

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs * Department of Government

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Master's)
Comprehensive Examination
Spring 2010

Directions: Answer THREE (3) 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. Organize your answers, and allocate your time evenly.

Part I (Answer at least ONE question from this section and not more than two questions)

1. What are the benefits and liabilities of 'minimalist' definitions of democracy, such as Dahl's? From an empirical perspective do such definitions sufficiently distinguish democracies from other systems of government, or is a more substantive 'maximalist' definition more effective? Give an analytic comparison of these definitions, with examples, and conclude with a normative assessment of which you believe is most effective and why.
2. Robert Bates, one of one hundred contributors to *The Future of Political Science (2009)*, recommends that rational choice theory and political culture theory be combined. If you believe this can be done, show how, using major works in both fields.
3. It is sometimes argued that there is no scientific progress in political science, which just circles endlessly around the same questions. It is also sometimes argued that the sub-field of comparative politics is different in that it does make a kind of progress. Consider the history of the sub-field over the past 60 or so years and evaluate the issue.
4. Quantitative and qualitative research in comparative politics often seem antithetical if not contradictory. Consider a variety of major works that use either one or the other approach and discuss whether the difference is (a) real, and (b) unbridgeable. Be specific.
5. Behavioralism historically cleared the political science field

of many myths, but some remain, even in comparative politics. Take what you believe to be a major comparative politics myth and design a research program that would evaluate whether it does or does not deserve to be (1) jettisoned, or (2) retained as an empirically useful concept.

6. The deconstructionists quite a while back tried to convince political science that the State did not exist, but it is still used everywhere in comparative analysis. Review the concept's history, explain its longevity, and suggest a way to escape its power.

Examination continues over

Part II (Answer at least ONE question from this section and not more than two questions)

7. Is Udehn's "strong methodological individualism" reconcilable with social movement theory, and would social movement theorists agree that this should be a standard against which they are to be judged? Be specific, referring to at least three social movement theories, and distinguish between movement leaders, followers, and latent members.
8. Are Islamic societies more resistant to democracy than Western societies? Evaluate at least three explanations and analyze in depth the explanation you believe is most effective.
9. Many analyses of Latin American politics focus on structural conditions as causal factors, but in recent years a growing literature in political science has examined the importance of 'agency' rather than structure—that is, the choices made by political actors. Choose at least one of the following cases, and one of your own (which may include those listed) and evaluate the relative importance of agency and structure.
 - (a) The radicalization of the Cuban Revolution 1959-1961.
 - (b) The decay of PRI hegemony in Mexico.
 - (c) The restoration of democracy in Chile.
10. Since Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) comparative politics has argued over whether the major impetus to development is political or economic. Draw together the major theorists in this debate and say which side has, forty years later, made the better case, or indeed if you find neither satisfactory.
11. Some suggest that a country's propensity to violence is shaped

by structural factors; others argue that social relations are more powerful determinants of both the likelihood of conflict and the form that violence will take. Assess these two schools of thought using specific examples and evaluate the evidence on both sides.

12. Historical institutionalists complain rational choice institutionalists don't (and can't) answer the 'big questions' so important in comparative politics. Rational choice institutionalists respond that the historicists are fuzzy-headed essay writers, incapable of providing solid explanations. Review the literature in both sub-schools and evaluate the justice of these claims.

Remember to Answer Three Questions

One from Part I, One from Part II, and One from Either Part

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