

**Comparative Politics Field Comprehensive Examination**  
**August 26, 2022**

**Instructions for Students for Whom Comparative Politics is A Major Field**

Choose one essay from Section I and two essays from Section II. Be sure that your essays take the form of an argument, that you cite relevant literature, and that you avoid overlap, so you can demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of comparative politics literatures. Also, be sure to draw examples from countries with which you are familiar in at least some of your answers--preferably countries from more than one area of the world.

**Instructions for Students for Whom Comparative Politics is A Minor Field**

Choose two questions, at least one of which should be from Section II. Be sure that your essays take the form of an argument, that you cite relevant literature, and that you avoid overlap, so you can demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of comparative politics literatures. Also, be sure to draw examples from countries with which you are familiar in at least some of your answers--preferably countries from more than one area of the world.

**Section I**

a. In recent years, the field of comparative politics has seen an increasing emphasis on causal identification. How have research agendas been transformed as a result of this new emphasis? Under what conditions is a focus on causal identification helpful? Are there situations in which a narrow focus on causal identification may hinder our understanding of important political phenomena?

b. Imagine you are in the audience in a job talk where the job candidate is advancing a theory linking economic inequality to increased political support for illiberal political parties. For the research design, the candidate selected two countries where support for illiberal parties has grown substantially in recent years and used causal process tracing to try to provide evidence for the argument. Echoing King, Keohane and Verba (*Designing Social Inquiry*), a professor in the audience argues that the research design is flawed because the candidate has "selected on the dependent variable." What are the merits of this critique and why is the professor concerned? How should the job candidate respond? What arguments could they make in defense of their research strategy?

c. Important funders of political science research have begun prioritizing interdisciplinary research. In what ways has comparative politics benefitted from incorporating methodological developments in other disciplines? How can innovations in comparative politics contribute to findings in other fields? In your answer be sure to cite at least two examples of each.

**Section II**

d. Recently there has been an increasing disciplinary interest in how institutions and practices that in an earlier era were primarily researched in a democratic context (elections, parliaments, judiciaries) function in authoritarian contexts. How do scholars in comparative politics understand the role of these institutions in authoritarian regimes? How do scholars understand

differences among authoritarian regimes? Given such variation, how useful is authoritarianism as an analytic category?

e. "As economies become more globally integrated, inequality within and among countries increases, and democracy is likely to recede." Do you agree with this statement? Choose at least three studies in comparative politics and discuss how they illuminate relationships among increasing global integration, inequality, and democracy.

f. Is ethnicity malleable as a form of political identity, or is it stubbornly persistent? What factors should we study to understand the conditions under which the political salience of ethnic identities changes and the conditions under which such identities persist? Discuss with reference to theory and two cases.

g. Are theories developed to explain the emergence of nation-states in Western Europe adequate to understand the emergence of nations and states in other parts of the world? Please explain why or why not with reference to at least two non-European contexts.

h. What factors help to explain variation in women and minority representation in politics? To what extent can quotas or other policies be effective in promoting women and minorities in politics and how does descriptive representation affect political processes or policy outcomes?

i. How do theories of comparative politics help us to understand Russia's invasion of Ukraine? In your answer, be sure to engage arguments from at least two of the following literatures: regime type; nationalism; political economy; state building.