

Theory Review Sheet
Stecher for PS169

What causes (interstate) war? A very general summary of some leading IR theories.¹

Realists

(International system, balance of power, material power, self-help politics)

Constructivists

vs. (Ideas, norms, institutions; shaped by historical/social processes)

Realists	Rationalists (aka Rational Choice)	Liberalists	Constructivists
Conflict is caused by states' pursuit of power/security in an anarchic system	Conflict is caused when states cannot come to a rational alternative to conflict (due to, e.g., information uncertainty, commitment problems, indivisible issues)	Conflict is caused by states that don't privilege the life/liberty of its citizens and pursue military agendas (imperialists, monarchies)	Conflict is caused by certain social/historical contexts and processes, including state/leader identities
<p>Three main types:*</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Classical realists 2. Neorealists AKA structural realists (includes offensive & defensive realists) 3. Neoclassical realists <p>*There's also the English School and the Copenhagen School, although realists might not claim the latter</p>	Fearon (1995) says that rationalist explanations for war could also be called "neorealist explanations" as both rationalists and neorealists believe that the international system (anarchy) sets the stage for conflict, not human nature or individual state ideas. Rationalists argue that coercion, cost-benefit calculations, and material incentives matter (realist ideas).	Neoliberalism is the revised form of liberalism, and is AKA "liberal institutionalism". Liberalists believe that institutions (like the UN, IMF, EU) are key actors in shaping state preferences and promoting cooperation instead of conflict. The spread of democracy and free trade will also promote cooperation instead of conflict (interdependence).	<p>Believe that international relations are shaped by ideas, not materialism. Social/historical processes create ideas, identities, norms and values.</p> <p>Identities are changeable and cannot be exogenously assumed (they are informed by the system and the processes within it)</p>

¹ Note that another main paradigm of IR thought, Marxist thought, has been excluded here (but exists!). This is not an exhaustive list.

Realists	Rationalists	Liberalists	Constructivists
<p>Realists believe:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> States are the key actors (statism) The international system is anarchic States want to survive States act in their rational self-interest 	<p>Still tend to see states as playing a “zero sum game”, like realists, where one state’s gain is another state’s loss. Use bargaining models to understand war, why war occurs despite its inefficiency.</p> <p>Audience costs can help solve informational uncertainty and signal resolve to opponents.</p>	<p>Not to be confused with the English school (aka liberal realism) which believes that a “society of states” exists in the world despite conditions of anarchy. A key person in the English school is Barry Buzan</p>	<p>Argue against the idea that the anarchic system inevitably leads to self-help/power politics. Not making a zero-sum argument</p>
<p>Classical realists believe that conflict is caused by human nature (Hobbesian argument) Key people: Morgenthau, Niebuhr</p>	<p>Critique: Unclear about what states’ interests are and how they’re created (perhaps through more constructivist means). For more, see this article. Ideas and norms can also be factored into the model (constructivist ideas), although this is controversial.</p>	<p>Liberalists/neoliberalists believe that conflict is not inevitable, and that states within an anarchic system can choose to cooperate. Liberalism differs from constructivism in its emphasis on economics/materialism</p>	<p>Some famous norms associated with constructivists: humanitarian intervention, nuclear taboo, state sovereignty, election monitoring, anti-torture</p>
<p>Most neorealists believe:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> States are egoists and want to maximize their power Conflict is permanent/inevitable in an anarchic system <p>Key people: Mearsheimer (offensive realism); Jervis, Waltz (defensive realism); Art, Posen (neorealism)</p>	<p>Key people: Schelling (earlier theories of conflict as bargaining) Fearon Powell</p> <p>Tomz (audience costs) Schultz (domestic political competition as a way of conveying information to rival states)</p>	<p>Early enlightenment thinkers that exposed liberal ideals: Kant, Locke, Smith, Voltaire, Paine</p>	<p>Key people: Wendt Finnemore (norm typology) Katzenstein Rugge Waeuver (Copenhagen School) <i>[The Copenhagen School believes that processes can make things relevant to security -- this process is called “securitization” -- such as the ideas of human and economic security]</i></p>