

WORKING PAPER

Belief Systems and Information Search in International Relations: An Experimental Information Board Study

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of material factors (e.g., the balance of military power) and ideational factors (e.g., a shared ethnic identity) in the perception of threat posed by “other” states in the international system. Employing an experimental technique known as an “information board,” the study monitors the information search process of the subjects (n=131). The findings reveal that individuals with “realist” belief systems, as measured by a ten item pre-test, were more likely to quickly access information about the material balance of forces. Conversely, individuals with “liberal” belief systems were more likely to quickly access information about the political identity of the other country. The study advances the international relations literature by identifying the conditions under material (or ideational) factors are likely to dominate the decision process and by proposing a new method to disentangle material and ideational factors in world politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, international relations scholars have debated whether the perception of threat is rooted in materialist or ideational factors. Neo-realists such as Waltz (1979) argue that material factors, such as the balance of military power, determine the level of threat posed by another state. Constructivists such as Wendt (1999) counter that ideational factors, such as a shared Kantian identity, can eliminate the perception of threat *regardless* of the material balance of power. This paper contributes to this debate by identifying the conditions under which individuals are likely to focus on material factors or ideational factors. Specifically, I argue that a liberal or realist belief system determines whether we privilege ideational or material factors.

Do ideas matter? Over the last decade constructivists have attempted to empirically demonstrate that ideas influence state behavior in a variety of ways. For example, Price and Tannenwald and (1996) argue that the growing conception that chemical weapons are “uncivilized” explains their non-use even when it would be militarily expedient to employ them.¹ Similarly, Cronin (1999) contends that a shifting line between the *self* and the *other* rather than a change in the balance of power explains the unification of Italy in the 19th century. The vast majority of studies in this literature have employed case studies to demonstrate that “ideas matter.”

Do ideas matter? Keohane argues that focusing on this question is a waste of time because the answer is obvious: of course ideas matter (2000, 129). According to Keohane, the difficult task is explaining “how” ideas matter. Such an explanation would involve disentangling the complex interactions between ideas and material forces (2000, 127). Goldstein also argues that simply demonstrating that ideas play a role in a particular foreign policy situation is inadequate: constructivists must demonstrate that ideas matter *more* than material factors if they hope to undermine traditional realist explanations and predictions.² This approach seems appropriate as long as the same standard is applied to realists (i.e., they must demonstrate that material factors matter *more* than ideational factors).

Keohane rejects Goldstein’s demand that scholars demonstrate the power of ideas relative to material factors. “The question – do ideas matter more fundamentally than material forces? – is also misguided but for the opposite reason. It is not that the answer is obvious, but that, for the reason given above, there is no answer to the question as posed” (2000, 129). If ideas and material factors interact in complex ways, Keohane argues that it makes no sense to attempt to treat the factors as competing explanations. Given the difficulty associated with assessing relative power of variables, particularly using the case study method which has dominated the constructivist literature in international relations, Keohane’s advice has been welcomed by many in the field.

While I concur with Keohane’s contention that we need to understand “how” ideas matter, I believe his a priori claim that the relative power of ideas cannot be assessed is premature at best. First, the mere fact that two variables interact does not preclude our ability to assess relative power as long as both conditions are not “necessary” for observation of the dependent variable. Second, the complexity of the ideational/material factor relationship as well as the relative power of ideas could vary by issue area. Third, experimental studies of the decision making process might be able to identify the conditions under which material factors (or ideas) are likely to dominate the decision process. In the following study, I exploit the power of experiments to examine “how” ideas matter and “when” ideas trump material factors.

BELIEF SYSTEMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Realism and liberalism are broad school of thought rather than precisely articulated theories of international politics. More precise theoretical constructs such as neo-realism and neo-liberalism fall within these broad schools. For this reason, there is no general consensus on the central assumptions and predictions of each school of thought. However, most (but clearly not all) realists and liberals would agree that the two schools differ in the following nine ways: 1) Realists are more likely to sanction the use of military force than liberals; 2) Realists are more likely to advocate unilateralism and liberals are more likely to advocate multilateralism; 3) Realists assume that states are more likely to be aggressive and expansionist; liberals are more likely to view states as advocates of the status quo; 4) Realists assume that conflict is inherent in the system due to competing goals; 5) Liberals are more likely to believe in the efficacy of international organizations; 6) Liberals are more likely to view states as generally trustworthy; 7) Liberals are more likely to stress the moral aspects of foreign policy than realists; 8) Liberals are more likely to advocate equitable solutions than power maximizing solutions; 9) Realists are more concerned with the fungibility of power.

The survey instrument employed in this study was designed to tap each of these nine dimensions. The survey questions, which appear in Appendix A, allow us to place individuals along liberal-realist continuum. While many individuals will hold mixed views (e.g., simultaneously believing military force is very useful for pursuing national goals and that international organizations can effectively constrain states), the collection of beliefs should allow us to predict threat perception, the salience of relative gains, and many policy positions (Rousseau 2002). This study explores whether the belief system influences how individuals search for information when confronting a potential threat.

INFORMATION SEARCH

All information individuals receive from the external world is filtered through a belief system. Although the belief system might vary from issue area to issue area, in virtually every situation we have expectations about how the world works and how we should behave. While this filtering is inevitable (and necessary), under certain circumstances the filtering can bias the decision making process. For example, individuals may interpret ambiguous information as supporting a strongly held belief (e.g., the “seeing what you expect to see” phenomenon discussed by Jervis (1976)).

While belief systems can influence our *passive* reception of information, they could also influence our *active* search for new information. When a new problem emerges, individuals often seek new information in order to define the problem, search for alternatives, assess probabilities associated with outcomes, define decision criteria, and weigh the overall cost and benefits of each alternative. This raises several interesting questions. First, do realists search for different information than liberals? Second, do realists differ with respect to the order in which they search for information? Third, does the sequence of search influence the final decision? Fourth, how does the information search process end?

How do individuals determine if another country is a threat? Gigerenzer et al. (1999) argue that individuals often use simple issue specific decision rules for making tough decisions in complex and stressful situations. The authors relate the story of doctors performing triage on heart attack victims in an emergency room setting. Doctors do not use complex algorithms to determine admittance. Rather, they use a decision rule based on three sequential questions: 1) Is the minimum systolic blood pressure over the initial 24 hours period >91?; 2) Is age > 62.5?; and 3) Is sinus tachycardia present? Notice the questions are dichotomous: the answers are either yes

or no. This eliminates the need for a pocket calculator. The questions are also sequential: only if all three factors are present do the physicians have to assign the patient top priority.

Could a similar process explain how individuals assess threats? Figure 1 displays two possible decision strategies: an ideational dominant strategy proposed by constructivists and liberals in “Version A” and a material dominant strategy proposed by realists in “Version B.” In Version A of the Figure, the sequence of questions begins with a question about identity, continues with a question about material capabilities, and ends with a question about recent experiences. As with the medical example, the questions are simple yes/no inquiries that do not require complex calculations or fine grained measures. In addition, the questions are sequential in that a negative answer to any of the three questions will terminate the search process. Version A of the Figure is “ideational dominant” in that it privileges ideas: the first question is ideational and a negative response to this single question is sufficient for an assessment. For example, if democracies view other democracies as non-violent, the individual may simply stop enquires once the regime type of the other state is established (Kahl 1998). It does not matter how many tanks or nuclear weapons the British possess because once an American knows he or she is dealing with the British the material balance of power becomes irrelevant. In contrast, the decision strategy in the bottom portion of Figure 1 is “material dominant” because it privileges the material balance of power. This decision strategy captures Waltz’s (1979) prediction that any asymmetry of power automatically constitutes as a threat in the anarchic international system.

It is important to emphasize that neither decision strategy driven is solely by material or ideational factors. As the Figure indicates, both strategies include the same three questions. The strategies only differ with respect to the *order* of the questions. Which of the two strategies will an individual employ? I hypothesize that it will be a function of the belief system of the individual. Prior beliefs about the nature of the international system and state behavior will influence both strategy selection and information search. The approach should satisfy Keohane because it explains “how” ideas matter. However, it can simultaneously satisfy Goldstein by highlighting when ideas are more important than material factors (and vice versa).

HYPOTHESES

From this decision framework, we can derive several hypotheses to test the role of beliefs, the process of information search, and the termination of search. Hypothesis #1 tests the impact of beliefs in situations of uncertainty. In the initial screens, before the information boards are presented, subjects are asked to make an initial assessment as to whether the other country represents a threat to “your” country.

Abstract Scenario: Regardless of where you live, your country must deal with other states. Please imagine that we have selected a state that interacts with your country. In the absence of any other information, how threatening is this state?

Concrete Scenario: Imagine that you have been assigned by your government to the political branch of your embassy in Niamey, the capital of Niger. In the absence of any other information, is Niger's western neighbor Mali a threat to Niger?

Given the absence of any other information, the subject is expected to draw on their internal belief systems to respond to this question. Strong realists, who hold beliefs such as “states are

aggressive” and “state have inherently conflicting interests,” are expected to view the other state as more threatening than non-realists.

Hypothesis #2 predicts that strong realists will search for different information than other subjects. Specifically, we would expect that strong realists would begin their information search by examining material factors such as alliance patterns or the balance of military forces. We would not expect the strong realists to be immediately drawn to ideational factors such as the religious affiliation of the other state or its ethnic makeup.

Hypothesis #3 predicts that one particular material factor dominates decision making; the balance of military forces. In “Version B” of Figure 1, this item was privileged in the decision process because it was the first question asked in the sequential decision process. The balance of military forces also dominates realist discussion in the international relations literature (Waltz 1979). The hypothesis predicts that strong realists are more likely to access this panel before any others.

Hypothesis #4 makes an analogous prediction for liberals and constructivists. Strong liberals (or non-realists more generally) are more likely to begin the search process by accessing the “regime type” panel. Although in other societies ideation factors such as religion or ethnicity may be more prominent, I suspect that in the heterogeneous society such as the United States a country’s democratic credentials are the most salient dimension used to draw a line between the self and other. This is probably particularly true in the post 9/11 era in which the promotion of democracy (even by force) has moved to the center of the political discourse in the United States.

Hypothesis #5 predicts that if the sequential decision making models in Figure 1 are correct, then subjects entering these panels will quickly truncate the search process. Strong realists, who are expected to privilege the material balance of power, are expected to truncate the search after learning that the other state has vastly superior military power. Conversely, strong liberals, who are expected to privilege identity, are expected to exit as soon as they realize the other state is a democracy. Specifically, individuals entering the “balance of power” or the “regime type” panels on the first move should visit fewer total panels than other subjects.

While individuals might use the sequential decision making strategies displayed in Figure 1, it is also possible that they will use more complicated strategies. For example, an individual might simply average across all the dimensions available (e.g., the unfavorable balance of power increases threat perception but a shared democratic identity decreases threat perception). Such a strategy would lead one to predict that subjects will examine most panels and the order of the panels will be random (or at least inconsequential). Thus, Hypothesis #6 predicts that realists and non-realists will access the same set of panels.

Finally, Hypothesis #7 predicts that the first panel will have the most impact on the decision process. If the first panel is selected because it is expected to provide the most information, then we should see the subject have the highest frequency of updating the threat assessment after viewing this panel. If they continue to poke around other panels but rarely if ever update their assessment, we can conclude that the first panel has the heaviest weight in the decision making process.

The hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

H1: Strong realists will view the other state as more threatening at the start of the scenario.

- H2:** Strong realists will seek information about material factors before seeking information about ideational factors.
- H3:** Strong realists will begin by seeking information about the balance of military forces.
- H4:** Non-realists will begin by seeking information about the regime type.
- H5a:** If shared identity measured by regime type is the dominant question in a sequential decision making process, then strong liberals should exit the decision process immediately after viewing this item.
- H5b:** If the balance of military forces is the dominant question in a sequential decision making process, then strong realists should exit the decision process immediately after viewing this item.
- H6:** If subjects are averaging over dimensions rather than using a simple sequential decision rule, all subjects will access the same information albeit in a different order.
- H7:** If the first panel accessed has a disproportional weight in the decision process, the frequency of changes in assessment should peak after the first panel and decline thereafter.

METHOD

The hypotheses are tested using an “information board.” Although this technique has been rarely used in political science (exceptions include Mintz et al. 1997 and Lau and Redlawsk 2001), it is a standard technique in psychology and decision analysis (Carrol and Johnson 1990, 84). Traditionally, the technique involved presenting subjects with an $M \times N$ matrix of index cards pinned to a bulletin board. The rows of the matrix contain the alternatives and the columns contain criteria that might be employed in the decision making process. The researcher followed the decision making process in “real time” by observing the sequence in which information is accessed by the subject. For example, using a computerized version of the decision board, Mintz et al. (1997) presented half their subjects with a static matrix containing four alternatives and four decision criteria and half their subjects a dynamic matrix in which the fourth option was added after the start of the exercise. The authors found that the subjects were more likely to change their strategy in the dynamic setting. Moreover, Mintz et al. claim that the subjects employed a dimension-based strategy until the number of alternatives was reduced to a manageable level and then shifted to an alternative-based strategy. In another study, Lau and Redlawsk (2001) created a dynamic information board in which information about candidates was presented in the form of a scrolling web page. This variation was employed because Lau and Redlawsk believed the traditional information board was too “manageable” and artificial.

The current study differs from both of these prior studies by focusing on situation assessment rather than policy (or candidate) choices. In the Mintz et al. study, a “threat” is created by the researcher in the hypothetical scenario and the subject is asked to select an option for responding to the threat (e.g., blockade or attack).³ The current study explores whether or not the subject views the current situation as threatening. Thus, unlike most decision boards, the subject does not have to choose among clearly specified alternatives. Although the terms are

often used interchangeably, the label “information board” seems to fit this situation better than the traditional “decision board.”

Snapshots of the computer screens employed in this study appear in Figures 2, 3, and 4. Figure 2 displays an “entry” screen in which subjects were asked to respond to a question without any other information available. Upon their reply, subjects were presented an “information board” such as the one displayed in Figure 3. The boards contained between eight and sixteen items which were randomly assigned either individually or by row.⁴ By clicking on an item, the subject would be able to access information about the category as shown in Figure 4. The subject would then update their assessment and return to the main information board screen. When they were ready to make a final decision, they pressed the “submit” button. Subjects were given five minutes to complete each information board; the timer appears in the upper right hand corner of each decision board. In the information boards analyzed below, subjects spent an average of 172 seconds examining an average of 13 items in the information board. The number of boards accessed varied from 1 to 31 (i.e., one individual opened almost every panel twice).

Each subject was presented with four decision boards: 1) a training board asking if the subject would move to a new city; 2) an abstract international relations board asking if a “neighboring” state were a threat; 3) an election scenario asking if the subject would vote for the incumbent; and 4) a concrete international relations board asking if Mali were a threat to Niger.⁵ These two African countries were selected because in pilot testing subjects admitted complete ignorance about the states on all dimensions. Ignorance was important because it ensured that the threat assessment was based entirely on the information presented to the subjects as well as their more abstract belief systems. All the information presented in this particular board was factual. Given that no major differences emerged between the abstract and the concrete international relations boards, the results from these two parallel boards have been merged into a single data set for analysis.

One hundred thirty-two students from the University of Pennsylvania enrolled in an introductory political science course participated in the study as part of a course requirement during the Fall of 2003. During the second week of the semester, the students responded to a broad 35 question survey on international relations which included ten questions used to create an liberal-realist index. Although the index has a theoretic range from -20 (pure liberal) to +20 (pure realist), the range within this sample varied from -11 to +10. The mean score on the index was -2. The questions used to build the index appear in Appendix A. For the purposes of this paper, a “strong realist” is defined as an individual falling within the upper quarter of the distribution displayed in Figure 5. Sensitivity analysis indicates that varying this cutoff does not materially alter the central conclusions of the study. Two weeks after taking the survey the student subjects completed the four information boards.

RESULTS

Hypothesis #1 predicts that individuals with strong realist belief systems will view the “other” state as more threatening at the initial assessment. While the pattern of results shown in Table 1 is consistent with this expectation, the differences are not statistically significant. Twenty-seven percent of strong realists view the “other” as either “probably” or “definitely” a threat compared to only 23 percent for non-realists.

Hypothesis #2 predicts that individuals with strong realist belief systems will begin the information search by accessing one of the seven material factors on the information board (i.e., alliances, balance of military power, economic growth rate, level of development, population, prior military conflicts, and geographic proximity). The results in Table 2 do not support the

hypothesis. Although strong realists are more likely to access information about material factors (53% to 47%), the results are not statistically significant.

Hypothesis #3 predicts that strong realists will be more likely to begin the search process by accessing information about the balance of forces. The results presented in Table 3 weakly support the hypothesis. Thirty-two percent of realists (compared with 22 percent of non-realists) began their search by accessing the balance of forces information. However, the difference is only statistically significant at the 0.097 level. Sensitivity analysis indicates that the results get stronger (probability =0.052) when the top third of the liberal-realist index is defined as “realist.”

Hypothesis #4 predicts that non-realists will be more likely to begin the search process by accessing information about the regime type of the other state. The results presented in Table 4 strongly support this hypothesis. While only 12 percent of realists accessed the regime type box first, fully 35 percent of non-realists first attempted to learn if the other was a democracy or not. Sensitivity analysis demonstrates that this relationship is extremely strong regardless of the cutoff used to define realists.

Hypothesis #5 predicts that individuals accessing the “regime type” and “balance of force” panels should terminate the search process if they are employing the sequential decision making process described by Figure 1. The “regime type” panel indicates that the other state is a democracy, implying that those driven by ideational considerations should exit. The “balance of forces” panel reveals that the other state is more powerful, implying that those driven by material considerations should exit. The results do not support this hypothesis. While non-realists are more likely to access the “regime type” panel first, contrary to expectations they continue on to visit slightly MORE panels than other subjects. A TTEST of means indicates that difference is statistically significant at better than the 0.004 level of significance. Similarly, while realists are more likely to access the “balance of forces” panel first, contrary to expectations they continue on to visit slightly MORE panels than other subjects. However, in this case the difference falls short of statistically significant.

Hypothesis #6 predicts that realist and non-realist subjects will visit the same panels albeit in a different order. The results strongly support this hypothesis. In 14 out of 16 possible panels, there is no statistically significant difference between realists and non-realists. The two exceptions are “regime type” and the “number of political parties”. In both cases, non-realists are statistically more likely to access that panel at some point of the exercise than realists. For example, while 61 percent of non-realists sought information about the number of political parties, only 45 percent of realists opened this panel (Chi Squared Statistic = 4.61, probability =0.032). Similarly, while 87 percent of non-realists searched for information about regime type, only 78 percent of realists did so (Chi Squared Statistic = 3.27, probability =0.071).

Hypothesis #7 predicts that if the first panel accessed has disproportional weight in the decision process, we should see most of the changes in threat assessment occur after this initial panel. The data only weakly supports this hypothesis. The peak number of changes does occur after the first panel: 13% of the subjects alter their threat perception. However, while the number of changes declines after this point, it does so very slowly. While 8 percent of the changes occur after the second panel, this only declines to 5 percent by the tenth panel. Thus, while the first panel is important, it does not dominate the decision process.

DISCUSSION

Three important conclusions emerge from the study. First, the information search process is dependent on the belief system of the individual. Realists and non-realist begin the

assessment by searching for different information. Second, subjects do not exit after getting on dominant piece of information as some realists and constructivists have proposed. For example, a shared identity or an unfavorable military balance is not sufficient for a termination of the search process. Third, the sequential decision making process proposed in Figure 1 does not seem to capture the decision making process very well. Subjects appear to be averaging over many dimensions rather than using a simple sequential decision making heuristic.

The conclusions remain tentative for three reasons. First, the experiment must be replicated with a more realistic time constraint. Most subjects complete the information boards in less than the 5 minute limit and over 30% of the subjects visited every panel in the information board (see Figure 6). The lack of time pressure could be the reason behind the broad search strategy.

Second, the experimental setting fails to capture the fact that in the real world searching for information search is costly. Lau and Redlawsk (2001) reject the standard decision board model because it is too “manageable” in that it allows the users to leisurely examine all aspects of a problem. Unfortunately, addressing this issue is much more difficult than the time pressure issue. Although the “dynamic decision board” proposed by Lau and Redlawsk is one possible solution, it appears better suited to the assessment of political candidates than threat perception.

Third, the experiment should be replicated using a more traditional “bulletin board” format. The computer format allows the subjects to simply click on any information and it becomes instantly available. Many users accessed a large number of panels in rapid succession before returning to the same boards for a more thorough reading. I suspect that one is less likely to haphazardly pluck pins and index cards from a bulletin board.

Fourth, the large number of changes recorded after each panel could be due to the particular construction of this information board. The update panel presented subjects with a five point Likert scale (along with a Not Sure item) using “radio buttons.” The current choice was displayed as a highlighted radio button. Users may have been less likely to click on the highlighted button (which confirmed the threat assessment) because this format is rarely used in web pages. Although this is a minor technical adjustment, it could explain why a small handful of subjects were constantly changing their assessment after each panel (e.g., fluctuating back and forth between “probably not a threat” and “not sure”).

Fifth, the current decision board presented the same information board to all subjects. In the revised test scheduled for next month, subjects will be randomly assigned one of two versions of the board based on the information in Figure 7. In the figure, the level of threat perception is appears in the cells. The predictions of the material factor hypothesis are shown in bold and the predictions of the ideational hypothesis are shown in italics. Version 1 of the information board will be the “unfavorable military but shared identity” scenario (i.e., the upper left cell in the figure). In this case, the four material factors (balance of forces, alliance ties, prior military conflicts, and proximity) will indicate a weak material position and the five ideational factors (regime type, language, ethnicity, religion, and economic structure) will indicate shared identity. In Version 2 of the information board, the situation will be reversed (i.e., the lower right cell). The remaining panels will be constant across both versions of the information board. This split ballot design will allow us to test the relative power of the competing explanations more precisely than the current version of the board.

Sixth, the study should be replicated using a smaller number of panels. I suspect that as the number of panels increases, the user is more likely to randomly select among alternatives.

Moreover, this random process may be biased toward items on the left in societies that read from left to right. This problem is likely to be particularly evident when a large number of panels are randomly order for each board the subject faces. The reduction in panels to manageable number (such as 4) would allow each panel to be randomly placed within a single row. Although rows were randomly assigned in the current study, some items (e.g., balance of forces and regime type) always appeared on the left most side of each row. This may have increased the probability that these items were accessed first.

APPENDIX A: Survey Questions for the Liberal-Realist Index

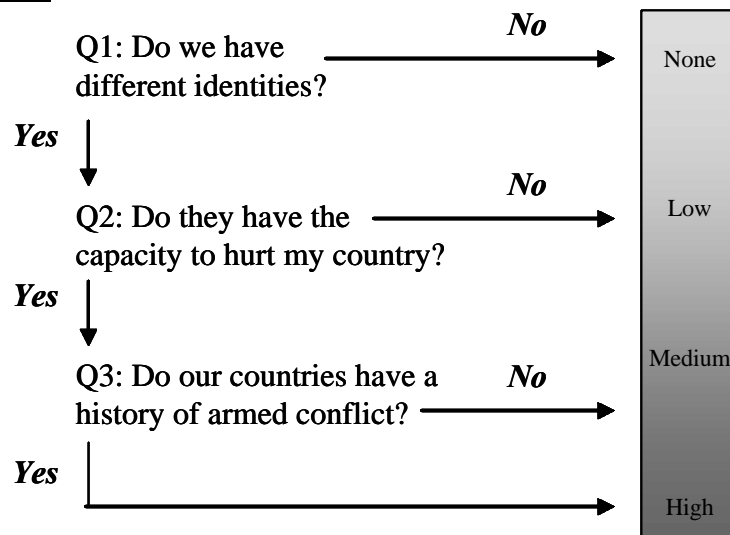
- 1.** Military force should only be used for defensive purposes. States should not use military force to intervene in the affairs of others states, including on-going military conflicts. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 2.** In order for a state to achieve its economic and security goals, it must cooperate with other countries around the globe. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 3.** States are inherently aggressive. They will naturally expand their economic and military power until they meet an opponent capable of checking their expansion. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 4.** Conflict is rare in the international system because states typically have compatible goals. What is best for one state is usually best for other states in the system. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 5.** In general, international organizations and trans-national interest groups are ineffective because they lack the power necessary to change the behavior of strong states and powerful corporations. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 6.** States are generally untrustworthy. Unless they are constantly watched, states will attempt to exploit their neighbors and to break international accords if it suits their needs. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 7.** Moral considerations such as the promotion of human rights and justice should play an important role in the formation of foreign policy. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 8.** The best way to solve international problems is to identify a fair solution in which both states benefit equally. Often this implies that stronger states forgo disproportionate gains they could have obtained through the use of threats and/or rewards. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 9.** In general, the use of military force against other states only makes problems worse. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]
- 10.** You must always be wary of the economic success of other countries because they can easily transform the economic gains into military power and use it to threaten your country. [*Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neutral, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Not Sure*]

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Figure 1: Decision Strategies for Classifying Threats

Version A



Version B

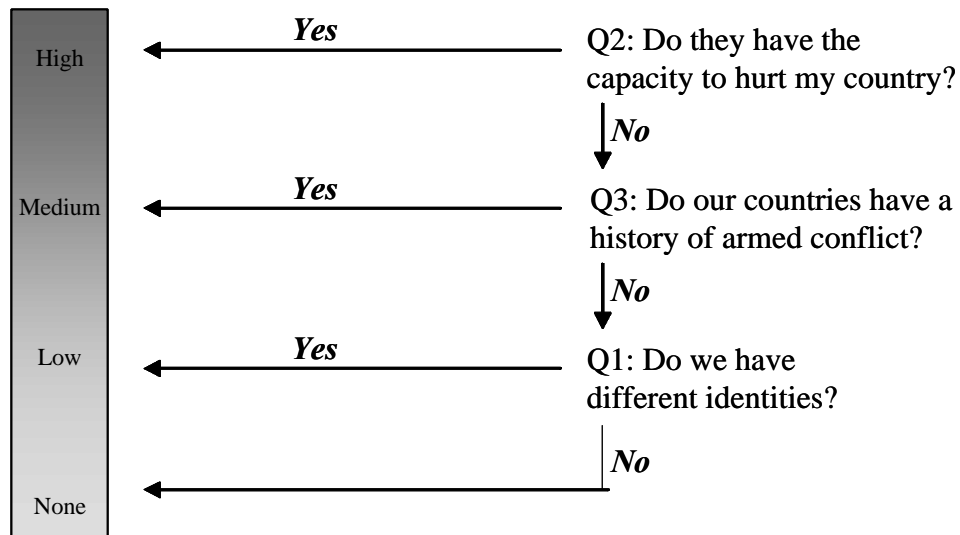


Figure 2: Introductory Screen in the Information Board

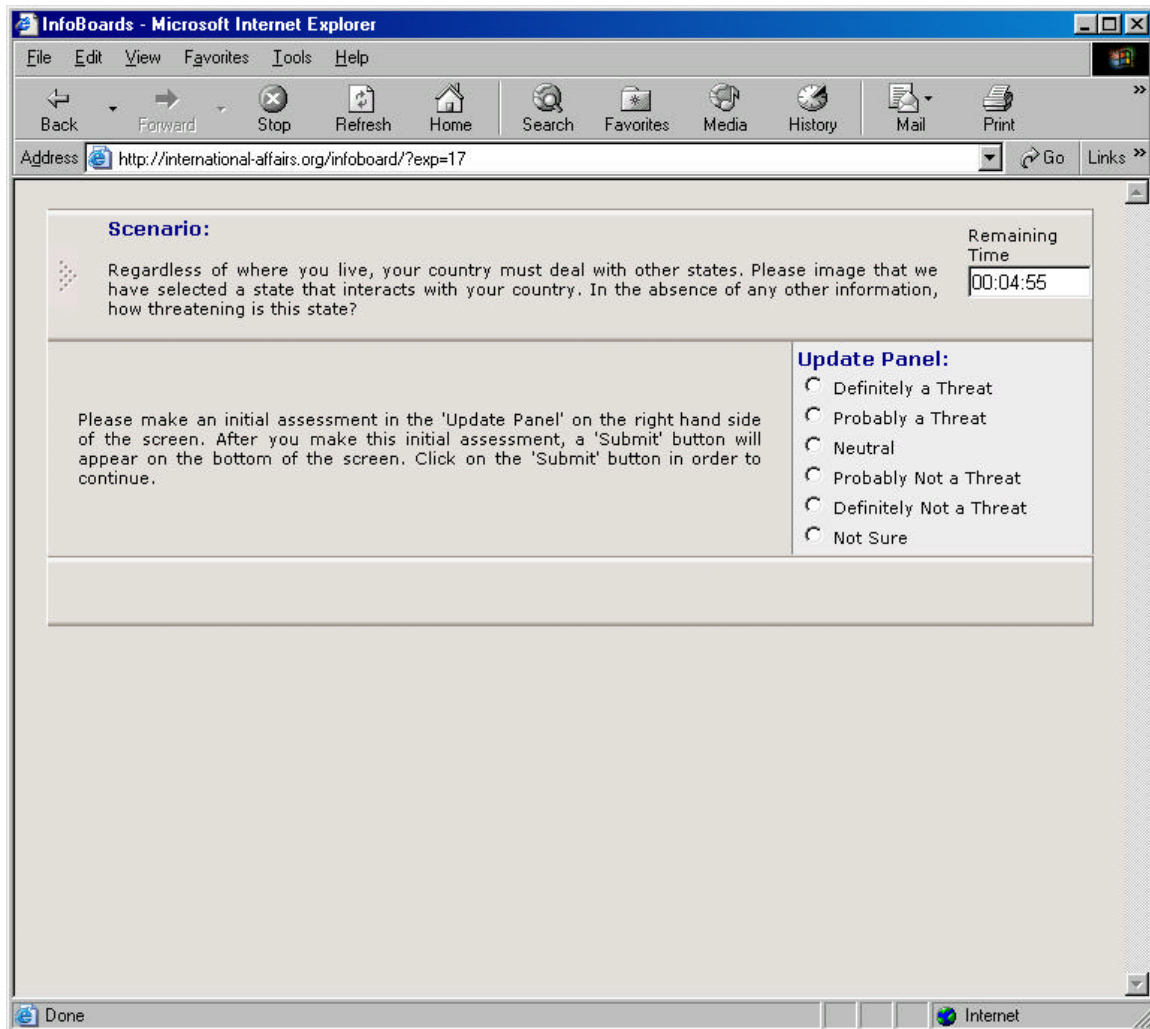


Figure 3: The Main Screen in the Information Board

InfoBoards - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home Search Favorites Media History Mail Print

Address <http://international-affairs.org/infoboard/?exp=17> Go Links

Scenario:

Regardless of where you live, your country must deal with other states. Please imagine that we have selected a state that interacts with your country. In the absence of any other information, how threatening is this state?

Remaining Time: 00:04:01

Information Panel:

Level of Democracy	Ruling Party	Number of Political Parties	Civil-Military Relations
Balance of Military Power	Alliances	Prior Military Conflicts	Proximity
Religion	Ethnicity	Language	Economic Structure
Population	Economic Growth Rate	Bilateral Trade Balance	Level of Development

Update Panel:

☐ Definitely a Threat

☐ Probably a Threat

☒ Neutral

☐ Probably Not a Threat

☐ Definitely Not a Threat

☐ Not Sure

Submit

Done Internet

Figure 4: Revealing in Individual Item in the Information Board

InfoBoards - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

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Scenario:

Regardless of where you live, your country must deal with other states. Please imagine that we have selected a state that interacts with your country. In the absence of any other information, how threatening is this state?

Remaining Time: 00:02:55

Information Panel:

Level of Democracy: The other state is a fully functioning democracy.

Please enter a response in the Update Panel at the right to close this window and return to the Information Panel.

Update Panel:

- ☐ Definitely a Threat
- ☐ Probably a Threat
- ☒ Neutral
- ☐ Probably Not a Threat
- ☐ Definitely Not a Threat
- ☐ Not Sure

Done Internet

Figure 5: Distribution of Beliefs Based on Survey Questions

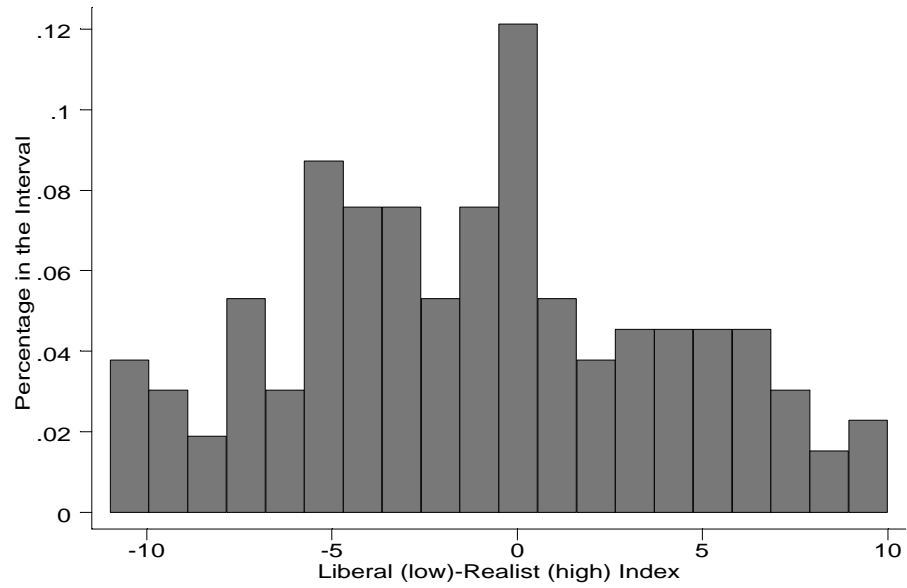


Figure 6: Number of Panels Viewed By Subjects

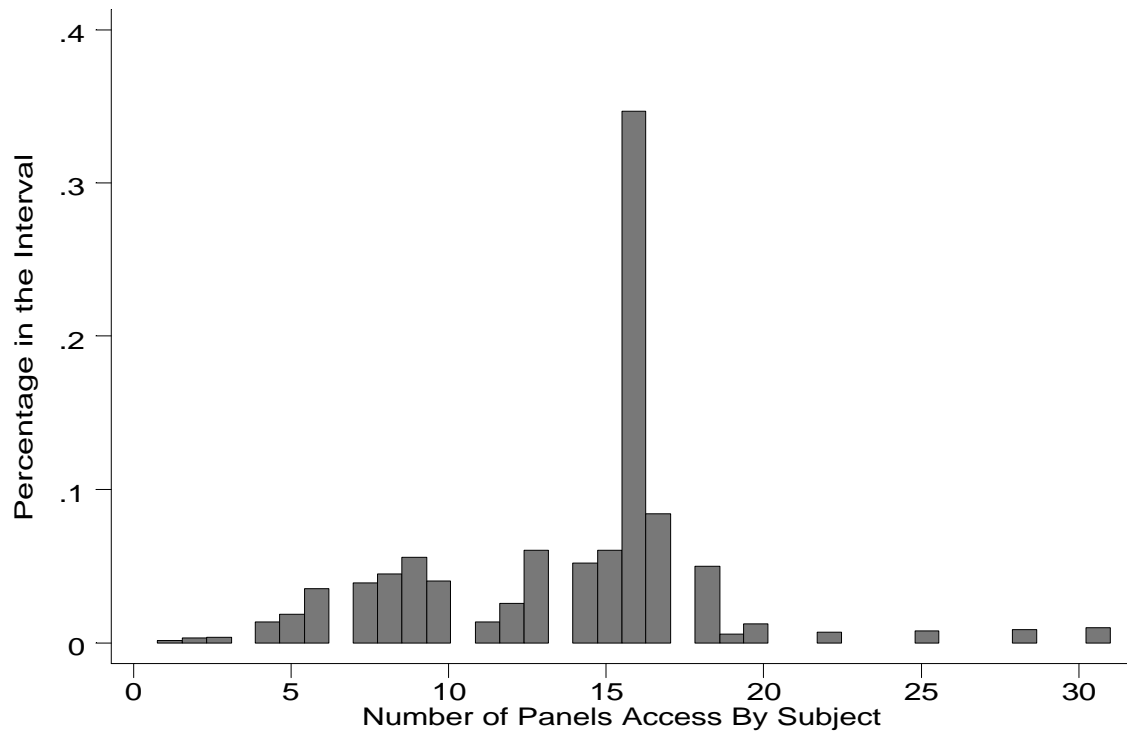


Figure 7: Deviant Predictions: Material Explanations versus Ideational Explanations

		<i>Identity</i>	
		<i>Shared</i>	<i>Different</i>
Material Balance	Unfavorable	High, <i>Low</i>	High, <i>High</i>
	Favorable	Low, <i>Low</i>	Low, <i>High</i>

Notes: Level of threat perception is appears in the cells. The predictions of the material factor hypothesis are shown in bold and the predictions of the ideational hypothesis are shown in italics.

Table 1: Beliefs and the Initial Assessment of Threat

		Belief System		
		Non-Realist	Realist	
Initial Assessment	Not a Threat	77%	73%	
	Threat	23%	27%	
	Total	100%	100%	(n=264)
Chi Square=0.44, Probability =0.507				

Table 2: Beliefs and the First Box Accessed From the Information Board

		Belief System		
		Non-Realist	Realist	
First Box	Ideational	53%	47%	
	Material	47%	53%	
	Total	100%	100%	(n=264)
Chi Square=0.73, Probability =0.394				

Table 3: Beliefs and Accessing Balance of Forces Information

		Belief System		
		Non-Realist	Realist	
First Box	Other	78%	68%	
	Balance of Forces	22%	32%	
	Total	100%	100%	(n=264)
Chi Square=2.75, Probability =0.097				

Table 4: Beliefs and Accessing Regime Type Information

		Belief System		
		Non-Realist	Realist	
First Box	Other	65%	88%	
	Regime Type	35%	12%	
	Total	100%	100%	(n=264)
Chi Square=12.37, Probability <0.001				

Endnotes

¹ See Desch (1998) for a critique of this argument.

² For a similar argument, see the conclusion of Desch (1998). For a response to Desch, see Duffield et al. (1999).

³ While all the Mintz et al. experiments involve policy decisions, only a subset are about crises involving threats. For example, they also explore decisions about the location of a new naval base.

⁴ In a pilot study, all panels were randomly assigned at the start of the process. In post-trial interviews, subjects indicated that the large number of seemingly randomly located items lead them to simply begin the search process in the upper-left corner of the matrix. Therefore, in the experiment the panels were grouped into similar rows (e.g., all ideational items in one row and all realist in another row) and the rows were randomly assigned for each information board.

⁵ The election scenario information board was designed to test the relationship between political knowledge and cueing. These results will not be explored here.