

Comparing Political Systems

Week 10 – Exam Preparation

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Outline

- Technical concerns
- Expectations
- Overview of topics and key concepts
- How to prepare (and what to avoid)
- How to write the exam (and what to avoid)

Technical concerns

- Online written exam in January (11th, check your exam timetable)
- Assessed! This exam is worth 30% of your final CPS mark
- You have 24 hours to complete it —» exam script via email, upload to Turnitin on KEATS
- University offers mitigation for overlaps; overlap time as extra time —» for details see <https://self-service.kcl.ac.uk/article/KA-01790/en-us#Guidance%20for%20overlapping%20assessments%20>
- Don't be late! Same policy as essays
- Don't plagiarise! Same policy as essays

Technical concerns cont.

- Please see sample exam sheet on KEATS
(https://keats.kcl.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/7816649/mod_resource/content/2/4SSPP103_sample_exam.pdf)
- Exam consists of two sections
- Section A
 - 5 questions, you have to answer all questions, each answers is assessed individually and worth 10% of the overall exam mark
 - Approximately 200 word answers are expected (pls. avoid extremes)
- Sections B:
 - you have to answer one of the two questions, approximately 1000 word answer expected, worth 50% of your overall exam mark

SECTION A

This section carries 50% of the overall marks

Answer to all questions

Just an indication: each answer should be approximately 200 word long (it is just an indication, not a rule).

Q1 What is economic explanation of democratic backsliding? (10%)

Q2 What is the difference between the minimalist and maximalist measures of democracy (10%)

Q3 According to the Most Similar System Design, you should select countries that are similar. Why? (10%)

Q4 In what type of democracy is the Prime Minister politically accountable to the parliament? What does 'politically accountable' mean in such context? (10%)

Q5 What is the European model of judicial review? (10%)

SECTION B

This section carries 50% of the overall marks

Answer to one out of the two questions

Just an indication: your answer should be approximately 1,000 word long (it is just an indication, not a rule).

No need to have a list of references at the end of your answers.

Q1 Do you agree with the following statement: Democracy is a binary concept, either a country is democracy or a dictatorship. Why/why not?

Q2 Do you agree with the following statement: Presidential systems are less stable than parliamentary systems. Why/why not?

Technical concerns cont.

- You won't be assessed on material from Week 9 (subnational governments) because of the strike
 - If there is a question relating to material from Week 9 in section A, pls. leave it blank and you'll get full score for that question
 - If there is a question relating to material from Week 9 in section B, choose the other question. You *can* choose the question relating to Week 9, in which case your answer will be assessed. Not recommended.
 - Both of these are unlikely scenarios
- Please try to use clear and concise academic writing —» we must be able to understand your arguments
- Feel free to use paragraphs, avoid long sentences —» aim for a clear structure that is easy to follow

Expectations

- Exam, not essay —» according expectations and marking/feedback
- We expect you to demonstrate an adequate understanding of the comparative mindset and key concepts discussed through the module thus far, as well as *some* ability to apply them
- No need to reference or to present any empirical data
- Definitely no hypothesis testing!
- For section A, provide straight forward answers with a focus on defining/explaining relevant key concepts
 - No need for genuine critical engagement, justification, alternative explanations etc.
 - No need to name drop
- For section B, you do need to construct an argument, but no need to overcomplicate
 - Mention the name of relevant authors/thinkers, use some real life examples to illustrate/support your claims
- Take advantage of the format!

Overview of topics and key concepts

Weeks 2-5

- Week 2: Democratic rules and democratisation
 - Democracy, non-democracy / authoritarian regime, transition and consolidation, what facilitates or hinders democratisation (Treisman)
- Week 3: Autocratic rules and democratic backsliding
 - Diverse range of authoritarian regimes (typology), institutions seem similar but very different functions (e.g. elections), democratic backsliding as inverse of democratisation (backsliding, backlash, breakdown), several potential explanations for backsliding, polarisation in focus (Svolik)
- Week 4: Political culture
 - Role and relevance of PC (democracy, social capital, participation, compliance), explain things like COVID-19 vaccine acceptance cross-country variation (Lindholt et al)
- Week 5: Comparative method
 - What is comparative politics, why systemic comparison, independent/dependent variables
 - Method (MSSD, MDSD), sample size (small-N, large-N), data (quantitative, qualitative)

Overview of topics and key concepts

Weeks 6-9

- Week 6: Legislatures
 - Institutions, systems of government, unicameral vs. bicameral legislatures, different functions of legislatures (representation, legislation, control/oversight), relative autonomy compared to other branches of power (Kreppel)
- Week 7: Executives
 - Executive-legislature relationship (fused-power or separation of power), parliamentary, presidential, semi-presidential systems, votes of no confidence vs. impeachment, any of them better/worse for democracy (Elgie, Linz)
- Week 8: Constitutions and courts
 - What is a constitution, democratic vs. non-democratic, codified vs. uncoded, flexible vs. rigid, two models of constitutional adjudication (European constitutional review vs. American judicial review), principal-agent relationship, zone of discretion, veto power
- ~~Week 9: Subnational governments~~

How to prepare

- Check example sheet on KEATS
- Go over the topics, focus on key concepts
 - Lecture slides, seminar questions and notes, relevant textbook chapters, academic readings for seminars
- Prepare notes (strategically!)
- Identify potentially problematic topics/concepts
- Don't overprepare, don't get lost in further reading
- (make sure you have stable internet connection)

How to write the exam

- Read the entirety of the sheet, maybe think about it for a bit before you start writing
- If any of the questions seem more challenging, consider starting with those
- For section A, write straight forward answers —» maybe a few paragraphs but no need for introduction, contextualisation etc.
- For section B, you might write a brief intro (present the subject matter and brief overview of what you'll be arguing) and a brief conclusion at the end to give it some structure. But again, keep in mind it's not an essay
- 24 hours is a lot —» you have time to think and re-think, set aside etc.
- Ideally you should aim to proofread at least once
- Take your time but once it feels complete do make the submission

Good luck, you've got this!