

Comparative Politics General Examination
Autumn 2009
Day 1

Directions. Answer four of the following questions, two each from parts A and B. Be sure to provide empirical evidence in support of your claims.

Important: In questions where a choice of theoretical arguments or body of literature is given to you, you may not use the same body of research that is discussed in any other question.

PART A: Please answer two of the following questions.

1. Some scholars have commented that there has been something of a return to society-centric theory in comparative politics (what some have called the 'new structuralism.')

That is, while not necessarily taking the state (and institutional analysis) back out of political science, there has been an effort to bring "society" (variously understood) back in. Is this a useful move, or is it likely to lead to the sort of alleged dead-ends that undermined an earlier wave of society-centric work, and helped to usher in the era of institutional analysis in the 1980s and 1990s?

In your answer consider the merits of recent society-centric work in light of its institutionalist competitors on any ONE of the following areas of research in comparative politics:

- a. regime formation;
- b. party system development;
- c. economic reform;
- d. political participation/social mobilization.

In your answer be sure to take a position as to: (1) the best way forward and why, (2) whether the new society-centric approaches avoid the alleged pitfalls of earlier efforts, (3) if and (if so) how such approaches might profitably be combined with institutional or other perspectives, and (4) what lacunae in institutional theories they fill (if any). Be sure to make your case with reference to specific theories backed by concrete empirical evidence.

2. Modernization theory is one of the classic theories of democratization. Does modernization theory offer a convincing explanation for differences in political regime type? In your answer, you should describe the main contours of the theory and discuss recent debates about its validity. Be sure to make clear your position: Is modernization theory (or a part of it) fundamentally correct—or should the entire paradigm be laid to rest? Why or why not?

3. Modern nation-states have widely varying levels of economic development. What are the causes of underdevelopment? Focus on causal variables in your explanations rather than battling paradigms in your answer.

4. It used to be conventional wisdom that democracy was inconceivable without political parties. More recently, however, a number of trends, including media-based election campaigning, partisan dealignment and political disaffection have undermined this consensus. Make arguments for and against the continued indispensability of parties for modern democracy, coming down on one side of the debate or the other.

PART B: Please answer two of the following questions.

5. Institutional research has been characterized as having the following core assumption: "Actors and their preferences are necessary but insufficient for understanding political outcomes; institutional structures, rules and even informal norms are also necessary components." Show whether and how this basic assumption aids us in understanding the operation of and outcomes produced by one of the following issues. Do so using empirical support from at least one country.

- a. Political party behavior in electoral competition
- b. Social violence
- c. Voting behavior
- d. Economic reform

6. In view of the recent wave of democratization in post-communist Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, far less attention has been paid in the past decade or so to authoritarianism. Apart from the use of coercion as an explanation, what factors help to account for authoritarian regimes' resilience? What factors contribute to the destabilization of authoritarian regimes?

7. All societies boast a wide array of social cleavages, including class, ethnicity, region, religion, identity etc. Why do some cleavages become politicized, while others do not? What does the literature in comparative politics have to say on this topic? What does it mean for a cleavage to become politicized? What does the literature say on this topic?

8. What is the state? What makes a state strong vis-à-vis the society/polity in which it is situated? Empirically, how can we tell if a state is in fact strong? And, finally (and most importantly), what are the causes of political development – that is, what drives this state-building process? Be sure to answer with clear reference to theory and concrete empirical support.