

**Morning Session  
Comprehensive Exam**

Spring 2017  
Comparative Politics  
Department of International Affairs

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. What would you characterize as the most important theoretical or empirical contribution in comparative politics in the last two decades? 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.

**Afternoon Session  
Comprehensive Exam**

Spring 2017  
Comparative Politics  
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Please answer two of the following questions, one from each area:

**Developed Countries**

1. 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?
2. The 1980s and 1990s were decades of globalization and welfare state retrenchment. The received wisdom, was that these two phenomena were causally related, that is, that globalization was the main cause of welfare state retrenchment. Discuss this proposition. In your answer, you will need to define the terms, globalization and retrenchment, and assess the magnitude of change of each. To the extent that you question the received wisdom on the effects of globalization, outline alternative sources of welfare state retrenchment, or more broadly, welfare state change.
3. Claims that the European economic model will eventually lose competitiveness compared to more "laissez faire" systems have been heard for more than three decades. Yet, European economies 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. Students examining the roots of political violence have focused on population characteristics (such as ethnic and class differences, among others), regime characteristics (such as regime type or particular institutions), external shocks (such as interstate war or global economic crises), and other factors. What do we know about the causes of civil upheaval? What questions remain? What are some promising avenues for future research?
2. Why do governments choose to violate (or merely fail to protect) the human rights of their citizens? Which country-level attributes and institutions promote better enjoyment of human rights by a state's citizenry? Why?
3. 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?