

Comparing Foreign Political Systems Unit 3: Focus Questions

Any changes to this guide that are made after it is posted on-line at the beginning of the unit will be noted in bold.

Why does underdevelopment persist in the modern world? Why are some countries finally pulling ahead while so many others are not?

What are the main qualities that distinguish the “developing nations” from the rest of the world? Where are they? How poor are they? How many people live there? How fast are they growing relative to the advanced industrial democracies? What is the main take-away from the short video we watched (featuring Hans Rosling) on changing development patterns over time?

Read Wade’s article very carefully. Why does it matter how we measure poverty? How is it possible that the poorest people in a country that is experiencing widening inequality may be doing better off than would be the case if they had lower growth with lower inequality? What different patterns do you see over the last several decades, depending on how you measure? How, if at all, has global poverty (growth rates and inequality) changed in recent decades as globalization has accelerated? How has it changed in recent years? What are the dominant patterns to the distribution of growth among and within developing countries?

What’s the difference between a country’s GDP, its GDP measure in PPP, and its Gini statistics (see Wade’s article on the last point)? Why do we need to look at “per capita” statistics as well as country-level data?

Based on the review of Paul Collier’s book, *The Bottom Billion*, what unique challenges do developing countries face relative to the advanced industrial countries? How is the global south changing with globalization? Why are some countries— especially those in the “bottom billion”—having unique problems with development, while many of the largest poor countries are doing much better than they used to?

What evidence is there that life in the developing world has gotten a lot better in the last couple of decades? What—per the Economist article on this topic—seems to have been the cause of these improvements, and why is there reason to be concerned that things may not continue to improve at a rapid rate?

What factors of underdevelopment have been emphasized by theories (including most of what the O’Neil text has to say about the subject) that focus on the legacies of imperialism and “neocolonialism” to explain contemporary global poverty? What growth strategies have advocates of this perspective recommended for the leaders of poor countries (e.g., what is the difference between “import substitution,” “export-oriented” industrialization, and neo-liberal approaches to growth), and how well have they worked?

How did the first modernization theories—those that focused on issues related to capital accumulation—explain underdevelopment in the Third World, and what solutions did they suggest? What about theories that see cultural factors as the primary sources of underdevelopment? In answering these questions, see O’Neils’ chapter in *Essentials*.

What does the growth of the “global titans”—the areas of the global south emphasized in slides reviewed in class— suggest about the relationship of international and domestic factors in determining why some countries develop and others do not? What role has state-led capitalism (i.e., governmental initiatives that collect and strategically target capital for the purposes of development) played in the rise of the so-called BRIC countries? How likely is rapid growth in the South likely to continue and why may it eventually transform the economies of the older industrial democracies?

Why do only some societies become democratic? What factors determine whether a society is likely to remain democratic?

Drawing insights from the Handelman chapter (a non-text reading), what makes a country democratic, and how do social scientists measure how democratic a society is? What factors seem most important in causing countries to “transition” to democracies and then to “consolidate”? Why did so many countries become democracies after the 1970s? , and is there any evidence to suggest that the “third wave” of democratization may now be in reverse?

What is the relationship between economic development and democracy? Why do some scholars, like Handelman, think that development is a prerequisite to becoming and especially staying a democracy? What is the logic and evidence behind their approach to understanding democracy’s causes, and why do they think that US policies to promote democracy abroad should emphasize economic development as a key component of democratization strategies?

What evidence, if any, is there to suggest that democracy is as much a cause of economic development as an outcome of it? What evidence is there that “democracies excel” in a way that other nations cannot, and what does this tell us about the likely trajectory of political change in places like China where authoritarian governments will need to continue to grow their economies if they want to remain in power?

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita argues that the relationship between democracy and growth is not static and that dictators are increasingly are getting better at figuring out how to grow national economies without democratizing? How and why is this happening?

What does China tell us about the cause of sustained development and its relationship to democracy?

Comparing the experiences of China with those of the USSR, but also thinking about other communist states, how correct were Marx’s predications about the benefits of communist revolution for most people and the type of societies likely to emerge through revolution? Is there any point to be made that the Chinese experiment with communism may have had more long-term positive consequences for China than was the case in Russia?

Why did Mao Zedong think China’s “Great Leap Forward” should depart from Soviet model of implementing communism through highly centralized planning in favor of intense mobilization of the masses using “moral capital”? Why did he later encourage everyday people, especially students and the “Red Guards,” to attack the communist party itself in the “Cultural Revolution”? What long-term effects did these two

movements have for China? How did Mao's approach to growth and dealing with his political enemies differ from the USSR under Stalin and afterwards?

At what point did governance in China shift from totalitarianism to authoritarianism? With the death of Mao Zedong and the weakening of his supporters, what major economic, political, and foreign policy changes did China's Deng Xiaoping implement?

What were the main results of Deng's changes? What important political policies did Deng adopt to institutionalize a more dynamic and much more stable form of authoritarianism in China? How his political did changes better position the CCP to withstand—at least for the short term—the factors that led to the demise of the USSR? What additional—and even contradictory—changes are being made today by President Xi as he tries to balance the need for political and economic reform in China?

Why has the Chinese economy been so successful in recent decades? How has the CCP's membership changed in recent decades as the party has sought to diversify its base, reward loyalty and especially merit over ideology, and secure the allegiance of China's growing entrepreneurial class? Does it even make any sense to call China a "communist" country anymore?

For all of its changes, China is still clearly an authoritarian state. What challenges are its political leaders facing as they seek to enhance the economic and foreign power of China and still retain complete control? How do the demographics and the nature of China's economy make it more difficult to use high levels of force to stay in power over the long run? Why are many China experts—including James Fallows—concerned about the policies and leadership style of Xi?

What specific challenges will the CCP face in maintaining the status quo? Based on profound changes taking place in Chinese society as a whole, how likely is it that continued economic growth will eventually cause the country to become a democracy? What is a "tipping point," and why may it be so difficult to see democratization in China until it is happening?

What does India tell us about development and democracy?

- What characteristics make India an especially good place to examine causes of democratization and development as well as the interaction between the two phenomena?
- Why is it so surprising that India is such a strong democracy? How big is India geographically and with respect to population? What are India's major religious, ethnic, linguistic, and other demographic differences? How many Indians live in absolute poverty and what are their lives like?
- Who were the most important leaders in India's transition to becoming the world's largest democracy? Were they as important as the British colonial legacy? What key choices did they make and to what effect? What made the composition and focus of the Indian National Congress so different than most movements that form to demand democracy? What was unique about the opposition (British officials) that they faced?
- What role did institutional and economic choices made by Jawaharlal Nehru play in helping democracy to consolidation in India? Why did India have such a low growth rate during its first

decades of democracy? Is there any upside to some of the specific post-independence decisions that kept India poor for so long?

- How and why has the pattern of economic growth in India changed so much since the early 1980s? How has the green revolution and especially economic liberalization (i.e., structural adjustment) impacted the rich-poor gap in India? How has liberalization reshaped the values and concerns of Indian elites and the growing middle class? To what extent has growing prosperity in the upper and middle-classes in India hurt or helped the quality of democratic representation for India's poor?
- What unique challenges—at least compared to China—stand in the way of India's full economic development? Specifically, what role will its massive, diverse, and still very poor population play in facilitating or hindering the nation's full development (you will find it useful to review Sinha's article section on "winners" and losers).
- How is political power divided in India? How has Indian democracy benefited from its key institutional choices (the most important being federalism and its British-style parliamentary system that mixes British-style district-level plurality elections, a multiparty legislature, and a powerful prime-minister who stays in power only by retaining majority support in the national congress)?