

Political Science
Oral Exam Preparation

These questions are intended to offer opportunity for reflection on major political issues. They require you to utilize material from coursework, along with your own reading, in order to formulate thoughtful responses. Discuss each question with sufficient detail to support your generalizations. Be prepared to answer any of the questions provided below and note that these prompts may serve as a starting point for deeper conversation on any of these topics.

I. Thematic Questions

A. American Politics

1. Discuss the changing role of the U.S. government in society. Describe the four historical eras of federalism. How have the relations between the federal and state governments changed? What is a change that has taken place that is in line with the vision of the Founding Fathers and one change that they might find to be distressing?
2. Examine the evolution of civil rights in American society. How have different movements been related to interest groups? What has been the role of the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court? What ways might an individual take action to shape and influence U.S. governmental policy?
3. Consider how federalism and the separation of powers limit the power of the national government. How do the House of Representatives and the Senate check and balance each other's power? With a veto gate being an institution that serves as a point in the legislative process where the progress of a proposal can be halted, what are examples of veto gates in the United States? Is it better to have a lower or higher number of veto gates and why?

B. Political Theory

1. Compare and contrast the theories of Plato, Locke, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Marx on their understandings of individualism, liberty, community, private property, and the state.
2. Most political theories agree that the international system is anarchic, but they do not agree on its consequences for state behavior. Explain how theories like realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism, and feminism differ, while also discussing why these differences matter within the international system.
3. Discuss feminism and its basic principles as a political theory. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a distinctly feminist political theory? What suggestions does this theory provide for political interaction?

C. International Relations

1. Consider the contemporary role of sovereign states. Some say the state is losing its importance, while others argue its significance is simply evolving over time. Referencing at least one international organization to illustrate your answers to the following, why do states form international organizations, and why do they work through them? In addition, discuss how transnational actors change the face of the

- international system. In other words, how do transnational corporations and advocacy networks influence international politics today?
2. Democratization has been one of the key U.S. foreign policy underpinnings since the end of the Cold War. Please evaluate this U.S. strategy with theories of democratization, particularly regarding the transition from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies.
 3. One of the most important developments of the past 200 years has been the rise and spread of nationalism. What is nationalism? How is national identity related to other identities, such as ethnicity or religion? In what ways has nationalism changed international relations? Do you think that nationalism remains as important and powerful as fifty or one hundred years ago?

D. Comparative Politics

1. Describe Weber's three forms of political legitimacy and how they tie to a state's primary features. Along with defining the term "state" and discussing how political legitimacy is part of those characteristics, make the distinction between a government and a regime. How does understanding the differences between these definitions and features contribute to the study of comparative politics?
2. Compare and contrast early European state-building with 20th century experiences of state-building outside of Europe. Give examples of the influence of Western thought on non-Western culture, government, economy, and society.
3. Discuss the principal features of presidentialism and parliamentarism in contrast to each other and evaluate their likely impact on democratic consolidation. Is a presidential system more democratic than a parliamentary system? Why or why not? Please incorporate any relevant democratic case studies and evidence from class or your readings to support your answer.

II. Classics in Political Science

The works listed below are independent readings. The following questions will help guide your reading and provide structure for your senior exam. You should be able to explain the thesis or primary themes of the following works, as well as the context of the scholarship.

A. John Locke – *Second Treatise of Government*

1. Locke makes several interesting claims about the laws of nature, reason, God, property, and justice. What sorts of things do humans not have liberty to do? What basic role does God play in this discussion?
2. What is the primary role of the community in this Lockean version of the social contract? By what mechanisms does the community execute this role?
3. Locke says that giving up the natural powers to join civil society is necessary and just. What sort of necessity is at work here? How does Locke understand justice in this context?

B. Adam Smith – *Wealth of Nations* (abridged version)

1. What modern examples support Smith’s views on the connection among the division of labor, the extent of the market, and the availability of cheap transport? Are there modern examples that contradict Smith’s view?
2. Although he is considered the founder of political economy, Adam Smith considered himself a moral philosopher. How does looking at him in this way – as someone fundamentally concerned with questions of ethics – change your understanding or appreciation of his work?
3. Explain Adam Smith’s theory of the “invisible hand.”

C. Machiavelli – *The Prince*

1. How does Machiavelli view human nature? What role does virtue play in Machiavelli’s views of a state?
2. Machiavelli argues that a leader should be both loved and feared. If one attribute has to be chosen, however, which characteristic does Machiavelli suggest a leader should prioritize? Why? Do you agree?
3. How much of this book is relevant to contemporary politics, especially because monarchies are no longer the primary form of government? Can Machiavelli’s arguments be translated into political interaction today?

D. Tocqueville – *Democracy in America* (abridged version)

1. What does Tocqueville say about the concept of equality in America?
2. What does he see as the peculiar relationship between individualism and community in America?
3. Which of Tocqueville’s observations about antebellum America strike you as still pertinent to contemporary America?

III. Influential Thinkers

Know the works and contributions of five of the authors below. While you may not have read all of the work by these authors, you should know the significant contributions they have made to the discipline.

Thucydides	Plato
Hobbes	Burke
Rousseau	Kant
Aristotle	Mill

IV. Terms and Theories

Explain the differences between the theories and terms listed below. Know which theory you subscribe to, and in addition, be able to understand and articulate how a few contemporary examples tie to these theories.

Realism	Nationalism
Liberalism	Fascism
Constructivism	Capitalism

Socialism
Marxism

Anarchy
Feminism

V. Professionalization

- A. Attend a professional conference
- B. CV edited by the University Writing Center listing conferences, papers written, coursework, and department participation.