Comparative Politics Field Comprehensive Examination
August 14, 2020

Section I

1. "The whole idea of having a separate examination in 'Comparative Politics' no longer makes much sense because the boundaries between 'Comparative Politics,' 'American politics,' and 'International Relations' are more porous than ever. In fact, the best research nowadays almost always cuts across such boundaries, rendering the boundaries artificial." Please evaluate this statement.

2. Process-tracing in comparative politics is sometimes criticized as "cherry-picking" qualitative evidence and weaving it into a narrative that supports one's theory but that (a) does not allow readers to fully assess alternative explanations and (b) would not likely be replicated by another researcher attempting to conduct the same research. Is this a fair critique? Are there ways to approach process-tracing that try to address these concerns? Are they adequate?

3. Experiments have become common in comparative politics in the last decade, yet their results are often criticized for weak external validity. To what extent is this criticism valid? With the spread of experimental political science, do we lose opportunities for creating generalizable knowledge in comparative politics? Are there techniques, or combinations with other methods, that can improve the utility of experiments in comparative politics?

Section II

1. The COVID-19 pandemic poses new challenges for, and reveals new patterns among, key actors in comparative politics – including states, governments, parties, elites, voters, and even armed groups. Identify one question relevant to the pandemic that comparative politics is poised to help answer and argue how comparative politics is well-positioned to advance knowledge about it. What do existing theories suggest about plausible hypotheses? What method(s) do you think is/are most appropriate for assessing them?

2. Why have some countries invested heavily in nation-building while others have not?

3. Is authoritarianism a distinct regime type or more of a residual category? Discuss some of the different conceptions of authoritarianism that are used by political scientists and explain the analytical usefulness and pitfalls of each.

4. How much of political behavior can we understand by looking primarily at the material (economic) interests of political actors in comparative politics? Please keep your answer focused on assessing how much material/economic interests *can* explain, rather than on identifying behaviors that they cannot explain.

5. Under what conditions, if any, does ethnic identity play a role in causing political violence, and how does it do so? Choose any form of internal (intra-state) political violence to illustrate your answer (for example, civil war onset, insurgency, indiscriminate or selective violence against civilians during warfare).

6. Scholarship on social movements has tended to focus on protest and "contentious politics." Discuss the pros and cons of this focus, considering research design, the consequences of social movements, framing processes, multi-sited activism, institutional tactics, transnational activism, and/or the relational turn in social movements scholarship. Frame your discussion with reference to comparative studies of movements in *either* democratic or authoritarian contexts.

7. What best explains why some countries have achieved and sustained high levels of economic development since World War II while others have not?