

# Liberalism

- In international relations, liberalism refers to an **emphasis on interdependence between states.**
- Realism stresses continuity in global politics over time, contemporary liberalism sees great changes.

## Key principles:

- Societies and states have become so interdependent by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century that, according to liberalism, the way they relate to each other changed in fundamental ways.
- **Interdependence:** The idea that states and their fortunes are connected to each other.
  - What happens in one state can have effects on another state.
  - Relations between two states can greatly affect the relations between other states.
- Liberalism suggests a particular kind of interdependence - **Complex Interdependence**

Three components of complex interdependence:

1. **Multiple channels**
2. **Multiple issues**
3. **Decline in use and effectiveness of military force**

## 1. **Multiple channels**

- Realism sees states as only significant actors – so global politics is confined to state-to-state relations. On the other side, Liberalism does not deny importance of state-to-state relations – but it proposes that states are not the only important actors in global politics

Non-state actors:

- Transnational corporations (TNCs) e.g. McDonalds, Apple
- Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) e.g. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch
- Intergovernmental organisations e.g. United Nations (UN), European Union (EU)

- According to Liberalism, these are all important international connections **across** state boundaries

Sub-state actors also make up multiple channels in a complex, interdependent world:

- Non-multinational business that buy imported goods from abroad
- Provincial governments
- Individuals – who travel abroad or may have friendships with individuals in other countries

- Liberalism sees a complex web of connections across the globe. Focusing on only state-to-state relations misses an important part of global politics:

- \* States are not the only actors to have interests that drive their actions.
- \* Non-state actors have own goals and interests that may differ to those of the state.

## 2. Multiple issues

- States are not only interested in military security.
- Economic, ideological, religious and cultural issues are part of the global agenda
- Even issues that realists would see as purely domestic can have an effect on the global system:
  - a. E.g. Environmental regulations may be adopted by a state to protect its own citizens but may affect trading partners if imports must meet new regulations
- Therefore, domestic policy can become foreign policy as a result of connections between issues, channels and interdependence between actors

## 3. **Decline in use and effectiveness of military force**

- Complex interdependence means military force is not as effective or frequently used as in the past:
  - Many issues of concern to states and non-state actors do not lend themselves to military action – For example, climate change.
  - No sense in state conquering trading partner through military force to address a trade imbalance – would destroy economic export market.
  - **Complete interdependence means states are constrained in use of military power because this power only harms multiple interests of states and other actors.**

The three components of complex interdependence lead liberalism to expect much more cooperation in global politics than realism does.

### Comparing liberalism and realism:

- Liberals do not deny the existence of conflict but argue cooperation is the norm.
- States trade peacefully; sign non-aggression pacts; share military responsibilities
- Some states have small/no militaries
- Some centuries old military rivalries have been transformed into military/economic partnerships

If the world is so anarchic and dangerous, then why do states cooperate?

States cooperate because it is in their interests to do so...

### Justifying the liberal perspective:

- States realize that hostile actions can harm their interests as much as those of any potential rival.
- The multiple channels that connect non-state actors constrain states.
- Even if leaders recognize security threats and want to employ conflictual means, they often face resistance from public or powerful interest groups.

### The relationship between liberalism and democracy:

- In democracies, where opposition is legal and citizens can hold their leaders to account, multiple channels are more likely to constrain leaders from conflict.
  - **Key point: According to liberal theory, the effects of complex interdependence will be more significant in a more democratic world**