

# Study Guide: Comparative Politics

## Introduction to Comparative Politics

### What is Comparative Politics?

- Comparative politics is a subfield of political science that seeks to understand and explain political phenomena by comparing different political systems, institutions, behaviors, and outcomes across countries or regions
- It involves analyzing and assessing the similarities and differences between political entities to draw meaningful conclusions and develop theories about politics

## Research Questions in Comparative Politics

### Types of Research Questions:

**Cause-Effect Questions:** Investigate the relationships between variables to determine the causes or effects of political phenomena.

- Example: Why are some countries rich while others are poor?
- Example: Why does North Korea want to develop its nuclear capabilities?
- Example: Why did the 9/11 attacks happen?

**Empirical Questions:** Focus on observing and explaining real-world political events and phenomena based on methodological rigor and empirical evidence.

- These questions aim to understand "why the world is the way it is."

**Normative Questions:** Engage in debates about how the world should be according to moral, ethical, or value judgments.

- These questions involve discussions of "how the world ought to be" and often encompass issues of justice, ethics, and morality
- Example: Why is democracy preferable to authoritarianism?

## Concepts, Variables, and Measurements:

### Concepts:

- Concepts are abstract ideas used to think about and analyze political phenomena
- Good concepts should be clear, coherent, consistent, and useful for measurable variables
- Examples of political concepts: state, political party, democracy, authoritarianism, nationalism, constitutionalism, war, terrorism, communism, capitalism, etc

### Working with concepts:

- **Conceptualization:** The process of creating and selecting social science concepts for study
- **Operationalization:** The process of making basic concepts measurable by defining variables and indicators
- **Variables:** Specific aspects or characteristics of a concept that can be measured
- **Indicators:** Measures used to quantify variables and assess political phenomena

### Challenges in conceptualization and operationalization:

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**JG Myers**



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