

The Myth of the Eclectic IR Scholar?

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Abstract

What does the decline in paradigmatic self-identification mean for how IR scholars think about the world? We answer this question with a 2020 survey among nearly 2000 IR scholars. We uncover a two-dimensional latent theoretical beliefs space based on scholarly agreement with conjectures about the state, ideas, international institutions, domestic politics, globalization, and racism. The first dimension separates status quo-oriented scholars from more critical scholars. The second dimension captures the Realist-Institutionalist divide. We have three key findings. First, non-paradigmatic scholars vary greatly in their theoretical beliefs. Second, measurement invariance tests show that there is a similar structure underlying the beliefs of paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. Third, we find no evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars rely less on their theoretical beliefs in making predictions about conflict, institutions, political economy, democracy, and human rights. Instead, the positions of scholars in the two dimensional theoretical belief space rather than self-assigned paradigmatic labels correlate with predictions about the world. Our findings suggest that non-paradigmatic scholars are not so different from self-identified Liberals, Constructivists, and Realists, although the decline of paradigmatic self-identification may still matter for how scholars organize debates and disciplinary divides.

Keywords: international relations theory, paradigms, realism, liberalism, constructivism

1 Introduction

The paradigmatic debates that long dominated the study of international relations (IR) appear to have become much less prominent (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013). Surveys by the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project reveal a persistent decline in the percentage of scholars who self-identify as members of a paradigm over the last 15 years. Lake (2013, p.581) suggests that we are seeing the “waning of the paradigm wars” and hopes for, and sees hints of, a new era characterized by reliance on mid-level theory, which “[r]ather than defending any single set of assumptions, [...] builds theories to address specific problems of world politics” (Lake 2013, p.573). These trends notwithstanding, citation patterns in the international relations literature are still clustered around communities defined primarily by shared commitments to the three main paradigms: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism (Kristensen 2018). This suggests the possibility that scholars are still wedded to paradigmatic models of the world even as they are no longer willing to label themselves or their arguments as such.

Do non-paradigmatic scholars flexibly adopt theoretical belief systems based on substantive questions? Or are they more like political independents in the United States, who label themselves as independent but in practice tend to vote consistently for one party, be it Republicans or Democrats (Keith et al. 1992)? We answer these questions with a survey of nearly two thousand IR scholars in Europe and the United States fielded in the summer of 2020. The survey allows us not just to observe the paradigmatic self-identification of scholars but also their agreement with a number of core substantive theoretical beliefs that define the paradigmatic debates: the state as the primary actor, the role of ideas versus material factors, the importance of international institutions, how domestic politics shapes international relations, assessments of globalization, and whether IR theory is imbued with racist assumptions. We thus focus on more substantive rather than epistemological differences between scholars.

Two latent dimensions characterize the structure of their beliefs reasonably well. The first dimension primarily separates more critically-oriented scholars from more status-quo oriented scholars, where the critical theorists think ideas matter more than material factors, that the state is no longer the primary actor in world affairs, that IR theories have racist foundations, and that globalization has not, on balance, made the world better off. The second dimension reflects the

classic Realist-Liberal Institutional division, with scholars who think domestic politics and international institutions matter on the institutionalist side of this dimension. The four quadrants of the resulting two-dimensional belief space capture the standard paradigmatic divides. Yet, we also see considerable variation within paradigms, which implies that paradigms are not homogeneous and thus that paradigmatic labels may not adequately capture underlying theoretical beliefs.

We structure our analysis around three questions about possible differences between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. First, we verify that the refusal to identify with a particular paradigm is, itself, not indicative of a common set of underlying theoretical beliefs. Although non-paradigmatic scholars are on average closest to self-identified Liberals, there are substantial numbers of non-paradigmatic scholars distributed throughout the theoretical belief space.

Second, the paradigms specify clear ways in which beliefs about IR form a consistent logical structure. A Realist, for example, typically believes that material factors are more important than ideational factors, that states remain the primary actors in the international system, and that international institutions do not modify anarchy in consequential ways. If non-paradigmatic scholars are less rigid in their devotion to a constellation of assumptions, then there should be less structure underlying their beliefs. That is, if these scholars are pragmatic, then the assumptions they hold at any time should vary and not cluster into a coherent framework, as it should for paradigmatic ones. Measurement invariance tests establish that the factor structure fits paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars equally well and that the factor loadings are equivalent across the two groups of scholars. As such, our two-dimensional latent space is an equally good model for non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic scholars. We do find, however, that non-paradigmatic scholars are slightly less likely to be on the ends of item scales, suggesting that the analogy with “partisan leaners” from the American politics literature may be apt: non-paradigmatic scholars are similarly coherent in their assumptions, but less extreme, on average (Petrocik 2009).¹

Third, we ask whether paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars differ in how they apply their

¹ Tetlock also finds that so-called foxes, who are similar to our non-paradigmatic scholars, are centrists in terms of political beliefs; and he finds that they inhabit all quadrants of the political ideologies he discusses (Tetlock 2005)

core theoretical beliefs to analyze international affairs. To appropriate Philip Tetlock, paradigmatic scholars “knew one big thing and sought, under the banner of parsimony, to expand the explanatory power of that big thing to cover the new cases; the more eclectic [non-paradigmatic scholars] knew many little things and were content to improvise ad hoc solutions to keep pace with a rapidly changing world” (Tetlock 2005, pp. 20–21). Advocates for eclectic theorizing argue that rigid paradigmatic thinking stands in the way of making accurate assessments of world affairs (Lake 2011; Sil and Katzenstein 2010). By contrast, skeptics fear that the decline of paradigmatic analysis reflects a generalized decline in the use of rigorous theory in IR scholarship (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013). We put the normative and substantive implications of these arguments aside and, instead, ask the prior question: do non-paradigmatic scholars really rely less on their theoretical priors in making predictions about international affairs?

We asked scholars to predict near-term (five year) developments in international security, institutions, and political economy. We then modeled those predictions as a function of their placement in our two-dimensional belief space and their paradigm. Overall, we find that the positions of scholars in our belief space are significant correlates of most of the predictions we asked IR scholars to make. For example, those on the critical side of the status quo dimension are much more pessimistic about the future of war (especially involving the United States) and the liberal institutional order. Yet, self-assigned paradigm labels are rarely a significant correlate after controlling for our two latent theoretical beliefs space dimensions. The exceptions are that self-identified Realists are somewhat more pessimistic about a few elements of the liberal international order, such as further exits from the EU, even after controlling for theoretical beliefs. Crucially, we find no evidence that the theoretical beliefs of non-paradigmatic scholars are less strongly correlated with predictions about real world events.

Relatedly, if non-paradigmatic scholars hold more flexible and context-dependent beliefs about world affairs, these features ought to be on display in cases characterized by significant novelty and uncertainty. We expect that paradigmatic scholars’ views should be little affected by these world events; after all, they are attached to a set of assumptions that shape their worldview. But for non-paradigmatic scholars, we anticipate that they should respond differently given their varied expectations about these events. Again using Tetlock’s ideas, non-paradigmatic scholars are skeptical of grand theoretical schemes and prefer to make predictions based on flexible ad hocery that

involves assembling diverse ideas and information (Tetlock 2005, p. 75). The timing of the survey – in the midst of a global pandemic and in the lead up to a U.S. presidential election with significant implications for the future of U.S. foreign policy – allowed us to assess whether those with different expectations about the length of the pandemic and/or Donald Trump’s re-election prospects made different predictions about world affairs and whether those differing predictions depended on a given scholar’s paradigmatic commitments. We found no evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars weighed their assessments of these events more than paradigmatic scholars. Expectations about Trump’s re-election shape predictions about events that rely strongly on U.S. policy among all scholars. Optimism or pessimism about COVID-19 did not correlate significantly with most predictions about world affairs.

Together, these results suggest that despite the undeniable decline in explicit paradigmatic self-identification, self-identified non-paradigmatic scholars use well-structured theoretical beliefs to make sense of international affairs in ways similar to those of self-identified paradigmatic scholars. We analogize these results to the political behavior literature showing that self-identified independents in the United States behave, in practice, very much like their partisan compatriots. In short, it appears that non-paradigmatics may not be as flexible as those calling for a post-paradigmatic IR had hoped. While we think there may be something to that characterization, it is possible that there are important dimensions of variation between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars that our survey did not draw out. Moreover, even if most non-paradigmatic scholars make predictions in similar ways as Realists or Liberals or Constructivists, the refusal to self-identify as card carrying members of a paradigmatic tribe may still matter, for example in lessening a devotion to spreading a paradigm as *THE* paradigm for IR. Indeed, our results suggest that putting scholars in neat paradigmatic boxes was always slightly misleading and that our attempt to characterize IR scholars in a continuous theoretical beliefs space is a useful step forward in efforts to map the intellectual commitments of the field.

The next section discusses the decline of paradigmatic self-identification and what this may mean for how IR scholars draw inferences about the world. We then discuss the conceptualization and measurement of theoretical conjectures before detailing our survey methodology and our detailed findings. The conclusion returns to the broader implications and the limitations of our study.

2 What does the decline of paradigmatic self-identification mean?

There is widespread consensus that IR research has become less openly paradigmatic in the past two decades. Fewer articles and books self-consciously proclaim to advance a Realist, Liberal, or Constructivist perspective, at least in relative terms (Saideman 2018). Syllabi are no longer as obsessed with teaching the “isms” (Colgan 2016) and scholars have become less likely to self-identify as card carrying members of any particular paradigmatic tribe (Maliniak, Peterson, et al. 2018).

The decline in paradigmatic relevance has caused alarm in some quarters, suggesting that it implies a decline in “theory laden” IR scholarship (Mearsheimer and Walt 2013) and a move towards “fragmented adhocacy” (Oren 2016) and empirical research that lacks a theoretical center.

Others are more optimistic about a post-paradigmatic world. David Lake argued at length in an International Studies Association Presidential Address and an accompanying piece that “isms are evil” because they help construct academic sects that limit the questions asked, how those questions ought to be studied, and the answers considered valid (Lake 2011). The decline of paradigms potentially makes space for scholars to develop application-specific theoretical approaches that borrow assumptions and arguments from a wide range of approaches.

Sil and Katzenstein (2010) argue that paradigmatic approaches establish principles by fiat that assign primacy to certain kinds of causal factors rather than others, which fosters inter-paradigm warfare that is irrelevant to the actual problems at hand. Instead, these authors call for “eclectic theorizing” that “explor[es] substantive relationships and reveal[es] hidden connections among elements of seemingly incommensurable paradigm-bound theories, with an eye to generating novel insights that bear on policy debates and practical dilemmas” (Sill and Katzenstein 2010:2).

2.1 Three empirical questions about paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars

The core normative argument against the emphasis on paradigmatic research is that IR scholars should flexibly adjust their theoretical assumptions to match the empirical problem they analyze. Yet, we don't really know if the increasing number of IR scholars who refuse to identify with an "ism" are indeed more flexible in how they link core theoretical beliefs to empirical assessments. We identify three key questions about what the decline in paradigmatic self-identification really means.

A first question is whether non-paradigmaticism is just a codename for a new ism? Identifying as non-paradigmatic may have become a matter of pride among specific subsets of IR scholars who reject old-style IR but who actually have quite cohesive theoretical beliefs. For example, "open economy politics" (OEP) has emerged as a recognizable theoretical approach whose adherents do not always self-identify with Liberalism or with any other paradigm and that has been accused of constituting an "intellectual monoculture" in IPE (McNamara 2009). So perhaps, scholars who identify as non-paradigmatic really mostly belong to this new camp. On the other hand, Sil and Katzenstein certainly do not fit this mold as scholars, and there are good reasons to suspect that the rise of the non-paradigmatics may be more widespread. The key empirical question is whether scholars who self-identify as non-paradigmatic have a distinct set of theoretical beliefs or whether they are distributed throughout the theoretical beliefs space. A survey is the most appropriate methodological tool for examining this question given that theoretical beliefs are not always easily observable from articles and books.

Second, one way to interpret Sil and Katzenstein's ideal of an "eclectic scholar" is that these scholars work with theoretical beliefs that do not cohere in the same way as those of paradigmatic scholars. For example, a Realist typically believes in the primacy of the state over non-state actors, international structural over domestic influences, and material over ideational forces. What makes Realism a paradigm is that these beliefs go together. Non-paradigmatic scholars should be eclectic in the sense that they mix and match theoretical beliefs. As the context changes, they should turn to different assumptions and hence their blend of assumptions at any point in time should not be consistent with those of paradigmatic scholars. The empirical question is whether the theoretical

beliefs of non-paradigmatic scholars are actually less or differently structured than those of paradigmatic scholars. We will use measurement invariance tests, explained in detail below, to evaluate this.

Third, the ideal of the eclectic non-paradigmatic scholar implies that they are less rigid in applying their theoretical predispositions to real world events than are paradigmatic scholars. This is the key advantage envisioned by those who cheer on the decline of paradigmatic self-identification. Different theoretical beliefs may be more appropriate to answer different substantive questions. Paradigmatic commitments lock scholars into answering questions in ways that stay true to their prior beliefs. Scholars, it is averred, may give better answers to questions if they are less rigid in how they use their theoretical beliefs to understand the world around them. Sil and Katzenstein cite Philip Tetlock's research on prediction accuracy as a key empirical justification for this assertion. Tetlock found that those who rigidly adhere to a few foundational theoretical beliefs ("hedgehogs") are much less accurate forecasters than "foxes" who are ready to flexibly adjust their ideas based on context (Tetlock 2005). Paradigmatic scholars, like hedgehogs, appear to seek cognitive consistency and have strong tendencies toward confirmation bias based on their assumptions. As Tetlock summarizes, foxes are "more motivated to weave together conflicting arguments on foundational issues in the study of politics, such as the role of human agency or the rationality of decision making" (Tetlock 2005, p. 88). Like foxes, non-paradigmatic scholars should operate without a consistent set of assumptions about international politics, while paradigmatic scholars should "push their favorite first principles as far as possible" on all occasions (Tetlock 2005, p. 89).

We evaluate this argument by asking scholars to predict the likelihood of consequential events spanning many different issue areas. We cannot (yet) compare the accuracy of these predictions between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars given that we gave a timeline of five years for most events. However, we can evaluate what role paradigmatic self-identification and theoretical beliefs play in making these predictions. First, we ask whether paradigmatic self-identification is useful at all in explaining the predictions IR scholars make. Jackson and Nexon (2009) argue that IR paradigms are, in fact, not paradigms (in the Kuhnian sense) or research programs (in the

Lakatosian sense) (see also Bennett 2013). Instead, it is more useful to think of IR's disciplinary debates as being about the validity of competing sets of potentially overlapping assumptions about or organizing principles of world politics. They explain, "[t]hese organizing principles are...are more like wagers about how the world is put together—wagers that can give rise to different sorts of empirical investigations" (Jackson and Nexon, 2009, p.922). Perhaps we should care more about how scholars use theoretical beliefs about organizing principles than their paradigmatic self-identifications.

Second, if non-paradigmatic scholars are more flexible in how they relate their theoretical beliefs to understanding the world of international affairs, then we would expect less consistent relationships between these beliefs and their assessments of the world. We thus examine whether the aforementioned theoretical beliefs are weaker correlates of predictions among non-paradigmatic scholars than among paradigmatic self-identifiers.

Third, if non-paradigmatic scholars are like foxes who readily adjust their predictions to real-world events, then we may expect that salient events play a greater role in their predictions. As Tetlock shows, the non-paradigmatic ones are not "anchored down by theory-laden abstractions", preferring to improvise by using "dissonant combinations of ideas that capture the 'dynamic tensions' propelling political processes" (Tetlock 2005, p. 91). The political context should shape their thinking more than a set of consistent assumptions. Two events loomed large at the time of our survey: the COVID pandemic and the re-election of President Trump. Scholars differ in how much they think the COVID pandemic will affect international relations. For example, Daniel Drezner argues that the "song will remain the same" as the pandemic does not fundamentally alter the balance of power, a prediction shaped by a commitment to a particular set of theoretical beliefs about how change occurs (Drezner 2020). Others see the potential for transformative changes (McNamara and Newman 2020). Assessing the potential influence of President Trump is more straightforward given his positions on immigration, U.S. commitments to international institutions, and economic openness. Still the main paradigms attach little significance to the role of individual leaders. Thus, we might expect that paradigmatic self-identifiers are less likely to condition their predictions on the perceived likelihood of a Trump victory.

2.2 Measuring Paradigms and Theoretical Beliefs

Our survey asks respondents both to self-identify with particular paradigms as well as their views on key beliefs about the entities and processes that the different paradigms privilege. Our measure of paradigmatic commitments follows past practices of the TRIPS surveys. We ask respondents, “Which of the following best describes your approach to the study of IR?” Response options included the “big three”: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism. In addition, respondents could choose among the English School, Feminism, Marxism, Other, or “I do not use paradigmatic analysis.”

Measuring the underlying conjectures scholars are willing to make about world affairs is more difficult. Our goal is to identify discriminating beliefs that have been key axes of debate in IR. The “paradigm wars” were themselves “contests over the truth status of assumptions’ Lake (2013) or the “primacy to certain kinds of causal factors rather than others” (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). Measuring agreement with theoretical conjectures over which paradigmatic adherents have long-debated should allow us to assess the extent to which the paradigmatic communities themselves still adhere to classic beliefs and the extent to which the non-paradigmatic secessionists resemble their ostensibly less ecumenical colleagues.

We identified a series of six conjectures about world affairs that have been recurrent objects of fundamental disagreement between different communities of IR scholars. We refer to these as “conjectures” over which IR scholars have “beliefs.” These conjectures are the subject of both empirical and theoretical debates. For example, there are core divisions among the paradigms over whether international institutions modify anarchy, as well as specific theories with accompanying empirical studies about how specific institutions cause outcomes that we would not observe in the absence of those institutions. We are interested in measuring these fundamental divisions, which cannot ultimately be proven, even if beliefs about these conjectures may well be shaped by empirical research. Our focus is on substantive theoretical wagers rather than epistemological assumptions as the former provide a cleaner fit with the paradigms. For example, both Realists and Liberals may identify as rationalists and positivists while Constructivists may be positivists or post-positivists.

These measures allow us to test for systematic differences in the belief structures of paradigmatic scholars and non-paradigmatic scholars. But they also allow us study questions of theoretical flexibility among scholars. A perennial complaint about “isms” research is that paradigmatic scholars

take a belief that institutions or ideas “matter” and apply that belief to any empirical context they encounter, rather than adopting context-specific beliefs about the role of particular variables.

Primacy of ideas: First, we asked scholars to indicate their agreement with the statement that “[i]deational forces are more important than material forces if we want to understand change in the international system.” Debates over the importance of ideational factors relative to material factors have long divided social scientists. In international relations, the centering of ideas, norms, and identity as driving forces in international politics is most associated with Constructivist approaches to international relations.² By contrast, Realist (and Marxist) scholars have traditionally focused more on material factors (Morgenthau 1948) while disagreements about the relative importance of ideas are a cleavage *within* the Liberal research tradition (Goldstein 1988).

The role of international institutions and anarchy: Second, we asked scholars whether they agree that “international institutions modify anarchy in important ways.” The relative importance of international institutions has been a core axis of empirical and theoretical contention. Structural realists maintain that institutions are simply epiphenomenal reflections of the distribution of power in world affairs (Mearsheimer 1994). Liberal institutionalists argued that even in an anarchical world, international institutions can stimulate cooperation by reducing transaction costs, encouraging reciprocity, and increasing the shadow of future interactions (Keohane 2005). Constructivists come to a similar conclusion but for a different reason: international institutions are part of the social environment in which international actors interact (Finnemore 1993).

Domestic politics and international relations: Third, we asked whether “Relations among states are often best explained by domestic politics.” The relative importance of domestic politics to explaining outcomes in world affairs is a key distinction between system level theorists on the one hand (especially structural realists like Waltz (2010) but also some influential Constructivists (Wendt 1999)) and research traditions that make more flexible assumptions about how unit-level attributes and domestic political interactions shape relations between states (Fearon 1998). Especially scholars within the Liberal tradition emphasize that foreign policies are often the product of the interactions between individuals, groups, firms, and political leaders (Putnam 1988; H. Milner 1997; Moravcsik 1997).

Are states the primary actors in world politics?: Another long-standing division among

² For a review of first-generation work on these issues, see Finnemore and Sikkink (2001)

IR scholars concerns who the primary actors in world affairs are. Realists maintain that states are central because of their unique role in the provision of security (Wohlforth n.d.). Liberals and Constructivists do not accept the inevitability of the state as the primary actor but they differ amongst themselves in their assumptions about the centrality of states. Some scholars highlight the centrality of political leaders (Saunders 2011), non-governmental organizations (Murdie and Davis 2012), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), multinational firms, intergovernmental organizations, regulators (Singer 2007), central bankers (Chaudoin and H. V. Milner 2017), and a whole host of other characters to take on leading and sometimes central roles in world affairs. Yet liberal intergovernmentalists maintain that states remain central as they aggregate the preferences of sub-national actors in interactions with other states (Moravcsik 1997) and some Constructivists also maintain that states have in practice remained the central actors (Wendt 1999).

These four conjectures reflect long-standing divides in international relations theory that draw contrasts between one or more of the “big three” paradigms. The next two assumption reflect more recent divides and separate more critical approaches from more status quo oriented approaches. Status quo oriented scholars are those that are less inclined to suggest major revisions to the prevailing international order and international relations theories. Less status quo oriented scholars are more likely to critique prevailing outcomes in world affairs and view the dominant explanations of those outcomes as justifying, covering for, or simply ignoring racist or colonial power structures that brought them about.

Globalization has, on average, increased global welfare: We asked scholars whether “[g]lobalization, on average, has made people better off even if there are some losers.” The idea that this is so is a key implication of neoclassical economics, which has formed the building block of many recent studies in especially International Political Economy. The Open Economy Politics (OEP) approach, as Lake (2009, p224-5) summarizes “adopts the assumptions of neoclassical economics and international trade theory” and then introduces political variables to explain deviations from theoretically optimal economic policy. Generally this is accomplished by considering the (material) interests of the relevant actors and the institutions which might condition the strategies that those actors use to pursue their interests. Often work in this tradition wants to explain these deviations from socially optimal policy in the hopes that these deviations might be turned back.

In addition to often being blind to more recent developments in macroeconomic and international trade theory as some of its adherents are willing to admit, this approach has been criticized as an intellectual “monoculture” (McNamara 2009) which admits few alternative perspectives. McNamara (2009)’s critique of the “monoculture” of OEP is, for the most part, concerned with the potential for such narrowness to lead to incomplete or inaccurate conclusions. Others, however, base their critiques more squarely on the normative implications of an OEP world. As Cohen (2007, p.209) reminds us, Susan Strange argued that the study of IPE ought to be about “justice, as well as efficiency: about order and national identity and cohesion, even self-respect, as well as about cost and price.” Strange was writing in an era before OEP came into its own, but was clearly concerned about the trend toward neoclassical economic assumptions and analysis in the early IPE cannon. This concern, that the quest for efficiency might lead to increased economic welfare for some, but require (or at least be coincident with) depriving others of human dignity or material well-being pervades the broader critical literature in IR. Sharman and Weaver (2013) and Maliniak and Tierney (2009) detail that the contrast between OEP approaches and more critical approaches is also geographical, with the latter approaches more common in the United Kingdom and continental Europe.

Racist underpinnings of IR theory: Finally, we asked whether scholars agree that “international relations theories are often based on racist assumptions.” Critical theorists have long argued that racism has been a central albeit largely ignored element underlying especially Liberal and Realist international relations theories (e.g., Henderson 2013; Vitalis 2015; Weber 2021; Acharya and Buzan 2019; Zvobgo and Loken 2020). These scholars start with Du Bois’s (1901) observation that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa in America and the islands of the sea.” Modern international relations theories, according to this view, were born against this backdrop and incorporated, often implicitly, assumptions of white supremacy. For example, Errol Henderson argues that social

Table 1: Expected level of agreement in each paradigm with each conjecture.
Level of agreement

Conjecture	Low	Middling	High
Ideas primary	Realism Marxism	Liberalism	Constructivism English School Feminism
Institutions modify anarchy	Realism Marxism	English School	Constructivism Liberalism Feminism
Domestic politics primary	Realism	Constructivism English School Marxism	Liberalism Feminism
States are primary actors	Constructivism Feminism Marxism	Liberalism English School	Realism
Globalization good	Feminism Marxism	Realism Constructivism	Liberalism
IR theory is racist	Realism Liberalism English School	Constructivism	Feminism Marxism

contract theories, the foundation of much international relations theorizing, implied one set of assumptions for whites and another for nonwhites. Moreover, modern Liberals and Constructivists ignore that much of the theorizing underlying the possibility of amicable relations between states, including democratic peace theory, was rooted in racial dualism (Henderson 2013). In addition, the roots of Realism are “are grounded in a rationalization of the construction of a hierarchical racial order to be imposed upon the anarchy allegedly arising from the tropics” (Henderson 2013, p.85).

The idea that mainstream IR paradigms have racist and white supremacist roots is not widely accepted by Western IR scholars. Given the substantive and normative implications of this conjecture, however, it can generate salient divisions among scholars. For example, we have already seen a highly charged debate about the alleged racist origins of securitization theory (Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2020; Wæver and Buzan 2020; Hansen 2020). We are likely to see similar debates in coming years.

Table 1 summarizes expectations of how we, on average, expect different paradigmatic families to view these six conjectures. As we noted earlier, paradigms are of course heterogeneous, but we should still expect some systematic adoption of these beliefs across the paradigms.

3 Survey methodology

The survey was fielded by the TRIP Project at William and Mary's Global Research Institute and was open between July 15, 2020 and August 19, 2020. To be included in the sample, an individual must have an appointment at a college or university in a political science or international affairs department and teach or conduct research on issues that cross international borders. We invited 10,226 individuals in the following countries to participate: Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States. The sample was constructed in 2017 for TRIP's international faculty survey, though the United States sample was updated in early 2020.⁴ We emailed invitations to the complete sample along with several reminders. In all, 1,861 individuals responded to at least one question, yielding a response rate of about 18 percent.⁵

The TRIP project has gathered the following publicly-observable information on all members of the U.S. portion of the sample: academic rank, university type, and perceived gender. On those dimensions, the respondents to this survey are quite representative. There is no statistically meaningful difference in the distribution of gender or university type. About 66 percent of our U.S. respondents are male compared to about 68 percent in the population and about 62.2 percent of our U.S. respondents were affiliated with a National Research University (R1) compared to about 58 percent in the population. In terms of academic rank, our respondents were somewhat more senior than the population. We over represent Full Professors by about 9 percentage points and under represent non-tenure track faculty by about the same amount. Those at the assistant and associate professor level in are sample are represented well relative to their population proportions.

We do not have the population data needed to make comparisons between respondents and non-respondents outside of the United States, but given that the sampling and recruitment strategies were identical we do not anticipate that selection into the survey would be systematically different in other countries. As we document in Table 2, our survey data show that younger scholars (in

⁴See Maliniak, Peterson, et al. (2018) for complete details on sample construction.

⁵For comparison, the Pew Research Center reports their response rates are typically between 5 and 15 percent (Pew Research Center 2020).

University type	Paradigmatic commitments	
	Any paradigm	Non-paradigmatic
National Research University	61.8% (423)	38.2% (262)
Regional Research University	71.1% (167)	28.9% (68)
National Liberal Arts College	71.9% (92)	28.1% (36)
Regional Liberal Arts College	82.9% (29)	17.1% (6)

Rank	Paradigmatic commitments	
	Any paradigm	Non-paradigmatic
Assistant Professor	58.4% (156)	41.6% (111)
Associate Professor	69.1% (424)	30.9% (190)
Full professor	67.3% (482)	32.7% (234)
Emeritus/retired	80.0% (36)	20.0% (9)
Other	71.6% (131)	29.2% (52)

Age range	Paradigmatic commitments	
	Any paradigm	Non-paradigmatic
<40	56.3% (147)	43.7% (114)
40-54	66.3% (395)	33.7% (201)
55-64	77.1% (239)	22.9% (71)
65	74.7% (148)	25.3% (50)

Location	Paradigmatic commitments	
	Any paradigm	Non-paradigmatic
US	65.3% (698)	34.7% (371)
non-US	70.2% (556)	29.8% (236)

Table 2: Distribution of non-paradigmatic individuals. Note that university type is among sub-set of U.S. respondents.

terms of age and rank) and those based in the United States are more likely to select into the non-paradigmatic category. The age effect likely has much to do with the deemphasis in paradigms in graduate training over the last 15 years. And, while there are differences between the US and the rest of the world, they are not substantively large (around 6 percentage points). We note too that those working at national research universities were the most likely to select into the non-paradigmatic camp.

4 Variation in Theoretical Beliefs

This section asks two questions. First, do the beliefs of paradigmatic IR scholars fit the expectations from Table 1? This is more of a validation exercise than a test of one of the core questions motivating this paper. Second, are non-paradigmatic scholars distinct in these theoretical beliefs?

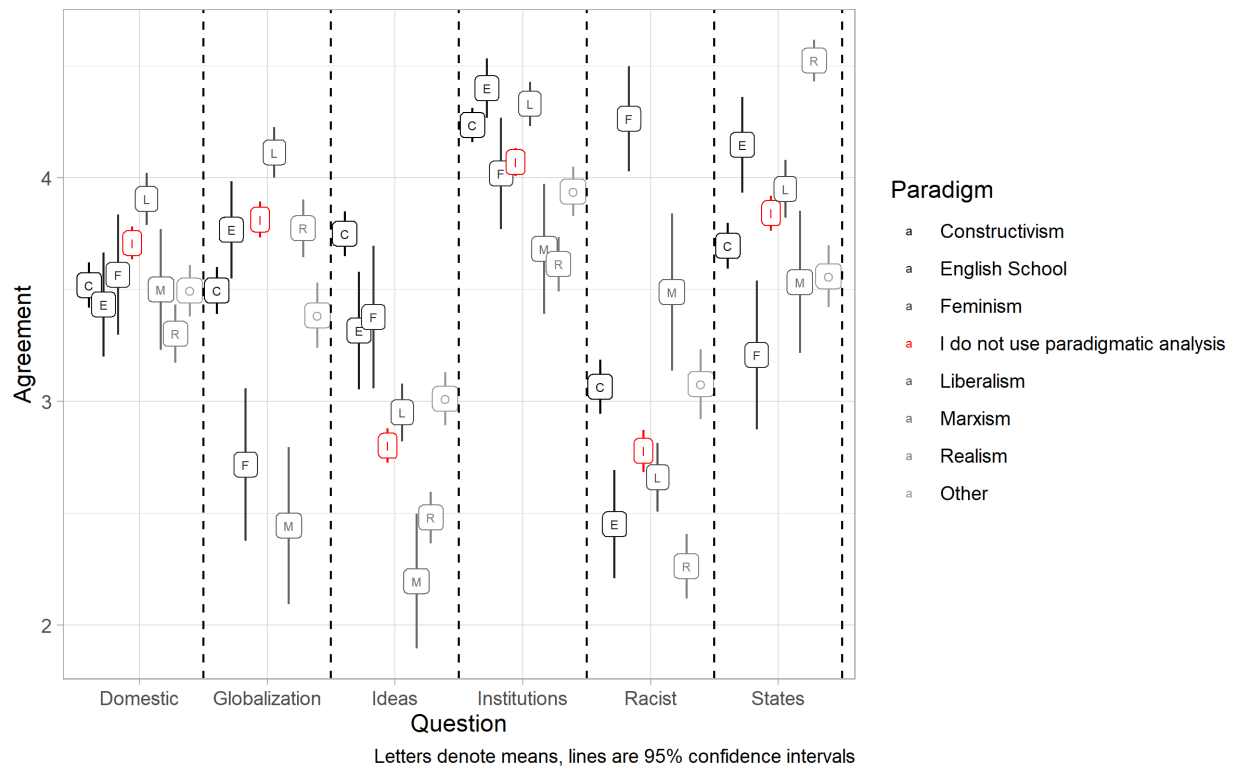


Figure 1: Agreement with conjectures by self-identified paradigm

Figure 1 shows the mean agreement (and 95 percent confidence intervals) with the six conjectures by self-identified paradigm. Those denoted by “I” are our non-paradigmatic “Independents” (non-paradigmatic). By and large, the paradigmatic differences are as expected. For example, those self-identifying as Constructivists agreed most with the conjecture that “Ideational forces are more important than material forces if we want to understand change in the international system,” followed by adherents to the English school and Feminist scholars. As expected, Marxist and Realist scholars are on the other side of the spectrum. There is less disagreement over whether “Relations among states are often best explained by domestic politics.” However, as expected, Liberals are most in agreement with this assumption, and Realists least.³

Again, as we anticipated, English school scholars, Liberals, and Constructivists all agree most

³Perhaps a question that more explicitly contrasted domestic and systemic explanations would have yielded sharper distinctions.

that “international institutions modify anarchy in important ways,” while Realists and Marxists disagree. Realists are by far the most likely to agree strongly that “states remain the primary actors in world politics.” Liberals are most likely to agree that “Globalization, on average, has made people better off even if there are some losers,” whereas Marxists and Feminists are most likely to disagree. This is consistent with the idea that beliefs on this point help distinguish scholars whose theories build on neoclassical economic doctrine from their more critically-oriented approaches. Finally, Realists are the least likely to agree that “international relations theories are often based on racist assumptions” followed by English school scholars and Liberals. Feminists are by far the most likely to strongly agree with this statement, followed by Marxists.

The greatest variation among scholars was on the racism, globalization, ideas, and states questions. There is more agreement on the role of domestic politics and international institutions, which were important dividing lines in the 1980s and early 1990s. Still, even on those questions we find the expected difference between the paradigms.

The differences above are largely identical when we control for a battery of respondent demographics (gender, age, rank, university type, and race/ethnicity). That said, there are some interesting demographic correlates of theoretical beliefs. First, more senior scholars are generally more likely to view globalization as being good on balance and to view the state as the primary actor, but less likely to view IR theories as making racist assumptions. Second, men were more likely than women to view states as the primary actors in world affairs and to view globalization as being good, but less likely than women to view ideas as being important or to view IR theory as racist. Notably, we find no evidence that self-reported race predicts views on IR theory being racist.⁴ Whether we control for rank or not, age is not an important determinant of most of the views we asked about. When the coefficient on age is statistically significant, it is very small in magnitude.⁵

Non-paradigmatic scholars do not stand out as a group on any of the six assumptions about

⁴ For about half the individuals in the sample, we have self-reported race/ethnicity. We re-coded these self-reports into three categories: White, Mixed-race, and Non-White and then estimated models predicting views on the IR theory is racist conjecture as a function of respondent race.

⁵ A forty year age difference between respondents would be needed to match the effect of gender on views that globalization is good, for example.

which we asked. Analysis of variance tests show that they do not, on average, hold significantly different beliefs from the average paradigmatic scholar when it comes to the role of institutions, IR theory being racist, and whether the state are the primary actors in world affairs. They are, however, slightly more likely to be materialist, supportive of globalization, and focused on domestic politics compared to the average paradigmatic scholar. Non-paradigmatic scholars appear somewhat close to liberals on the role of ideas, racism, and the primacy of states but not on the other beliefs. For the most part, non-paradigmatics are in the middle of the pack.

This section provides initial evidence that the theoretical beliefs about which we asked pick up on important intellectual dividing lines in the discipline. It also establishes that non-paradigmatic scholars do not stand out as a group with a distinctive set of theoretical beliefs. This group is not simply an emerging, but yet-to-be-named paradigm or tradition. We do not take this result as especially surprising, but it does make way for the possibility that non-paradigmatic scholars are more eclectic in their theorizing. Still, we are quite limited in what we can say in a positive sense here. Indeed, the results are consistent with two very different states of the world. First, as suggested, these findings are consistent with a world of post-paradigmatic eclecticism in which non-paradigmatic scholars are simply not that strongly wedded to any of the theoretical assumptions about which we asked. This is the world hoped for by Lake (2011) and Sil and Katzenstein (2010) – abandoning paradigms allows scholars the flexibility to adapt their approaches to different substantive contexts. At the same time, the findings are consistent with the idea that non-paradigmatics are an amalgam of paradigmatic leaners who hold a diverse set of beliefs about international affairs, but who do so in ways that mimic their paradigmatic colleagues. In this state of the world, non-paradigmatic scholars, as a group, end up in the middle of the paradigmatic pack on most of the theoretical beliefs we asked about, not because they are ambivalent, but because there is significant heterogeneity across the group members that is obscured when characterizing the group's average views. We start to disentangle these two possibilities in the next two sections.

4.1 Structure Underlying Theoretical Beliefs

This section examines the latent structure underlying IR scholars' answers to the conjecture questions. We then examine whether this structure fits non-paradigmatic scholars as well as

paradigmatic scholars. We start with a basic principal component analysis. Figure 2 shows the eigenvalues. A widely used short-cut is to select factors with eigenvalues of 1 or higher. The results imply that a two-factor solution explains almost 50 percent of the underlying variation in the answers to the six items.

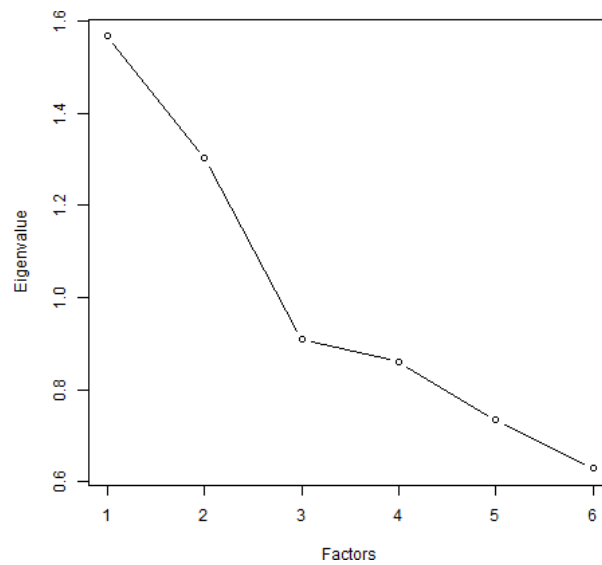
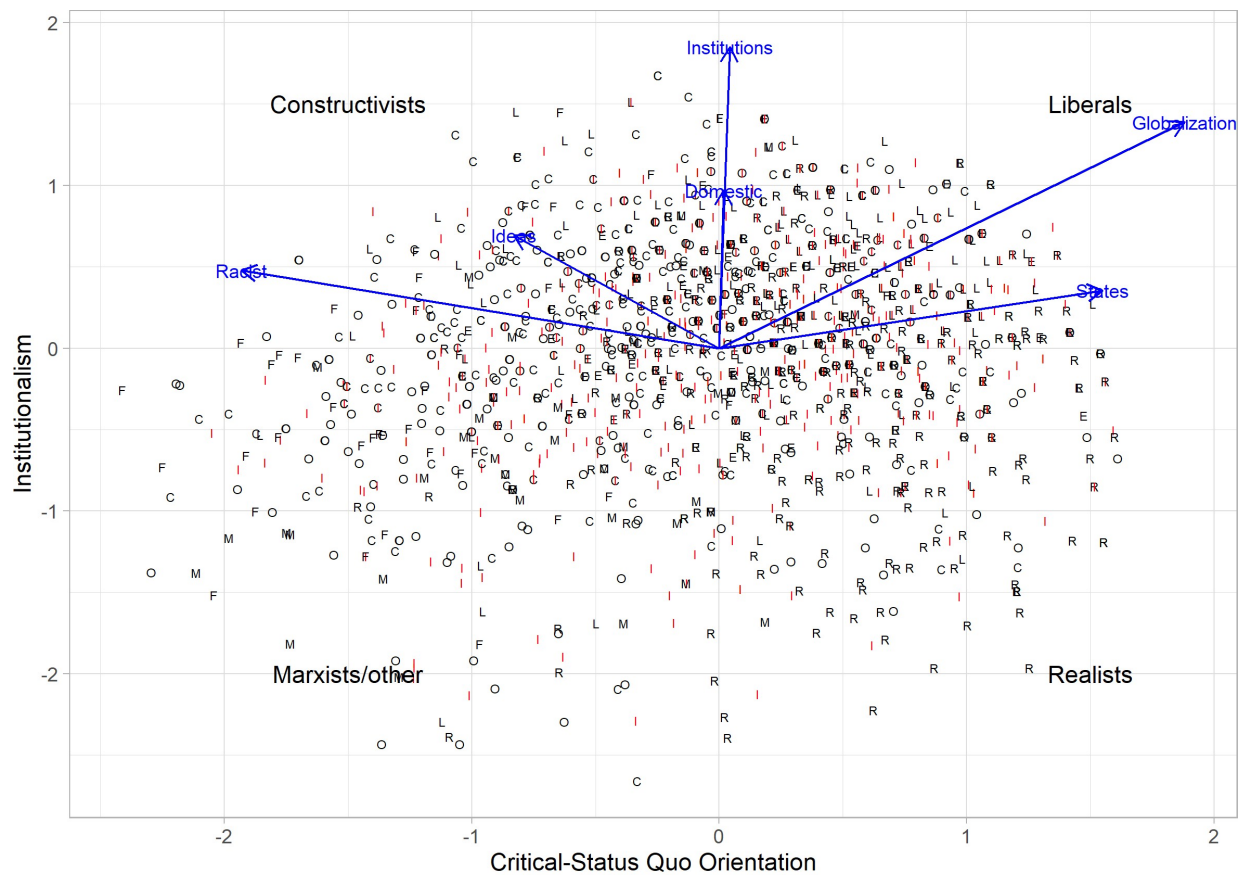


Figure 2: Scree plot of principal component analysis on theoretical assumptions; we use first two factors.

Figure 3 helps us interpret the underlying latent structure. The figure shows the factor scores for individual scholars (after VARIMAX rotation), indicated by the first letter of the self-identified paradigm. As before, non-paradigmatic scholars are marked with an I. The figure also plots the eigenvectors for the six items. For example, the vertical arrow for Institutions indicates that scholars who agree that institutions matter typically have positive scores on the second factor but that answers on this question do not differentiate scholars along the first factor. By contrast, the angled vector for globalization indicates that scholars who agree that globalization is on average good have positive scores on both the first and the second factor. By contrast, scholars who think that ideas are relatively important and who think IR theory is built on racism typically have negative scores on the first factor but positive scores on the second factor.

These eigenvectors combined with the paradigmatic labels help us interpret the underlying structure. The first factor reflects a critical theory vs status quo orientation. Scholars with positive

factor scores on the first dimension tend to believe that states remain the primary actors in the international system, that IR does not have racist underpinnings, that material forces are more important than ideational forces, and that globalization has benefited most people. The primary factors pushing scholars to the opposite direction are beliefs that states are no longer the primary actors and that IR does have racist underpinnings.



Factor scores of scholars denoted by 1st letter of paradigm. Scholars who answered 'I do not use paradigmatic analysis' in red.

Figure 3: Factor scores and factor loadings on theoretical assumptions

The second factor can be seen as reflecting the Realism versus Liberalism debates from the 1980s and 1990s. Those who believe that institutions and domestic politics are relatively unimportant have lower scores on the second dimension. In addition, scholars who are less optimistic about globalization and more materialist in their theoretical orientation also on average score lower on this dimension.

Another way to read this figure is to look at the four quadrants. Most Constructivists are in the upper left quadrant, characterized by a commitment to the role of ideas. But Constructivists also vary in the extent to which they accept the premises of more critical approaches. Self-identified Liberals are in the upper right quadrant. They share a commitment to open economy politics, although they vary in their insistence on material versus ideational factors. Realists are in the bottom right quadrant, while the bottom left quadrant is occupied by a variety of scholars, including many Marxists. These scholars are statist and materialist, but challenge the value of globalization.

The depiction of scholars in this two-dimensional space may be more informative than paradigmatic self-identification. Paradigms are heterogeneous, and our belief space maps tap into at least some of that variation. Moreover, this allows us to visualize non-paradigmatics (or Independents) in the same space as paradigmatic scholars. The “Independents” are all over the map. This could either mean that they are truly eclectic, or that they are very similar in their adoption of theoretical assumptions to others that are close to them in this latent space.

4.2 Measurement Invariance

Measurement invariance tests examine the (psychometric) equivalence of a construct across groups (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, and Hox 2012). These tests tell us whether a construct has the same meaning to different groups. For example, political scientists have used measurement invariance tests to examine whether different racial and ethnic groups have a similar structure of beliefs over core political values, such as authoritarianism (Saavedra Cisneros et al. 2022). These tests do not tell us whether different groups have different mean levels of authoritarianism but whether their answers on the individual items are similarly related to the overall concept of authoritarianism. For instance, it could be that the different items that scholars use to operationalize authoritarianism form a coherent authoritarianism scale for white men but not for other groups. Or that the different

items load differently into the latent authoritarianism construct for different groups.

In our case, measurement invariance tests examine whether the six items relate in similar ways to the two dimensional latent structure from Figure 3 for paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. Measurement invariance tests typically come in three steps. The first, and easiest, test is a configural invariance test, which examines whether the measurement model fits the different groups equally well. If paradigmatic scholars have more structured beliefs than non-paradigmatic scholars, then this test should fail.

We start by estimating a confirmatory factor analysis in the R package Lavaan based on the factor scores from Figure 3.⁶ A configural invariance test estimates the same measurement model for non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic scholars separately and then compares the fits of these models. The comparative fit index is 0.94, well above the 0.90 threshold often recommended in research (Van de Schoot, Lugtig, and Hox 2012). Moreover, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.05, also below the typically used threshold of 0.08. This indicates that the factor model fits non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic scholars equally well.

Second, metric invariance tests examine whether each item contributes to the latent construct to a similar degree across groups. The configural invariance tests tells us that the factor models have similar fit for the two groups of scholars, but not whether the underlying factor loadings are the same. It may be that the theoretical beliefs of non-paradigmatic scholars are not less structured but differently structured. That is: we may need a different model for non-paradigmatics than for paradigmatic scholars.

⁶ We model the first dimension, status quo orientation, as a function of views on the primacy of states, effects of globalization, whether IR theories are based on racist assumptions, and the primacy of ideas. We modeled the second dimension, institutionalism, as a function of views on whether institutions modify anarchy, the role of domestic politics, the primacy of ideas, and the effects of globalization.

To test this, we first estimate a model that assumes that both intercepts and factor loadings are the same for paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. The metric invariance test examines the extent to which the fit improves upon loosening the restriction that the factor loadings are equal. A Chi-Square test is unable to reject the null hypothesis that the factor loadings for non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic scholars are equal (at the 5 percent level). The comparative fit index is 0.93. Moreover, information theoretic criteria (AIC and BIC) also do not show a model fit improvement. So, we cannot reject the hypothesis that the underlying structure of beliefs are the same for non-paradigmatic and paradigmatic scholars.

Finally, a scalar invariance test loosens the restriction that the item intercepts are equivalent. Here, the findings are more mixed. The Chi-Square test does reject the null-hypothesis of equivalence at the 5 percent level. Moreover, the comparative fit index is 0.84. However, the AIC and BIC are higher for the less restrictive model. AIC and BIC make a trade-off between model fit and model complexity with lower levels indicating a better trade off. Moreover, the RMSEA also suggests that the scalar invariance condition is met.

When we delve deeper, it appears that non-paradigmatic scholars are slightly less likely to be on the extremes of item scales and also the factor scores. This affects the intercepts but not the factor loadings. For example, non-paradigmatic scholars are 0.05 and 0.07 closer to the center of the space on the first and second factor, respectively. This suggests that the analogy with “partisan leaners” from the American politics literature may be apt, as well as the analogy to foxes in Tetlock’s work. Overall, the measurement invariance tests imply that non-paradigmatic scholars are somewhat more centrist in their theoretical beliefs but they are similarly coherent in their beliefs as paradigmatic scholars and there is a similar latent structure underlying their views.

5 Predictions about the World

We asked scholars to make a range of predictions about the future of international affairs in various issue areas. Most of these predictions have a five-year window and reflect on-going debates in the field about the future of the liberal international order and the relative influence of the United States. Our purpose is not to examine which theorists make better predictions (although we might five years from now). Instead, we ask two questions.

First, to what extent do scholars' theoretical beliefs and paradigmatic self-identification correlate with views about how the world will evolve? Our hypothesis is that after controlling for the position of scholars in the two-dimensional theoretical belief space, their self-assigned paradigm label is not informative about their empirical predictions. That is, a categorization of scholars in this continuous belief space is a better depiction of divisions among IR scholars about how IR will evolve than are paradigm labels.

Second, we examine whether the correlations between theoretical beliefs and empirical predictions are less pronounced for non-paradigmatic scholars? That is: is there an interaction effect between non-paradigmatic self-identification and the degree to which Status Quo Orientation and Institutionalism correlate with views about the world? If non-paradigmatic scholars are truly eclectic, we would expect that their theoretical beliefs are a less robust predictor of their views of IR. After all, we expect eclectic scholars to adjust their empirical assessments based on the substance of each issue rather than bring their pre-existing beliefs to each new question.

Third, we asked whether the predictions of non-paradigmatic scholars are influenced more by current events, namely the COVID pandemic and Donald Trump's re-election chances. For COVID, we asked "As you know, the COVID pandemic has been extremely disruptive. When do you expect all COVID-related travel, economic, and social restrictions in your country of residence to be lifted?" Scholars who answered "before January 2021" received a score of 1, those who answered "after June 2022" a 0 with other scholars in between. We asked scholars "How likely is it that Donald Trump will be re-elected as President of the United States?" on a scale from 0-100 (recoded to the 0-1 interval).⁷ We then interacted these subjective assessments with non-paradigmatic self-identification.

All results are based on linear regression analyses and they are correlational. We estimate models with and without paradigmatic self-identification. The baseline category are those who identify as paradigmatic but not Realist, Liberal, or Constructivist. We also estimated models including the demographic characteristics that are correlated with non-paradigmatic affiliation and for which we have near complete data: gender, age, and whether the scholar is based in the United States. We

⁷ We also randomly assigned whether scholars answered COVID and/or Trump questions first or last in the survey. We estimated models including these indicators but they had no effect, suggesting that COVID and Trump were already on the minds of scholars.

present the findings on COVID and Trump in a separate section at the end. Results where COVID and Trump expectations were included in the other regressions are qualitatively identical.

5.1 Institutional Exit and Default

Our first battery of questions ask about institutional exit and crisis among advanced economies. We asked respondents how likely it is on a scale from 0-100 that the U.S. will leave the WTO, that a country other than the UK will leave the EU, and that an OECD country will default on its debts over the next five years.

Overall, the respondents assigned a 25 percent probability to a US WTO exit, a 27 percent probability to an EU exit, and a 41 percent chance to an OECD country defaulting in the next five years.

Figure 4 shows the results of the regression analysis. Both factor scores are significant correlates of predictions about institutional exit: those who hold status quo and institutionalist beliefs think all three events are much less likely than scholars on the opposite poles. The factor scores all have mean 0 and standard deviation 1. So a scholar one standard deviation more towards the status quo end thinks it is about four percentage points less likely that another country will leave the EU or that an OECD country will default in the next five years.

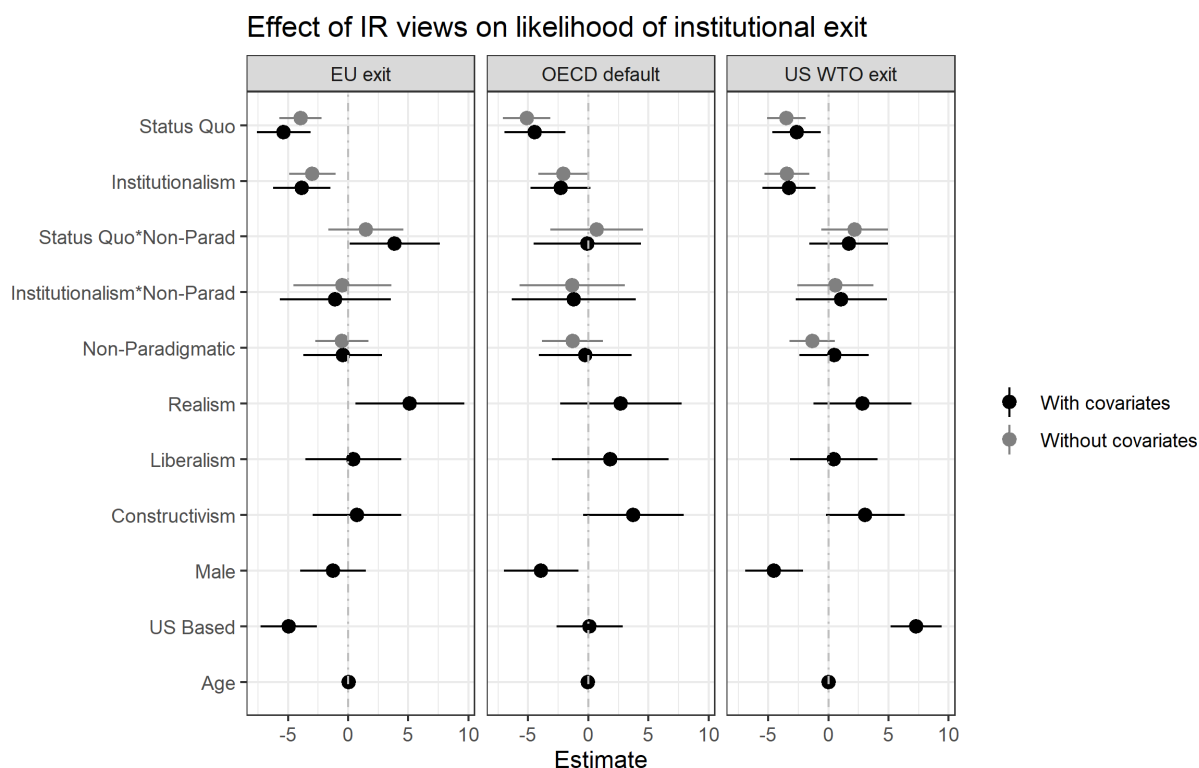


Figure 4: Effect of IR views on beliefs about institutional exit

Paradigmatic self-identification is not strongly correlated with predictions, although Realists appear about five percentage points more likely than others to believe in another exit from the EU. This reflects longstanding Realist skepticism about the durability of the EU. However, overall there is no strong evidence that paradigmatic self-identification correlates with predictions about institutional exit once we control for the two dimensions of theoretical beliefs. More importantly, there is no strong evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars rely on their theoretical beliefs less than paradigmatic scholars. Five of the six interaction effects are not significant. The exception is that among non-paradigmatic scholars status quo beliefs are slightly less strongly correlated with predictions about EU exit. However, this coefficient is only significant in one of the models. Overall, there is little evidence that theoretical beliefs are less strongly correlated with predictions about institutional exit among non-paradigmatic scholars.

U.S. based scholars think that an EU exit is significantly less likely and a U.S. exit from the WTO more likely than non-U.S. based scholars. This finding also holds when we control for a respondent's subjective probability that Donald Trump would be re-elected. We also asked scholars

about institutional decline of the World Bank, IMF, and other institutions. The findings were qualitatively similar.

5.2 Security Issues

We next asked what respondents believe the probability of a war is between the U.S. and China, the U.S. and another country, and China and another country over the next five years. On average, IR scholars think there is a 16 percent chance of a war between the U.S. and China, 35 percent of another U.S. war, and 30 percent of a different war involving China.

Figure 5 shows the results from the regression analyses. Institutionalism is not significantly correlated with these predictions in 5 of the 6 models. However, scholars more on the critical side of the spectrum believe that wars are more likely than more status quo oriented scholars. For example, a scholar who is one standard deviation more on the critical side of the status quo dimension on average attaches almost two percentage point greater likelihood of a war between the United States and China, which is substantial given the relatively modest baseline probability. The effects are much larger for war between the U.S. and another country.

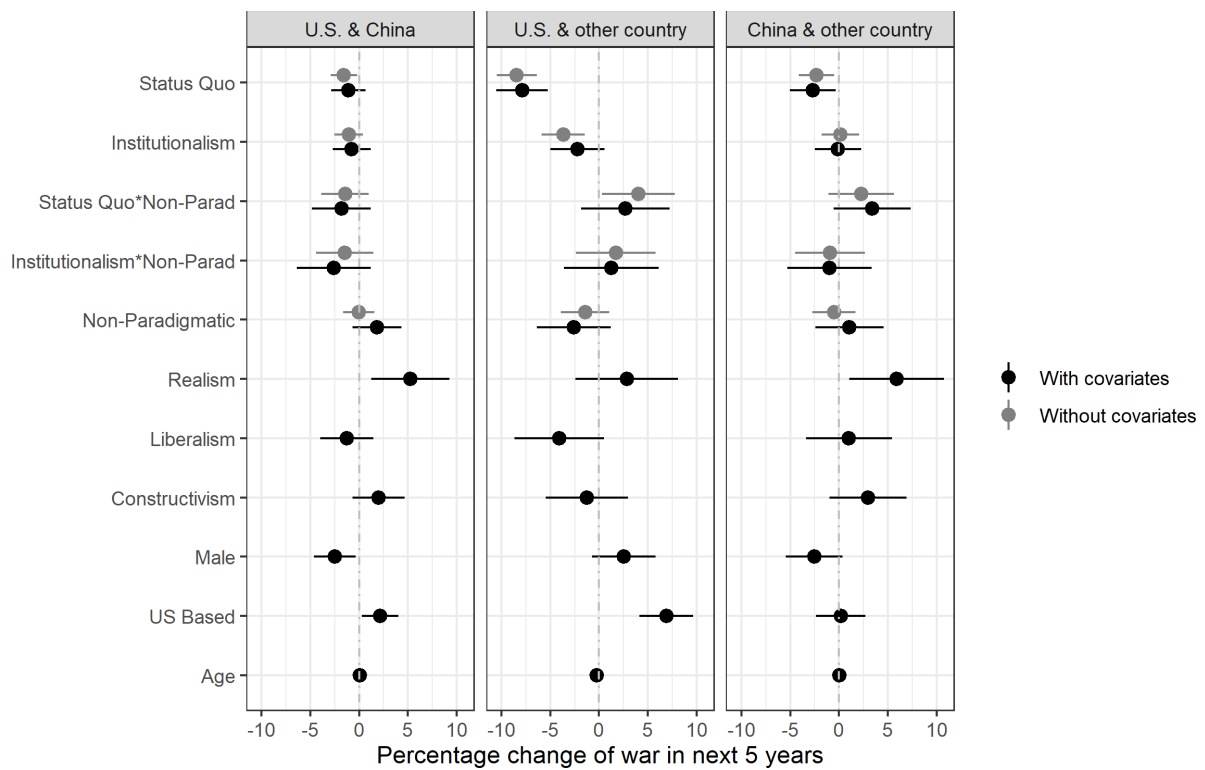


Figure 5: Effect of IR views on probability of war

Realists believe that war with China is slightly more likely than non-paradigmatic scholars and Liberals, but there are no other significant effects of paradigmatic self-identification. None of the interaction effects are significant, suggesting that paradigmatic scholars do not use their theoretical beliefs more to make predictions than non-paradigmatic scholars.

Next, we asked respondents whether they think the number of civil wars, terrorist attacks, and failed states will increase over the next five years. The question format identified a precise number of events in 2019 and then gave options with regard to the size of the increase. For example, “Based on data collected in 2019, the Fragile State Index lists 31 countries in their highest risk categories for collapse or conflict (“alert”, “high alert”, or “very high alert”). Do you expect that by 2025 this number will increase or decrease?” Increases were coded as 1, decreases -1 and “about the same” as 0. All details are in the appendix.

Figure 6 presents the regression results. More critical scholars (low on the Status Quo factor) are more pessimistic about civil wars, fragile states, and terrorism. Institutionalists are more optimistic about civil wars (perhaps because of peacekeeping?), but Institutionalism is not correlated with the other predictions.

For the most part, the interactions between non-paradigmatic status and theoretical beliefs are not significant. However, there is some evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars with strong institutionalist beliefs are more optimistic about civil war than paradigmatic scholars. This is interesting because the effect goes in the opposite direction of what we would expect if non-paradigmatic scholars were less guided by their theoretical beliefs.

As before, adding paradigmatic self-identifications contributes little to our understanding of predictions after controlling for theoretical beliefs. The most interesting finding is that Realists appear more pessimistic about civil wars than Liberals. Liberals are also less concerned about terrorism than the “Other” paradigmatic self-identifiers (but not than Realists).

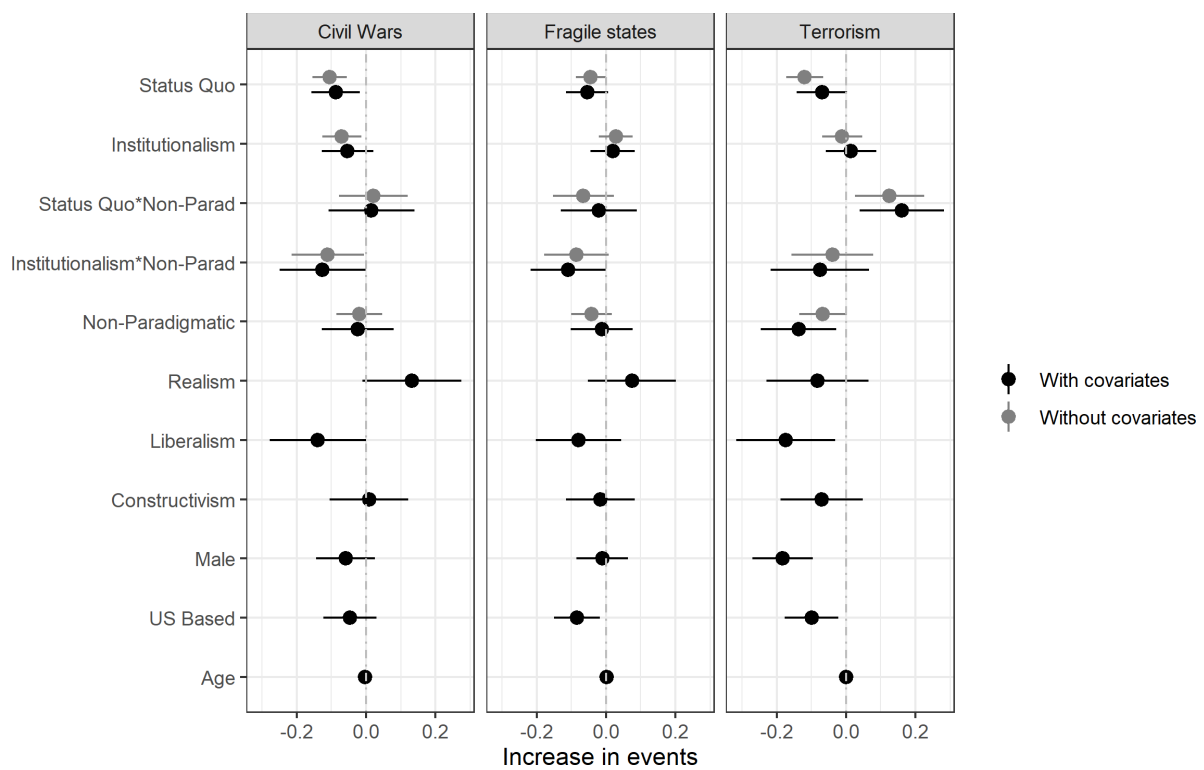


Figure 6: Effect of IR views on occurrence of civil war, terrorism, and failed states

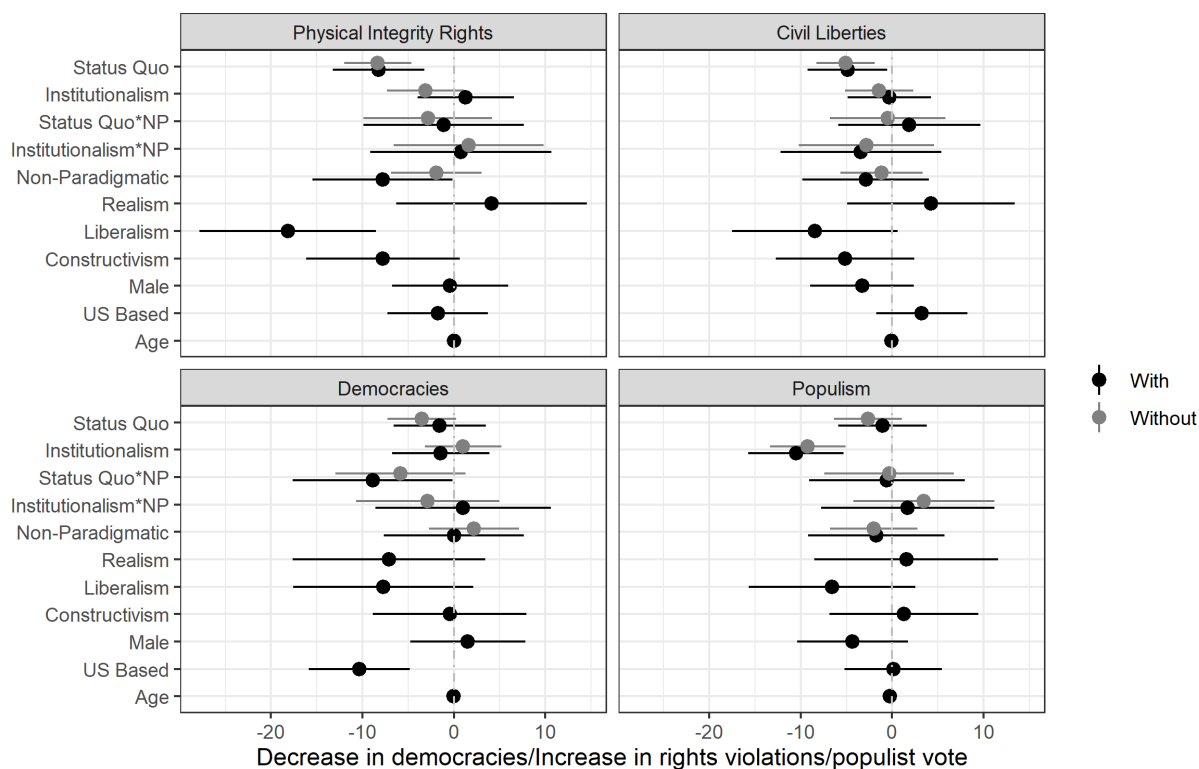


Figure 7: Effect of IR views on increased human rights violations, populist vote and democratic breakdown

5.3 Democracy and Human Rights

We used a similar set-up to ask questions about the future of democracy and human rights. For instance, we asked “According to V-Dem, there were 87 democracies in the world at the end of 2019. Do you expect this number will increase or decrease by 2025?” About populism, we asked: “According to research by political scientists compiled by the Guardian, about 25 percent of European citizens (31 countries) voted for a populist party in 2018. Do you think that by 2025 the percentage of Europeans voting for populists will increase or decrease?” We then asked whether civil and political rights violations as well as physical integrity rights violations would increase a lot. Higher scores indicate decreases in democracy and increases in rights violations.

Figure 7 presents the regression analyses. More critically oriented scholars are much more pessimistic about the future of human rights, but less so about democracy and populism. By contrast, institutionalists are most optimistic on populism but are not differentiated on human rights. None of the interaction effects are significant.

Even after controlling for theoretical beliefs, Liberals are much more optimistic about physical integrity rights violations than Realists, perhaps reflecting differing assessments about a security versus liberty trade-off. There is a similar, but less pronounced, difference on civil liberties but no clear paradigmatic effects on the other outcome variables.

5.4 US and China

Finally, we asked scholars about the future of the dollar as a reserve currency and public opinion towards the U.S. and China. Again, we used specific numbers to anchor expectations. For example, we asked: “Some people believe that the U.S. dollar will become more important as a reserve currency, whereas others believe that the dollar will become less important. In 2019, the dollar made up 60 percent of global currency reserves. Do you expect that by 2025 this percentage will increase or decrease?” On public opinion, we asked: “Data from the 2019 Pew Global Attitudes Survey show that about 54 percent of people around the world have a favorable view of the United States, whereas 40 percent of people around the world have a favorable view of China. Do you think that by 2025 global favorability toward China will increase or decrease relative to global favorability toward the United States?” In addition, we asked whether by 2025 “average reliance on global supply chains will increase or decrease?” The variables are coded such that higher values indicate beliefs that reliance on global supply chains will decrease, the status of the dollar as a reserve currency will decrease, and US favorability vs China will decrease.

Figure 8 shows the regression results. More status quo oriented scholars are more optimistic about the dollar as a reserve currency and much more optimistic about US favorability in public opinion. Scholars who score high on institutionalism are more optimistic about global supply chains, perhaps reflecting their beliefs about globalization. Interestingly, institutionalism correlates with optimistic beliefs about the dollar as a reserve currency among non-paradigmatic scholars but not

among paradigmatic scholars. As before, paradigms have little effect, although Realists are slightly less likely to believe that the position of the dollar as the world's reserve currency will decrease.

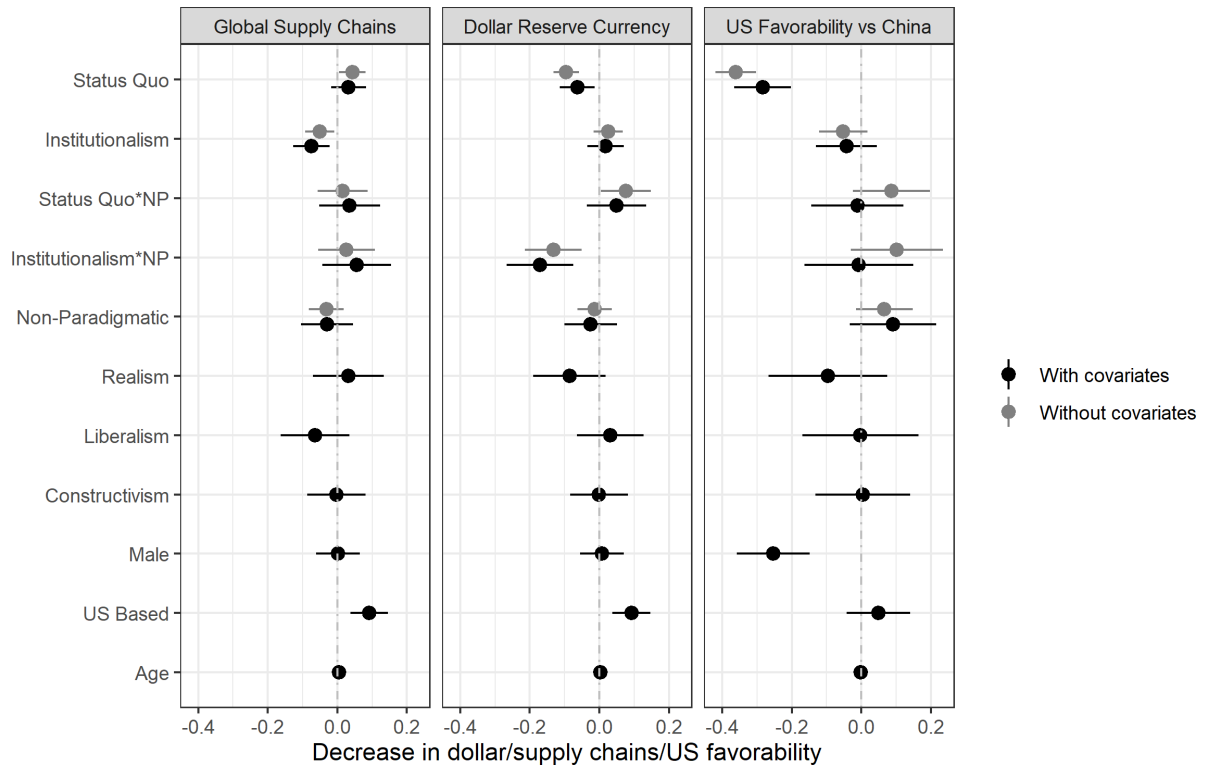


Figure 8: Effect of IR views on supply chain, the dollar as the reserve currency and US favorability

5.5 Beliefs about COVID and Donald Trump

Finally, we asked whether non-paradigmatic scholars rely more on their assessments about the COVID pandemic and Trump's election prospects in making predictions about the world. Figure 9 plots the interaction effects between COVID optimism and Trump's perceived election chances and refusal to label oneself as belonging to a paradigm. Again, we find almost all null effects. Overall, we found that scholars who assigned Trump better prospects of re-election were more pessimistic about aspects of the liberal order that directly involved the United States, such as U.S. exit from the WTO. However, these effects were not significantly different between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. COVID optimism was not significantly correlated with any prediction other than physical integrity rights. It appears that pessimism about future physical integrity rights violations among COVID pessimists appears to be concentrated among non-paradigmatic scholars. We resist the temptation to come up with an ad hoc explanation for this anomaly. Overall, there is no evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars differ systematically in how they use their assessments about Trump or the pandemic in making predictions about the world. If understanding of context rather than a set of assumptions is important to making (accurate) assessments of future outcomes, then we see little evidence for this pragmatic approach among non-paradigmatic scholars.

6 Conclusions

The decline in paradigmatic self-identification is one of the most visible trends in IR scholarship. It has affected how professors teach and write about world affairs and so has important implications for the intellectual identities that these individuals cultivate and present to their colleagues and the broader world. But does abandoning paradigmatic labels actually affect which theoretical priors scholars adopt or how they use them to draw inferences about world affairs? Our findings suggest that this may not necessarily be the case. Non-paradigmatic scholars are diverse in their theoretical beliefs, but the structure underlying the theoretical beliefs of non-paradigmatic scholars is not

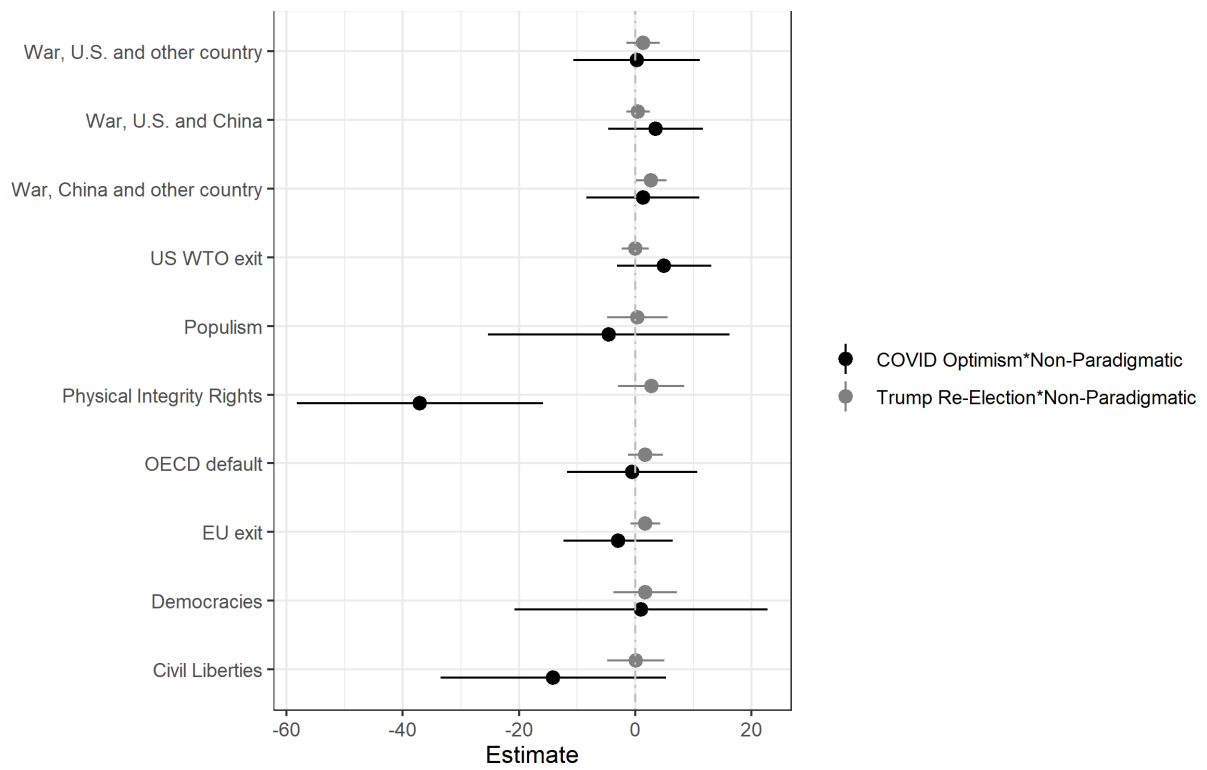


Figure 9: Interaction between non-paradigmatic and theory beliefs

noticeably different from their paradigmatic colleagues. Moreover, we find no evidence that non-paradigmatic scholars are less rigid in how they use their theoretical beliefs to make predictions about consequential events across varied empirical contexts.

This exercise sheds new light on the belief structures of IR scholars and their correlation with paradigmatic commitments on the one hand and predictions about outcomes in world affairs on the other. Above, we tested the implicit causal model of prior work in which the particular paradigmatic commitments that scholars adopt cause them to hold different beliefs about outcomes in world affairs and found it wanting. Our results suggest that such an approach misses, to turn a phrase, the paradigmatic trees (i.e., underlying theoretical beliefs) for the paradigmatic forest (i.e., the paradigmatic labels). The theoretical beliefs about IR are stronger correlates of scholars' views on world affairs than self-reported paradigmatic commitments. Reliance on these beliefs across contexts is not moderated by whether one is committed to any particular paradigm or not. In focusing instead on the underlying theoretical beliefs, we uncover fairly strong evidence against the "flexibility" hypothesis, at least when it comes to the set of assumptions about which we queried our respondents. Non-paradigmatic scholars appear no more "eclectic" in their theoretical tool box than those willing to identify with a particular paradigm.

Of course, the beliefs we asked about are, in some sense, backward looking. We focused on beliefs that were key axes of contention in the literature over the last 30-40 years. Non-paradigmatic scholars appear to have been shaped and divided by these debates just as much as their paradigmatic colleagues, but it is possible that they select out of the paradigms because they hold distinct views on other (newer?) theoretical questions or dimensions. We tested this to an extent, especially with our questions on racism and globalization.

Still yet, the conjectures we identified were overwhelmingly substantive wagers about world politics and not, say, epistemological. Future work might focus on identifying new axes of substantive or epistemological debate within the literature and study whether these dimensions help reliably separate paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars. In addition, a focus on the intellectual pedigree of respondents (where they earned their undergraduate or graduate degree or the format of their initial introductory courses) might be useful.⁸

⁸ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion. Such an approach would take seriously potential selection

Our effort might also be seen as limited by the nature of our research design. Responding to a survey is not the same as producing scholarly research. It is possible that the results we report here do not reflect how scholars behave when actually writing books and articles. This is a problem of external validity: perhaps non-paradigmatic scholars use their beliefs about world affairs to predict future international developments in a survey even as they are more flexible and pragmatic in the assumptions they rely on in their research explaining past events. While this is possible, we are heartened by the correspondence between our results and those of Kristensen (2018) who uses bibliometric citation analysis to show that the IR literature is still dominated by citation communities which are defined by their association with one of the “big three” paradigms.

One final limitation relates to the fact we asked scholars to make predictions about the future, but did not ask them to rate their confidence in those predictions. We saw little variation in the importance of theoretical priors between pragmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars across prediction contexts, implying that—conditional on their placement in the theoretical beliefs space—a scholar’s paradigmatic identity does not affect their predictions about outcomes in world affairs. It is still possible, however, that paradigmatic status affects how confident scholars are about the predictions they do make. Perhaps non-paradigmatic scholars are more realistic about the limits of their theoretical beliefs and so are better able to assess uncertainty surrounding certain kinds of events. Space constraints prevented us from asking systematically about confidence in each of the predictions. In addition to assessing the accuracy of the predictions of IR scholars, future work might study whether there is systematic variation in uncertainty across paradigms or between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic scholars.

To be sure, our survey-based approach has important advantages over examining books and articles directly and/or their interrelation via citations. First, it may be straightforward to observe paradigmatic self-identification in articles but identifying abstract theoretical beliefs would be much more difficult to ascertain in a systematic way. The TRIP project has done a version of this,

effects (e.g., picking a graduate program because of its association with one approach or another) and so would possibly help identify underlying intellectual predispositions associated with paradigmatic commitments or lack thereof.

categorizing articles by paradigm based on the motivating assumptions an author adopts whether or not the author identifies their account as consistent with any particular paradigm (Maliniak, Oakes, et al. 2011). But the TRIP journal article database does not track trends in self-identification or track the use of theoretical assumptions individually. More sophisticated tools, perhaps relying on recent innovations in “text as data” methods (Roberts, Stewart, and Nielsen 2020), are needed to place articles and books in a continuous and multidimensional theoretical belief space, as we have done using survey data here.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, our approach is not hindered by the fixed history of citation networks which can cause changes in citation behavior today to be apparent in the overall structure of the network only after long delays. Highly-cited papers are likely to attract more citations even as older papers are cited less on average (Perc 2014). In practice, this means that a few highly cited, but older, works come to be recognized as “representative” and may therefore appear more important in citation networks than they are in the shaping current lines of argumentation (see, e.g., Kristensen 2018).⁹ Given the relatively slow pace of the peer-review and publication process, it may take decades for the emergent citation communities to shift towards the new non-paradigmatic normal. Our survey is not hindered by concerns about citation histories causing a “paradigmatic overhang” in the empirical record.

What, then, do our results mean for how we understand both the decline in paradigmatic self-identification and arguments heralding the supposed benefits to knowledge production of a less paradigmatic international relations discipline? As noted above, we find little evidence that self-proclaimed non-paradigmatic scholars are less rigidly wedded to their theoretical beliefs across contexts than their more paradigmatic colleagues. Despite this, it is possible that the pernicious effects of the “paradigm wars” on knowledge production identified by Lake (2011) and others were quite real and that by moving toward less paradigmatic frames, knowledge production is now more efficient. By consciously invoking paradigms, authors activate a bundle of theoretical expectations for their readers. This could be a quite useful expositional shortcut if the paradigms were, in fact, well-specified and mutually exclusive models of the world. But they are not. Indeed, authors may have different ideas than their readers about what assumptions invoking a given paradigm requires

⁹ Maliniak, Powers, and Walter (2013) make a similar point with respect to the potential for an overhang in the gender gap in citations.

accepting. So, while paradigmatic branding may have the benefit of making theoretical exposition somewhat more economical, it may also lead to miscommunication or, worse, be used as a heuristic by paradigmatic in-group members looking to quickly marshal intellectual allies or by out-group members looking to quickly dispose of a particular argument or work.

Dispensing with paradigmatic framing forces authors to elaborate their argument's assumptions explicitly, making it less likely that authors and readers alike are burdened by paradigmatic assumptions that may not be relevant to a given substantive case. Under these conditions, agreement or disagreement can more easily be a matter of degree rather than kind. Even if non-paradigmatics are just as wedded to their beliefs across contexts as they were as self-identified paradigmatics, those beliefs are made more explicit; and combinations of those beliefs are revealed directly rather than implicitly through the invocation of a particular paradigmatic research tradition. As such, the flexibility that comes with the decline of paradigms may not be in the assumptions made by particular scholars across contexts, but in the ability of scholars with strong theoretical beliefs to place more flexible boundaries on the set of works with which they engage as they develop their own arguments and make sense of the empirical record. Future survey work might study if categorizing an existing argument as fitting within a particular paradigm modifies judgments of the argument's utility by other IR scholars. In sum, even if adherence to core sets of beliefs continues to characterize IR, the move away from using paradigmatic labels may bring benefits to the field.

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