

Comparative Politics Field Comprehensive Examination
January 4, 2021

Section I

- a. What is “comparative politics”? What should it be?
- b. Political science research with true randomization is always superior to political science without it. What is the strongest argument for this statement? What is the strongest argument against it? What do you think, and why?
- c. Outline one advance in the conceptualization or measurement of a political phenomenon that has changed the way we understand an important topic in comparative politics. Explain how that advance has worked. What has this new approach taught us about the way politics functions from a comparative perspective?

Section II

- d. Where does the long-standing debate on the economic sources of democracy stand today? Has it now been more or less resolved?
- e. In the mid-2000s, comparative politics researchers began embracing micro-level approaches to the study of civil war. Since then, has the pendulum swung too far in that direction? That is, has recent conflict scholarship focused too little on meso- and macro-level approaches? What kind of research is now needed to advance knowledge about internal (intrastate) conflict, and why?
- f. In what ways do domestic political institutions influence economic policy decisions? Please illustrate your answer with examples from several countries.
- g. In 2020, Freedom House declared that “2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.” What does political science have to tell us about the sources of democratic

backsliding, a process through which a country becomes less democratic? What are the most promising approaches to understanding democratic backsliding, in your view?

- h. The concept of a “developmental state” was developed to understand the rapid rise to industrialization and prosperity experienced by post-war Japan and some other countries of East Asia. But it has been used more recently to explain the rise of China and India among other emerging market economies. Is this a case of “concept stretching” or does the “developmental state” formulation truly have explanatory power that extends well beyond the original cases where it was developed?
- i. What are the primary institutional arrangements through which states attempt to accommodate ethnic diversity, and what does comparative politics tell us about which is most effective at defusing or preventing ethnic conflict, and why?
- j. In March 2020, some commentators believed that COVID-19 would likely lead to a period without much political protest because potential protesters would fear contracting the coronavirus and because government lockdown policies would keep them at home. Since then, massive protests have emerged or continued everywhere from Hong Kong to the United States to Belarus. What tools does social science (in particular political science) theory on political protest, contentious politics, and social movements have to offer for understanding why the year 2020 has not seen the disappearance of public protest?