

**Comprehensive Exam**  
Spring 2014  
Comparative Politics  
Department of International Affairs

Morning Session:

Please answer one of the following questions:

1. 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 the 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 a well known example of each type of approach (one based on rational choice and the other on a culturalist perspective) and report on its findings. Do you think that the differences, if any, are driven by the different approaches? If yes/no, what are the implications?

2. 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.

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Comparative Politics, Afternoon Session:

Answer two of the following questions, but no more than one from each area

Developed Countries

1. Developed countries are characterized in part by the existence of a relatively stable, coherent and capacious state. Historically, however, this was not always the case. What theories have been proposed to explain state-building? Which theory or combination of theories is most compelling? Discuss what, if any, lessons this has for one of the following: (1) contemporary variation among developed states, (2) European integration or (3) state-building in developing or transitional economies.
2. In recent years, this capacious 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.
3. Some scholars regard political parties as the primary organization vehicle by which people control their rulers in developed democracies. Others suggest that other organizations such as interest groups (or social movements) have supplanted political parties. Discuss the overall role and importance of political parties in contemporary politics and how their role has changed over the course of the postwar period. Are these trends uniform, or do they vary by country and region?

Developing Countries

1. After debating the balance between market competition and state intervention for decades, many political economists have come to acknowledge that successful development is predicated on “good governance.” What is good governance and where does it come from? What variables or characteristics do and do not have a significant impact on good governance? Be sure to support your answer with concrete examples of good (and bad) governance at the national, sectoral or local level.
2. 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, define what you mean by economic development and democracy.
3. Most leading definitions and theories of political development are often criticized to be Western biased. Do you agree with this criticism? If you do, in what ways do those biased conceptions hinder scholarship and policymaking? If you do not, justify your answer.