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Rules For The World: International Organizations In Global Politics



Synopsis

Rules for the World provides an innovative perspective on the behavior of international organizations and their effects on global politics. Arguing against the conventional wisdom that these bodies are little more than instruments of states, Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore begin with the fundamental insight that international organizations are bureaucracies that have authority to make rules and so exercise power. At the same time, Barnett and Finnemore maintain, such bureaucracies can become obsessed with their own rules, producing unresponsive, inefficient, and self-defeating outcomes. Authority thus gives international organizations autonomy and allows them to evolve and expand in ways unintended by their creators. Barnett and Finnemore reinterpret three areas of activity that have prompted extensive policy debate: the use of expertise by the IMF to expand its intrusion into national economies; the redefinition of the category "refugees" and decision to repatriate by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and the UN Secretariat's failure to recommend an intervention during the first weeks of the Rwandan genocide. By providing theoretical foundations for treating these organizations as autonomous actors in their own right, Rules for the World contributes greatly to our understanding of global politics and global governance.

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Customer Reviews

"International organizations are a growing presence in the global system but remain a neglected subject of study. This book by two prominent political scientists provides a groundbreaking look at

their impact, making clear that international organizations may be created by powerful states but, once established, are neither straightforward tools of states nor unalloyed servants of a global common good. . . . Barnett and Finnemore conclude that the impact of these organizations lies less in the expert knowledge they wield than in the ways they define problems, set agendas, and deploy 'intellectual technologies.' The most intriguing insights of the book, however, emerge as the authors grapple with what the growing 'global bureaucratization' means for democratic accountability." — G. John Ikenberry, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2004 "The authors take a novel approach to studying international organizations and establish a framework wherein these actors have the potential to develop preferences and cultures that are counter to the wishes of their member states. The authors breathe new life into the study of IGOs by removing the rose-colored glasses of the extant literature, which cannot account for negative and independent behaviors of these organizations." — C. S. Leskiw, *Choice*, September 2005 "Few books about world politics merit the description of 'path-breaking.' *Rules for the World* is one of them. States matter, but so do their creations, international organizations. Realists beware." — Thomas G. Weiss, Presidential Professor and Director, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, The CUNY Graduate Center "This is essential reading on the authoritative roles played by international secretariats. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore look at international organizations as organizations, applying a sophisticated bureaucratic analysis and identifying the modal pathologies of these unique institutions. They make a completely persuasive case that scholars need to pay more attention to the ways in which international organizations can be held accountable to their ultimate clients, not to their state members, but to citizens throughout the global polity." — Craig N. Murphy, Wellesley College, Historian of the UN Development Programme and Chair of the Academic Council on the UN System "Provocative and controversial in the best senses of those words, *Rules for the World* urges us to rethink the widespread view that portrays international bureaucrats as selfless and powerless agents of states. The authors mix an insightful treatment of the sociology of organizations with in-depth and original case studies of three pathologies of global governance, instances when international organizations contributed to failures in the management of international financial crises, the protection of refugees, and the stopping of genocide." — Michael W. Doyle, Harold Brown Professor of Law and International Affairs, Columbia University

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International relations theory has long ago identified a subfield that deals specifically with the existence of international organizations - IOs in the jargon. This field has yielded relatively few insights, and is of little use to the practitioner. Scholars have proposed complex theoretical constructs - "international regimes" - to explain cooperation among states, but they have tended to treat international organizations as mere servants of states' interests, not as actors in their own right. They have very seldom opened the black box to describe what IOs are really like. Now Barnett and Finnemore want to revive the subject by going back to basic questions - what do international organizations do, how do they work - and by using the tools of another discipline, sociology, which has much to say about the behavior of organizations. They begin with an obvious starting point: international organizations are bureaucracies and, as such, they exhibit many of the pathologies that we associate with these large impersonal organizations - their lack of responsiveness, their taste for red tape, their tunnel vision, their mission creep. But bureaucracies also have qualities for which they do not always get credit but that make them an indispensable component of our modern world: their capacity to manage complex tasks in a rational way, their predictability and fairness in the application of general rules, their expertise in the use and production of knowledge, their legitimacy in the pursuit of the common interest. The two authors then lead the reader through a crash course in organizational behavior, starting with scholarly debates about IOs' autonomy, power, dysfunction and change, then moving to the characteristics of modern bureaucracies (hierarchy, continuity, impersonality, expertise) and to the effects of bureaucratic rules (rules as operating procedures, rules as lenses through which problems are defined and classified, rules as creating a world amenable to the intervention of experts, rules as the basis of an organizational culture). Rules of experts "construct" the social world, they help create the world as it is: this is the basic tenet of the "constructivist" school of thought from which this book derives. The authors distinguish between four types of authority that international bureaucracies can wield in their relations with states and other actors: delegated authority, when international organizations act on behalf of states; moral authority, when they represent the interests and values of the international community; expert authority, when knowledge yields power; and rational-legal authority, which is the hallmark of bureaucratic power. These four types of authority - delegated, moral, expert, and rational-legal - have the twin effects of putting IOs "in authority" and of making them "an authority": IOs are often the actors empowered to decide if there is a problem on a particular issue, what kind a problem it is, and whose responsibility it is to solve it. After having developed this theoretical

framework, Barnett and Finnemore then move on to present three case studies of international organizations, focusing on their autonomy from states, the way they exercise power, their change processes, and how they sometimes produce inefficient and self-defeating outcomes. They first examine the IMF and the way its economic expertise made ever-increasing intervention in domestic economies seem logical and even necessary to states that had explicitly barred such action in the organization's Articles of Agreements. They then describe how the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) used its authority to expand the concept of refugee and later developed a repatriation culture that led to violations of refugee rights. Finally, they look at the UN Secretariat, the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, and the development of a peacekeeping culture that led the institution to turn a blind eye when crimes against humanity were committed in Rwanda. The book is not exempt from verbose jargon that sometimes makes it a hard read, and from approximations that lead the authors to couch some controversial statements without substantiating them (on the "failure" of IMF programs, for instance). They mostly keep a bird eye's view on the bureaucracies that they study, and fail to describe their inner workings in a meaningful way. They spend too much time discussing chicken-and-egg problems, such as the autonomy of international organizations vis-à-vis the states, and too little on important issues such as leadership or accountability. Their last proposition, that the promotion of democracies and liberalism is more and more dependent on organizations that are neither liberal nor democratic, would in itself have deserved a single volume. Despite its shortcomings, this book is a valuable addition to the field, and one hopes that it may spur further empirical studies on the bureaucracies that increasingly provide rules for the world.

One of the most important books in constructivist international relations theory yet written! A must assign for any course in international organization or global governance.

Good condition.

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