

Comparative Politics Comprehensive Examination

August 2025

Majors: Answer THREE questions from three different sections.

Minors: 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.
- Discuss at least two theoretical accounts and at least two bodies of evidence as they relate to the theories (a “body of evidence” is a study or related set of studies that address a problem empirically).
- Critically assess the theoretical and empirical literatures that you discuss.

Section I: Approaches

1. Many scholars have noted an empirical shift toward comparisons within, instead of across, countries. To what extent has this helped progress in the field of comparative politics? Consider the advantages and disadvantages of this shift with respect to at least two topics.

Section II: Primitives

2. Ethnic diversity is often linked to negative outcomes, including low public goods provision and low levels of economic development. How do theoretical arguments about this link differ depending on whether scholars focus on local- or national-level public goods? Which arguments are most persuasive and why?

3. Can we identify ideas (e.g., ideology, theology, culture) as causes of political behavior, or are they the result of another cause that itself explains the behavior we are trying to explain? Discuss in the context of three works addressing the relationship between ideas and political behavior.

Section III: Political Structures

4. Are high-capacity states imposed on citizens, demanded by citizens, or a combination of the two? How does your answer depend on the era of state development?

5. The notion of “institutionalization” plays an important role in the study and classification of autocratic regimes. Are there areas of democratic politics to which the idea can be productively applied, or is all democratic politics necessarily institutionalized?

Section IV: Outcomes I

6. What, if anything, can research in comparative politics tell us about whether and when China will democratize its national political institutions?

Section V: Outcomes II

7. Is corruption best understood as a symptom of institutional failure, a strategy of political elites, or a deeply embedded cultural norm? In your view, which frameworks offer the most leverage for understanding why corruption endures and what might effectively reduce it?

8. Is citizens' electoral and non-electoral political participation generally explained by the same factors?

Section VI: Outcomes III

9. Why, and to what extent, do poor voters vote against parties that favor greater redistribution? Focus your answer on either advanced democracies or new democracies.

Section VII: Wild Card

10. How will generative AI alter the way political scientists do and think about politics? Discuss how the spread of this technology may change prevailing practices and theoretical paradigms in two areas of comparative politics.