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Ordinary Citizens as Realists: How do Americans Assess Threat?

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Abstract

How do ordinary citizens assess threats posed by a rival state? International relations scholars, particularly realists, provide important insights into ordinary citizens' threat assessment. Based on a survey experiment that utilizes a representative sample of U.S. citizens, this study examines how ordinary U.S. citizens assess a rival state's threat. This study finds that instead of using all the information available, ordinary citizens utilize information about both state power and intentions heuristically for threat assessment. As a result, U.S. citizens respond as though they were offensive realists under certain conditions (when uncertainty about a strong state's intentions is high), while they respond as though they were defensive (motivational) realists under some other conditions (when uncertainty about a strong state's intentions is low). This study makes a theoretical contribution to the existing scholarship by empirically testing at the micro level the baseline assumption of realists of international relations over the role of a state's intentions in threat assessment.

Keywords: *threat assessment, power, uncertainty, intentions*

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현실주의자로서의 시민: 미국인은 위협을 어떻게 평가하는가?

김석준

국문요약

일반 시민은 상대방 국가가 위협인지 아닌지를 어떻게 평가하는가? 국제관계 학자들, 특히 현실주의자들은 일반 시민의 위협평가에 대한 중요한 통찰력을 제공한다. 본 연구는 미국 인구를 대표할 수 있는 샘플을 이용한 서베이 실험에 기반하여, 미국시민이 상대방 국가의 위협을 어떻게 평가하는지를 검토한다. 본 연구는 일반시민이 국가의 의도와 관련 가용한 모든 정보를 사용하는 대신에 국가의 힘과 의지에 관한 정보를 위협 평가를 위해 목적에 맞지만 간편하게 (heuristically) 사용한다는 것을 발견하였다. 그 결과 미국시민은 어떤 상황 (불확실성이 높고 상대방 국가가 강할 때)에서는 공격주의형 현실주의자처럼 반응하고, 어떤 상황 (불확실성이 낮고 상대방 국가가 강할 때)에서는 방어주의형 현실주의자처럼 반응한다. 동 연구는 국제관계에서 국가의도의 역할에 관한 국제관계에서 현실주의자들의 기본 가정을 미시적 수준에서의 (at the micro level) 테스트 함으로써 동분야의 연구에 이론적으로 기여한다.

키워드: 위협평가, 힘, 불확실성, 의도

I. Introduction

How do ordinary people perceive and assess threats? This question is important to cognitive psychologists, international relations (IR) scholars, and foreign policy decision-makers. The study of ordinary people's perception, information processing, and threat assessment on its own is an important topic for cognitive psychologists. This topic is important to IR scholars and policymakers as well because ordinary people's perceptions and attitudes toward a rival state may affect policymakers' decisions. First, elected officials have an incentive to listen to voters, because those who do not listen to public opinion may face repercussion and get punished in future elections. President Clinton admitted this, saying, "any sustained endeavor involving our military forces requires the support of the people over the long run" (Kertzer 2016, 50; Foyle 1999, 195). Second, arguably, political elites' decision-makings are not fundamentally different from public decision-makings.[1] Most recently, Yarhi-Milo and her colleagues directly compared the political elite group and ordinary citizen group in their assessment of state intentions and actions, finding that there was no fundamental difference between the groups (Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018).

Realists provide important insight into how rational actors undertake decision-making when engaging in threat assessment. To realists, power is the most critical factor in assessing threats because a strong state has considerable leeway in pursuing its intentions. However, realists diverge as to whether information about state intentions (i.e., peaceful versus aggressive) is important in assessing threats. Typical realists, particularly offensive realists, suggest that a state can never be sure that other states "do not have offensive intentions to go along with their offensive capabilities" (Mearsheimer 2001, 31). Because of the high level of uncertainty regarding state intentions, rational actors should "assume the worst" about a great power's intentions (Mearsheimer 2001; Rosato 2015). Thus, to them, state intentions are not an important variable for explaining state behaviors. More optimistic defensive (motivational) realists contend that rational actors can overcome the uncertainty to some extent by incorporating information about state intentions in their threat assessments and resulting security options (Kydd 1997, 2005; Glaser 2010).[2] According to their logic, a state should be

[1] Scholars are still debating over whether public opinion matters in foreign policy decisions. See, for example, Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Russett 1990; Sobel 1993; Gronke, Koch, and Wilson 2003; Converse 2006; Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver 2007; Guisinger and Saunders 2017.

[2] This paper uses the terminology "defensive (motivational) realists" to indicate realists who identify state intentions as either benign (status quo, peaceful) or greedy (revisionist, aggressive). Such realists include Randall Schweller, Andrew Kydd, and Charles Glaser. Randall Schweller, Charles Glaser, and Andrew Kydd, are motivational realists in the sense that they assume that states have different motivations or intentions. Glaser, for example, mentioned: "whatever elements are further developed in my theory could be included in motivational realism; there is not a fundamental incompatibility" (Glaser 2010, p. 159). They are also defensive realists in that they view security dilemmas, not greedy intentions per se, as the key to conflicts.

more cautious of states that signal aggressive intentions while being reassured by states that indicate peaceful intentions.

The debate over whether states can discern intentions among international relations scholars culminated in the article in *International Security*, "Correspondence: Can Great Powers Discern Intentions?" (Glaser, Kydd, Haas, Owen, and Rosato 2016). Rosato contended that a state should be certain or nearly certain of a rival state's intentions for mutual cooperation (Rosato 2015). Glaser and Kydd, on the contrary, contended in their correspondence that a rational state should cooperate under a range of conditions when an opposing state's intentions is "far from certainty" (Glaser et al. 2016, 199). Both groups of scholars, however, agree that states, particularly great powers, mistrust other powers and their intentions because of the anarchic features of the international system. They also implicitly agree on the significant role of intentions for a state's competitive or cooperative strategies when information about state intentions is certain or nearly certain.

Recently, increasingly more and more IR scholars have begun to examine the effect of state intentions on ordinary citizens' perceptions and attitudes in foreign policy decisions (Quek 2016; Kertzer 2016; Kertzer and McGraw 2012; Kim 2016; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018; Kim and MacDonald 2019). They made an important contribution to the signaling literature at the micro-level in terms of how a signal receiver perceives a signaler's actions. Some found that there is a perceptual gap between a signaler and a receiver (Quek 2016), some found that both hands-tying and sunk-cost signaling are effective in shaping assessments of resolve (Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018), and some found that a state's costly signals of reassurance are not as effective as Glaser or Kydd expected in reassuring observers of state actions (Kim and MacDonald 2019). However, all of them take it for granted that rational actors should consider state intentions in explaining state behaviors when uncertainty about state intentions is almost zero, without actually testing the assumption. However, state signaling as a means of conveying state intentions will not be meaningful if state intentions themselves are not important in international outcomes in the first place.

Therefore, this study tests the baseline assumptions of realists through a survey experiment that utilizes a representative sample of U.S. citizens. This study finds that ordinary U.S. citizens assess threats just as realists assume rational actors do with information about a rival state's intentions being important in the assessment of threats when the information is certain or nearly certain. However, the finding of this paper is more nuanced. The experimental results suggest that ordinary citizens use information about intentions heuristically to save cognitive efforts for the assessment of the threat. First, information about state intentions with certainty is utilized only when the state being assessed is strong but not when the state is weak. In other words, information about state intentions was not appreciably considered in the assessment of a weak state's threat. Furthermore, the information about a strong state's intentions is utilized when the information is certain. Second, when uncertainty about state intentions is high, the intention of the state being assessed was assumed to be the worst or aggressive. Overall, information about an opposing state's intentions was perceived to be important in the calculation of the threat assessment both (1) when the state is strong, and (2) when uncertainty about the strong state's intentions is low.

This study makes a theoretical contribution to the existing scholarship by empirically testing the baseline assumption of realists of international relations over the role of a state's intentions at the micro-level. This study shows that ordinary citizens use information

heuristically about state intentions and relative power for the assessment of the threat. This finding suggests why Americans are more interested in assessing the intentions of great powers such as China or Russia rather than weak states.[3]

In the rest of this paper, first, the debate over the role of state intentions within the various strains of realism in international security literature is discussed. The framework of threat assessment by individuals and three sets of hypotheses is then presented, followed by a description of the survey experiment design. The results of the experiment are then presented. Finally, the findings are summarized and the paper is concluded.

II. Power and Intentions in the International Security Theory

What makes a state be considered a threat? Most notably, typical realists' main variable is relative power. For structural realists, under international anarchy, weaker states fear stronger ones and should act to offset them through internal balancing (i.e., increasing military or economic capabilities) or external balancing (i.e., making an alliance). Unit-level characteristics of a state such as state intentions are not factored when explaining systemic outcomes; relative power is sufficient to explain patterns of state behaviors. A state with strong military capabilities has the means to threaten the survival of another state, and the possibility that it will use these capabilities is ever-present. Thus, standard structural realists such as Waltz traditionally do not distinguish peaceful states from aggressive states because the constraints of the international system render such distinction meaningless (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). John Mearsheimer, an offensive realist, further argues that states should assume the worst about great powers' intentions (Mearsheimer 2000, 45).

Schweller criticizes Waltz's realism for falling into "a status quo bias" in his explanation of international politics (Schweller 1996, 92), arguing that structural realism "overlooks the importance of revisionist goals (non-security expansion) as the driving force of international competition." Thus, Waltz's claim that the anarchic nature of the international system that drives states to compete would not work in a world in which only security seekers exist. We must assume "the prior existence of a threat" (Schweller 1996, 91). Thus, defensive (motivational) realists such as Schweller, Kydd, and Glaser categorize state motives into two general types.[4] At one extreme are the security-seeking, status-quo, benign states that have no intention of attacking other states preemptively unless their security is breached (Schweller 1996; Glaser 2010). At the other extreme are aggressive, expansionist, malignant, and revisionist states that intend to attack other states when opportunities arise. These scholars acknowledge the active role of intention in shaping state behavior (Walt 1987; Jervis 1978; Schweller 1994, 1996; Glaser 1996, 2010). These scholars argue that without at least the

[3] Nuclear-aspiring states such as Iran and North Korea are unusual exceptions. Even though they are weaker than the United States, they have been the object of long-standing interest by American policymakers because of the destructiveness of the nuclear weapons they intend or threaten to develop.

[4] I use intentions and motives interchangeably even though both words are used differently in different contexts. Glaser defined motives as "inherent features of states" and intentions as "what a state intends to do" (Glaser 2010, 38). This paper uses the term intentions primarily because the actions this study describes indicate the actions of a state in the relatively short term.

possibility of expansionist states, security-seekers cannot be trapped in the security dilemma as standard structural realists assume.

Even though defensive (motivational) realists acknowledge that there is uncertainty about state intentions, they contend that this uncertainty can be overcome. States can reveal their intentions by taking actions that aggressive, yet deceptive, states cannot easily mimic. For example, the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War period would not have withdrawn its forces from former Warsaw Pact countries such as East Germany if it had still intended to invade Western Europe or maintain its grip over Eastern Europe. That action would have been too costly and self-defeating for a state that actually had aggressive intentions. A greedy state would lose the opportunity to seize territory or influence other countries by taking such conciliatory gestures, as such acts would constitute a significant loss of offensive capacity for such a state.

Put bluntly, offensive realists hold that state intentions are not important in international politics. In contrast, defensive (motivational) realists suggest that information about state intentions is important in explaining and predicting state behaviors. The next section suggests that these seemingly contradictory claims are reconcilable when looking at individual perceptions of threat, depending on the level of uncertainty about state intentions.

III. Individual Threat Assessment as Cognitive Misers

Studies in the cognitive psychological tradition provide insight into building a framework regarding how ordinary citizens assess the threat in response to the information about a rival state's intentions. Human beings cannot process an unlimited amount of incoming information to understand the complex world due to limits in cognitive ability. Thus, people select only the information they believe is important to the process, which has proven to be "fast and frugal" (Gigerenzer and Goldstein 1996, 650). This selective attention to information is a heuristic in use by human beings that may cause individuals to occasionally err, but it is an efficient way of processing information given limited human cognitive ability (Simon 1956, 1982; Tversky and Kahneman 1973).

As cognitive misers, individuals select the information that is most helpful for national security when they assess a threat in international relations. Most realists agree that power is the most prominent variable when assessing a threat. Therefore, if individuals think as if they were realists, then they would select information first about power and use that information to decide whether the object (i.e., the state in question) of the assessment is actually a threat or not. They may disregard information about state intentions when the state being assessed is weak. If people cannot process all the information about more than 150 countries in the world, then paying attention to strong states while ignoring weak states can be a more efficient strategy to deal with potential threats. In fact, "ignoring part of the information can lead to more accurate judgments than weighting and adding all information" (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011, 451). Indeed, it is no coincidence that American IR scholars and policy-makers have been increasingly concerned over Chinese intentions when China has rapidly increased its military and economic capability (Gallagher 1994; Segal 1999; O'Hanlon 2000; Gertz 2002; Glaser 2011; Mearsheimer 2014; Kim 2020). Similarly, Japan's neighbors have reason to be suspicious of Japan's intentions because its economic power can be translated fairly easily into strong military capacity. On the contrary, Americans are less interested in the intentions of weak states, which cannot inflict serious damage to the United States.

Individuals may want to be even more selective when processing information to judge which country is a threat to their country, conditional on the certainty about state intentions. If individuals think as though they were offensive realists, they may heuristically assume the worst about other states' intentions when uncertainty is high as Mearsheimer suggested. In contrast, individuals may seriously consider information about intentions when assessing threats when uncertainty about state intentions is low as defensive realists claim. However, in this case, again, individuals will pay attention to information about state intentions only when the state is strong and correspondingly less when the state is weak. Combined, information about state intentions will play an important role in the assessment of threat when (1) the state subject to the assessment is strong, and (2) uncertainty about that state's intentions is low.

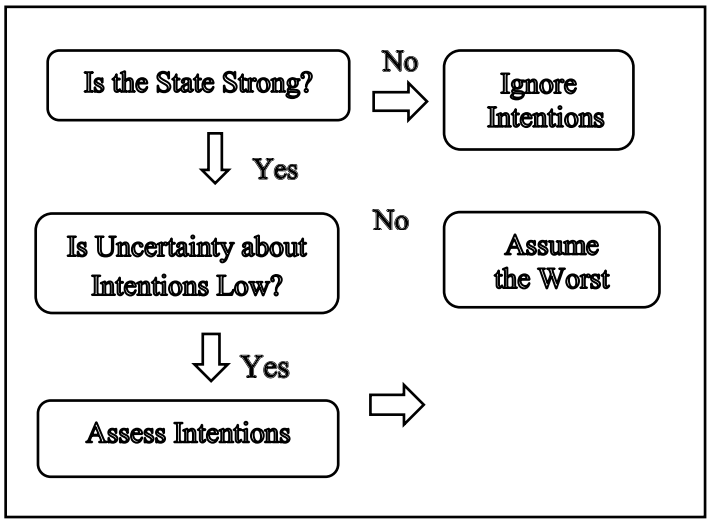


Figure 1. Individual Heuristic Information Processing for Threat Assessment

Figure 1 illustrates individual heuristic information processing for threat assessment proposed above. When an individual commences with processing information to assess a threat, that assessor starts with the criterion of relative power. When a rival state is perceived as too weak to be able to incur serious damage, ordinary people will not bother to process information about the state's intentions. Conversely, when the assessment concludes that the state is sufficiently strong militarily to inflict serious damage, then the assessor will move to the question concerning the level of uncertainty about that state's intentions. When the level of uncertainty about state intentions is high, then the individual may assume that the state is aggressive. This heuristic is not rational, given that the assessor inferred the state as being aggressive with almost no information about the state's intentions. Assuming a rival state's intentions as aggressive may escalate tension and correspondingly increase the probability of unnecessary war. However, given the importance of national security, assuming the other strong state to be aggressive may be a plausible way to prepare against potential surprise attacks. On the contrary, it is only when uncertainty is low regarding the state's intentions that information about state intentions matter for the assessment of the threat. Overall, the flow chart in Figure 1 suggests that an individual heuristically selects information for threat assessment depending on information about military power and uncertainty about intentions.

IV. Hypotheses

Three sets of hypotheses are formulated based on the insight above. The first set of hypotheses addresses whether the utility of the information about state intentions is affected by the information about a rival state's relative power.

Hypothesis 1a: Ordinary citizens' threat assessment varies in response to the variation of the information about the intentions of the state being assessed *when the state is strong, but not when the state is weak.*

Hypothesis 1b: Ordinary citizens' threat assessment will vary in response to the variation of the information about the intentions of the state being assessed, *regardless of the state's power.*

The second set of hypotheses addresses how ordinary citizens assess threat when they have no information about a rival state's intentions, and thus uncertainty over the state's intentions is high. Hypothesis 2a below is consistent with Mearsheimer's argument that a rational actor at the state level should assume the worst about a great power's intentions. However, ordinary citizens at the individual level do not have to assume aggressive intentions when they have no information about a rival state's intentions. They may assess a rival state's intentions and threat somewhere between that of an aggressive state and a benign state (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 2a: When information about a rival state's intentions are not given, ordinary citizens assess the threat level of that state as being as high as that of an aggressive state.

Hypothesis 2b: When information about a rival state's intentions is not given, ordinary citizens assess the threat level of that state as being somewhere between peaceful and aggressive.

The third set of hypotheses tests whether ordinary citizens assess threats as expected by realists, who have taken for granted that rational actors should be able to discern an aggressive state from a benign one when they receive information about state intentions with certainty. Both offensive realists and defensive realists agree that information about intentions with certainty should influence observers' threat assessment. However, neither strain of realism is explicit as to whether this information is affected with certainty by the information about a rival state's power. The third set of hypotheses adds this nuance as to whether the information about intentions with certainty affects individual threat assessment equally for both a strong and a weak state. Ordinary people's assessment of intentions may vary depending on a rival state's relative power. Alternatively, it is also possible that ordinary people would not bother to assess a strong state's intentions differently from a weak state's intentions.

Hypothesis 3a: When information about a rival state's intentions are given with near certainty, ordinary citizens' threat assessment will vary depending on the information about intentions only when the state is strong, not when it is weak.

Hypothesis 3b: When information about a rival state's intentions are given with near certainty, ordinary citizens' threat assessment will vary similarly for both strong and weak states in response to the information about intentions regardless of a rival state's power.

V. Previous Experiments

Studies following the psychological tradition in international relations have proceeded to investigate individuals' perceptions of their foreign policy choices. The experimental approach to international relations has, in fact, some advantages over case studies in identifying causal relationships and exploring political phenomena that cannot be achieved through case studies (Hudson and Butler 2010). Many theorists found that the image individuals create about a state affects their information processing and in turn, their attitudes towards the state. Hermann and his colleagues (1997), for example, found that a perceived relationship with a state, whether the state is an ally, enemy, or colony, creates an image and these images evoke cognitive and affective processes in forming individual opinions towards that state.

Among those in the psychological tradition, some scholars focused more on the effect of state motivations on threat perception (Jervis 1970; Herrmann et al. 1997; Schafer 1997; Alexander, Levin, and Henry 2005). They have attempted to explain how the general public's belief systems are systematically structured and how those beliefs affect the public's foreign policy preferences (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987). They assert that public attitudes toward a state are systematically structured by their general values and beliefs (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993). In turn, individual images of a state, for example, whether they are "friend" or "enemy" or whether they are "desirable" or "not-desirable," influence the processing and interpretation of new information and affects expectations about how state actors will behave (Hermann, Voss, Schooler, and Ciarrochi 1997).

More recently, scholars have demonstrated how the international environment, including factors such as relative power, regime type, and culture, also affects public perceptions and attitudes. Individuals indeed react differently, in terms of their threat assessments or policy choices, to information about state power and intentions, cultural or religious similarity, regime type, and shared identity (Rousseau 2006; Schafer 1999; 1997; Kertzer and McGraw 2012; Lacina and Lee 2013; Tomz and Weeks 2013). This literature showed that individual attitudes are affected by both dispositional factors such as their belief systems as well as by situational factors such as other states' power, intentions, identity, etc. (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero 2007; Kertzer 2016; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018).

VI. Research Design

Experiments can provide a useful analytical tool to test theoretical arguments focusing on a few variables. If the variables of interest prove insignificant in a simple and clean experimental setting, one would less likely expect them to have any meaningful effect in the far more complex world of reality. While it is still possible that what is learned from this simple experiment cannot directly translate to the real world, the results of these experiments will help to find the conditions under which the variables of interest either operate or cease being effective.

The experiment design follows the approach employed in many previous survey experiments on threat perceptions and foreign policy choices (Tomz 2007; Rousseau 2006; Lacina and Lee 2013). To test whether and under what conditions information about a rival state's power and intentions matters to respondents' threat perceptions, this study performed a survey experiment by commissioning an internet-based polling company, YouGov, to conduct the survey among a nationally representative sample of 210 U.S. citizens. The experiment was administered in January 2015. Before commissioning the experiment

employing YouGov, this study conducted the same experiment in November 2014 using a crowdsourcing internet market place, Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), to check interval validity.[5] Only the results of the experiment by YouGov are presented in this article because the results are fundamentally the same. The results of the MTurk sample are presented in Appendix A.

The main dependent variable (DV) is a threat assessment.[6] The DV was measured on a five-point Likert scale (the lowest score, 1, indicates no threat, and the highest score, 5, indicates extremely high threat). The key treatment variables are information about a hypothetical state's (1) relative power and (2) intentions. *Relative Power* has two values (strong and weak), and *Intentions* has three values (benign, aggressive, and no information). Variables that indicate individual characteristics such as dispositional and demographic variables are included as well. They include age, gender, education, political ideology, political knowledge, and income (Heskin and Power 1994; Zaller 1992; Kertzer and McGraw 2012). Each participant was then randomly assigned to one of the six groups listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Manipulation Used in the Experiment

Condition	Is the country described as strong or weak?	Is the country described as benign or aggressive?
A	Strong	Benign
B	Strong	Aggressive
C	Strong	No Information
D	Weak	Benign
E	Weak	Aggressive
F	Weak	No Information

First, participants were instructed to read an introductory script that went as follows: "…(T)he scenario described here is one that the United States has faced in the past, and may have to deal with again in the future. Imagine how you would react to this situation and which policy options you would support…" Participants then read a hypothetical scenario in which "(t)he government of the United States needs to take a position on a territorial dispute between Country X and a U.S. ally in the region. The ally is important to U.S. security, has strong diplomatic ties with the U.S., and is a major trading partner…"

[5] Respondents were paid 75 cents each, and the average time for respondents to complete the survey was 6 minutes and 24 seconds. Survey participants were asked to confirm that they were U.S. citizens and at least 18 years of age.

[6] This experiment used another variable, a foreign policy choice. For consistency and simplicity, I present the results of the threat assessment.

Country X was used as the state whose threat was to be assessed instead of an actual state to avoid any potential bias associated with the particular state. Country X was described as a state opposing a U.S. ally rather than a state direct challenging the United States. The direct threat to the US was not used in the scenario because there is no power in reality that is as powerful as US. Participants were presented with more details on the relationship between Country X and the U.S. ally: "Country X and the U.S. ally are historical rivals in the region. Because of this, they have experienced political and military tensions. Tension is particularly high around a specific mountainous border territory between the two countries…"

Participants received two kinds of information about Country X: *Power* and *Intentions*. These factors were randomly and independently varied. *Power* had two levels, and *Intentions* had three levels. Power was defined mostly in terms of relative power and an estimate of battle deaths in the event of a conventional war with Country X occurring. Thus, half of the participants read a description of a country that is "as strong as the combined power of the United States and its ally in terms of military capability in the region." Then the script mentions "… the Department of Defense estimates that the U.S. military would suffer over 3,000 deaths and that the war would cost the United States heavily in terms of financial resources." The other half read about a country that is "weaker than the combined power of the United States and its ally in terms of military capability in the region." Thus, "the Department of Defense estimates that the U.S. military would suffer fewer than 25 deaths and that the war would cost the United States little in terms of financial resources.

Intentions were manipulated at three levels: benign, aggressive, and no information. Instead of giving information about state intentions indirectly through a description of the state's actions so that observers could infer the state's intentions with some uncertainty, information about intentions was directly given as either *benign* or *aggressive* to make the information certain or near certain. Thus, one-third of the participants read about a country that "is known to be an aggressive country that is dissatisfied with its current status in the world." Another third read about a country that "is known to be a peaceful country that is satisfied with its current status in the world." Another third received no information about intentions. Thus, this study had a 2 (power) x 3 (intentions) between-subjects design (see Appendix B for more details).

Having read the information provided about a hypothetical state, participants were asked two attention check questions, which were intended to demonstrate whether respondents actually paid attention to the survey and understood the scenario. Then, participants were asked to assess the potential threat that Country X posed to U.S. security and interests. To assess their political knowledge, seven questions about domestic and international politics were posed. At the end of the survey, they were asked to record their gender, age, education, political ideology, and household income.

VII. Results

The results presented here are based on the data generated by those who completed the survey and passed the attention check. Accordingly, for those who participated in the survey from the sample, the responses of 150 participants out of 210 were included for analysis.

Table 1. Summary of the Analysis of Variable (ANOVA)

	Threat Assessment
Power	
F Statistic	52.99
Significance	$p < .001$
Intentions	
F Statistic	4.76
Significance	$p < .05$
N	150

Table 1 summarizes the results of analyses of variance (ANOVA), focusing on the effect of two treatment variables (*Power* and *Intentions*) on participants' threat assessment. This result is robust when the data of those who failed to pass the initial manipulation check is not removed from the sample. First, information about a state's power significantly affected survey participants' threat assessment (F = 52.99, p<.001). Participants exposed to a strong state tended to perceive the hypothetical state in the scenario as more threatening than those exposed to a weak state. Second, information about a state's intentions significantly affected survey participants' threat assessment (F= 4.76, p< .05). Participants exposed to a peaceful state tended to perceive the hypothetical state in the scenario as less threatening than those participants who were not exposed to the peaceful state.

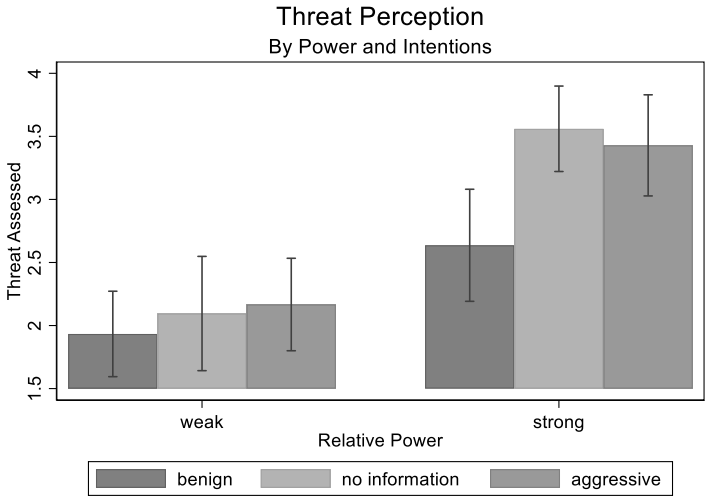


Figure 2. Effect of Information Regarding Power and Intentions on Threat Perception

Figure 2 above depicts more in detail about how survey participants assessed the threat in response to information about a hypothetical state's power and intentions. The Y-axis represents the level of threat assessed by respondents. The lowest value on the scale, 1, indicates no threat while the highest number on the scale, 5, indicates an extremely high level of perceived threat. The graph bar indicates the mean of threat perceived, and the error bar in the graph indicates a 95 % confidence interval for the mean.[7] The three bars on the left in Figure 2 represent survey participant responses regarding a weak state with different information about state intentions in the following order: peaceful, no information, and aggressive. Similarly, the three bars on the right side represent responses to a strong state with three different levels of information in the following order: a peaceful state, no information, and an aggressive state. Additionally, a two-sample t-test was also conducted to compare the average responses between the two groups.

First, Figure 2 shows that consistent with hypothesis 1a, survey participants' threat assessment significantly varied in response to the variation of the information about the intentions of the state being assessed *when the state is strong, but not when the state is weak*. There was no significantly different threat assessment among the three groups exposed to a weak state, while there were significantly different responses among the three groups exposed to a strong state. Among those exposed to a strong state, the responses of those who were exposed to a peaceful state were different from those exposed to other groups. This result suggests that ordinary citizens tend to utilize information about state intentions when a rival state is strong, but not when the state is weak.

Second, consistent with hypothesis 2a, when information about a rival state's intentions was not given, participants tended to assess the threat level of the rival state as high as that of an aggressive state. This pattern of responses was particularly clear when a rival state was described as *strong*. In Figure 2, the middle bars in both the left and right three bars represent those who were not given any information about a hypothetical state in the experiment. For those exposed to a strong state (three bars on the right), the threat assessments of those who received *no information* about a hypothetical state's intention were significantly different from those exposed to a *benign* state ($t = -3.47$, $p < .01$). However, the threat assessments of those who received *no information* about a hypothetical state's intention did not significantly diverge from those exposed to an *aggressive* state among those exposed to a strong state ($t = .51$, $p = .61$). Survey participants tended to respond to the state whose intentions were not known as if they had observed an aggressive state. This result suggests that ordinary citizens tend to assume the worst about a rival state's intentions when uncertainty about a rival state's intentions is high.

Third, consistent with hypothesis 3a, when information about a rival state's intentions is given with near certainty, participants tended to discern a benign state from an aggressive state when the state being assessed was *strong* but not weak. As illustrated in Figure 2, among those exposed to a *strong* state (the first and the third bar on the right), the group exposed to a *benign* state showed significantly different threat assessment from the group exposed to an *aggressive* state ($t = -2.73$, $p < .01$). In contrast, among those exposed to the *weak* state scenario (the first and the third bar on the left), the group exposed to a *benign* state did not show a significantly different threat assessment from the group exposed to the *aggressive* state

[7] To understand the meaning of the error bar, see Schenker and Gentleman 2001.

scenario (t= -.96, p= .34). Indeed, individuals appear to take advantage of information about a state's intentions only when the object of assessment is presented as *strong* and when the uncertainty of that state's intention is deemed *low*.

VIII. Conclusion

Figure 3, which summarizes the findings of the experiment, reveals two influential variables when information about state intentions is used in threat assessment. This study reveals that instead of utilizing information about state intentions continuously, ordinary citizens utilize information about both state power and intentions heuristically for threat assessment. As a result, U.S. citizens appear to respond as though they were offensive realists under certain conditions (when uncertainty about a strong state's intentions is high), while they respond as though they were defensive (motivational) realists under others (when uncertainty about a strong state's intentions is low). When a rival state is sufficiently weak and unable to inflict serious damage, U.S. citizens are less concerned about the state's intentions.

		Power	
		Strong	Weak
Uncertainty regarding state Intentions	High	Assume the worst about intentions	Intentions are not important
	Low	Intentions are important	Intentions are not important

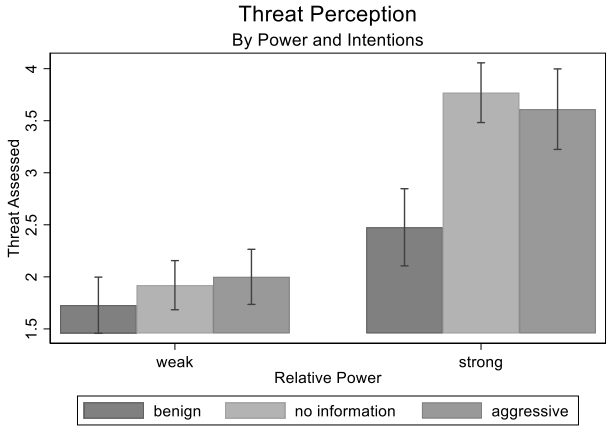
Figure 3. Individual Assessment of Threat

This study offers novel insight that integrates both offensive and defensive (motivational) realism regarding the role of state intentions and builds a framework to understand threat assessment formed by ordinary individuals adopting the realist's lens. This study offers insight as to whether and under what conditions information about state intentions is taken into account by ordinary citizens when they assess threats posed by a rival state.

There are several ways to further progress this research. First, instead of using a hypothetical state, future studies can use actual country names such as China, North Korea, Canada, and the UK as the subject state of assessment. In that case, special attention would need to be paid to the variables that could influence the experimental outcomes. For example, regime type (democracy or non-democracy), perceived relationship (enemy or ally), and cultural similarities with survey participants may affect respondents' assessment. Second,

information about uncertainty over intentions may be directly manipulated. In this study, the uncertainty was manipulated by including information that defense analysts directly estimated (uncertainty is *low*) or by giving no information about state intentions (uncertainty is *high*). Rather than directly providing or withholding information about intentions, researchers may manipulate the extent of the uncertainty by providing limited signs of intentions. These kinds of analyses could aid academics and decision-makers in their understanding of the citizenry's perception of threats and state actions.

Appendix A. The Result of MTurk Sample



Appendix B. Survey Question Wording (YouGov)

The country described below is hypothetical and does not really exist. That said, the scenario described here is similar to one that the United States has faced in the past, and may have to deal with again in the future. Imagine how you would react to this situation and which policy options you would support. The survey questions are based directly on the scenario below. Please read the scenario carefully and then answer the questions that follow.

The government of the United States needs to take a position on a territorial dispute between Country X and a U.S. ally in the region. The ally is important to U.S. security, has strong diplomatic ties with the U.S., and is a major trading partner. The central aims of U.S. foreign policy in this region are to protect the U.S. ally and to prevent the emergence of a hostile regional power that can threaten U.S. security.

Country X and the U.S. ally are historical rivals in the region. Because of this, they have experienced political and military tension. Tension is particularly high around a specific mountainous border territory between the two countries. The disputed territory is currently controlled by the U.S. ally. This territory is militarily important because—owing to its geographical features—it is easier both to defend one's own country and to attack the other country when controlling this area.

[Display]

Country X is [as strong as the combined power of the United States and its ally; weaker than the combined power of the United States and its ally] in terms of military capability in the region. Country X is currently [strong enough to inflict serious damage on U.S. and allied forces in the region; too weak to inflict serious damage on U.S. and allied forces in the region]. In the event of war with Country X on the one side and the United States and its ally on the other, the Department of Defense estimates that the U.S. military would suffer [over 3,000 deaths; fewer than 25 deaths] and that the war would cost the United States [heavily; little] in terms of financial resources.

[Country X is known to be an aggressive country that is dissatisfied with its current status in the world. According to U.S. military experts and intelligence agencies, Country X has a

strong desire to take the disputed border territory, use it as a jump-off point for further territorial expansion, and eventually to become a regional power.;

Country X is known to be a peaceful country that is satisfied with its current status in the world. According to U.S. military experts and intelligence agencies, Country X is not interested in occupying the territory of the U.S. ally or other neighboring countries for expansionist reasons. If Country X took over the disputed border territory, it would do so only because it is advantageous for defending its home territory.]

To summarize, Country X is known to have a relatively [strong; weak] military capability [, and to be an aggressive country; and to be a peaceful country; no wordings].

[Questions]

[Q1-Q2 will check your understanding of the situation described in the scenario.]

1. Which of the following best describes the scenario above?
    1. A border dispute between Country X and the U.S. ally
    2. A trade dispute between Country X and the United States
    3. Country X's economic policy

2. Which of the following describes Country X best?
    1. The United States
    2. The U.S. ally
    3. The U.S. ally's rival

Q3. How much of a threat is Country X to U.S. security and interests?

1. No threat	2. Slight threat	3. Moderate threat	4. Serious threat	5. Extremely high threat

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