Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination, Spring 2013

Introduction:

Preliminary examinations are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to preliminary examination questions may illustrate critical points with examples from one or many countries so long as case material (regardless of how many countries it involves) buttresses theoretical arguments. Accordingly, an essay should convey that a student is: (1) well-versed in the key literature; and (2) able to knowledgeably apply a case or cases of their own choosing to that literature.

You should answer one of the questions if Section I. In Section II, you should answer one question from two of the subsections (A, B and C). Answers for each question should be no more that 2,500 words. Alternatively, you may omit one question to write about your research agenda (D) linked to published literature. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your examination. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

Section I: Comparative Theory and Methods

1. What is a “middle-range” theory and why might it be a useful guide for conducting research in comparative politics? What are the alternatives to such an approach? Provide an example of a research program in comparative politics that you think best illustrates a middle-range approach.

2. The use of mixed methods is increasingly advocated in the field of comparative politics. What are the benefits and drawbacks of each? How does the use of mixed methods help overcome the traditional tradeoffs? What are the drawbacks of using mixed methods? Make sure to provide illustrative examples throughout your answer from recent comparative work using mixed methods.

Section II: Answer one question from each of the subsections below: (A) Comparative Institutions and Government; and (B) Comparative Public Opinion and (C) Comparative Social Politics. Or you may choose (D) to write on your comparative research agenda.

A. Comparative Institutions and Government

1. Inherited institutions, such as colonial influence and authoritarian regime types, are some of the factors that influence democratic transitions. What role, if any, do inherited institutions play in democratic transitions? Provide one example where you can identify the positive and negative role inherited institutions played in the transition process.

2. Several authors suggest that majoritarian regimes produce less representation that consensus regimes. What evidence do these authors use to support their claims? In your answer, address whether of not this is a widely accepted claim.
B. Comparative Public Opinion

1. The democracy deficit of the European Union supposedly prevents the development of a fully functioning polity. Discuss the different ways in which this democracy deficit have been discussed in the literature (e.g., institutions, parties, public opinion)? Which versions appear to have simple solutions? Which ones are more intricate? To what degree can and should one take the design of national-level institutions as a model to design the EU framework? Finally, to what extent has the recent expansion of the EU exacerbated the problems resulting from the democracy deficit?

2. European party systems have undergone what is sometimes described as a fundamental transformation of the voter-party linkage. Some analysts even discuss the possibilities of a far-reaching realignment between parties and their constituencies. In your essay, discuss and evaluate the debate concerning the nature of the voter-party linkage. First, what are the social foundations of European party systems? What, for example, provides the basis for European party systems according to such analysts as Lipset, Rokkan, Lijphart or Rose? In a second step, describe the changes that have occurred since the early 1970s. What are some of the main theoretical explanations for these developments? What factors might explain some of the cross-national variation of partisan realignments within the European (East and West) context? Finally, what do these developments imply for the validity of competing theoretical models of electoral behavior in advanced democracies (e.g., psychological approaches, spatial, directional, or cleavage-base models.

C. Comparative Social Politics

1. Mark Lichbach calls adaptation of protesters a “higher productivity tactic”. Lichbach cites this in the Market group of solutions. Is this an adequate treatment of adaptation? Cite examples of adaptive tactics and comment on how they should be treated theoretically.

2. What accounts for the fact that almost all conflicts stay in equilibrium? This is true even for civil wars. How do you explain this surprising finding in light of the supposed chaos of conflict?

D. Comparative Research Agenda

Pick a subfield of comparative politics and write a coherently organized and analytically rich discussion of how your personal research agenda relates to that subfield. This research may not relate to the same topic that you addressed in Section II (A) or II (B) above.