

Levels of analysis Analysts of global politics may examine factors at various levels—such as individual, domestic, systemic, and global—to explain actions and events. Each level provides possible explanations on a different scale.

we explain a nation-state's allocation of development assistance or foreign aid? We know the amount of development assistance (dependent variable), but we now must find the independent variable that might explain this allocation.

Independent variables reside in one of four **levels of analysis** (which we will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 4):

- *Individual/Human Dimension*: This level explores the range of variables that can affect leaders' policy choices and implementation strategies. Current research reveals that individuals matter, particularly in the midst of crises, when decisions require secrecy and/or involve only a few actors, or when time is of the essence. The influence of individuals increases when they have a great deal of latitude to make decisions and when they have expertise and a keen interest in foreign policy.
- *Domestic Sources or National Attributes*: Factors at this level include a state's history, traditions, and political, economic, cultural, and social structures, as well as military power, economic wealth, and demographics, and more permanent elements like geographic location and resource base.
- *Systemic Factors*: To most realists, the anarchic nature of international relations may be the most important factor at this level. However, the individual and collective actions states have taken to cope with anarchy via treaties, alliances, and trade conventions—formal contracts created by states in an attempt to provide order—also constitute significant systemic factors. More informal constraints based on traditions, common goals, and shared norms shape state behavior as well. For example, most states respect the sovereignty of all states and follow the rule of international law because they expect others to do the same. This notion of reciprocity is the primary incentive for states to support a rule-based international system. Finally, distribution of power in the system (e.g., bipolar, multipolar) and the nature of order (e.g., balance of power, collective security) are also important systemic factors. Remember, the international system is created by the interaction of states and other powerful actors like international and regional organizations.
- *Global Factors*: Often confused with system-level factors, global-level variables challenge notions of boundaries and sovereignty. The processes that define globalization are multidimensional and originate from multiple levels. Globalization and its economic, political, cultural, and social dimensions derive from decisions made or actions taken by individuals, states, and international and regional organizations or other nonstate actors, but they are seldom traceable to the actions of any one state or even a group of states. A technological innovation (e.g., the internet and the information revolution) that diffuses through the system affecting everyone but that does not belong to any single actor is an obvious example. The movement of capital by multinational banks, the broadcasts of CNN, and the revolutionary ideas of religious fundamentalists all represent global factors that shape policy behavior. Natural conditions such as environmental degradation, pandemics (AIDS, severe acute respiratory syndrome [SARS], and the flu), and weather

patterns also affect foreign policy. Consider, for example, how global climate change and resulting changes in weather patterns might result in excessive rain or the opposite, a drought. Might these conditions influence a country's trade policies? Will a country now need to import food and establish trade relations with other food-producing states? Climate is a global factor that may have an impact on the globalization process.

What is exciting about research in our field is that there is always disagreement about which variables explain the most. The strength of any one argument is based on the quality of the empirical evidence collected to support the hypothesis being tested. Since we are not lab scientists, we cannot conduct experiments with control groups to test our propositions. Instead, we look to the work of historians, public-policy records, government documents, interviews, budgets, and journalist accounts to gather evidence to confirm or reject hypotheses.

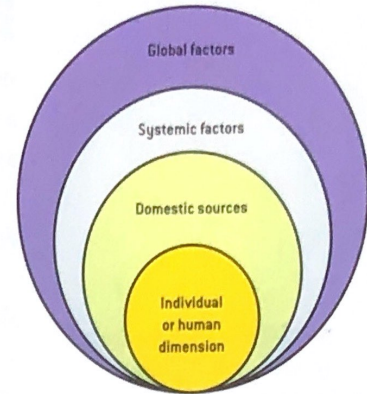
The level chosen as a source for an independent variable depends on the situation you wish to examine, the availability of data or evidence, your research skills and interests, and, finally, your creativity and imagination. Each level is like a drawer in a toolbox; the analytic approaches or variables at each level are the tools that the researcher uses to develop and explore the explanatory power of three kinds of hypotheses: (1) causal hypotheses: if it rains, it will flood; (2) relational hypotheses: if it rains, flooding in certain geologic and geographic areas will worsen; and (3) impact hypotheses: if it rains more than n amount, the flooding will be particularly severe.

None of this is new. Both the ancient Greek historian Thucydides and the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant indirectly discussed levels of analysis in their efforts to explain state behavior. Thucydides focused on the explanatory potential of power capabilities and even suggested that the distribution of power in the international system influenced a state's behavior. Kant referred to the first three levels of analysis when he suggested that nation-states could avoid war by eliminating standing armies, managing the self-interests of rival leaders, and finding ways to provide order in the international system.

The Constructivist Approach

Constructivists question the underlying assumptions supporting historical and social scientific approaches to understanding international relations. Instead, these scholars postulate that there is no single historical narrative. Rather, the interests of specific actors shape the story, and it is their control of that story that gives them power. No perspective offers the truth because words, meanings, symbols, and identities are subjective and are used by individuals, groups, and society to gain and maintain power.

Further, constructivists argue that all of us interpret events and global conditions according to our beliefs, interests, values, and goals. We are not free to do anything we want in any given situation; instead, we are handed a menu reflective of the dominant interests and goals of powerful groups within a state or in the international system.



Levels of Analysis.

In the study of global politics, there are four levels of analysis. Some scholars would say there are only three levels, but the authors of this book make a distinction between *systemic* (or international) factors and *global* factors. What is the argument for this distinction?