

The Project on International Affairs Speaker Series, the International Institute and cPASS present



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Do Leaders Pay a Cost for Lying in Foreign Policy?

Does it matter that leaders lie on foreign policy and the use of military force? Do they suffer reputational or political costs for being caught lying? And if so, when and by whom? These questions have both scholarly and policy importance. International relations scholars have yet to carefully examine the political and reputational consequences of lying in foreign policy, and the conditions under which such costs are more likely to be imposed. Using a vignette-based survey experiment and relying on theoretical insights from the field of behavioral economics, we test two pathways that could shape voters' willingness to punish leaders for deception: the characteristics of the leader and the lie, and the attributes and predispositions of the voters. Our results reveal a significant partisan double standard for lying. When the president and the voter are from the same political party, the former is significantly less likely to punish the leader for lying compared to situations of different partisan allegiances. This partisan double standard is, however, only significant among Republican and Independent voters, and does not appear among Democratic voters. We also find a strong motivated bias: voters are less willing to impose costs on leaders who lie when they are in agreement with the policy that the lie was used to justify, compared to when they disagree with the policy. Finally, we find that certain predispositions and beliefs of voters significantly moderate their willingness to punish leaders for lying. In particular, voters who are either high self-monitors, hawkish, or high in nationalism are significantly less likely to care when leaders use a lie to justify the use of military force. Finally, our results reveal that voters compartmentalize lying: they perceive lying in politics, and specifically in foreign affairs, to be fundamentally different from lying in interpersonal lives.

Thursday, February 20th
Dean's Conference Room at GPS
12:30 p.m.
Lunch Provided