

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs * Department of Government

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Master's)
Comprehensive Examination
Spring 2009

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. "Procedural definitions of democracy are too cynical in their low estimation of the human potential for building a more utopian world. Substantive or 'social' definitions of democracy are biased by their Western normative assumptions which they believe to be universal." Discuss this issue generally, then make a case for your preferred definition.
2. Is worldwide poverty predominantly a result of an uneven distribution of natural resources, a result of market forces, or a result of unevenly distributed political capacity? Use political economy and at least two other theoretic approaches to answer this question.
3. "Political culture was born as an adjunct to functional theory in comparative politics, then was captured by democratic theorists who saw it as an alternative to 'bowling alone,' and finally has ended up in the embrace of constructivists. This is its death knell." Describe the history of political culture and evaluate whether the writer's conclusion is correct.
4. The origins of comparative politics go back at least to Plato and include a wide array of philosophers over the intervening centuries. What relevance do any of these thinkers have for the field today? You may answer this either in terms of what you perceive as actual influence on comparative politics research, or from a normative viewpoint using ideas you think would be useful in comparative research.
5. A prime opportunity for empirical research is the field of social movements. Choose a particular social movement and describe its emergence, strength, and effect; then extend it as a research design, stating a theory, a methodology, and a plan

for data collection and analysis, and finally testing.

6. The field of comparative politics, like any living thing, changes over the years. Describe its development since the 1950s, explaining what changed and why. Be specific.

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

7. Propose rational choice and historical institutional interpretations of the 2004 decision by Vladimir Putin to greatly centralize authority in Russia. Are there other possible approaches? Evaluate them comparatively.
8. Describe and debate the movement towards or away from formal political institutions and parties in global politics. Are institutions suffering a loss of support just at the time historical institutionalism has become popular?
9. Is the impact of Islam on politics fundamentally and irrevocably different from the impact of Christianity? Bring case studies and theory to defend your arguments.
10. Shepsle and Bonchek seem to extol the virtues of plurality electoral systems, while Lijphart and Powell seem to favor proportional representation. Evaluate their arguments.
11. You have been hired by the U.S. State Department to advise it on policy towards Afghanistan. Which theorists from the history of comparative politics would you bring to the discussion and what would they advise? Stay close to the chosen theorists in your answer and be both theoretically-consistent and empirically specific.
12. How does recognizing gender as an important comparative lens influence the study of comparative politics, and how do the normative and methodological insights of feminism influence research in the field? Do you believe the perspective is useful?
13. Structural theory has been a mainstay of comparative politics since its modern origin. Choose a major theorist within this approach and outline his theory and method; then apply it to a Twenty-first Century problem of your choice in comparative research.
14. Is there any place for resistance in a post-9/11 world, or have rebellion and revolution become impossible?

Remember to Answer Three Questions

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

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