

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
MAY 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. Political scientists have attempted to integrate formal theory and empirical analysis in varied subfields of comparative politics, such as the study of collective action, party competition for votes, legislative behavior, and multiparty government. Assess the analytical leverage and the limits of extant efforts to evaluate the empirical implications of formal theory in comparative politics. What is the “extra value added” of such work? What are the special challenges that such work must overcome? How successful have these efforts been?
2. Douglass North argues that institutions are key factors determining the relative success of economic development. At the same time, he observes: “Institutions are not necessarily or even usually created to be socially efficient; rather they, or at least the formal rules, are created to serve the interests of those with the bargaining power to devise new rules” (1990, 16). Discuss and assess the implications of North’s remarks for the literatures on the politics of institutional change or the political economy of economic development.

Part II: Comparative Methodology

1. What are the main approaches to the conceptual understanding of causal mechanisms? What are the methodological implications of this conceptual rivalry? Should empirical political scientists be concerned about underlying philosophical debates?
2. Describe Mill’s Method of Difference as used in qualitative comparative research. In what sense is this method similar to stratification and matching techniques used in

quantitative research? In what sense are the underlying assumptions of Mill's Method of Difference different than those of these other techniques?

3. What is the central difference between an experiment and an observational study? How does the assignment of units to the treatment and control groups in a randomized experiment differ from the assignment of units to the treatment and control groups in an observational study? What is the consequence of these different assignment mechanisms?

Part III: Applied Theory

1. Two generations of scholarship explain the origins of the modern European nation-state. What theoretical and methodological positions distinguish the two groups? What have we learned about the rise of the nation-state? What remains to be learned? What approaches hold the most promise for expanding our knowledge?

2. Do certain electoral systems foster clientelistic policies on the part of governments elected under these rules? Explain the logic behind your answer and provide evidence from at least two cases.

3. When several communist regimes collapsed in 1989-91, some predicted the collapse of all communist regimes. Instead, some systems run along communist lines and run by communist parties have fallen while a number of others have survived basically intact. How do you account for this difference in regime fates? Discuss in light of what you deem to be relevant theoretical literatures.

4. Why have certain East Asian economies (Japan, South Korea, China, and others) grown more quickly than other states at a comparable stage of development (Argentina, Brazil, India, and others)? Discuss in light of relevant theoretical literatures.

5. Evaluate what are often termed the "sociological" and "institutional" approaches to understanding parties and party systems by comparing the analytical leverage afforded by these approaches in the study of either (a) the origins of parties and party systems or (b) change in parties and party systems. Discuss in light of evidence from at least two countries of your choice.

6. Ben Ross Schneider (2004, p. 457) observes, "...Little is gained by trying to deduce groups' political behavior based solely on their economic interests. These and other studies reveal how ambiguous and malleable economic interests actually are and how, consequently political and organizational factors play a more influential role." Evaluate Schneider's argument by examining the politics of particular policy domain. Give examples from at least two countries to support your point of view.