

5/21

Professor Roseanne McMANUS

Title: Crazy Like a Fox? Evaluating the Limits of the Madman Theory in International Politics

Abstract:

The “Madman Theory,” an argument that being perceived as irrational gives a leader an advantage in international crisis bargaining, was first proposed by economists who studied nuclear strategy in the early Cold War. It was later adopted by former US President Richard Nixon and may also influence the strategy of current US President Donald Trump. My research questions the utility of madness reputations in crisis bargaining. While perceived madness does boost the credibility of threats, it also makes it harder to credibly commit to peace, especially when a leader's madness reputation is very strong. This can undermine a leader's crisis bargaining success, as adversaries will be less likely to comply with a leader's threats if they doubt compliance will lead to peace. I test the Madman Theory using a multi-method approach, but this presentation will focus primarily on a survey and survey experiments.

#