

Comparative Politics General Examination
Autumn 2011
Day 1

Directions: Answer four of the following questions, two each from parts A and B. Note that certain questions cannot be combined.

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. Also, be sure to provide empirical evidence in support of your claims.

PART A: Please answer **TWO** of the following questions. You may **NOT** respond to both questions #3 and #4.

- (1) Assess the state-of-the art in comparative political economy linking political institutions (e.g., democracy, presidentialism, federalism, consociationalism) to economic outcomes (e.g., growth, investment, human development, inflation, unemployment). What are the main lessons to be drawn from this literature for our understanding of political representation?
- (2) Examine the strengths and limitations of Down's rational choice theory, both in terms of voter and party behavior. What alternative models of vote choice and party behavior exist? Do you find them compelling? Why or why not?
- (3) Few, if any, political scientists anticipated the collapse of communist one-party systems. Twenty years or so later, few, if any political scientists anticipated the breakdown of (some) dictatorial regimes in the Arab world. Stathis Kalyvas argued that "the failure to anticipate the breakdown share(s) common causes: the absence of a theory of one-party systems or single (or hegemonic) party rule, the absence or misspecification of links between the major building blocks of the arguments put forth, and the analytical conflation of decay and breakdown."

Focus on one of these deficiencies and offer an argument grounded in both theory and empirics to advance our understanding of the likelihood of the end of authoritarian rule.

OR

- (4) 2011 has seen political turmoil rock many of the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. Some regimes collapsed, others endure. What factors does comparative politics suggest may affect the following:
 - a. Regimes that have not yet collapsed to end
 - b. Democratic governments replacing fallen dictatorial regimes
 - c. Long-term and stable democratic rule in these countries

PART B: Please answer **TWO** of the following questions. You may **NOT** respond to both questions #7 and #8.

- (5) ‘Causal inference’ plays an increasingly important role in political science. Discuss some of the ways in which social scientists attempt to establish causality with observational data. Discuss how some classic contributions fare relative to the gold standard(s) you identify. What do you think should be the role of causal inference in comparative politics? Which alternative goals do you see? Are there trade-offs?
- (6) Much of international and comparative political economy is characterized by the estimation of cross-national regression models. Most of the data used in such analyses represents estimated quantities. As such, these data embody measurement error.
- Explain when and why measurement error is problematic in a regression framework. In so doing, distinguish between measurement error of a dependent variable and independent variable.
 - Distinguish between random and systematic measurement error. Use examples. What can we say about the effects of each on estimates?
 - What can be done about measurement error? Assuming you had an estimate of the “noise” in an independent variable, what might you do to assess the potential effects it has on your results?
 - Discuss a substantive literature in Comparative Politics in which issues of measurement error have played an important role.
- (7) Country and area specialization was long a hallmark of scholars in the comparative politics field. Indeed, earlier attempts to develop “general” theories have typically been judged failures. However, some argue that area and country specialization has inhibited the development of the types of systematic theory that should be the goal of the “scientific” study of politics.
- Discuss the merits and drawbacks of area or country-specific research, and more general comparative cross-national research. What are good and bad examples of each?
 - In developing your answer, be sure to address not only what you think of specific studies, but also what you believe are appropriate goals for the field of comparative politics and for any specific research study.
 - In particular, consider examples that help us to explore the “carrying capacity” of concepts developed in the study of developing countries for advanced democracies, or conversely, the applicability of concepts employed to analyze advanced democracies in the study of developing countries.

OR

- (8) “There is no common ground between those who see institutions as historical products of societal development and those who treat them as the expression of rational choices by strategically acting individuals and organizations. To attempt to synthesize the two approaches obfuscates, rather than clarifies, explanation.”

Do you agree? In developing your answer, be sure to employ empirical examples and to discuss relevant literatures.