

**Columbia University Department of Political Science**  
**Written Qualifying Examination in International Relations**  
**August 2022**

**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. Theoretical approaches to international relations are of two types: substantive theories such as realism and liberalism, and methodological approaches such as rationalism and constructivism. Discuss the relationship between the substantive and the methodological types. Where do “problem-solving” approaches fit into these distinctions? Discuss your own criteria for making choices among these various approaches to theory.

2a. The world has changed in dramatic ways since the fall of the Berlin Wall, but most IR theories are rooted in thinking from the Cold War era. To what extent can the dominant theories of IR help us understand issues like transnational terrorism, global pandemics, or climate change? Do we need new theories, and if so what might they look like? Or can existing theories be adapted to these new (or newly salient) issues? Or are the issues of international relations not as different from that era as they might appear?

**World Politics B**

1b. Many conceive of climate change as a collective action problem but others argue it is better thought of as distributive conflict? How should we characterize the problem to best understand

it? Does the way we do so matter for understanding the prospects for achieving cooperation to avert a climate catastrophe, and if so how?

2b. In recent years, there has been an increase in internationalized civil wars in which foreign governments are active or proxy combatants. What explains this trend? Can our theories of civil wars and/or interstate wars explain internationalized civil war onset and termination?

3b. What factors determine whether international organizations cooperate or compete with each other in a given issue area?

4b. In bargaining in international crisis, does the introduction of psychology and misperception affect the optimal choice of bargaining strategy relative to a baseline assumption of rationality? If so, how? If not, why not?

5b. In what ways does China comply with, and in what ways does it violate, its obligations under international law? Discuss with respect to at least two particular domains of international law, such as (but not limited to) human rights, arms control, trade, or territorial sovereignty. What explains the compliant and non-compliant behavior that you discuss?

## **International Security**

1is. Academic conventional wisdom sees much of the reason for the Long Peace between the superpowers after 1945 as the natural stability of mutual nuclear deterrence. What would a contrarian analyst cite to refute this, and how convincing would the refutation be?

2is. How much does cybersecurity require reinvention of basic strategic concepts?

## **IPE**

1ipe. "Gender and race/ethnicity/identity are key variables explaining outcomes in international political economy." Do you agree or disagree, and why?

2ipe. "Large corporations are the main drivers of trade liberalization in the USA." Discuss this statement in light of recent research on the political economy of trade. In elaborating your answer, please be specific about the actors involved in these negotiations, their constraints, and preferences.