



# Comparative Politics (GL 261)

## Exam #1 -- Fall 2009

### STUDY GUIDE

**GENERAL GUIDELINES:** The first exam covers all lectures and reading (Kesselman, et al. Chapters 1-4 and 7 and Lim Handout) since the beginning of the course. You will have to answer **TWO ESSAY QUESTIONS** from the list below. You will NOT have a choice as to which questions you have to answer, so it is strongly recommended that you work up outlines for each of these questions. You ARE allowed to use your textbook and notes during the exam, but BE WARNED! Fifty minutes is not nearly enough time to construct intelligent answers to these questions. You need to come into the exam with answers already in mind and only use your notes to help you to remember and clarify specific details.

Make sure to read the questions carefully and address all parts of the question. Your weekly tests focused on specific details about these political systems. The emphasis here is on comparative political analysis, not simply the regurgitation of previously covered material. Each requires you to compare and contrast across political systems, elaborate on the relative strengths and weaknesses of different structures, and draw reasoned conclusions based on your analysis. You are allowed, even encouraged, to work with you classmates in thinking through your answer, but you final essay should be entirely your own work.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Scholars often talk about American 'exceptionalism' -- the idea that American politics and government is very different from other industrialized democracies. Is America really that different from other wealthy democracies? If so, how is America different and why do think we are different? Given the nature of these differences, is the American political system a useful model for other states to follow in terms of creating a stable democracy and effective public policy?

2. Our government faces major challenges – wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a global financial crisis, attempts to reform the healthcare system. Critics often slam Washington being lumbering and ineffective in responding to such challenges. Would our government be better able to respond to our national problems if we had a parliamentary system rather than a presidential system with separation of powers? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Do you think, for example, that the policies of the Obama Administration would differ if he were the head of the majority party in the legislature rather than a separately elected President? Given this, which system do you think works better and why?

***MORE QUESTIONS ON BACK →***

3. Britain, France, and Germany all have very different party systems, varying in both the number of parties and the stability of parties over time. Compare and contrast the key differences in political party systems across these three states? Why do they differ? In terms of representing and responding to the interests and demands of voters, which system do you think works best? In terms of creating efficient and effective public policy, which works best? Given your analysis, is there anything that Americans can learn from these countries that might serve to improve our party system?

4. France and Germany have both seen the collapse of democracy and authoritarian political systems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet both of these countries are now stable, prosperous, successful democracies. What aspects of their respective political systems allow democracy to work in the present when it has failed in the past? Are the long-term foundations for democracy strong in both countries, or is there still potential for backsliding into authoritarian regimes?

5. The German “social market economy” claims to represent a balance between free-enterprise capitalism and state-led socialism. Explain the basic principles and institutions of the German social market economy. How does this differ from America’s more *laissez-faire* capitalism? From your own perspective as a future employee and/or business owner, would you rather work in the German or American economic system? Which of these systems do you think is better in providing growth and prosperity for the overall national economy? (If you answer these questions differently, explain why.)

6. Managing collective identities is a crucial issue for any political system. Select any TWO of the countries we have studied so far. What are the most significant identity-based demands of (e.g., ethnic/racial, religious, regional, class) being placed on the government of those countries? What are the causes and goals of these demands? Which government do you think has done a job of managing this issue? Why?