

Comparative Politics Comprehensive Exam, September 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. In 1997, Robert Bates noted that we will know that the tension between “area studies” and political science has been reconciled when “someone who has been heavily invested in the knowledge of an area [will be able] to respond to a dean, provost, or departmental chair who inquires: ‘What has the study of your area contributed to the broader discipline?’ (1997, 169). What do you think: can so-called “area studies” research also advance general theories of comparative politics?
2. A recent trend in political science has been a focus micro-level explanations, using survey data and increasingly innovative survey experiments. Can micro-level explanations answer the big questions in comparative politics? Or is there still a need for macro-level explanations?
3. The problem with most studies in comparative politics is that they are single country case studies, which by definition inhibit theorizing. Do you agree?

Part II

1. Which cleavage is more important for understanding contests over economic policy: ethnicity or class? Discuss with reference to at least two countries, making clear why you select the cases you do.
2. Has the focus on “civil society” left political scientists ill-equipped to understand the ways that society is not always civil?
3. Does economic growth lead to democracy?
4. Nationalism is of interest to both comparativists and IR specialists. What is the distinctive contribution of comparative politics to the study of nationalism?
5. Study of the state has gone in and out of fashion. Why?
6. Institutional approaches in political science vary in how they treat political institutions. In some work, institutions are seen as key independent variables shaping political outcomes. In other work, institutions themselves are the dependent variable. Thinking about recent work in comparative politics, which approach is most convincing and why?
7. Twenty years has passed since Huntington published the Third Wave. Are we any closer to a general theory that can explain why some democracies persist and consolidate over time in some countries, but not others, than we were at the time Huntington was writing?
8. “Comparativists will never be able to understand authoritarianism as long as they continue to treat it as a residual category.” Do you agree or disagree?