

Deception and Deceptive Strategies in International Relations

Donald Trump admitted that he “didn’t even know” when he told Justin Trudeau that Canada had a trade deficit with the US in 2018. Russian officials denied plans to invade Ukraine in February 2022. Orchestrated misinformation campaigns have characterized recent elections in, for example, the US, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Diplomats, leaders and negotiators regularly omit or ‘spin’ facts to further their respective political and strategic agendas. Indeed, deception, lying and insincerity in international relations seem to be on the rise – are we witnessing post-truth world politics? Concurrently, is deception truly pervasive in international relations? What conditions, benefits, costs and risks may be associated with deceptive foreign policies?

While threats, promises, propaganda and subversion have been researched extensively in international relations, deception and deceptive speech acts (e.g. lying, bullshit), though possibly as widespread in international politics as in everyday life, remain underexplored. Beyond a handful of key texts, the discipline writ large seems ill-positioned to contribute to the investigation of deceptive strategies and associated international outcomes. The workshop intends to investigate the key motives underlying deception, the conditions making deception (or its various particular forms) possible or likely, and the ways and means by which state, non-state actors or international organizations go about deceiving domestic and/or other international actors, including in the conduct of diplomacy, trade, global governance or war.

By bringing together leading and junior scholars in international relations theory, foreign policy analysis, security and intelligence studies as well as (political) communication, the workshop contributes to addressing a political and theoretical problem in contemporary international politics, and formulating an (interdisciplinary) research agenda in deception studies. Participants are invited to engage in one or more of the following aspects of deception in IR:

1. The **analytical utility** (or lack thereof) of concepts such as deception, lying, bullshit, evasion, misinformation, propaganda, for the analysis of contemporary world politics or particular aspects of it. This may include theoretical or conceptual recourse to other disciplines including philosophy, linguistics, and media & communication studies. In turn, what is the analytical utility of extant IR scholarship for understanding deceptive strategies in world politics?
2. **Types of deception** in international politics. What are the underlying motives for deceitful actors, e.g. political, strategic or other purposes? Which conditions may make deception more or less likely (e.g. issue at stake, regime type, polarization, digitization, conflictual relationships, public interest, etc.)?
3. **Deception strategies**, processes and dynamics. How does deception, esp. deceptive communication in rhetoric, text or other media, work or function in international politics? Which historical or contemporary cases or examples are particularly illustrative? How does one best investigate deception in world politics?
4. **Effects**. What are the effects on audiences, other actors, or international political dynamics writ large (e.g. trust in diplomacy, international organizations, uncertainty/insecurity)?
5. **Policy solutions**. What are the most effective policy solutions in addressing ongoing deceptive strategies in foreign policy and international relations aimed at, for example, domestic destabilization or order disruption?