

**COMPARATIVE POLITICS
QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
Department of International Studies
Spring 2008**

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.

Mandatory Question

1. Leading scholars have conceptualized the field of Comparative Politics in terms of a contrast or a choice of theories and methods between a “disciplined center” and a “messy center.” While the former is driven by the search for a single, predominant theoretical and dominant methodological approach, the latter is characterized by a case- or problem-driven empirical research agenda with a multiplicity of contending theoretical perspectives and a plurality of alternative methodological orientations. Your task is to describe succinctly these two alternative contending theoretical and methodological perspectives, taking care to identify the most influential authors and to evaluate the strengths and weakness of their contributions. In your opinion, do you think the field of Comparative Politics is evolving toward a “disciplined” or a “messy” center?

Optional Group #1 – Theories, Concepts and Methods

2. “Modernization” theory was the most influential paradigm in Comparative Politics in the 1950s and 1960s in the nascent field of development studies. The status of this paradigm subsequently was seriously challenged in the late 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s from a diverse group of scholars arguing to “bring the state back in,” to “bring class back in,” to “bring capital back in,” to “bring the masses back in,” and so on. For a while it seemed that the modernization paradigm had been completely eclipsed. More recently, however, with the rise of rational-choice, game theory, and historical institutionalist perspectives, modernization theory has made a powerful comeback. Succinctly describe and critique these theoretical debates and assess the current literature in the development subfield of Comparative Politics. Which, in your view, are the principal approaches to the comparative study of “development” today? Why?
3. One of the most significant debates in Comparative Politics over the past two decades centers on the meaning of the term *comparative*. Some prominent analysts proclaim the superior scientific merits of “large N” cross-national studies, contending that studies of a single country or region are really just studying the politics of a foreign country, and therefore are not comparative. Others argue with equal conviction that the emphasis on

the more traditional case study approaches demanding detailed knowledge of the history, language and culture of a country or region, and, frequently as well, extended periods of fieldwork is essential and would be lost if more traditional case study approaches were abandoned. Still others contend that neither case studies nor large-N comparisons are an unalloyed good: rather, both entail trade-offs. Taking care to identify the main scholars in these debates, your task is to analyze the trade-offs entailed in 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 theory.

Optional Group #2 — Comparative Political Economy

4. Many IR 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 IR theorists even say that democracy itself and partisan politics have been vitiated. In contrast, some 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 social welfare policies may have actually been strengthened by globalization. Who is correct? And how do we know? What is the empirical evidence? How would you operationalize the hypotheses of the contending perspectives? What empirical evidence would be relevant to adjudicating the issues surrounding arguments about states, domestic institutions, and the vitality of democratic politics in the epoch of globalization?
5. The European Union is engaged in a series of efforts to expand the scope of common policies subject to the “pooled sovereignty” exercised by a strengthened institutional system. In contrast, there is considerable pessimism regarding the prospects for subregional integration projects in the Americas. In Asia and the Pacific Rim, economic integration seems to proceed without major attempts to create institutional frameworks. Briefly explain the most significant historical and contemporary differences characterizing these processes of regional integration. Be sure to frame your essay in terms of the relevant academic literature in comparative politics, comparative political economy, and integration studies.

Optional Group #3 – Democracy and Democratization

6. The 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 postcommunist Europe. Others contend that theoretical (and normative) concern 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. 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?

7. The literature in the so-called “transition/consolidation school” has come under increasing criticism for an alleged elitist emphasis and a conservative or purely “formal” or “procedural” conception of democracy. The gist of this critique is that the mainstream literature gives short shrift to the importance of structural constraints and opportunities and the role of subaltern actors such as labor, peasants, minority ethnic groups and social movements. Identify the key authors and write an essay providing a coherent account of the central issues in this debate and how they relate to assessments of historical and contemporary instances of democracy and democratization, including distinctions currently made between electoral, liberal, and illiberal democracies as well as deliberative or advanced types of democracy.

Optional Group #4 – Social and Political Actors

8. The predominant focus in the structuralist and 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 contending theoretical perspectives 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? 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.).
9. Scholars in comparative politics and political sociology in the field of “contentious politics” are progressively encroaching on 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, has garnered considerable attention. Explain the emergence of transnational advocacy networks and global social movements and evaluate how they affect the behavior of national states, domestic actors, and conventional international intergovernmental institutions. There is considerable debate whether these emergent transnational actors constitute a “global civil society.” What is your own view? 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.

Optional Group #5 — Ideologies, Discourses, Cultures

10. In most of the postcolonial world, priority has been placed on the construction of national identity and the protection of national sovereignty, later giving greater urgency to social justice and human rights in a globalizing world. Taken together, poverty, inequality, criminality, social conflict and, in some extreme cases, the phenomena of “failed” states, indicates that all is not well in the nation-state. Indeed, some analysts argue world politics is witnessing new impetus to political contestation over heretofore dominant political discourses and ideologies. Describe how and why these transformations of political discourse and ideologies have taken place. 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 theoretical debates and bodies of empirical research do you think are most relevant to the analysis of political culture, ideology, and identity in an epoch of globalization?

11. Periodically political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, and others proclaim that industrialization or globalization (or some other major transformation) is leading/has led to the “end of ideology,” including nationalism. Identifying the most influential proponents and critics of these pronouncements, and taking care to define your terms carefully, critique the theories and the empirical evidence underpinning claims that ideologies, world-views, religious and/or secular dogmas are either “dead” or “alive.” Relate this theoretical debate and empirical research to the contemporary Comparative Politics literature on political culture, political ideologies, and identity politics.