Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination, September 13, 2004

Answer one question from Section I and two questions from Section II. Evidence may be drawn from one or more cases to answer questions in Section II. Please note that strong examinations show breadth as well as depth. Choose questions that will allow you to show your knowledge across different sub-fields and areas of comparative politics. Answers for each question should be no more than 2500 words.

Section I: Methodology and General Theory. Answer one of the following three questions.

1. An oft-stated objection to positivism in the social sciences is that it has proved incapable of yielding law-like predictions, akin to those found in the hard sciences. How compelling an indictment is this of positivism? Does the lack of "laws" suggest a need to rethink the widespread commitment to positivism among political scientists? Why or why not? Use examples from a specific research topic in comparative politics to illustrate your argument, whatever your response to this issue.

2. There seems to be inherent tension in research in comparative politics: if the researcher advocates large-N models, she may be criticized for omitting significant variables; if the researcher advocates case-studies, she may be criticized for selecting on the dependent. What, according to the literature, are problems associated with omission of variables and selection on the dependent? Discuss some solutions adopted in comparative politics to overcome these problems. Which of these solutions do you recommend and why?

3. How is democracy measured? For example, some authors define democracy as a continuous variable. Others argue that democracy is a dichotomous variable and a state is either a democracy or a non-democracy. How does the measurement of democracy influence research on democratization? What are the implications of each approach?

Section II: Political Institutions, Social Politics, and Political Economy. Choose two of the following three topics and answer one question from each.

A. Political Institutions:

1. In George Tsebelis' recent book, Veto Players, he attempts to develop a comprehensive explanation for policy stability and change that transcends typical debates such as the role of election rules. He implies that his approach moves us toward a theory of the design and consequences of political institutions. But, many scholars have challenged the study of institutions, noting its flaws or omissions. Is a comprehensive explanation of institutions attainable? In your answer, address the successes and shortcomings in the study of political institutions and their effects.

2. If you were an advisor to a new, developing democracy, would you suggest that it adopt a presidential system of government? Does this decision matter? Explain what the most recent research suggests about any advantages/disadvantages of this form of government for democratic stability.
B. Social Politics:
1. Critically explore and analyze theories seeking to explain political quiescence and rebellion by comparing the work of three major contributors to this debate. Use a specific case (either your own original one or a case from the literature) to illustrate your own preferred theory on how a subordinate group moves from passive, obedient subjects to become active agents of social change.

2. In a context of injustice, does inaction on the part of subordinate groups reflect a) anticipated or real repression or the expectation that movements would be likely to fail; or b) the consent of the subordinate groups to the order that keeps them in positions of subordination? Explore this question through the work of at least three scholars. What theory do you find most compelling, and why?

C. Political Economy:
1. A key development issue in much of the world is resource availability, such as water. Among the approaches proposed to allocate limited resources are:
   - privatization
   - international law
   - power politics
   - human rights
What are the implications for development of at least two of these approaches? Specific examples will strengthen your answer.

2. In the field of political economy, the literature of the autonomous state assumes a state that is autonomous from rent-seeking interests is able to enact policies for the general interests and, hence, pursue growth. Przeworski and Limongi (1993) point out that this assumption overlooks an important consideration: if a state is autonomous, why would it behave in the interests, long- or short-term ones, of anyone? Consider at least three theorists of the autonomous state milieu and discuss if and how they overcome Przeworski and Limongi’s point. Also discuss how at least three theorists outside of the autonomous state tradition approach the question. Do you think that the assumption is too restrictive?