

International Relations

Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam Spring 2017

Questions

I) International Relations Theory

1) A recent trend in Ph.D. dissertations in International Relations has been towards 'mixed-methods' dissertations. Is this a fad, is it a sign of intellectual progress in the field, or do you have some other assessment? What are any challenges and downsides of any emerging expectation of mixed-methods dissertations as a standard?

2) In recent times there seems to be numerous challenges to what some commentators depict as liberal norms and institutions of the international order. Identify at least two such norms or institutions, and discuss the reasons why you think it is a better bet that 1) these norms are likely to significantly erode or 2) withstand such challenges. What conditions and/or mechanisms are relevant to consider that could enable such norms to be viable in the face of illiberal challenges?

3) On the one hand, theory seems to be highly prized and rewarded in the field of International Relations. On the other hand, there have been a number of criticisms of the pathologies of privileging theories - 'isms' – and instead advocacy for middle-range and/or eclectic approaches. Discuss and assess these propositions in order to make an argument about what you think ought to be the proper place and value of theory in international relations scholarship.

4) As China has increasingly emerged as one of the world's most influential states, do you expect it to decreasingly abide by international norms and the rulings of international organizations like the WTO (or any others you wish to analyze)? Why or why not?

II) Norms and Legitimacy

1) Perhaps never more in recent times than in the age of Trump has the question become more relevant: how seriously we should take the role of legitimacy in international relations? How can scholars demonstrate the extent to which it does or does not matter? Use at least one example each of developments which provide some apparent evidence for the influence of legitimacy and its lack of effectiveness to make your argument.

2) A plethora of scholarship over the last 20 years or so has documented that international norms matter and the mechanisms by which they wield influence in international relations. There has been a backlash by numerous states in recent years against civil society and non-governmental organizations aimed at severely curtailing the ability of such actors to be effective transnationally by restricting funding, having to register as foreign agents subject to numerous constraints, and so on. Was the

scholarship on transnational networks and norms too optimistic about 'people power,' and insufficiently attentive to the power of states to reassert sovereign control over their affairs?

3) There has been a vibrant debate over the findings of case study and quantitative approaches regarding the effectiveness of human rights norms in international relations, with researchers focusing on case studies pointing to numerous successes whereas some scholars conducting quantitative assessments have concluded such norms have had little impact overall. Assess relevant findings and arguments to draw your own conclusions as to what we know about the effectiveness of human rights norms and the value of different approaches for understanding their influence.