

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. 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?
2. 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.

C. International Relations

1. 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.
2. 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. 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.

2. 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. 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?
2. 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. Machiavelli – *The Prince*

1. How does Machiavelli view human nature? What role does virtue play in Machiavelli's views of a state?
2. 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?

C. 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?

V. Professionalization

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