

Comparative Politics/International Relations Review Guide Spring 2015

Make sure that you draw upon material from specific area/theme classes as well as Scope & Methods, Research Methods, Pro-Seminar in IR, & Pro-Seminar in Comparative Politics material.

Section #1 – Theory & Method

1. Think about research questions that interest you. How do you translate a question into research? Remember the different components of research design – selection of approach, data collection & analysis method as well as recognizing that all research design choices have pros & cons. Be prepared to defend your choices!

Section #2 – Comparative Politics

Comprehensive questions will be based on the topics presented below:

1. A number of different theoretical approaches are utilized in comparative politics. Among the most common are: institutionalism, rational choice, and constructivism (culture/ideas). Be able to discuss the essential and distinguishing characteristics of each approach, as well as strengths and weaknesses of each school of thought. Also, you should be able to analyze a situation/question from each approach to illustrate strengths and weaknesses.
2. Democracy is a major focus within comparative politics. Be familiar with the different theories of democratization and democratic consolidation. Be able to assess which theories better explain the processes than others (evidence is always a plus!).
3. States are typically the center of political analysis. Yet, the demise of the state has been predicted by many. What is a state? What are the different ways that the state has been characterized in different theories? Be familiar with the various theories of the state in political science.
4. Institutions are a popular object of study. How do different theories do approach the study of institutions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? Be able to apply an institutional approach to the study of a country and/or comparative politics issue.
5. The idea of development has been criticized as being more wishful thinking (or imposition of Western values) than a theory. Evaluate the concept of development, examining how it has been theorized in political science. What are the benefits of the concept of development; what are the weaknesses? Be able to apply development approach to the study of a country and/or comparative politics issue.
6. Nationalism is a powerful force in politics. How has the nation and nationalism been analyzed in political science? Is there any agreement on the topic? What are the main areas of contention? How useful is the research?
7. How well does political science/comparative politics help us understand change? Which approaches/theories are strong in this area? What theories are problematic? Does any offer a good understanding of how political regimes change? (Be able to offer specific applications to support your assertions.)

Section #3 – International Relations

Comprehensive questions will be based on the topics presented below:

1. Discuss the various “grand theory” approaches to understanding the very nature of the international system. To what extent are their views compatible? Incompatible? Which (or which combination) provides us with the most convincing and useful understanding of the nature of the global system? Why?
2. Examine the alternative perspectives which offer a critique to the approaches that dominate the discipline. Which perspective is ultimately most accurate theoretically and empirically? Why?
3. What is the Constructivist challenge to Realist and Liberal IR theory? Explain what Constructivism is. Citing relevant books and/or articles, discuss the ways in which international actors have “constructed” world politics and how, in turn, international politics “constructs” international actors.
4. Be able to compare & contrast how different theories in international relations conceptualize the following: the state; power; security; hegemony; war; international cooperation; and national interests.
5. Be able to compare and contrast different political economy approaches to international relations. How does each address the issues of dependence, interdependence, and globalization?