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FOREIGN POLICY BRIEF

Challenges in International Relations Research and Policy in the West: Blinded by Inadequate International Relations Theory, Deeply Rooted Prejudices, and Harmful De-Contextualization

The study explored a relatively minor event, but one of fundamental importance for international relations and one seen as having a long-term impact, shaping even the understanding of the current Russo-Ukrainian war. Therefore, we selected only some related findings that are of immense importance.

Among the more universal findings, the study highlights the problematic contribution of authors with military backgrounds to scholarly discourse, noting that military training, education and experience in general, prioritize operational and strategic competencies over critical analytical frameworks. Similarly, military-defense organisations share a specific culture that nurtures priorities that may contradict the very purpose for which they were established.

As a secondary, but at the same time extremely relevant finding, is that the Russian Federation's foreign policies have only reluctantly evolved towards aggression. Thus, this thesis challenges the frequent assumption that Russia has always been an aggressive, neo-imperialist state. This erroneous thesis seems to be prevailing in particular in Poland and the Baltic states.

The central academic argument posits that epistemic bias (deeply rooted prejudices), factual ambiguity, and evidence selectivity fundamentally compromise both the validity and neutrality of IR analyses, especially in research addressing politically contentious conflicts. Geographically diverse, or stronger devil's advocate role, and methodologically transparent approaches to scholarly knowledge production and storage in the field are needed.

The coverage and interpretation of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War in Western — more specifically, U.S. and European — media were largely shaped by national stereotypes, political leverage, and the interplay between political actors and journalists, as well as by structural features of the media, including hegemonization and instrumentalization.

Therefore, we recommend adopting critically reflexive approaches to analyzing global news production, with explicit attention to narrative construction mechanisms and the systematic inclusion of devil's advocate and non-Western perspectives in international relations research.

We advocate that decision-makers prioritize nuanced understanding of international actors' motivations over binary or distorted assessments, recognizing that accurate comprehension — not endorsement — is crucial for strategic engagement.

To overcome the significant obstacles posed by institutional distrust, geopolitical instability, and entrenched cognitive and personal biases, this recommendation requires:

- Systematic training in perspective-taking, understanding theory's indirect impacts, and recognizing personal, professional, or national-level biases
- Institutional incentives for complexity over simplification, especially for factual and contextual saturation
- Long-term commitment to analytical rigour regardless of peer pressure, dominant IR theory impact, media reporting, or governmental rhetoric

Source: Školka, Andrej (2026). *Identification of Methodological Challenges in International Relations Studies: A Case Study of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War*. Version 5.0. 93,000 words. Research study funded by the EU NextGenerationEU through the Recovery and Resilience Plan for Slovakia under the project No. 09I03-03-V04-00308.

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