

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION  
August 2011

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.

**Section I: General Theory**

1. Some authors argue that there has been a gradual convergence of historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism. Other authors see a clear contrast between these two approaches. Which viewpoint do you find more valid? Why?
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 at least two relevant cases.

**Section II: Comparative Methodology**

1. "Qualitative methods are not a method." Discuss.

2. What is the relationship between process tracing and causal mechanisms? Does process tracing add anything to quantitative analysis?
3. How can natural experiments in the social sciences be evaluated? Illustrate your argument by evaluating two natural experiments in the literature.

### **Section III: Applied Theory**

1. Evaluate the current status of knowledge about the causes of democracy and dictatorship derived from statistical models that link regime outcomes to levels of income and/or wealth.
2. Some scholars argue that political identities differ from cultural identities in that they are legally enforced, and that their nature and content is a consequence of the history of state formation. Evaluate this claim and its relevance for analyses of ethnic conflict.
3. Evaluate the contributions of competing strands of coalition theory to our understanding of how and why coalition governments take the shape they do. Discuss how these competing theories perform in explaining the pattern of coalition formation in large-n studies, as well as in at least two specific countries.
4. Does agency matter for regime outcomes?
5. North and Weingast (1989, 808) observe, “The ability of a government to commit to private rights and exchange is thus an essential condition for growth.” Assess the importance of governmental commitment to property rights in promoting economic development. Include at least two empirical cases to support your argument.
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 two countries to support your point.