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 must answer one question in each section (Sections I-III). Answers for each question should be no more that 2,500 words. 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 (Answer one question in this section)
1. Pick a substantive research area and identify two competing theories in the literature. Explain how the two groups of scholars advocating distinct theories might approach the same topic in similar/dissimilar ways. Based on empirical research that has followed, compare the kinds of research questions asked, research methods used, and conclusions drawn by each group. Discuss ways in which the debate between the two groups could be addressed. (Note: the substantive research area that you select in your answer to this question should be different from the substantive area selected in Section III below).

2. Select a major substantive theory in Comparative Politics that has originated in a single case and, as a result, has benefitted from its origins in that case. You may focus on any major theoretical approach that is salient in the Comparative literature (e.g., legislative institutions; presidentialism; partisanship, etc.) to explain the development of the theory. (Note: the substantive research area that you select in your answer to this question should be different from the substantive area selected in Section III below).

Section II: Comparative Methods (Answer one question in this section)
1. Scholars increasingly advocate for using the mixed methods approach in comparative politics research. Pick an area where scholars in the field have successfully implemented the strategy to advance knowledge. Pick another area where mixed methods approach remains relatively uncommon (i.e., dominated by either large N quantitative or small N qualitative). Discuss how mixed methods approach could help advance knowledge in this field.

2. Today, political scientists have access to a wealth of survey data that compares public attitudes cross-nationally. On the one hand, large cross-national surveys, such as the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, the World Values Survey, and various Barometers, have allowed researchers to address a range of topics across countries and over time. On the other hand, the blind use of large cross-national survey datasets is problematic. Discuss the methodological concerns in cross-national survey research and the methodological tools/developments in comparative politics to deal with these concerns.
1. To what extent do existing theories of democratization help explain the ways in which countries undergo democratic transitions in the contemporary period?

2. Examining the period since the “Third Wave” of democratic regime change, are institutionalized party systems necessary for the successful consolidation of democracy?

3. Political institutions have long been cited as a way to abate ethnic-religious conflict in heterogeneous states. How can electoral systems affect ethnic identity, and the potential for ethnic or sectarian conflict?

4. Political parties provide a central mechanism through which public preferences can influence public policies and voters can hold governments accountable (what is termed party government). As a result, parties often form as soon as nascent democracies emerge. Despite the ease with which parties are founded, however, the smooth operation of accountability and representation is difficult to realize. In your essay, discuss the reasons for these difficulties. First, establish the assumptions upon which the idea of representation and accountability through parties are based. Address the major party-level and individual-level assumptions. Second, what conditions may threaten the successful development of party governments in newer democracies? Provide a discussion of the fundamental issues (such as partisanship, the novelty of organizations, or potential institutional impediments) and refer to specific areas/countries exemplifying these problems. Finally, is there evidence that parties lose their prominent position in stable democracies as well?