

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

April 2021

You must answer a total of three (3) questions for this examination. You have six (6) hours to do so. You must answer one (1) question from the core section and one (1) question each from your two subfield sections. 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. How is identity defined and understood in comparative politics, and can it be properly understood as a variable (whether independent or dependent) for developing generalizable theories of political processes? Mention at least three authors or works that discuss identity.
2. Do we understand why, or under what conditions, institutions change? What do you consider the most important findings on this issue in comparative politics, and what do we still have to learn?

SECTION 2

SUBFIELD – POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

1. Which findings about citizens' political behavior appear to apply across different contexts? Which findings depend on party systems and/or party types?
2. 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?

SUBFIELD – COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY - DEVELOPMENT

1. There is a wealth of research in political science and economics showing that factors rooted in colonialism can explain present day outcomes in development. Discuss several of these factors. How do scholars empirically show the link, given that the independent variables and outcomes are so temporally distant? Do you find their arguments and strategies convincing? Why or why not?

2. Increasingly, comparativists who study development are engaging in experimental research. Proponents of experiments tout their superior scientific rigor in comparison with observational approaches. But are experimental and observational approaches directly comparable in terms of the knowledge they produce? What methodological problems do experiments solve and which remain? Explain with reference to examples from the study of development.

SUBFIELD- THE STATE

1. Looking at the literature that has emerged since scholars first called on the discipline to “bring the state back in,” what would you consider to be the most important contributions to the study of the state? Discuss in relation to *two* of the following types of contributions: substantive, conceptual, methodological.
2. In the 1980s, considerable research was conducted on the "developmental state." There is much less attention to this concept today. Whatever happened to the developmental state? Is the notion still salient for the field or was it merely an epiphenomenal deviation at a particular point in research time?

SUBFIELD – CHINESE POLITICS

1. Previous generations of China scholars have primarily relied on archival work, field research, and interviews in China for their work. Scholars nowadays have access to unprecedented amount of new data—social media posts, public opinion surveys, government websites, to name a few. Some believe that with advanced methods that can extract and analyze these data remotely, it is now entirely possible to study China without even having to set foot in the country. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Refer to specific readings and evidence where appropriate.
2. In what ways has the Chinese governance system evolved over the past 20 years? How have those changes affected policy effectiveness and legitimacy? What are the long-term implications of these changes? Please include a discussion of ways to measure these outcomes and several examples.

SUBFIELD – SOUTH EAST ASIAN POLITICS

1. Identity politics in various forms have attracted a growing amount of scholarly attention. Southeast Asia has several countries in which either Islam or Buddhism are used as vehicles to mobilize political support. There is a sense that these movements are highly effective, and that they crowd out alternative vehicles like class or ideology. Is there evidence to support this proposition? Is there evidence that contradicts or complicates it?
2. Southeast Asia contains a spectrum of political parties. These often vary considerably from their counterparts in advanced democracies, on which scholarly attention typically focuses. What are the most notable distinctions, and how do they affect the politics of at least two countries from the region?