Interests, Institutions and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations by Helen V. Milner
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cies stands in sharp contrast to simple theories of rational choice. We must also recognize that Franklin Roosevelt was not your average politician. Ironically, Farnham’s analysis partially undercuts her broader theoretical point by convincingly demonstrating just how open-minded, uncommitted, experimental, and wily Roosevelt could be when seemingly caught between the Scylla of foreign threat and the Charybdis of domestic constraints. By her own admission, Jimmy Carter did not demonstrate these qualities. Nor did Woodrow Wilson or Lyndon Johnson.

Farnham has undeniably made a contribution to our understanding of political leadership, and her analysis highlights a broader problem: the different styles and capabilities of leaders. She has done an excellent job of defining the way in which one type of leader responds to impending values conflicts. On the base of additional case studies, we must identify other patterns of response and the kinds of leaders with which they are associated.

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Traditionally, domestic-level arguments in international political economy (IPE) begin with an analysis of the distribution of interests within a country, perhaps examine the ease or difficulty of organizing interests, then relate interest groups to political parties and more formal political structures to explain state policy. Several states’ policies can then be joined to arrive at a picture of systemic outcomes. We can easily borrow from economics work portraying the distribution of interests within societies, thus we have a growing literature building off variants of the Heckscher-Ohlin model (notably the Stolper-Samuelson theorem and its rivals). This literature employs economic models to fill in substance about interests and then makes broad assumptions about how interests compete to shape policy.

In this book, Helen Milner emphasizes the politics at the domestic level rather than the economic interests. She seeks to explain the success or failure of agreements to cooperate, an issue central to debates between Realists and Institutionals. Milner argue that both fail to take domestic politics adequately into account. She poses an alternative that uses the interaction of the distributions of interests, of information, and of decision-making powers to inform our understanding of the negotiation and ratification of international cooperative arrangements. Since it is not about the substance of interests, but rather about how interests are distributed, the overall argument is strikingly different. By drawing much more heavily on analyses of domestic politics and informational asymmetries, and by abstracting out the details of interests for the purposes of modeling, the results are a fresh cut at an old question; international factors still matter, since domestic political leaders must reflect on the need for international cooperation and the possibility of retaliation in issue areas that exhibit policy externalities.

Innovation typically generates wariness, and in this case the wariness may spring from the literature Milner draws on, since it is less familiar to specialists in international relations (IR). This literature is centered not simply on democratic politics, but on American practices. For instance, divided government drives many of Milner’s findings. This has clear applications to the United States, but Milner must (and does) construct convincing reasons
why parliamentary systems, which produce coalitional governments or which lack parties able to discipline their back-benches, would exhibit similar patterns. Britain, Japan, or other states thus may exhibit decision-making and ratification processes more like the United States than we would first expect. More importantly, cases where decision making is concentrated in the hands of an executive are actually easier to model. Milner can therefore not only cover different regime-types and states open or closed to the international economy, her arguments can also encompass the explanations that Realists or Institutionalists provide for cooperation. Another potential problem is that the analysis is about directional dyads (one state’s decisions concerning interaction with one other state). This, however, does not limit the results, partially because in practice many negotiations take place between two states and then are extended to cover others through multilateral institutions, but more importantly because the model is sufficiently abstract that its assumptions can be easily altered to deal with such concerns.

The book may not be easy reading for the very audiences Milner wishes to persuade; when the first half of the book is devoted to theoretical models, some readers may be lost along the way, no matter how clear the thinking or writing. Part I of the book covers much ground, and the abstraction is necessary to zero in on those causal forces deserving greater attention. While I found the graphs and models presented in chapters three and four tied things together, such representations may not be so illuminating for those unused to them—much of the IR audience; those in IPE who already focus on domestic forces are more likely to be receptive. These representations might have been more accessible if they contained referents to the substance of policies, though this is simply a stylistic point. It does highlight a disjuncture between Parts I (theory) and II (cases), however, since these representations are not replicated as devices for organizing evidence, as one might expect.

That point aside, the cases provide compelling support for the arguments. Each chapter considers a pairing of attempts to reach an agreement on cooperation, controlling for different factors. By examining decisions involving the same countries at the same time, but where cooperation was achieved in one issue-area but not the other, Milner provides ammunition for criticisms of purely systemic explanations. By including the failure of the European Defense Community, she deals with an example in security affairs, showing that the arguments apply outside economic issue areas. The cases also illustrate how the arguments draw in a number of factors. As she also points out, often the domestic bargaining is more difficult and takes more time than the international negotiations!

*Interests, Institutions and Information* helps us focus on domestic-level variables, which have received too little attention in IPE. It brings us back to the politics of domestic-level analyses to balance the emphasis on economics. It also provides important insights into questions concerning the foreign policy behavior of different regime-types—a burgeoning issue in IR more generally. This is a powerful work that will be the springboard for further research, since it gives us a new lens through which we may examine issues central to the field.

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The end of the cold war has led to something of a crisis in paradigms in political science: “Who got it right, who got it wrong?” is one debate. “Can’t we just begin in many respects