

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs * Department of Government

Govt 73 Comparative Politics (Doctoral)
Comprehensive Examination First Field
9 September 2011

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. In many cases the possible consequences of institutions have been used to justify their origins, particularly in the literature of rational-choice institutionalism. Do you believe this approach is justified? Use specific literature and examples in making your argument.
2. Some scholars of conflict emphasize the importance of structural conditions while others see conflict as the result of mobilizing tactics, political appeals, or other more contingent factors. Evaluate the two different perspectives drawing on the example of at least one violent episode.
3. What subfield of comparative politics is the most highly developed and the most useful for policymakers, and what subfield is the least developed and the least useful for policymakers? Explain your choices and be sure to define "developed" and "useful."
4. Who has contributed the most to comparative politics: Samuel Huntington, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, David Laitin, Robert Bates, Robert Dahl, Arend Lijphart, Ronald Inglehart, Larry Diamond or Joel Migdal? Explain why you made your choice and contrast the writing of your choice to three of the other authors listed.
5. "The central tension in democracy is that philosophers have never resolved the question of whether democracy should strive for liberal rights or equality, and practitioners never even bothered to consider this as a dilemma." Evaluate this argument, with specific literature and examples.

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

6. How do our models of democratization and transitology help explain the unexpected eruption of political change in the Middle East? What other theoretical debates and questions are germane both to the success of some of these uprisings and the challenges to others?

7. The 1986 O'Donnell and Schmitter *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* volume is widely viewed as the lynchpin of contemporary democratization literature, but does it retain any relevance to the contemporary study of democratization? Justify your answer thoroughly.
8. The role of informal institutions has been increasingly emphasized in the literature on institutional change. Review the relevant literature on this question, identify its weaknesses, and propose possible avenues for future research.
9. "Social movements only succeed where there exists adequate political opportunity." Evaluate this thesis within the context of the relevant literature.
10. USAID missions in embassies all over the world have offices for "Democracy and Governance." Are the concepts related?
11. Nobody talks about revolutions any more. Trace the reasons for this outcome.
12. A well-known critic on Capitol Hill is making a career of trying to abolish National Science Foundation grants in political science. Devise a research proposal so interesting and socially-useful that it will completely justify the scientific utility of political science. Your proposal should be, if possible, based on literature in the field, and should be operationalized in terms of variables and data collection.

***Remember to answer three questions
one from each part and one from either part***

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