

Comparative Politics Field Comprehensive Examination
August 23, 2021

Instructions for Students for Whom Comparative Politics is A Major Field

Choose one essay from Section I and two essays from Section II. Be sure that your essays take the form of an argument, that you cite relevant literature, and that you avoid overlap, so you can demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of comparative politics literatures. Also, be sure to draw examples from countries with which you are familiar in at least some of your answers--preferably countries from more than one area of the world.

Instructions for Students for Whom Comparative Politics is A Minor Field

Choose two questions, at least one of which should be from Section II. Be sure that your essays take the form of an argument, that you cite relevant literature, and that you avoid overlap, so you can demonstrate familiarity with a wide range of comparative politics literatures. Also, be sure to draw examples from countries with which you are familiar in at least some of your answers--preferably countries from more than one area of the world.

Section I

- a. However much theories may change, comparativists retain an affection for case studies. What is the role of case studies in modern-day comparative politics? How can case studies be fruitfully combined with other methods? In your response, be sure to cite examples of case studies that represent the “gold standard” of inquiry as well as those that have turned out to be misleading.
- b. What is model dependence and why should researchers in comparative politics be concerned about it? What are some examples of model dependence that have been uncovered in well-cited studies? Discuss your experience with model dependence in your own research and how you have (or intend to) overcome it.
- c. Discuss the variety of ways in which history has been used by scholars in comparative politics. What are the weaknesses and strengths of the roles history has played in these approaches? Cite at least three works (books or articles).

Section II

- d. How do we explain democratic backsliding? Are the causes of backsliding the same as those of democratic transitions? Or do we need new theoretical lenses for understanding why countries slip back into hybrid or authoritarian status? Discuss with reference to at least two countries in two world regions.
- e. Has comparative politics done an adequate job analyzing the effects of concentrated economic power on political and social systems? What does comparative politics say about how inequality affects stability and political participation? What linkages require more attention?

f. David Laitin's book *Nations, States, and Violence* (Oxford University Press, 2007) begins with the question: "Is nationalism dangerous?" On one hand, nationalism has served as the basis of the modern nation state. Yet nationalism has also been linked to populism or other destabilizing political forces. Based on your understanding of the relevant literature, how would you theorize/explain these divergent effects of national identity?

g. Political scientists are frequently consulted on how violent conflicts between ethnic groups might best be resolved for the long run. Comparative politics has advanced a number of possible solutions, ranging from partition to ethnofederalism to consociationalism. In your view, do institutional arrangements matter for keeping violent conflict from reemerging among two previously warring ethnic groups? If so, what set of institutional arrangements would be most successful in preventing conflict in divided societies?

h. What are the primary downstream effects of diversity (ethnic, gender, etc.) for public goods provisioning and/or development? Why do many diverse societies struggle to manage their diversity while others harness it in the interest of innovation and economic growth?

i. Electoral systems vary widely around the world, sometimes but not always providing a critical link between citizens and their politicians. Under what conditions do elections serve as effective mechanisms of representation and accountability? Discuss with reference to theory and two cases.

j. What factors help to explain variation in women's representation in politics? How does women's representation affect political processes or policy outcomes, and to what extent can quotas or other policies be effective in promoting women in politics?