

# Contemporary Global Politics

Robert Kissack  
Daniel Nicholls

4 ECTS

**IBEI Academic Material**

## Introduction

The four chapters of the course are divided into the most relevant and appropriate levels of analysis for global politics in the 21st century – global, regional, national, and the role of individuals. Each chapter (worth 1 ECTS) is structured in the same way: three issues that resonate with contemporary politics are presented and then studied through the lenses of International Relations.

The learning objectives of the course are:

- Introduce students to a structured understanding of global politics across multiple levels
- Develop analytical skills to interrogate contemporary issues in global politics and Identify competing answers and explanations
- Illustrate the practical application of International Relations theories issues of concern in global public policy. +

## Module 1: Global

### 1.1 Power in the international system

How do we understand and quantify power? Is the distribution of economic and military resources alone enough to determine system polarity and positions of predominance? Or should we consider other, more diffuse, conceptualizations of power? Can concepts such as soft, structural, agenda-setting and institutional power help us to better interpret international life? This section unpacks different forms of power so as to provide students with a comprehensive toolkit with which to analyse international interactions, events and trends.

#### Reading Reference

Barnett, M and Duvall, R. (2005), *Power in International Politics*. International Organization 59 (1)

### 1.2 Anarchy, hierarchy and authority

The international system is anarchic in that there is no overarching authority empowered to adjudicate disputes and differences between states. But interstate dynamics are often based on authority relations between superordinate and subordinate states that allow some actors to control political space and actions. Building on the understandings of power developed in Section One, here we question the usefulness of anarchy as an analytical category and look at the causal mechanisms which

#### Reading Reference

Nexon, D and Wright, T. (2007). *What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate?* The American Political Science Review 101 (2)

determine economic and political outcomes within the international sphere.

### 1.3 Theoretical approaches

Section Three brings together the concepts studied in the previous sections so as to interpret the key theories of International Relations. Does material power competition within an anarchic system condemn us to constant conflict, as Realism argues? Or should we listen to Liberals, who contend that institutions, free trade and democracy create the conditions for cooperation? This section also looks at Constructivism's reinterpretation of anarchy through a focus on identities, interactions and change, as well as Neo-Gramscian understandings of capital accumulation and hegemony.

#### Reading Reference

Blair, A. and Curtis, S. (2009). *International Politics: An Introductory Guide*, pp.124-150

## Module 2: Regional

### 2.1 Regions, regionalism and regionalisation

What are the structures and interactions which give meaning to a region? Through which processes, and for what reasons, are regions constituted as political, economic, social and security entities? This section examines the ways in which regions both condition and react to a globalizing world, allowing regional clubs of states to act collectively in the pursuit of shared interests.

#### Reading Reference

Collard-Wexler, S. (2006). "Integration under Anarchy: Neorealism and the European Union." *European Journal of International Relations* 12 (3).

### 2.2 Economic and political regionalism – from integration to post-hegemony

Section Two analyses different forms of regional projects, comparing the economic integration of the European Union with more political and less institutionalized projects in other parts of the world, notably South America. We thus see regional projects which embody and promote fundamentally different ideas on state-society relations, modes of capitalism and the global distribution of power. Regions, in this sense, may either embrace and internalise or counterbalance and tame processes of globalization.

#### Reading Reference

Riggiozzi, P. (2012). *Regions, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis*. *New Political Economy* 17 (4)

### 2.3 Regionalism and security

Most conflicts take place within regions or sub-regions, so to what extent can a focus on regional relations help us understand security dynamics?

This section looks at regions as security complexes, providing insights into interactions which destabilise regions in security terms as well as those which enhance regional security, both through the easing of intra-regional tensions and the limiting of military incursions or pressures from extra-regional actors. Whilst during the Cold War security dynamics were overlain by superpower control, now regions have the possibility to collectively manage their own security structures and identity, which has important consequences for reducing conflict.

#### Reading Reference

Fawn, R. (2009). *Regions' and Their Study: Wherefrom, What for and Where to?* Review of International Studies 35 (1)

## Module 3: National

### 3.1 Sovereignty

The Westphalian System of mutually exclusive territorial units with centralised legal and political authority is at the heart of the modern international system. This section will briefly identify what makes the modern state distinct from previous forms of political order, and how it also constitutes the international system as anarchic.

De facto and de jure, internal and external, positive and negative; all of these binaries will be explored in order to show that despite being at the centre of our understanding of the modern world, it is a highly fluid concept.

#### Reading Reference

Krasner, S. (1995). *Compromising Westphalia*. International Security 20(3): 115-151

### 3.2 Domestic Politics

Why do states behave in the way that they do in global politics? How are foreign policies made? Is state survival such a pressing issue that all other policies are subordinated to it, as realists would have us believe? Are democracies really more peaceful? To answer all of these questions we have to look into the domestic politics of states, and identify how both the politics (i.e. how members of the society influence the policies of their governments) and the polity (i.e. how societies are structured and what type of government system they employ matter.

#### Reading Reference

Russett, B. (2013). *Liberalism' in Dunne, T., M. Kurki & S. Smith (eds.) Theories of International Relations: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch. 5.

### 3.3 State-building and War

War is often regarded as destructive – and in many ways it is, not least in terms violence, loss of life, and material damage. But for many centuries, fighting wars helped governments become stronger, and paradoxically, help 'build' states because warfare is often associated with national history

and thus national identity. Since the end of the Cold War, 'new wars' have broken out in the Balkans, Central Asia, and parts of Africa, where the lines between combatant and civilian are blurred, and the 'war economy' is based on illegality. According to Mary Kaldor – for the first time in centuries, these 'new wars' weaken states, not build them.

#### Reading Reference

Kaldor, M. (2012). *New and Old Wars*. Cambridge: Policy Press pp.1-31

## Module 4: Individual

### 4.1 Human Rights

Human rights form a fundamental part of global politics today. Do states protect human rights because they believe it is the right thing to do, or because other states put pressure on them to comply – either by promising incentives or threatening punishment? Under what circumstances can important norms of international society, such as the non-intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, be violated in the name of protecting people from the gravest violations of human rights? This section answers these questions and more.

#### Reading Reference

Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Kiyoteru Tsutsui. *Human Rights in a Globalizing World: The Paradox of Empty Promises*. *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 5 (March 2005): 1373-1411

### 4.2 Civil Society

How do individual change the world around them? In global politics there are many ways that do not require using public institutions such as governments – these are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that operate in a public space separate from the state – civil society. The revolution in communication technology has made communication across borders easier and cheaper than ever, it is possible to mobilise public awareness and support for injustices that a few decades ago would have remained unknown. States are being forced to adapt to the impact of networks of civil society groups operating domestically and transnationally.

#### Reading Reference

Keck, M. E. and K. Sikkink (1999). *Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics*. *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159): 89-101.

### 4.3 Development

While globalisation has brought economic opportunities to many, including the platform of growth for the 'emerging economies' led by Brazil, South Africa, India and China, it has also furthered inequalities between people, with more wealth concentrated in the hands of fewer people than ever before. What should be the response of global politics to

#### Reading Reference

Sen, A. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*. Harvard University Press, Chapter 1 – pp. 1-27.

questions about the (un)fairness of opportunities for people across the planet?

## **Assessment**

Students will be assessed on a continual assessment basis and there is no final exam.

Throughout the course students will have to carry out five exercises, as listed in the teaching plan.

All the exercises will require students to read the set materials and to interpret and critically evaluate these.