Values are core beliefs that shape the actor’s worldview. They include the fundamental ideological and normative precepts that guide the actors, and are usually not forsaken. Survival, security, and power are among the primary values of all states. Human rights and liberal freedoms are common values of democracies. Strong leadership and control are characteristic of autocratic states. Media actors, too, have core values, such as freedom of speech, professionalism, credibility, economic profit, exclusivity, and rating.

The fundamental values of an actor usually remain intact for generations. But in different situations some values become more important and relevant than others. In the 2008 Russia-Georgia tensions, for instance, American status and credibility were of much higher significance to the United States than economic well-being and gains. Awareness to these priorities should guide the choice of goals and lead a debate on the trade-offs one makes when a policy plan is adopted.

Once students are familiar with the specific situation described in the initial scenario, ask them to (1) define their actor’s most crucial values that need to be promoted or defended in the given situation, limiting the number of values so the debate is practical and time efficient, and (2) rank the chosen values and discuss the relationship between them in order to understand value trade-offs. As different students are likely to have views of their own, this task may lead to intensive debates till teammates agree. From a learning perspective, such discussions are valuable as they provoke students to think analytically, lead them to continue the exploration of their actor, and increase their identification with it. In some cases, especially in acute situations when the actor faces an imminent threat, the students may easily and quickly agree on the content and rank of values. In other situations they may engage in provoking moral deliberations that require analytical skills, sensitivities to intercultural diversities, and even empathy with the actor they represent. The discussion regarding values is an introduction to the debate on political goals.

Goals

Goals are the operational stakes an actor wants to reach and is ready to allocate resources immediately in order to promote them. They stem from core values and are closely related to events that appear in the initial scenario and in the case that was chosen for the simulation. For instance, the value of power was selected as first priority by the U.S. team in the 2008 Russia-Georgia simulation. But what exactly did the team want to promote? One goal was to preserve American status and influence in the Caucasus, but another one with very different implications was to strengthen the American position, as the sole superpower, against Russia. While each of the two goals was linked to the value of status, the team also wanted to avoid a violent confrontation with Russia, linked to the value of a peaceful orientation characteristic of a democracy. The team’s activity followed the latter at the expense of the former.

After students define and rank the values of their team, ask them to (1) clarify a limited number of most important goals their actor wants to achieve regarding the situation detailed in the initial scenario, and (2) rank the chosen goals according to their importance and address the issue of conflicts between goals. Opposition and coalition members are likely to disagree on the content and rank of many goals. The more students discuss and debate goals the better, because through such discussions they learn more about their actor, experience group dynamics in decision-making, and understand how difficult it is to reach an agreement on the fundamental elements of the policy formation process.

Some teams may avoid serious discussions in order to quickly complete their assignments. This happens because participants may be wrongly impressed that the outcome of intrateam discussions is more important for their grade