

Comprehensive Examination in Comparative Politics May 2015

*This examination is designed to test your knowledge of, and ability to synthesize, the complete field of comparative politics. The best answers will demonstrate a broad understanding of the literature on comparative politics. They also will respond directly to the questions – mere literature reviews will not do – and will deploy both analytical rigor and relevant evidence in support of their arguments. Theoretical or empirical overlap among your answers will diminish their overall quality; avoid answering two or three questions for which your answers would be redundant. Gratuitous citations of UVA faculty will not help your grade. **Please note that the examination is “closed-book” – i.e., any use of notes, books, computer files, or internet sources constitutes an Honor violation.***

CP Majors should answer one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and two questions from Part III. CP Minors 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. Majors have six (6) hours and minors four and a half (4.5) hours to complete the exam. You may either type your answers or write them by hand. If you choose the latter, make a clear photocopy and give Bonnie Bragg the original at the end of the allotted time. Then type up your answers word-for-word from the handwritten version (correcting spelling and minor grammatical errors) and hand in the typed version within twenty-four hours. Include a signed pledge that the typed version is identical to the handwritten version.

Section I: General Theory (Majors: 1 question)

1. “A science of comparative politics is impossible in the modern world. Globalization has not only connected every political and economic unit, but made them functionally reliant on each other. The result is that we have only an N of 1 when studying the most important political issues.” Critically assess this statement; is it right or wrong, in what respects, and why?
2. Is it necessary to update theories of comparative politics in light of the shift of the global economy from one in which profitability was a function of control over physical assets (e.g. car factories) to one in which profitability is a function of control over intangible assets (e.g. patents on software or pharmaceutical formulae)? Regardless of whether you think an update is necessary, compare and contrast the current shift to that which occurred as the global economy shifted from predominantly agricultural output to predominantly industrial output (c. 1880-1940).
3. In their discussion of distributive politics, Golden and Min (2013) distinguish between theories of democratic accountability and theories of government responsiveness. Critically

review how the literature on democratic accountability conceptualizes the manner in which politicians use distributive allocations of benefits to promote their electoral interests and assess the impact of these strategies for government responsiveness to the broader public interests.

4. A rapidly growing research program in comparative politics and political economy on “endogenous institutions” studies how political institutions emerge. There are three basic types of explananda used to account for shifts in institutional structure in this work: arguments about economic interests and economic structure, arguments about the role of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, and arguments about changes in the balance of power between ideological groupings in the government and opposition. Making reference to specific contributions to this research program, compare and contrast the explanatory value of each of these types of arguments in providing an understanding of how institutions are formed.

Section II: Comparative Methodology (Majors: 1 question)

1. Econometric approaches to political behavior are modeled on physics. But, arguably, evolutionary models drawing on the biological sciences are better suited to understanding the behavior of actors that possess some ability to both reshape their environment and learn new behavioral routines. Discuss the relative merits of evolutionary and econometric approaches, being careful to specify what those approaches posit as fundamental mechanisms for behavior.
2. “Most of what we know from the comparative politics literature is hopelessly irrelevant. Human behavior is fundamentally driven by struggles to establish and maintain patriarchal dominance and secondarily the supremacy of self-defined tribal groups (including ‘racial’ groups) over other (and often ‘other-defined’) tribal groups. Ignoring these fundamental motivations means most of the literature ignores the real drivers of politics.” Discuss.
3. In their volume, *A Tale of Two Cultures*, Goertz and Mahoney contend that “At its core...the quantitative-qualitative disputation in the social sciences is really a clash of cultures.” (p. 1) Elaborate their argument and then explain whether you agree and why.
4. A variety of research designs are available for conducting causal inference in an observational setting. Among the most commonly encountered such designs are matching, instrumental variables, difference-in-differences, and regression discontinuity. For each such design, please describe: 1) the type of data structure for which the design is appropriate (e.g. what type of variation must be present in order to employ the design); 2) the causal estimand(s) that can be estimated using the design; 3) the assumptions the researcher must impose in order to identify said estimand(s) from the data. After you have done this, please describe examples of research questions that might be fruitfully addressed using each design.

5. Define the term natural experiment. Why are natural experiments highly valued by scholars of comparative politics? Discuss three works that claim to exploit natural experiments and evaluate the credibility of the causal claims made therein.
6. Evaluate the contribution of field experiments to comparative politics. Have such experiments advanced our knowledge about a specific major question? Support your argument with specific examples from the literature.

Section III: Applied Theory (Majors: 2 questions)

1. How well do theories of comparative politics that originated with reference to the context of what are now developed democracies “travel” to the contexts of developing democracies? Be sure to specify your criteria for evaluating “traveling capacity,” and be sure to illustrate your answer by citing specific works and evidence.
2. Feminist scholars made major interventions into the welfare state debates from roughly the mid-1990s onwards. How did these interventions re-shape (or not) the literature on the origins and effects of the welfare state? Please focus on the three areas you think were most significant in terms of the research agenda or the concepts used to understand the welfare state.
3. “Welfare state politics was never about labor unions or social movements. The modern welfare state was born in mass warfare, which required social inclusion. By contrast, the war on terror is exclusionary. As the war on terror has replaced mass warfare, the modern welfare state is dying and being replaced by a winner-take-all welfare state. Nothing can be done to prevent the erosion of social solidarity.” Assess the statement above, using examples from at least two countries.
4. “The fiscal history of a people is above all an essential part of its general history...In some historical periods the immediate formative influence of the fiscal needs and policy of the state on the development of the economy and with it on all forms of life and all aspects of culture explains practically all the major features of events; in most periods it explains a great deal and there are but a few periods when it explains nothing....Our people have become what they are under the fiscal pressures of the state.” --Joseph Schumpeter

How have contemporary political scientists built on Schumpeter’s theory of the fiscal basis of the state? Has this theory survived challenges from alternative theories of state formation? Discuss critically, drawing on empirical examples, where relevant.

5. In recent years scholars have disaggregated the concept of authoritarian regimes to analyze the consequences of different authoritarian regime types. Assess the consequences of different authoritarian regime types for regime durability and transitions to other authoritarian regime types and to democracy. Give specific examples to support your views.
6. In a memorable passage in an essay critiquing presidential systems of government, Juan Linz wrote: “In parliamentary democracies, leadership crises lead to government crises and not,

as in presidential systems, to regime crises” (Linz 1994, p.67). Explain why Linz and his followers believed that presidentialism was more prone to regime crises than parliamentarism and assess the accumulated empirical evidence in favor or against this claim.

7. A large literature in comparative politics argues that the electoral rules that govern legislative elections are fundamental drivers of public policy outcomes. In particular, a number of authors have argued that certain types of electoral rules encourage the provision of highly local public goods (“pork”) whereas other types of electoral rules encourage the provision of public goods that are national in scope. Please describe the types of electoral rules that have been argued to contribute to the provision of local versus national public goods, outline the rationale for why electoral rules should affect the scope of public good provision, and evaluate the success of this literature in explaining variation in public policy outcomes.
8. What are the fundamental causes and consequences of weak parties and party systems among new democracies?