

COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Department of International Studies
Spring 2010

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

Comparative politics scholars disagree about what the ideal research program should entail. Some scholars argue in favor of deductive hypotheses and/or large N research designs relying on sophisticated statistical techniques that do not require much in-depth knowledge of a particular polity. Other scholars favor a more inductive approach and pursue more qualitative work using case study methods that require in-depth knowledge of one or a few particular cases. Still others advocate a tripartite approach combining formal modeling, statistics, and case studies. Your task is to evaluate these rival methodological approaches in comparative politics. What strengths and weaknesses of each approach? What are their weaknesses? What do you believe to be the ideal approach to Comparative Politics?

Optional Questions

2. Institutions

The three main variants of the so-called “new institutionalism”—rational-choice (RI), historical institutionalism (HI), and sociological institutionalism (SI)—have developed rapidly in the last two decades. These theories do a reasonably good job of bringing institutions “back in” and providing persuasive accounts of stability and continuity in institutionalized polities. In contrast, critics claim they provide less persuasive accounts of processes of dynamic change, such as revolutions or other major historical transformations. Recently some scholars have articulated a fourth “new” institutionalism, so-called discursive institutionalism (DI). 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.

3. Political Culture

In the 1960s, Almond and Verba’s book *The Civic Culture* and 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 systemic outcomes at the level of the political system. These early studies generated major controversies leading to a decline in interest in cultural explanations in Comparative Politics. What were those controversies? More recently, scholars such as Ronald Inglehart have claimed that the problems with the earlier efforts of advocates of political culture have been overcome and that we now have 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. **Economic Development and Democracy**

In 1959, political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset famously argued modernization caused democracy. Subsequently, other scholars have replicated this same finding—democracy is correlated with development. However, more recently Przeworski and his coauthors present strong empirical evidence that development does not cause democratization. Rather, they argue, development reduces the likelihood of democratic breakdown, thus increasing the number of wealthy democratic countries even though it has no causal effect on transitions *to* democracy. Subsequently, other scholars have reaffirmed the classic Lipset-Aristotle position. How can we go beyond this impasse? Is there a clear and stable relationship between democracy and development? Or does this relationship vary by historical period? How does the nature of the regime type prior to democratization affect the findings and conclusions of specific studies on democratization? Who, if anyone, 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.

5. **Democracy and Regime Change**

Some comparativists are critical of the so-called “transitology” school, claiming that its central arguments are based upon a “conservative conception of democracy” that downplays the significance of norms and values and that the focus on elites and agency underplays the importance of structural constraints and opportunities in the democratization process. Similarly, building on the earlier work of Barrington Moore (“no bourgeoisie, no democracy”), some more recent analysts charge that “elitist” approaches fail to recognize the crucial importance of the working class (“no strong working class, no broadly inclusive democracy”) and other subaltern social groups in shaping the type of political regimes that emerge following transitions from authoritarianism. Who are some of the main scholars, and what are the central contentious issues, in current debates? In your judgment, how do these issues relate to the historical assessments of democracy and democratization?

6. **Comparative Political Economy**

Many scholars contend that globalization and 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 out of step with globalization. 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 globalization, rather than weakening state power, may actually increase the scope and intensity of social welfare policies, and contribute to the continuing vitality of democracy and partisan politics. Who is correct? What empirical evidence would be relevant to adjudicating rival arguments about states, democracy, and partisan politics under conditions of rapid globalization?

7. Contentious Politics

Scholars in Comparative Politics (and Political Sociology) active in the relatively new field of “contentious politics” are progressively encroaching upon the traditional terrain of International Relations theorists. Recently, for example, much attention has focused on a new kind of actor, namely “activists beyond borders” operating simultaneously in domestic and international or transnational arenas. Explain the emergence and operation of transnational networks and global social movements and evaluate how they affect the behavior of national states, domestic actors, and conventional, international or intergovernmental institutions. There is considerable debate about whether or not these emergent transnational actors constitute a “global civil society.” Which are the key points and who are the key authors in this debate? What is your own view? Why? How should the impacts of these new transnational actors be measured or evaluated? Be sure to discuss the appropriate theoretical and empirical literature, and to analyze a variety of pertinent issue-areas in world politics.

8. State Failure and Civil War

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.

9. Geographical Concentration

9A

While Latin America currently enjoys more democracy, more efficient market economies, and more integration in the world system than in the past, there nevertheless remain extremely high levels of poverty and social, economic, and gender/racial/ethnic inequality. What are the analytical factors that can help explain why the transitions to democracy throughout the region haven’t had a more positive impact on the lives of the majority of Latin Americans? How would you explain the contrasts between greater economic modernity, on the one hand, and “low quality” democracies and the persistence (and in some cases the worsening) of social exclusion and “low-intensity” citizenship, on the other? What is the relationship between the “quality” of democracies in the region and their “sustainability”? Your essay should identify the most influential authors in this debate and give specific examples to illustrate your arguments.

9B

The recent elections in Chile meant the loss of power for the *Concertación*, the center-left coalition formed by the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, which had governed the country since the end of the Pinochet regime. Your task is to offer an analysis of the ideological background of both parties and the role of similar parties in other countries elsewhere in Latin America during the last half a century. What explains the crisis of traditional parties, including Christian Democrats and labor-mobilizing left and social democratic parties in much of the region? Focusing on the last decade, explain the rise of the “New Left” (taking care distinguish the main variants) parties and movements in recent years. Make sure to define your concepts carefully and to discuss the most influential analysts of Latin American party systems and electoral politics.