
The Rise of Norms and Domestic Politics

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I was editor of *International Organization* from 1986 until the first part of 1991. The two most widely cited articles ever to appear in *International Organization*, Robert Putnam's "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games" and Peter Haas's "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," which was the lead article for a special issue on epistemic communities, appeared while I was editor.¹ These two papers addressed issues that have become ever more important in the study of international relations: the influence of domestic politics on international behavior and systems; and the impact of ideas/norms/identities—the multiplicity of factors associated with nonmaterial considerations—in the study of politics. Our understanding of the relationship between domestic and international factors has grown richer since the late 1980s. But regarding nonmaterial factors, we are still wandering in the wilderness, despite Haas's paper and a number of other notable contributions that appeared in *International Organization* before, during, and after the period when I was editor.

The study of international politics has never been divorced from contemporary events. At a minimum the headlines provide topics for which we deploy our analytic tools. *International Organization* began as a journal that focused on international organizations—often the formal characteristics of these organizations. This changed dramatically when Robert Keohane became the editor. During the 1970s and 1980s *International Organization* became the premier outlet for studies associated with international political economy, or perhaps more accurately stated, the study of the politics of international economic interactions. Until sometime in the 1980s this was regarded as low politics.

High politics dealt with international security. And international security, perhaps the most iconic of all public goods, did not so obviously lend itself to an examination of the domestic political characteristics of states. Realism, which focused on the international distribution of power and had, at best, a highly stylized view of domestic politics (such as Morgenthau's distinction between status quo and imperialist states), dominated both academic and policy discourse. Waltz's neo-realism, which demonstrated with exceptional clarity that many supposedly realist scholars were sneaking in reductionist arguments through the back door, eliminated considerations of domestic politics altogether.² Even Keohane's *After Hegemony* (one of the seminal works in international political economy) assumed that states could be distinguished primarily by their relative capacities rather than their possibly unique domestic characteristics, but

¹ Putnam 1988; Haas 1992.

² Waltz 1979.

it faulted realism for treating the world as zero sum rather than recognizing that a major challenge for states was to avoid market failures that would prevent them from reaching the pareto frontier.³

Realism and neo-realism, which could ignore domestic politics or treat variations in the domestic characteristics of states, could not survive the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Without the constraints imposed by bipolarity, it was almost self-evident that domestic politics would matter. Political economy in particular could hardly avoid distributional questions. Regardless of the specific policy, there were often winners and losers—or, at a minimum, some who gained more than others. A focus on domestic not just international politics, along with the elegance of the formulation, is why Putnam’s conceptualization of two-level games has been so consequential.

However, Putnam was hardly the only author who was focusing on the importance of domestic politics. As Robert Keohane suggested in his comment on his years as editor, important articles published during his editorship, such as Gourevitch’s “second-image-reversed” paper and Katzenstein’s special issue on international relations and domestic structures, showed that attention to domestic politics hardly began in the late 1980s.⁴ One core debate that occurred largely if not exclusively in the pages of *International Organization* involved the relative importance of factors of production as opposed to domestic political institutions. In the spring of 1987 Ronald Rogowski’s article “Trade and the Variety of Democratic Institutions” appeared in *International Organization*.⁵ Rogowski argued that institutions in advanced democratic countries were not autochthonously determined but rather reflected the degree to which a country was dependent on trade. The more dependence on trade, the more important it was that a country have stable policies and be able to resist the rent-seeking and counter-competitive activities of particular groups. These goals, which would contribute to a country’s international competitiveness, could best be achieved with large constituencies, strong parties, and proportional representation. This was not quite the same as the argument for which Rogowski is most famous, which he developed in *Commerce and Coalitions* a few years later, namely his application of the Stolper Samuelson theory relating trade to specific factors within a country, but it was a harbinger of that argument.⁶

In “Invested Interests” published in autumn of 1991, Jeffrey Frieden begins with the increased mobility of capital, especially in the industrialized world, and traces the impact of this development on political preferences and coalitions.⁷ Like Rogowski, he argues that international economic developments drive domestic politics. The alternative to this position was articulated in the same issue of *International Organization* by Geoffrey Garrett and Peter Lange in “Political Responses to Interdependence: What’s ‘Left’ for the Left?”⁸ Garrett and Lange recognize that interdependence has placed a premium on competitiveness

³ Keohane 1984.

⁴ Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1976.

⁵ Rogowski 1987.

⁶ Rogowski 1989.

⁷ Frieden 1991.

⁸ Garret and Lange 1991.

and flexible adjustment in the advanced industrial democracies but they argue that these external pressures have not eliminated differences between the left and the right. There has not been policy or institutional convergence.

The extent to which interdependence and globalization has, or has not, led to a convergence in policies and institutions, especially among advanced industrial democracies, is only one of the dimensions along which the relationship between domestic and international politics were discussed in the pages of *International Organization* in the late 1980s. Peter Evans wrote about Brazil's policies toward the computer industry in "Declining Hegemony and Assertive Industrialization: US–Brazil Conflict in the Computer Industry" published in the spring of 1989.⁹ There were numerous papers in the late 1980s pointing to Japan's unique political economy, reflecting the extent to which Japan appeared to be a potential challenger to the United States.

Obviously, the papers that appeared in *International Organization* more than two decades ago did not produce that holy grail of political science, a logically exhaustive taxonomy of different polities, but these papers did contribute to a still-vibrant discussion about the relationship between domestic and international politics. Robert Putnam's notion of two-level games was a seminal contribution to a robust line of academic inquiry that has, for the good, obfuscated the distinction between comparative and international politics.

The second-most-cited article during my tenure as editor and in *IO*'s history, Peter Haas's introduction to the special issue on epistemic communities published in the winter of 1992 (my last issue as editor) is part of an ongoing discussion of the importance of nonmaterial factors in international relations and politics more generally.¹⁰ Haas's work was not the only paper that addressed this set of issues published in *IO* during my term as editor. Others included Alex Wendt's "The Agent–Structure Problem in International Relations Theory" in the summer of 1987; "Ideas, Institutions, and American Trade Policy" by Judith Goldstein which appeared in winter of 1988, and Ethan Nadelmann's "Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society," which appeared in the fall 1990 issue of *International Organization*.¹¹ (Because Goldstein was and is a colleague, I am sure that that I farmed her paper out to another editor who made the decision to publish and chose the reviewers.) All of these articles, obviously especially Haas's, have been widely cited. These papers, however, and others by scholars such as Martha Finnemore, Kathryn Sikkink, and Michael Barnett (who did not publish in *International Organization* during my tenure as editor but have under other editors), have not generated a research program, at least not in the United States, that is as robust as those associated with analyses of material well-being and power. Given that ideology or beliefs that are not directly generated by concerns about physical power and material well-being play such a prominent role in many of the challenges faced by the United States and other industrialized countries, the relative absence of scholarly concern with such questions is striking.

⁹ Evans 1989.

¹⁰ Haas 1992.

¹¹ Wendt 1987; Goldstein 1988; Nadelmann 1990.

It is impossible to understand the international position of Iran much less the decision by jihadis to sacrifice or put at risk their own lives to kill westerners, without a grasp of how belief systems might affect human behavior. Perhaps because of the dominance of economics in American social science or perhaps because of America's own underlying belief system, which is so focused on economic opportunity (perhaps itself a myth) and openness, the causal impact of ideational, nonmaterial factors, whether scientific knowledge or religious convictions, have not been as deeply explored as material factors. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx wrote that "men make their own history but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."¹² American international relation scholars—and those publishing in *International Organization* are no exception—write about issues of contemporary concern in their own time, but their analyses are conditioned by the analytic frameworks that are available and validated by their colleagues. There are only three big causal factors in the study of politics: material interests, physical power and security, and ideas/identities/norms. We understand the first two pretty well, but not the third, despite the many illuminating articles that have appeared in *IO* over the years.

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¹² Marx 1852, chapter 1.

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