
Advanced seminar BA Major
The Liberal International Order Under Pressure
Winter semester 2024/25

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Office hours Tuesdays, 2.30 – 4.00 pm, registration via *MyStudy*. In-person or via Zoom.

Time and place

Mondays, starting 14 October 10:15 – 11:45 am Weekly seminar C 14.202

Course description

Pundits and scholars alike agree that the liberal international order (LIO) is in crisis, maybe even in decline. Two reasons are argued to be at the root of this crisis: power shifts towards states with less liberal visions of liberal order and the rise of populist parties that contest core tenets of liberalism within core liberal states. This English-speaking seminar will examine the "decline thesis" through an in-depth reading and discussion of seminal texts. Topics of discussion include: the nature of the LIO and its historical genesis; the current state of the LIO and the causes of its alleged decline; alternative visions of world order; and contemporary struggles over world order in selected issue areas.

Course objectives

By the end of the class, students

- will have received a comprehensive overview of the debate about the liberal international order;
- are able to summarize and critically assess existing arguments; and
- are able to develop their own argument in relation to existing ones.

Course assessment

This advanced course is intended for students who study Political Science as a Major and seek to deepen their knowledge in the field of International Relations in general and cooperation and conflict in particular. Successful completion of the course Introduction to International Relations is a prerequisite. Assessment is via a combined scientific work (“kombinierte wissenschaftliche Arbeit”) consisting of an oral presentation (33% of the final grade) and two essays (67% of the final grade).

1. Oral presentation (33 percent of the final grade)

Students give an oral presentation on a topic of their choice. Presentation topics are specified in the session outline for each session and will be distributed online through MyStudy (“Gruppen”). Each presentation topic can only be allocated once. There are two types of oral presentations, and you must choose one:

- *Individual presentations:* Presentations are held individually on a given question and based on given literature as outlined in the syllabus (the exception are presentations in sessions 5 & 9, see below!). The goal is to provide a concrete, well-structured and well-reasoned answer to the question. An individual presentation lasts no more than 10 minutes and is accompanied by a handout of ca. 1,5 pages. Handouts are uploaded to the MyStudy page (“Material” > folder for respective session) the day before the session.
- *Group presentations:* presentations on different dimensions of the liberal international order and alternative visions of international order by major states in the international system are given in sessions 5 and 9. They are held in groups of two students and last a maximum of 12 minutes. You must research your own literature and provide a handout of ca. 3 pages summarizing the main results. You can find more specific instructions in the description of the respective session. Handouts are uploaded to the MyStudy page (“Material” > folder for respective session) the day before the session.

2. Two essays (each 33 percent of the final grade)

Students write two essays of 1500 words each (excluding the cover sheet and bibliography). The two essays must be on questions from different weeks.

- *Essay 1:* The first essay covers your presentation topic and develops your answer to the respective question(s) in fully fledged essay form. Essays are written individually, that is, not in (the oral presentation) groups, which is relevant to presentations in sessions 5 and 9. The essay is **due one week after the presentation**, that is, before the next session on Monday. Upload your essay to the folder “Essay 1” under “Material”. Essays that are submitted late will receive a “fail” (5,0).
- *Essay 2:* The second essay answers one of the starred (*) questions in the session outline based on the given literature and two additional pieces of research (journal articles, book chapters, etc.). Use specific empirical examples to illustrate your arguments, even if this is not explicitly mentioned in the respective question. Submit your second essay by **15 March 2025, 11:59 pm in Word format** to the respective folder under “Material” in MyStudy. Essays that are submitted late will receive a “fail” (5,0).

Teaching arrangements

This course consists primarily of reading and discussing selected academic literature on the basis of given questions. It is therefore important that you prepare the required reading thoroughly and then actively participate in the seminar discussion. Thorough preparation means that you read the texts carefully, highlight important arguments and ideas, note down your own comments as well as ambiguities and questions of understanding and jot down key points on the respective question(s) in the syllabus. Such preparation is time-consuming, but you will find that it is worth it: the better prepared you are, the more you will take away from the seminar.

The texts to be read (the required reading as well as the texts for the presentations) can either be obtained in electronic form from the Leuphana library (marked “[e-resource]”) or will be provided by me directly in the “Material” folder. To download electronic texts from outside the university network via the library, you will need a VPN client.

The individual seminar sessions consist of a mixture of group discussions in the entire seminar group, short interventions on my part, oral presentations and discussion in small groups.

Course overview

Session	Date	Topic
1	14 October	Introduction and overview
Part 1: Basic concepts		
2	21 October	What is international order? Overview
3	28 October	Alternative conceptions of international order
4	4 November	Liberal international order in history
5	11 November	Dimensions of the liberal international order (presentations)
Part 2: Sources of pressure		
6	18 November	Rise of authoritarianism
7	25 November	Rise of nationalist populism
8	2 December	Race and racism
9	9 December	Alternative visions of international order (presentations)
Part 3: Dynamics and outcomes		
10	16 December	Struggles over international order: Security
11	6 January	Struggles over international order: Human rights
12	13 January	Struggles over international order: Economics <i>Final evaluation</i>
13	20 January	Is the liberal international order worth saving?
14	27 January	Final discussion and Evaluation

General readings

The academic debate on the liberal international order is prolific and wide-ranging. Here are some good works that represent different angles on the topic. These may also be useful as sources for the presentations in sessions 5 and 9.

- Friedman, Rebekka, Kevork Oskanian and Ramon Pacheco Pardo. 2013. *After Liberalism? The Future of Liberalism in International Relations*. Springer. Especially section 2.
- Alcarro, Ricardo. 2019. *The Liberal Order and Its Contestations: Great Powers and Regions Transiting in a Multipolar Era*. London: Routledge.
- Börzel, Tanja, Johannes Gerschewski and Michael Zürn (eds.) *The Liberal Script at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Session outline

14 October: Introduction and overview

Part 1: Basic concepts

21 October: What is international order? Overview

Questions

- ❖ What does the concept of international order refer to? Is it a useful concept?
- ❖ Give historical examples of international orders. On what dimensions do they differ?

Required reading

- Lascurettes, Kyle and Michael Poznansky. 2021. International Order in Theory and Practice. In: *The Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

28 October: Alternative conceptions of international order

Questions

- ❖ What are basic alternative conceptions of international order? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each conception? (*)
- ❖ How do they each balance core challenges to international order in the contemporary international system according to Hurrell?

Required reading

- Hurrell, Andrew. 2007. *On Global Order: Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 1.

Presentation topics

Topic 1. How does the polarity view characterize the contemporary international order? To what extent does the polarity view provide insights into the substantive orientation of an international order? Why? Why not?

- Wohlforth, William. 1999. The Stability of a Unipolar World. *International Security* 24(1): 5-41. [e-resource]

Topic 2. What are the core characteristics of international order according to Bull? To what extent is Bull's conception better able to capture historical variation in the substantive orientation of international order than the polarity view? (*)

- Bull, Hedley. 1977. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Houndmills et al.: Palgrave, esp. chapter 1.

Topic 3. What are the main critiques that Hurd levels at the concept of international order? How powerful are they?

- Hurd, Ian. 2024. What's the Problem with International Order? APSA Roundtable on 'World Order, What?' Unpublished manuscript.

4 November: Liberal international order in history

Questions

- ❖ What distinguishes the liberal international order after 1945 from other international orders in history according to Ikenberry?
- ❖ How does the Cold War order differ from the post-Cold War order?

Required reading

- Ikenberry, John. 2001 [2019]. *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chapter 1; skim ch. 2. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. How do Börzel and Zürn characterize the difference between the post-1945 and post-Cold War international orders? Where does their conception differ most prominently from Ikenberry's? Which one is more useful?

- Börzel, Tanja and Michael Zürn. 2021. Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism. *International Organization* 75(2): 282-305. [e-resource]

Topic 2. Who has shaped the emergence of the liberal international order and how? Is Ikenberry's account overly major power-centric? (*)

- Tourinho, Marcos. 2021. The Co-Constitution of Order. *International Organization* 75(2): 258-281. [e-resource]
- Risse, Thomas. 2024. Order-Making Through Contestations: The Liberal International Order and its Many (Co-)Authors. In: Tanja Börzel, Johannes Gerschewski and Michael Zürn (eds.) *The Liberal Script at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 112-130. [open access]

Topic 3. Describe and assess Glaeser's critique of the liberal international order as an academic concept. How convincing do you find his critique?

- Glaeser, Charles. 2019. A Flawed Framework: Why the Liberal International Order Conception Is Misguided. *International Security* 43(4): 51-87. [e-resource]

11 November: Dimensions of the liberal international order

Questions

- ❖ What is liberal about the liberal international order?
- ❖ What are the core dimensions of the liberal international order?

Required reading

- Lake, David, Lisa Martin and Thomas Risse. 2021. Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on *International Organization*. *International Organization* 75(2): 225-257. [e-resource]

Presentation topics (3)

Present the core characteristics of the respective dimension of the liberal international order in **12 min**. How has the United States and its 'Western' allies sought to advance liberalism in the respective dimension?

- Political liberalism
- Economic liberalism
- Liberal internationalism

The presentation includes researching and integrating an additional **three sources** of literature as well as a handout of ca. 3 pages.

Part 2: Sources of pressure

18 November: Rise of authoritarianism

Question

- ❖ Why does the rise of authoritarian states, such as China, present a challenge to the liberal international order? To what extent does the severity of the challenge vary across different issue areas of international politics? (*)

Required reading

- Weiss, Jessica Chen and Jeremy Wallace. 2021. Domestic Politics, China's Rise, and the Future of the Liberal International Order. *International Organization* 75(2): 635-664. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. Is authoritarianism on the rise? How has authoritarianism evolved historically?

- Lührmann, Anna and Staffan Lindberg. 2019. A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New About It? *Democratization* 26(7): 1095-1113. [e-resource]

Topic 2. What fundamental tension exists between the liberal international order and the sovereign territorial state? Sketch some of the implications of this tension for issues of interest to scholars of international relations.

- Simmons, Beth and Hein Goemans. 2021. Built on Borders: Tensions within the Institution Liberalism (Thought It) Left Behind. *International Organization* 75(2): 387-410. [e-resource]

25 November: Rise of nationalist populism

Question

- ❖ What are the core sources of contemporary discontent with the liberal international order according to Adler-Nissen and Zarakol? How convincing is the empirical evidence they muster for their claim? Are there alternative explanations that they overlook? (*)

Required reading

- Adler-Nissen, Rebecca and Ayse Zarakol. 2021. Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of its Discontents? *International Organization* 75(2): 611-634. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. How do populists act towards international organizations, a key pillar of the liberal international order? What explains their pattern of engagement with international organizations? (*)

- Spandler, Kilian and Fredrik Söderbaum. 2023. Populist (de)legitimation of international organizations. *International Affairs* 99(3): 1023-1041. [e-resource]
- Söderbaum, Fredrik, Kilian Spandler and Agnese Pacciardi. 2021. *Contestations of the Liberal International Order: A Populist Script of Regional Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 1. [open access]

Topic 2. How do truth-subversion practices shape the liberal international order? Which aspect of this phenomenon do you find most worrisome, and why?

- Adler, Emanuel and Alena Drieschova. 2021. The Epistemological Challenge of Truth Subversion to the Liberal International Order. *International Organization* 75(2): 359-386. [e-resource]

Topic 3. How do left wing and right-wing populist groups differ in their engagement of international organizations? What domestic political dynamics shape political conflict over international cooperation?

- Hooghe, Liesbet, Tobias Lenz and Gary Marks. 2019. Contested World Order: The Delegitimation of International Governance. *Review of International Organizations* 14(4): 731-743. [e-resource]

2 December: Race and racism

Questions

- ❖ How does racism shape the liberal international order?
- ❖ How has the balance between racist and antiracist political forces changed over time in the international system? Why? (*)

Required reading

- Búzás, Zoltán. 2021. Racism and Antiracism in the Liberal International Order. *International Organization* 75(2): 440-463. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. How do race and racism shape the politics of and within international organizations? (*)

- Oksamytna, Kseniya and Sarah von Billerbeck. 2024. Race and International Organizations. *International Studies Quarterly* 68(2): sqae010. [e-resource]
- Lipscey, Phillip and Jiajia Zhou. 2022. Institutional Racism in International Relations. Paper presented at the PEIO conference.

Topic 2. What role has racism played in major global wars in history? What follows from this insight for the theory and practice of the liberal international order today?

- Henderson, Erroll. 2024. Racism and Global War in World Politics: As Obvious as it is Ignored. *International Politics* 61: 413-442. [e-resource]

9 December: Alternative visions of international order

Questions

- ❖ What alternative visions of international order exist among challengers of the liberal international order?
- ❖ On what dimensions and to what extent do they challenge core dimensions of the existing order?

Required readings (read and re-read)

- Lake, David, Lisa Martin and Thomas Risse. 2021. Challenges to the Liberal Order: Reflections on *International Organization*. *International Organization* 75(2): only 225-232 (!). [e-resource]
- Handouts from the presentations in session 5 (Dimensions of the liberal international order)

Presentation topics (4)

Characterize the main tenets of alternative visions of international order along the political, economic and international dimensions of international order (see session 5) in **12 min**. To what extent do these visions challenge core tenets of the liberal international order across dimensions? Up to four presentations address major states in the international system that should include the following:

- China
- Russia
- Two other states of your choice (please coordinate with me!).

The presentation is based on at least **three sources** of academic literature and includes a handout of ca. 3 pages.

Part 3: Dynamics and outcomes

16 December: Struggles over international order: Security

Questions

- ❖ Who are the core actors in contesting a central pillar of the international security order, the nuclear non-proliferation regime? What is the object of contestation?
- ❖ What does Tannenwald mean when she describes the regime as self-undermining?

Required reading

- Tannenwald, Nina. 2024. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime as a ‘Failed Promise’: Contestation and Self-Undermining Dynamics in a Liberal Order. *Global Studies Quarterly* 4: ksae025. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. To what extent do pro-Russian separatists and *Da’esh* pose a serious challenge to the liberal international order and its state-making practices? What does this imply for the stability of the current order in the future? (*)

- Grzybowski, Janis. 2024. State Creation Out of Bounds? Pro-Russian Separatists, *Da’esh*, and (Liberal) International Order-ing. *Global Studies Quarterly* 4(2): ksae045. [e-resource]

Topic 2. Describe the core features of UN peacekeeping in Haiti and how they relate to domestic security governance inside Brazil. What do the findings imply for our normative assessment of Global South actors’ contributions to the liberal international order?

- Müller, Markus-Michel and Izadora Xavier do Monte. 2024. Better than the “Liberal Peace”? Brazilian Peacekeeping between Postcolonial Branding and Violent Order-Making. In: Tanja Börzel, Johannes Gerschewski and Michael Zürn (eds.) *The Liberal Script at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 336-356. [open access]

6 January: Struggles over international order: Human rights

Question

- ❖ How does China seek to reshape international human rights policy in its favour? To what extent does this threaten the liberal international order? (*)

Required reading

- Dukalskis, Alexander. 2023. A Fox in the Henhouse: China, Normative Change, and the UN Human Rights Council. *Journal of Human Rights* 22(3): 1-17. [e-resource]

Presentation topics

Topic 1. How do Oud (2024) and Zhang & Buzan (2020) portray China's international human rights policy? To what extent do they come to different conclusions about China's international human rights policy from Dukalskis (2015), and why?

- Oud, Malin. 2024. Powers of Persuasion? China's Struggle for Human Rights Discourse Power at the UN. *Global Policy* 15(S2): 85-96. [e-resource]
- Zhang, Yongjin and Barry Buzan. 2020. China and the Global Reach of Human Rights. *The China Quarterly* 241: 169-190. [e-resource]

Topic 2. To what extent have African practices of dealing with external critique of its human rights record changed? Why has this changed occurred?

- Jordaan, Eduard. 2016. The African Group on the United Nations Human Rights Council: Shifting Geopolitics and the Liberal International Order. *African Affairs* 115(460): 490-515. [e-resource]

Topic 3. How do formal and informal hierarchies shape the contestation of the liberal international order? How do they relate to formal institutionalization? (*)

- Lesch, Max, Lisbeth Zimmermann and Nicole Deitelhoff. 2024. Contestation from Within: Norm Dynamics and the Crisis of the Liberal International Order. *Global Studies Quarterly* 4(2): ksae022. [e-resource]

13 January: Struggles over international order: Economics

Questions

- ❖ Why has support for the trade regime weakened in the United States?
- ❖ What is the dilemma that US policy-makers have faced when establishing and trying to maintain a liberal international trade regime?
- ❖ Are there broader lessons to be learned from the US' experience?

Required reading

- Goldstein, Judith and Robert Gulotty. 2021. America and the Trade Regime: What Went Wrong? *International Organization* 75(2): only 524-557. [e-resource]

Presentation topic

How has Latin America shaped the US-led liberal international order, and how has the order shaped Latin America and its politics? What can we learn from engaging the Latin American experience for our understanding of the dynamics by which the liberal international order evolves over time?

- Long, Tom. 2018. Latin America and the Liberal International Order. *International Affairs* 94(6): 1371-1390. [e-resource]

20 January: Is the liberal international order worth saving?

Question

- ❖ What purposes should a morally legitimate international order serve? How well are these principles instantiated in the current liberal international order? (*)

Required reading

- Hurrell, Andrew. 2007. *On Global Order: Power, Values and the Constitution of International Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 12.

Presentation topics

Topic 1. What does Barnett see as the core moral foundation of the liberal international order? Does this provide enough of a reason to try to maintain the liberal international order?

- Barnett, Michael. 2021. International Progress, International Order, and the Liberal International Order. *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14(1): 1-22. [e-resource]

Topic 2. Why is the liberal international order not worth saving from the perspective of Neorealism? Do you agree with Mearsheimer's argument? Why or why not?

- Mearsheimer, John. 2019. Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order. *International Security* 43(4): 7-50. [e-resource]

Topic 3. Why is the liberal international order not worth saving from the perspective of critical (postcolonial) scholarship? What are some of the weaknesses of Kumar's argument?

- Kumar, Sanjeev H.M. 2020. Traversing the Romance of a Liberal International Order: The Democratic Peace Thesis and the Regional Security Problematique in South Asia. *International Studies* 57(4): 344-360. [e-resource]

27 January: Concluding discussion and assessment of course evaluation