

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to address two distinct mechanisms in international relations—bilateralism and multilateralism—concerning maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The objective of the comparative analysis is to assess the effectiveness of these mechanisms in resolving disputes and to determine which is more effective. In the first part of the thesis, a general description of the disputes will be provided to establish a foundational knowledge necessary for the analysis. The second part will assess the effectiveness of bilateralism in the South China Sea through four case studies involving Vietnam-China, Philippines-China, Malaysia-China, and Brunei-China relations. Subsequently, the thesis will examine multilateralism with the focus on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the principal multilateral organization in the region. The final section will conduct a comparison of both frameworks, aiming to identify the more effective mechanism for dispute resolution in the South China Sea. Additionally, this thesis seeks to evaluate the applicability of two prominent international relations theories—realism and liberalism—to the dispute-resolution mechanisms in the South China Sea. In the concluding section, an assessment will be made to determine which theoretical framework more accurately explains the use of these dispute-resolution methods in the region.