

## Anarchy explainer video INST/POLS 184

Hi, everyone! It's Professor Floros, and I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about **anarchy**. Our textbook defines anarchy as "the absence of a central authority with the ability to make and enforce laws that bind all actors."

So, we're not talking about anarchy in a punk rock sense or lawlessness *within* a country. Anarchy in international relations is about the lack of a world government that can police state behavior and make and enforce international law.

Think about it this way: If your neighbor destroys all your Halloween decorations because they think the decorations are creepy, you can call the police, have your neighbor arrested, and a court will determine a punishment for the crime and will make your neighbor comply with the punishment, with the help of the police if necessary.

In international relations, if a state bombs the territory of its neighbor, there is no international police force to call. Even if the situation ends up in an international court and the court rules against the aggressor, there is no global military to impose any punishment on it.

In this way, states operating in a system defined by anarchy must be able to rely on themselves for their own defense. We refer to this as "self-help". States need to develop the means to defend themselves because there is no one else who they can depend on to defend them.

Here's an example: Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Crimea is territory that was, and still is, internationally recognized as belonging to Ukraine. So, what was the international response? Many state leaders condemned the annexation, and individual countries imposed economic sanctions on Russia, but the international community collectively didn't actually *do* anything.

"But wait!" you might say. "What about the United Nations? Isn't that a world government?"

The UN is an international organization whose members are states. “The UN” does not have the power to make decisions or take action independent of its members. Troops *from member states* are only sent into conflict zones when the *member states* of the Security Council agree that should happen. And when they don’t, which we’ll talk about in another video, the UN can’t act.

So, anarchy in international relations means that states can only rely on themselves for defense *and* must be able to enforce any agreements they make with other states without the support of a global government. The effects of anarchy are felt in all areas of international relations from war and peace to trade, climate action, protection of marine life, commercial aviation, international mail delivery, and any other issue area where cooperation is needed across borders.

So, to summarize, anarchy describes an international system in which there is no central authority to make and enforce rules, and states must rely on themselves for their security and well-being.

Anarchy is a key concept that we’ll return to over and over again throughout the semester *and* that must be addressed in your Current Events Questionnaires. If you have *any* questions about this concept, please reach out to me or your TA for clarification.

Thanks for watching; I’ll see you in the next video.