

COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Department of International Studies
Fall 2011

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.

1. Mandatory Question -- Paradigm Debates

Has Comparative Politics moved beyond a “battle of paradigms”? Some scholars believe that the field has cohered around a more disciplined and rigorous center, and that, consequently, foundational debates, seen as typical of an immature discipline, should give way to practical questions of methodology and measurement. In contrast, others argue that foundational issues remain highly contested, and thus it is to be expected that paradigm debates will continue, as “rationalists turn to economics and psychology, structuralists to history and sociology, and constructivists to anthropology and literature theory.” Taking care to define your terms carefully and to cite major authors and arguments, your task is to evaluate these rival claims and explain your own view of the current status--and probably the future--of Comparative Politics.

Optional Questions

2. Institutionalism

We all know that “institutions matter,” but how and why do they matter? There is considerable confusion about just what the so-called “new institutionalism” is, how the alternative approaches coexisting under this label differ, and what sort of theoretical and empirical promise they display. Taking care to identify the key authors and arguments, your task is to analyze the main contending theoretical perspectives represented in this heterogeneous literature and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of rival institutionalist theories in providing persuasive accounts of stability and continuity, on the one hand, and large scale processes of dynamic change such as revolutions, on the other.

3. Political Culture

In the 1960s, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba’s book *The Civic Culture* and Harry Eckstein’s “congruence” theory made pioneering contributions to the study of political culture and to efforts to employ individual-level psychological characteristics (beliefs and attitudes) in the analysis of macro outcomes at the level of the political system. More recently, scholars such as Ronald Inglehart have claimed that major advances in conceptualization and survey research techniques have given rise to a robust understanding of the role of mass beliefs in explaining democratic institutions. How successful, in your

judgment, has the latest generation of political culture approaches been in explaining the emergence, survival, and development of democracy?

4. Participation and Civil Society

One of the most influential ideas in the field of comparative politics is the notion of a positive and universal relationship between participation and democracy. This idea has nurtured a vast literature on the topics of civil society, social capital, new social movements, and the public sphere, to name the most popular ones. However, the social capital thesis advanced by social scientists such as Robert Putnam has been challenged in recent years by scholars who argue that the relationship between civic engagement and democracy is not necessarily positive nor a universal one. Please address this debate in its various dimensions. Be sure to cite the most influential authors and to illustrate your analysis with relevant empirical evidence.

5. Democracy and Development

Political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset's observation that democracy is related to development, first advanced in his classic 1959 article, has generated the largest body of research on any topic in comparative politics. The Lipset thesis has been supported and contested, revised and extended, buried and resuscitated. Neither the theory nor the facts are clear, however. One thing is clear: in terms of aggregate patterns, the relation between levels of development (measured by income per capita) and the incidence of democratic regimes is quite robust. Yet there are two distinct reasons posited to explain why this relation may hold: either democracies are more likely as countries develop economically, or they may be established independently of economic development but may be more likely to survive in wealthier countries. In your opinion, which interpretation is correct? Citing the major contributors to this debate, your task is to review the theoretical and empirical studies and to adjudicate the findings in the contested field of democratization studies.

6. Comparative Political Economy

Do states still have "room to move" in a globalized world? Many scholars contend that the acceleration of international integration of markets in goods, services, and capital have seriously eroded state power and national autonomy. These same analysts claim that the welfare state belongs to a previous era and is no longer viable. Yet the challenges that many welfare states sought to address remain and have, in some instances, intensified (e.g., poverty, inequality, racial segregation, lack of access to public goods, etc.). In this regard, other analysts claim that rather than weakening state power, international economic integration actually increases the scope and intensity of social welfare policies, and contributes to the continuing vitality of democracy and the centrality of redistributive politics. In your view, which position is correct? After identifying the most influential authors participating in this debate, describe the empirical evidence and operational indicators you believe are most relevant to adjudicating rival arguments about states, democracy, and partisan politics under conditions of rapid globalization.

7. Contentious Politics and Social Movements

Scholars of contentious politics have stressed the key role of “diffusion” in studying the emergence and development of social movements. Taking care to identify the most influential authors and works, write an essay conceptualizing the mechanism of diffusion and analyzing how it has worked in several historical episodes of regional or transnational contention. What factors facilitate or hinder diffusion? Cases you may wish to analyze might include, for example, the women’s rights movement (first, second or third wave), the anti-colonial period of the mid-20th century, the end of military dictatorships in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s-80s, or the fall of communism in the late 1980s-early 90s. Contemporary cases of diffusion you might consider include the anti-neoliberal globalization struggles of the 1990s-2000s, the post-9/11 anti-war protests, or the mobilizations associated with the “Arab spring” going on today, in 2011.

8. State Failure and Civil War

“State failure” is characterized by the loss of the monopoly over the means of coercion by centralized public authority. This pervasive collapse of state institutions frequently leads to government predation, the militarization of civic society, and perhaps even ethnic wars or revolutions, not to mention massive violation of human rights, and perhaps even genocide. Despite this general agreement, there is much less consensus among social scientists regarding the causes of state failure. Some comparativists focus on the economy (poverty, inequality, lootable resources, etc.), while others stress 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, political competition and representation, or the density of civil society 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 status of the debate on the causes of state failure and civil war.

9. Ideology

Recent elections in Latin America, political upheavals in the Arab world, and trends in Europe have shown the reappearance of various types of nativist politics (populism, religious fundamentalism, racism and other right wing tendencies). These events seem to herald an epoch of *vive la difference*, marking a sharp contrast with post-Cold War expectations regarding the “end of history” and the hegemony of orthodox liberal democracy. Concomitantly, traditional ideologies supporting mainstream political parties (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Liberals and even old-fashion Conservatives) seem to be threatened by new trends. Indeed, some analysts argue world politics is witnessing new impetus to political contestation over heretofore-dominant political discourses and ideologies. Do you think there is a peculiar brand of ideology or national identity (e.g., religious, ethnic, etc.) that is best suited to contemporary circumstances? Which scholar, theoretical debates, and bodies of empirical research do you find most relevant to the analysis of political culture, ideology, and identity in the current epoch of globalization?

10. Domestic Politics and International Order

Democratic regimes in many regions of the world are currently beset by the rise and spread of a variety of phenomena associated with the negative aspects of globalization, particularly transnational organized crime. Taking care to cite the relevant literature and to conceptualize the relationship between global or transnational processes and domestic political and institutional orders, analyze and critique the contributions of the most important Comparative Politics scholars (as well those in related disciplines or fields) working on this general topic. In particular, you should address the principal factors that have contributed to the rise of organized crime and related illicit activities in these societies. What have been the principal impacts of transnational crime network on the processes of state capacity, democratic consolidation and deepening, and the quality of citizenship in these countries? Are there any positive aspects of globalization and the “dark side of the force” relevant to the control of transnational organized crime?