**Comparative Politics Major Field Exam**

**January 2015**

**Instructions**

Pick one topic from Part I and two topics from Part 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 political science 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.

**Part I**

1. In recent years, regression analysis has become prevalent in comparative politics.  Is regression analysis usually necessary for a solid comparative-politics argument, in your view?  Is regression analysis usually necessary, but insufficient?  What other methods (process tracing, discursive or interpretive analysis, game theory, and experiments) do you consider most helpful to the development of robust arguments in comparative politics? Why?

2. Conceptual precision and clarity are important for inference in comparative politics, but so are theoretical insights that "travel." Since Sartori, numerous scholars have raised concerns about conceptual "stretching" in quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis. Critically review three important pieces of scholarship on a particular topic, focusing on how they avoid the danger of conceptual "stretching."

3. There are a significant number of comparativists who reject positivist approaches in favor of discursive, interpretative, or constructivist analysis. What advantages do the latter have over the former? Are these comparativists right to reject positivism?

4. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the research designs of two influential pieces of scholarship that tackle a similar question in comparative politics. Conclude with advice about research design for a PhD student preparing a dissertation prospectus on this topic.

**Part II**

1.Discuss the pros and cons of using “exogenous shocks” as an explanatory variable. In your answer, assess at least three different scholars' operationalizations of this concept.

2. The concept of cleavage has been extremely useful in the analysis of politics. Analysis of divisions along class, ethnic, or cultural lines often leads to explanations of civil wars, democratic instability, or long term trends in political development. What are the advantages of focusing on political cleavages? To what extent does this focus exaggerate the importance of conflict in politics?

Comparative politics has long been interested in structural explanations of politics. More recently, comparativists have returned to studying political phenomena such as party systems and constitutions, phenomena previously assumed to be superficial manifestations of deeper structural forces. Are parties and constitutions epiphenomena? Why should we study them?

4. Scholars have long sought to assess the importance of economic factors to democratization as well as the lack thereof.  To this end, "modernization theory" and more recently theories about the "resource curse" were developed.  Describe the debates about modernization theory and resource curse theory and indicate in what respects you think they are correct or incorrect.

5. Scholars of comparative politics have analyzed the causes of protest movements, insurgencies, and internal violent political conflict in general.  In your view, have scholars developed theories that are helpful to understanding internal violent political conflict across countries and across time periods?  Or are the specific conditions within each country and period too important, limiting the validity of universal theories?

6. What lessons do authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and Africa have for understanding why authoritarian countries in other regions, like some in Asia and Latin America, have not witnessed regime change? Assess the cross-regional portability of theories of authoritarian resilience.

