

Comprehensive Exam
Spring 2019
Comparative Politics
School of Public and International Affairs
University of Georgia

Morning Questions

Instructions: answer one of the following questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. Make a case as to why a political culture approach in comparative politics can be applied, or not, to a large-N study. Could there be a middle ground where a political culture approach might be compatible with a large-N study? Where appropriate, cite the relevant literature.
2. Richard Rose made a memorable distinction between “splitters”, i.e. comparativists who know every historical detail of country, and “lumpers” i.e. people who seek generalizations across a large number of countries. In 1991, Richard Rose described it this way: “Whereas case studies may arrive at concepts and generalizations at the end of research, comparative analysis of more than one country requires the specification of concepts at the beginning in order to identify what is to be examined in different national contexts”.

There is a tension between comparativists who are sensitive to time and place of a particular country, its history and culture and those who seek to make generalizations across a number of different countries. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Provide a research question where you believe it is most adequately answered using a case study approach and a research question where you believe a large-N approach might be better suited and explain as to why you believe one approach is “superior” to the other.

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Afternoon Questions

Answer two of the following questions (make sure you answer all “sub-questions”). Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. One of the greatest challenges to European politics in the last half decade has been the influx of large number of immigrants and refugees mostly from the Middle East and North Africa, but also from Sub-Saharan countries. What precisely are the challenges that this large scale immigration allegedly represents? Different governments reacted quite differently to these challenges. What would explain these differences? Some argue that it fundamentally changed the character of European politics – do you agree or disagree, and 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 you will need to 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. 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) the current challenges developed countries face; or (3) state-building in developing or transitional economies.
4. It is well known that some of the predictions of Modernization theory, and its more contemporary variant, the Washington Consensus, have not come to pass. Provide an assessment of the successes and failures of Modernization theory. Why have some developing countries been more successful in overcoming developmental challenges while others have faltered?
5. What do we know about why democracy emerges and survives? Historically, economic conditions, including development generally and income inequality, have been viewed as important contributing factors to the creation and maintenance of representative government and other checks on state power. What theoretical reasons and empirical evidence do we have to support the claim that economic conditions are related to democratic transitions and survival? Which conditions are the most important in determining whether a country becomes and remains a democracy?
6. While social uprisings have toppled several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa region since 2011, other authoritarian regimes such as China remain resilient. Draw on studies relevant to regime transition, contentious politics, democratization, and enduring authoritarianism to explain why some authoritarian regimes are more resilient than others.