# Comparative Politics Catalogue of Core Comprehensive Exam Questions, 2019

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the single case study, illustrating how specific case studies have contributed to the theory of comparative politics?
2. Political scientists often emphasize features in political systems that induce institutional and policy equilibrium and stability.  At the same time, we also observe political and policy arrangements undergoing major change over time.  What analytical tools can political scientists draw on to account for major changes in political life?  Explain with detailed reference to the comparative politics literature on either institutional change or policy change, as well as empirical examples.
3. What does the literature on comparative politics tell about where institutions come from and how they change?
4. Make a case on the basis of the literature that it is either i) economic structure, ii) political culture, or iii) political institutions that is the strongest predictor of democratic stability in any given country.
5. What are some of the major theories of political regime change and why do those theories offer such little help in predicting regime change?
6. Does economic development cause political democracies to emerge? Outline the various positions in this debate. What do we know, and what do we not know about the relationship between democracy and development?
7. Does economic inequality (or lack thereof) matter for democratic stability?
8. Samuel Huntington famously wrote: “The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government.” In making this statement, Huntington implies a tension between portions of the field of comparative politics that focus on regime type (e.g., democratization) and those that focus on the state. Set out where you stand on this issue, and justify your position by drawing on specific scholarly works and empirical examples.
9. Science is ideally characterized by a sustained, progressive, and cumulative growth of knowledge. Identify at least two areas of comparative politics that in your view best exemplify a sustained, progressive, and cumulative growth of knowledge. If no such area exists in your view, then explain why a sustained, progressive, and cumulative growth of knowledge is so hard to achieve in comparative politics.
10. Critically compare and contrast at least three works on political culture, assessing their respective achievements and limitations.
11. The concept of social class is a fundamental building block in many theories in comparative politics, but scholars disagree about what “class” means and how it ought be used. What conditions or phenomena are most amenable to class analysis, and what are the limits of class analysis?
12. What explains the origins of dictatorship and democracy? Compare and contrast the answers and approaches of Moore and Acemoglu and Robinson. What are the strengths and weaknesses of those two works in addressing this question?
13. Why are some institutions easily changed, whereas others persist despite no longer being functionally optimal or no longer serving dominant interests? Illustrate your argument using at least two empirical cases, one of institutional persistence and one of institutional change.
14. What is the relationship between state development and regime development?
15. Are certain constitutional arrangements inherently better than others in promoting or ensuring democratic stability? Discuss the various positions in this debate.
16. Many of the seminal texts in comparative politics on both state development and political development generalize from European experiences to speak to political processes in the so-called Third World. What are the advantages and limits of generalizing from the European experience to Third World contexts?
17. Discuss whether or not 'minimalist' definitions of democracy provide a valuable analytic tool for comparativists. Draw on examples of such definitions, criticisms of minimalist definitions, and their applied usage within the field.
18. How important are international/ transnational factors in shaping domestic politics, and has the comparative politics field adequately taken them into account?
19. Under what circumstances are cultural explanations for political outcomes more powerful than structural or rational-choice explanations? To what extent can these different theoretical approaches be combined to enhance their explanatory power?