

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
School of Public Affairs \* Department of Government

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Doctoral)  
Comprehensive Examination  
January 2006

Directions: Answer THREE (3) of the following questions: one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and one question from either part. Your answers will be judged for their responsiveness to the specific question, their skilled and ample citation of the relevant literature, and their clarity of organization. Any arguments you advance should be defended against plausible counter-arguments. The material used in your answer to any question should not substantially overlap with the material used in other questions. Take time to organize your answer.

Part I (Answer at least ONE question from this section)

1. The argument over methodology in political science is perhaps felt most strongly in the field of comparative politics because the study of other countries highlights both the need for empirical research and the difficulties of simplifying reality sufficiently to force it into formal models. Discuss at least three major theorists or schools in comparative politics and how they have dealt with this problem. Is the field getting any nearer to consensus?
2. There is an ancient division in comparative politics between the scholars who study European and other developed nations, and the scholars who study the so-called developing world. Evaluate a variety of works in the recent comparative politics literature in order to determine whether this division is being overcome, or whether it endures still today.
3. Ethnic politics is a major concern in all countries, and seems likely to grow rather than diminish in the years ahead. What are the possible institutional methods of dealing with ethnicity? Describe and evaluate the arguments made by various scholars in this respect, and analyze the possibilities for theoretic progress suggested by those scholars.
4. The test of anyone's command of a scientific field is the ability to devise research in which other scholars in the field will be interested. For an area of your choice, evaluate the existing literature and sketch out (in good detail) what research you believe would be appropriate to making progress on the central questions in that field.
5. Comparativists tend to feel their discipline began with Gabriel Almond, for better or worse. Do you think there are earlier theorists that have had, or should have had, greater influence?

Part II (Answer at least ONE question from this section)

6. Post-modernism entered comparative politics perhaps earlier than it was found in other subfields in the political science discipline. Who are its major proponents? What are its

- major contributions? How might it be used to advance our understanding of micro-politics.
7. Asian countries have been a major source of innovation for comparative politics despite their failure to fit the 'standard model' of American political science's modernization theories. Review the engagement of comparative politics with Asia, over the past half century, showing its impact on thinking and research.
  8. The state, for many observers, is the central concept of all political science. What has happened to the state in comparative politics, over the years, and where does it stand today.
  9. Do globalization theories help us understand the spread of terrorism worldwide? Discuss globalization theories in reference to specific comparative scholarship, and suggest what alternatives there may be for the better understanding of terrorism.
  10. Political activity in Latin America today stands as an interesting commentary on dependency theory. Evaluate both the political facts and the theoretical concepts, and suggest what theory might be more appropriate to current events in Latin America.
  11. Comparative politics is sometimes said, by critics, to be disorganized and amorphous, yet various scholars have tried to develop approaches to understanding the field intellectually. Compare and contrast at least three of these classificatory or explanatory approaches.
  12. Social movement theory stands at the juncture between empirical and normative theory. Discuss this situation and say whether it is a help or a hindrance to fuller understanding of such movements.
  13. What does it mean to 'explain' a political system? How is it done? How are such theories to be tested? Relate your answer to specific scholarly works.
  14. Rational choice theory claims to be the one 'universal' theory that meets behavioralist criteria and is thus the master paradigm for political science. Evaluate this claim from the comparative politics viewpoint.