

## Comparative Politics exam (Fall 2024)

Instructions: Answer 3 of the 7 questions below. Choose questions that show the depth and breadth of your knowledge. In incorporating the existing literature into your answers, do not simply summarize the readings but engage with the implications of their theoretical framework and the empirical findings for the question at hand. Each answer comprises one-third of the exam grade.

- The exam will “open” at 9:00 AM (EST) on Monday, August 19 and will “close” 24 hours later. You have a 7.5-hour block of time to complete the exam in one sitting at any point during this 24-hour period.
- This exam is not open-book, but you can use up to 30 single-spaced pages of notes using standard 12-point font size and a clean copy of the reading list.
- The exam has a strict 21-page limit (double-space, 12 font).
- If you cite sources that are not on the reading list, please provide a full citation at the end of your answer. This reference list for external sources will *not* count against the exam’s 21-page limit.

### Question 1:

In recent years, scholars, pundits, and activists have raised the alarm over the rise of populist, extremist, or autocratic politicians in democracies. Is this development the result of how certain institutions operate (or fail to operate) in democracies? If so, then what types of institutional reform might address the problem?

Your response is to be addressed to a think tank that is interested in advocating for institutional reform in democracies. The think tank must decide how to deploy its limited resources. So your focused discussion of select institutions (not a vague sweeping discussion of many institutions) should be designed to influence this resource allocation. Furthermore, the think tank is composed of intelligent non-academics so your discussion of how these institutions contribute to the problem and can be fruitfully reformed should draw on our discipline’s theory and evidence, but in a way that is accessible to those not directly familiar with the literature (i.e., clear exposition and assessment of theoretical mechanisms and empirical evidence).

### Question 2:

What have we learned about autocracies from studying authoritarian elections? Name two other authoritarian institutions that scholars should pay more attention to, and explain why/how studying these institutions can enhance our understanding of autocracies. Draw examples from at least two world regions.

### Question 3:

Scholars of political violence have recently shifted their attention from attempting to explain the onset of violence to attempting to explain other outcomes of interest during war. Identify two key dependent variables that have moved our research forward on this topic, and discuss the various explanations proposed by comparative politics scholars. Draw examples from at least two world regions.

Question 4:

A political party is an institution that aims to win elections. To do so, its members - whether they are leaders, candidates, legislators, or voters - often are forced to confront a variety of coordination and collective action problems. Describe at least two situations in which members of a party must coordinate or deal with an externality to accomplish something that would yield electoral benefits for the party. What was the source of the coordination or collective action problem? Was the party able to deal with it successfully? If so, how? If not, why not? Draw examples from at least two different empirical contexts.

Question 5:

In some areas of the world, different ethnic groups not only peacefully coexist, but also cooperate with each other. Yet in other places, groups just barely tolerate each other, if not engage in bitter conflict. What factors explain why some ethnic groups are able to live in peace and cooperate with each other while others are in conflict? In your response, discuss both the theoretical claims as well as the empirical evidence in support (or not) of them.

Question 6:

Empirical research in comparative politics has been increasingly employing survey experiments. Use three examples to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of this method when applied to major questions in comparative politics.

Question 7:

Some scholars claim that peaceful protests are more effective at achieving major political change than violent ones. Discuss the theoretical foundations and empirical support for this proposition.