

Explaining Cooperation among Illiberal States :

A Social Constructivist Challenge*

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· **Key words** : cooperation, illiberal states, social constructivism, democracy, neoliberal institutionalism

[ABSTRACT]

Cooperation among illiberal states is likely to occur and be sustained when there is a commonality of interest as well as ideas. While realists would dismiss any notions of international cooperation growing out of factors other than interests defined in terms of power, some liberals (with varying degrees of an institutionalist bent) realize the importance of norms shared among states. For some reasons, however, their insight has been limited to the analysis of cooperation among democracies. Instead of covering nondemocratic cases for the test, early neoliberal institutionalist literature tends to assume the causal relationship between

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democracy and interstate cooperation. Recent empirical studies show that autocratic peace is observed in non-commercial issue areas, while economic openness is more closely related to democracy. I focus on illiberal states, not democracies, to emphasize dynamic aspects of international cooperation. A social constructivist explanation is given as a corrective to the extant theories of democratic peace or democratic cooperation that fail to consider the intertwining relationship between liberal and illiberal states in various issue areas. Illiberal states have good reason to gather forces against the seeming and/or actual coalition of liberal states when the latter poses a threat to their cherished social purpose.

I . Introduction

Scholars of international relations, particularly those working in the subfield of international political economy, have long sought to explain under what circumstances states choose to cooperate with each other under anarchy. One way to explain the rare conditions of cooperation among self-interested states is to look into similarities of domestic political (and economic) regimes. Particularly, there is no dearth of theoretical and empirical arguments on the close association between democracy as a regime type and international cooperation as a course of action chosen by states. Neoliberal institutionalists have suggested well-articulated theoretical arguments on the close links between democracy and cooperative behavior on the international scene. Empirical works have been produced and are still being produced to test the democracy-cooperation linkage.¹⁾ Cases where democratic countries fail to make credible commitments to other democracies or multilateral organizations are not difficult to find. But it is widely accepted that

1) Examples include: E. Mansfield, H. Milner, and B. Rosendorff, "Why Democracies Cooperate More," *International Organization* 56 (2002), pp. 477-513; K. Remmer, "Does Democracy Promote Interstate Cooperation?" *International Studies Quarterly* 42-1 (1998), pp. 25-52; S. Polacheck, "Why Democracies Cooperate More and Fight Less," *Review of International Economics* 5-3 (1997), pp. 295-309; M. Mousseau, "Democracy and Militarized Interstate Collaboration," *Journal of Peace Research* 34-1 (1997), pp. 73-87.

democracy as a regime type is more likely to engage in cooperative behavior due to its characteristics such as a higher level of domestic audience costs.²⁾

Instead of trying to debunk the democracy-cooperation linkage, I argue that cooperation among illiberal states is likely to occur and be sustained when there is a commonality of interest as well as ideas. While realists would dismiss any notions of international cooperation growing out of factors other than interests defined in terms of power, some liberals (with varying degrees of an institutionalist bent) realize the importance of norms shared among states as a shaper of cooperative behavior.³⁾ For some reasons, however, their insight has been limited to the analysis of cooperation among democracies. Instead of covering nondemocratic cases for the test, early neoliberal institutionalist literature tends to assume the causal relationship between democracy and interstate cooperation. Recent empirical studies show that autocratic peace is observed in non-commercial issue areas,⁴⁾ while economic openness is more closely related to democracy. I focus on illiberal states, not democracies, to emphasize dynamic aspects of international cooperation that will be emphasized in a typology constructed later. A social constructivist explanation is given as a corrective to the extant theories of democratic peace or democratic cooperation that fail to consider the intertwining relationship between liberal and illiberal states in various issue areas. Illiberal states have good reason to gather forces against the seeming and/or actual coalition of liberal states when the latter poses a threat to their cherished social purpose.

With the partial exceptions of the European Union and some regional organizations including the United States, most of regional organizations are composed of illiberal states that include both democracies and autocracies. There are easy explanations for the prevalence of regional organizations as a form of interstate cooperation among illiberal states. First, there are more geographical regions inhabiting illiberal states than those inhabiting liberal

2) M. Tomz, "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations," *International Organization* 61-4 (2007), pp. 821-840. A rebuttal of the dominant interpretation is found in J. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs," *International Organization* 62-1 (2008), pp. 35-64.

3) J. Goldstein and R. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy," in idem (eds.), *Ideas and Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3-30. T. Risse-Kappen's *Cooperation among Democracies* (1995) provides a good example of the "liberal" account of how norms shaped the transatlantic relationship.

4) M. Perceny, C. Beer, and S. Sanchez-Terry, "Dictatorial Peace?" *American Political Science Review* 96-1 (2002), pp. 15-26.

states. Geographical proximity tends to go with cultural similarities, which in turn are closely related to political similarities. Second, many regional organizations in the “illiberal zone” of the world were created with the tacit intention of responding to the “globalization of liberalization.”⁵⁾ For the purpose of this article, the latter provides us with a clue to identify what influences illiberal states to hang together. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent triumphalism of economic and political liberalism have sharply limited illiberal states’ room to maneuver in dealing with issues on their own terms. Faced with the encroachment of market forces unleashed by liberal states in North America, Western Europe, and (partly) Japan, illiberal states in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and recently Africa have felt the need to strengthen collective action to defend their position in international trade and finance. Recent years have witnessed more cases of cooperative behavior in regional organizations such as MERCOSUR, ASEAN, and the African Union (AU). Particularly, the AU has since the 1990s made significant progress in security issue areas.

For reasons that will be discussed in Section 3, most of illiberal states have been considered “less likely” to cooperate. Skepticism of illiberal cooperation derives from the static nature of rationalist research programs. Regardless of regime types, according to neorealists and even neoclassical realists, it is a given that states seek their national interest, that is, determined by their location, size, wealth, and most importantly their position within the distribution of power at the international level. Many neoliberal institutionalists have looked at domestic sources of cooperative behavior and hinted at the low possibility of illiberal cooperation largely because institutions are very slow to change. Social constructivists counter the realist argument by pointing out that the national interest is not a given, rather it is a result of intersubjective understanding that reflects the experience, memory, and aspiration of a particular state. Unlike neoliberal institutionalists who view the institutions as a fixity, social constructivists stress that institutions are what states (or agents) make of them.

How to define “illiberal” states is also a daunting task. Does the term

5) The phrase is borrowed from B. Simmons and Z. Elkins, “The Globalization of Liberalization,” *American Political Science Review* 98-1 (2004), pp. 171-189. Simmons and Elkins focus on the spread of economic ideas and policies, while I use the term in a wider sense to include such issues as human rights and the environment.

illiberal mean nondemocratic? If so, why not use a seemingly straightforward term “nondemocratic” instead of quite a fuzzy one such as illiberal? Although the two are interchangeable in a good number of cases, illiberal is preferred here for the following analytical purposes.

The term “illiberal” covers not just a larger number of country cases than nondemocratic does but also allows us to understand interstate cooperation and discord more substantively. Democracy and the lack thereof are much easier to measure than liberalism and the lack thereof because a procedural notion of democracy is widely accepted. As a result of the global spread of democracy, according to one estimate, we now have 125 democracies (as compared to 40 in the early 1980s) with varying levels of economic and social development.⁶⁾ However, due to the lack or underdevelopment of liberal elements or what Robert Keohane and his co-authors call “constitutional democracy,”⁷⁾ it quickly became clear that many newly democratizing countries were not just a far cry from the norms of liberal democracy but needed a new category. Fareed Zakaria provides a useful characterization of those “illiberal democracies” by describing them as a mixture of elections and authoritarianism. Without liberalizing first their economy and society, it is argued, illiberal democracies face insecurity, albeit not breakdown.⁸⁾ Thus the category of illiberal states includes both illiberal democracies and illiberal autocracies. Liberalizing autocracies can also fall under the rubric of illiberal states.

As a dimension of domestic regime, liberalism denotes quite different things from what democracy does, although the two overlap in some respects. Since there are so many different definitions of liberalism, here I use an indirect definition of it by borrowing the notion of “constitutional democracy,” which is composed of three strands of democratic value: combating special interests, protecting individual and minority rights, and fostering collective deliberation.⁹⁾ It is closer to a political definition of liberalism, and for that reason those components are also included in some definitions of democracy.

6) W. Cole and E. Jensen, “Norms and Regional Architecture,” in M. Green and B. Gill (eds.), *Asia's New Multilateralism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 243.

7) R. Keohane, S. Macedo, and A. Moravcsik, “Democracy-Enhancing Multilateralism,” *International Organization* 63 (2009), pp. 5-9.

8) F. Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2003).

9) R. Keohane, S. Macedo, and A. Moravcsik, *op. cit.*

But it should be added that liberalism and the lack thereof are about the relationship between the individual and the state (or community).

Another source of terminological confusion results because most developing or less developed countries have a nondemocratic and/or illiberal polity.¹⁰⁾ Since the term developing covers a larger number of cases than illiberal does, it could be a better choice particularly for researchers who are interested in hypothesis testing with as many cases as possible. However, the terms “liberal” and “illiberal” are used to indicate the multiple sources of international cooperation and discord. From the perspective of social constructivism suggested in this article, states are willing to cooperate with other states in some issue areas when they understand that nationally defined interests and social purposes may coexist. Particularly, the use of the liberal/illiberal distinction allows us to look at the cases of illiberal states with a relatively high level of economic development taking issue with the predominant liberal world order.

My argument proceeds as follows. Section two provides a brief overview of the existing literature on cooperation by focusing on how neoliberal institutionalists conceptualized the term in a way that legitimizes the liberal bias. Section three discusses the assumed demerits of illiberal states in terms of their disposition to engage in cooperation. Section four examines social constructivist notions of cooperation by constructing a typology of cooperation among illiberal states. I conclude with a discussion on the links between multilateralism and illiberalism.

II. The Conventional and Comfortable Wisdom: Cooperation among Liberal States

This section provides a brief overview of the existing literature on cooperation among states, which has long been dominated by neoliberal

10) One may observe old democracies in developing countries such as Costa Rica, which is the only Latin American country included in the list of the world's 22 older democracies compiled by Robert Dahl in his 2001 book, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* According to the IMF's 2010 estimate, Costa Rica's GDP per capita is \$10,686 based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP), which means that the country has a typical developing economy. See the data at <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo>> (accessed on 26 September 2010).

institutionalism and/or rationalism. From the perspective of neoliberal institutionalists who usually employ rationalist research programs, cooperation among states is more likely and made more feasible when participating countries in a given issue area have common interests and, more importantly, similar institutional arrangements through which one state's preferences and commitments are made clear to others. Neoliberal institutionalists and even scholars who do not subscribe to the research program have widely used Robert Keohane's definition of cooperation as "requir[ing] that the actions of separate individuals or organizations—which are not in pre-existent harmony—be brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination."¹¹) With a definition almost universally accepted, however, scholars have long debated within a theoretical paradigm and/or across different paradigms over the question: under what circumstances cooperation is achieved.

For most IR scholars, the starting point when it comes to asking the question, "how does cooperation arise?" is the neorealist position that cooperation among states is a rare thing, if not impossible. Realist teachings have long indoctrinated the students and practitioners of international relations that states act as if they are billiard balls that understand only the logic of power and relative gains. States respond to power, not to social purpose. Furthermore, some realists would argue that social purpose or national identity, when it is projected abroad, becomes nothing other than a component of power. Realists may not hesitate to call social purpose by a different name such as "soft power," but they will be quick to add that soft power complements hard power, not the other way around.¹²) From this perspective, US hegemony at the international level, for example, should not be confused with bourgeois hegemony interpreted by Antonio Gramsci as the combination of force and consent at the domestic level. Predominant power allows ideology and other cultural forms of influence to play a significant role in shaping cooperative behavior among states. The single most important thing for realists to consider regarding the prospect of international cooperation is systemic constraints on state behavior that can be epitomized as anarchy.¹³)

11) R. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 51.

12) J. Bially Mattern, "Why 'Soft Power' Isn't So Soft," *Millennium* 33-3 (2005), pp. 583-612.

Joseph Grieco as a realist has offered a balanced account of the state of the art in the study of international cooperation by pointing out that neoliberal institutionalists misconstrued the meaning of anarchy in a way that conceptualizes states as “rational egoists.” In a typical Prisoner’s Dilemma game imagined by neoliberal institutionalists, states as rational egoists are concerned about the possibility of being cheated by other states. In contrast, as part of his challenge to neoliberal institutionalist emphasis on absolute gains, Grieco describes states as “defensive positionalists” who are concerned about physical survival and political independence as well as the danger of being cheated in a world without any supranational authority. States as defensive positionalists, according to Grieco, reluctantly engage in cooperation with other states with an expectation that their concession will be rewarded with proportionate compensation.¹⁴⁾ Realists like Grieco wanted, for the most part, to demonstrate that cooperation among nations rarely occurs mainly because states have a universal incentive to avoid any kinds of threat to their physical and political security. The golden rule applies to each and every state regardless of the political character of particular states.

Since the debate with realists was mostly on absolute versus relative gains, neoliberal institutionalists have put aside a more fundamental issue of the source and nature of interstate cooperation. Neoliberal institutionalists could indulge in constructing various hypotheses about the conditions of cooperation, while safely assuming that there are common interests for states as rational actors to care about. Although some neoliberals follow Max Weber’s dictum that “[n]ot ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men’s conduct,”¹⁵⁾ ideational factors as sources of interstate cooperation were not taken seriously. As neoliberals are predisposed to explain the lack of cooperation as a result of the failure to overcome collective action problems, employing ideas about cooperation itself as an explanatory variable is tantamount to looking into states’ varying incentives

13) That does not, however, mean that the structure of the international system favors competition over cooperation. As Charles Glaser cogently argued, structure may induce states to cooperate as a strategy of self-help. C. Glaser, “Realists as Optimists,” *International Security* 19-3 (1994-1995), p. 31.

14) J. Grieco, *Cooperation among Nations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 10 and p. 47.

15) M. Weber, *From Max Weber*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1948), p. 280; J. Goldstein and R. Keohane, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

or disincentives to engage in cooperative behavior. A typical neoliberal would argue that a country's negative view about multilateral trade liberalization is an outcome of cost-benefit analysis and needs no further explanation. Instead, neoliberal institutionalists have focused on the preconditions of cooperation from the perspective of strategic game theory. Following Robert Axelrod who provided the field of international relations with such conceptual tools as Tit-for-Tat strategy and iterated games,¹⁶⁾ neoliberal institutionalist scholarship on cooperation has been premised upon the game-theoretic notion of two players, whether they be individuals, firms, or, states, interacting with each other with a common understanding of the situation.¹⁷⁾ Two players, while most of the time finding themselves separated from each other, have a common knowledge of the rule of the game. You will pursue your own interests with whatever means is available; and he or she sitting in the next room will do the same. The eventual result is not known even though you want to know exactly how big your share should be. But as long as both players stick to the rules and keep the game going, the end result is likely to be mutual benefit with various distributive outcomes.

Having said that, there is no good reason why we should confine the evolution of cooperation to two "democratic" or "liberal" players. Autocratic or illiberal players should be assumed to participate in the game if they are well aware of and willing to abide by its rules. As Lisa Martin points out, however, "[c]ommitment is the keystone of international politics," particularly when states need to find ways to seek mutual benefit in a world that "does not provide the social context that allows for mutual trust among individuals in other social settings."¹⁸⁾ The state makes commitments in its dealings with other states in a very formalized and impersonal way. This is so because the state is not a unitary actor in the sense that an individual is assumed to be both the principal and the agent in his or her decision making. In contrast, the state is disaggregated into the government and society; regimes and institutions; agencies and administrative bodies; and powerful individuals as well.

For the reasons mentioned above, neoliberal institutionalists have produced a sizable body of work on the domestic sources of international cooperation.

16) R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1984).

17) H. Milner, "International Theories of Cooperation among Nations," *World Politics* 44-3 (1992), pp. 470-473.

18) L. Martin, *Democratic Commitments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 3.

According to Lisa Martin, democratic institutions such as legislatures play a more important role than is assumed in enhancing the credibility of international commitments. Beth Simmons has provided an estimation of domestic institutional variables such as electoral systems and labor strength in shaping national responses to the troubled international monetary system during the interwar years.¹⁹⁾ The neoliberal institutionalist literature focusing on domestic political and institutional arrangements is divided into two groups. One group of scholars is interested in showing how regime types affect the prospect of international cooperation by examining the nature of democratic political institutions. Another group of scholars is interested in explaining national variations in cooperative behavior within one regime type by looking at a set of political and institutional arrangements. And, as Brett Ashley Leeds demonstrates, the same set of domestic arrangements can be employed to explain why democratic dyads and autocratic dyads are more likely to cooperate than “dyads composed of one democracy and one autocracy.”²⁰⁾

Neoliberals’ preoccupation with cooperation among liberal states has also a normative dimension, although it is kept implicit by most scholars who are looking at the correlation between democracy and interstate cooperation. If states with a system of democratic governance, either by chance or by design, are found to be more cooperative in their foreign relations, the end result is assumed to be a more peaceful and stable world. That is why democracy-cooperation linkage comes as not just the conventional but also comfortable wisdom.

III. Are Illiberal States Really Unfit for Cooperation?

Both structural realists and neoliberal institutionalists share the view that the prospect of illiberal cooperation is dim, albeit for different reasons. For structural realists, the meager possibility of cooperation can be predicted with relative ease because the international structure shapes state preferences in a way that maximizes relative gains in both security and economic affairs. And most importantly, structural realists do not see any significant differences

19) *Ibid.*; B. Simmons, *Who Adjusts?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

20) B. Leeds, “Domestic Political Institutions, Credible Commitments, and International Cooperation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 43-4 (1999), p. 979.

between liberal and illiberal states in their incentive to avoid the loss of relative gains. Therefore, structural realists have not elaborated on the list of reasons why illiberal states are unfit for cooperation. In contrast, neoliberal institutionalists have offered some clues to the presumed mismatch between illiberal states and international cooperation.

Firstly, there are too many players in the game of illiberal cooperation as compared to the one of liberal cooperation. Having a larger number of players means that more free-riders exist than you could expect to see in the game of liberal cooperation. This problem becomes acute when one accepts the fact that illiberal states are at the same time economically developing or less developed countries. A majority of illiberal states constitute the much wider bottom of the global pyramid in terms of socioeconomic development. When there are too many players in search of power and security in international affairs, resources are deemed much scarcer than they actually are. Stakes in the game are conceived as larger, and states under the circumstances are more likely to care about relative gains rather than absolute gains from international policy coordination.

Secondly, illiberal states are prevented from engaging in long-term cooperation with other states, both liberal and illiberal, due to a short time horizon. Considering that most illiberal states are under some forms of dictatorship or authoritarian rule, electoral hurdles to international cooperation should not be as high as they are in democracies. Autocratic rulers can be said to be relatively free from the pressure of playing two-level games and, therefore, make international commitments without being subject to the time pressure generated by democratically set election schedules. Such an argument seems intuitively plausible but understates the possibility of political instability due to the institutional weaknesses of nondemocratic regimes. Since the institutions governing regime change do not exist, and, even if they do, those institutions and the political reality bear a remote resemblance to each other, autocratic rulers are highly sensitive to their political survival and possible threats to it. When autocratic rulers have a weak sense of political legitimacy, they are easily tempted to pursue high-profile policy achievements particularly in foreign relations.

And thirdly, illiberal states are considered to be lacking in institutional arrangements which help to enhance the credibility of international commitments. As electoral control of autocratic rulers is not easy, political

oppositions in illiberal states are likely to resort to direct action including mass resistance, which in turn increases the possibility of the regime's sudden collapse. With little or no institutional checkpoints put in place, autocratic rulers are likely to make a hasty and/or wrong decision about dealings with other countries. Even when autocratic rulers make a sound decision that is expected to bring mutual benefits to both states, cooperation among illiberal states tends to be short-lived and in many cases aborted largely due to the fear that your counterpart's regime may be embroiled in radical political change and social transformation. Ironically, a newly established democratic regime may revoke prior commitments made by a previous authoritarian government, even though international policy coordination agreed upon by autocratic rulers is deemed mutually beneficial.

Those factors deemed responsible for illiberal states' failure to pursue cooperation among themselves have been conceived of by neoliberal institutionalists who tend to assume the universality of state preferences. As Lisa Martin put it, they "assume that all [state] actors have similar patterns of preferences, that they have symmetric ordinal preference rankings"²¹⁾ regardless of the nature of domestic political and institutional arrangements. If any significant differences are not observed in the goals sought by and the strategies used by states, and at the same time significant variations are observed on the degree of commitment to pursuing joint action, neoliberal institutionalists would explain the variations by employing variables other than systemic constraints. Here is where domestic politics or society approach comes in.²²⁾

And as Jeffrey Knopf rightly points out, domestic politics approach has been employed by researchers who want to show that cooperation is difficult to achieve particularly between countries with many "veto points" domestically. The notion of two-level games has been at the center of those works on the role of domestic political and institutional arrangements as barriers to interstate cooperation.²³⁾ Some institutionalist scholars relax the democracy-cooperation linkage by empirically confirming that "all democracies are not the same," particularly in the number of veto players.²⁴⁾ A recent study

21) L. Martin, *Coercive Cooperation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 8.

22) J. Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 22.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 12, p. 17, and p. 22.

observes that democratic countries are more likely to engage in international commitments regarding environmental protection than nondemocratic ones, while the democracy effect on policy outcomes such as emission reductions is less clear.²⁵⁾ The “words-deeds” gap can exist in any country regardless of regime types, but it may be quite safely assumed that democratic countries experience more stumbling blocks in putting international commitments into practice. The US failure to ratify the Kyoto Protocol cannot be fully explained without taking into account the simple fact that transportation in the United States accounts for much larger portions of living costs than in any other developed country. Although other factors such as exceptionalist views on international commitments must be considered in the US case, it is evident that elected officials in democracies are faced with greater opposition from society. In contrast, nondemocratic countries have fewer obstacles to making good on their promise even in environmental issues.

IV. Social Constructivism as an Approach to Cooperation

Constructivists focus on the role of ideas and identity in shaping the preferences and intentions of state and non-state actors in world politics. As John Ruggie has put it succinctly, “constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life.”²⁶⁾ Andrew Moravcsik rightly points out that constructivists and rationalists have in common the theoretical premise that “state and social actors hold ideas consistent with their actions.”²⁷⁾ Ideas matter for both constructivists and rationalists as a key explanatory variable, although the two differ over the meaning of agency as compared to structure. For constructivists, agency does not stand alone; rather it is socially constructed. And when it comes to talking about agency, social constructivists stress the links between agency and structure, while some rationalists tend to

24) E. Mansfield, H. Milner, and J. Pevehouse, “Democracy, Veto Players and the Depth of Regional Integration,” *The World Economy* 31-1 (2008), pp. 67-96.

25) M. Battig and T. Bernauer, “National Institutions and Global Public Goods,” *International Organization* 63 (2009), pp. 281-308.

26) J. Ruggie, “What Makes the World Hang Together?” *International Organization* 52-4 (1998), p. 856.

27) J. Checkel and A. Moravcsik, “A Constructivist Research Program in EU Studies?” *European Union Politics* 2-2 (2001), p. 227.

view agency as separated from structure.

But more important for my analysis is to distinguish between two meanings of structure. As James Fearon and Alexander Wendt aptly point out, what some rationalists consider “exogenous structure” provides a larger setting in which state preferences are shaped.²⁸⁾ States easily and instinctively notice what is at stake in an anarchical international system. Security dilemma is fast learned by states because it is deemed an unavoidable environment. In so far as the structure does not change in a relatively short period of time, state preferences are also seemingly fixed and translated into routinized actions such as deterrence.

By contrast, there is another variant of structure, an endogenous one. “[I]t is *mutually constituted* by the beliefs and attendant actions of all [states].”²⁹⁾ In this variant of structure, agency does not just respond to what surrounds it. States understand the logic of anarchy and security dilemma, and they know exactly what to do in certain circumstances. Talking about endogenous structure means that there can be a discrepancy between having a preference and taking a specific action. Under anarchy, that is, without any supranational governing body, states know that they must be wise to seek security militarily, economically, and politically. Cooperation is one way of achieving a state’s desired goal, while discord or going alone still remains an option. Rationalists tend to view interstate cooperation as growing out of the prisoner’s dilemma game situation where actors respond to the payoff structure. Iterated games generate learning effects, the argument goes, and self-interested states cooperate just because of increasing expected utility. Social constructivists need not deny the logic itself, nor do they have to repeat empirically fuzzy arguments of their reflexive or postmodern brethren that such a payoff structure is nothing but an outcome of intersubjective understanding.

As with other liberal arguments on diverse aspects of international relations, social constructivists would agree with some liberals that cooperative behavior of states grows on specific domestic conditions. When states with similar domestic conditions including cultural structures encounter each other

28) J. Fearon and A. Wendt, “Rationalism vs. Constructivism,” in W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, and B. Simmons (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), p. 66.

29) *Ibid.*; emphasis in original.

in various forums of the international society, they may expect a lower cost of understanding the preference and intention of their counterpart in international negotiations than they have to face culturally heterogeneous countries. Alastair Iain Johnston provides quite a similar argument on the importance of ideational factors in international relations by giving a close look at “socialization.”³⁰⁾ As Akira Iriye put it, “nations like individuals... develop visions, dreams and prejudices about themselves and the world that shape their intentions.”³¹⁾

Constructivist challenges to the dominant IR paradigms in the study of interstate cooperation, whether or not they put emphasis on the extent to which cooperation or discord is socially constructed, have one thing in common. They seek to suggest a counterargument that cooperative behavior is dictated neither by the systemic distribution of relative power nor by cost-benefit analysis made in terms of material interests. Constructivists, structural and social, are more sensitive to the role of ideas and identity in shaping state preferences about the course of action toward other states. One can easily think of state A that prefers state B over state C as its partner in the pursuit of joint ventures, even though it seems evident that being close to the latter will lead to a more profitable bilateral relationship. This situation cannot be fully explained when it is assumed that systemic distribution of power is automatically functioned into states’ cost-benefit analysis. Instead, the constructivist notion of state preferences emphasizes the ideational context in which systemic distribution of power is understood and utilized as guidelines for state action.

One way to look into the ideational context is to construct a typology of cooperation among illiberal states. Using the two dimensions of interstate cooperation, power and regime, one can think of four different ways to engage in cooperative behavior among illiberal states.

Type I denotes limited revisionism where a great power with an illiberal domestic regime or a group of such illiberal powers serves as the rallying point for illiberal small states within the context of the existing liberal order. A related question that haunts social constructivists would be “what if the source of illiberal states’ emerging power lies not in their buzzing economy

30) A. Johnston, *Social States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

31) Cited in D. Scott, *China Stands Up* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 4.

or daunting military power but in their own ideology?” As Naazneen Barma and Ely Ratner point out, China, one of the prominent illiberal states, has made steady efforts to further its relationship with Southeast Asian countries by ensuring that China will not be a security threat.³²⁾ China’s strategy of selling its image abroad can be understood as a projection of the country’s blueprint of a new international order, not just demonstrated power, whether it be economic or military. China’s ambition as regional hegemon has been observed also in the south Caucasus and Central Asia.³³⁾ The growing power of China deserves our attention not just because it may present a possibility of regional hegemonic system but also because the country can be a rallying point for illiberal states in Asia and around the world.³⁴⁾ A crucial point that can be made from a social constructivist view is that illiberal states follow China’s lead “because they believe members of an in-group *should* share interests.”³⁵⁾

Type II denotes full revisionism where an illiberal great power or a group of such powers leads other illiberal states in more or less organized forms of protest against global liberalism. This would be the worst case scenario for liberal leaders, particularly the United States as the current hegemon who had fought revisionist challengers such as Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan during the last century. Once realized, Type II is likely to generate highly conflictual relationships between liberal and illiberal camps of nations.³⁶⁾ Both world wars during the twentieth century can be characterized in part as the systemic confrontation between liberal and illiberal political economies. And, interestingly enough, social constructivism resembles realism when scholarly discussion focuses on the sources of institutional weaknesses of the existing liberal political-economic order and a subsequent contestation over global hegemony. This scenario can be taken seriously when an alternative model of international political-economic order is suggested by a great power with

32) Barma and Ratner, “China’s Illiberal Challenge,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas* 2 (2006), pp. 56-68.

33) R. Sokolsky and T. Charlick-Paley, *NATO and Caspian Security* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), ch. 4.

34) J. Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

35) A. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 13, fn. 18; emphasis in original.

36) Type II closely resembles the “clash of civilizations” suggested by Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

both the commitment and resources to challenge the current hegemon. Full revisionism is made feasible when a common social purpose is backed with great power involvement rather than the other way around.

Of the four cells, Type III would be considered closest to an image of cooperation among illiberal states who are not pressured or coaxed by a great power or a group of great powers.³⁷⁾ It also most closely resembles the model of European integration where a multitude of countries with similar domestic arrangements and vision of a community hang together. As the level of great power engagement is low, Type III is more likely to be motivated either by common interests or by common ideas. But when taking into account the striking disparities in economic and social development among illiberal states, interest-driven cooperation may occur in very specific issue areas and mostly around a particular region. The prospect of idea-driven cooperation among illiberal states is also dim when it is not backed by great power leadership. Illiberalism in itself does not constitute a coherent set of principled and causal beliefs that can be found in fascism, socialism, or even nationalism. In many cases illiberalism is a mixture of fascist, socialist, and nationalist elements all of which are cemented by the rejection of liberal norms about the economy, politics, and society. Backlash against globalization does not lead to anti-globalizationism as a distinct set of ideas, and the same thing can be said of illiberalism.

Figure 1. *A Typology of Cooperation among Illiberal States**

		Stay with regimes	Stay out of regimes
Great power engagement	High	I Limited revisionism	II Full revisionism
	Low	IV Status quo	III Alternative multilateralism

*Constructed by the author

37) Type III is closer to what Stephen Krasner calls “collective self-reliance.” See S. Krasner, *Structural Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 17.

This is why the extant literature plays down the prospect of cooperation among illiberal states who are considered to have difficulty in locating “shared focal points” or expressed common interests. Social constructivists respond to the critique by emphasizing the process of “discovering shared focal points”³⁸⁾ through which illiberal states develop the norms of cooperative behavior.

Environmental issues well demonstrate the scenario of alternative multilateralism where illiberal states push their own agenda forward in global forums in the absence of formally agreed upon terms. The Stockholm Conference signified the compromise of the conflicting interests of North and South by emphasizing the links between economic development and environmental protection. Suspicious of liberal states’ intent, illiberal states wanted to get assured that the economy-environment linkage would be considered in a direction more favorable to them. The concept of sustainable development adopted in the Brundtland Commission was an outcome of such a maneuver on the part of illiberal states. Illiberal states are well aware that the notion of sustainable development may degenerate into efforts to square the circle but put emphasis on the process of devising an alternative model of the economy-environment linkage.

A more interesting question regarding this typology would be under what circumstances one type of illiberal cooperation moves to another type. Leading liberal states such as the United States and some of its European allies would prefer Type IV over other types of illiberal cooperation. Some liberal states who are disaffected with liberal leaders such as the United States would seek a viable alternative in Type I where powerful illiberal states act as a balancer but do not defect entirely from the existing liberal order.³⁹⁾ There will be various answers to the question, and social constructivism provides one of them.

38) A. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 13, fn. 18.

39) George W. Bush’s interrupted address to the Australian parliament and the warm welcome Hu Jintao received soon after Bush’s short visit in 2003 may be interpreted as exemplifying Type I. Criticizing US foreign policy in recent years is an expression of “liberal anti-Americanism.” See J. Perlez, “A Visitor from China Eclipses Bush’s Stop in Australia,” *New York Times* (25 October 2003); P. Katzenstein and R. Keohane, “Varieties of Anti-Americanism,” in *idem* (eds.), *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 29-31.

V. Conclusion

Cooperation among illiberal states has existed throughout history and still can be observed across different areas of global governance from trade and finance to the environment. Even security cooperation is no longer a policy agenda to be shunned by troubled states particularly in the regions with protracted conflict.⁴⁰⁾ As can be seen in the cases of less developed countries that made concerted efforts to make their voices heard on global issues such as the environment and development, illiberal states have various kinds of incentives to engage in cooperative relationship among themselves.

As one journalist observes, “there is no evidence to suggest that [illiberal states’] wealth is producing greater liberalism.”⁴¹⁾ Social purposes deemed more valuable by Russia, China, and lesser illiberal states include “trade, order and development.”⁴²⁾ From the perspective of realist IR scholars and foreign policy practitioners, it would not be surprising that national interests defined in terms of power trample democracy and liberalism. But it still remains uncertain whether the UN Security Council’s failure to sanction Zimbabwe for its human rights violations was due to concerted action of those illiberal states sitting in the world’s supreme body contemplating security issues.

Another aspect of cooperation among illiberal states, which should be of interest, is its scope in terms of the number of countries that participate in concerted action on specific policy issues. As have been demonstrated in historical and contemporary cases, illiberal states tend to enter into cooperative relationships with each other on a bilateral basis, or in a way that involves a relatively small number of participants. In other words, illiberal states seem not to be good at managing multilateralism in international affairs. There could be some explanations for the alleged mismatch between illiberal states and multilateral governance. A widely acceptable explanation would cite the nature of multilateral governance, which relies on more explicit sets of rules and decision-making procedures such as the majority

40) S. Tan and A. Acharya (eds.), *Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2004); B. Franke, *Security Cooperation in Africa: a Reappraisal* (Boulder, Col.: First Forum Press, 2009).

41) M. Boyle, “The Coming Illiberal Order,” *The Guardian* (16 July 2008).

42) *Ibid.*

voting system. Illiberal states, whether they be categorized as a procedural democracy or not, tend to feel uncomfortable with a rules-based system of interstate bargaining because it can constrain the discretion exercised by national governments.

Although recent studies have shown that international institutions can have significant impact on nondemocratic states' behavior,⁴³⁾ it still remains uncertain what really makes illiberal states, many of which are nondemocratic, participate in international institutions in the first place. Many empirical works on Latin American and Central European countries argued that the need to push for economic reform increased the incentive for governments to tie themselves to international commitments such as the IMF conditionality. Those cases seem to corroborate the argument that countries with fragile democratic institutions at home are more likely to follow the guidelines of economic integration than those with stable and well-functioning systems of checks and balances.⁴⁴⁾ It cannot and should not be denied that there are some cases where multilateralism and illiberalism go hand in hand. Then could we safely conclude that illiberal states abide by the rules and norms set by multilateral organizations when the former sees the possibility of harmony with the latter in terms of social purpose?

To answer this question we need to distinguish among different levels of social purpose. For example, China might have no real intention to vie with the United States for global influence, while continuing to zealously defend its status of regional hegemon. And China would not give any serious look at the option of relegating its national autonomy to multilateral organizations even in issue areas traditionally characterized as technical and thus nonpolitical. Most illiberal states around the world want to decide what is technical/nonpolitical and what is not on their own terms. There is no good reason to assume that illiberal states pursuing economic integration as part of their developmental strategy would automatically adopt Western norms and values that are closely related to the idea of economic integration in one way or another.

43) S. Fang and E. Owen, "Subtle Signals, Limited Device," Mimeo., n.d.

44) D. Rodrik, *One Economics, Many Recipes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

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