

Global Politics – Comparative Theories

Politics Edexcel and AQA – revision notes – based on Hodder Education revision guides

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Realism = a relatively conservative orientation of global politics; states are being characterised by the pursue of self-interest.

Liberalism = a liberal orientation of global politics that is predicated on the assumption that states benefit from cooperation and they are inextricably interconnected.

International anarchy = a lack of an overarching international power/world government thus the international system is inherently chaotic.

Security dilemma = states become defensive so they can protect themselves and that leads to other states acting similarly to protect themselves; it leads to increasing tensions in an anarchic system.

Complex interdependence = predicated on the liberal orientation, in an increasingly globalised world, states are interconnected and interdependent.

Global governance = a process of governing on a global scale.

Refers to the way by which nation-states cooperate in the international system through intergovernmental organisations such as the UN and the World Trade Organisation. Collective measures can be beneficial without having to relinquish sovereignty altogether.

This is not the same as a world government. Whereas liberals consider global governance to be essential to the international system, realists consider it to be ineffective.

Anarchical society = coined by Hedley Bull; the principle that the international system is volatile and states will inevitably clash with one another in the absence of an overarching power. Demonstrated by the '**billiard ball model**'.

Society of states = based on the liberal ideas of interdependence and interconnectedness between states to the extent that the international community can be considered to be a society of states. Like friends tied up together. It is based on the idea of a **global civil society that binds its component states with an increasing cosmopolitan shared identity**.

Realism

Main ideas

Foundation terms = state, security, self-help, sovereignty, survival.

(1) Human nature

- Negative and pessimistic, human beings are selfish and egotistical and always seek to maximise their advantages.
- **Machiavelli, The Prince** (1513), human beings are “insatiable, arrogant, crafty and shifting, and above all malignant, iniquitous, violent and savage.”

(2) State sovereignty

- Refers to the states’ absolute power and authority over its citizens within its borders. The power of authority is rested on the ability to exercise control and use force/impose if necessary.
- States should act according to their own national interests, to protect their interests. It is based on the assumption that human nature is basically selfish.
- Consequently, nation-states are the protagonists in global politics.
- Hard power could and should therefore be used to protect sovereignty.

(3) International anarchy

- Absence of an overarching power in the international system.
- There is no higher authority than the nation-state, thus, states operate within a system that is inherently and inevitably characterised by chaos, and nation-states exist in ‘**self-help**’ world.
- Realist political philosopher **John Mearsheimer** argued that there is no ‘**night watchman**’ that can enforce rules of behaviour of the states in international relations. The international anarchy thus is a feature of the system, but it doesn’t mean that war is inevitable, rather that the threat of war is embedded in the fabric of the system because the states are concerned in maximising their safety against threats = **the security dilemma**.
- **Kenneth Waltz**, coined the term in his book ‘**anarchical society**’ (1977).

(4) Inevitability of war

- The absence of an overarching power above the nation-state level, coupled with the states protecting their own interests, means that war is inevitable and unavoidable in such an international system.
- This argument may lead to a common mistake that realists ‘favour war’ whereas they argue that it is best to acknowledge the feature of international anarchy and its dangers, and the best way to enhance peace is to be prepared for war.

- The international system, therefore, is inevitably **leaning towards conflict**.
- The pursuit of self-interest by the state would lead it to maximise its position and power in all possible means.
- **The billiard ball model** = states are separate entities that will collide and crash into each other. This idea reflects the centre-stage role of each state and because all nation-states are independently sovereign, and like the hard shell of billiard balls, their sovereignty is protected from external forces.
- According to this idea, realists considered the bipolarity of the Cold War between two equally balances superpowers to be **a time of stability** that rested on the **MAD idea** = '**mutually assured destruction**'.

(5) **Security dilemma**

- In an anarchic system, states seek to increase their defences so they can protect themselves, and that effect is rippled to all other states, resulting with inevitable tensions and conflicts.
- In an anarchic system, states are obliged to be self-reliant because there is no overarching authority to turn to. This need leads to developing one's military and building-up alliances with other states. Like 'gang-wars'.
- Thus, the state's attempt to safeguard itself results in other states doing the same: **encouraging arms race, alliance building and sparking conflicts**.

A comparison between realism and conservative ideology

- Both share a pessimistic and negative view of human nature.
- Realists focus on the state with regard to its survival in the international system whereas conservatives examine also the domestic role of the state.
- Both argue about the constant instability and threat of violence.
- Security and survival can be achieved by power building for realists and law and order for conservatists who argue the primary job of the state is to protect its citizens and provide security and stability.
- **Mearsheimer**: "In the anarchic world of international politics, it is better to be Godzilla than Bambi." However, **Edmund Burke** rejected the violence of the French Revolution and advocated hierarchy and authority.
- Both argue that states should focus on survival and security rather than engagement with moral issues that may not help their survival.

Liberalism

Main ideas

(1) Human nature

- While realists predicate their ideas on the selfish pursuit of interests, liberals base their ideas on a more positive platform that perceives individuals to be capable of cooperation that is considered desirable, in most circumstances.
- Global interconnectedness means that it is possible to cultivate cooperation and to develop positive cooperative mechanisms for global issues by the creation of global institutions designated for such activity.
- Peace, cooperation and stability are possible in the international system, and global governance is an effective force of good.
- Liberals thus value the use of **soft power**.

(2) Balance and harmony

- While realists emphasise balance of power, liberals focus on harmony. The balance achieved in a cooperative international system cultivates more than mere balanced 'cold' coexistence, but rather, peace, stability and harmony.
- Nation-states are guided by rationality.

(3) Complex interdependence

- While realists considered states to be independent single entities, liberals argue that they are inextricably intertwined = **the cobweb model**, multi-layered networks of connectivity with diverse avenues of interdependence.
- The collective cooperation creates a system with a complex interdependence.
- Global governance encourages collective cooperation, and nation-states should prioritise collective goals over narrow self-interests.
- In an increasingly global world, states, NGOs and IGOs are all crucial actors in the international system.
- The interdependence manifests itself in economic, political and sociocultural spheres.

(4) Global governance

- In contrast to realists, liberals considered global governance to be essential and effective because it enables states to address and cooperatively resolve conflict at a global level.
- This orientation is necessary to cultivate the **peace and harmony** in a cooperative international system.

- Global governance is an inevitable component in an increasingly globalisation process.
- **Fukuyama** argued that humanity is at the end of its political evolution, **'the end of history'** and the winner is liberal democracy. Global governance is a vehicle to promote liberal democracy. The problem of course is that globalisation erodes the position of the nation-state.

(5) **International organisation**

- International organisations are paramount in a global system with global governance because they are the platform for cooperation between the states.
- Liberals argue that non-state actors are essential actors in an international system that is organised around cooperation and seek stability, including NGOs and IGOS.
- These international institutions are a feature of globalisation, and they foster peace and harmony because they are linked with multilateralism and multipolarity.

(6) **Morality**

- The importance of protection of human rights and the prioritising of human rights in strategies of foreign policy.
- The cobweb model entails mutual responsibility for support and respect based on morality.

(7) **Free trade and democracy**

- According to liberalism, democracies do not engage in war with one another. Thus, the dissemination of democratic liberal ideas is deemed essential.
- Economic growth that fosters stability and free trade is an important part of this process. Thus, it has both an economic and moral rationale.
- The spread of free trade creates 'zones of peace' instead of 'zones of conflict'.

A comparison between liberalism and liberal and socialist ideology

- Liberalism is grounded in optimism that is rooted in assumptions regarding human nature, thus, the possibility of peace and harmony.
- For liberalism, war and conflict are not inevitable, and for Marx and Engles, human beings are essentially social creatures that prefer cooperation over competition.
- Nation-states benefit more from cooperation rather than competition and collective efforts and shared goals are prioritised.
- A moral prism should be used at considering any idea and activity.

A combined approach

Anarchical society of states

This theory is an attempt to balance the arguments between realists and liberals:

- **Hedley Bull, The Anarchical society** (1977) argued that while sovereign states play the central role in the international arena, conflict and war are not inevitable.
- **States can balance their sovereignty with cooperation.**
- This cooperation creates a **global society** despite the anarchical nature of the international system. Therefore, order and stability are derivatives of the anarchical nature of the system, rather than chaos, conflict and wars.

Global relations in the 21st century

(1) Francis Fukuyama (1992) The End of History and the Last Man

At the end of the cold war and following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he developed the argument that liberal democracy and free trade are going to reign supreme as the end of the political evolution, thus eradicating wars because democracies do not fight with one another. While for **Marx** the end of history was the **classless and stateless communism**, for Fukuyama it is '**the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government**'. This global peace is predicated on shared values of mutual interdependence.

(2) Samuel Huntington (1996) The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order

International relations will always be rooted in conflict and war simply because of the continuing struggle for power and entrenching domination.

The difference between Huntington's argument and traditional realism is that the nation-states are not the protagonists in this struggle for power. Rather, it is predicated on **the rivalry between distinct civilisations, each seeking domination: between the Islamic civilisation and Western liberal civilisation**, because the values on which every aspect of life is predicated upon are mutually exclusive. Consequently, there is an inextricable conflict that cannot be bridged.

Differences between realists and liberals

- Human nature and power

Realists with a negative pessimistic view of human beings that are being motivated by satisfying selfish interests versus liberals with a more positive view of the value of cooperation to achieve shared goals to the benefit of all parties.

Realists advocate that global governance will be ineffective at best because states will not relinquish the pursuit of their self-interest and reliance on their ability to protect themselves versus liberals that have faith in global governance to be the mechanism that filters through cooperation and cultivates harmony.

- Security and conflict

Realists argue that states ought to maintain and protect their sovereignty at all costs making conflicts inevitable.

Offensive realists, **Mearsheimer**, argues that states are inherently aggressive and seek to maximise their power. They will temporarily concede to cooperate when it serves their long-term objectives.

Liberals, on the other hand, advocate that states become stronger when they cooperate if only because it prevents sparking conflicts and wars. If the state surrenders a certain degree of sovereignty to overarching international actors (IGOs, SGOs and the EU) the resulting peace and cooperation make the member states stronger.

Liberals support intervention in other states when they failed to act as a legitimate sovereign entity resulting in a humanitarian cost, thus, the use of 'the responsibility to protect' = R2P.

- International organisations and states

Globalisation brings about global issues pertinent to all states in all spheres.

International organisations are indispensable because they provide the necessary platform to address issues that transcend the borders of the nation-states.

Realists argue that international organisations are at best ineffective, and at worst, undermine the state's sovereignty and therefore its power and ability to protect itself. A bipolar system provides the greatest stability because of the balanced threat; or alternatively, a unipolar system that is a hegemonic system with one dominant power with unrivalled power.

Further comparative evaluation

Liberals argue that multipolarity provides the most stability because it encourages cooperation and multilateralism making the different actors accountable to one another.

Some liberals accept that a potential hegemon can be benign and provide security and stability because it is a benevolent global leader. Thus, a hegemon may cooperate with global governance for the sake of peace in the international arena benefiting all parties. (however, that may hold only insofar the hegemon's position as hegemon is not threatened or challenged...)

Global governance = realists argue that it is ineffective compared with liberals that argue it is essential.

Economic = liberals, neo-liberals in particular, argue that global governance fosters economic cooperation (trade blocks and treaties) and a certain degree of regulation making it increasingly effective. Realists argue that economic global governance erodes state sovereignty without paying off economically.

The Washington Consensus = another term referring to economic liberalism that is based on **free markets and free trade** = the nation-states should not protect themselves from foreign competition by applying excessive tariffs and subsidies to their own national industries.

- Liberals argue that the way in which the World Bank and IMF are expanding their programmes means that the Washington Consensus is the dominant orientation in the global arena.

Human rights = liberals emphasise human rights and liberties as part of a deeper commitment to individuals' freedom. Global governance can assist in protecting human rights at the state and international levels. Realists focus on state sovereignty and therefore on the state responsibility towards the welfare and security of its own citizens, including their rights. Intervention though is valued when a state failed its citizens thereby violated their rights; the state is not fulfilling its duty.

Environment = liberals consider environmental issues to magnify the need for international cooperation because, by its nature, such issues transcend the unique concern of individual states. Realists consider global governance in all areas to be void of effective outcomes because ultimately states will take care of their own interests at all costs.

Power = liberals argue that we are in an international constellation of multipolarity characterised by stability because the spread of liberal democracies has made wars between states less likely. **Kaldor** argues that civil internal wars are more frequent than

wars between states. **Fukuyama** argued that liberal democracy won the political battle for a long-lasting supremacy.

Realists consider the current multipolarity of the international system to be unstable and dangerous, especially in comparison with the Cold War bipolar system. Increased regionalism encourages power battles that spill over into the international global arena.

- Nation-states according to realists continue to be motivated by ideas that are underpinning realist principles: in 2014 Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.
- Trump withdrew from the Paris Treaty in 2017 arguing that its terms are not aligned with US economic interests.
- The international community is not pulling forces together to prevent and alleviate humanitarian crises such as in Syria and Yemen.
- Russia and Iran intervened in Syria to entrench their influence.
- Growing defiance of China and Russia.

Regionalism and EU = liberals advocate increased regionalism as a force of cooperation and stability that is worth the surrender of some degree of sovereignty. Realists, on the other hand, take a negative view of any erosion in sovereignty because it undermines the ability of the state to defend itself independently. Regional alliances also tend to amplify the power of states that are stronger than others in the first place.