

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: COMPARATIVE POLITICS
4 HOURS

September 2021

You must answer a total of two (2) questions for this examination. You have four (4) hours to do so. You must answer one (1) question from the core section and one (1) question each from your subfield section. In your answers to any of the questions below, please be sure to present an argument and to refer to relevant readings and empirical examples. Please select questions that allow you to demonstrate breadth of knowledge (avoid overlap between core and sub-field questions).

SECTION 1. CORE QUESTIONS

1. Are certain constitutional arrangements inherently better than others in promoting or ensuring democratic stability? Discuss the various positions in this debate.
2. 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?

SECTION 2

SUBFIELD – POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

1. In recent decades, experiments have become the predominant approach to studying public opinion and vote choice. Work relying on observational data is less common than 20 years ago. What are the strengths and limitations of this change? Which classic questions in the comparative study of political behaviour are most amenable to experimental research? Which classic questions are less amenable to experimental study?
2. Mass publics are completely ill-equipped to handle the demands placed on them by a democratic political system: most citizens know virtually nothing about politics, lack attitudes on political issues, and are unable to assess candidates, government performance or policy alternatives with anything approaching “rationality”. Does the foregoing assessment strike you as accurate? Why or why not, and so what? In your answer, please consider how both individual psychology and the broader political system succeed (or fail) in connecting public opinion and policy.

SUBFIELD – COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY - DEVELOPMENT

1. A body of research has examined the effects of ethnic diversity on public goods provision. What are the major arguments and findings from this research? In responding to the question, please consider measurement issues and important intervening variables that either strengthen or weaken the relationship (between ethnic diversity and public goods).
2. How are formal institutional structures thought to affect flows of information, accountability, and decision making? Has empirical research shown any major effects of formal institutional structures on major developmental outcomes?