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Identification of Methodological Challenges in International Relations Studies: A Case Study of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War

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POLICY BRIEF

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 latter thesis seems to be prevailing in particular in Poland and the Baltic states.

The central academic argument posits that epistemic bias, factual ambiguity, and evidence selectivity fundamentally compromise both the validity and neutrality of IR analyses, especially in research addressing politically contentious conflicts. 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 recommend 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 biases, this recommendation requires:

- Systematic training in perspective-taking and bias recognition
- Institutional incentives for complexity over simplification
- Long-term commitment to analytical rigour regardless of peer pressure, media reporting, or governmental rhetoric

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Experimental Design,
Methodology and Outputs for
Detecting Foreign Policy Discourses



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