Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination, Sept 22, 2003

Answer one question from each section. Section I stresses methodology, bibliography, and general theory. Section II emphasizes comparison and mid-range theory. Section III consists of region-specific questions and how political events support or undermine theory. Please note that strong examinations show breadth as well as depth. We therefore advise you to choose questions that will allow you to show your knowledge across different sub-disciplines and areas of comparative politics. Good Luck! Please limit your answers to 2500 words.

Part I: Methodology, Bibliography, and General Theory

1) Focusing on one research problem in particular, compare the merits of large-n cross-national versus small-n approaches in comparative politics.

2) Many scholars have urged their colleagues to think more deeply and systematically about the relationship between international relations and comparative politics. The fact that pleas are routinely offered for what seems like a necessary intellectual development suggests that the discipline remains unconvinced. Specifically, you are to:
   a. identify the theoretical and empirical arguments in favor of maintaining the distinction between international relations and comparative politics, paying particular attention to the rationale for systemic theorizing;
   b. identify those literatures and calls for integration between international relations and comparative politics;
   c. evaluate the success of those attempts at integration on their ability to provide a more comprehensive and systematic theory of global politics.

3) It seems that, more often in comparative politics than other fields, new research often fails to corroborate old theories. For instance, systematic evidence fails to support a comparative politics theory that dictators are better at generating economic growth than democracies (Przeworski et al, 1996). As another example, findings show that the traditional business cycles wherein the incumbent deliberately manipulates fiscal and monetary policies to usher stronger economic conditions do not exist (Alesina et al, 1997). What does this lack of corroboration say about comparative politics in terms of our methods for study, and the evolution of the field? Should we (and if so, how) try to reconcile old theories with new findings? Should we abandon new findings in favor of former wisdom? If so, explain why.

Part II: Comparison and Mid-Range Theory

1) Discuss several approaches (no less than three, no more than five) to the causal relationship between political and economic development. Discuss two or three methodologies or advances in the literature, clarifying why you believe they are compelling to the development of the study of political and economic development.

2) What do you think have been the most outstanding successes in the study of institutions in comparative politics? What are the most important
findings? What do you suppose are the most serious shortcomings of these studies, and do you have any remedies to propose?

3) Choose a subfield of comparative politics and write about the knowledge we have now in this area. What do we know? What puzzles remain? How should those questions be resolved?

Part III: Region- or Event-Specific Knowledge

1) Area studies scholars and rational choice scholars agree about at least one thing: it is necessary to know the context in a situation before you can begin to create a valid model. Choose a region and evaluate how much contextual knowledge might be necessary in a comparative politics topic of your choice.

2) Within the literature on democratization, there is a clear division between those scholars who argue there is a clear set of political, social, and economic "prerequisites" that a country must fulfill in order to move toward democracy and those who maintain there are numerous alternative "paths" to democracy and no fixed necessary preconditions that every state must meet. Drawing on both the general theoretical literature and empirical evidence from at least two different world regions, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches. Which do you find most compelling?

3) While the European Union's existing members established its political institutions, the EU is poised to add many new members in 2004 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). How might the incorporation of new members affect the domestic politics of the incoming states? Use examples from your region or country of interest to illustrate and support your arguments.