

Introduction to International Relations

Introduction to International Relations (IR)

Key concepts, theories, actors, and contemporary issues

1. What Is International Relations?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The systematic study of political, economic, social, and cultural interactions among sovereign states and other global actors.
Scope	Diplomacy, war, trade, international law, global governance, human rights, environmental policy, and transnational networks.
Goal	Explain why states behave as they do, predict outcomes of international events, and offer policy recommendations.

2. Core Levels of Analysis

Level	Focus	Typical Questions
Individual	Decision makers, leaders, public opinion, psychological factors	What personal beliefs drive a leader's foreign policy?
State (Domestic)	Regime type, economic structure, national identity, interest groups	How do domestic politics shape a country's stance on climate accords?
Systemic (International)	Distribution of power, anarchy, international norms	How does the rise of China alter the balance of power?

3. Major Theoretical Paradigms

Theory	Core Assumptions	Main Proponents	Policy Implications
Realism	International system is anarchic; states seek survival & power; rational actors	Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz	Emphasize balance of power, deterrence, military strength

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Theory	Core Assumptions	Main Proponents	Policy Implications
Liberalism	Cooperation possible through institutions, interdependence, democracy	Robert Keohane, Michael Doyle	Support multilateral regimes, trade agreements, democratic peace
Constructivism	Ideas, identities, and norms shape state behavior; reality is socially constructed	Alexander Wendt, Martha Finnemore	Promote norm diffusion, address identity-based conflicts
Marxist/Critical	Global capitalism creates exploitation; imperialism drives inequality	Immanuel Wallerstein, Robert Cox	Advocate anti-imperialist policies, economic redistribution
English School	International society blends power politics and shared norms	Hedley Bull, Martin Wight	Balance realist security with liberal norms of law and legitimacy

4. Primary Actors

Category	Examples	Typical Roles
States	United States, Germany, Brazil	Sovereign decision-makers, primary security actors
International Organizations	United Nations, WTO, IMF	Norm-setting, dispute resolution, collective action
Non-State Actors	NGOs (Amnesty International), MNCs (Apple), Terrorist groups (ISIS)	Advocacy, economic influence, security threats
Transnational Networks	Climate coalitions, diaspora communities	Issue-specific coordination beyond state borders

5. Key Concepts & Vocabulary

- **Anarchy** – Absence of a central authority in the international system.
- **Sovereignty** – Supreme authority of a state over its territory and population.
- **Balance of Power** – Distribution of capabilities to prevent any one state from dominating.

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- **Collective Security** – Agreement that an attack on one is an attack on all (e.g., NATO).
 - **Soft Power** – Ability to shape preferences through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion.
 - **Hard Power** – Use of military and economic force to influence outcomes.
 - **Interdependence** – Mutual reliance among states (trade, finance, technology).
 - **Global Governance** – Coordination of policies across borders without a world government.
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6. Contemporary Issues