

International Relations Theories-example #1

Liberal theory has been revived in recent decades in reaction to the inability of realists to address some components of contemporary international relations. Efforts were made to account for international phenomena, such as the increasingly global economy, the environment, human rights, and world health issues that could not be adequately explained within the realm of military security or state-based models of analysis. Furthermore, the increasing importance of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the United Nations (UN) and proliferation of NGOs was largely not considered by realist analysis except to assert the primacy of the state's role in empowering such organizations. Thus, liberalism was reintroduced as a paradigm that could explore growing interdependence in the international community.

Liberal theory (and its neoliberal variants) suggests that NGOs have weakened state sovereignty as the international community has become more interdependent (Keohane and Nye, et al 1977; Keohane, 1984; Keohane and Nye 1989; Martin 1992; Hurrell 1995; Weiss and Gordenker, et al 1996; Cleaver 1997; Scholte, 1997; Hochstetler, Clark, and Friedman 2000; Ronit and Schneider 2000). In essence, the inability of states to cope efficiently with issues of complex interdependence has given rise to NGOs. Not only have NGOs managed to challenge governments and their policies, but they have also undermined state sovereignty by directly working against state policies (Cleaver, 1997:1). Another liberal argument is that state sovereignty should be restrained because it interferes with addressing global issues (Hurrell, 1995:147). This differs from the assertion that interdependence will result in the denigration of the state. Instead, the state is deemed to be an obstacle to international cooperation, and therefore should be restricted. Arguably, then, NGOs facilitate efforts to restrain state sovereignty.

During the Cold War, the emphasis of the state was on national security, leaving it up to citizens to mobilize and organize on issues outside of the scope of military affairs. Keohane and Nye (1989) differentiate these interests as 'high' and 'low' political issues, where military security dominates 'high politics' and economic and social affairs represent 'low politics' (24). In response to the blurring of high and low politics, the number of NGOs increased (and is still on the rise today), as citizens needed outlets to voice their concerns. The more interdependent international actors become, the more issues arise that need to be addressed. In turn,

the more issues that surface and demand attention, the more NGOs form to facilitate citizens' concerns. Because NGOs address concerns that fall outside of the scope of the state, the organizations that take on these issues consequently challenge state authority in the process.

The place of globalization theory in the international relations literature is a continuing debate. Some pair globalization theory with neoliberalism because it challenges the same realist core principles (Holsti, 1991:66). Others present globalization theory as a new paradigm (Giddens 1990; Scholte 1997, 2000; Dicken 1998; Held and McGrew 2000). They assert that interdependent issues are "eroding the capacity of nation-states to act independently in the articulation and pursuit of domestic and international policy objectives," thus resulting in the decline of "the power and role of the territorial nation-state" (Held and McGrew, 2000:13). Still others argue that it is not a paradigm within itself, but rather it presents new issues for theorists to consider within the existing paradigms (Drezner 2001).

That NGOs might reinforce state sovereignty is not an issue that has been considered by realists or their liberal challengers. Instead, the realist position on NGOs is that they work through states, as they are the primary political units in the international system (Adler, Crawford, and Donnelly, 1991:5-6). Though states might sponsor an NGO as a donor, work in coordination with one to promote development, or grant NGOs observer status in IGO proceedings, states do so when it benefits their interests.

When realists do admit that NGOs can have an impact on state sovereignty, they see only the negative repercussions of NGO activity. In turn, they move quickly to situate the results in a context that diminishes the effect. For instance, Stephen Krasner (2001) concedes that NGOs are "nibbling at national sovereignty" but justifies his admission by arguing that "their power to affect a country's domestic affairs has been limited when compared to governments, international organizations, and multinational corporations" (26). Realists also argue that states are adaptive to the conditions of international relations, so their sovereignty remains intact as they adjust to changes in the world (Thomson and Krasner 1989; Thomson 1995). Being on the defensive has prevented the opportunity to consider the potentially positive impact that NGOs might have on state sovereignty. Instead, realists have largely ignored, dismissed, or minimized the importance that institutions--

and thus NGOs---may have (Keohane and Nye, et al 1977; Strange 1982; Keohane and Nye 1989; Kegley 1995; Drezner 2001).

Realist thought on NGOs also presents a problem insofar as it bases its assumptions of power on advanced industrial states. Realism is based on the notion of states as the primary actors in the world, but when moving to considerations of developing countries, the situation arises where they do not have the same resources or access to power as the advanced industrialized states. IGOs often serve as a forum for developing states that would otherwise be completely powerless in the international system (Keohane and Nye, 1989:31, 36). They are, in turn, more likely to rely on NGOs for assistance. In some cases, NGOs even substitute for government agencies in poorer, less developed countries, acting as surrogate agencies, providing services states cannot afford to offer to their citizens (Gordenker and Weiss 1996a, 1996b; Stirrat and Henkel 1997; Fisher 1998; Ronit and Schneider, 2000). In this context, NGOs reinforce the sovereignty of weaker states.

In summary, liberalism and globalization theory assert that interdependence increases the number of issues that states cannot appropriately deal with individually. Citizens have responded by forming and supporting NGOs that compensate for the inabilities of states. The result is that NGO activity diminishes state sovereignty. Realists acknowledge that these organizations and issues exist, but reaffirm that states are the primary actors in the international system. They argue that since organizations that do emerge to deal with political issues do so through the state, states make the adequate adjustments in order to reduce the impact of NGOs on state sovereignty. Neither side addresses the anomaly---cases where NGOs, the product of growing interdependence, strengthen state sovereignty.