

LIBERALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

This entry presents an overview of recent trends and developments in liberal international relations theory—both empirical and normative. An effort is made to highlight the link between contemporary liberal scholarship on international relations and the thought of classical liberal figures such as John Locke, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Giuseppe Mazzini, and John Stuart Mill. The first part of the essay introduces key liberal principles and ideas and identifies three different traditions of liberal thought on international relations. Thereafter, we discuss classical and contemporary theories on the relationship between liberal democracy and international peace, followed by an overview of related, recent scholarship on global governance and international cooperation among democracies. The final part of the essay briefly discusses two alternative liberal approaches to the ethics of military intervention and shows, in particular, how liberal theorists, while they all share a fundamental attachment to representative governance and human rights, can fundamentally differ in their support for coercive regime change.

Basic Liberal Principles and Institutions

Liberalism resembles a family portrait of principles and institutions, recognizable by certain characteristics—such as individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity—that all liberal democratic societies, by definition, share to some degree. Political theorists identify liberalism with an essential principle: the importance of the freedom of the individual. Above all, this is a belief in the importance of moral freedom, of the right to be treated and a duty to treat others as ethical subjects and not as objects or means only.

The ideal version of liberalism is marked by a shared commitment to four essential institutions. First, citizens possess juridical equality and other fundamental civic rights such as freedom of religion and the press. Second, the effective sovereigns of the state are representative legislatures deriving their authority from the consent of the electorate and exercising their representative authority free

from all restraint apart from the requirement that basic civic rights be preserved. Most pertinent, for the impact of liberalism on foreign affairs, the state is subject to neither the external authority of other states nor the internal authority of special prerogatives held, for example, by monarchs or military bureaucracies over foreign policy. Third, the economy rests on a recognition of the rights of private property, including the ownership of means of production. Property is justified by individual acquisition (e.g., by labor) or by social agreement or social utility. This excludes state socialism or state capitalism, but it need not exclude market socialism or various forms of the mixed economy. Fourth, economic decisions are predominantly shaped by the forces of supply and demand, domestically and internationally, and are free from strict control by bureaucracies.

Locke, Smith, and Kant: Three Pillars of Liberal Internationalism

Liberal internationalism consists, at its most fundamental level, in the attempt to promote the aforementioned principles and institutions across national borders and apply variations thereof to international relations. The classical realists from Thucydides onward described an international state of war that could be mitigated, but not overcome, short of a world Leviathan. The classical liberals, with important variations, broke with this skeptical tradition and announced the possibility of a state of peace among independent, sovereign states.

Contemporary scholarship on liberalism and international relations looks back at three distinct traditions of liberalism, attributable to three groups of theorists: John Locke—the great founder of modern liberal individualism, who claimed that states have themselves rights derived from individual rights to life and liberty (political independence) and property (territorial integrity), thereby providing the liberal foundations of international law; Adam Smith, Baron de Montesquieu, and Joseph Schumpeter—brilliant explicators of commercial liberalism and what they saw as its natural result, liberal pacifism; and finally, Immanuel Kant and Giuseppe Mazzini—liberal republicans who theorized an internationalism that institutes peace among fellow liberal republics. The liberal republican tradition, while incorporating to some degree

both liberal individualism and commercial liberalism, has exerted the greatest influence on contemporary liberal international relations theory. It argues that liberal democracy leaves a coherent international legacy on foreign affairs: a separate peace. Liberal states are peaceful with each other, but they are also prone to make war on nonliberal states.

A Separate Peace Among Liberal Democracies

The claim that liberal constitutional states behave differently in their foreign relations goes back at least as far as Immanuel Kant and Thomas Paine, but attempts to demonstrate it empirically are more recent. In the 20th century, Clarence Streit (1938) first pointed out the tendency of modern liberal democracies to maintain peace among themselves, and Dean V. Babst (1972) was the first to find statistical support for the hypothesis. Over the past 3 decades, scholars have found strong empirical evidence for the existence of a separate peace among liberal democracies but not between democracies and nondemocracies. Critiques of the separate-peace proposition have focused largely on the underlying causal argument, suggesting that the interdemocratic peace might be simply a by-product of bipolarity and related strategic alliance patterns during the Cold War (see, e.g., Henry Farber & Joanne Gowa, 1997).

Michael Doyle, in his 1997 book *Ways of War and Peace*, argues that two centuries of separate peace among liberal democracies cannot be dismissed as an epiphenomenon, or by-product, of strategic alliances; in fact, stable international alliance patterns among liberal democracies appear to be largely a consequence of shared liberal values and domestic institutions. Doyle develops an original explanation of the separate peace among liberal democracies based on Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace." In Doyle's interpretation, Kant's hypothetical peace treaty shows how liberal republics lead to a dichotomous international politics: peaceful relations—a pacific union—among similarly liberal states and a state of war between liberals and nonliberals.

First, Kant viewed the republic, based on constitutionalism and popular representation, as the ideal form of government; he understood that

republican governments would introduce various institutional restraints on foreign policy and ingrain the habit of respect for individual rights. Of course, we know today that domestic republican restraints do not automatically end war. (If they did, liberal states would not be warlike, which is far from the case.) Kant seems to have been well aware of this: He pointed out that institutional restraints merely introduce republican caution, or hesitation, in place of monarchical caprice. In line with this intuition, modern democratic liberalism does not need to assume either that public opinion directly rules foreign policy or that the entire governmental elite is liberal. It can instead assume that the elite typically manages public affairs but that potentially nonliberal members of the elite have reason to doubt that illiberal policies would be electorally sustained and endorsed by the majority of the democratic public. In other words, liberal states fight only for popular, ostensibly liberal purposes since elites need to be constantly concerned about domestic support for the war effort.

Second, Kant foresaw that liberal republics would progressively establish peace among themselves by means of the pacific union described in his Second Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace. Kant probably had in mind a mutual nonaggression pact or perhaps a collective security agreement with a rudimentary court of arbitration. Complementing the constitutional guarantee of caution, international law adds a second source—a pledge of peaceful respect. As republics emerge (the first source) and as culture progresses, an understanding of the legitimate rights of all citizens and of all republics comes into play; and this, now that caution characterizes policy, sets up the moral foundations for the liberal peace. Correspondingly, international law highlights the importance of Kantian publicity. Domestically, publicity helps ensure that the officials of republics act according to the principles they profess to hold just and the interests of the citizens they claim to represent. Internationally, free speech and the effective communication of accurate conceptions of the political life of foreign peoples are essential to establish and preserve the understanding on which the guarantee of respect depends.

Kant's categorical imperative of course requires that all statesmen and liberal republics reject imperialism and international aggression on moral

grounds. But liberal republics cannot simply assume reciprocal peace with all other states; instead, they understand that states subject to international anarchy are potentially aggressive. Only republics tend to be consensual and constrained, and they are therefore presumed capable by other republics of reliable mutual accommodation. The experience of cooperation among republics helps engender further cooperative behavior when the consequences of state policy are unclear but (potentially) mutually beneficial. In short, fellow liberals benefit from a presumption of amity; nonliberals suffer from a presumption of enmity. Both presumptions may be accurate. Each, however, may in particular cases also be self-fulfilling.

Finally, Kant's cosmopolitan law, discussed in his "Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace," adds material incentives to moral commitments. The cosmopolitan law and the related right to hospitality permit the spirit of commerce to take hold of every nation sooner or later, thus creating incentives for states to promote peace and try to avert war. Building on this classical liberal intuition, modern economic theory holds that under a cooperative international division of labor and free trade according to comparative advantage, each national economy is better off than it would have been under autarchy—hence, each participant acquires an incentive to solve disputes peacefully and avoid policies that would lead others to break mutually advantageous economic ties. Furthermore, the international market removes difficult decisions of production and distribution from the direct sphere of state policy. As a result, a foreign state does not appear to be directly responsible for unfavorable economic outcomes—states can stand aside from, and to some degree above, contentious market rivalries and be ready to step in to resolve crises. Finally, the interdependence of commerce and the related international contacts of state officials help create crosscutting transnational ties that serve as lobbies for mutual accommodation. The variety of ties among liberal states across numerous issue areas also ensures that no single conflict sours an entire relationship by setting off a spiral of reciprocated retaliation.

In recent years, some scholars, such as Georg Cavallar and John MacMillan, have taken issue with Doyle's interpretation of Kant as the father of modern democratic peace theory. According to

these critics, Kant's pacific union, the *foedus pacificum* outlined in his second definitive article, was probably intended to include all states and not just liberal republics. Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati (2009) go one step further and suggest that the first to explicitly anticipate the emergence of a separate peace among constitutional democracies, based on a defensive pact of alliance against despotic states, was not Kant but Giuseppe Mazzini, the 19th-century revolutionary thinker and democratic political activist.

Against these views, Doyle holds that there are good reasons to view Kant as the founding figure of modern democratic peace theory, and he interprets Kant as requiring that peace must be established by a rightful constitution involving all three definitive articles. Most current scholarship on the democratic peace focuses either exclusively on the role of liberal-democratic institutions, liberal norms, or economic interdependence. But Kantian liberal peace theory, as developed by Doyle, is neither solely institutional, nor solely ideological, nor solely economic: It is only together that the three specific strands of liberal institutions, liberal ideas, and the transnational ties that follow from them plausibly connect the characteristics of liberal polities and economies with sustained liberal peace among states that meet the three criteria embedded in the three definitive articles. Statistical data sets on the liberal peace do not adequately code for these three factors together. As noted by Bruce Russett and John Oneal, the most thorough recent empirical test of the liberal peace hypothesis confirms the separate positive effects of democratic institutions and international trade (as well as membership in international organizations), but it does not separately code for liberal norms and related interdemocratic trust, which may indeed be difficult to measure through quantitative analysis.

Global Governance and Cooperation Among Democracies

Classical liberals such as Bentham, Kant, and Mazzini anticipated that international institutions (especially arbitration courts but also more advanced international federations with their own parliamentary assemblies) would reduce uncertainty and improve mutual trust among states,

thereby attenuating the security dilemma and actively promoting international cooperation and world peace. In recent decades, international relations theorists have systematically developed and corroborated this intuition.

Relying on new insights from game theory, scholars during the 1980s and 1990s emphasized that so-called international regimes, consisting of agreed-on international norms, rules, and decision-making procedures, can help states effectively coordinate their policies and collaborate in the production of international public goods, such as free trade, arms control, and environmental protection. Especially, if embedded in formal multilateral institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), regimes crucially improve the availability of information among states in a given issue area, thereby promoting reciprocity and enhancing the reputational costs of noncompliance. As noted by Robert Keohane, institutionalized multilateralism also reduces strategic competition over relative gains and thus further advances international cooperation.

Most international regime theorists accepted Kenneth Waltz's (1979) neorealist assumption of states as black boxes—that is, unitary and rational actors with given interests. Little or no attention was paid to the impact on international cooperation of domestic political processes and dynamics. Likewise, regime scholarship largely disregarded the arguably crucial question of whether prolonged interaction in an institutionalized international setting can fundamentally change states' interests or preferences over outcomes (as opposed to preferences over strategies), thus engendering positive feedback loops of increased overall cooperation. For these reasons, international regime theory is not, properly speaking, liberal, and the term *neoliberal institutionalism* frequently used to identify it is somewhat misleading.

It is only over the past decade or so that liberal international relations theorists have begun to systematically study the relationship between domestic politics and institutionalized international cooperation or global governance. This new scholarship seeks to explain in particular the close international cooperation among liberal democracies as well as higher-than-average levels of delegation by democracies to complex multilateral bodies, such as the

European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), NAFTA, and the WTO (see, e.g., John Ikenberry, 2001; Helen Milner & Andrew Moravcsik, 2009). The reasons that make liberal democracies particularly enthusiastic about international cooperation are manifold: First, transnational actors such as nongovernmental organizations and private corporations thrive in liberal democracies, and they frequently advocate increased international cooperation; second, elected democratic officials rely on delegation to multilateral bodies such as the WTO or the EU to commit to a stable policy line and to internationally lock in fragile domestic policies and constitutional arrangements; and finally, powerful liberal democracies, such as the United States and its allies, voluntarily bind themselves into complex global governance arrangements to demonstrate strategic restraint and create incentives for other states to cooperate, thereby reducing the costs for maintaining international order.

Recent scholarship, such as that of Charles Boehmer and colleagues, has also confirmed the classical liberal intuition that formal international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) or NATO, independently contribute to peace, especially when they are endowed with sophisticated administrative structures and information-gathering capacities. In short, research on global governance and especially on the relationship between democracy and international cooperation is thriving, and it usefully complements liberal scholarship on the democratic peace.

The Ethics of Military Intervention: Should Liberal Democracy Be Imposed?

Liberal thinkers on international relations have always displayed a keen interest in the ethical dimension of foreign policy, based on the assumption that ideas, as well as material interests, ultimately determine state behavior. Thus, questions about the admissibility and desirability of military intervention to spread or uphold liberal values abroad were central to the political thought of seminal figures, such as Kant, Mazzini, and Mill. The classical realists, for their part, did not necessarily dismiss normative concerns entirely (unlike their contemporary followers); yet they were skeptical about the possibility for moral behavior in an

anarchical environment where state survival was assumed to be constantly at stake.

Contemporary liberal theory on military intervention consciously builds on the classics. At the risk of oversimplification, one can identify two groups of liberal scholars in the ongoing normative debate on military intervention and regime change: cosmopolitan interventionists, on the one hand, and liberal internationalists, on the other.

Cosmopolitan interventionists typically build on Kant's moral theory, but they only loosely follow his political thought. They assert that everyone who has the ability to intervene militarily in the face of systematic human rights violations also has a moral duty to do so, subject to criteria of effectiveness and/or proportionality. For cosmopolitans, if a state is tyrannical and systematically oppresses its own population, it "forfeits any respect for its independence." As noted by Brian Barry (1998), by implication, "international [military] intervention to displace the government and, if necessary, place the country under international trusteeship" (p. 160) is always *prima facie* morally justified and indeed required, although prudential considerations might ultimately counsel against the use of force. (See also David Luban, 1980.)

Liberal internationalists, on the other hand, have tended to place greater value on state sovereignty and the attendant international duty of nonintervention. Kant favored absolute nonintervention as a matter of principle: He thought it necessary to stabilize international relations and to ensure that each political community could freely determine its own way of life. Mazzini and Mill were not categorically opposed to military intervention (e.g., they justified it to end protracted civil wars and to save helpless populations from outright slaughter); yet they vigorously opposed the use of force for the purpose of promoting liberty and democracy more generally. They sensed that unless tyranny was defeated domestically, with economic and diplomatic assistance from the outside but crucially without foreign military intervention, any liberty achieved would remain exceedingly fragile and could be hardly sustained in the long run.

Contemporary liberal internationalists such as Michael Walzer (1977) and John Rawls (1999) typically justify (but contrary to the cosmopolitan interventionists do not require) humanitarian

military intervention as a last resort in the face of the worst human rights violations, such as state-sponsored slaughter or genocide, suggesting that sovereignty can be disregarded under similar circumstances. But they crucially insist that military intervention ought to be multilaterally authorized and overseen, ideally by the UN Security Council, if it is to be legitimate. The underlying assumption is that collective authorization and oversight reduce the risk of usurpation by powerful states (Doyle, 2006). Most contemporary liberal internationalists follow their classical forebears and reject policies of forcible democratization on both principled and consequentialist grounds. Democratic transformation is best fostered peacefully and indirectly through trade, investment, and foreign aid. These can help diversify societies, and diversified, growing societies tend to demand responsive governance in the long run.

Finally, most contemporary liberals agree that becoming a democracy is hardly a cure-all. Research suggests that overall and on average, the diffusion and consolidation of liberal democracy within countries reduces the chances of both international and civil war. However, there is also evidence that transitions to democracy often produce political turmoil at the domestic level, unless they are carefully managed. Where the rule of law and public institutions are weak, political elites will be tempted to use nationalist rhetoric and violence to achieve and hold office, which may result in international or civil war. Furthermore, as Doyle (1983) pointed out, the very respect for individual rights and shared commercial interests that establish grounds for peace among liberal democracies may establish grounds for additional conflict in relations between liberal and nonliberal societies. Evidence of this can be found today in relations between the United States and its liberal allies, on the one hand, and a resurgent Russia, emerging China, or defiant Iran, on the other. In short, liberal internationalism is no recipe: It merely offers a set of normative guidelines and empirical hypotheses—some of which are indeed supported by solid evidence—and it needs constant, prudent vigilance to avoid crusades and misguided interventions.

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LIBERALIZATION

Liberalization is a process that reduces state control over the lives of persons subject to the authority of a state. It may have both economic and political dimensions. Economic liberalization reduces state intervention in the marketplace. Political liberalization expands individual liberty and rights, including the right to speak freely against state authorities and to organize with others to oppose those authorities. Economic and political liberalization may or may not go together. Political liberalization may or may not lead to democratization, which also enables a broadly inclusive electorate to unseat an incumbent government.

The concept of liberalization must be understood in the context of liberalism, the dominant modern political philosophy. Liberalism first emerged in the 17th century as a challenge to the notion that monarchs had God-given, absolute authority. Thomas Hobbes defended absolute authority but grounded it not in divine will but rather in the hypothetical agreement of the subjects to yield entirely to a sovereign their natural rights to defend life and property.

John Locke rejected Hobbes's argument. While agreeing that governmental authority is indeed grounded in the consent of the governed, Locke held that people would leave the state of nature and set up a commonwealth only if they could thereby protect their natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Rather than cede their natural rights to a sovereign, the people became the sovereign by virtue of the social contract through which they established the commonwealth. Monarchs were no more than magistrates who could be removed by the sovereign people if they failed to protect natural rights.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in turn, rejected Locke's emphasis on individual rights, returning instead to the Hobbesian concept of ceding natural rights to an absolute sovereign. But Rousseau also rejected Hobbes's idea of a sovereign separate from the people. He envisioned the whole people, acting together, a radically democratic polity in which individual rights had no place. Locke's liberalism was thus bracketed by two absolutisms.

Liberalism after Locke remained committed to protecting individual liberty, but it left behind the