Comparative Prelim Questions

Theory and Methods
1. Recent calls for a new theory of politics affect comparative politics most directly. What are the candidates for a theory of politics that are sufficiently general as well as valid?

2. Critics of positivism argue that the social sciences have become too focused on methodology. A recent article stated that, “The tendency toward privileging methodology is a symptom of the insecurity shared by most branches of the human sciences about the scientific status of their findings...[M]any in the social sciences have concluded that the task of the social sciences is to construct an exact science of humans and their societies incrementally, strictly eschewing metatheory. The motto is that science cannot ask a question for which an algorithm is not available for its answer.” Discuss your view of this criticism with regard to a research program (of your choosing) in comparative politics. Do you find the criticism valid? Or, do you think that perhaps there has not been enough concern with methodological issues?

3. What areas of comparative politics have generated the greatest agreement among scholars? What areas of comparative politics have generated the least agreement among scholars? What accounts for the differences?

Political Institutions
1. What are the three most important works on comparative political institutions to be published in the last decade? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How have they influenced the study of institutions?

2. Questions about democratization and institutional design (i.e., presidential vs. parliamentary systems) dominated the literature in the last 15 years. What other themes are likely to emerge as the most important areas for research in the coming decade? How could existing methods and approaches evolve to address these issues?

Political Economy
1. A large literature describes the effects of regime type on economic development. Cite five or six studies in this milieu (that is, describe their arguments, findings, contributions, weaknesses), explain what you consider to be the most important contribution from each, and explain how your research into political economy builds upon these contributions or addresses their weaknesses.

2. Political economy as a subfield incorporates both substantive and analytical approaches.
   a. Describe no less than 3 works that characterize the substantive approach (that is, show arguments, contributions, and weaknesses (if any)) and explain how they typify the substantive consideration of political economy.
   b. Also describe no less than 3 pieces of work that use political economy as an analytical framework (show arguments, contributions, and weaknesses (if any)) and explain how they typify using political economy as an analytical approach.
Social Politics

1. Increasingly civil conflicts are being explained as information failures. To what extent is this true? Are there instances of relatively complete information in evolving civil conflicts?

2. How does the form of state repression affect the nature of protest mobilization?