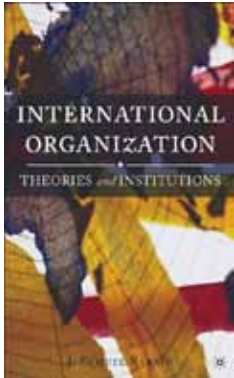


# BOOK REVIEW

## International Organization: Theories and Institutions

Reviewer : Dita Liliansa  
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Author : J. Samuel Barkin  
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Since the World War II, the number of international organizations has proliferated. At first, they were designed to address very specific issues. Later on, the mandates were broadened in order to deal with a wide range of problems that a number of states faced in common.

Barkin opens up the discussions on international organizations by asking whether or not IOs matter. In this book, Barkin restricts the term international organizations (IOs) to inclusive intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) that are created by treaties signed by states, as opposed to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations. In other words, it comprises institutions whose constituent members are states. The book put a significant emphasis on the theory of IOs and its application. As quoted in the preface, it aims to “suggest ways in which the theories discussed can help us understand the role of IOs in international politics,” and is intended to fill the gap between introductory textbooks and primary sources of theory.

The first half of this book talks about theoretical approaches to the study of IOs while the second half examines the role of specific IOs in particular issue-areas. The United Nations (UN) has become the core of the discussions since the majority of multilateral IOs are in some way related to the UN. Barkin breaks down several chapters into spe-

cific issue-areas and elaborates the role of specific IOs in those particular issue-areas. For instance, in the issue-area of international political economy, in which Barkin believes that IOs are both most active and most contentious, Barkin draws the three most prominent organizations in this issue-area: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank, and unveils some criticisms to these international economic institutions.

Barkin argues that from the perspective of efficiency-maximizing, functional IOs are best kept small, issue-specific, and as technical as possible. However, from an institutional perspective, larger and more diffuse organizations are more vulnerable to bureaucratic pathologies and inertia, but they are also more able to act meaningfully and push particular items onto the international agenda. In other words, Barkin believes that there can be a trade-off between technical efficiency and political effectiveness. Moreover, from the perspective of functionalist theory, the role played by technical IOs in driving international political integration is actually surprisingly small. In fact they have tended to coordinate activity within their issue-areas at the level of the lowest common denominator of political consensus among their members.

In spite of a relatively strict definition of IOs to inclusive multilateral intergovernmental institutions, there are some institutions that are clearly part of the international organization system but not in traditional sense. Here, Barkin looks briefly at some hybrid IOs that involve both states and non-state actors as primary participants. They include the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (ITSO, formerly INTELSAT), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Barkin elaborates that as new hybrids are created, existing hybrids can retain their status as traditional IOs. This happened because they set voluntary standards and therefore do not pose a threat to the authority of states or the multilateral system.

In conclusions, Barkin states that the role of IOs should not be overstated, meaning that they cannot be expected to perform beyond their limits. Although they are able to influence international relations by

facilitating cooperation and by legitimating rules, they do not have the traditional power resources as states; they cannot tax, and they do not have either independent means of force or the right to regulate actors authoritatively. At the end of the day, they are beholden to the states that formed them and are constrained by the interests and preferences of those states.

Among many books on IOs, this book manages to stand out by pooling a wide range of IOs in a variety of issue-areas into a comparative theoretical context in a broad sense. Other authors may look at IOs at the micro level, for instance at the effects of particular IOs within their issue-areas, whereas Barkin is able to look at IOs at the macro level, at the effects of IOs in general. To sum up, Barkin does a splendid job to provide a thorough and solid overview of IOs.