

Comparative Politics Comprehensive Examination January 2025

Majors: Please answer three questions from at least two 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.
- 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).
- Include critical assessments of the theoretical and empirical literatures that you discuss.

Section I: Approaches

1. Write an essay that either agrees or disagrees with the following statement: “We cannot study the impact of formal institutional arrangements – like court structures, or electoral laws or political decentralization – on behavior and outcomes if we wish to truly take seriously the need to estimate unbiased causal effects.”

Section II: Primitives

2. Is it possible to distinguish cultural and institutional explanations for long-run differences in political and economic outcomes? Evaluate the identification of effects and the mechanisms of their persistence with reference to a major research question in comparative politics.

3. Why do ethnic politics and distributive politics tend to coincide?

Section III: Political Structures

4. Under what conditions can autocratic leaders be held accountable for their policy decisions?

5. Comparativists study “strong” vs “weak” states and they also (often independently) study political control of bureaucracy. How can studies of political control of bureaucracy inform the “strong” vs “weak” state dichotomy? Does the study of political control of bureaucracy lead to insight about the origin of strong vs weak states? Why or why not?

Section IV: Outcomes I

6. Can theories of democratization help us understand the democratic backsliding that has marked many democratic countries in recent years?

Section V: Outcomes II

7. To what extent can we best understand the occurrence of corruption by viewing it as a way for partisan politicians to distribute benefits to their supporters and to withhold them from opponents?

8. To what extent can theories of political science explain variation in electoral turnout within and across contexts?

Section VI: Outcomes III

9. Under what conditions, if any, does income inequality lead to the implementation of more redistributive policies?

Section VII: Wild Card [Note: this is an extra section which may be answered by majors or minors instead of any other section]

10. How do social networks affect the likelihood that citizens organize collectively?