

“COMPARISON OF REALIST AND LIBERAL THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS”

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Abstract: *This article compares two major theories of International Relations—realism and liberalism—by examining their assumptions about human nature, key actors, the international system, and state behavior. Realism views humans and states as inherently self-interested and power-seeking, operating within an anarchic international system where survival and security are the primary goals. From this perspective, states are the dominant actors, and military power and national interests largely determine international outcomes. Liberalism, by contrast, presents a more optimistic view of human behavior and emphasizes the potential for cooperation through rationality, shared interests, and institutions. Liberals recognize the importance of non-state actors such as international organizations, multinational corporations, and NGOs in promoting cooperation and stability.*

The article evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of both theories, noting realism's effectiveness in explaining conflict and power politics, particularly during crises, while also acknowledging its tendency to overlook cooperation and institutional influence. Liberalism's emphasis on cooperation and interdependence is highlighted, though it is criticized for underestimating power politics. Drawing on contemporary geopolitical tensions, particularly U.S.–China relations and disputes in the South China Sea, the article concludes that realism currently provides a more accurate explanation of global politics, where national interests and power considerations often outweigh cooperative ideals.

INTRODUCTION

There are two main theories in the field of international relations (IR): realism and liberalism. They each have their ideas about how people behave, the role of players, the global system, and state behavior.

Realists think that people are selfish and competitive by nature. They say that people and countries are mostly interested in power and safety, which creates an unstable international system where people are always fighting for control. Liberalism, on the other hand, is more positive about people and says that they can work together and think things through. Liberals think that people can be selfish, but they can also be kind, and they think that organizations and shared rules make it possible for countries to work together.





Figure- 1.

Realists believe that states, which are seen as separate entities working in their own best interests, are the main players in international affairs. Realists stress how important armed power and national goals are in determining how a state acts. On the other hand, liberalism recognizes a wider range of players, such as multinational companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations. Liberals say that these groups, along with states, can affect what happens in the world and help bring about peace and agreement (Hawkins, D. 2022).

Realists think that the global system is chaotic, meaning that there is no central power that controls how states act. This makes people pay attention to how power works, and states act strongly to make sure they stay alive. On the other hand, liberals believe that the global system is interdependent, meaning that institutions, trade, and diplomacy are all ways that states and non-state players deal with each other. Liberals think that states work together because they want to find solutions that benefit everyone (Liveable, 2022).

There are good and bad points to both ideas that make them useful in understanding foreign relations. Realism's strength lies in its practical method of understanding how power works and how states act, especially when there is competition and conflict. Realists can explain why states do what they do in times of crisis and war when power is the most important thing. Its focus on conflict and power, on the other hand, can make people see international relations in a way that is set in stone, missing the chance for unity and the power of international institutions.





Liberalism's strong point is that it stresses working together, organizations, and the chance for peace through negotiations and sharing resources. It does a good job of explaining the rise of international groups and deals that try to get states to work together. But liberalism can be criticized for being too optimistic and not taking power politics seriously enough, especially when states put national interests ahead of group goals (Khan, I. 2022).

I believe that realism gives a truer picture of world events today. The ongoing geopolitical tensions, like the fight between the US and China, show how competitive ties between countries are. For example, the disagreements in the South China Sea show how states act aggressively when they care about national security and territorial integrity. This supports the realist view that in an anarchic system, states put power and life first. Even though liberalism stresses working together, recent events around the world show that power relations and national interests often take precedence in how states deal with each other.

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