Comparative Politics Preliminary Exam
Fall 2000

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 sub-fields and areas of comparative politics. Good Luck!

Part I:

1. Review the concept of positivism in the social sciences, taking care to cover its main elements and to discuss the versions put forth by a couple of key political scientists. Then go on to critically reflect upon these in relation to criticisms of positivism. Discuss two alternatives to positivism that you think are important to the field. Finally, make a clear defense for the methodology you find most compelling.

2. Do you think that the quantitative-versus-qualitative methods debate has largely become obsolete within the field of comparative politics? If so, what accounts for the change? If not, why do you think this schism still exists?

3. In the most recent issue of APSA-CP, the newsletter of the comparative politics section of the APSA, president Michael Wallerstein begins his contribution with the statement that “Comparative politics is under assault.” Seven years earlier, then-president David Laitin had started his incoming letter in the same publication with the claim that “A specter is haunting comparative politics.” Why so much angst on the part of senior scholars in the field? In what sense might the field be considered to be “under assault,” and what is likely to be the evolution of the field given the nature of its empirical scope and the issues that have shaped it in the past, as well as the developments that seem to be pushing it in new directions? What will comparative politics look like ten years from now?

Part II:

1. The role of the state is regarded as important towards economic growth. Yet evidence of state success seems limited. Discuss the major theories regarding the role of the state, show if and how they predict economic success or failure, discuss the empirical evidence for these theories and explain why they support or fail to support them.

2. What is nationalism and why should comparativists care about it?

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 “liberlized 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? Your answer should draw on examples from at least two different world regions.
Part III:

1. Is there any evidence that mass publics in newly-democratizing countries are any more or less tolerant than mass publics in the advanced industrialized societies? Pick any region of the world and discuss what recent work tells us about political tolerance in that region and its implications for democratic government.

2. Identify the five most significant works (books or major articles) published in the past three 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 in 1995?

3. Explore the political problem of corruption in any region of the world. How does it arise? What are its effects on politics? How can it be eradicated?