

Comprehensive Exam Questions

Fall 2014

Comparative Politics

Department of International Affairs

Morning Session:

Please answer one of the following two 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. What would you characterize as the most important theoretical or empirical contribution in comparative politics in the last decade? Why? Defend your answer with reference to the historical and recent development of the field. In explaining the strengths of this contribution, discuss any weaknesses and opportunities for further research.

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Afternoon Session

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

Developed Countries

1. Research on political behavior across the developed world generally ascribes outcomes (turnout and participation, vote choice, strategic behavior, etc.) to factors intrinsic to the individual, including ideology, partisanship, and several demographic factors. To what extent are such outcomes also dependent on the context to which an individual is subject, such as electoral institutions, the party system, or the competitiveness of the election? Is there any evidence that individual-level and contextual factors work in tandem to condition political behavior?
2. Advanced industrial democracies have provided social welfare benefits to citizens in different ways to different extents. How do welfare states vary and what factors are relevant in predicting this variation? What kind of problems each type of those welfare states face? Cite studies and specific examples to support your answer.

Developing Countries

1. Social media played an important role in Arab Spring. Citizens in China and other authoritarian regimes have also utilized the internet to expand the boundaries of social and political resistance. Do you think that the rise of new social media and digital activism calls into question our thinking about social movements in authoritarian regimes? Explain with examples and relevant studies.
2. The literature on economic development is divided into camps. Developmental statisticians prioritize active intervention in range of domains, from industrial policy to financial markets and macroeconomic management. Proponents of the Washington consensus, by contrast, seek to limit state intervention to a narrowly defined, often pro-competitive, set of functions such as property rights and rule of law. How would you resolve this debate? What is the most effective way to promote economic growth in the developing world? Support your answer by comparing developments in at least two countries.