

International agreements and international institutions: When do they occur, and why do they matter?

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LSE

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Introduction

Anarchy, hegemony, and cooperation

- Cooperation in the international arena

- Theories of international cooperation

- Accounts of international institutions/agreements

Why sign an international agreement?

Do international agreements/institutions constrain?

- Conduct of war

- The WTO and Trade

- Human rights

A perverse application: Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2011

Conclusion

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Key elements:

- ▶ there are collective action problems at the global level
- ▶ different theories of international relations emphasize different solutions
- ▶ international agreements that are not enforced by a third party can play a role in *structuring reciprocity* at the international level and *coordinating dissent* at the domestic level

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Recurring examples:

- ▶ Conduct of war (Geneva Convention)
- ▶ Trade (WTO)
- ▶ Human rights (UN Convention Against Torture)

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Interdependence in the international system

In many domains, policies/actions in one country affect outcomes in another. For example:

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- ▶ **Environment:** carbon emissions, water pollution
- ▶ **Human rights:** war crimes, refugee crises, localized abuses

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Possible “prisoner’s dilemma” situations abound:

- ▶ **Trade:** trade wars, free-rider problem in provision of effort toward harmonization
- ▶ **Environment:** global common pool problem
- ▶ **Human rights:** mutual disregard for POWs (prisoners of war), free-rider problem in addressing refugee crises and localized domestic abuses

Anarchy in the international system

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Recurring theme: The same was true of the relationships between/among

- ▶ citizens or firms trying to lobby the government in Olson (week 2)
- ▶ interest groups trying influence politicians (week 4)
- ▶ the state and citizens in Weingast (1997) and North and Weingast (1989) (week 7)
- ▶ conflicting states in Fearon (1995) (week 7 & 8)

International collective action

From week 2: The collective action problem may be escaped . . .

1. When voluntary contributions *are* rational
2. When beneficiaries are able to *organize*
3. When cooperation is enforced by reciprocity
4. When values matter

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- ▶ (1) \approx “hegemonic stability theory” / “realism”;
- ▶ (3) \approx “neoliberal institutionalism”, and
- ▶ (4) \approx “constructivist”.

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Each of these theories has its own interpretation of (2).

Hegemonic stability theory

Kindleberger (1973) claim: the breakdown of the international system in the Great Depression (1930s) (trade wars, currency devaluations, etc) was due in part to the absence of a dominant power.

Contrast with 19th-century, when U.K. was dominant, and post-World War II period, when U.S. was hegemon (and U.S.S.R. in its own sphere).

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What does the hegemon do? In part, it provides *global public goods*:

- ▶ Voluntarily provides low trade barriers
- ▶ Provides direction and structure for a global currency system
- ▶ “Policing” the world: pressures and punishes violators of the international order

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Contemporary relevance of HST: From 1980s to now, world system has roughly been **bipolar** \rightarrow **unipolar** \rightarrow **multipolar?** Implications?

Neo-liberal institutionalism

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For example, free trade is achieved through repeated interactions between countries and the ever-present mutual threat of launching a trade war.

Neo-liberal institutionalism (2)

Again, drawing on week 2, when is cooperation in repeated games likely to work?

- ▶ Players interact frequently and extensively
- ▶ Good information
- ▶ Players patient

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Again, contemporary relevance: think about effects of increasing globalization, global transparency, but also regime instability, democracy.

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- ▶ What is a “just war”?
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International institutions/agreements

Each theory has its own view of international institutions:

- ▶ They are one of the hegemon's means of coercion (HST)
- ▶ They structure cooperation among states by providing information, coordinating expectations, and sometimes enforcing agreements (neolib. inst.)
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In all accounts (especially the neoliberal institutional one), international institutions constrain despite not having their own enforcement capabilities.

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Motivations for self-constraint

Suppose for now that international agreements/organizations constrain the state. (We will revisit this.)

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Again, many prisoner's dilemmas:

- ▶ **Trade:** states better off in a free-trade world, even if unilateral tariffs would (temporarily) be beneficial
- ▶ **Environment:** states better off in a clean/cool world, even if unilaterally polluting is preferable
- ▶ **Human rights:** states better off in a world with constraints on conduct of war, even if taking proper care of prisoners is costly

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(You could also think of signing the treaty as a way of constraining **future** governments, i.e. current pro-trade government wants to make it costly for future possibly anti-trade government to restrict trade.)

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Framework

International agreements can constrain at two levels:

- ▶ **Internationally**, by structuring reciprocity
- ▶ **Domestically**, via coordinating dissent

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Let's look at three examples: conduct of war, international trade, and human rights.

Treaties on the conduct of war

- ▶ Treatment of **prisoners and civilians**: Geneva Conventions (19th century roots, expanded 1949, three amendments “protocols” added 1977)
- ▶ Use of **weapons** in war: Hague Conventions (1899, 1906), Geneva Protocol (1929), Biological Weapons Convention (1972), Chemical Weapons Convention (1993)

Geneva Conventions: prisoners of war and civilians detained in a war may not be treated in a degrading manner.

Reciprocity in war

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Treaties on conduct of war can define “cooperation” and “defection” such that reciprocity/retaliation can take place.

Example: U.S. and violations of Geneva Convention

We violated fundamental commitments that the United States of America made when we signed the Geneva Conventions. And we disregarded what might happen to Americans who are held captive in the future. And by the way, those who say our enemies won't abide the Geneva Conventions – they will if they know there's going to be retribution for their violation of it.

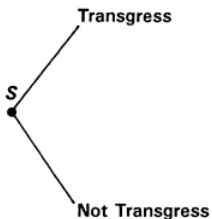
John McCain, 2009, on *Meet the Press*

International commitments as coordination device for domestic audience

FIGURE 2. Payoffs for the Sovereign-Constituency Coordination Game

S Moves first

**Induced subgame between
A and B (payoffs: S,A,B)**



		<i>B</i>	
		Acquiesce	Challenge
<i>A</i>	Acquiesce	8, 2, 2	8, 2, 1
	Challenge	8, 1, 2	0, 7, 7

		<i>B</i>	
		Acquiesce	Challenge
<i>A</i>	Acquiesce	2, 8, 8	2, 8, 7
	Challenge	2, 7, 8	0, 7, 7

Example: U.S. and violations of Geneva Convention



Evidence on compliance

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Findings:

- ▶ **Compliance and form of government:** Democracies that sign comply more than those that do not. (Not so for non-democracies.)
- ▶ **Retaliation/reciprocity:** Whether one country in a conflict complies is highly correlated with whether the other country in the conflict complies. *This is more true of signatories than non-signatories.*

Agreements on trade

- ▶ **Bilateral trade agreements** for centuries, e.g. Offa II and Charlemagne, 796 → Frankish traders permitted in Mercia
- ▶ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (**GATT**): multilateral trade agreement 1946-1993, World Trade Organization (**WTO**) 1993-present
- ▶ Regional and preferential trade agreements

Generally, treaties specify permissible levels of tariffs, quotas, subsidies, etc.

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Again, treaties can **define** “cooperation” and “defection”; WTO and dispute resolution mechanism can **judge** compliance.

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Historical examples of reciprocity in trade:

- ▶ Bilateral agreements for reciprocal reductions
- ▶ Trade wars: e.g. Anglo-Hanse periodic 1300-1700; France and Italy 1880s and 1880s; Great Depression (1930s) (Conybeare, 1985)

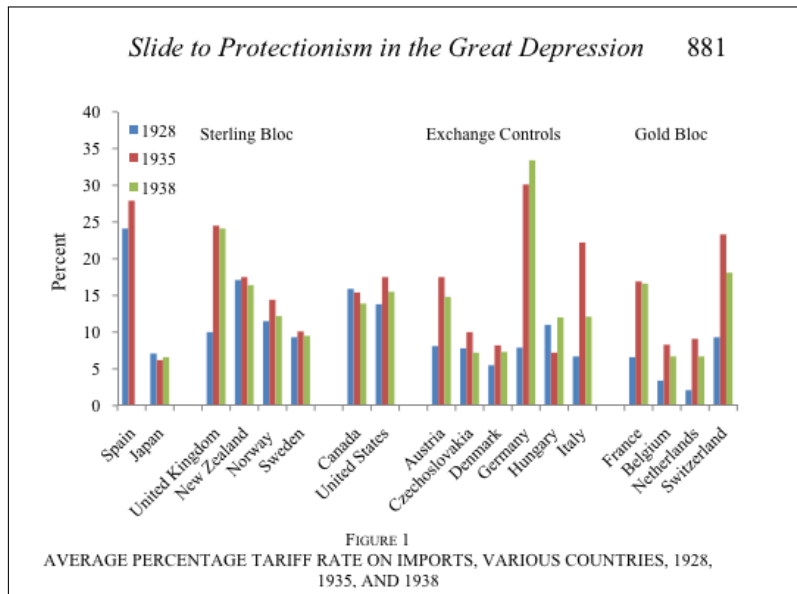
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Restraint **and** absence of restraint.

Example: Great Depression (Eichengreen and Irwin 2010)



Reciprocity in trade under the WTO

Pre-GATT/WTO: “defect” meant “trade war”, with no rules.

Reciprocity in trade under the WTO

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Explanation of GATT principle by US representative, 1947:

We have introduced a new principle in international economic relations. We have asked the nations of the world to confer upon an international organization the right to limit their power to retaliate. We have sought to tame retaliation, to discipline it, to keep it within bounds. By subjecting it to the restraints of international control, we have endeavored to check its spread and growth, to convert it from a weapon of economic warfare to an instrument of international order. (Emphasis added.)

Reciprocity in trade under the WTO: US-Brazil cotton example

- ▶ Brazil initiates WTO complaint against US cotton subsidy program, 2002
- ▶ WTO finds that US program violates WTO principles, 2004 (upheld after revisions, 2007, and appeal, 2008)
- ▶ WTO arbitration panel announces permissible retaliation levels for Brazil, 2009
- ▶ Brazil announces retaliation in cotton as well as “cross-retaliation” against other goods and IP, 2010; U.S. agrees to pay Brazilian cotton farmers in return for dropping cross-retaliation.

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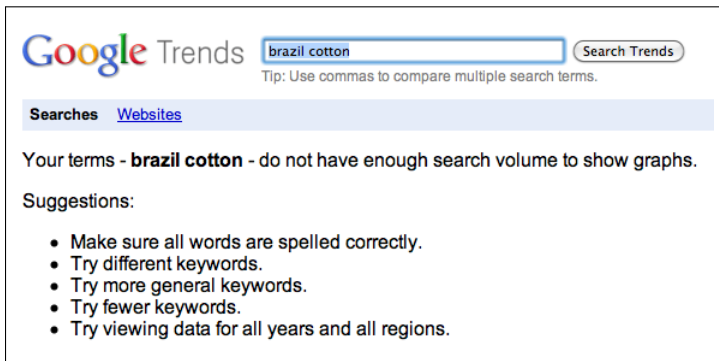
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Allows punishment “on the equilibrium path” (Bagwell and Staiger 2002).

Domestic responses: U.S. and violations of WTO agreements



The screenshot shows the Google Trends interface. At the top left is the Google logo followed by the word 'Trends'. To the right is a search input field containing the text 'brazil cotton' and a 'Search Trends' button. Below the search bar is a tip: 'Tip: Use commas to compare multiple search terms.' Underneath is a navigation bar with 'Searches' and 'Websites' tabs. The main content area displays the message: 'Your terms - **brazil cotton** - do not have enough search volume to show graphs.' Below this is a 'Suggestions:' section with a bulleted list of four tips.

Google Trends

Tip: Use commas to compare multiple search terms.

Searches [Websites](#)

Your terms - **brazil cotton** - do not have enough search volume to show graphs.

Suggestions:

- Make sure all words are spelled correctly.
- Try different keywords.
- Try more general keywords.
- Try fewer keywords.
- Try viewing data for all years and all regions.

Domestic responses: experimental evidence (Tomz, 2008)

TABLE 1. *Effect of international law on policy preferences*

	<i>Opposition to policy (%)</i>
<i>Violates international law</i>	44 (38 to 51)
<i>Does not violate international law</i>	27 (23 to 31)
<i>Difference (effect of int'l law)</i>	17 (10 to 25)

U.S. survey respondents asked about support for proposed trade restrictions on Burma; one group told illegal, the other only told the policy would hurt Burma.

Evidence on compliance with trade rules

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Selection problems and spillovers.

- ▶ **Track record:** Signatories comply with WTO rulings, usually by revising policies but also by adopting permissible retaliation. Countries do not leave the WTO.

Agreements on human rights

Examples:

- ▶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1976: liberty and security of the person, equality of persons before courts and tribunals, ...
- ▶ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1981: women's equality in political life, access to work, education ...
- ▶ Convention Against Torture (CAT), 1987: rejecting torture

Generally, defining good and bad behavior, requiring periodic self-reports

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Generally, defining good and bad behavior, requiring periodic self-reports

Again, **defining** “cooperation” and “defection”.

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(But some treaties e.g. CAT requires signatories to prosecute/extradite violators who come to their territory.)

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But may be difficult to replace or convict political leaders in places where domestic human rights abuses are likely to be found.

Empirical evidence on compliance with human rights treaties

Not encouraging.

- ▶ Hathaway, 2002:
 - ▶ Weak evidence of better behavior among democratic signatories than democratic non-signatories
 - ▶ No evidence of positive effect of signing for non-democracies; in fact non-democratic signatories may be *worse*
- ▶ Hathaway, 2007: Authoritarian regimes that sign tend to have tortured more in the past
- ▶ Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2011: Authoritarian regimes that sign tend to torture more in the *future*.

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CAT and torture: selection bias explanation

A puzzle: Why might autocrats who sign the Convention Against Torture actually torture *more* afterward than those who do not?

One important possible explanation is **selection bias**:

It is not that signing the treaty causes torture; rather, countries that torture are pressured to sign.

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One important possible explanation is **selection bias**:

It is not that signing the treaty causes torture; rather, countries that torture are pressured to sign.

For example, Hathaway (2007) shows that having more anti-torture NGOs increases probability of signing CAT.

CAT and torture: Hollyer and Rosendorff explanation

A puzzle: Why might autocrats who sign the Convention Against Torture actually torture *more* afterward than those who do not?

H&R's explanation is **signaling**/commitment:

States signal resolve (or "burn bridges" as a commitment device) by signing the CAT and then committing torture.

CAT and torture: H&R's key claim about CAT

By signing CAT and then torturing, the state raises the cost of losing power:

If country A signs and country A's leader commits torture and leaves the country, he cannot escape to other countries that have signed. (They must prosecute or extradite him.)

CAT and torture: H&R argument (signaling version)

Citizens unsure of whether the state is “resolved” to hold on to power.

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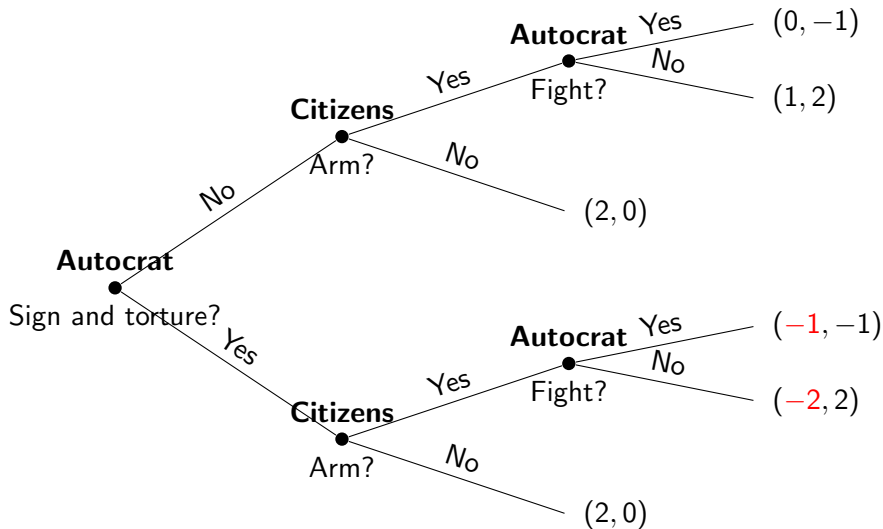
Citizens unsure of whether the state is “resolved” to hold on to power.

By signing CAT and then torturing, the state raises the cost of losing power.

Citizens think, “Only a state that is highly resolved to hold on to power would sign and then commit torture. Perhaps we should not fight.”



CAT & torture: H&R argument (commitment version)



Note: payoffs are (autocrat, citizens)

Introduction

Anarchy, hegemony, and cooperation

- Cooperation in the international arena

- Theories of international cooperation

- Accounts of international institutions/agreements

Why sign an international agreement?

Do international agreements/institutions constrain?

- Conduct of war

- The WTO and Trade

- Human rights

A perverse application: Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2011

Conclusion

Conclusion: international cooperation

- ▶ International system is mostly anarchic: interdependence without external enforcement.
- ▶ Cooperation/collective action can be seen through the same framework we used domestically:
 - ▶ Some public goods provided unilaterally by the “hegemon”
 - ▶ Some provided through reciprocity
 - ▶ Some cooperation due to norms.

International organizations provide public goods and facilitate the other channels as well.

- ▶ Many situations in which states would benefit from signing constraining treaties.

Conclusion: effect of international institutions/agreements

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Signing affects behavior if noncompliant signers experience

- ▶ international costs, e.g. from suspended cooperation
- ▶ domestic costs, e.g. from coordination of domestic opposition.

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Signing affects behavior if noncompliant signers experience

- ▶ international costs, e.g. from suspended cooperation
- ▶ domestic costs, e.g. from coordination of domestic opposition.

In most empirical work there is selection bias and spillovers, but:

- ▶ evidence for effects of signing on behavior in democracies (for conduct of war, human rights (?)), audience costs
- ▶ evidence for effects of signing on trade (?)
- ▶ perverse negative effect of signing in autocracies, perhaps due to use of treaty as signaling device or commitment device

Announcements

- ▶ Encouraged to contact Alex, Hande, or Andy to get feedback on essay topic – email feedback deadline is April 5
- ▶ Next week: no lecture. Andy hosting special office hours Friday 10-12
- ▶ GV478 exam
 - ▶ **Format:** similar to previous years; “mock exam” to be distributed soon
 - ▶ **Date/time:** to be published last day of LT
- ▶ Summer term revision lectures:
 - ▶ Andy: May 10
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- ▶ Now: fill out feedback forms.

Gratitude

Thank you!