

# Global politics: Subject-specific guidance

See also: EE generic guide and EE Teacher support material

## Overview

An extended essay (EE) in global politics gives students an opportunity to undertake an in-depth analysis of a significant, contemporary global political issue.

Students should choose a topic that will allow them to demonstrate their:

- knowledge
- research skills
- critical thinking skills.

The outcome should be a substantial, coherent and structured essay that utilizes relevant key concepts, theoretical foundations and approaches to global politics to effectively answer a specific research question.

Global politics is an interdisciplinary subject, reflecting the complex nature of many contemporary political issues. Nonetheless, it has its own theoretical and conceptual frames, terminology, methods and literature. It is essential for students undertaking an EE in global politics to have knowledge and understanding of these. Global politics is **not** a residual category for essays that do not fit into any other subject.

## Choice of topic

In the Diploma Programme global politics course, a political issue is defined as:

“Any question that deals with how power is distributed and how it operates within social organization, and how people think about, and engage in, their communities and the wider world on matters that affect their lives.”

Hence, there is a wide range of questions that are in principle suitable for an EE in global politics. Students must narrow their initial topic ideas to a concise question that can be researched effectively within the EE’s 4,000-word scope.

EEs in global politics may focus on topics that invite a local to global level of analysis, or on any level in between. Sometimes, it may be interesting to investigate how the same political issue unfolds at different levels of analysis.

The benefit of undertaking research that investigates issues at a global level is the availability of secondary data. Research at a local level may be more effectively investigated using primary methods.

In addition to levels of analysis, different theoretical foundations or the perspectives of varying groups of people or individuals on a political issue may help students to formulate a clear and focused research question.

## “Contemporary” rule

The topic students choose must be contemporary. Contemporary here is taken to refer to events during the student’s lifetime.

References to historical events and issues can be included if they:



- provide useful background context
- are necessary for understanding a topic
- have clear implications for the present.

However, the emphasis of the essay should be on current affairs. Similarly, students should not base their essay on future events, as in this case it will become speculative and unsupported.

When choosing a topic, students and supervisors must ensure that the various assessment criteria can be satisfied within the word limit. Students are advised to avoid topics that are too broad in scope to permit an in-depth study within the prescribed word limit.

## Examples of topics

These examples are for guidance only. Students must ensure their choice of topic is focused (left-hand column) rather than broad (right-hand column).

Focused topics 	Broad topics 
A comparison of how the Hong Kong protests of late 2014 were portrayed in the official media in Singapore versus the reporting undertaken by NGOs X, Y and Z active in Singapore	The influence of 2014 Hong Kong protests on Singapore
The influence of the election success of Syriza in Greece on the campaign and outcomes of the 2015 parliamentary election in Spain	How populist political parties have changed the political landscape in Europe
An evaluation of the ability of Mexican migrants to achieve a political voice in county X in Arizona	How Mexican migration has changed the politics of the US

## Treatment of the topic

EEs in global politics will often be interdisciplinary in terms of subject matter and research approach and may use both primary and secondary sources.

Essays that rely on secondary sources only are perfectly valid, but students must engage critically with the sources of information that they use.

The topic and chosen level(s) of analysis will suggest the appropriate theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches.

Various approaches to the research are possible, such as:

- case studies

- comparative studies
- analyses of discourse.

Relevant techniques for gathering and interpreting evidence include:

- interviews
- literature or media reviews
- quantitative data analysis.

Students may use journalistic or visual material, interviews or data from popular and social media, but their essay should not be based solely on such sources.

## Theoretical underpinning

Students must show that they have grounding in theories and methods of global politics and are able to use these appropriately and effectively in order to develop a reasoned argument.

The essay is a formal research essay that examines contemporary political issues, and may do so from an angle previously unfamiliar to the student. For example:

- Students interested in a more theoretical approach to political issues can examine the key concepts of global politics in a way that is more anchored in academic debates.
- Students interested in statistics that underpin decision-making and perceptions in global politics can undertake more comprehensive data analysis.

## Examples of topics, research questions and suggested approaches

Once students have identified their topic and written their research question, they can decide how to research their answer. They may find it helpful to write a statement outlining their broad approach. These examples are for guidance only.

Topic	<b>Influence of “big data” on election campaign tactics: the case of the Obama 2012 campaign</b>
Research question	To what extent should we be worried about the use of “big data” in election campaigns? The case of the Obama 2012 campaign.
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review of the ways in which “big data” on voter opinions and behaviours delivers different information to political campaigners than traditional pre-election voter surveys.</li> <li>• Analysis of the differences in how the Obama 2008 and 2012 campaigns approached voters and which of these could be attributable to understanding more about individual voters in the 2012 campaign, including an interview with a key campaign manager.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of the ethical implications of the use of “big data” tactics in light of different political conceptions of democracy and different political ideologies about individual freedom.</li> </ul>
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Topic	<b>A comparative study of migration from rural areas into cities in Australia and Indonesia</b>
Research question	To what extent are the ideological and practical forces that drive urbanization global instead of nation-specific? A comparison of the political rhetoric, government policies and impact of global forces in driving migration from rural areas into cities in Australia and Indonesia.
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the extent and local and global reasons behind rural-to-urban migration in Australia and Indonesia.</li> <li>• Analysis of the political rhetoric used in the two countries to argue for the necessity (or otherwise) and benefits (or drawbacks) of this form of migration.</li> <li>• Analysis of the government policies applied in the two countries that have as their intention to encourage this form of migration.</li> </ul>

Topic	<b>Evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis</b>
Research question	To what extent is the evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis evidence that a realist view on international politics still has applicability?
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review on the ways in which variants of the theory of realism have been used to explain big powers’ strategies and moves in post-Cold War international politics.</li> <li>• Brief historical review of the Russia–China relationship in the post-Cold War era.</li> <li>• Analysis of Russian, Chinese and Western media reporting on the evolution in the Russia–China relationship during and after the 2014–15 Ukraine crisis.</li> <li>• Evaluation of these developments against realist theories of international politics.</li> </ul>

## An important note on “double-dipping”

Students must ensure that their EE does not overlap significantly with any other work they are submitting for the Diploma Programme. For example, the engagement activity and higher level extension tasks might give students ideas and inspiration for their EE but they must not examine the same political issue.

## The global politics EE and IA

In particular, an EE in global politics is not an extension of the internal assessment tasks—the engagement activity (SL and HL students) and the HL extension (HL students only)—for the subject. Students must ensure that they understand the differences between the two.

- The engagement activity task is based primarily on experiential learning, whereas the EE in global politics is a formal research essay relying primarily on secondary sources.
- Although the HL extension task and the EE in global politics are both based primarily on secondary sources, the HL extension task is directed towards an oral end product, whereas the EE in global politics culminates in a comprehensive written task.

**Supervisors play an important role here in guiding students on these distinctions. Students risk their diploma if academic misconduct is found.**

## Interpreting the EE assessment criteria

### Criterion A: Focus and method

(Strands: Topic, Research question, Methodology)

Students must choose a topic that deals with a contemporary global political issue. They must explain the significance of the issue and why it is worthy of investigation. Often this has to do with how the issue affects people's lives within a social organization either locally, globally or at other levels of analysis.

The topic chosen must be expressed in the form of a research question. The research question must be specific and sharply focused and capable of being discussed effectively within the word limit. As global politics is an interdisciplinary subject and as what counts as a 'political issue' is broadly interpreted, it is particularly important that students choose a topic and formulate a research question that allows them to base their essay on the specific theoretical and conceptual frames, terminology, methods and literature of global politics.

Students must demonstrate that they have made considered methodological choices in their research and selected a suitable range of appropriate and relevant sources. Case studies, comparative studies and analyses of discourse are all legitimate approaches to research, whereas interviews, literature or media reviews, or quantitative data analysis are all possible research techniques; choices depend on the research question and what is available, and need to be justified. It is appropriate to use only secondary sources or a combination of primary and secondary sources; selection depends on the level of analysis at which students approach their political issue. Again, this needs to be justified.

The approaches, techniques and sources must provide sufficient material to develop and support an argument and conclusion relevant to the research question, and they must contain different theoretical or conceptual perspectives for critical engagement to be possible.

Effective planning and a well-focused research question tend to go together. A key indicator of this is that students have chosen a comprehensive range of sources and suitable research methods, which are relevant and appropriate to answering the research question.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to global politics essays where the issue is not contemporary. (“Contemporary” is defined here as an issue that is relevant during the student’s lifetime.)

## Criterion B: Knowledge and understanding

(Strands: Context, Subject-specific terminology and concepts)

The essay must demonstrate an effective understanding of the place of the research question in a broader context of global politics and the theoretical discipline, establishing links between the political issue investigated and political institutions, actors and theories. Additionally, students should demonstrate an awareness of how social and cultural contexts and biases can affect understandings of political issues.

Students must be able to demonstrate both a sound understanding of, and the ability to employ accurately, the terminology and concepts relevant to the research topic. Where it is deemed useful to clarify meaning or context, students may provide further explanation or definition of selected terms or concepts. A solid use of the key concepts of the global politics course is particularly expected.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than four marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to global politics essays where the issue is not contemporary. (“Contemporary” is defined here as an issue that is relevant during the student’s lifetime.)

## Criterion C: Critical thinking

(Strands: Research, Analysis and Discussion and evaluation)

“Research” here refers to a critical engagement with a contemporary political issue through relevant approaches, techniques and sources.

Students must be able to construct, present and support effectively a specific argument or position that provides their response or answer to the research question. This argument will be developed through an analysis of the research material, including consideration of the value and limitations of this material.

Additionally, students must demonstrate that the knowledge gained from their selected approaches, techniques and sources can then be analysed and, on the basis of this analysis, an argument can be formed and a conclusion(s) to the research question reached.

The points contained in the analysis must, at all times, be supported by specific, relevant material chosen from the student’s research. Throughout the essay, the thoughts and ideas students present must relate to the analysis of the research question. The inclusion of thoughts or ideas that are not relevant will detract from the value of the analysis and limit the student’s ability to score well on this criterion.

Students should not present essays that are wholly or largely narrative or descriptive in nature. These do not provide any evidence of analytical skills and will not score well.

In global politics, the development of a reasoned argument based on research may start with a student stating their position in relation to the question posed. This position must then be supported by evidence and developed into a reasoned argument, which culminates in conclusion(s) being given.

Personal views should not simply be stated without being supported by reference to the research material. When constructing an argument in global politics, it is crucial that students seek to achieve a balance by presenting conflicting views in an impartial way before reaching a conclusion.

A conclusion summarizes the student's response to the research question. This conclusion must be consistent with the position and evidence presented in the essay. The conclusion may not include material that has not been discussed in the body of the essay. However, questions that have arisen as a result of the research and may be suitable for further study may be included in the conclusion.

An integral part of the analysis of the evidence and the development of a reasoned argument is that an evaluation of the relative value and limitations of the selected approaches, techniques and sources is made. This evaluation should not be contained in a separate section of the essay but should be integrated into the text where it provides useful insight relative to an approach, technique or source that the student is referring to.

Because global politics issues are often contested and it is common for biased views to be presented, students must pay particular attention to the evaluation of sources. They should avoid unjustified and subjective value judgments, and instead be able to evaluate views using the theoretical and conceptual frames of the subject.

If the topic or research question is deemed inappropriate for the subject in which the essay is registered, no more than three marks can be awarded for this criterion. This applies to global politics essays where the issue is not contemporary. ("Contemporary" is defined here as an issue that is relevant during the student's lifetime.)

## Criterion D: Presentation

(Strands: Structure, Layout)

This criterion relates to the extent to which the essay conforms to accepted academic standards in relation to how research papers should be presented. It also relates to how well these elements support the reading, understanding and evaluation of the essay.

Students may provide a section and subsection structure to their essays, with informative headings. Subheadings should not distract from the overall structure of the essay or argument presented.

Charts, tables and images may appear in the body of the essay only if they illustrate or clarify the argument at that particular point. The inclusion of non-relevant or superfluous material will not be rewarded and may actually detract from the argument. All charts, images and tables must be properly referenced with respect to their origin or source.

Any tables should enhance a written explanation and not themselves include significant bodies of text. If they do, then these words must be included in the word count.

Students must take care in their use of appendices as examiners are not required to read them. All information with direct relevance to the analysis, discussion and evaluation of the essay must be contained in the main body of the essay.

A bibliography is an essential structural element, contributing as far as it is visually presented, to criterion D, in addition to the other presentation requirements: title page, table of contents, page numbers, and so on.

While there is no explicit penalty in criterion D for exceeding 4,000 words, students should be aware that examiners will not read beyond the 4,000-word limit, therefore affecting the application of multiple criteria. Criterion D specifically may be impacted if, in exceeding 4,000 words, one of the structural requirements of the essay (for example, the conclusion, or important illustrative material) is unassessed by the examiner because he or she is not required to read beyond 4,000 words.

Any material that is not original must be carefully acknowledged, with specific attention paid to the acknowledgement and referencing of quotes and ideas. This acknowledgment and referencing is applicable to audiovisual material, text, graphs and data published in print and electronic sources. If the referencing does not meet the minimum standard as indicated in the guide (name of author, date of publication, title of source and page numbers, as applicable), and is not consistently applied, work will be considered as a case of possible academic misconduct. Incomplete references and those that do not meet the minimum requirements as detailed in the *Effective citing and referencing* document are not penalized in criterion D, but examiners are required to alert the IB to candidates who overlook these minimum requirements, for further investigation. Criterion D assesses references and bibliography purely on how they are presented (for example, consistent, laid out in an appropriate academic manner).

## Criterion E: Engagement

(Strands: Process, Research focus)

This criterion assesses the student's engagement with their research focus and the research process. It will be applied by the examiner at the end of the assessment of the essay, and is based solely on the candidate's reflections as detailed on the [RPPF](#), with the supervisory comments and extended essay itself as context.

Students are expected to provide reflections on the decision-making and planning process undertaken in completing the essay. Students must demonstrate how they arrived at a topic as well as the methods and approach used. This criterion assesses the extent to which a student has evidenced the rationale for decisions made throughout the planning process and the skills and understandings developed.

For example, students may reflect on:

- the approach and strategies they chose, and their relative success



- the *Approaches to learning* skills they have developed and their effect on the student as a learner
- how their conceptual understandings have developed or changed as a result of their research
- challenges they faced in their research and how they overcame these
- questions that emerged as a result of their research
- what they would do differently if they were to undertake the research again.

Effective reflection highlights the journey the student has engaged in through the EE process. Students must show evidence of critical and reflective thinking that goes beyond simply describing the procedures that have been followed.

The reflections must provide the examiner with an insight into **student** thinking, creativity and originality within the research process. The **student** voice must be clearly present and demonstrate the learning that has taken place.