

Ronald Rogowski, "Institutions as Constraints on Strategic Choice", in *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, ed. David A. Lake & Robert Powell. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999: 115-36.

To determine the extent to which domestic political institutions affect foreign policy, Rogowski proposes to examine empirical evidence in the context of a set of three independent variables:

- 1) Franchise, or the extent of the group whose preferences count
- 2) Representation, or the makeup and mode of selection of those who represent the franchise
- 3) Decision Rules: When and how can the representatives commit the larger body to a particular course of action.

According to Rogowski, these characteristics of institutions affect foreign policy in five ways:

- 1) Policy bias: by controlling the process, institutions shape the ways in which the national interest is defined, as well as the goals of foreign policy. As proof of this, Rogowski cites Gourevitch, who claims that this is the reason why institutional change is so bitterly contested.
- 2) Credibility of Commitments: Governments that can keep their promises have much to gain, but what is it that constrains an agent whose power knows few if any checks? Institutions are part of the answer, and if this is the case in domestic politics, there is no reason to assume that it does not extend into the international realm as well.
- 3) Coherence and Stability of Policy: Even without braking their promises, some governments are less consistent than others. Presumably some of the difference is due to the extent to which domestic institutions successfully "congeal" group and individual preferences.
- 4) Mobilization and projection of power: "Legitimate" regimes seem better able to extract resources and project power abroad, because they are better at encouraging investment and mobilizing social resources.
- 5) Strategic Environment: Institutions constrain the choice of strategy. Strategies work in some institutional settings but not in others.

Joining the independent and dependent variables above, and comparing their interaction to empirical evidence, Rogowski finds that:

Outcomes are biased by:

- Franchise: because assigning too much weight to a particular group leads to privileging that group's preferences.
- Representation: in that large constituencies point representatives to the general welfare, whereas small ones encourage particularism. Also, short-term appointments tend to lead to opportunism, whereas longer and more secure ones to a long-term perspective.
- Decision Rules: multiple bodies and veto points bias results towards the status quo. These points also cause delays in response and discourage sacrifice, which encourages "easy" responses (deficits, inflation, devaluation). Finally, authority over the agenda advantages holders of the authority.

Commitments are made credible by:

- Franchise: because there are claims that a wider franchise leads to wider credibility, although there seems to be strong evidence for the claim that strong and insulated bureaucracies can commit more reliably.
- Representation: delegation lends credibility by insulating from public opinion and temptation to yield to short-term pressures.
- Decision Rules: specialized and irrevocable delegation enhances credibility. Also useful: multiple veto systems, and most of all clarity regarding the rules about who decides and how.

Coherence and stability of outcomes are assured by:

- Franchise: because entities that are divided internally on many independent issues (e.g. class and religion) are less stable than those in which conflict centers on a single dimension (e.g. class).

- Representation: fewer bodies or a clear hierarchy among many lead to greater coherence and stability.
- Decision Rules: when authority is concentrated in a single body and that body has extensive agenda-setting powers.

Mobilization and projection of power are facilitated by:

- Franchise: because of the “commonplace” that democratic (or “legitimate”) regimes mobilize more effectively and, when pushed, fight better than authoritarian regimes.
- Representation: as above, greater connection/interaction between the franchise and the representatives makes for more support.
- Decision Rules: multiple veto systems encourage disagreement and impede mobilization. Strong agenda-setting powers a prerequisite for successful mobilization.

Domestic actors’ strategies are affected by:

- Franchise: because variations in the franchise affect actors’ abilities to formulate strategies and find the means to pursue them.
- Representation: because if power is concentrated in a single body, then domination or intimidation of that body is the only means of influencing strategy. If power is more dispersed, then strategies of influence can be more varied and intricate.
- Decision Rules: because delegation can be used as a tool more effective than the maximization of votes or contributions, as in the case of powerful courts and parties who choose to further their aims through those courts, rather than by appeal to the electorate.

Conclusions:

- 1) *Institutions vary and their variations matter*: there is evidence that significant differences between countries and their institutions “profoundly affect the style and relative success of their foreign policy”.
- 2) *Research and theorizing on this topic are in their infancy*: important studies of all kinds of aspects of institutions are being largely ignored by scholars; they should be taken into account.
- 3) *A strategic choice approach yields important new insights*: despite (2), above, there are two fundamental assumptions that are necessary to understanding representation and decision rules in foreign policy: i) principals and representatives are characterized by “self-interest seeking with guile”, and ii) all players try to take into account others’ strategies and actions.
- 4) *Microfoundations remain weakly explicated*: impressive statistical results in international relations usually raise more questions than they answer. Large-scale explanations remain disconnected from microfoundations (individual motivations and processes), and understanding of the latter is essential for further breakthroughs.