

Jeffrey Frieden, "Actors and Preferences in International Relations," in David A. Lake and Robert Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice in International Relations*.

Actors' preferences must be carefully differentiated from the strategic setting, and an unambiguous derivation of those preferences is needed. A preference (defined as "the way the actor orders the possible outcomes of an interaction") are of interest not only for their own sake, but because of their relationship to actors' behaviour and actions. (42) A strategy is a tool the actor uses to get as close to its preferences as possible; hence, a strategy is a means to an end, and not evaluated by the actor for its own sake.

Preferences are sometimes obscured by the strategic setting and therefore difficult to discern. Frieden cites three types of problems in considerations of preferences and the international environment:

*Sins of confusion*, which mix preferences and settings inextricably, thereby denying visibility of individual effects of either preferences or settings;

*Sins of commission*, which assert that preference variation is the sole cause of outcome variation (thus overlooking the setting); and

*Sins of omission*, which assert that preference variation has no relationship with outcome variation.

To avoid these difficulties, one must determine preferences. Frieden lists three ways of doing this:

*Assumption*, which is quick-n-easy but fraught with oversimplificatory peril;

*Observation* (empirical induction), which is more satisfying but might ignore environmental influences and poses a high risk of tautology; and

*Deduction* (derivation from theory), which Frieden finds analytically sounder and more theoretically rigorous, but which presupposes good theories.

All three methods rely to a greater lesser degree on both internal and systemic factors.

As a subdiscipline, international trade policy has generally had a well-worked-out set of preferences available for analysis, and has thereby benefited. The study of European imperialism, in contrast, has generally had less agreement on preferences, and has thus become more muddled subfield.