

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

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Master's)  
**Comprehensive Examination**  
**Spring 2011**

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. Methodological individualism is a core assumption of much political science research. What are the strengths and weaknesses of its approaches to explanation? Are there questions for which this framework is unsuitable? Give appropriate and ample examples.
2. What is the most important global political trend that comparative politics fails to explain? Discuss why it fails to explain the issue and what sources within comparative politics might be used to begin to address it. Anchor your answer in specific cases.
3. In what sense was the so-called Behavioral Revolution actually a revolution? Discuss what they fought about, who won and who lost; or whether the battle is still current. Provide examples also of what, if anything, was learned.
4. Have policy makers, Western powers, and students of comparative politics misunderstood democratic theory and the democratization literature by overemphasizing the importance of elections? Explore the question using specific cases and specific theories.
5. Target one sub-field in comparative politics, such as democratization, political behavior, institutions, dependency theory, development, social movements, etc., and lay out its main contributions, its major theoretical and methodological debates, and its changes over time.

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

6. Among various approaches to the collective action problem have been community-based solutions for the provision of public goods, social movements, and corporate governance. Discuss the elements of this approach and explain the role of heterogeneity or homogeneity with reference to pertinent literature.

*Examination continues over*

7. Does a country need a middle class to sustain a democracy? Why or why not?
8. Rational choice theory has been a bone of contention within comparative politics from its first emergence in political science. Trace its history in broad terms and explain why its partisans and critics are equally adamant.
9. Recall Bismark's request of the German people to think with your blood. Walker Connor adopts this view that nationalism is based more on feeling than reason and what matters is not *what is* but *what people believe is*. For a contemporary nation or regional group, evaluate the validity of this position.
10. Samuel Huntington once remarked that the most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. Critically assess this point, relating his opinion to those of others on the subject.
11. Political culture was conceived, born, and killed by the same men; leaving behind merely a ghost of what might have been a good idea. Evaluate this claim from both sides, with examples.
12. Selection bias has been widely recognized as a key challenge to the validity of empirical findings in comparative politics. What do critics mean by this complaint? How can it be solved methodologically?
13. What can comparative politics teach us about what might happen in Egypt over the next five years? Discuss at least four comparative works that contribute to our understanding of the possibilities inherent in the situation.
14. Some of the leading figures in social movement theory (McAdam,

Tarrow, Tilly and others) have argued that the literatures on social movements, revolutions, and democratization can all be subsumed under the rubric contentious politics. Is this effort to create a grand unified theory promising? Why or why not?

**Remember to Answer Three Questions**

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

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