

## Study Guide Comprehensive Exam

Fall 2016  
Comparative Politics  
Department of International Affairs

The exam for majors and minors in Comparative Politics will include a morning session requiring students to answer one out of two general questions. The morning session will include two questions chosen from the six below. All six questions can be covered during the oral examination. Majors will also have to answer two more specific (subfield) questions during an afternoon session of the exam.

1. “The primary justification for conducting cross-national comparative research is to develop universal generalizations about political institutions, processes, and behavior. However, it is not possible to develop universal generalizations about politics that are valid across space and time. Therefore, the “science” of cross-national comparative research will always be weak and unsatisfying, and researchers would accomplish much more if they were to turn their attention to the study of particular, timely questions in a country or region of special interest.” To what extent, and in what specific ways, do you agree or disagree with the above statement?
2. A core tenet of some democratic theorists is that democracy leads to improved government performance, in areas such as the provision of public goods. Cite the recent scholarly work that attempts to give empirical rigor to this theory. What are some of the specific outcomes which appear to be sensitive to regime type, democratic competition, transparency, or other aspects of democracy? What do you believe are the important outstanding questions in this subfield?
3. Some claim that, because rational choice theory was imported from economics, it embodies assumptions that cannot be applied to comparative politics. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples from at least two separate subfields of comparative politics.
4. What would you characterize as the most important theoretical or empirical contribution in comparative politics in the last decade? Why? Defend your answer with reference to the historical and recent development of the field. In explaining the strengths of this contribution, discuss any weaknesses and opportunities for further research.
5. In an influential article about the politics of representation, Jane Mansbridge famously asked, “Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women?” Discuss the affirmative and negative responses to this question in the comparative politics literature. What are some of the important normative arguments and empirical evidence offered on each side of this debate?
6. Scholars examining the roots of political violence have focused on population characteristics (such as ethnic and class differences, among others), regime characteristics (such as regime type or particular institutions), and external shocks (such as interstate war or global economic crises), and other factors. What do we know about the causes of civil upheaval? What questions remain? What are some promising avenues for future research?