

**Columbia University Department of Political Science**  
**Written Qualifying Examination in International Relations**  
**August 2020**

**Instructions**

This examination consists of four sections: World Politics A (WPA) consists of general international relations questions; World Politics B (WPB) consists of somewhat narrower or more specific questions; the last two sections consist of questions on international security (IS) and international political economy (IPE).

Majors in IR must write three essays: one from WPA, one from either the IS or IPE section, and one from any other section (that is, you may not write more than one essay in any one section).

Minors in IR must write two essays: one from WPA, and one from any other section.

You are advised to demonstrate breadth as well as depth of knowledge in your set of essays. You should therefore avoid writing essays with answers that overlap substantially with respect to either theoretical arguments or substantive examples.

**World Politics A**

1a. "Race is not a perspective on international relations; it is a central organizing feature of world politics... Yet mainstream international relations (IR) scholarship denies race [and racism] as essential to understanding the world, to the cost of the field's integrity."

Discuss. Are some theories or branches of IR scholarship more suited to the study of race/racism in world politics than others? Why is race important, or not important, to understanding international relations? If you agree that race has been ignored to the detriment of the field, why do you think this has been so? If you disagree, explain why the study of race would be a distraction from or detrimental to understanding the most important questions of world politics.

2a. Assess the following claim "International relations has been far too focused on historical contingency and in particular on the role of leaders and their beliefs." Do you agree or not? Cite the success or failure of specific theories or research programs. What factors increase or reduce the salience of leaders in IR?

## **World Politics B**

1b. "Diplomacy can do little to settle a conflict other than to register and reflect the balance of power between the contesting states"

Discuss.

2b. In what ways do the domestic politics of China and the US interact with their foreign policies? The interaction could go in either direction or both – with domestic politics affecting foreign policy and/or foreign policy influencing domestic politics. Avoid an overly general answer by focusing on two specific examples of such interactions.

3b. What in your opinion is the most viable solution to the problem that states face when attempting to cooperate on reducing carbon emissions? Can lessons from other cooperation problems in the global economy help states combat climate change, or are new theoretical and empirical approaches required for successful decarbonization to take place?

4b. Compare Rawls and Beitz on the issue of international economic justice. Defend one against the likely criticisms the other would raise.

5b. Scholars have long debated the distinctiveness of democracies. Some have argued that democracies enjoy an advantage over autocracies in their conflictual behavior toward other states. What are the sources of that advantage, and to what extent has the empirical literature established that the democratic advantage exists?

6b. What arguments best explain terrorism as a distinct form of political violence, and what prominent theories of terrorism are better thought of as theories of political violence more generally? Be sure to elaborate how you define "terrorism" in your answer.

7b. Conventional wisdom sees nationalism as on the rise in many parts of the globe. How might major theories of the origins and historical rise of nationalism explain this contemporary trend? If you accept the premise of the question, which explanation(s) do you find persuasive?

## **IPE**

1ipe. The following passage appeared in a *New York Times* article in the run-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election: "Donald Trump...promises to cut back legal immigration with new controls he says would 'boost wages and ensure open jobs are offered to American workers first.' Hillary Clinton, his Democratic rival, takes an upbeat view, saying immigrants contribute to the economy...by providing labor for American employers and opening businesses that create jobs for Americans rather than taking them" (*New York Times*, September 21, 2016).

Drawing on theory and evidence from historical or comparative cases, provide a rationale for each candidate's campaign platform. Is one perspective electorally more lucrative? If yes, why do candidates and parties diverge on immigration policy? If no, why is compromise immigration policy reform so elusive?

2ipe. Political economists have analyzed the choice of alternative exchange-rate arrangements and different levels of central bank independence, emphasizing their role in resolving both the time-inconsistency problem and dilemmas created by an open economy." Discuss the main theoretical and empirical contributions in this issue area.

## **Security**

1is. "Strategic studies is too Eurocentric." Discuss.

2is. New states are particularly prone to civil war, and revolutionary states frequently fight international wars. Why? Are these two phenomena explained by similar or different factors? What can we learn from this about the interaction of domestic social change and international anarchy in shaping international relations? Discuss with reference to at least two examples.