

Comparative Politics Comprehensive Exam, January 2011

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. “Mixed methods are for mugwumps.” Comment. (N.B. A mugwump is someone who cannot make up his or her mind on a critical question.)
2. To what extent and in what ways (if any) have advances in comparative social science methodology (qualitative or quantitative) improved our understanding of important political phenomena? In your answer, please pick at least one important subject of comparative politics research as an example, discussing concretely how different innovations in method or research design have (or have not) facilitated progress in our understanding of it.
3. To what extent is rational choice theory a productive way to improve our understanding of important political phenomena?

Part II

1. Early studies of “transitions from authoritarianism” were criticized for their teleological nature. Is such a criticism fair? And does the shift in focus to “hybrid regimes” solve any problem of teleology?
2. Is primordialist theory of nationalism dead? Should it be? Why or why not?
3. Across societies, governments become involved in governing the economy to varying degrees and manage the economy in different ways. How do theories of political economy explain the fact, extent and manner of government involvement of the economy?
4. “The study of comparative politics swings each decade or two from societal-based approaches to those that focus on the state. And then it swings back again, driven only by intellectual fashion.” Comment.

5. Pick one of the following regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the postcommunist region, or Western Europe. What issues in this region have been the most hotly debated by political scientists? What has research on this region done by political scientists taught us about these issues?
6. Comparativists have discarded a large number of approaches over the past five decades (such as formal-legal studies, modernization theory, and dependency). Select a discarded approach that you think still has insights for problems and issues currently of interest to comparativists, and explain what might be gained by reviving the selected approach.
7. Can the international community hope to be successful in promoting democracy in countries that are currently authoritarian?
8. In the past, scholars have relied on the concept of “civicness” to explain outcomes ranging from the quality of governance to ethnic conflict. Is civicness still a useful concept for political science? To what extent is civicness endogenous to economic factors?
9. For some observers, the recent economic success of China demonstrates the importance of strong central leadership in promoting rapid economic growth. To what extent does authoritarian governance contribute to economic growth? Is the Chinese model sustainable over the long term? Is it transferrable? In your answer please compare China with at least one other country or region.