by their government. In response, North Americans have relied very heavily on the militarism dimension to structure their more specific policy attitudes (Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993:264)." While the specific structure (*core values* and *general postures*) may vary from culture to culture, a hierarchy of beliefs makes opinion – even opinion based on little information – more consistent and stable than early research suggested (e.g., Converse 1964).

In relation to our experiment, it seems possible that the question "Is China a military threat to the United States?" taps views closer to core values which are more stable than policy beliefs. In order to probe this possibility, we conducted a latent response analysis using similar questions from a related experiment. Latent response analysis exploits the fact that subjects differ with respect to how quickly they respond to questions (see Fazio 1989). Subjects should respond quickly to questions tapping deeply held beliefs and slowly to questions which require them to construct a response. Using a computer-based survey that measured the length of time in milliseconds between the display of the question and the subject's response, we asked subjects a series of questions about China including a military threat question and several relative gains questions. The mean response time for the threat question was 6135 milliseconds; the mean response for the relative gains questions was 7537. A t-test of means indicates that the difference is significant at better than the .03 level of significance.

Therefore, in order to probe the impact of the stimulus further we shift our focus from threats to beliefs about the gains from cooperation with China. We included the following policy question in the post-test. The results of the question are shown in Table 8.

***Question: Would you support or oppose an international trade agreement that results in small economic gains by the U.S. but major economic gains by China?***

- ☐ ***Support Strongly***
- ☐ ***Support Somewhat***
- ☐ ***Neutral***
- ☐ ***Oppose Strongly***
- ☐ ***Oppose Somewhat***
- ☐ ***Not Sure***

(Insert Table 8 About Here)

The question is designed to measure the subjects' willingness to cooperate despite asymmetries in gains from cooperation. The fact that China gains more than the United States

should trigger concerns about relative gains and potential threats. While we might expect individuals with realist beliefs to be more concerned about relative gains (Rousseau 1999), the random assignment of subjects to the three newspaper packages should neutralize this factor. If the stimulus packages had no impact on attitudes and perceptions (i.e. the null hypothesis), there should be no difference between groups.

A brief examination of the results in Table 8 leads us to reject this null hypothesis. The Table creates a dichotomous measure separating those who oppose cooperation (somewhat and strongly) from all other subjects. While responses from the diverging group were very similar to those of the control group (54.74% versus 53.06%), subjects reading the converging package were much more likely to support cooperation. The results are statistically significant at better than the 0.03 level. While the converging package failed to alter responses along the four-point threat scale, it did alter the subjects' willingness to accept absolute gains (and relative losses).

Hypothesis 3 predicts that individuals with more knowledge about the international system will have more complex pictures of other countries in the system. The results in Table 9 strongly support this proposition. We developed trichotomous categorical variables from the knowledge index and complexity variable in order to distinguish individuals scoring "high", "medium," and "low" on each variable. The Table indicates 55.17% of those score low on the knowledge test also employed a restricted number of dimensions in the open-ended comparison of countries. Only 17.24% of the low knowledge subjects fell into the "high" complexity category. In contrast, a majority of the high knowledge subjects fell in the high complexity category (43.52% in the Table). The results are statistically significant at better than the .001 level. A regression analysis using the continuous versions of the variables produces similar results. Clearly, individuals with more knowledge about international affairs employ more dimensions in their construction of the "other."

(Insert Table 9 About Here)

Hypotheses 4 and 5, which form two legs of the triangular structure in Figure 3, are difficult to test without a panel research design. Moreover, the failure of the stimulus package to significantly alter threat perception stymies one important avenue of investigation. However, we can probe the direct and indirect impact of knowledge using the cooperation question discussed above: *Would you support or oppose an international trade agreement that results in small economic gains by the U.S. but major economic gains by China?* We hypothesized that the impact of the stimulus package would be strongest for those with medium knowledge because they possessed sufficient complexity to facilitate reception of the prime but not so much knowledge to render any new information superfluous.

(Insert Table 10 About Here)

The results in Table 10 only partially support our expectations. The Table replicates the analysis in Table 8 with one important variation: we separate the subjects according to their level of knowledge. As expected, the high knowledge group was impervious to priming. As the upper portion of the Table indicates, there is no statistically significant difference between the responses of subjects reading the converging, control, or diverging newspaper packages. For the Medium knowledge group, a clear pattern emerges -- those reading the converging package are less likely to oppose cooperation. However, the results fall just short of statistical significance. For the low knowledge group, the same pattern emerges and it is statistically significant at the 0.016 level. Low knowledge subjects reading the diverging package were more likely to oppose cooperation with China than the control group (74.07% compared to 68.75%). Conversely, those reading the converging package were much less likely to oppose cooperation with China compared to the

control group (39.29% compared to 68.75%). Finally, it is also clear that knowledge is related to cooperation in general (i.e., regardless of the package). While only 38.89% of the high knowledge group opposed cooperation, we see that 46.88% of the medium knowledge and fully 60.92% of the low knowledge subjects opposed cooperation with China.

Why didn't the lack of complexity in the low knowledge group inhibit the impact of the stimulus as expected? We believe two factors are at work. First, we chose to prime two of the most commonly used dimensions in the evaluation of other states. This implies that these dimensions were already salient for many low knowledge people. Second, the selection of "China" as the other state may also have influenced the findings if evaluations of China tend to employ fewer dimensions (including the two we chose to prime). While we believe these initial results of the triangular relationship between knowledge, complexity, and priming are exciting, clearly the complex relationship must be addressed in future research.

### ***Conclusions***

This paper adds to the identity literature in international relations in two ways. First, we develop a unique and testable model linking identity to threat perception. While several studies have argued that identity is related to threat, they have not articulated the micro-foundations of this relationship (Clunan 2000). Second, we employ an experimental approach to probe the relationship between the perception of threat and identity. The growing identity literature in international relations has focused almost exclusively on a single methodological approach: historical case studies (Risse-Kappen 1995; Johnson 1995; Katzenstein 1996; Price and Tannenwald 1996; Kier 1997; and Berger 1998). While historical case studies have unique strengths (George and McKeown 1985; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), they remain but one method available to researchers interested in identity. The experimental method allows us to test key causal arguments identified by the case study literature.

Four key findings emerge from the analysis. First, a sense of shared identity is negatively correlated with threat perception. States viewed as military threats are also seen as very dissimilar to the home state. Second, the perception of shared identity and the perception of threat are manipulable. Although the manipulation failed in some respects, it did demonstrate that a very limited stimulus (two newspaper articles) can significantly shift identity and threat relative to the **control** group. Third, the manipulation altered the willingness of subjects to cooperate with China. Subjects reading newspaper articles describing Chinese progress toward democracy and a market economy were more likely to cooperate with China despite suffering relative losses. Fourth, individuals with more knowledge about the international system construct much more complex images of the "other."

This paper represents a first step in a larger research program. The objective of the program is to explicitly link the individual level, the state level, and the international level. We seek to understand how individuals form identities, how specific identities come to dominate societies, and the international implications of specific domestic identities. Clunan (2000) argues that Wendt errs by focusing on international interactions to the exclusion of domestic identities and Haas errs by focusing on domestic identities to the exclusion of international interactions. We hope to bridge this domestic-international divide. Moreover, we seek to bridge the individual-societal divide by providing a mechanism linking cognitive process at the individual level to competition within the collective to define the identity of the society. Although much work remains to be done, the paper represents a first step in this bridging process.

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## APPENDIX A: Factual Questions Used to Develop the Knowledge Index.

1) What is the international organization dedicated to the stabilization of exchange rates?

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2) Identify the current chief executives (e.g., Presidents or Prime Ministers) of the following countries:

### **United Kingdom**

☐ William Hague      ☐ John Major      ☐ Tony Blair      ☐ Margaret Thatcher      ☐ Not Sure

### **Egypt**

☐ Hosni Mubarak      ☐ King Hussein      ☐ Ismail Salaam      ☐ Anwar Sadat      ☐ Not Sure

### **Japan**

☐ Kakuei Tanaka      ☐ Eisaku Sato      ☐ Keizo Obuchi      ☐ Yoshiro Mori      ☐ Not Sure

3) Identify all the countries that currently possess nuclear weapons.

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4) In terms of Gross National Product (GNP), estimate how large Japan is relative to the U.S.

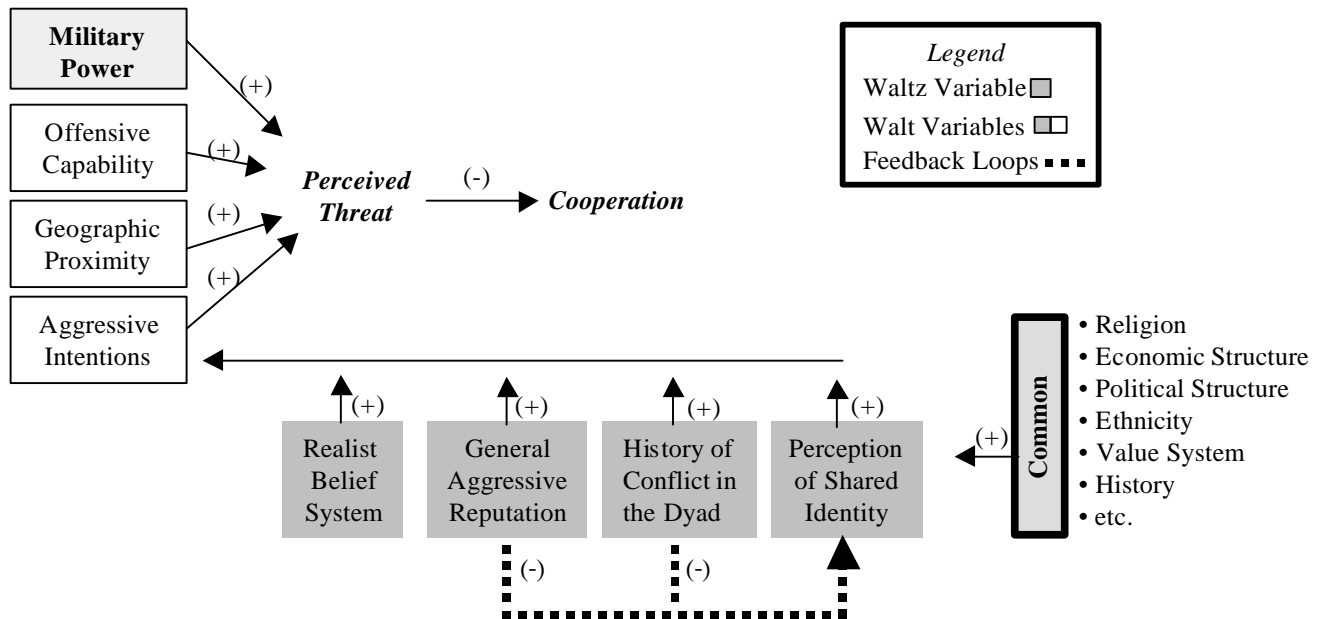
- ☐ Japan is much larger than the U.S.
- ☐ Japan is slightly larger than the U.S.
- ☐ The two countries are equal in size.
- ☐ The U.S. is slightly larger than Japan.
- ☐ The U.S. is much larger than Japan.
- ☐ Not Sure

7) Which of the following states are currently members of the European Union?

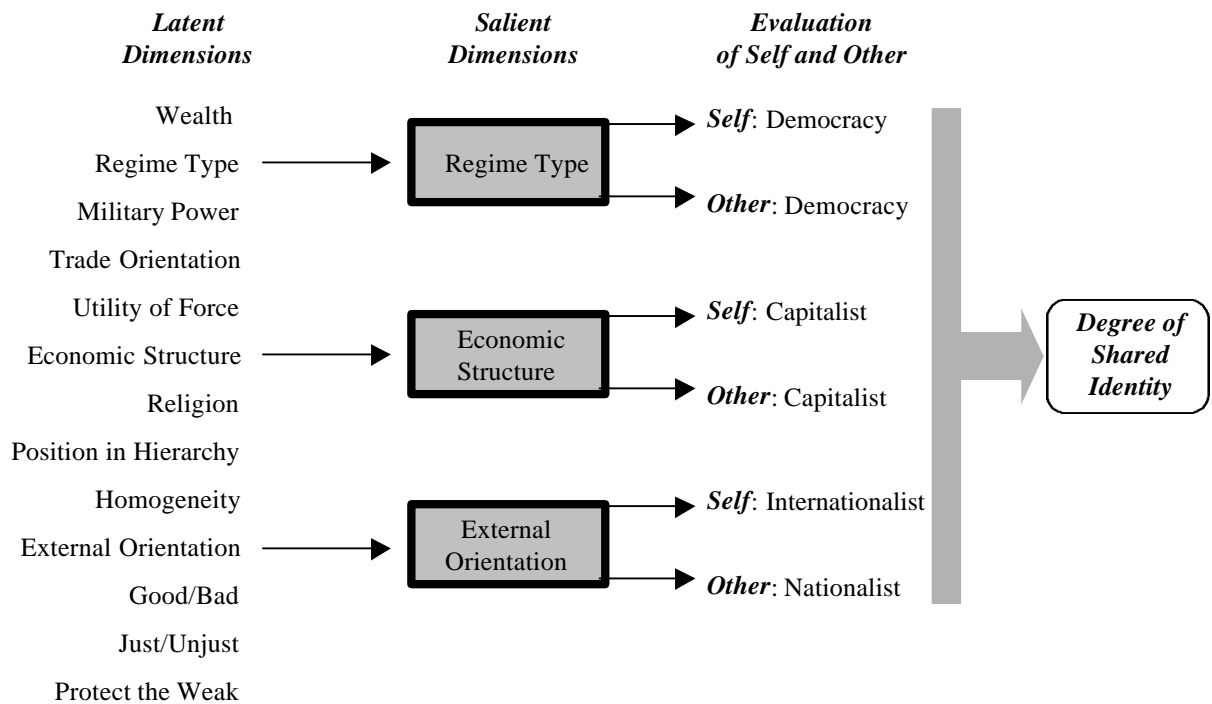
<b>France</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure
<b>Poland</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure
<b>Germany</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure
<b>Switzerland</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure
<b>Norway</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure
<b>Portugal</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> member	<input type="checkbox"/> not a member	<input type="checkbox"/> not sure

8) In which year did the Communists under the direction of Mao Zedong emerge victorious in the Chinese civil war? \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 1: Threat, Cooperation, and Identity**

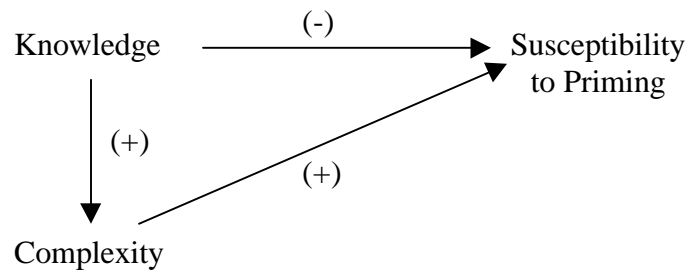


**Figure 2: Jane Doe's Construction an Identity of the "Other"**

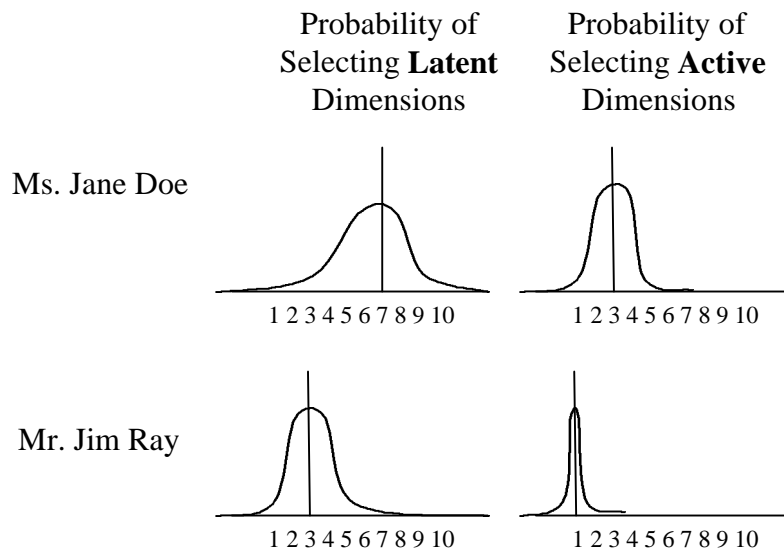




**Figure 3: Relating Knowledge, Complexity, and Susceptibility to Priming**



**Figure 4: Selecting Active and Latent Dimension**



**Table 1: Newspaper Packages with Five Articles**

	<b>Group A: Converging</b> -----	<b>Group B: Diverging</b> -----	<b>Group C: Control</b> -----
1	<i>European Union</i> : Political	same	same
2	<i>China</i> : Democratizing	<i>China</i> : Authoritarianism	<i>Philippines</i> : Political
3	<i>Chile</i> : Political	same	same
4	<i>Congo</i> : Military	same	same
5	<i>China</i> : Market Economy	<i>China</i> : Statist Economy	<i>Africa</i> : Economic

**Table 2: Average Number of Similarities and Dissimilarities by Country**

<b>Country</b> -----	<b>Average Number of Similarities</b> -----	<b>Average Number of Dissimilarities</b> -----
Russia	2.2	3.9
Britain	3.7	2.1
Cuba	0.7	4.1
China	2.5	4.3
Brazil	1.2	2.1
Japan	2.9	2.6
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.2</b>

**Table 3: Categories of Similarities and Dissimilarities**

Category	Number of Times Identified As		Number of Times Identified As		Total
	Similarity	Percent	Dissimilarity	Percent	
1 Size: Territory and/or Population	249	0.06	331	0.07	580
2 Geography or Location	107	0.03	97	0.02	204
3 Heterogeneous or Homogeneous	22	0.01	81	0.02	103
4 Ethnocentric or Nationalistic	14	0.00	16	0.00	30
5 Ideology (e.g., Democratic or Communist)	244	0.06	349	0.07	593
6 Nuclear Capabilities	162	0.04	13	0.00	175
7 Political Structure	262	0.07	678	0.14	940
8 Economic Strength: Strong or Weak	509	0.13	682	0.14	1191
9 Economic Structure	351	0.09	368	0.07	719
10 Important International Actor	243	0.06	189	0.04	432
11 Corruption or Crime	7	0.00	91	0.02	98
12 Language, Religion, or Culture	257	0.07	593	0.12	850
13 Regime Stability or Instability	43	0.01	134	0.03	177
14 historical legacy	107	0.03	117	0.02	224
15 Human or Civil Rights: Protection or Violation	50	0.01	226	0.05	276
16 Membership in International Organizations	114	0.03	31	0.01	145
17 Military Capabilities	204	0.05	249	0.05	453
18 Allies or Adversaries on International Issues	100	0.03	38	0.01	138
19 Other	273	0.07	346	0.07	619
20 Superpowers	83	0.02	20	0.00	103
21 Distrust	9	0.00	6	0.00	15
22 Trade Issues	115	0.03	72	0.01	187
23 Economic Competitors	11	0.00	1	0.00	12
24 Desire for International Influence	70	0.02	44	0.01	114
25 Education or Literacy	61	0.02	70	0.01	131
26 Technology	176	0.05	79	0.02	255
27 Environment (climate, etc.)	5	0.00	29	0.01	34
28 Science	16	0.00	3	0.00	19
Total	3864	0.99	4921	1.00	8785

**Table 4: Economic and Military Threat Assessment****Military Threat**

	high	medium	low	none	Total
Russia	51 17.47	133 45.55	92 31.51	16 5.48	292 100.00
China	103 35.27	129 44.18	55 18.84	5 1.71	292 100.00
Japan	25 8.59	63 21.65	121 41.58	82 28.18	291 100.00
Total	179 20.46	325 37.14	268 30.63	103 11.77	875 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(6) = 207.0913$  Pr = 0.000

**Economic Threat**

	high	medium	low	none	Total
Russia	3 1.03	35 12.03	190 65.29	63 21.65	291 100.00
China	103 35.40	138 47.42	48 16.49	2 0.69	291 100.00
Japan	147 50.52	117 40.21	27 9.28	0 0.00	291 100.00
Total	253 28.98	290 33.22	265 30.36	65 7.45	873 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(6) = 486.8123$  Pr = 0.000

**Table 5: The Relationship between Military Threat and Identity.**

Military Threat					
	high	medium	low	none	Total
disimilar	99 27.42	158 43.77	87 24.10	17 4.71	361 100.00
neutral	60 16.81	135 37.82	119 33.33	43 12.04	357 100.00
similar	16 12.40	26 20.16	45 34.88	42 32.56	129 100.00
don't know	3 15.79	5 26.32	11 57.89	0 0.00	19 100.00
Total	178 20.55	324 37.41	262 30.25	102 11.78	866 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(9) = 106.1321$  Pr = 0.000

**Table 6: The Experiment: Priming and Similarity**

Similarity				
	disimilar	neutral	similar	Total
diverge	73 77.66	20 21.28	1 1.06	94 100.00
control	58 59.79	35 36.08	4 4.12	97 100.00
converge	70 72.16	22 22.68	5 5.15	97 100.00
Total	201 69.79	77 26.74	10 3.47	288 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 9.5949$  Pr = 0.048

**Table 7: The Experiment: Priming and Military Threat Assessment**

	<b>Military Threat</b>				
	high	medium	low	none	Total
diverge	35 36.84	41 43.16	18 18.95	1 1.05	95 100.00
control	34 34.69	49 50.00	12 12.24	3 3.06	98 100.00
converge	34 34.34	39 39.39	25 25.25	1 1.01	99 100.00
Total	103 35.27	129 44.18	55 18.84	5 1.71	292 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(6) = 7.3798$  Pr = 0.287

**Table 8: The Experiment: Priming and Willingness to Cooperate with China**

	Else	Oppose	Total
diverge	43 45.26	52 54.74	95 100.00
control	46 46.94	52 53.06	98 100.00
converge	62 62.63	37 37.37	99 100.00
Total	151 51.71	141 48.29	292 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 7.1991$  Pr = 0.027

**Table 9: The Relationship between Knowledge and Complexity**

Knowledge Categories	3 quantiles of Complexity			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Low	48	24	15	87
	55.17	27.59	17.24	100.00
Medium	30	38	28	96
	31.25	39.58	29.17	100.00
High	20	41	47	108
	18.52	37.96	43.52	100.00
Total	98	103	90	291
	33.68	35.40	30.93	100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 32.5504$  Pr = 0.000

**Table 10: Knowledge and Priming: Willingness to Cooperate****Subjects with High Knowledge**

	Else	Oppose	Total
diverge	22 64.71	12 35.29	34 100.00
control	21 58.33	15 41.67	36 100.00
converge	23 60.53	15 39.47	38 100.00
Total	66 61.11	42 38.89	108 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 0.3072$  Pr = 0.858

**Subjects with Medium Knowledge**

	Else	Oppose	Total
diverge	14 41.18	20 58.82	34 100.00
control	15 51.72	14 48.28	29 100.00
converge	22 66.67	11 33.33	33 100.00
Total	51 53.12	45 46.88	96 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 4.4022$  Pr = 0.111

**Subjects with Low Knowledge**

	Else	Oppose	Total
diverge	7 25.93	20 74.07	27 100.00
control	10 31.25	22 68.75	32 100.00
converge	17 60.71	11 39.29	28 100.00
Total	34 39.08	53 60.92	87 100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(2) = 8.2910$  Pr = 0.016