

The Ideological Turn in International Studies

Thursday, 22 June 2023 09:00 (1h 30m)

Panel Abstract: Traditionally, International Relations scholars have accorded ideology a marginal role in world politics. Recently, however, a slew of scholars have mounted the argument that ideology exerts much more influence on the behaviour of states, the character of international norms and institutions, and the existence, reach and agenda of transnational organizations and movements, than traditionally thought. These scholars charge that the neglect of ideology has left IR with a profound blindness to many of the key driving forces and transformations in world politics, undermining efforts to address the world's current and future challenges. This panel will present and discuss five examples of such scholarship, that analyse ideology's international role through diverse approaches and across a range of different global challenges in world politics.

Chair: Jonathan Leader Maynard (King's College London)

Papers

1. **Katherine Mann (University of Cambridge), 'Beyond 'Us' and 'Them': The Interaction of Ideology and Social Hierarchy in Shaping Violent Practices'** - A growing body of conflict scholarship examines the mechanisms through which armed group ideology influences combatant perceptions of social in-groups and out-groups and, in turn, their violent behavior. These studies elucidate why certain groups are subject to violence and not others, yet they often take for granted the characteristics of violence itself. Why, in some cases, do armed groups target different out-groups with divergent patterns of violence or with more extreme forms of violence than others? And why are certain people within out-groups, such as women, subject to unique violence? This article highlights that social relationships are far more complex than simply demarcating 'us' and 'them,' emphasizing that hierarchies also exist within these in- and out-groups. Ideology may influence how combatants collectively understand these hierarchies and, as a result, impact what forms of violence are considered 'appropriate' against sub-communities within out-groups. Adopting a relational understanding of violence allows us to recognize how particular forms of violence take on different (and often intersectional) ideological and normative frames, depending on whom they target. I substantiate these claims with evidence from two armed groups that have engaged in conflict-related sexual violence: the FARC in Colombia and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

2. **Jonathan Leader Maynard (King's College London), 'Ideological Infrastructures in World Politics'** - Debates over the role of ideologies in world politics – in, for example, guiding foreign policy, legitimating regimes, generating or undermining norms, provoking state and non-state violence, or stabilising international organizations – depend on assumptions about how ideology might influence political outcomes. International Relations theorists must work with at least a tacit account of the 'power of ideology' – the causal mechanisms or constitutive relationships through which ideology could be relevant. Yet no such account of ideology's power has been systematically and effectively articulated in IR scholarship. Three broad tacit accounts do exist – focused on ideological belief, on the instrumental use of ideology as a political tool, or on ideology as manifested in discourse – but all suffer from important explanatory paradoxes and confusions. I proceed to offer a more effective account which presents ideologies as a kind of cultural 'infrastructure' that sustains, shapes and sometimes transforms patterns of collective political action through multiple interacting causal mechanisms. I draw on empirical research from political science, political psychology, political theory, sociology and history, as well as insights from social theory and complexity theory, and apply my account to key changes in world politics, including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the restructuring of the liberal world order in the late 20th Century, the growth of religious and far-right terrorism, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. With a proper theory of ideological infrastructures, I argue, we are able to capture the importance of ideology in world politics, without presenting it as simply overriding or displacing rational power-politics and self-interested cooperation.

3. **Benjamin Martill (University of Edinburgh), 'Not Right Now? The Delayed Effects of Brexit on**

Foreign Policy' - The 2016 Brexit vote in the United Kingdom ushered in a period of political chaos, culminating in the collapse of Theresa May's government and the rise of the pro-Brexit faction within the Conservative Party under Boris Johnson. Despite early indications that foreign and security policy would be an important area of stability post-Brexit, the Johnson government oversaw efforts to shift Britain's international role in important ways, including in overseas development aid, the strategic relationship with the EU, in the signing of new trade and security agreements, and in changes to the UK's force posture. None of these changes were inherent in the Brexit agenda, but may rather be traced back to the ideological concerns of the Johnson government – especially its preoccupation with sovereignty – and to the significant domestic changes which occurred during the course of the EU-UK withdrawal negotiations. Drawing on over 20 interviews with policymakers and senior think-tank officials, this paper demonstrates the impact the growth of conservative ideology has had on UK foreign policy since the 2016 vote. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of the link between party ideology and foreign policy and the conditions under which party positions 'matter' for external policies.

4. **Fiona B. Adamson and Rochana Bajpai (SOAS), 'Varieties of Nationalism in Decolonial Thought: Algeria and India Compared'** - Situated within the decolonial turn in IR and Political Theory, this paper undertakes a critical examination and comparison of nationalist thought in the Algerian and Indian anti-colonial movements. The paper examines internal debates between liberal imperial, religio-nationalist and radical strands of anti-colonial thinking, tracing their connection to both metropolitan, but also broader global circuits of religious and political transnationalism. By placing figures and movements – such as Abd-el-Kadar, Messali Hadj, Ferhat Abbas and Frantz Fanon in the case of Algeria, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar in the case of India – into dialogue and situating them in the broader political context of global ideological contestation, the paper seeks to unpack notions of decoloniality and anti-colonial nationalism, pointing to ways forward for the development of a richer understanding and more plural conceptualisation of decolonial thought.

5. **David Lewis (University of Exeter), 'The Role of Ideology in Russian Foreign Policy'** - Many scholars have been sceptical of the role of ideology in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, viewing Russia's leaders as driven either by ruthless realpolitik or by narrow personal material interests. Yet Russia's invasion of Ukraine appears to demonstrate the importance of ideational factors in shaping Russian foreign policy decision-making. In this paper I seek to conceptualise an emerging Russian ideology, based on fundamental tenets of radical conservative thought but as yet only loosely formulated as a coherent guide to political action. This set of ideas is based on underlying philosophical beliefs about the nature of political order and political change and the role of states and other actors in the international system. As such it offers an interpretative framework for understanding the past and the present, but it lacks a clear programme for the future with popular and universal appeal. Nevertheless, its overlap with thinking in other authoritarian regimes and right-wing populist movements suggests that it forms part of a global ideational trend that is not unique to the Russian experience. As such, it is unlikely that 'Putinism' will disappear with Putin - many of its core features will prove to be enduring in Russian political thought.

Membership

Track Classification: Historical Sociology and International Relations Working Group