

Comparative Politics Comprehensive Exam, May 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. “Much research published by so-called comparativists doesn’t compare anything. And that work that does compare doesn’t usually teach us anything.” Comment.
2. Does comparative politics need area studies? Does area studies need comparative politics? Drawing on examples from one or more topics within comparative politics, discuss the potential tensions as well as synergies between area studies approaches and cross-national comparative research.
3. A Princeton University graduate student recently complained on the internet that political science graduate students spend too much time studying methods and not enough time studying theory. Is this student right? Evaluate the relative importance and role of theory and methods in comparative politics research.

Part II

4. Political scientists spend a lot of time studying politicians and other people in positions of political power, yet some scholars have contended that politics can also be impacted by “ordinary people,” people who (at most) belong to groups in civil society but are not formally involved in politics. Write an essay that evaluates the extent to which these formally non-political people have an impact on politics and how any such impact takes place. Note: how you define politics is up to you, but make sure you are clear about which dimensions of politics these ordinary people can influence.
5. Assess the state of our knowledge about political institutions. Has the “new institutionalism” been a fruitful avenue of research? If so, why? If not, what are its weaknesses?
6. “The great debates on nationalism are over. Constructivism has won.” Comment.
7. You work for a thoroughly unscrupulous consulting firm. Your boss has just accepted a contract from an authoritarian regime where opposition parties are banned, independent

journalists harassed, and elections, though they occur, are thoroughly rigged. Your boss has told that regime that the firm has a hot-shot political scientist (you) who can draw on his/her doctoral training to design a strategy for the regime to maintain itself for at least another twenty years. You need a paycheck. Write the report.

8. What has political science now taught us about the nature of the “resource curse?” Is oil, for example, really a curse for the economy and polity?
9. Pick one of the following regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the postcommunist region, or Western Europe. What issue or 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 this issue/these issues, what is left unresolved, and what would be a positive direction for future research?
10. Does the adoption of a rational choice paradigm preclude the study of culture? Does the decision to focus on culture as an independent variable preclude the use of a rational choice paradigm? Discuss these questions in light of important works of political science.
11. Do political science theories adequately capture international or transnational factors in explanations of domestic political phenomena?
12. Does ethnic diversity promote conflict? Evaluate what political science research has taught us on this question.