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) Comparative politics is rich with case studies informed by fieldwork. These cases often become the basis for new theoretical ideas in the field or can just as often serve to challenge existing ideas. What are the components of a rigorous fieldwork-based case study, and what are the methodological, scope, and validity challenges and advantages that come with fieldwork? Use examples from the field of comparative politics to illustrate your answer.

2) Imagine that I need a measure of "regime type," and I decide to use Freedom House's combined measures of "political rights" and "civil liberties." Is this a good or poor choice for capturing regime type? Provide examples from recent research on regime change over the past two decades or so to explain your evaluation of the appropriateness of using the Freedom House measure.

Section II:

A. Comparative Institutions and Government

1) Almost all countries in the world today hold national-level elections. Among authoritarian regimes, some scholars argue that elections, even authoritarian, lead to greater democratization. Others argue that elections actually sustain authoritarian regimes. Summarize each set of arguments and discuss the theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses of the arguments. How do you see the role of elections in authoritarian
regimes? Please provide specific examples from contemporary research to support your argument.

2) Common among new and developing democracies are fractionalized and volatile party systems. Discuss the causes and consequences (e.g., on democratization and representation, among other things) of party system volatility and fractionalization.

B. Comparative Public Opinion and Parties

1) Political representation is a central feature of western democracies. Yet, its precise meaning is controversially discussed. Some argue that the key feature is to achieve opinion-policy congruence. Others follow Schumpeter's dictum maintaining that parties and voters must compete over policies before representation can occur. Evaluate this debate. Make sure that you discuss the meaning of representation; how it can evolve in a democratic party system (e.g., its mechanisms and assumptions), and how institutional features (both formal and party-system properties) can affect representation. Finally, is it possible that policy-centered and election-centered approaches to representation converge under certain conditions? Why, or why not?

2) Given the recent availability of nationally representative surveys conducted across the globe, what are the potential benefits and shortcomings associated with international surveys? Discuss the benefits of cross-national surveys as well as the methodological and conceptual challenges. In your answer, provide empirical examples to demonstrate benefits and challenges.

C. Comparative Social Politics

1) Knowing what we know about collective action theory and social movement research, what could this field contribute to studies of new types of movements, such as cyber-activism and movements using social media and technology as both a method and target of protest? Include in your answer a relevant example or examples from recent events.

2) Why do national conflicts stay in equilibrium? Almost all are stable, except for terror, and that is often a saddlepoint. What is it about human conflict that promotes stability?

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.