

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

AUGUST 2012

Major Field Instructions: Answer one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and two questions from Part III. You have six hours to complete the examination.

Minor Field Instructions: Answer one question from Part I and either one question from Part II and one question from Part III or two questions from Part III. You have four and one-half hours to complete the examination.

Section I: General Theory

- A. "All institutional explanations share an elemental problem: the institutions that are presumed to constrain and channel actors' choices are themselves the products of actors' choices." Discuss.
- B. Katznelson and Weingast (2005, 2) write, "Preferences are foundational for any theory that relies on agency." They observe that scholars have argued that preferences are generated in three ways: 1) "they are imputed to actors"; 2) "they are caused by historical processes"; and 3) "they are induced by strategic circumstances and human interaction". Evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the analytical use of preferences by at least two of the following analytical perspectives: rational choice, historical institutionalism and constructivism.

Section 2: Comparative Methodology

- A. In the first edition of *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, Henry Brady and David Collier write, "Crafting good social science research requires diverse methodological tools... Yet diverse tools are not enough. Without shared standards, social science can lose its way." Select two distinctive methodologies. Discuss their respective strengths and limits. Elaborate the shared standards that should be applied to guide their use.
- B. Cross-regional, small-N comparative studies like Theda Skocpol's *States and Revolutions* has been said to have been rightly "relegated to the margins" of comparative politics. Discuss.

Section 3: Applied Theory

- A. It is often asserted that civil society plays a central role in democratization and democratic consolidation. To what extent is this true? To what extent can we generalize about the relationship between civil society and democratization and democratic consolidation?

- B. In *Competitive Authoritarianism*, Levitsky and Way (2010, 5) observe, “Some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized during the post-Cold War period, while others remained stable and authoritarian and still others experienced turnover without democratization.” Critically assess the explanations political scientists have provided for the dynamics of competitive authoritarian regimes.
- C. In *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*, Stathis Kalyvas (2006, 3) observes, “Despite the obvious significance of the matter, there have been few attempts to move toward a systematic explanation of the variation in violence.” Critically discuss Kalyvas and others explanations for the variation of violence in civil wars.
- D. Some scholars argue that the concept of “political opportunity structure” continues to offer the most promising approach for the study of social movements. Do you agree? Why or why not? Draw on empirical evidence to support your argument.
- E. Political party systems play a crucial role in the process of interest representation in democratic societies. Scholars have traditionally argued that the nature of party systems is a product of either existing political institutions or deeply entrenched historical cleavages. Yet these two features are constant causes over time. They are of limited use in explaining party system change. Critically evaluate different approaches to party system change.
- F. The varieties of capitalism approach has predominated in our understanding of the political economy of advanced industrial societies over the past decade. Yet the two distinct institutional configurations posited by this approach have increasingly experienced pressures to change from the internationalization of trade and finance. To what extent does the varieties of capitalism approach help us to understand how advanced industrial countries respond to economic internationalization and can we still productively view advanced industrial countries as being divided into two distinct institutional configurations.