

Study Guide
Comprehensive Exam

Spring 2017
Comparative Politics
Department of International Affairs

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.

3. 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?

4. 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?

5. Identify one testable hypothesis you feel the existing comparative politics literature has not adequately addressed. Then:

a) state and discuss the hypothesis.

b) design a comparative research project to test your hypothesis using one of the following approaches:

- I. most similar systems design
- II. most different systems design
- III. statistical approach
- IV. a single-country case study

Discuss which particular country or countries you would analyze and why. Also, discuss why you picked a particular approach from i.-iv. above. Why did you choose this approach instead of the other three? In the process of doing this, you should discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of each approach, both in general and as applied to the testing of your specific hypothesis.