

Traditional Structural Approaches: Neorealism and Liberalism

- We shall study international **conflict** and **cooperation** for the perspective of **strategic interaction**.
- Traditionally, these have been studied from a **structural perspective** that emphasizes the impact of system structure on state behavior and ignores the internal differences between states.
- The main assumption (which we'll keep) is that the international system is **anarchic**:
 1. there is no central authority to enforce agreements, and so no actor can rely on anything but its own resources;
 2. the use of force is always possible; unlike domestically where the government has a monopoly on the coercive use of force, everyone can potentially use force internationally at any time.

The international system is a self-help system where each member must be prepared to deal with others using force against it, and in doing so cannot depend on anything else but the resources it can muster by itself (either internally by arming or externally with alliances).

- There are two dominant structural theories of IR, and both assume that (a) the international system is anarchic, and (b) states are rational unitary actors. They differ in what objective they assume states maximize:
 1. **Neorealism** assumes states maximize security and predicts that (a) relative gains matter more than absolute gains, (b) the distribution of power tends to balance, and (c) bipolar systems are more stable than multipolar ones.

It distinguishes between **system stability** which refers to survival of each state in the system, and **resource stability** which refers to how much shifting of resources among states there is. States behave in like fashion regardless of their internal composition in seeking security and their actions are conditioned by the structure of the system and their position in it.

They may make mistakes because of uncertainty, which is why bipolar systems are more stable (less uncertainty).

Very pessimistic about cooperation because of concern for relative gains. Focuses exclusively on security issues.

2. **Liberalism** assumes states maximize welfare and predicts that states will cooperate quite a bit when it is in their interest to do so even if there is some conflict of interest.

It focuses on how states can overcome collective action problems: (a) **the tragedy of the commons** which refers to overconsumption of non-excludable divisible goods, and (b) **provision of public goods** which refers to free-riding on efforts of others to provide non-excludable non-divisible goods.

States can create **norms** (shared expectations of behavior) and **regimes** (formal laws, rules, and organizations) to promote cooperation.

According to **hegemonic stability** theory, a single dominant state, the hegemon, can provide public goods and enforce compliance. According to the **strategic repeated interaction** perspective, states can cooperate by pursuing strategies that punish deviant non-cooperative behavior in the short-run, thereby ensuring cooperation in the long run.

Very optimistic about cooperation because absolute gains matter more than relative gains. Focuses exclusively on political economy issues.

- We do not want to separate artificially security and political economy. Instead we shall study the strategic interaction of actors in different environments to see what principles we can glean from that. We can then apply these insights in diverse settings regardless of the area as long as the formal description of the environment matches the environment of the area we are interested in.