

**Columbia University Department of Political Science**  
**Written Qualifying Examination in Comparative Politics**  
**January 2022**

**Majors:** Please answer three questions from three different sections.

**Minors:** Please answer two questions from two different sections.

In each essay, you should:

- **Answer the question** that is asked. Refine if necessary but do not expand. If you find questions ambiguous, clarify how you interpret the question.
- **For all questions:** Unless clearly not relevant for the question, you should discuss at least two theoretical accounts and at least two bodies of evidence as they relate to the theories.
- **Be critical:** Include critical assessments of the theoretical and empirical literatures that you discuss.

**Section I: Approaches**

1. Social scientists are often tempted to explain major singular events, such as a particular war or a particular revolution. But singular events sometimes turn out to be difficult to study in a rigorous fashion. What are the greatest benefits of studying singular events, and are there effective remedies to the potential pitfalls?

**Section II: Primitives**

2. Should political science restrict itself to middle-range theory for discrete questions, or should it aim for a unified theory of politics that applies across a range of questions? Explain your answer with respect to topic areas in comparative politics.

3. In what ways, if any, does political culture affect political institutions and processes?

**Section III: Political Structures**

4. To what extent does the contemporary practice of liberal democracy conform to or deviate from the notion of “rule by the people”? Discuss your position and support your argument with specific examples and evidence from the literature.

5. Scholars have identified conditions under which both democratic and authoritarian governments can be held accountable. Do these arguments fundamentally tap into the same logic across regimes or are there different accountability logics at work for different regime types?

#### **Section IV: Outcomes I**

6. Why are some developing countries more successful at promoting economic development than others? In your view, what are the most influential arguments about internal and/or external factors for achieving economic development? Does the evidence support these arguments?

#### **Section V: Outcomes II**

7. Given experiences elsewhere, how would you assess the risk of political violence in the United States?

8. To what extent can the recent rise of populism be explained by rising economic inequality or immigration?

#### **Section VI: Outcomes III**

9. How do the determinants of vote choice differ in old and new democracies? How do these differences influence the nature and degree of political responsiveness to voter preferences? Illustrate your answer with examples from old and new democracies.

#### **Section VII: Wild Card**

10. Historically there was a perceived consistency between scientific advancement and democratic development. Yet in many long-standing democracies today, we are observing deep and widespread public suspicion against science and experts, as well as the rise of populist leaders who take explicitly anti-science stances on many issues. How should we understand these seemingly contradictory patterns and conceptualize the relationship between science and democracy?