

Liberalism in International Relations

A non-trivial issue is what constitutes "liberals". Many definitions exist in the literature, but the steps on the continuum liberal - idealist - optimist can be virtually indistinguishable. For my purposes, I assume that a liberal internationalist is someone that believes that the use of force in international politics can (and should) be eliminated or minimised by appeal to human nature. Liberal internationalists do not see fundamentally the disestablishment of nation states although they can see a possibility of some diminished role for states accompanied by a strengthening of societal international actors. The aversion to war and faith in human nature makes the liberal internationalist an optimist almost by definition.

With such a broad definition, liberal internationalists can see the way to a better future following many different paths and having a multitude of causes.

Liberal internationalists come in a variety of shades. The future is going to be better than the past, but the reasons vary markedly. Many of the arguments are not new, being made by a variety of authors from Kant onwards. Nor is it unusual for a cataclysmic event to spark more optimism - both world wars and many major wars had done that. We see to identify the major rationales for a better future as follows: