

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXMINATION  
AUGUST 2008

**IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS:** This is a closed-book, closed-notes exam. No materials outside of what you have stored in your head may be used to assist you in writing essays in response to the following questions.

**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.

Part I: General Theory

1. Are the core phenomena studied by political scientists products of distinct and autonomous political forces, or are they more fundamentally shaped by those factors studied by economists, sociologists, psychologists, and other social scientists?
2. Historical institutionalism (HI) has relatively quickly established itself as a prominent tradition in comparative politics. It has come to include efforts to integrate HI with rational choice (RC) assumptions. Evaluate the relative persuasiveness and analytical power of what you consider to be relatively “pure” HI and also “blended” HI and RC, with reference to at least one major area of research.

Part II: Comparative Methodology

1. "Qualitative methods are not a method." Discuss.
2. What precisely is the “small-n” problem? In the light of your interpretation of this problem, discuss what role, if any, case studies have in the generation and testing of theories, and what procedures, if any, might be incorporated into case-study designs to resolve or ameliorate the small-n problem.

Part III: Applied Theory

1. Do what are called “failed states” help us identify what bases contribute to the existence of effective state structures?

2. Welfare states are alternatively portrayed as burdens on economic growth and as useful contributors to it. Can we reconcile the durability of these two opposing images?

3. Evaluate efforts to build explanatory accounts of parties and party systems that are or could be applied to both established and new democracies. In discussing the relevant work, cite empirical evidence from at least one established and one new democracy.

4. Samuel Huntington identified successive “waves” of democratization, but also two major “reverse waves” of democratic breakdowns, the first in 1922-1942 and the second in 1958-1975. Some are now suggesting that we may be amidst the beginning of a third reverse wave. What explanatory frameworks best help us consider both patterns of democratization *and* democratic breakdowns?