

Key theoretical differences between realists theories politics essay



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International Relations theory involves the progress of conceptual frameworks and theories to assist the understanding and clarification of events and any phenomenon in the world politics in addition to analyzing and acknowledging associated policies and practices.

The question is why we study International Relations Theory. In fact, the concept of International Relations was formally formed prior to the First World War with an outlook to keep away from any possible future mass conflicts and to guarantee every possible peaceful change in the international relations. This continues to be a valuable goal, but at the present the range and complications of world politics require the best possible knowledge of a much wider extent of issues. Additionally, new conceptual frameworks and theories are needed to make better our fulfilled knowledge and grasp in the advancement of more enhanced and improved policies and practices[2]. There are key theoretical differences between realists, liberal and constructive IR theory. Each of the three realists, liberal and constructive IR theories are discussed here.

International relations theory tries to support a conceptual framework which helps international relations to be analyzed properly. Theories of International relations can be seen as coloured eyeglasses which allow the wearers to see only the most prominent events related to the theory.

Advocators of realism may totally take no notice of an event that a constructivist might advance as vital and essential, and vice versa. The three most common theories in this regard are realism, liberalism and constructivism[3].

In this regard, international relations theories can be segmented into positivist/rationalist theories which concentrate on a mainly state-level analysis, and post-positivist ones which include extended meanings of security, scaling from class, to gender, to postcolonial security. There are several conflicting ways of thinking available in IR theory, consisting of constructivism and others. On the other hand, there are two positivist schools of thought which are most common: realism and liberalism; in spite of the fact that constructivism has been considered majority[4].

Moreover, there are great debates in international relations theory. Such debates imply various disagreements among the international relations scholars. Some of them believe that regulation of international relations is sometimes affected by historical narratives. According to them “ no single idea has been more influential” than the idea of the debate between the utopian and realist thinking[5].

One important debate was an emerging dispute among idealists and realists which was dominant in the 1930s and 1940s[6]. In such debates the realist scholars stressed the rebellious nature of international politics and the demand for state survival. Besides, the idealists stressed on the prospect of international institutions in treating any kind of that such as the League of Nations. Nevertheless, there are some others who claimed that identifying and recognizing the debate between realism and idealism as a great debate is sometimes a deceptive misrepresentation and thus they considered what is called great debate fable[7]. A second great debate also happened among the “ scientific IR” scholars who looked for refining scientific ways of

investigation in international relations theory and those who formed further
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interpretative methodology to the theory of international relations. Other great debate was among positivists and post-positivists.

Another IR theory is realism or political realism which has its own differences from other IR theories such as liberalism and constructivism. Realism has been prevailing among international relations since the formation of the discipline[8]. Historically the theory emerged from the old school of thought of writers like Machiavelli, and Rousseau. The manifestation of realism was recognized as a reaction against the interwar idealist thinking. The outburst of World War II was considered by realists as evidence of the cyclical nature of international politics and the fallacy of idealist thinking. There are many strands of current day realist thinking. Yet, the main elements common amongst all realist schools of thought are that of statism, survival, and self-help[9].

The above three notions which are key differences of realism from other theories are discussed hereafter.

Statism is the realists claim that nation states are the major actors in international politics[10]. Thus realism is regarded as a state-centric view of international relations. This makes a difference from the liberal international relations theories that uphold and advocate the roles of non-state actors and international institutions. Such difference is at times put across by identifying a realist world view as one that considers nation states as billiard balls, liberals would regard relationships among states to be more of a cobweb.

As for survival, the realists often consider that the international system is controlled by anarchism. In other words, they consider that there is no

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central authority[11]. Accordingly, international politics is regarded a tussle for power between self-interested states[12].

The third aspect discussed here is self-help. Here, the realists consider that states cannot depend on other states for assistance to guarantee their survival.

Additionally, realism formulates various key assumptions. It suggests that nation-states are serving as a unit and also considered geographically-based actors in a non regulated international system which has no enough control and authority which can regulate and control the interactions among the states because there is no existent true authoritative world government according to them. A second key different aspect is that realism presumes that a lot of sovereign states are regarded main and major actors in the international affairs. Accordingly, the realists consider the states in competition with each other. At this point they regard that a state behaves as a rational self-governing actor in pursuit of its own self-interest with a principal goal to keep and guarantee its own security” and therefore its autonomy and survival. Realism states that in pursuit of their interests, states will try to gather resources, and that relations among states are decided by their relevant levels of power. Such level of power is accordingly decided by the state’s military and economic potentials.

Furthermore, other realist schools of thought, who are considered offensive realists, claim that states are naturally antagonistic. They also believe that protective expansion is restrained only by combating powers. However, some other realists, defensive realists, claim that states are possessed with

the security and persistence of the state's survival. Such defensive view possibly leads to a security problem, because raising one's own security very possibly leads to bigger instability due to the fact that the opponents build up their own arms, making security a zero-sum game where only relevant achievements can be made.

Another important issue relevant to realism in the IR theory in addition to the key differences from other issues is what is called nowadays new-realism or neo-realism, which has another substitute called structural realism. This class of realism has been regarded as an advancement of realism sophisticated by Kenneth Waltz in the Theory of International Politics[13]. Yet, one of the strands of neo-realism was combined with more traditional realists. Such strand, which was developed by Joseph Grieco, is called new-realist thinking and sometimes it is called modern realism[14]. There is another key difference of realists IR theory shown in Waltz's neo-realism, asserting that the effect of structure has to be taken into consideration in illustrating state behavior. Such structure is recognized of two faces. One is the ordering principle of the international system, being regarded as lacking central authority and the other one is the allocation of potentials across units. In addition, Waltz competes traditional realism's focus on traditional military power. He portrays power in terms of the combined abilities and capacities of the state[15].

Another key aspect to discuss here is liberalism in which the key theoretical differences to be stated in regard to its relation with IR theory. Although it has its own differences from idealism, or what is called utopianism, idealism is the ancestor to liberal IR theory. E. H. Carr believed that idealism in IR <https://assignbuster.com/key-theoretical-differences-between-realists-theories-politics-essay/>

referred to a thought school exemplified in American diplomatic history and it was called "Wilsonianism[16]". Prior to liberal IR theory, its ancestor ideal IR theory held that a state should make its internal political philosophy the aim of its foreign policy. For instance, an idealist may claim that ending poverty at home should be twined with solving poverty problem abroad. Such an idealism arose between the "institution-builders" after World War II[17].

Expanding on the liberal theory, the new liberal IR theory claims that state preferences, rather than state capabilities which were known in idealism, are the mainly determining factor of state behavior. Contrasting realism, where the state is recognized as a unitary actor, liberalism permits for plurality or duality in state actions. Accordingly, preferences will change from one state to another, based on some factors like culture, economic system or government type. What is more, liberalism claims that interaction among states includes the political security, as well as economic and cultural. Political security is related to high politics while economy and culture are related to low politics. Accordingly, there are substitutes to chaotic international systems especially in having more chances of cooperation and wider use of power like cultural capital. Another issue assumed here is that unlimited achievements and winnings can be done by cooperation and interdependence. Accordingly it is possible to achieve and to fulfill peace more perfectly.

When compared with other IR theories, the liberal democratic peace theory implies that liberal nation states possess a little chance of going to war with each other. Conflicts in liberal IR theory are fewer than those of realistic IR

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theory. This looks contradictory particularly the realist theories and this empirical claim is currently considered disputable in political science. There are many explanations provided for the democratic peace. Another argument of liberal IR theory states that the economic interdependence lessens the possibility of having wars trading partners[18]. On the other hand, realists profess that economic interdependence grows the possibility of having resulting conflicts.

As it is the case with new-realism, there is also neo-liberalism or new liberal IR theory which is a development of liberal thinking. It claims that international institutions can permit nations or ideas to effectively collaborate in the international system[19].

A third key issue with its key theoretical differences from the two above discussed ones is the constructivist IR theory. Constructivism is related to other terms like social constructivism and idealism[20]. It is considered a challenge to the control, supremacy and governance of neo-liberal and neo-realist international relations theories.[21] Furthermore, the constructivist international relations theories are considered to be regarded with how ideas identify international structure. The key principle of constructivism is the belief that “ International politics is shaped by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture, and social identities”[22] Constructivism claims that international reality is socially formed by the cognitive construction which convey the sense to the material world[23]. The theory came out of debates about the scientific means of IR theories and their role in the creation of international power. According to Emanuel Adler constructivism has a predominant position rationalist and interpretative theories of international

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relations[24]. In addition, constructivist theory disparages the static assumptions of traditional international relations theory and focuses on international relations as a social construction.

Moreover, constructivist IR theory is critical in regard to the existence of the fundamental IR rationalist theories. However, realism tackles chiefly security and material power, while liberal IR theory examines mainly economic interdependence and domestic-level factors. In addition, constructivist IR theory is often concerned with the function of notions in forming the international system. Actually, sometimes there is a coincidence between constructivist IR theory and liberal IR theory; however, they are considered two different schools of thought. By such notions, the constructivists pass on goals, threats, fears, identities, and all other elements of apparent reality that have effects on states and non-state actors in the international system[25]. Constructivists claim that these conceptual factors sometimes have deeper effects, and that they sometimes create materialistic power worries. For instance, the constructivists refer that a rise in the amount of a big country military is probably to be seen as a worry to another country, which might be with disputes with such country. Thus, there must be views in forming international effects. Accordingly, the constructivists don't believe that disorder can be an inflexible base of the international system[26]. Instead, they negotiate that " anarchy is what states make of it"[27]. Finally, the constructivists have the belief that social norms form and alter foreign policies on the long run more than security which realists quote.

To sum up, realists, liberals and constructivists have their own

interpretations, explanations and practices of international relations theories
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which have been discussed above. Although, they might share in some basis of such interpretations, they have some other theoretical differences among one another.