

Gov 50.08: "Standard IR" and the Rational Baseline

Professor Kathleen E. Powers

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Questions about the course?

- On reading...
- On quantitative work...
- On lack of background in psychology...

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Objectives for Today

- After today, you should be able to...
 - Explain one way that psychology can inform conventional debates in the 3 primary IR paradigms (realism, liberalism, and constructivism).
 - Explain expected utility theory/rational choice approach and basic assumptions.
 - Explain and evaluate the "rational baseline" in international relations research.
 - Differentiate between instrumental and procedural rationality.
 - Make an argument about rational choice and psychological approaches complement or compete with one another.

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Standard IR: The Paradigms

- A crash course (adapted from Snyder 2004, p. 59):

	Realism	Liberalism	Constructivism
Core ideas	Self-interested states compete for power and/or security; system is anarchic	Economic interdependence, shared democracy, and institutions promote cooperation	Ideas, norms, values, and identities shape state behavior
Key actors	States (who are all functionally similar)	States & international institutions; some emphasis on domestic political actors	Everyone (including individuals and non-governmental organizations)
Main instruments	Power (measurable capabilities)	International institutions, global trade	Ideas and values
Example	International institutions are a reflection of state power (no independent effect)	International institutions can shape state behavior (provide incentives to cooperate)	International institutions can create and solidify new norms, which can change behavior

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How can psychology inform IR?

- What are some of the assumptions that standard IR paradigms make about individuals or behavior?



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How can psychology inform IR?

- Rathbun (2011) "Before Hegemony: Generalized Trust and the Creation and Design of International Security Organizations"
 - What is the question?
 - How would a (non-psychological) IR scholar answer this question?
 - "They are created in the absence of strategic trust in order to provide strategic trust" (p. 246).
 - How does Rathbun answer this question?
 - What evidence does he provide?
 - What remains puzzling or debatable about his argument or evidence?

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How can psychology inform IR?

- Active learning:
 - **Realists:** Do states maximize security, or power?
 - **Institutionalists:** Why do states comply with international institutions?
 - **Constructivists:** Why don't states use certain types of weapons, like nuclear weapons, even when it is materially useful?
- **Step 1:** (independently)
 - What is the standard IR answer or debate?
 - What is the psychological contribution to that question or debate?
- **Step 2:** (with others who had the same paradigm)
 - Clarify answers to both questions, come to a consensus
- **Step 3:** (in groups of 3 that represent each paradigm)
 - Teach the answers for the questions you had.

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Rational Choice in IR

- Much IR scholarship relies on the assumption that states – and their leaders – are “rational” actors.
- Examples?
 - Neorealism
 - Neoliberal institutionalism
 - Rational deterrence

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Rational Choice in IR

- Rational choice “explains both individual and collective outcomes in terms of *individual goal-seeking under constraints*” (Snidal 2012, p. 87).

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...individual goal-seeking

- Instrumental rationality: "actors making decisions that maximize their expected utility in light of structural constraints"
- Actors must form preferences over outcomes, based on the **utility** of each (the value they anticipate from a choice).

$$EU/EV = \sum p * v$$

- EU/EV: the weighted average of the possible outcomes
- p: the likelihood that a given outcome will occur
- v: the value of the outcome (payoff)

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...individual goal-seeking

- Instrumental rationality: "actors making decisions that maximize their expected utility in light of structural constraints"
- Actors must form preferences over outcomes, based on the **utility** of each (the value they anticipate from a choice).
- These preferences are **transitive** and **invariant**.

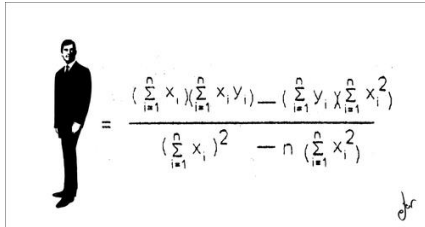
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...under constraints

- Features of the environment constrain an actors' ability to maximize utility.
 - E.g., Balance of power: Is the actor in a weak or strong bargaining position?

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Procedural Rationality: *Homo Economicus*



$$= \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^n x_i)(\sum_{i=1}^n x_i y_i) - (\sum_{i=1}^n y_i)(\sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2)}{(\sum_{i=1}^n x_i)^2 - n(\sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2)}$$

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Procedural Rationality: *Homo Economicus*



Adapted from Figure 5.2 in Mingst and Arreguin-Toft (2011)

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Procedural rationality

- This is hard to do.
- Are human decision-makers “procedurally rational”? What does Mercer (2005) conclude about this? And Rathbun, Kertzer, and Paradis (2017)?



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Discussion Questions

- Is procedural rationality necessary for instrumental rationality?
- (NOTE: We will begin class on Tuesday with a discussion of the questions below).
- Do international relations theories need a "rational baseline"? In other words, should all theories compare outcomes to what a rational model would expect?
- Do psychological and rational choice approaches complement or compete with each other?

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Fin.

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