

AP Comparative Government and Politics*

What You Need to Know

If you find things here you don't know, look them up!

Comparative Politics

The study of how internal and external forces affect a country's domestic politics.

These studies are done • to test hypotheses
• to understand political processes
• to explain those processes

Comparative politics is good for

- explaining complex causality
- qualitative as opposed to quantitative analysis
- utilizing interpretation and context

The case study is probably the most common type of study.

Cases are • specific examples of developments, issues or institutions
• bounded geographic spaces or
• certain periods of time

Comparative studies can be done within one case over time.

- **Qualitative** Design Strategies:
 - **Most Similar Systems (MSS)** Design: comparing significant differences between two or more very similar systems
 - **Most Different Systems (MDS)** Design: comparing significant similarities between very dissimilar systems
- **Quantitative** Design Strategies: identifying correlations between independent and dependent variables
- **Mixed** design using several strategies

Basic comparative strategies all look for **patterns** and the **causal relationships** between independent and dependent variables. The goal is to make valid **generalizations**. **Classification** systems are based on generalizations about groups of countries (e.g., First World, Third World...).

The **small number** of cases in studies **makes generalizing difficult**.

While case studies focus on **empirical** data, they are often done in efforts to answer **normative** questions like, "How can democracy best be promoted?" or "Does prosperity improve human rights?"

Theoretical approaches determine what similarities and differences are significant and what strategies are appropriate.

Important theories include:

Rational Choice Theory: People act rationally in their own self-interest. Understanding their perceptions of their self-interest will explain their behavior. Therefore a comparative study should focus on individual behavior and motivation.

Structural Theory: Human actions are determined by underlying arrangements which determine behavior. (Marxism posited economic relationships as such arrangements.) Understanding the structure will explain political behavior. Therefore a comparative study will focus on the structures that determine relationships.

Cultural Theory: Culture is a way of believing and acting shared by people with a common identity. Culture varies and evolves over time. Understanding the culture will explain political behavior. Therefore a comparative study will focus on context within which people act politically.

Systems Theory: Inputs to the state affect decision making which creates outputs of public policy. The environments outside of the state and feedback from previous decisions influence policy making. Therefore a comparative study will examine the system as a whole mechanism in search of explanations for political behavior.

Important Concepts

accountability
authoritarianism
authority
bureaucracy
capacity (of a state)

judiciary
legislature
legitimacy
liberalism
multinational corporation

citizenship
civil society
class
cleavage
clientalism

nation
nationalism
nationalization
nation-state
NGO

consensus
constitution
corporatism
democracy
democratization

parliament
plurality system
policy
political party
political socialization

compromise
conflict
devolution
distributive policy
electoral system

privatization
power
proportional representation
recruitment
redistributive policy

ethnicity (ethnic identity)
executive
extractive policy
faction
federalism

regime
regulatory policy
rent-seeking
republic
revolution

fusion of powers
globalization
governance
government
identity politics

rule of law
separation of powers
social contract
social movement
social welfare

institution
interdependence
interest group
international
interventionist policy

sovereignty
state
structural adjustment
suffrage
unitary state

The AP Examination

Multiple-Choice:

There are 55 multiple-choice questions on the exam. You are allowed 45 minutes to answer these questions. You will be asked about all 6 countries and about any of the concepts common in comparative government and politics. About 5% of the questions will be about the discipline of comparative politics; 20% will be about political culture, nations, states, and regimes, 35% will be about political institutions, 15% will be about civil society, political participation, and media, 15% will be about political and economic change, and 10% will be about public policy. There is a small penalty for incorrect answers, but guessing when you have some knowledge of the topic is probably worthwhile. (This section is 50% of your exam grade.)

Free-Response Questions (FRQs):

There are three types of free-response-questions on the exam. You are allowed 100 minutes to respond to all the items.

Definitions – You will be asked to write definitions for and describe five basic ideas from the field of comparative politics (12.5% of your exam grade)

Conceptual Analysis – You will be asked to apply a major concept from the field to a country you have studied (12.5% of your exam grade)

Country Context Questions – You will be asked two questions that require you to compare and analyze features of the political systems from the countries you have studied. (25% of your exam grade)

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For more information go to <http://apcomparativegov.com/tools.html>

The United Kingdom

Comparative Politics

A model of democratic governance. Parliamentary systems exist all over the globe. It's a danger to think it's normal.

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

One of the oldest sovereign states. Legitimacy based on the people. Most people got the right to vote in the 20th century.

Political Institutions

A sovereign parliament which elects a government led by a prime minister. The civil service is a model of neutral meritocracy. Social welfare system is extensive.

Citizens, Society, and the State

Obvious and persistent social class divisions minimized by *noblesse oblige* and deference. Political elite come from privileged classes and unions. Interest groups work through parties at the national level. Plurality elections limit third party to marginal role.

Political and Economic Change

Government involved in the economy. Privatization and deregulation began under Thatcher and continue. Adjustments to post-industrialism difficult in old industrial areas.

Public Policy

EU and global competition force responses. Expectations of quality public services balance expectations of less costly government. Devolution aims to defuse local issues. Policies and actions aim to maintain global power of country.

China

Comparative Politics

An autocratic elite promotes economic change and continues to hold power. Will prosperity lead to democratization?

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

Sovereignty claimed in the name of the people by a small elite. Extensive powers now justified by economic results.

Political Institutions

Democratic centralism puts power in hands of tiny elite. Institutions are vehicles for implementation of policy made at highest levels.

Citizens, Society, and the State

Communist revolution and Cultural Revolution based on populist participation organized from top. No independent civil action tolerated.

Political and Economic Change

Government runs economy. Since '76, much independent economic activity. Closing huge state enterprises is difficult task, as is establishing a banking system and a code of commercial law (and courts to enforce it).

Public Policy

Elite maintains monopoly on power to make policy which aims to promote rapid economic growth and greater Chinese power around the globe.

Russia

Comparative Politics

Regime change and consistency in political culture are features to be noted. Do revolution and autocracy go together?

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

Stability, relative prosperity, and democracy provide legitimacy. Power centralized and extensive.

Political Institutions

Presidential power overshadows everything and is growing. Constitutional change common and instigated from the top.

Citizens, Society, and the State

No tradition of independent civil society. State power is government power.

Political and Economic Change

Structural adjustment difficult and uneven. Government remains major actor and director. Private sector operates at pleasure of government. Oil is the key to what success has happened.

Public Policy

Governance and economic issues are at forefront of politics. Great power status sought.

Nigeria

Comparative Politics

High stakes politics in a corrupt, ethnically-fractured, poor country, without a long-term democratic tradition.

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

Military rule for more than half its history. Democracy is fragile. Political cultures vary as much as the populace. Where does this system earn legitimacy? How does it govern?

Political Institutions

Powerful presidency. Legislature is an arena for politics. State governors seek local advantages and personal fortunes.

Citizens, Society, and the State

Parties and civil society based on ethnicity. Elite and grassroots politics are very different. Oil states struggle for what they see as a fair share of revenues. Parastatals dominate the economy. Corruption and clientalism are ubiquitous.

Political and Economic Change

Oil wealth allows Nigeria to resist extremes of IMF mandated structural adjustment, while planning economic reforms. Corruption the top obstacle. Political change is stalemated by ethnic politics.

Public Policy

Struggles over economic policies, ethnic politics, infrastructure creation, food production, and social welfare are ongoing.

Mexico

Comparative Politics

Attempts to create a more democratic system. Mexican "*perestroika*?" Patron-client politics dominate.

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

Revolution and promises of social justice provide legitimacy. Growing prosperity helps. Governmental authority and power is undermined by powerful drug exporters and corruption.

Political Institutions

The powerful presidency is challenged by legislature in opposition. Non-reelection can bring big changes.

Citizens, Society, and the State

Camarillas provided routes to influence and power in the PRI. New arrangements may be necessary. Parties focus on leaders more than policies.

Political and Economic Change

PRI loss and privatizations might mean future changes. Change is slowed by divided government and populism.

Public Policy

Top-down policy making about economic growth, globalization, and social welfare are keys to Mexico's future.

Iran

Comparative Politics

An intersection between democracy and theocracy, between Truth and modernization.

Sovereignty, Authority, and Power

Sovereignty is claimed by virtue of religious Truth. Power is exercised in constitutional and non-constitutional ways. Nationalism is powerful.

Political Institutions

Undemocratic religious elite sets the conditions for elections and representative government. Elected leaders and legislators are regularly and constitutionally vetoed by the autocrats. State controls economy.

Citizens, Society, and the State

Westernized and educated elite important to the theocrats but alienated by them. Majority rallies around Islam and nation.

Political and Economic Change

Talk of change but merchants and religious charities are threatened by structural adjustment. Isolation and trade sanctions hurt economy and insulate it from change.

Public Policy

Welfare of rapidly growing population as well as economic growth dominate policy concerns. Foreign policy can be both a distraction and a route to economic growth.

For more information go to
[http://apcomparativegov.com/
tools.html](http://apcomparativegov.com/tools.html)

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