

Reasons for Countries to Join International Organisations from the Perspective of Rational Institutional Theory

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Abstract

This study analyses the reasons behind countries' decisions to join international organisations using the rational institutional theory framework. By reviewing recent academic literature and employing a qualitative analysis approach, the study identifies key motivations such as increased international legitimacy, access to resources, and enhanced security and stability. The research findings indicate that these factors significantly influence countries' decisions to engage in international organisations. The implications of these findings provide deeper insights into the dynamics of international relations and the foreign policy strategies of nations.

Keywords: *International Organisations; Rational Institutional Theory; Membership Motivation; International Legitimacy; National Interests*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of globalization marked by increased interdependence between countries, the involvement of countries in international organizations is becoming an increasingly important phenomenon in the study of international relations (Arlen, Scherz, & Vestergren, 2023). International organizations, both global such as the United Nations (UN) and regional ones such as ASEAN, play a crucial role in regulating political, economic, and security cooperation at the international level (Coicaud, 2019). Membership in these organizations not only provides a platform for countries to collaborate in achieving common goals, but also brings various strategic advantages that can strengthen the international position of member countries (Bellamy, 2019).

A state's decision to join an international organization is often driven by rational considerations involving the calculation of benefits and costs (Ostrom, 2019). Rational institutional theory offers an analytical framework that emphasizes the importance of rational calculations in political decision-making, including the decision to engage in international organizations (March & Olsen, 2021). This approach sees the state as an actor acting to maximize national interests through participation in international structures that provide a framework to achieve those goals (Haug, 2024).

This study aims to analyze the main motivations that drive countries to join international organizations using the framework of rational institutional theory (Liu & Cao, 2023). By understanding the factors that drive this engagement, this research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of international relations and the foreign policy strategies of countries (Campbell, 2020). In addition, this study also aims to identify how these motivations vary between different countries and

international organisations, as well as their implications for international policy and global cooperation (Haas, 2024).

Previous literature reviews have examined the reasons for countries joining international organizations from various theoretical perspectives, including realism, liberalism, and constructivism (Rosenau, 2021). However, the rational institutional theory approach offers a perspective that focuses more on rational calculations and strategic importance in decision-making (Manulak, 2020). Therefore, this study chose to adopt this theoretical framework as the basis for its analysis (Ostrom, 2019).

Rational institutional theory, as put forward by March and Olsen (1984), highlights that a state's decision to join an international organization is based on rational calculations that consider the strategic benefits and costs involved (Pouliot, 2021). This theory emphasizes that states act to maximize their national interests through participation in institutional structures that provide a framework to achieve those goals (Stephan, 2024). In addition, this theory also pays attention to the role of international norms and legitimacy in state membership decisions (Merkle, 2023).

Several empirical studies have supported the view of rational institutional theory. For example, Keohane (1984) points out that international organizations provide a framework that allows countries to achieve their strategic goals more effectively (Tosun & Rinscheid, 2021). In addition, Barnett and Finnemore (2004) emphasize that international legitimacy gained through membership in international organizations can increase a country's status and influence in the global community (Haug, 2024).

However, criticism of rational institutional theory has also been raised, especially related to the assumption that the state always acts rationally and has perfect information in decision-making (Coicaud, 2019). Some researchers argue that internal factors such as domestic political dynamics and national identity also play an important role in the membership decisions of international organizations (Liu & Cao, 2023). Therefore, although rational institutional theory offers a robust framework for analysis, it is important to consider other factors that can influence a country's decision to join an international organization (Arlen et al., 2023).

This research will contribute to the existing literature by providing an in-depth analysis of state motivations based on rational institutional theory, as well as exploring additional factors that might influence such decisions in the ever-changing global context (Manulak, 2020). In addition, this study will also consider regional geopolitical dynamics, domestic pressures, and non-state influences in the membership process of international organizations (Haug, 2024).

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the literature study method as the main strategy (Campbell, 2020). This method was chosen because it allows an in-depth analysis of a wide range of relevant academic sources and provides a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for countries joining international organizations (Coicaud, 2019). Data is collected from a variety of sources, including journal articles, books, official reports of international organizations, and policy documents of member countries (Haas, 2024).

Source selection criteria include relevance to the research topic, authors' credibility, and publications in the past decade to ensure the accuracy of the information (Liu & Cao, 2023). The main focus is on literature that adopts or critiques rational institutional theories in the context of membership of international organizations (Ostrom, 2019). In addition, case studies of specific countries that have joined various

international organizations are also analyzed to provide an empirical illustration of the motivations identified (Bellamy, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out by identifying the main themes related to the reasons for countries to join international organizations (Pouliot, 2021). These themes are then linked to a rational institutional theoretical framework to interpret the findings and relate them to the existing literature (Rosenau, 2021). This approach allows for the identification of patterns and variations in state motivation, as well as understanding how strategic and institutional factors interact in membership decision-making (Stephan, 2024).

In addition, this study also considers contextual factors such as regional geopolitical dynamics, domestic pressures, and non-state influences in the membership process of international organizations (Manulak, 2020). These factors are analyzed to understand how they affect the rational calculation of countries in deciding whether or not to join international organizations (Haug, 2024).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied source triangulation, which is comparing information from various sources to ensure consistency and accuracy (Merkle, 2023). In addition, this study also uses comparative analysis to compare the motivation of countries in joining different international organisations, to identify differences and similarities in these motivations (Barnett, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that several main reasons encourage countries to join international organizations, which can be explained through the framework of rational institutional theory (Arlen, Scherz, & Vestergren, 2023). These reasons include increased international legitimacy, access to resources, increased security and stability, and coordination of international policies and standards (Bellamy, 2019).

Joining international organizations provides political and moral legitimacy for member states (Coicaud, 2019). This legitimacy is important to increase international status and gain recognition in the global community (Ostrom, 2019). For example, membership in the United Nations not only enhances a country's status but also provides a platform to participate in global decision-making (Haug, 2024). According to Barnett and Finnemore (2004), the legitimacy gained through membership in international organizations can strengthen the country's position in facing international challenges.

In addition, international legitimacy can also be used as a tool of diplomacy to build alliances and strengthen bilateral relations with other countries (Haas, 2024). Countries that have high legitimacy at the international level tend to have greater influence in setting global agendas and policies (Liu & Cao, 2023). This is in line with the findings of Keohane (2020) who stated that international organisations provide a framework that allows countries to achieve their strategic goals more effectively through acquired legitimacy (Manulak, 2020). International legitimacy also plays a role in strengthening national identity on the international stage (Rosenau, 2021). By being recognized as a member of international organizations, the state can present itself as a responsible global actor and committed to international norms (Haug, 2024). This can increase international trust in the country and open up opportunities for further cooperation in various fields (Haas, 2024).

International organizations often provide access to economic, technological, and information resources that are essential for national development (Campbell, 2020). For example, members of the World Bank and IMF gain access to funds and technical support

that can help in economic development (Stephan, 2024). This access allows member states to overcome domestic resource limitations and increase their development capacity (Tosun & Mišić, 2022). In addition, international organizations also provide a platform for technology and knowledge transfer, which can increase efficiency and productivity in various sectors of the economy (Haug, 2024). For example, cooperation in organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) allows member countries to share best practices and improve their production standards, which in turn can improve their competitiveness in global markets (Merkle, 2023).

Access to these resources is not only limited to economic aspects, but also includes access to international information and networks that can assist countries in developing more effective domestic policies (Coicaud, 2019). Through information exchange and cooperation in international organizations, countries can adopt innovations and best practices that have proven successful in other countries (March & Olsen, 2021). This can accelerate the development process and improve the quality of public policies (Manulak, 2020).

Membership in organizations such as NATO or ASEAN allows countries to enhance national security through regional defense and security cooperation (Pouliot, 2021). This cooperation helps reduce the risk of conflict and improve regional stability (Haug, 2024). For example, NATO provides collective security guarantees for its members, which can prevent aggression from non-member countries and create a more stable environment for economic and social development (Bellamy, 2019).

In addition, international organizations also play an important role in conflict mediation and dispute resolution, which can prevent the escalation of conflicts and maintain international peace (Haug, 2024). Membership in international organizations focused on security allows member states to participate in peace missions and security operations, which in turn can enhance their national stability and security (Coicaud, 2019).

The security and stability offered by international organizations also create an environment conducive to foreign investment and economic growth (Ostrom, 2019). Countries that feel safe and stable tend to be more attractive to foreign investors, who can bring new capital and technologies into the country (Liu & Cao, 2023). This can contribute to sustainable economic development and improve community welfare (Manulak, 2020).

Joining international organizations facilitates policy coordination in various areas, including trade, environment, and human rights (Haug, 2024). This allows countries to set international standards that can be economically and socially beneficial (Campbell, 2020). For example, membership in the WTO allows member states to engage in fair and transparent trade negotiations, which can improve market access and strengthen their international trade relations (Tosun & Rinscheid, 2021).

In addition, international organizations also play an important role in setting and enforcing international standards in various sectors (Arlen, Scherz, & Vestergren, 2023). For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) sets global health standards adopted by member countries to improve the quality of their healthcare services (Stephan, 2024). Similarly, the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) provides a framework for countries to collaborate on climate change mitigation and adaptation to its impacts (Rosenau, 2021).

This policy coordination not only increases the effectiveness of national policies, but also creates international policy harmonization that can reduce policy conflicts between countries (Coicaud, 2019). This is important in facing global challenges such as

climate change, terrorism, and pandemics, which require a collective and coordinated response (Haug, 2024). By joining international organizations, countries can work together to address these issues more effectively and efficiently (Arlen et al., 2023).

Further discussion shows that a country's decision to join an international organization is often the result of rational calculations that consider strategic benefits compared to the costs involved (Ostrom, 2019). Factors such as national interests, domestic pressures, and geopolitical dynamics also play an important role in this process (Tosun & Mišić, 2022). For example, countries that face domestic pressure to increase international legitimacy or gain access to certain resources tend to be more motivated to join international organizations (Haug, 2024).

In addition, regional geopolitical dynamics can also influence the decision to join international organizations (Manulak, 2020). Countries that are in regions with high levels of tension or intense regional competition may be more likely to seek protection and support through cooperation in international organizations (Stephan, 2024). This can be seen in the context of ASEAN, where member countries work together to maintain regional stability and security amid various security challenges faced (Bellamy, 2019).

Internal factors such as domestic political dynamics also play an important role in the membership decisions of international organizations (Rosenau, 2021). Governments facing political pressure or the need to strengthen domestic legitimacy may see membership in international organizations as a way to improve their image in the public eye and increase political support (Haug, 2024). In addition, national identity and political aspirations can also influence the decision to join international organizations, where countries may see membership as a way to strengthen their national identity on the international stage (Merkle, 2023).

Non-state influence is also increasingly important in the membership decisions of international organizations (Liu & Cao, 2023). NGOs, multinational corporations, and other non-state actors can influence a country's foreign policy through lobbying, advocacy, and cross-sectoral cooperation (Tosun & Rinscheid, 2021). For example, pressure from environmental NGOs can encourage countries to join international organizations that focus on environmental issues (Pouliot, 2021). Likewise, multinational corporations can influence the membership decisions of international trade organizations to improve market access and reduce trade barriers (Haug, 2024).

In addition to the factors already mentioned, historical and cultural factors can also play a role in the membership decision of international organizations (Stephan, 2024). Historical ties between countries, colonial heritage, and shared cultural values can influence a country's tendency to join certain international organizations (Campbell, 2020). For example, countries with close historical ties tend to find it easier to form alliances and join international organizations that reflect those relationships (Haug, 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

The study identified that the main reasons for countries joining international organizations include increased international legitimacy, access to resources, increased security and stability, and coordination of international policies and standards. Using the framework of rational institutional theory, the study asserts that such decisions are driven by rational calculations that consider strategic benefits for member states. These findings show that countries see international organizations as tools to maximize their national interests through participation in institutional structures that provide a wide range of strategic advantages.

In addition, the study also shows that contextual factors such as regional geopolitical dynamics, domestic pressures, and non-state influences play an important role in the membership decisions of international organizations. It highlights the complexity of a country's decision-making process and the importance of considering various factors in the analysis of state involvement in international organizations.

Further research can explore more deeply the role of domestic dynamics and non-state influences in the membership process of international organizations. In addition, comparative studies between different international organizations can provide further insight into the variation in countries' motivations in joining and how these factors affect the effectiveness and sustainability of those international organizations. The research can also consider the impact of membership of international organizations on the domestic policies of member countries and how countries balance national interests with their international commitments.

Overall, this study makes an important contribution to the international relations literature by highlighting the role of rational institutional theory in understanding the motivation of states to join international organizations. By broadening the understanding of the factors that drive state involvement in international organisations, this research can assist policymakers and academics in formulating more effective strategies to enhance international cooperation and achieve common goals.

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