

Trust in International Cooperation

International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics and American Multilateralism

Trust in International Cooperation challenges conventional wisdoms concerning the part which trust plays in international cooperation and the origins of American multilateralism. Brian C. Rathbun questions rational institutionalist arguments, demonstrating that trust precedes rather than follows the creation of international organizations. Drawing on social psychology, he shows that individuals placed in the same structural circumstances show markedly different propensities to cooperate based on their beliefs about the trustworthiness of others. Linking this finding to political psychology, Rathbun explains why liberals generally pursue a more multilateral foreign policy than conservatives, evident in the Democratic Party's greater support for a genuinely multilateral League of Nations, United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Rathbun argues that the post-World War Two bipartisan consensus on multilateralism is a myth, and that differences between the parties are growing continually starker.

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BRIAN C. RATHBUN





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To Nina, Luc and Max - my circle of trust



Contents

Preface		page xi
1	Circles of trust: reciprocity, community and multilateralism	1
2	Anarchical social capital: a social psychological theory of trust, international cooperation and institutional design	24
3	The open circle: the failure of the League of Nations	57
4	Squaring the circle: the birth of the United Nations	110
5	Closing the circle: the negotiation of the North Atlantic Treaty	163
6	Coming full circle: fear, terrorism and the future of American multilateralism	209
Works cited		229
Index		249

ix



Preface

This is not a modest book. In its pages, I contend that the way that most in the field go about explaining international cooperation and the creation of international organizations, as the rational and functional response to objective security environments marked by uncertainty, is almost always too narrow, often obvious, and sometimes exactly wrong. Drawing on insights from social psychology, I contend that trust, rather than distrust, drives the institutionalization of cooperation and the construction of multilateral institutions. And the type of trust that matters, the "generalized" variety, is dispositional, an attribute of decision-makers that varies even in the same structural situation. This book is decidedly "old school," seeking to provide better answers to old questions in the field - What explains international cooperation? Why do states create international organizations? - with new tools. In the course of writing this book, I have become convinced that some of the most foundational issues in international relations cannot be adequately addressed without attention to psychology. Like many, given our field's dispositions (and prejudices), I originally resisted its insights as reductionist and lacking external validity. I am now a convert. I hope to change readers' minds as well, including those already drawn to psychology but who self-ghettoize themselves in the field of foreign policy analysis with the mistaken belief that international relations is somehow a bridge too far.

Writing a preface for a new book is tremendously gratifying, particularly as books are always the culmination of a long process and each has its own story. This book about American multilateralism actually has its roots in Europe. It began with an observation I made while an undergraduate study abroad student in Vienna observing the tortured ratification process of the Maastricht Treaty in Western Europe in 1992. Sitting in Vienna cafés reading the now-defunct *European* newspaper, I noticed that conservative parties in particular seemed to resist encroachments on national sovereignty, but I didn't know why.

хi



xii Preface

In 1994, I spent the summer in Berlin as a research assistant at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, a position arranged for me by my undergraduate mentor, Joseph Grieco, who at the time was engaged in a prominent academic debate with Robert Keohane about the possibilities for significant international cooperation and the role of international organizations in world politics. My boss found for me a room to rent in his daughter's unfurnished apartment. With no friends, very poor German skills, and no television, I took to checking out issues of journals from the WZB's library such as International Security and International Organization to read at night. I remember reading Mearsheimer's "Back to the Future" at intermission in the German State Opera in what was once East Berlin. Thinking that I might want to attend graduate school in political science, I also set out to master Keohane's After Hegemony, a used copy of which I had bought at the college bookstore the previous semester. I remember agreeing more with Keohane than Grieco, although I dared not tell Joe as he had been so kind to me. In hindsight this was probably little more than a sense that international organizations (IOs) mattered, derived from my very interest in them. I was of course far, far away from developing my own unique voice on international relations. But it piqued my interest in international cooperation and reciprocity.

My very first paper in graduate school at Berkeley was on the integrationist instincts of leftist parties in the European Union, although it was full of anomalies and problems that I hoped to address when I turned back to it a few years ago, after graduate school. It seemed to me that the explanation for the formation of supranational institutions such as the EU that rationalists working in the Keohane tradition had developed – that they were a simple functional response to collaboration problems – simply did not work. International organizations did seem to serve some function; they were not just created for their own sake. But the process was simply too contested, too politically controversial, too emotionally charged to be explained with such coolness and calculation. The rationalist approach lacked a sense of real politics, but I could not put my finger on an alternative.

It was about this time that chance intervened. While an assistant professor at McGill, in pursuit of a free pizza, I stumbled upon a talk by Eric Uslaner on the "varieties of trust." I recognized in his description of "strategic trust" the logic of repeated games and cooperation that Keohane had given voice to in international relations. From this



Preface xiii

I figured out that the implicit concept driving *After Hegemony* was trust. IOs solved problems of distrust by institutionalizing cooperation. This begged the question, however – how could those who did not trust one another collaborate in building an organization? But Uslaner also spoke of "generalized trust," an instinct to cooperate somewhat independent of circumstance that might explain the motivations of those political actors more predisposed towards international cooperation. This insight led me to invert the rationalist conventional wisdom – trust rather than distrust drives the formation of international organizations.

Another moment of clarity arrived when I was presenting a preliminary version of the argument to colleagues at Indiana University. A more rationalist-oriented colleague stopped me in the middle of the presentation to ask, "What game are they playing?" It only occurred to me after the talk that different political actors in the same situation saw their strategic environment differently and that they were playing different games based on their own subjective framing. Some trusted and were playing an assurance game; others did not and were in a prisoner's dilemma. Luckily I was hardly the first to have had this realization, and following this thread led me to a veritable treasure trove of work in social psychology on the effect of "social orientation" on cooperation almost completely ignored in international relations. And social orientation reduced to variation in levels of generalized trust. Had this been one or two articles only somewhat tangentially related to our subject of concern, it might be forgivable. But this was almost a half century of research on the very same questions with which we were grappling telling us that the economistic work the field has become so enamored of simply did not work in the real world. It is microeconomics and formal modeling that really has the problem with external validity.

Work on this book has spanned three universities, and along the way, a lot of colleagues and friends have helped me work through the argument. In no particular order, I thank Robert Keohane, Eric Uslaner, Andy Kydd, Jonathan Mercer, Craig Parsons, Rick Herrmann, John Odell, Alex Wendt, Charli Carpenter, Ned Lebow, Shiping Tang, Nicolas Onuf, Hendrik Spruyt, Brendan Green, Jacques Hymans, Colin Dueck, Peter Trubowitz, Joseph Jupille, David Andrews, Benjamin Fordham, Aaron Hoffman, Joshua Busby, Wade Jacoby, Regina Smyth, Mark Manger, and Juliet Johnson and



xiv Preface

audiences at Purdue University, Indiana University, American University, Scripps College and the University of Southern California for comments on this project at various stages of development. Debbie Larson, David Houghton and Nicolas Jabko revealed themselves to me as reviewers after the manuscript had been accepted, and I hope this final version shows the impact of their trenchant critiques. Research support was provided by the Advancing Scholarship in the Humanities and the Social Sciences initiative of the University of Southern California. Christina Faegri was an invaluable research assistant. Work done by Kevin Duska, my first undergraduate assistant at McGill, is finally seeing the light of day. John Haslam was an attentive and gracious editor from start to finish. Nicolas Wheeler, who co-edits this series along with Christian Reus-Smit, was a champion from the beginning. I appreciate his confidence. The School of International Relations at USC has served as a wonderful home to write the manuscript. I am so pleased to have come full circle, back to California.

My sons form bookends to this project. My first, Luc, was born just before I began. My second, Max, came into this world just after I finished the draft that went to Cambridge University Press. As always, my wife Nina Srinivasan Rathbun was my sounding board, shoulder to cry on, copy-editor, and critic. I dedicate this book to them.