Introduction:

Preliminary examinations are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to preliminary examination questions may illustrate critical points with examples from one or many countries so long as case material (regardless of how many countries it involves) buttresses theoretical arguments. Accordingly, an essay should convey that a student is: (1) well-versed in the key literature; and (2) able to knowledgeably apply a case or cases of their own choosing to that literature.

You should answer one of the questions in Section I. In Section II, you should answer one question from two of the subsections (A, B and C). Answers for each question should be no more that 2,500 words. Alternatively, you may omit one question to write about your research agenda (D) linked to published literature. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your examination. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

Section I: Comparative Theory and Methods

1) Ever since Lipset’s famous essay, the contemporary literature on the evolution and stability of western democracies has wrestled with the question of whether socio-economic affluence (often measured as income) precedes democratic institutions (as Lipset argued most recently in 1994). What evidence leads some observers to claim that there is no relationship at all? And how does yet another group of scholars argue that the relationship is conditional, dependent on a range of circumstances, either cultural or structural? --What are the major issues in measurement?

2) About a decade ago, rational choice theory seemed poised to become the dominant approach to comparative analysis, to the delight of some and the dismay of others. Today, although rational choice approaches are still commonly used in comparative research, there seems to be no single, dominant approach in the subdiscipline. Do you see the inability of rational choice to achieve analytical dominance as a positive or negative development in the subdiscipline? In your answer, discuss what you see as the main successes and limitations of rational choice theory, citing examples from comparative research.

Section II:

A. Comparative Institutions and Government

1) Protection and promotion of minority interests is an important goal of democratic governments. This is one reason why political science research pays
increasing attention to institutional rules that help minority representatives get elected into government. What institutional features (e.g., electoral systems) assist involvement of underrepresented groups in elected bodies of government? What have we learned from this literature? What questions remain?

2) Given the diverse approaches that fall under the rubric of "institutionalism," is it at all meaningful to say, as many political scientists do, that "institutions matter?" Is there a core conception of "institutions" that makes that phrase meaningful? Or has "institutionalism" become so broad a term as to be meaningless? Whatever position that you argue, provide examples from comparative research that best illustrate your argument.

B. Comparative Public Opinion and Parties

1) Public preferences are central to the policymaking process in democratic systems. For instance, periodic elections are important mechanisms through which the public chooses their political representatives, also giving leaders a mandate to decide and implement major public policy. In some democracies, the public can more directly shape policy outcomes by directly engaging in referendums. Discuss the extent to which comparative politics research to date has explored the linkage between public opinion/preferences and public policy, and make an assessment about the role of the public in the policymaking process across political systems.

C. Comparative Social Politics

1) In the last few decades, many movements have chosen to professionalize and become more institutionalized, a process often called "NGOization." This can mean that movements surrender the methods and mission of collective action and protests for the promises of security and funding promised by becoming professionalized. What are the research findings in this area, and what are the implications of this process for social movements domestically and transnationally?

2) What conditions lead most to collective action, and what conditions minimize collective action?

D. Comparative Research Agenda

Pick a subfield of comparative politics and write a coherently organized and analytically rich discussion of how your personal research agenda relates to that subfield. This research may not relate to the same topic that you addressed in Section II (A), (B), or (C) above.