Preliminary Examination in Comparative Politics
Fall 2002

Answer one question from each part. Part I stresses methodology, bibliography, and general theory. Part II emphasizes comparison and mid-range theory. Part 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 subfields and areas of comparative politics. Good luck!

Part I: Methodology, Bibliography, and General Theory

1. Comparative politics has been “invaded” by outsiders (principally U.S. politics) than any other field in political science. Have these invasions improved theory and research in comparative politics?

2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the comparative methodologies of qualitative and quantitative studies. Given these considerations, discuss the prospects of unifying both approaches.

3. Two general approaches dominate the study of political institutions: historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism. What are their main features? What are the primary advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches? How might scholars reconcile the differences between them? In your answer, be sure to cite examples of scholarship coming from both traditions.

Part II: Comparison and Mid-Range Theory

1. Two broad strands of research developed in explaining party systems in the industrialized democracies. Over thirty years ago, scholars argued that party systems reflected relatively fixed "cleavage" structures; others emphasized the importance of electoral laws in explaining party systems. Using examples from at least three European cases, discuss to what extent these two research agendas have accumulated knowledge about how party systems develop and evolve. What issues do we still not understand about party systems?

2. With reference to the literature on political regimes and economic growth, discuss a)three models used in the field b) the assumptions motivating the models c) the methodology d) the results e)the problems/oversights f) how the models may be improved

3. A few years ago, scholars were all talking about the new wave of democratization sweeping the world. It has now become clear, however, that in many parts of the world what we are actually seeing is a “semi-democratization,” or “liberalized authoritarianism” rather than democracy. Were the theories of democratization just wrong or were they misapplied? Taking into account the successful and unsuccessful transitions to democracy that have occurred in the past 15 years, what do political scientists now know about the conditions under which democratization is more or less likely to occur?
Part III: World-Region Specific

1. What role(s), if any, do public opinion and formal or informal interest groups play in the creation and implementation of domestic policies in one world region? Can you explain this theoretically?

2. Identify the five most significant works (books or major articles) published in the past five years that deal with politics within a specific region of the world (your choice). Explain why you have chosen these particular pieces, framing the discussion in terms of important theoretical or empirical debates. What do we know now (or understand differently) about politics in your chosen region that we didn’t know or understand before these studies?

3. Studies of East Asian economies contend that the governments of East Asia, insulated from the interest group pressures, are able to command or even compel their citizens to follow government's economic policies. But Przeworski and Limongi (1993) make an important critique of this argument: if governments are insulated from particularistic pressures, why would the government work in the short- or long-term interests of anyone to pursue economic development? Using the experiences of two East Asian countries (preferably less-democratic countries or during periods prior to political liberalization) cite evidence to show:

(a) if and why the governments may be considered to be insulated from pressure groups and whether this enabled government to command or compel their citizens to follow the government's economic policies. In your opinion, did these conditions lead the governments to work in the short- and long-term interests of their people?

and

(b) if and why the governments may not be considered to be insulated from pressure groups and how this affected government's economic planning. In your opinion, did these conditions lead the governments to work in the short- and long-term interests of their people?