

**COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Program of International Studies
Fall 2016**

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. 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.

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS

Failed States, Revolutions and Civil Wars

2. Max Weber defined a state as the entity possessing a “monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”. Sometimes, however, a given state’s monopoly is not perceived as legitimate and internal armed opposition to that state arises. Why is this the case? Compare some of the main comparative politics explanations of failed states, revolutions and civil wars. In your view, which of these are most compelling and which are least persuasive? Explain your position.

Comparative Political Economy

3. Welfare state policies have suffered important transformations since the second half of the 20th century. Your task is to analyze the emergence and evolution of welfare state policies and answer the following questions: Do different regions have varying systems of welfare states? If so, why? How have historical legacies influenced contemporary

social policies? How can we best explain the variations over time in extent of redistribution and the identities of the beneficiaries of welfare state policies? Be sure to mention the principal contending theorists in CP literature, and address concrete examples that illustrate the similarities and/or differences in welfare state across regions.

Democratization

4. 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.

Contentious politics and Identity

5. Recent work in the ethnic conflict tradition has converged with work on social movements and nationalism to show that the vast bulk of political violence today occurs between subgroups within states, while most political violence in the nineteenth century was between states. Similarly, in Latin America and elsewhere, scholars have found that indigeneity is a more powerful mobilizing symbol than class. And in Europe “ethnicity” has risen from the ashes to produce both xenophobia and Islamist mobilization. Do these observations cohere in marking a single historical trend? Or do the differences in cultural and institutional variables convince you that we must approach these trends within traditional area traditions? In your view, what kind of theories can be used to compare and explain them?

OR

6. Scholars such as Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow have been highly influential in a growing movement that challenges the standard, variable-driven, statistical correlation approach to the study of non-conventional forms of political participation as well as the traditional subfield distinctions between the comparative study of topics such as revolution, civil war, social movements, protests, and so on. Your task is to discuss this relatively new field of contentious politics and explain the preference for “causal mechanisms” (rather than variables) as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the contentious politics literature. What is your position vis-à-vis the claim that different forms of contentious politics (peaceful protest, violent civil war, revolutions, etc.) share certain fundamental characteristics? Be sure to discuss the appropriate theoretical and empirical literature, and utilize a case of a recent wave of mobilization (Tahir Square, Gezi Park, Brazilian mass demonstrations, Spanish *indignados*, etc.) to illustrate the notion of contentious politics.

Regional Studies

7. Although democratic processes have been the standard in Latin America since the transition from dictatorships to electoral constitutionalism, today’s variations in political

practice offer a much ampler panorama. Summarize the current political trends and trace them back to key historical periods. Choose three of them that according to your view define time periods and the fabric of specific countries. Illustrate your choices with examples of leadership, political parties or ideologies.

Domestic Politics and International Trends

8. Recent elections in Latin America, political upheavals in the Arab world, and trends in Europe have shown the reappearance of native political formats (new populism, religious fundamentalism, secularism, right wing tendencies, racism). There seems to be a pattern of *vive la difference*, in contrast with successive democratization waves of the past and the prediction of the “end of history” and the establishment of orthodox liberal democracy. At the same time, traditional ideologies supporting standard parties seem to be threatened by new trends. Trace an approximate map of the shifting political and ideological patterns in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East/ Arab world, and beyond if applicable, proposing geographical, cultural, economic, and social identifiers. In sum, how the world is and will be governed in these first decades of the new century

Transitional Justice

9. 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.

Institutions

10. The different variants of the so-called “new institutionalism”—rational-choice (RI), historical institutionalism (HI), sociological institutionalism (SI) and discursive institutionalism (DI)—do a reasonably good job of bringing institutions “back in” and providing persuasive accounts of stability and continuity in more institutionalized polities. However, critics claim that institutionalist theories are largely incapable of providing persuasive accounts of processes of dynamic change, such as revolutions or other major historical transformations. Taking care to identify the key authors and arguments, your task is to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the rival explanations for stability and change articulated by each variant of institutionalism.