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# The Domestic-International Nexus in Indian Foreign Policymaking

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## Abstract

Foreign policymaking in a country like India was long assumed to be strongly centralized and mainly the preoccupation of a limited group of political and bureaucratic elites. However, the 2024 elections have shown an increasing interest in foreign policy matters, notably over India's role and status in the world, especially following India's hosting of the G20 summit in 2023. Over time, it has also become clear that the foreign policy decision-making process in India is directly or indirectly shaped by a multitude of actors with varying foreign policy preferences. Despite multiple examples seeming to show how domestic politics shape Indian foreign policy, and vice-versa, there had been few attempts until recently to develop robust domestic theories of foreign policymaking in India. An emerging body of literature has begun to study the domestic politics of India's foreign policy, building on existing substantive bodies of literature on Indian domestic and regional politics, political economy, social movements, identity politics, clientelism and trust networks and state institutions. This emerging literature looking at domestic drivers of India's foreign policy can be divided into four broad categories depending on their focus of inquiry: (a) Institutions and bureaucracies; (b) Public opinion and accountability; (c) Ideology and Partisanship; and (d) Regional influences. The broader field of Foreign Policy Analysis would also benefit from new theoretical and empirical findings of this more systematic study of Indian foreign policy.

## Keywords

Foreign policy analysis, public opinion, federalism, ideology, bureaucracies

While foreign policy has generally been considered to be an elite issue and interest, survey data in India has shown that Indians have diverse opinions over foreign policy issues (Vaishnav & Mallory, 2024). In addition, a series of incidents in the run-up to the 2024 Indian national elections have further demonstrated the close interlinkages between domestic and international politics. For instance, the incumbent Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, criticised the Indian National Congress (INC) for ceding the Katchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka in 1974. For many observers and former diplomats, this long negotiated development was politicised by the governing and incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in order to

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gain votes in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where it had previously failed to make any electoral gains (Haidar, 2024). Prior to the elections of 2019 also, Prime Minister Modi had politicised the terrorist attack in Pulwama in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and the following military response decided by his government against Pakistan (Rizwanullah, 2019).

This might not be the first time that an incumbent Indian government uses foreign policy issues for electoral purposes, but the politicisation of international politics is becoming more systematic in national and regional elections in India. The latest elections have shown an increasing interest in foreign policy matters, notably over India's role and status in the world, especially following India's hosting of the G20 summit (Bajpae, 2024; Mukherjee, 2024). Even the political opposition has been regularly criticising the governing BJP government for its foreign policies whether on the neighbourhood (Riaz, 2024), or towards the Israel–Palestine conflict (Gandhi, 2023). In 2024, the INC has recognised that it, too, must articulate the role it envisions for India abroad in its general election manifesto (INC, 2024).

Despite multiple examples seeming to show how domestic politics shape Indian foreign policy, and vice-versa, there has been a surprising lack of domestic theories of Indian foreign policymaking until recently (Ganguly & Pardesi, 2015; Mehta, 2009; Raghavan, 2012). Over the last decade, some scholars have begun to incorporate domestic political institutions, national strategic culture, leaders' perceptions and ideational predispositions as relevant factors to account for some of India's foreign policy decisions (Bajpai, 2013; Bajpai & Mallavarapu, 2005; Beitelmaier-Berini, 2021; Friedrichs, 2019; Hall, 2019; Narang & Staniland, 2012; Miller, 2014; Miller & Sullivan de Estrada, 2017). In this Special Issue for instance, Mallavarapu examines how classical realism could be applied to interpret Indian foreign policy spread over the last decade (Mallavarapu, forthcoming). While these works moved away from the assumption that international-systemic constraints solely dictate India's external behaviour, domestic factors have often been integrated as intervening or secondary variables which can account for why the Indian state did not react, or did so in a lagged fashion, to pressures emanating from changes in the material distribution of power at the international level. Basrur for instance recently argued that the mismatch between India's growing material capacities and ambitions and its achievements was due to domestic political constraints, leading thereby to what he labelled 'policy drift', defined as necessary action not taken or suboptimal foreign policy actions (Basrur, 2023).

Most of these approaches often privilege a single variable over others, whether it is the ability to extract and mobilise national resources, the innate constraints of certain political regimes or a national cultural predisposition, but do not explain *how and when* these domestic factors become salient and, possibly, *jointly interact* with international factors in the foreign policy making process to explain particular foreign policy decisions (or non-decisions). For instance, one important question to ask following the June 2024 re-election of the BJP-led coalition is whether the BJP would push for its distinctive ideological perspective when formulating and implementing its foreign policy agenda or whether, after a decade of single-party rule, one could expect foreign policy changes and realignments given the BJP's reliance on coalition partners to remain in power (Jacob, 2024). It is crucial here to disaggregate and weight the causal role of ideational and political–institutional factors at play.

As argued elsewhere, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) has offered a broad array of options to open this 'black box' of the Indian state (Blarel & Paliwal, 2019; Ganguly & Pardesi, 2015; Hansel et al., 2017; Pant & Paliwal 2018). In this article, I review and divide this emerging literature on domestic determinants of Indian foreign policy into four broad research programs which are discussed in the following sections. I present their analytical insights but also discuss some of their remaining conceptual and empirical limitations. Based on this critical overview, the article then assesses the state of the study of the domestic explanations of India's foreign policy, as well as provides some suggestions to move the dialogue forward between these four strands, but also between the fields of FPA and Indian foreign policy.

## Research Program I: Institutions, Bureaucracies and Indian Foreign Policy

A first strand of scholarship has gradually broken with the assumption that Indian foreign policy was a centralised and exclusive prerogative of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of External Affairs. Furthermore, it is notable that scholars of Indian foreign policy focused mostly on foreign policy actions or outputs, generally assuming a greater deal of state rationality and intentionality, and thereby overlooking the precise and complex decision-making process leading to a particular decision. As a result, initial studies of Indian foreign policy rarely delved into operational level policy debates, and were largely unencumbered by the push-and-pull of foreign policy decision-making.

This excessive focus on visible policy outputs was partly explained by the difficulty of access to primary sources and archival material. Barring Jeffrey Benner's (1984) *Structure of Decision* that decoded India's foreign policy-making bureaucracy, most dedicated studies of India's foreign and security policy-making processes were therefore made by historians instead of political scientists (Chaudhuri, 2014; Engerman, 2018; Guyot-Richard, 2016; Nayudu, forthcoming; Raghavan, 2020; Raghavan, 2010, 2013; Sarkar, 2022; Thakur, 2018). Building from specific historical decisions, these studies investigated the complex interlinkages between domestic political contestation, bureaucratic turf battles and actual policy implementation. Furthermore, the burst of private media houses, big businesses, the NGO sector and private think-tanks since mid-1990s has further opened the foreign policy decision-making process in India to a multitude of actors (Baru, 2009; Bhatnagar, 2021; Khan & Köllner, 2022; Kumar, 2016; Mohan, 2009).

This is where the field of FPA helped fill a conceptual gap in the study of Indian foreign policy. FPA is based on the premise that interactions between states are 'grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups' (Hudson, 2013, p. 1). Rather than focusing on the states as unitary and rational actors, FPA has generally emphasised the internal processes, organisational structures, and group-level dynamics that shape policy outcomes. Building therefore on this focus on the decision-making process, and specifically on institutional, bureaucratic and public policy approaches from the FPA literature (Allison, 1971; Brummer et al., 2019) a new scholarship has opened the black box of governmental institutions in cases where policymakers were confronted with new decision problems and ambivalent information. Under these conditions, institutional inertia (standard operating routines, organisational culture) or political advocacy proved to be decisive in shaping the selection among competing foreign policy options. Blarel's (2015) and Paliwal's (2017) studies, respectively on India's policies towards Israel and Afghanistan, have analysed the influence of advocacy coalitions<sup>2</sup> on foreign policy change when India was confronted with a series of and strategic dilemmas. By operationalising concepts that originated in the public policy literature, these two books also exemplified how scholars of Indian foreign policy can benefit from insights from FPA approaches.

However, there have been limitations to the application of these bureaucratic and public policy approaches to understanding foreign policy making in the Indian context. One relates, as mentioned above, to the limited amount of information which is available about the decision-making process (Basrur, 2019). Second, and more importantly, this type of approach tends to overemphasise the role of bureaucratic actors and inter-agency competition while downplaying the influence of other factors like leadership, political ideology, or external pressures in shaping foreign policy. For instance, Basrur (2019) showed that during the Parakram crisis that external threats like nuclear weapons played a major role in

<sup>2</sup> Understood here as groups of policy actors that share policy core beliefs and coordinate their behavior to influence the policy process (Sabatier, 1988).

circumscribing India's policy options and limiting bureaucratic fragmentation. Finally, the bureaucratic approach has still primarily focussed on national government bureaucracies and may not adequately account for decentralised levels of governances, as well as public accountability for foreign policy decisions. This where the other domestic approaches to foreign policy come in.

## Research Program 2: Public Attitudes on Indian Foreign Policy

A second strand of scholarship has looked at breaking down how Indian democratic institutions, and especially how varying 'accountability environments' depending on public salience and institutional set-ups (Narang & Staniland, 2018), can shape Indian foreign policy debates in varying directions. Initially, and in line with assumptions of centralised foreign policymaking, the study of these 'accountability environments' was limited to elite circles (and thereby justified the application of the *Research Program 1* models discussed above). Most surveys on politics in India, such as those run before and after state and national elections by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), only sporadically included foreign policy questions, aligning with the general assumption that foreign policy was peripheral to India's domestic politics. As a result, most salience studies were limited to elite surveys (Cortright & Mattoo, 1996; Ganguly et al., 2016) which had important insights on some foreign policy attitudes, but which were also not seeking to make claims about the entire Indian public. This has created an important gap in our understanding of what public opinion in India has been, how it has changed, and what factors may drive variation within the public and over time.

In one of the most comprehensive surveys on public attitudes on Indian foreign policy, Kapur initially confirmed the assumption that the Indian masses seem to show 'little interest in foreign policy issues' but he also noted that there was a link between 'non-responsiveness to questions on foreign policy and socio-economic status' (Kapur, 2009). This seemed to imply that foreign policy issues could gain more public salience if Indian median voters become wealthier and more educated and as some specific foreign policy issues become directly entangled with domestic politics. Since then, several survey studies have examined Indian public opinion on external issues to understand the political incentives and constraints Indian elites have faced over time when deciding on foreign policies (Clary et al., 2021; CPR, 2022; Huang et al., 2023; Milliff et al., 2019; Pant et al., 2024).

In line with recent developments in FPA which have increasingly shown that the influence of public opinion matters depending on institutional, accountability and electoral circumstances, the issues at hand, and the specific context of the foreign policy decision (Kertzer, 2023), Narang and Staniland (2018) hypothesised that the varying electoral salience of foreign security policies and the clarity of responsibility for policy outcomes which depend on varying institutional set-ups can jointly create different accountability environments in which politicians operate. Specifically, the incentives for politicians to devote attention to national security issues in this article is argued to be a product of both the electoral salience of the specific issue as well as the degree to which individual politicians can be held to account for specific policy outcomes. Building on this study, Ladwig (2025) demonstrated that the level of attention individual politicians devoted to a particular policy issue, such as foreign security policies, could also vary within a given accountability environment. By investigating the nature and extent of parliamentary engagement with foreign security policy in the Lok Sabha, Ladwig looked at electoral considerations, but also how personal experiences, constituency preferences, and institutional incentives stemming from committee roles or political party membership can shape a Member of Parliament's effort to oversee foreign security policy. Similarly, Hinton and Vaishnav (2023) also tested the assumption that security issues do matter for the average citizen by looking at electoral salience in

the critical context of a security crisis with potential ‘rally-around-the-flag’ effects (Hinton & Vaishnav, 2023). While their survey studies found that the Pulwama-Balakot crisis benefited the incumbent BJP nationally, ‘villages exposed to the soldiers’ funeral processions were less likely to rally behind the BJP government despite the patriotic fervor those processions fomented’, indicating varying degrees of public reactions and salience, and thereby electoral benefits, to the politicisation of foreign policy issues (Hinton & Vaishnav, 2023).

This second strand of scholarship has therefore also some potential in improving our understanding and fine tuning the dynamics of how public opinion, public salience, institutional differences and diversity of institutional representation can affect India’s foreign policy decision-making. However, here again, there is a need for more systematic and reiterated survey studies to further understand when and how foreign policy issues become salient at the national and local levels (see *Research Program 4*), and when public attitudes influence directly and indirectly foreign policy decisions (or non-decisions), notably when the Indian government is faced with external pressures, or when governments, media and interest groups try to shape public opinion through elite cues, including political mobilisation (as discussed below in *Research Program 3*), sometimes distorting public preferences and insulating decision-making from public pressures. This is another important research area where insights and synergies from the fields of FPA and political communication can contribute (Kertzer, 2023).

### **Research Program 3: Partisanship, Ideology and Indian Foreign Policy**

A third strand of the scholarship has focused on the role of ideology in shaping foreign policy debates in India, and more specifically on how these ideological debates have been mediated through party and partisan politics, as well as through political personalities and their individual ideational predispositions. Over the past three decades, India’s two main national political parties, the INC and the BJP, have led stable governing coalitions twice: the BJP at the helm of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from 1998 to 2004 and, with an absolute majority, since 2014; and the INC at the helm of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) I (2004–2009) and II (2009–2014). These two parties have sustained fundamentally different political ideologies, and there have been studies attempting to determine to what extent such ideologies have contributed to changes in Indian foreign policy (Narang & Staniland, 2012). The problem has been that most FPA theories looking at the partly politics of foreign policymaking are derived from West European cases and have focused on party competition along the traditional left–right ideological spectrum, overlooking some of the specific cross-cutting political and social cleavages typical to a federal and multicultural polity like India (Blarel, 2019).

As a result, one area in which the study of Indian foreign policy could both build on and lead to conceptual advances to FPA includes the interaction between ideational factors, namely religion and foreign policy. In this vein and building on earlier work looking at the long-standing ideological tradition of Hindu nationalism and its impact on domestic policies, some scholars like Ogden (2010), Hall (2019) and Huju (2022) have all studied the impact of Hindu nationalism on foreign policy making and the ensuing changes in foreign policy orientation. However, while Hindu nationalists have a long tradition of thought about international politics, dating back to the 19th century (Sagar, 2014, 2022), some have argued that there has not been a direct and systematic influence on Indian foreign policy and break with traditional foreign policy orientations (Hall, 2019; Gupta et al., 2019).

During the period of ideological and political dominance from the BJP from 2014 to 2024, some scholars have noted the (re)turn in interest to the concept and projections of India as a civilisational state and power (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023). Sullivan de Estrada (2023) has notably interpreted the enactment

of the role of *vishwaguru* (or ‘world teacher’), as a key feature of the foreign policy discourse under contemporary Hindu nationalist rule in India, as part of its bid for recognition as equal with great powers, but also to claim superior social positioning in the current global order. Sullivan de Estrada also argued that the overtly Hindu nationalist framing of India’s *vishwaguru* or pedagogical mission has been both a domestic political project of Hindutva but also a strategy for international recognition. Sullivan de Estrada notes that this ideological framing has happened at a particular geopolitical opportune moment for Indian as the US, UK, EU and Australia have aimed to develop strategic partnerships with New Delhi to counter China’s influence (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023).

In addition, Destradi and Plagemann (2022) have noted that the impact that ideologies have on foreign policy within competitive democracies largely depends on the salience of foreign affairs for domestic voters. As a result, while the *vishwaguru* rhetoric has been employed by the BJP government in both its domestic and international discourses, it remains an empirical question whether this framing is a salient and politicised issue within the Indian public. Building on the established literature on populism in comparative politics and on populist foreign policy (Chryssogelos, 2017), Destradi and Plagemann have therefore encouraged the scholarship to further explore on the link between populism and Hindu-nationalism, as the populist politicisation of foreign policy might increase such salience of foreign policy issues in the longer term (Plagemann & Destradi, 2019). This is one other area where the study of Indian foreign policy could help advancing theory-building in FPA as there are still questions over the effects of populism on a state’s foreign policy. For instance, does Modi use populist rhetoric for strategic and electoral reasons (and this relates to the ideational elites cues mentioned in *Research Program 2*), to organise the foreign policy making process differently (notably through bypassing the institutional actors mentioned in *Research Program 1*), or to influence the substance of a foreign policy, and confirming here the inspiration of a civilisational project. This is an open debate in the contemporary study of India’s foreign policy which could contribute to refining our understanding of the effects of ideology and populism on foreign policy (Jenne & Thies, 2024; Wajner et al., 2024).

#### **Research Program 4: The Local and Regional Origins of India’s External Policies**

The literature cited in the previous section has mainly concentrated on ideological debates between the national parties—the INC and the BJP—and has not systematically integrated the foreign policy preferences of subnational, regional and local actors. Building on insights from the discipline of FPA, this section focuses more specifically on the subnational and local drivers of India’s foreign policy. For instance, it is well known that the states of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have historically had a substantial influence on New Delhi’s foreign policy towards some of its regional partners, namely Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Plagemann & Destradi, 2015), but there have been few studies looking at when, in which ways, and to what extent these and other regional and local actors become involved in the foreign policy-making process. As a result, systematic analyses of state–society relations (and more specifically state-periphery) and their implications on foreign-policy making processes in India have emerged over the last two decades.

Initially, some insights were gained from a body of scholarship that has studied the influence of political decentralisation of political power and federal arrangements on foreign policymaking. According to this scholarship on para-diplomacy, some regions, states, provinces and cities have managed to develop their own external relations when constitutional arrangements accommodate some power-sharing possibilities and/or remain ambiguous over the distribution of competences over foreign policy among federal as ambiguous (Cantir, 2024). At first sight, foreign policy in India is heavily centralized as the constitution

envisaged and made space for a federal structure with a unitary bias, especially on foreign policy matters (Asthana & Jacob, 2019). However, since the 1990s period of economic liberalisation and coalition politics, divergent political interests of the central and state governments have led to contestation in foreign policy implementation. Indeed, some have argued that the process of liberalisation initiated in the early 1990s had gradually given leverage to Indian states in the country's foreign economic policy (Jenkins, 2003). Since states have engaged in direct economic negotiations with external entities over the last decade, they have developed economic interests and stakes with specific regions and partners (Asthana & Jacob, 2017). Consequently, some studies have demonstrated that federal units can have input on foreign economic and security policies towards neighbouring countries, especially if these are bordering states (Chattopadhyay & Debnath, 2024; Jacob, 2016; Maini, 2014; Paliwal, 2019).

Building on these initial findings which had identified regional and local foreign policy positions, other scholars have focused on how regional parties which have joined (or supported) ruling coalitions have been actively involved in foreign policy-making at the national level (Blarel & van Willigen, 2021; Sasikumar & Verniers, 2013; Wyatt, 2017; Sharma, 2020). While initial studies assessing the role of coalition politics on Indian foreign policy-making had insisted upon the institutional and political constraints of coalitions, which supposedly led to foreign policy conservatism (Mazumdar, 2011; Sridharan, 2003), more recent scholarship has demonstrated how particular configurations of federalism and coalition politics can help explain how regional parties, which usually run and control many seats in regional legislatures but are minor players in national parliaments, can influence foreign policy decisions made by governing coalitions. The regional political parties have gradually realised the importance of their presence in the coalition government for the continuity of the government. In such circumstances, states' bargaining power has begun to increase, and the regional parties have started raising their voices on every issue related to their interest, including foreign policy formulation and implementation, which later enabled them to engage in the issues of cross-border relevance (Blarel & Van Willigen, 2021; Chattopadhyay & Debnath, 2024; Sridharan, 2003).

Building on the extensive scholarship on the effects of India's experience with coalitions on its domestic politics (Chakrabarty, 2005; Kailash, 2014; Sridharan 2014), Blarel and Van Willigen have investigated the ways in which the multi-level nature of coalition-building in a federal and pluralistic polity like India, especially from 1989 to 2014, has made it necessary for national parties like the INC and the BJP to increasingly take into account the inputs of regional interests when designing foreign policies. Under some institutional conditions, namely regional salience of foreign policy issues and coalitional configuration, regional parties have been able to exploit the political weakness of the national parties to push their own foreign policy preferences or to get other policy and/or electoral concessions from the central government.

Regional salience of foreign policy issues has been defined as small but spatially concentrated constituencies that hold informed and committed preferences over time (through the intermediary of regional parties) on specific foreign policy issues. The variation in regional preferences can be observed through the geographical distribution and concentration of specific interests relative to foreign policy issues. For instance, the Tamil parties have held consistent and enduring preferences over India's relationship with Sri Lanka, notably over the welfare of the Tamil minority (Wyatt, 2017).

However, strong regional salience on a foreign policy issue is generally not a sufficient condition to observe regional influence on foreign policy. Building on the accountability pressures highlighted by Narang and Staniland (2018), Blarel and Willigen (2021) have observed that strong foreign policy preferences and opposition from state parties seemed to only lead to a reaction from the Union government if these disagreements were likely to bring electoral costs. To observe this, Blarel and Willigen (2021) suggested looking at the multi-level coalition bargaining between a national party, heading the central government, and

regional parties in both the national parliament and the state assemblies. What needs to be observed here is not so much the relatively small number of national parliamentary seats of the regional party allied with a national party within a coalition, but also its vote and seat shares in its state legislature of origin.

The particular institutional features of the Indian federal political system has created the phenomenon of mutual electoral interdependencies or ‘locked-in supporters’ (Sridharan, 2014) which have led to specific structural constraints and opportunities for national and regional parties to shape the policy agenda of a governing coalition at the centre. As national parties build coalitions or electoral alliances with regional parties both within the national and regional parliaments, they are bound by agreements that might give a disproportionate amount of leverage to regional parties to shape national policies, including on foreign policy. However, the interlocking mechanisms can work in both directions. Some regional parties might have also depended on support from the national parties in their regional parliamentary elections and have therefore been constrained in their capacity to pressure the agenda of the national government, even if they had the seats in the national parliament to be a pivotal player. These informal interlocking coalitional bargaining games have generally not been captured by traditional para-diplomacy approaches.

One of the scope conditions of these approaches on coalition foreign policy is that the polity should be under multiparty governance. Future studies should look if these the interactive and causal effects of regional salience and coalitional arrangements can explain Indian foreign policy decisions both before and after the 1989–2014 period of coalition governance. For instance, can some of these approaches help explain India’s external behaviour from 2014 to 2024, when India has been ruled *de facto* by a single party central government? Similarly, it is an open question as to whether these explanations are also again relevant following the 2024 parliamentary elections and the move from a strong single-party majority government to multi-party governance. Early speculations about India’s foreign policy direction under a coalition government have hinted at possible obstruction and foreign policy conservatism (Jacob, 2024). However, initial findings from the literature cited above have shown that coalition governments in India have been to take important foreign policy decisions and, at times, to engage in radical foreign reorientation. Some of the most consequential decisions pertaining to India’s security policy, such as the nuclear tests of 1998 and the signing of nuclear deal with the US in 2008, happened under fragile coalition governments (Blarel, 2017; Sasikumar & Verniers, 2013). In fact, in the case of the nuclear deal debate, the central government could garner approval at the central and regional levels for its own foreign policy preferences by bargaining and offering policy and electoral support to regional parties such as the Samajwadi Party in the state of Uttar Pradesh, in return for their vote on a foreign policy decision (Blarel & van Willigen, 2021). According to this logic, we should also expect to see possible bargaining processes between the BJP and its coalition allies, notably as we approach regional elections and multi-level coalitional pressure opens leverage possibilities for these junior partners.

## Perspectives for Future Research

As scholar of India’s foreign increasingly take domestic politics and decision-making processes seriously, as discussed in this article, many still focus on one particular research direction, and the dialogue and analytical synergies between the research programs cited in this article are still untapped. One possible way to link these various research programs is to further unpack when and how some foreign policy matters become salient, debated and politicised in the Indian context? How have globalization and trans-nationalisation, political decentralisation, polarisation, domestic opportunity structures and the mobilisation strategies of political actors led to a more open and contested political space? While

some of the scholarships here offers partial answers to these questions, more dialogue between the four identified research programs will be necessary to further disaggregate the processes through which some issues enter the realm of political choice and contestation, and others not.

One other possible direction forward for studies of Indian foreign policy is a more sustained engagement with decades of research in FPA and many theoretical approaches which have been introduced, tested and refined to further tease out the domestic political processes and factors which shape foreign policy decisions.<sup>3</sup> These studies have notably demonstrated that the linkages between domestic and international politics are far more complex than portrayed. As such, FPA does not offer a comprehensive theory but rather a series of more specific causal explanations for different pieces of these linkages between the domestic and international arena such as the bureaucratic politics model, the organisational process model, leadership trait analysis, the role of decision-making units, the influence of partisan preferences, variations in legislative–executive relations and coalition politics among others (Allison, 1971; Hermann, 1980; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Kaarbo, 2015; Tapio & Wagner, 2017).

Why have these concepts and approaches not been more systematically applied to the Indian context? There are various reasons for this, ranging from these disciplines' excessive reliance on Western case studies, or the lack of interest in mainstream International Relations scholarship by South Asianists (in contrast to disciplines such as economics, political theory and developmental studies, all of which have benefited from the Indian experience) (Basrur, 2009; Kapur, 2018). As an increasing number of scholars study the domestic politics of India's foreign policy, it is also important to build on the existing substantive bodies of literature on Indian domestic and regional politics, political economy, political communication, social movements, identity politics, clientelism and trust networks and state institutions, among others (Auerbach et al., 2022).

At the same time, the FPA field would benefit from new theoretical and empirical findings of the identified research programs here. Much has been written in recent years about the Western-centric nature of existing international relations theory and about the inapplicability of some concepts to India's external behaviour. But according to this overview of an emerging systematic scholarship on the study of the drivers Indian foreign policy, many concepts seem to offer new avenues of research that had long been overlooked because of data access issues, and an impression that the Indian case was idiosyncratic. Key insights on issues like bureaucratic struggles and politics, the role of public salience in varying accountability environments, the politicisation of civilisational traits, or the regional politics of foreign policy in federal settings might be applicable to a larger set of other cases, including many countries who can share some similar institutional and societal attributes in both the Global South and the Global North. In addition, some of the cited scholarship in this article has also identified the limitations of some FPA's concepts and theories when applied to a different complex political system like India's multi-ethnic federal and democratic polity. Rather than discarding the Indian case as outlier, some of the conceptual and theoretical exceptions should be understood as opportunities for FPA's formative concepts to be reconsidered and fine-tuned. For example, the study of specific Indian cases of foreign policy-making, notably on the role of peripheral and local communities and relations with the neighbourhood, can lead us to reinterpret to problematise the concept of the state in IR, and in FPA more specifically. Breaking with the ahistorical and uncontested assumption of the Weberian state as the main unit of analysis in much of the FPA scholarship, Paliwal (2019) and Vivekanandan (2024) have recently argued that the state should be reconceptualised as a dynamic entity and that the degree of development and control of a state needs over its territory, and notably over its periphery, as well as transnational solidarities across borders, affect its motivations and its capacities used to implement its foreign policy.

<sup>3</sup> For a good review of this scholarship, see Kaarbo & Thies (2024).

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