

Notes for Putnam

Putnam: The Logic of Two Level Games

Putnam discusses whether domestic politics influence international politics or vice-versa and his answer is both. He advocates “general equilibrium” theories which account simultaneously for the interaction of domestic and international theories. According to him, the politics of many international negotiations can be conceived as a two-level game:

Level I—bargaining between the negotiators, leading to a tentative agreement.

Level II—separate discussions within each group of constituents about whether to ratify the agreement.

The requirement that any Level I agreement must in the end be ratified at Level II imposes a crucial theoretical link between the two levels. The “win set” for a given Level II constituency is the set of all possible Level I agreements that would “win”, i.e. gain the necessary majority among the constituents, when simply voted up or down. Level II win sets are very important for understanding Level I agreements because—1) larger win sets make Level I agreement more likely and 2) the relative size of the respective Level II win sets will affect the distribution of the joint gains from the international bargain: the larger the perceived win set of a negotiator, the more he can be pushed around by other Level I negotiators.

Three factors affect win set size—1) the distribution of power, preferences and possible coalitions among Level II constituents 2) Level II political institutions 3) the strategies of the Level I negotiator.

Three other factors affect the relationship between the two levels—1) uncertainty can be a bargaining device or a stumbling block: uncertainty about the size of an opponent’s win set can increase the risk of involuntary defection but at the same time negotiators have an incentive to understate their own win sets and mislead their opponent 2) international pressures can reverberate within domestic politics tipping the domestic balance and thus influencing international negotiations 3) the role of the chief negotiator and his preferences can have a powerful impact.