

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
AUGUST 2009

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. In their classic work, *Shaping the Political Arena*, Ruth and David Collier assert that “critical junctures ... played a central role in shaping the national political arena in the ... decades” after the junctures occurred (p. 29). The analysis of critical junctures has become widespread and influential in the field of comparative politics. Define what is generally meant by a critical juncture, and assess the extent to which political change is characterized by critical junctures in two different analytical fields (e.g., democratization, economic policy, state formation, party systems, or social movements). As an integral part of your answer, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of analyses informed by the concept of critical junctures.

2. In the conclusion of *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Barrington Moore observes,

Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. They are abstractions by an observer, based on the observation of certain similarities in the way groups of people behave... Even though one can often make accurate predictions about the way groups and individuals behave over short periods of time on the basis of such abstractions, as such they do not explain the behavior. To explain behavior in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. If we notice that a landed aristocracy resists commercial enterprise, we do not explain this fact by stating that the aristocracy has done so in the past or even that it is the carrier of certain traditions that make it hostile to such activities: the problem is to determine out of what past and present experiences such an outlook arises and maintains itself... To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read

newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, and sometimes even taught sociology.

Are norms of political behavior better understood, as Moore suggests, as the results of power and control, or instead as the products of deep-running and at some level consensual cultural values? Develop your answer in the context of one body of theorizing about political behavior (such as democratization, voting behavior, or others) and make specific reference to relevant cases.

Part II: Comparative Methodology

1. Is process tracing a method?
2. James Mahoney asserts, “Knowledge accumulation is not equivalent to knowledge generation. Unless the new knowledge grows of preexisting knowledge, its addition to a research program does not signify accumulation.” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003 pp. 132-3) Discuss the importance of knowledge accumulation and explain how research should be conducted to promote it.
3. Drawing upon the so-called Rubin Causal Model, some scholars have made the observation that causal effects must always be estimated, they can never be directly observed. The impossibility of directly observing causal effects is referred to as the fundamental problem of causal inference (Holland 1986). Using the logic of potential outcomes, please explain why causal effects cannot be directly observed. After you have done so, describe three different research methods that can be utilized to estimate causal effects and provide an accounting of the benefits and drawbacks of each. In your discussion of each method, you should: 1) cite at least one study in the social sciences that utilizes the method; 2) specify what the causal effect to be estimated is (the causal estimated); 3) specify what assumptions are necessary to estimate the causal effect of interest using the method.

Part III: Applied Theory

1. Recent works on democratization by Acemoglu and Robinson and by Boix have returned to the theme of economic development and democracy. Do these works represent a substantial increase in our understanding of regime dynamics relative to the pioneering work of Seymour Martin Lipset?
2. Does democracy bring advantages for economic reform, or instead does democracy hinder economic reform? Discuss the impact of democratic institutions, as explanatory variables, on economic development. What schools of literature bear on this question, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the contending explanations?

3. Since the end of the Cold War, religious and ethnic conflict has become a growing concern and an object of greater interest among political scientists. Early primordial approaches to ethnic identity and conflict have increasingly given way to rational choice and constructivist approaches. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of these different analytical approaches, giving empirical examples from at least two regions of the world to support your points.

4. Ten years ago, Scott Mainwaring wrote (in *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization*) that most of the classic, ostensibly general work on parties and party systems (such as Duverger and Sartori) rests on the implicit assumption that the parties and systems under study are relatively highly institutionalized. In the light of varied party politics in the decade since Mainwaring wrote, assess the import and purchase of his critique. In the course of your assessment, compare individual parties and system-level dynamics in at least one established democracy and one “third wave” democracy.

5. Many contemporary comparativists believe that in one way or another “institutions matter,” as a T-shirt in one prominent political science department proclaims. There are, however, different varieties of institutionalist arguments – such as historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism – and different applications of even one variety of institutionalism can be more or less successful. How do institutions matter for what we as comparativists care about? How do the answers differ across varieties of institutionalism? What distinguishes a successful implementation of an institutionalist argument as opposed to a weak one? In answering, be sure to specify the dependent variable(s) you treat, and discuss with reference to cases in at least two regions of the world.

6. The process of globalization has increasingly integrated international and domestic economies since World War II. Discuss the mechanisms through which international factors shape the domestic economic policy decisions of political leaders. Give specific examples from at least three countries to support your point.