COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
MAY 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. Historical institutionalists claim that one of their primary contributions is that they take time seriously as a factor that shapes political outcomes. Evaluate their claim by examining several studies in the HI tradition. What, if anything, does the consideration of time add that rational choice analysis misses? What, if anything, does the consideration of time add that social structural analysis, and a focus on ideas and culture, misses?

2. Mahoney and Thelen (2010, 7) write, "All three varieties of institutionalism [rational choice, historical, and sociological] ... provide answers to what sustains institutions over time as well as compelling accounts of cases in which exogenous shocks or shifts prompt institutional change. What they do not provide is a general model of change, particularly one that can comprehend both exogenous and endogenous sources of change." Critically assess this observation, and discuss what you believe are the core elements of a general model of institutional change.

Section II: Comparative Methodology

1. What is a causal mechanism and why should we care?

2. What contributions have comparative small-*n* studies based largely on qualitative methods made to theories of comparative politics over the past decade?

3. James Mahoney and Gary Goertz (2006, 277) argue, "the quantitative and qualitative research traditions can be thought of as distinct cultures marked by different values, beliefs, and norms." Discuss this claim, and evaluate the strengths and limits of each approach for causal explanation.

Section III: Applied Theory

1. How do electoral systems affect public policy? Outline the logic behind at least one theory connecting electoral systems to public policy outcomes and evaluate the claim by examining evidence from at least two specific countries.

2. 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. Make certain to include at least two empirical cases to support your argument.

3. For over a decade, political scientists have struggled to define and categorize various "degenerative" forms of democracy, such as "illiberal" democracy. Discuss the conceptual debates over defining and categorizing these sub-types. Then use at least two countries within one region of the world to evaluate how the experiences of those countries might inform that debate over definition and categorization. Your answer should also analyze two or three of the leading challenges that region faces for improving the quality of democracy.

4. Ethnic conflict and identity formation has been studied from rational choice, constructivist and institutional perspectives. Drawing on at least two of these perspectives, critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each, and then discuss the advantages and limits of combing the two approaches.

5. Studies of political development typically adopt the decision-making perspective of either state elites or major social groups. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this analytic strategy. Discuss as well recent works that have attempted to synthesize the two approaches. Have they succeeded? What future steps are necessary, if any?

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