

MA Comprehensive Exam Spring 2009
Comparative Politics/International Relations Review Questions/Issues

Make sure that you draw upon material from specific area/theme classes as well as the Pro-Seminars in IR & Comparative Politics material.

You will have to answer one question based on the topics presented in this section:

1. Three major research approaches in comparative politics can be identified: rationality, culture and structure. Be able to discuss the essential and distinguishing characteristics, its (theoretical) strengths and weaknesses, and its “internal logic” for each of these major research schools
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.
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. But the definition of institution is broad: it could be a legal framework, a pre-existing policy, a cultural norm, or an economic relationship. How do different theories do approach the study of institutions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?
5. The idea of development has been criticized as being more wishful thinking (or imposition of Western values) than a theory. Evaluate this position, examining how development has been theorized in political science.
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?

You will have to answer one question based on the topics presented in this section:

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. How do 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?

You will be given two articles (one on comparative politics and one on international relations); you will select one to analyze.