

Comparative Politics Field Exam December 2019

Section I

1. Many scholars believe that single-case research designs do not enable causal inference. They therefore favor strategies that compare cases. How might single-case scholars respond, showing that a single-case research design provides grounds for reliable causal inferences?
2. Currently, there is a significant movement among political scientists towards the use of field experiments for the study of politics. What are the strengths and weaknesses of field experiments as a method in comparative politics?

Section II

1. “Because authoritarianism has become a residual category, it will remain resistant to theoritization or generalization.” Comment.
2. How important are ideas in shaping political institutions? Compare the various approaches to this question, including historical institutionalism, discourse analysis, and class analysis. Illustrate your argument with specific historical examples.
3. “To explain the success or failure of democracy, we must consider the importance of interests and how people perceive interests.” Comment.
4. What factors best explain the transition to democracy in many nations throughout the world in the 1980s-1990s-early 2000s? And what factors best explain the erosion of many democracies in recent years?
5. Do institutions matter? Discuss with reference to 1) countries’ democracy AND/OR 2) countries’ economic growth AND/OR 3) countries’ social welfare. Be sure to define institutions and consider a spectrum of institutions.
6. As globalization intensifies, ethnic identities and nationalist proclivities will erode.” Do you agree? Have theories of globalization, ethnicity, and nationalism correctly predicted recent trends in domestic political conflicts in different regions of the world?
7. Is political culture still a viable field of research within comparative politics? Or do other theories do as well or better in explaining the political outcomes that cultural theories purport to explain?
8. How important are international forces to the shaping of domestic institutions? Choose three studies in comparative politics that argue for the importance of international forces and critically assess their contribution.

