

The Impact of Ideas and Identity on Foreign Policy

Statement of research interests

My research is located at the intersection of international relations and comparative politics. Conscious that ideas are often crucial in determining policy choices, I seek to develop and systematically test theoretically grounded models of the impact of ideational factors, such as beliefs, perceptions, and identity, on foreign policy. I am particularly interested in the implications of different ways people “frame” (think about) a particular policy and its purpose, with an empirical focus on international and comparative political economy.

My research agenda is concentrated in two different issue areas: European integration, and the political economy of international humanitarianism. In addition, I have an ongoing interest in the promise of agent-based computational modeling as a tool in political science.

European integration and motivations for international cooperation

Scholarship on European integration has traditionally emphasized national commercial interests and considerations of efficiency or spillover. Until recently, scholars paid little attention to competing visions for Europe, whether at the elite level or among the general public. Increasingly, however, it has become clear that those visions matter a great deal. In my research on European integration I am particularly interested in understanding both the origins of such visions and their implications for integration outcomes.

I have two book projects in this area. The first is currently under review at Cambridge University Press (since May 2012). Titled *Envisioning Europe: Debating membership, enlargement and the purpose of the European Union from the 1950s to today*, it offers a new model for understanding decisions about membership and enlargement in the European integration project going back to its very beginning. Drawing on more than half century of legislative debates about European integration in six European states (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden), I show that variation in their enthusiasm for European integration can be explained neither by commercial interests nor by an idealistic commitment to European cooperation.

Crucial, instead, are perceptions of the implications of integration for 1) the management of interdependence and mutual vulnerability within Europe and 2) the protection and diffusion of important norms and socio-economic standards. Thus, when decision-makers come to believe that it is no longer possible to insulate their country satisfactorily against economic decisions made in neighbouring countries, they will seek a seat at the table with those other countries, in order to obtain influence over those decisions. In addition, in a context of rising interdependence, national leaders may become convinced that normative and welfare-political goals require the type of international rules and regulations that the EU is best positioned to promulgate. The book offers an innovative theoretical approach that sheds new light both on the politics of enlargement today and on the development over time of the European integration project.

The second book project will be completed by the end of 2012. Provisionally titled *Europe in the eye of the beholder: Citizens and the meaning of European integration*, it shifts the focus from political elites to the general public. At the heart of the book is a new interpretation of the concept of European identity, and of its implications for the future of European integration. I argue that the very notion of a European identity erroneously implies that it is possible to conceive of, define, and indeed promote, a single, coherent identity throughout the EU. Instead, however, individuals identify with the European integration project in many different ways. This simple, yet crucial, insight helps us answer some of the thorniest questions about public attitudes towards European integration.

The book makes its case by analyzing evidence about the salience of different ways of framing European integration over time and across member states. Most of the data come from Eurobarometer public opinion surveys, although the material is strengthened by two key case studies based on in-depth process tracing, including interviews with key actors. The first of these examines the framing of the failed French and Dutch referenda in 2005 on the EU's Constitutional Treaty, and shows that framing choices made by those calling on the public to vote 'yes' were both nationally specific and, ironically, almost certain to be counterproductive. The second case study investigates changes over time in attitudes towards European monetary union in Ireland, Greece, and Germany.

The project not only advances the theoretical literature on European integration — by shedding new light on the affective components of support for the EU, by systematically analyzing cross-national variation in these components, and by identifying important shortcomings in intergovernmentalist and neofunctional explanations of integration — it also represents an important methodological innovation. In analyzing individual-level patterns in framing European integration I make use of support vector machines, an approach originally developed for machine learning. Use of this method is rapidly spreading to other disciplines that work with large quantities of multidimensional data; however, only a handful of political scientists have used SVMs until now. None, to my knowledge, have done so to analyze public opinion data.

Several smaller ongoing research projects intersect with and complement these two book projects. For example, in researching elite visions of European integration, I have become interested in the circumstances under which elites decide to call (or push for) a referendum on particular EU initiatives such as the Constitutional Treaty or the euro. How publics vote on EU referenda is an issue included the second book project; how they vote in elections to the European Parliament is not, but is another issue area where I expect my theoretical approach to offer new insights.

Most recently I have written two papers for workshops sponsored by the EU Centers of Excellence at Rutgers University and York University (Canada), respectively. In the first of these I build on insights from the first book project to predict that states may pre-emptively support integration initiatives in advance of enlargement when they expect the coalition opposed to those initiatives to become stronger through enlargement. In the second, which is closely related to the second book project, I show that individual preferences for integration in specific issue areas have a strong, but not previously understood, impact on overall support for the EU.

The political economy of international humanitarianism

In my research on the political economy of international humanitarianism I am interested in developing an understanding of the factors that determine why and when countries spend money on foreign policies that appear to have no direct material payoff. My first book, *Ideas, interests, and foreign aid* (Cambridge, 2011) shows that different visions of the purpose of foreign aid strongly shape the overall organization and quality of aid programs. Moreover, they also affect specific program features, such as the total volume of aid and the geographical allocation of aid across recipient states. In order to test the model, I developed a unique dataset on ideas about aid in four European countries — Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Norway — over half a century, derived through content analysis of legislative debates in those states.

I have adopted a similar approach in a paper investigating the surprising continuity in U.S. foreign aid policy during the 1970s, despite Carter's attempts at introducing a concern for human rights. I show that Carter fell short largely because he was unable to change how members of Congress framed the purpose of foreign aid. Since Congress passes aid legislation, this effectively doomed Carter's attempts at change. In future research, I will investigate the origins of U.S. aid policy by taking a closer look at the creation of the food aid program (PL 480). In addition, I am also interested in analyzing how ideas about the purpose of foreign aid that are salient within particular countries can diffuse to the international level, for example in the European Union.

My most recent work on foreign aid focuses on humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of major disasters, natural as well as “man-made” (most prominently, refugee crises caused by civil and international conflict). In current research with some undergraduate students at William & Mary we investigate changes in both the volume and content of aid flows following natural disasters. Do donors react by giving more aid? By giving aid for different kinds of projects? And how long does this effect last?

I intend to expand this last research into a broader project under the umbrella of AidData, a massive data collection and (geo-)coding project housed at William & Mary, and jointly run with Brigham Young University and Development Gateway. By breaking down aid information to the level of individual projects AidData's dataset makes it possible to investigate the causes and effects of aid with far greater precision than heretofore possible. We hope to look into a range of questions, including which types of aid are most likely to make a difference in the aftermath of disasters, and what role aid plays in preventing or mitigating humanitarian crises associated with civil or international wars.

In the future, I am also interested in investigating the determinants of other humanitarian or seemingly altruistic foreign policy initiatives, such as peacekeeping, election monitoring, etc. Why do countries decide to contribute to peacekeeping or election monitoring operations and, in turn, how do their motivations affect the nature of their participation? In the foreign aid field, I have found that considerations of international obligation and reputation play a surprisingly large role; I expect something similar will turn out to be the case in these other policy areas.

Finally, I am interested in debates over the appropriate label for different humanitarian challenges and crises. If the way we think about an issue matters, then deliberate attempts to frame an issue in a certain manner become all the more important to understand. In 1984, Orwell memorably introduced Newspeak, a language developed in order to make "thoughtcrime" impossible; governments and political entrepreneurs often appear engaged in a similar enterprise.

For example, governments have gone to great lengths to prevent words with highly negative connotations (genocide, torture, etc.) from being applied to their policies. In several papers, I look at the politics surrounding the application of the label "genocide" to the Armenian genocide, which took place nearly a century ago, as well as to more modern cases, such as during the war in Bosnia. A better understanding of the political economy of such labels is of considerable interest not just theoretically, but also from a policy perspective, as a tool for improving international responses to major humanitarian challenges.

Agent-based computational modeling

Over the past decade, agent-based modeling (ABM) has become an increasingly established methodology in political science research, albeit one actively used by only a small number of scholars. I believe that ABM will eventually become as valuable a tool for political science research as game theoretical modeling has been for some time. ABM allows us to run our own quasi-experiments when the real world does not provide enough data. More importantly, it allows us to investigate whether the stated assumptions and parameters of a model can (and will) produce the outcomes that we theoretically predict or empirically observe, and it can do so regardless of the number of actors in our models and the complexity of their interactions.

My agent-based modeling research focuses on the micro-foundations of identity and preference change — factors that are central to my substantive research agenda. In one paper, I examine the implications of interaction topology for the emergence of cooperation. A follow-up to this paper studies the implications for cooperation of changes in the salience of different types of frames (or motivations), such as conformity, security, or wealth. In research with Ian Lustick and Dan Miodownik, I have looked at changes in the identities of entire populations and the degree to which such changes respond to environmental signals. In addition, in research with David Rousseau, I have studied the emergence of shared identities.

Most recently, a model I developed with David Laitin to study the political economy of ethnic appeals in democratic politics has given rise to two chapters published in an important new volume on *Constructivist theories of ethnic politics*, edited by Kanchan Chandra (Oxford, 2012). In future research, I will apply this model to the study of nationalist appeals by political parties in European elections. With the rise of nationalism and euroskepticism in European politics in recent years, better understanding the political costs and benefits to parties — and to voters — of choosing to introduce strong nationalist appeals is of considerable interest.