

# Comprehensive Exam

Spring 2021

Comparative Politics

School of Public and International Affairs  
University of Georgia

## Morning Questions

Instructions: answer **one** of the following questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. Multi-method research designs have gained popularity in comparative politics. What are the strengths and limitations of multi-methods research in comparative politics? Has the “multi-methods turn” contributed to progress in the field of comparative politics? Has it helped to address the methodological divide between qualitative and quantitative approaches? Why or why not? In your answer, be sure to draw on key works and strands of research to illustrate your claims and arguments.
2. Assess the progress that the field of comparative politics has made over the last five decades regarding a) economic growth and development, b) democratization and/or regime change, and c) the relationship between them. What, if anything, do we know today about these topics today that we did not know then? What explains the progress, or lack of progress, in each area of research? Finally, what are the most promising questions for future research on each topic?
3. What role does interdisciplinary research play in the field of comparative politics? Has interdisciplinary “trespassing” been a help or hindrance to the advancement of knowledge? In general, what do you see as the major strengths and weaknesses of interdisciplinary comparative research? In your answer, be sure to provide examples drawn from at least two substantive research areas in comparative politics (e.g., democratization and regime change; ethnic conflict and civil war; the politics of economic reform; economic growth and development; welfare states and comparative social policy; etc.)

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## Afternoon Questions

Answer **two** of the following questions (make sure you answer all “sub-questions”). Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. How well have political scientists succeeded in using “culture” and “ethnicity” as an independent variable, capable of explaining variations in economic growth, party competition or other outcomes of interest? Be sure to discuss different theoretical frameworks, specifically essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, and institutionalism.
2. Why does ethnic violence occur? Critically assess recent theories of ethnic conflict. Be sure to address different types of violence addressed in the literature, including riots, civil wars, and genocide. What unresolved questions persist in the field and deserve further research?
3. Nation-building and state-building processes are sometimes intertwined and sometimes distinct. What are the consequences of different relationships between nation and state-building for the long-term stability of the polity?
4. A vibrant civil society is often seen as a source of resistance to authoritarianism and as a necessary condition for the consolidation of democracy. Yet the reality in many countries is that the deepening of civil society has taken place in the shadow of persistent authoritarian rule and democratic backsliding. What are the implications of this fact for theories of democratization from below? How might we construct and test a more adequate account of the role of civil society in political transitions?
5. Why did welfare states emerge in the advanced, industrialized countries and why have they taken such a variety of forms or types? How have political scientists explained the resilience or retrenchment of welfare states in the industrialized countries in the era of globalization? In your answer, critically

assesses major sets of factors used to explain these outcomes. Your empirical analysis should refer to cases from at least two of the following regions: Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and North America.

6. What explains democratic backsliding? Do theories of democratization and consolidation offer any insights into democratic erosion? What distinguishes democratic erosion from authoritarian transitions, and how can we distinguish weakened democracies from electoral autocracies? What seem to be the most promising strategies of resistance to democratic erosion and why?

7. Political scientists use the notion of “political regime” ubiquitously to explain outcomes such as economic performance, political stability, and social welfare. Conversely, they try to explain the emergence of political regimes with a variety of causal arguments. Discuss the concept of regime and its significance for the political science literature (or lack thereof). Appraise one theoretical strand of research that employs political regime either as an independent or dependent variable. Based on your appraisal would you advocate to keep relying on the regime concept or to abandon it?