Comparative Politics Preliminary Exam
Spring 2001

Instructions:
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: Methodology, Bibliography, and General Theory
1. Several years ago, Green and Shapiro (1995) argued that rational choice theory has failed, both because its practitioners were largely disinterested in real world applications and, when they actually got around to empirical testing, their theories were usually disconfirmed. Examining the ways in which rational choice theory has been used within the field of comparative politics in recent years, do you think that Green and Shapiro have been proven right or wrong?

2. Many comparativists strive to develop theory that can be applied to many countries and contexts. They disagree about how they ought to go about it. Some argue that it is important to begin with a general theory and apply it to one or more countries, while others study one or more countries and attempt to create a theory on the basis of their observations. There have been successes in each approach. Describe one or two of the most notable successes for each strategy. Then outline a set of criteria that you might use to decide whether a particular research project should be pursued through one avenue or the other.

3. Identify the most significant book or major article published in the past decade that deals with some aspect of comparative politics. Explain why you have chosen this particular piece, framing the discussion in terms of important theoretical or empirical debates. What do we know now (or understand differently) about comparative politics as a result of this work and subsequent research building on it that we didn't know or understand in 1990?

Part II: Comparison and Mid-Range Theory
1. What is ethnicity and why should comparativists care about it?

2. Many theories of political behavior do not have country-specific aspects, so it seems like it ought to be easy to apply them in a variety of contexts. Some scholars argue, however, that we still seem to have a great deal of difficulty in testing specific hypothesis in cross-country studies. Do you agree? If so, what factors do you suppose frustrate the effort to develop a "unified behavior theory" and empirically verify it? If you don't agree, explain why, and suggest an outline of the elements that you think can contribute to success of these efforts. Provide ample references to the literature to justify your claims.

3. The role of the state is regarded as important towards economic growth. Yet evidence of successful state involvement 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.

Part III: Region- or Event-Specific Knowledge
1. Can theories of collective action be strengthened through examinations of political ideology? After a review of the relevant literature, support your position in relation to a specific social movement or revolution.

2. In some small states, such as the Philippines, domestic politics occurs within a complicated context imposed by the international system and/or specific foreign interests and powers. One might argue that a study of domestic politics in these small countries is futile unless it takes into account these extranational influences. Do you agree? Why or why not? Must all political scientists in these small states study international affairs? You can cite studies of any states you care to, but please keep your attention on the question that we have asked.

3. Despite an increasingly sophisticated literature on institutional design, a substantial number of new democracies have faltered in recent years. Where did they go wrong? Did they fail to follow the findings of the institutional design literature, or does the literature itself produce bad advice? Or is the failure of new democracies due to other factors which overwhelm the influence of institutional design? Discuss these issues with respect to at least two countries.