

Comprehensive Exam Questions

Spring 2016
Comparative Politics
Department of International Affairs

Morning Session

Please answer one of the following questions:

1. Some claim that, because rational choice theory was imported from economics, it embodies assumptions that cannot be applied to comparative politics. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples from at least two separate subfields of comparative politics.
2. For each of the past four decades (the 70s, 80s, 90s, and 00s), identify the most important article or book published in comparative politics. In terms of the promulgation of knowledge, why is each of these articles particularly important? In addition, how did each article help to shape the state of research in the field?

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Afternoon Session

Please answer two of the following questions, one from each area:

Developed Countries

1. A core tenet of some democratic theorists is that democracy leads to improved government performance, in areas such as the provision of public goods. Cite the recent scholarly work that attempts to give empirical rigor to this theory. What are some of the specific outcomes which appear to be sensitive to regime type, democratic competition, transparency, or other aspects of democracy? What do you believe are the important outstanding questions in this subfield?
2. In recent years, the state has been challenged by a number of developments, including neoliberal ideas, financial internationalization, technological change and regional integration. How, if at all, has state intervention in developed societies changed in response to these challenges? Do we observe more state, less state or a different kind of state? Are these trends universal or is there significant cross-national variation? If you argue that state intervention has changed, be sure to specify the most important causes.

Developing Countries

1. Since 2011, democratic uprisings have toppled several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa region. Yet the Chinese authoritarian regime has remained resilient. Compare the Arab Spring and the Chinese case, how would you explain the different outcomes? Draw on studies on democratization and authoritarian resilience and reflect the lessons that can be learned from the Arab Spring.
2. Theories about the link between civil society and democracy have argued that a robust civil society generates social capital, trust, habits, and norms conducive to effective democratic collective action. In this way, in the words of Robert Putnam, civil society “makes democracy work.” But such theories were originally developed in the context of Western democracies. What are the challenges in applying these theories to non-Western, non-democratic countries? Are robust civil societies also conducive to processes of democratization? Under what conditions can a strong civil society weaken, rather than strengthen, democracy and democratization?