

COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Department of International Studies
Fall 2014

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR STUDENT NUMBER ON YOUR EXAM

Instructions: Ph.D. students have eight (8) hours to complete the exam and must answer the mandatory and three (3) optional questions. M.A. students have four (4) hours and must answer the mandatory and two (2) optional questions. Note: you may answer only one question from any optional group. The exam will begin promptly at 9 am at the Sociology Computer Lab (Merrick Building Room 207). You must email your exam to Dr. Yaffe (l.yaffe@umiami.edu) immediately upon completion.

MANDATORY QUESTION

1. Over the past decades, multiple efforts to establish the dominance of particular theoretical, epistemological and methodological perspectives have marked the evolution of Comparative Politics. Accordingly, the field's evolution frequently is thought of in terms of a succession of competing theoretical paradigms (e.g., focusing on the "independent" or causal variables). In contrast, others argue that contributions in Comparative Politics should be evaluated in terms of major "problems" or themes (e.g., focusing on the "dependent" variable or the phenomena to be explained). Your task is to describe succinctly the current status of these debates regarding the field. How would you characterize the current status and probable future trends in Comparative Politics? You should take care to identify the most influential authors and to evaluate the strengths and weakness of their contributions and of alternative views of the field's evolution.

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS

Debates in Methods

2. A significant debate in Comparative Politics centers on the meaning of the term *comparative*. Some analysts proclaim the superior scientific merits of "large N" cross-national studies, contending that studies of a single country or region are not really comparative. Others argue that the emphasis on the more traditional case study approaches demanding detailed knowledge of a country or region is essential, and would be lost if small-N approaches were abandoned. Still others contend that neither case studies nor large-N comparisons are an unalloyed good: rather, both entail trade-offs. Identifying the main scholars in these debates, your task is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the contending positions. You should focus specifically on the relative merits of each approach in terms of developing and building theory, internal and external validity, exploring causal mechanisms, and confirming or refuting theories.

Democracy and Democratization

3. What are the preconditions for a successful transition from authoritarian to democratic political systems? Do preconditions actually exist that one could say are common across time, regions, and political systems? To what extent do the scholars writing about this issue in the past quarter of a century agree with, or differ from, those whose work was published half a century ago, such as Robert Dahl, Barrington Moore, and Seymour Martin Lipset? In your response be sure to discuss the views of key analysts in the field.

Comparative Political Economy

4. In the current neoliberal global era, some scholars have argued that national governments' powers will be eroded or eliminated altogether, whereas others have claimed that globalization will actually "augment" state power. Review the literature in this area and discuss your own opinion regarding the ways globalization may have weakened state power and autonomy in the last decades and in what ways states may have augmented their power as a consequence of globalization. It will be useful to analyze this debate by discussing several specific policy domains (e.g., macroeconomic policy, social welfare, labor markets, and so on).

OR

5. The past seventy years have led to the spread of mixed economies across the globe; these combine market mechanisms with a degree of government oversight and regulation. These "varieties of capitalism" take different forms in different countries, however. Review the literature in this area and discuss the principal forms capitalism takes around the world. In your opinion, at the start of the 21st Century do the differences across capitalisms outweigh the similarities?

Revolutions, State Failure and Civil Wars

6. There is general agreement among scholars that "state failure" is characterized by the loss of the monopoly over the means of coercion by centralized public authority, a situation that typically leads to government predation and the militarization of civic society, produces conditions that may precipitate the outbreak of ethnic wars or revolution, and foments the massive violation of human rights, and perhaps even genocide. Despite this general agreement, there is much less consensus regarding the causes of state failure. Some comparativists focus on the economy (greed vs. grievance), while others stress the role of ethnic conflict, racial and/or linguistic cleavages. Still others give causal priority to the political and institutional factors such as the provision of public goods or political competition and representation, or to questions of the density of civil society density and social capital. Some even insist on the importance of geography or climate. Who, if anyone, is correct? Your task is to survey this literature, identifying the most influential authors, and to offer your own assessment of the current status of the debate in the social sciences on the causes of state failure and civil war.

CP Theories and International Conflict.

7. Immediately following the Sochi Olympics, Russia occupied Crimea, part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine, and then—despite US and EU opposition—proceeded to outright territorial annexation. How might CP’s major paradigms such as Rationalism, Structuralism and Culturalism attempt to explain this ongoing international crisis? Make sure to identify the main arguments of each theory, citing the contributions of the relevant scholars. Which theoretical perspective do you find the most useful?

Ideology and National Identity

8. The “End of History” prediction apparently (according to certain views) has not been fulfilled in many regions of world, most especially in Latin America. Do you agree with this assessment? Why you do not concur? If you agree, outline the reasons for this failure and a selected number of examples of ideological exceptions.

Or

9. In the 1960s a number of political analysts such as Daniel Bell argued, in effect, that the age of ideology had come to an end. Francis Fukuyama made a similar point in his influential article on the “End of History.” Reflecting this tendency, many social scientists had virtually relegated the study of nationalism to the “ashbin of history.” Yet, in the past several decades ethnicity, nationalism and ethnically-based conflict have reemerged as significant factors in both domestic and international politics, as well as in the writing of social scientists (recent examples are Catalonia and Spain; Scotland and England). To what extent does this represent the return of “ideology” as an important explanatory factor in human social behavior? What is the role of ethnicity or national identity in the politics of modern industrialized states? In your answer be sure to refer to the most important of the analysts on whose work you are drawing.

Transitional Justice

10. Recently scholars have pointed out that Transitional Justice intersects with other fields of the social sciences and the humanities. This realization has tended to complicate the theoretical (conceptual over-stretching) and empirical developments in this field of study, and may have helped create or maintain false dichotomies such as the well-known Peace vs. Justice “dilemma” that has been exploited by wily leaders of repressive regimes and perpetrators of mass atrocities. Please identify the theoretical merits and scope of the field of Transitional Justice by addressing these key questions: Can justice (trials and other forms of accountability) prevent and deter future injustices? Can truth telling and reparations for the victims be efficient as reconciliation tools? Can conditional amnesties enhance the search for justice and truth? Can an amnesty coexist with trials and other forms of accountability (i.e., lustration)? In your essay be sure to discuss the most important scholars and analyses in the field of Transitional Justice.