

UQ leads research on 'visual' politics

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University of Queensland political science experts are exploring the ways in which images shape our views and understanding of humanitarian crises.

Professor Roland Bleiker, Dr Emma Hutchison and Honorary Professor David Campbell from Durham University are working on an ARC-funded project examining how images affect the way we feel and respond to political events.

“We live in a visual age and images shape our understanding of the world,” Professor Bleiker said.

“One needs only to recall the chilling images of the 9/11 attack on New York's Twin Towers, Saddam Hussein's statue falling in Baghdad, or the iconic Vietnam war image of Kim Phuc naked, badly burned and fleeing from her South Vietnam village after it was napalmed,” Professor Bleiker said.

The research team is examining why responses to crisis can differ so dramatically. Why do some humanitarian crises capture global attention, solidarity and aid, while other catastrophes fail to generate decisive and generous actions?

To look for answers, the researchers will investigate how Australian media sources have visually represented four different humanitarian crises: genocide in Darfur, The Boxing Day Tsunami, the refugee crisis involving Sri Lankan boatpeople, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic in

Africa.

Professor Bleiker and his team propose that the way in which humanitarian crises are depicted and framed through images in the media shapes how we perceive, debate and respond to those in need.

They believe the emotional nature and impact of images play a particularly important role – one that has not received sufficient scholarly attention to date.

“We hope our research will help us to understand exactly how images shape Australia's international responsibilities and the subsequent allocation of a considerable amount of public funding on humanitarian assistance and aid,” Professor Bleiker said.

These activities are a central part of a larger research effort led by Professor Bleiker in the area of visual politics.

Further information about research being conducted within the School of [Political Science](#) and International Studies is available [online](#).

Provided by University of Queensland

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