Levels of Analysis
Notes Based On:


• Henry R. Nau, Professor Political Science/International Affairs, Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University.
Levels of Analysis

Perspectives deal with the cause of what makes something happen in international relations—
- Power
- Institutions
- Ideas

Levels of Analysis deal with the origin of that cause—
- Individual
- Country
- International System
Systemic Level of Analysis

Most comprehensive level of analysis.

Like playing a card game:
Cards you hold are the structural level.

Cards themselves are the relative power states hold.

When you play the cards in your hand, you are at the process level.

When a state forms an alliance with another state it commits some of its power, or plays one of its cards.
Domestic Level of Analysis

Locates causes in character of domestic system of specific nation/states.

More specific causes than at systemic level, but not as specific as individual level.

Failed State: State whose domestic system has collapsed.

Rogue State: State that seeks systematically to acquire nuclear weapons with possible intent of passing them on to non-state terrorists.
Individual Level of Analysis

Deals with individual decision-makers or leaders of state.

Tends to not regard as important any situation that might have set up actions of leaders.

Especially true of democracies where leaders are accountable and media is free to report failures.

Often useful to exaggerate importance of decision-maker, but isn’t same as proving it.
Foreign Policy
Level of Analysis

Foreign Policy individuals actually make decisions.

Between systemic and domestic levels of analysis.

It’s a two-level game.

Sometimes toughest negotiations are not with other nations but within your own country.
Professor Bruce Bueno de Mesquita

“International relations is the process by which foreign policy leaders balance their ambition to pursue particular policy objectives against their need to avoid internal and external threats to their political survival.”

Leaders have objectives that motivate their behavior.

They pursue these through the use of power.

Calculate costs and benefits of options based on their perceptions of available power and political risk and then choose the option that maximize achieving their goals.
SUMMARY

How do perspectives and levels of analysis interact?

Differences in how each perspective determines which factors and levels of analysis it judges to be most important.

What causes the outcomes?

Among various levels of analysis, which way do the causal arrows run between power, institutions, and ideas.
Relevance in Real World

**Realist Perspective** – actors in IR behave mostly on basis of what they HAVE—how much power they control and how power is used vis a vis other nations and actors.

**Liberal Perspective** – actors behave mostly on basis of what they and other actors DO—how actors interact and process of reciprocity and interdependence create institutions facilitate pursuit of collective goods.

**Identity Perspective** – actors mostly behave on basis of WHO they are—ideas that construct their identities or serve as causal guidelines for choosing policies in real world.