

become objectively valid through the magic wand of a software program from the early days of personal computing.

Foreign policy decision making is above all characterized by uncertainty. An approach predicated on the idea that certainty is possible if only we think more systematically is doomed to fail. That is doubly true when “thinking more systematically” actually means “assigning quantitative values to guesswork.”

**Discriminatory Clubs: The Geopolitics of International Organizations.** By Christina L. Davis. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023. 472p. \$110.00 cloth

doi:10.1017/S1537592724001555

— Tamar Gutner, *American University*,  
tgutner@american.edu

Christina L. Davis’ book, *Discriminatory Clubs: The Geopolitics of International Organizations*, is both a broad and detailed examination of the question of how a core set of states in individual international organizations (IOs) choose their members. This question is an offshoot of a rich literature going back decades that asks why states join IOs, by delving into the specific issue of why a group of states might admit some member states and not others. As the title suggests, her central argument is that IOs are, in fact, discriminatory clubs of states containing a core of states that are geopolitically aligned with shared yet diffuse security interests. This alignment then “shapes who wants to join an organization, whether they are accepted into the club, and the price of entry” (p. 2).

She approaches this from a variety of angles. Chapter 2 develops and tests a theory of membership that examines provisions in IO charters. Davis uses descriptive statistics drawn from the Correlates of War (COW) International Organizations Dataset 3.0 to underscore the club-like nature of IOs in that IOs tend to have discretionary rules that give their member states flexibility on whom to admit. Club-style membership design allows powerful member states to use “bargaining leverage and informal influence” (p. 57) as a means to shape who can join.

Chapter 3, coauthored with Tyler Pratt, draws on the COW IO dataset to examine membership patterns in a set of over 200 international economic organizations between 1949 and 2014, finding evidence of geopolitical alignment in 44% of membership decisions and showing that security ties are also prevalent in economic organizations. Chapter 4, coauthored with Meredith Wilf, turns to a history of how accession has worked in the case of the GATT/WTO, observing that the formal rules of accession for both GATT and WTO are discretionary, which makes geopolitical discrimination easier. This chapter also creates a new dataset based on GATT/WTO applications and membership negotiations to measure geopolitical alignment among members using United Nations voting

patterns. The analysis shows the impact of geopolitics on the choice of members, why and which rivals are excluded, and the speed of the accession process. Chapter 5 offers a case study of the OECD as a discriminatory club, showing a correlation between UN General Assembly voting and OECD membership. Yet, this chapter makes an argument that goes beyond shared security interests, as it brings in the importance of membership as a proxy for status and an association with “the most exclusive club of ‘the West’” (p. 125).

Chapter 6 presents a case study of Japan’s experience in approaching IO membership. Japan, as Davis argues, often prioritized political relationships and status-seeking in making decisions about joining IOs. She also found that in some cases economic interests on both sides (either of major member states or of Japan) can outweigh geopolitical alignment. With this, the chapter recognizes that the book’s central argument cannot predict every outcome. The remaining chapters explore club politics in regional organizations, which Davis argues is a hard test of her theory because the main criterion for membership is geography. However, she observes that regional organizations do not make their geographic boundaries clear. She finds geography was not determinative and the correlation between security interests and membership remained strong.

Chapter 8 takes on the case of universal organizations, such as the United Nations, which are supposed to allow any state to join. Here, the argument implicitly shifts the criteria for what makes an IO discriminatory compared with the rest of the book, as the objects of discrimination in this chapter are applicants that are not universally recognized as sovereign states, such as Taiwan and Palestine. The politics of discrimination are important in these cases, as there is a “wide range of entities that may or may not be deemed to be states, depending on who makes the decision” (p. 314). She points out that “statehood” is not always objective, and sovereignty can be ambiguous (p. 319). The chapter also examines the rare occasion in which states can be kicked out of an IO. The book’s final chapter explores the implications of IOs as discriminatory clubs that favor allies. Here, she concludes that geopolitical alignment may be “one prominent criterion, but it is not at the exclusion of other factors” (p. 388). This recognition of nuance makes sense given the richness of the findings of the individual book chapters, but it is not well aligned with the narrower arguments presented at the beginning of the book.

Although Davis’ argument looks broadly and carefully across many IOs, it is still worth considering that the theory cannot explain the membership of an important new IO, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), created by China as its first major foray into leading an IO with global membership. Explaining this would be important as it is a case where shared security interests did not

form a basis for economic cooperation. The 57 founding AIIB members who signed its articles of agreement in December 2015 included a number of major donor countries and others that are clearly not geopolitically aligned with China on security issues. Among these were the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and India. Today, the AIIB has the second largest MDB membership behind the World Bank, with 110 approved members. While the security alignment hypothesis may contribute to explaining why the United States and Japan refused to join the AIIB, it cannot explain why AIIB membership is open to any country that was a member of the World Bank Group's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), or the Japanese-led Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Despite failing to explain every case, Davis' book will spur a wide-ranging debate within the scholarly community and contribute in important new ways to existing research on IO membership.

#### **Nation Branding and International Politics.** By

Christopher S. Browning. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023. 240p. \$130.00 cloth, \$39.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1537592724001610

— Felix Berenskötter , King's College London  
felix.berenskoetter@kcl.ac.uk

When picking up this book, I recalled a conversation in 2003 with a fellow student about whether governments were thinking about their states' "brand" in international politics and how to study it. We agreed this was a fascinating phenomenon, but apart from Peter van Ham's articles in *Foreign Affairs* (2001) and *Millennium* (2002), there was no literature on it (as far as we were aware). Classical realists had noted the relevance of reputation and status, political psychologists had written about perceptions and images, and constructivists about how state behavior is shaped by culture and identity. But the idea that states might have a "brand" that was politically created and protected seemed new. Twenty years on, the concept of "nation branding" and its place in international politics is still flying under the radar of much of international relations (IR) scholarship. This is surprising given the rise to fame of the concept of "soft power" (Nye 2004), which highlights the power of attraction as an instrument of statecraft and, consequently, raises the question of how states *can* make themselves attractive vis-a-vis others. The practice of branding offers an answer. And as Christopher Browning notes, many governments have taken this answer to heart, leading to a "proliferation of nation branding programmes" (p. 7). Yet, analyses by the likes of van Ham, Nadia Kaneva (*Branding Post-Communist Nations*, 2012), Melissa Aronczyk (*Branding the Nation*, 2013), Kristin Eggeling (*Nation-Branding in Practice*,

2020), or Browning were largely ignored by the "soft power" cottage industry.

Against this backdrop, Browning's decision to synthesize and expand on his earlier work in this book is welcome and a valuable contribution to the field of IR. The main message is that nation branding "intersects with international politics in often complex ways" (p. 182), and the book sheds light on this complexity by analyzing the phenomenon from different perspectives. General points are given empirical texture through useful illustrations and case studies.

The book is divided into six substantive chapters. The first three are presented as the conceptual framework. Chapter 1 (Brand(ing) States) sets out to specify the meaning of nation branding as the selective projection of an image that creates an emotional connection with an audience, differentiating it from related concepts of national image, national identity, propaganda, public diplomacy, and soft power. The chapter emphasizes the close link to questions of identity and the analytical focus on the *practice* of branding, the active attempt to create or protect a brand. As Browning argues, this ties the concept to agency and intent and has a strategic dimension. While overlapping with propaganda and public diplomacy, he sees nation branding as less political in presentation and not focused on selling policies but as situating the state in the logic of a "global imaginary."

Chapter 2 (Competition States) places the emergence of foreign policy branding practices in the cultivation of a new geopolitical imagination after the end of the Cold War, which replaced the logic of great power competition with a process of globalization defined by economic rationalities. In this imaginary, states had to follow the logic of the market if they wanted to be successful, turning "statesmen" into "salesmen" (p. 37). Browning focuses on intellectual entrepreneurs like Simon Anholt pushing this outlook and creating an industry around it, with themselves as branding consultants advising governments on how to stay competitive in this new world.

Chapter 3 (Anxious States) takes a step back to argue that states engage in branding practices to gain ontological security, that is, to establish and protect a stable sense of self, primarily via external recognition. Browning argues that the projection of a simple, marketable image tailored to external audiences tends to be unsuitable for fostering nationalism internally. (For example, the Oktoberfest may be a good brand to attract tourists, but it is not an effective symbol for fostering an imagined community among Germans.) He discusses overlaps, also in later chapters, but cautions about seeing branding as a tool for nation building.

The next three chapters investigate different claims about the benefit of nation branding. Chapter 4 (Good States) discusses the practice of trying to gain recognition as a "good" or "virtuous" state by pursuing what are