

COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Department of International Studies
Spring 2009

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

The evolution of the field of Comparative Politics been marked by recurrent efforts to establish the dominance of particular theoretical, epistemological, and methodological perspectives. Accordingly, the field's evolution frequently is thought of in terms of a succession of competing theoretical paradigms (e.g., 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., on the "dependent" variable or the phenomena to be explained). Your task is to describe succinctly the current status of these sometimes rancorous 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.

2. Methods and Research Design

Comparative politics scholars disagree about what the ideal research program would 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 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. Evaluate these varying research programs in Comparative Politics by discussing at least three or four major empirical research programs. What strengths do these studies have? What are their weaknesses? What do you believe to be the ideal approach to Comparative Politics?

3. New Institutional Theories

The three main variants of the so-called "new institutionalism"—rational-choice (RI), historical (HI), and sociological (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.

4. Democracy and Democratization

What are the preconditions for a successful transition from authoritarian to democratic political systems? Or do preconditions actually exist that one could say are common across time, regions, and political systems? To what extent do the “transitologists” 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.

5. Political Culture

In the 1960s, Almond and Verba’s book *The Civic Culture* and Eckstein’s “congruence” theory were pioneering contributions to the study of political culture and to efforts to employ individual-level psychological characteristics (beliefs and attitudes) to 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. 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?

6. Politics and Economic Development

In 1959, Lipset followed Aristotle in arguing that wealth and modernization caused democracy. In succeeding decades, many other comparativists have replicated this same finding—democracy is correlated with development. However, Przeworski and his coauthors emphatically argue that development does not cause democratization; rather, 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 others confirmed the classic Lipset-Aristotle position. How can we go beyond this impasse? Some recent studies argue that the relationship in question probably varies by historical period and according to previous regimes type. Another suggestion calls for disaggregating processes of democratization. A final suggestion is that there is an “omitted variable” problem and that both democracy and development are “caused” by something else. 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.

7. Comparative Political Economy

Many IR and IPE scholars contend that globalization and the attendant acceleration of international integration of markets in goods, services, and capital has seriously eroded state power and national autonomy. Some even say that democracy itself and the significance of ideological differences and of partisan politics have been vitiated. In contrast, many leading comparativists argue that the dynamics of partisan politics in the institutions of electoral democracies have not been fundamentally weakened by globalization. In fact, some find evidence that state capacity and the scope and intensity of social welfare policies may have

actually been widened and strengthened by globalization. Who is correct? What empirical evidence would be relevant to adjudicating rival arguments about states, domestic institutions, and the vitality of democratic politics in the epoch of globalization?

8. 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.” 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.

9. The Armed Forces

The predominant focus in the historical institutionalist literature on civil-military relations and the nature of democratic governance in new civilian regimes has been on the “mode of transition” from authoritarian rule. In contrast, approaches based upon rational choice theories have a different temporal focus and stress other variables. Your task is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the contending theoretical perspectives that scholars employ to analyze civil-military relations in the new democracies. What are the main hypotheses generated by each of these alternative approaches? To what extent have these differing predictions about civil-military relations in post-authoritarian polities been sustained or refuted? Be sure to illustrate your argument with systematic reference to cases in at least one major geographical region (i.e., Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia, Southern/Mediterranean Europe, etc.).

10. Geographical Concentration

Debates about the most appropriate way to examine post-authoritarian political systems have yet to be resolved satisfactorily. Some analysts have questioned the relevance and utility of concepts such as “transition” and “consolidation” in the study of post-authoritarian political developments. Others have questioned the applicability of the conceptual framework developed in the study of democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America to the process of political change in post-communist Europe. Others contend that theoretical and normative concerns should focus on the “quality” of democratic governance and how best to integrate the study of the “new democracies” into the general study of democratic systems. Assess the various debates that have occurred in the field of democracy studies in your own area of geographical interest (Latin American, Asia, post-communist countries, etc.). Who are the major scholars involved in those debates? What are the most important differences in their respective approaches to the study of democracy in post-authoritarian societies? Can you identify a potential or emerging consensus?