

What Is International Political Economy?

OVERVIEW

What is **international political economy (IPE)**? In simple terms, we define IPE as an analytical effort to break down the barriers that separate and isolate the disciplines of politics, economics, and sociology and their methods of analysis, seeking a comprehensive understanding of mainly international, if not global, issues and events. In doing so, IPE employs three major analytical perspectives and four international structures that combine elements of economics, politics, and sociology to describe and explain international and global problems and issues in a way that cannot adequately be addressed by each of those disciplines alone.

This chapter clarifies the nature of IPE as a field of study through an examination of several different definitions of IPE written by some well-known experts on the topic. Based on their views, we focus on its fundamental principles and multidisciplinary nature, along with reasons why we feel it is important and should be studied. Drawing on the topics of **globalization**—the intensive political, economic, and social connections between states and the people in them—and the dramatic events of September 11, 2001 (aka “9/11”), we examine how different disciplines would explain these phenomena, and why those explanations are inadequate, given the complex nature of issues and problems in the international political economy today. Because globalization and 9/11 continue to profoundly shape the lives of people not only in the United States but everywhere in the world, we argue that events like these are better understood from the interdisciplinary, multidimensional perspective that IPE provides, as opposed to a single disciplinary explanation. The same holds true for a great many other issues, including: the transformation of different national economic systems in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and in other parts of the world; continued problems surrounding the development of some of the world’s poorer nations; and efforts by states, international organizations (IOs), and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to solve a host of problems related to Third World poverty and debt, hunger, and global warming.

To provide more detail about the nature of IPE we explore some of the fundamentals of the three disciplines that form its core focus of study—economics, political science, and sociology—together with a number of analytical issues that result from efforts to splice together these disciplines.