

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam in International Relations
Spring 2021
Morning Exam

Please number your pages continuously and ensure that your name is on each page.

Answer **one** of the following questions.

1. Plan and outline a graduate seminar that would serve as an appropriate introduction to international relations for all political science graduate students.

- What topics would you cover? Are there any common topics you would omit?
- Which works are the essential readings for the course? Are there any “canonical” readings you would omit?
- Offer detailed justifications for the topics and works included/excluded.

2. What are the most significant theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of international relations over the past twenty years?

- Discuss at least one theoretical and one empirical contribution, citing specific examples from the literature. Why have these contributions advanced the state of the field?
- What are some existing weaknesses in the field of international relations that offer particularly attractive opportunities for further research?

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Afternoon Exam

Answer *two* of the following questions.

1. Do international institutions play an important role in international relations or not? If so how? If not, why not? Is the role of international institutions sensitive to the issue area? And where do you think the most promising breakthrough in the study of international institutions is likely to occur? Address these questions based on previous theoretical and empirical research in both international conflict and cooperation.
2. Assume that explicit assumptions about human decision making are necessary to construct coherent explanations of state behavior. Evaluate rational and cognitive assumptions in terms of their usefulness for building international relations theory and/or for conducting foreign policy analysis.
3. How do individual grievances grow into large-scale, violent, internal conflicts (civil wars)? In your answer discuss the strategic and tactical considerations of the aggrieved in organizing resistance.
4. Can economic sanctions ever be used to improve human security? If your answer is yes, explain under which conditions we would expect to see those improvements and under which conditions the sanctions would be likely to fail. If your answer is no, explain why economic sanctions are bound to fail as a method for improving human security and why governments still use them for that expressed purpose.
5. The study of colonialism and empire was foundational to the contemporary (ie Post-WWI) discipline of international relations. Has imperialism always been a driving force of world politics? What are some ways we see the influence of colonialism and racism in international relations today? In your answer be sure to address whether and why the big IR “isms” are inherently racist in history, assumption, and practice. Discuss the implications of these foundations for our theory, policy, and community today.
6. Many contend that non-state actors have grown in their numbers and influence in the last twenty years. How have non-state actors been incorporated into IR theory? Are the growth of these actors in society influencing IR in lasting ways? Focusing on any one type of non-state actor (firms, terrorist organizations, NGOs, etc), what are a few of the big questions left for scholars to understand?
7. After several decades of quantitative research on international conflict, are we any closer to a unified theory of war? Is there a theoretical framework in the literature that can coherently piece together the various findings from this body of research? If so, what is it? If not, what is the best available framework?