

**Comprehensive Exam**  
Fall 2015  
Comparative Politics  
Morning Session  
Department of International Affairs

Please answer one of the following questions:

1. “The primary justification for conducting cross-national comparative research is to develop universal generalizations about political institutions, processes, and behavior. However, it is not possible to develop universal generalizations about politics that are valid across space and time. Therefore, the “science” of cross-national comparative research will always be weak and unsatisfying, and researchers would accomplish much more if they were to turn their attention to the study of particular, timely questions in a country or region of special interest.”

To what extent, and in what specific ways, do you agree or disagree with the above statement?

2. Compare and contrast “culturalist” and “rational choice” explanations as central approaches to comparative politics. Describe in detail the degree to which you think they are different or similar by first clearly describing the central claims they make (by referencing the most important authors in both arenas) and then focusing on their differences or similarities, if any. Do you believe that, depending on the substance of one’s research, one approach is preferable over the other, or do you believe that such a claim is contradictory? Provide an example where the findings from research on a similar topic, but conducted using the different approaches, diverge. Do you think that these differences are driven by the use of the different approaches? Why or why not?

**Comprehensive Exam**  
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Afternoon Session  
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Answer two of the following questions, but no more than one from each area:

Developed Countries

1. Across developed countries, governments are involved in the economy to varying degrees and manage the economy in different ways. How do theories of political economy explain the existence, amount, and method of government involvement of the economy? Be sure to reference specific authors and countries in your answer.
2. Some authors argue that political parties are vote and seat maximizers. Identify at least two pivotal works in this tradition and discuss their reasoning. Other authors have argued against the assumption that parties' sole objective is to maximize votes and seats. Identify at least two pivotal works in this tradition and discuss their reasoning. Which perspective do you find most convincing? Why?
3. Claims that the European welfare state will eventually lose competitiveness compared to more "laissez faire" systems have been heard for more than three decades. Yet, European welfare states continue to be listed at the top of statistics such as the Global Competitiveness Index published by the World Economic Forum. It appears that such systems have managed to square the circle of producing high levels of social equality while maintaining economic competitiveness. With reference to the comparative politics literature, what explanations can you offer as a response?

Developing Countries

1. Some argue that the recent economic success of China establishes the importance of strong central leadership in the promotion of robust economic growth. To what extent does authoritarian government contribute to economic growth? Is the Chinese model sustainable in the long term? Could it work in other countries? In your answer, be sure to compare China with at least one other country or region.
2. New democracies have had varying experiences with democratic consolidation. Some argue that democracies which experienced problems with consolidation adopted poorly designed constitutions. Others argue that consolidation problems are a result of deep social and cultural issues that could not be resolved with constitutional engineering. Which point of view do you think is correct? Discuss your answer with reference to published research and examples from at least two countries. For the purposes of this question, place yourself firmly in one camp and avoid an "it's a little bit of both" answer.
3. Over fifty years later, scholars continue to debate the merits of modernization theory. How have scholars characterized the relationship between economic development and democracy, and where do you stand on this issue? Does economic growth lead to

democratization, does it inhibit it, or are the two variables only weakly related? Does this relationship hold across all countries or is it conditional on other variables? In your answer, be sure to define what you mean by economic development and democracy and to include references to the extant literature.