

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

August 2010

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 her critique of general theories of comparative politics, B. Geddes writes "Large-scale phenomena such as democratic breakdown, economic development, democratization, economic liberalization, and revolution result from the convergence of a number of different processes, some of which occur independently from others. No simple theory is likely to explain such compound outcomes." Critically evaluate Geddes' rejection of 'grand theory.'

2. Contemporary theories of democratic competition provide two competing perspectives on how elections produce accountability. One perspective is that elections serve as a disciplining device that rewards incumbents for good behavior and punishes them for bad. This framework essentially formalizes the idea of retrospective voting. The other suggests that elections are better thought of as a means of sorting out good politicians from the bad, where the terms good and bad refer to the unknown inclination or capacity of politicians to enact policies favored by the electorate. Identify scholars associated with each of these positions and describe, in detail, the theoretical underpinnings of each perspective. After you have done so, state which of these perspectives you believe provides the more useful framework for thinking about how democracy promotes accountability. Clearly articulate the logical and/or empirical bases for your preference.

3. Mahoney and Thelen recently argued that historical institutionalists should turn their attention to gradual institutional change in place of earlier emphasis on abrupt, wholesale transformation. Does this signal an exciting new era of historical institutionalism, or the long-overdue end of a fundamentally misguided approach to comparative politics?

Part II. Comparative Methodology

1. Why are causal mechanisms important? What means for their identification are most valuable?

2. Evaluate three recent works that use mixed methods of causal inference: what are the costs and the benefits of methodological pluralism?

3. Sidney Tarrow recently observed that paired comparison is widely used but “seldom theorized.” He points out that it was implicit in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, and has been used by authors like Valerie Bunce, Peter Hall, Peter Katzenstein, Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Putnam and Richard Samuels. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this method by comparing it to another method of your choice.

Part III. Applied Theory

1. Analysts of democratization have shifted their focus from the consolidation of democracy to the quality of democracy. What accounts for this shift, what is the quality of democracy, and how can it be measured? Discuss with reference to at least two democratizing states.

2. Charles Tilly famously claimed that states made war and war made the state. Should this claim continue to motivate theorizing about the determinants of state formation?

3. Discuss the role of the state in identity construction, and evaluate the factors that influence the political salience of one type of identity over another (eg., race over ethnicity). Give empirical examples from at least two countries.

4. Comparativists have long debated the relative virtues of parliamentary versus presidential constitutions. These debates have featured especially prominently in discussions about the causes of democratic breakdowns and the level of accountability of rulers to citizens in democratic systems. Identify the scholars on each side of the parliamentarism vs. presidentialism debate and describe the causal logic which leads them to prefer one system over the other. Based on your assessment of the quality of both the theory and evidence employed by each camp, outline which position you find more persuasive and why.

5. Two of the major happenings of the past thirty years have been the stagnation and collapse of European communism and the success of communist party-states in China and Vietnam. What accounts for their different fates?

6. Dani Rodrik concludes, “...Participatory democracies provide higher-quality growth: they allow greater predictability and stability, are more resilient to shocks, and deliver superior distributional outcomes.” (*One Economics Many Recipes*, Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 155.) Assess Rodrik’s contention regarding the superiority of democratic regimes for economic development. Make certain to give empirical examples from both democratic and authoritarian regimes to support your points.