

Comparative Politics Field Exam

August 2019

Section I

1. At the traditional heart of the field of Comparative Politics is the “comparative method,” sometimes referred to as “small-n” analysis or the structured comparison of a limited number of cases. Does this method have a place in contemporary political science, where causal identification and “big data” are valued? Whether you agree or disagree it has a role in contemporary political science, discuss, with examples, the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional “small-n” method.
2. Is establishing causality necessary for a good comparative politics argument, and how does one go about identifying causal relationships?
3. Outline one advance in empirical methods, or in the measurement of a political phenomenon, that has changed the way we understand an important topic in comparative politics, and explain how that advance has worked. What has this new approach taught us about the way politics functions from a comparative perspective?

Section II

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of authoritarian systems for promoting economic growth? Under what conditions do certain authoritarian systems lead to improved welfare for citizens?
2. Do the most prominent theories of ethnicity and nationalism adequately explain the identity-related crises we see around the world today, such as the rise of populist nationalism, hostility to migrants, separatism, and various forms of ethnic cleansing? Pick one of these types of crises (or another type of crisis centering around ethnic or national identity) and assess the degree to which existing theory can account for the problems we see today in different countries.
3. Are democracy and capitalism compatible? Does globalization intensify or alleviate these tensions?

4. Compare mass mobilizations around elections in semi-authoritarian regimes in two world regions with regard to main actors, techniques, responses of regimes and degrees of success.
5. What are the conditions that facilitate successful nation-building? When and why do such efforts fail?
6. How durable have third wave democracies been? Discuss with reference to two different regions.
7. Disillusionment and discontent with liberal economic reform are becoming widespread around the world. Using at least two cases, explain what implications these negative attitudes have for the maintenance of the institutional viability of democracy.