



International Organizations

Fifth Edition

International organizations are increasingly important to global politics, law, and culture. Now in its fifth edition, this leading textbook provides the definitive introduction to modern international organizations by examining a dozen prominent global institutions. With a mix of legal, empirical, and theoretical approaches, the author examines timely cases where international organizations are in the headlines today, including on migration, Brexit, trade wars, and border disputes. This new edition is fully revised and updated, featuring new chapters on how global sports are organized by FIFA and the International Olympic Committee. The book explains the power and limits of international organizations by seeing how their legal authority interacts with politics in real-world controversies. It will be of interest to undergraduate and graduate students taking courses in international organizations, international institutions, global governance, and international law.

Ian Hurd is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Weinberg College Center for International and Area Studies at Northwestern University, where he teaches international politics and law. His research combines contemporary global affairs with attention to the conceptual frames used to make sense of the world. His previous books include *How to Do Things with International Law* (2017), *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the UN Security Council* (2007), which won the 2008 Chadwick F. Alger Prize, *The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations* (coeditor, 2017), and *The UN Security Council and the Politics of International Authority* (coeditor, 2008). He has been a visiting scholar at the American Bar Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Sciences Po in Paris, and elsewhere, and is past Chair of the International Organization section of the International Studies Association.

“This is the go-to textbook for an interdisciplinary understanding of the workings of international organizations. The many case studies bring the subject to life, ensuring an accessible and enjoyable read for students of all disciplines.”

Shirley Scott, UNSW Canberra

“Ian Hurd’s *International Organizations* has established itself as one of the most accessible and insightful textbooks on this important topic. Offering a world tour of the UN, the WTO, and other key institutions, it dives deeply into the daily practice of those institutions with thoughtful and thought-provoking examinations of the interplay of law and politics.”

Simon Chesterman, National University of Singapore, and Editor of the *Asian Journal of International Law*

“In this new edition, Ian Hurd again gives an extremely well-balanced and nuanced picture of the power and limits, the benefits and deficiencies, of international organizations in world politics. My students enjoy being introduced to IOs with this book.”

Gisela Hirschmann, Leiden University

“Hurd’s textbook seamlessly integrates the law and politics of international organizations. Combining theory with many real-world examples of different IOs in action, he offers an ideal introduction to the field for students in multiple disciplines. By viewing IOs as actors, fora, and resources, he demonstrates their multiple roles – and the challenges they face – in global affairs today.”

Steven R. Ratner, University of Michigan

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Politics, Law, Practice

Ian Hurd
Northwestern University

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Preface



This book examines the world's main international organizations. It looks at the legal and political forces that constitute the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and a range of other institutions and then considers how these rules are used in practice in foreign policy and global governance. It is unique among textbooks on international organizations with its close attention to the interaction between international politics and international law.

The book begins from the premise that international politics cannot be understood without thinking about international organizations and that international organizations cannot be understood without thinking about legal and political features. The reciprocal relationship between law and politics gives a clearer view into how international organizations operate as players in the world of power politics and how governments and others try to use them to advance their own interests. It is at once strategic and social, legal and political, global and local. My approach gives a window into deeper questions in international relations about the dynamics among power, interests, institutions, and actors.

Thinking about international organizations requires paying attention to power, law, politics, and more all at once. It also needs practical as well as theoretical thinking. The chapters in this book look at the world of global governance with an eye on these big issues.

To see the big picture, we must first see the details. Each chapter tells stories from the daily life of the institution. For instance, we see how the government of Myanmar has manipulated the International Labour Organization around the problem of forced labor in that country. We also see how Japan's whale hunting got it in trouble with the International Court of Justice and how it has escaped that trouble by leaving the treaty that regulates whaling. These and other stories provide the raw materials that we can use to construct our understanding of international organizations. From there we can ask bigger questions about international relations, such as "when does international law work and when does it fail?," "what can international organizations accomplish?," and "who decides the rules of the game?"

This fifth edition of the book brings it up to date with the rapidly changing world of international politics and law.

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- Chapter 1 directly challenges the common assumption that international organizations are naturally good and progressive. Global governance through international organizations is as nuanced, politically freighted, and complicated as any other form of governance. The book argues against the “enchanted” view of international organizations and advocates instead for being alert to the political effects of global governance. These could be good, bad, or (more likely) contested.
- Chapter 3 looks at how the United Nations accidentally sparked a cholera epidemic in Haiti in 2010 and how its legal immunities make it impossible for the victims to get compensation from the organization.
- A decade of civil war in Syria involves international organizations on both the security and the humanitarian fronts. Chapter 4 looks at the role of the UN Security Council in response to governments that turn on their populations, with evidence from Rwanda, Sudan, and Syria.
- The rise of anti-internationalist policies in the United States is covered throughout. These are particularly threatening to the United Nations (Chapter 4) and the World Trade Organization (Chapter 5).
- The debt crisis has reshaped the landscape for international financial institutions in recent years, and Chapter 6 includes details on the Argentine default and restructuring. This helps us understand the politics of financial flows as well as the role of international institutions in shaping the movement of money.
- The COVID-19 pandemic brought the World Health Organization to center stage in world politics. Chapter 8 shows how the organization’s mixed performance in the crisis came from the peculiar set of powers and constraints that are built into its basic construction.
- The International Court of Justice was asked to rule on whether Japan was illegally hunting whales in the Southern Ocean. Chapter 10 includes a case study of the dispute that ensued, pitting Australia and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) against Japan and its whaling industry.
- The International Criminal Court has issued a warrant for the arrest of the Russian president. Chapter 11 explains the law behind the politics of international criminal law playing out in practice around Putin and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.
- The world of global sports is organized by agencies that look a lot like international institutions but aren’t. Chapter 13 looks at how FIFA and the International Olympic Committee bring into being the grand public sports events that make them famous (and rich). These private organizations have astonishing powers of governance on a global scale, but they are legally constituted as nonprofit charitable foundations in Switzerland.

All of today's global issues are linked to the international organizations in this book. From human rights to financial flows and environmental collapse, a broad range of government decisions are influenced by the rules, decisions, and powers of international organizations, and by their absence: a government that wishes to subsidize a steel factory must consider how this fits with the rules of the World Trade Organization; Iceland's decision to allow whale hunting is causing problems in its application to join the European Union; the International Court of Justice has some say over the legal implications of Israel's wall inside the Palestinian territories; the International Criminal Court may have jurisdiction over US soldiers in Afghanistan and Russians in Ukraine despite both the United States and Russia having refused to join the Court.

The goal of the book is to understand the power and limits of these and other international organizations. Some institutions make major contributions, as when the International Criminal Court convicted Thomas Lubanga in 2012 for using children as soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some are paralyzed by internal disagreement, as when the UN Security Council failed to take action to protect Ukraine when it was invaded by Russia. Some, such as the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization, seem to survive by avoiding controversy and making relatively few demands on their member states. In Chapter 9, we see that the international rules on refugees and migrants come from a mix of treaties and institutions that are widely flouted by governments.

Both the failures and the successes of international organizations stem from the rules and competencies set out in their legal charters, as well as from the interaction between these rules and the wider world of states and other kinds of actors. It is as important to understand why these organizations sometimes fail to take collective action as it is to understand when they do act. The World Health Organization has no power over governments and yet it was widely criticized for weakness as the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world. In the area of peace and security, the UN Security Council is expressly designed to be paralyzed when the strongest states disagree with one another over what to do – this is the main feature that explains how it responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and to the civil wars in Syria and Libya a decade earlier.

The main goal and overall structure of the book remain the same since its first edition: to understand the international organizations that operate in the most important areas of international policymaking, including trade, finance, and international peace and security – and now health, migration, and sports as well. Throughout, it strives for a realistic view of these

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organizations, one that neither overstates nor understates their power and influence. It aims to inform readers and open new questions for inquiry and research.

To that end, each chapter first presents the legal foundation of the organization and then explores how it operates. The controversies that surround the organizations come out of the interaction between their legal powers and the political context in which they find themselves, the push and pull of motivated actors seeking to use the organization in the pursuit of some goals. What comes out of this interaction may be judged to be good or bad, or somewhere in between, but it is clear that we cannot make sense of contemporary global politics without understanding the network of interstate institutions.



Acknowledgments

This book grew from my class on international organizations at Northwestern University. It owes its existence to the students who, over many years, asked questions and looked for answers about international politics and intergovernmental institutions. The book has evolved since the first edition in response to the changing interests of students and readers. Each edition has offered a chance to reconsider the world of international organizations. I am grateful for all these conversations. For comments on the new material, I am grateful to Stephen K. Donnelly, Tanisha Fazal, Arnout Geeraert, and Colin Hurd. Emma Davis gave thoughtful comments on the entire manuscript and produced the index and supporting materials.