

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs * Department of Government

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Master's)
Comprehensive Examination
Spring 2013

Directions: Answer THREE (3) questions: one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and one question from Part III. 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 Synoptic Questions on Field (Answer ONE and only one question from this section)

1. A recent compendium of the comparative politics field argues that the field has now accepted "the need to develop broad, general propositions about politics and about the value of employing standard scientific practices to provisionally validate them." Review the recent history of comparative politics to explain how this conclusion was reached.
2. The study of institutions, especially their origins, their effects, and change, has taken many forms in comparative politics research over recent decades. Define the major forms of institutional study, compare and contrast them, and identify their respective advantages and disadvantages.
3. "Scholars in comparative politics stand on the shoulders of their predecessors. Theoretical innovations in comparative politics result in theories of greater explanatory power." Evaluate this statement and discuss why it may or may not be true. Be specific.
4. The study of democracy has been central to comparative politics for generations yet it has not, perhaps surprisingly, culminated in any theoretical consensus. Evaluate the history of this disciplinary discussion, going back no further than the behavioral period, and explain both its positive and negative dimensions.

Part II Specific Topic Questions (Answer ONE and only one question)

from this section)

5. Is sovereignty dead? What factors encourage the collapse of sovereignty and what factors maintain or promote it?
6. The work of Samuel Huntington can be considered a model for the comparative politics field; explain his contributions to different substantive topics, and evaluate his role in the development of the field.
7. Rational choice theory has revolutionized political science research in general but has had a narrower impact in comparative politics. Review the work of scholars who have introduced rational choice theory and suggest what its future progress might entail.
8. Has the debate between presidentialism and parliamentary systems been superceded by other vital institutional considerations in democratic political systems, or is it as relevant today as it was at its height twenty years ago? Anchor your answer firmly in the literature.
9. A large monetary prize is being offered by the Caucus for a New Political Science for a research design that will revolutionize the comparative politics discipline, basing itself on classical works from the past but forging ahead into ideas that will transform society. If you choose to compete, explain what literature you would use and define the research project, including data collection and hypothesis formulation and testing, in detail.

Part III Practical Applications (Answer ONE and only one question from this section)

10. "The reason comparative politics cannot be considered a science, or even an art, is that not a single scholar foresaw the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and indeed even in retrospect no one has a well-organized explanation." Evaluate this argument and suggest whether there actually may be appropriate theories available.
11. Levels of democracy worldwide, according to Freedom House, have been declining in the Twenty-first century after great increases in the 1980s and 1990s. Explain, in detail.

12. The Arab Spring has been compared to Europe in 1848, as a series of uprisings that had no long-term effect on the participant nations, largely because the revolutionary conditions necessary for permanent change were not present. Use at least three major comparative politics theories to evaluate this argument.
13. You have been hired by Venezuelan authorities to provide advice on perfecting the Bolivarian Revolution in the current period of transition. You can take one comparative politics theorist with you on the plane. Who would it be, and what would he say?

Remember to Answer Three Questions
One from Part I, One from Part II, and One from Part III

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