

**Columbia University Department of Political Science**  
**Written Qualifying Examination in International Relations**  
**January 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. "The origins of international conflict and cooperation lie in the political and economic micro-foundations of individual societies." Discuss.

2a. The biggest problem facing the world today is arguably climate change, but IR scholarship on the problem remains limited. What do theories of IR tell us about the prospects of addressing this problem? Note, you need not refer to literature that addresses climate change specifically, though you are free to do so. Rather think about what theories of IR that have been applied to other issue areas tell us about this issue.

## World Politics B

1b. "The concept of signaling adds little if anything to the older idea of credibility." Discuss.

2b. "A risen China will not indefinitely defer resolving its claim to Taiwan. History suggests only two alternatives: The USA will concede China's conquest of the island, or there will be a war between the USA and China." Discuss.

3b. Both scholars and policy makers who work on terrorism (at least in the US) have focused primarily on transnational terrorism, but the majority of terrorism in the world is domestic. Are the causes of domestic and transnational terrorism quite different or largely similar?

4b. Much of international politics consists of diplomacy, yet the academic literature here is very thin. How do you explain this? What theories can most fruitfully be brought to bear on how diplomacy functions.

5b. A number of recent studies have investigated public opinion regarding trade, foreign aid, and investment. Please pick a few of these works to discuss critically. In particular, what questions are such studies helpful (or unhelpful) in answering? What factors seem to influence people's views of these topics? What are some common concerns regarding sample populations, generalizability, and survey design?

6b. Private actors engaged in illicit behavior are arguably under-studied and undertheorized agents in international relations. Please take a position with regard to this statement with reference to at least two specific topics in international affairs. What are the main elements of a research design that you could use to test your argument with respect to one of those examples?

## **IPE**

1ipe. The WTO's appellate body no longer has enough judges to function, leading some to ask: are international institutions still relevant today? Please use existing theories of how IOs increase cooperation to understand the current state of global governance. What would these theories predict if IOs continue to weaken? Which countries would benefit and which would lose (if any)?

2ipe. "The IMF and other international financial institutions are responsible for the recurrence of financial crises and their negative consequences." Assess the validity of this statement. Use economic and political arguments to support your answer.

## **Security**

1is. How do militaries cope with the problem of uncertainty in war? Do different militaries deal with uncertainty in different ways?

2is. Most scholars of international politics are interested in the causes and consequences of war but not its conduct. Is this the appropriate focus of attention or an analytical mistake?