



POLI 150: Foundations of International Relations

Daniel Gustafson

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Today's Class

- What is political science & what is IR?
- Analytic framework
- Classical systemic explanations & more recent IR research



International Politics

- What is politics? What makes something political?
- “Who gets what, when, and how” – Harold Lasswell
- What makes something international?
- When actors interact across state borders or when actions have global implications



- What is science?
- Knowledge about the world based on experiments or observation
- Using evidence and data to learn about the world
- Hard sciences vs. social sciences



- Putting it together, political science relies on observation or experiment to learn about who gets what
- In the academic context, we generally divide the field of political science into subfields
- American politics, comparative politics, political theory, and **international relations**



International Relations

- International relations will be used interchangeably with global/international politics
- Encompasses all interactions between political units that have global implications
- Which actors or units are included? tons!



Levels of Analysis

- Domestic: how do individuals, voters, legislators, interact with domestic institutions to determine foreign policies?
- International: how do states interact with one another or international institutions?
- Transnational: how do groups whose members exist across borders influence domestic and international politics?
- Levels are interconnected, and processes can be bottom-up or top-down



Puzzles





Thinking Theoretically

- To answer these complicated puzzles, it's useful to build theories
- Theories help us describe events, predict phenomena, and prescribe policy solutions
- Are theories always right? No! They generally allow us to make probabilistic claims
- What are some advantages and disadvantages of crafting theories?



The FLS Framework: The Three Is

- The FLS book centers around three concepts: interests, interactions, and institutions
- **Interests:** the goals that actors have or outcomes they hope for
- **Interactions:** the ways in which actors' decisions interact to produce outcomes
- **Institutions:** sets of rules known by actors that structure interactions



Applying the Framework

- When we discover a puzzle, we can tackle it using this framework:
 - 1 Identify the relevant actors and interests
 - 2 Enumerate the choices or strategies they must choose from
 - 3 Think about how those choices interact to produce outcomes
 - 4 Consider whether institutions structure the interaction
 - 5 Profit!



Bargaining & Cooperation

- Many international interactions can be boiled down to one of two types: bargaining or cooperation
- Bargaining: actors divide something they both want
- Cooperation: actors have common interests and need to coordinate to achieve them



Applying the Framework: The Cuban Missile Crisis





Applying the Framework: The Cuban Missile Crisis

- In small groups, discuss:
 - 1 Relevant actors and interests
 - 2 Possible strategies by each actor
 - 3 How choices of all actors interact
 - 4 Consider institutions
 - 5 Outcomes that could have emerged



Analytic Framework vs. Grand Theories

- This framework is relatively new in international relations
- Previously, scholars espoused and adopted ‘grand theories’ to explain international politics
- Each of these theories makes assumptions about the interests, interactions, and institutions that really matter



Realism

- Two key assumptions: states are the dominant actors in international politics and the world is *anarchic*
- What do we mean by anarchy in this context? The absence of binding laws and international institutions to constrain states
- World politics is the Hobbesian state of nature in which every state is constantly preparing for war



Realism

- All states strive to gain power, specifically military power
- Security dilemma: one state's gain in power makes all others insecure
- Bargaining dominates cooperation
- Institutions matter very little



Liberalism

- Many different actors are important: states, individuals, firms, etc.
- Military strength is not an overwhelmingly dominate interest
- States' interests are largely the result of bottom-up pressures
- Wealth can accommodate a number of goals, so states can be seen as wealth-maximizers



Liberalism

- Cooperation is nearly always possible
- International institutions matter a great deal and can help encourage cooperation
- Democratic institutions are incredibly important for peace prospects and cooperation in general



Constructivism

- Concepts like culture, ideas, and identity are important in determining interests
- Norms (i.e. standards of behavior) are created by institutions and guide political actors
- Actors are driven by what they think is appropriate, and this can change over time
- Transnational actors that can shape norms have great sway in world politics



The 'isms

- Which of these is the correct 'grand theory?'
- Modern IR has moved away from these theories toward more 'mid-range' theories
- Why?
 - 1 Privilege certain actors/interests at the expense of others
 - 2 These are system-centric, and therefore struggle to explain change
 - 3 As the number of actors has exploded, grand theories do increasingly poorly