

# COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

## SPRING 2009

**For the MAJOR: Answer 4 questions. You must answer at least one question in Part I and at least two questions in Part II. Time: 8 hours.**

**For the MINOR: Answer 3 questions. You must answer at least one question in Part I and at least one question in Part II. Time: 6 hours.**

### PART I

1. Critically evaluate the various ways in which “the lessons of history” have been used to craft causal arguments in comparative politics, assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses. Are these different conceptions of history mutually compatible, or do they diverge in significant ways with respect to the phenomena being explained and/or the explanations offered? How useful are they in opening up new avenues of research? Do they shed light on more recent or contemporary phenomena? Refer in your answer to at least three different literatures. Examples of such literatures include those focused on the development of the nation-state; propensities to democracy and dictatorship; war; revolution; economic structures; social classes; and social movements.
2. Research in comparative politics tends to fall into one of four categories: (a) area studies; (b) small-N, theoretically informed case studies that use qualitative and/or quantitative methods; (c) large-N quantitative studies, and d) mixed-method approaches, i.e., combinations of these categories. Often there is an assumption that mixed-method approaches are the best. Is this assumption correct? What are the trade-offs and compromises involved in simultaneously pursuing different approaches? When might just one of the original three approaches be appropriate?
3. Gabriel Almond wrote: “[Only a very] small part of reality that we, as social scientists, want to explain is captured by the rational-choice model.” Do you agree? Which realities might rational choice explain, and which realities might it not? How useful do you think rational-choice explanations have been in furthering our understanding of phenomena that are usually the subject of research in comparative politics?

### PART II

4. Has globalization replaced modernization as the better approach to understanding political development or other key aspects of comparative politics? Alternatively, do the two concepts explain essentially different phenomena in complementary ways, thereby remaining mutually compatible? Describe and critically evaluate how scholars have conceptualized modernization and globalization, specifying their (possible) differences and (possible) points of convergence or complementarity. Then provide your own answers to these questions.

5. What are the pros and cons for political development of (a) the main institutional forms of democracy (viz., parliamentary systems; presidentialism; semi-presidentialism), and (b) the main electoral systems for the national legislature and (as appropriate) the presidency. Which combination of institutional and electoral systems is most broadly applicable to countries that are consolidated democracies or are democratizing, and why? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this particular combination?
6. No sooner had we succeeded in “bringing the state back in” than we were confronted with a plethora of ‘failed states’. How have political scientists defined and analyzed failed states? Has this literature produced anything really new that was not already adequately covered in earlier studies of political development, the breakdown of democracies, social cleavages, or other relevant topics? Has it provided widely applicable generalizations or explanatory variables that can be applied across regions and cultures? How would you advance the discussion of failed states?
7. Define political culture and discuss its strengths and weaknesses as an independent variable (i.e., which phenomena does it explain?) and as a dependent variable (i.e., which factors shape political culture?). In addressing these questions, critically evaluate the work of relevant scholars and focus on three of the following five topics: (a) ethnic identity; (b) religion; (c) violence; (d) nationalism, and (e) values. In your view, is political culture still a useful focus of comparative politics?
8. How have the terms ‘social capital’ and ‘social movements’ been defined and analyzed by various scholars? To what extent have these studies enhanced our understanding of such phenomena as civil society, political participation and mobilization, democratization or other relevant topics in comparative politics? Do the social-capital and social-movement perspectives diverge (e.g., by seeking to explain different phenomena or by leading to different conclusions), or are they complementary and perhaps combinable?