

**Comparative Politics  
Minor Exam**

**PART ONE: ANSWER ONE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

1. Arend Lijphart, and many others after him, have argued that the characteristic methodological problem of comparative politics research is “too few cases, too many variables.” Others, however, argue that this represents far too limited an understanding of the kinds of data and methodologies that are available to comparativists and that are appropriate for their research.
  - a. What do you think? Evaluate representative studies employing ‘small-n’ and ‘large-n’ types of data in comparative politics with respect to their strengths and limitations in regard to the goals of understanding political processes.
  - b. In doing so, you should also make clear what you think are the appropriate goals that comparative research should strive for.
  
2. The essence of the field of comparative politics is comparison. But there are many ways of designing the comparisons one will make to explore a question. Using significant examples of scholarly works that have employed these various comparative methods, discuss the merits and weaknesses of these methods, and explain whether certain methods are better suited to certain kinds of problems.

**PART TWO: ANSWER THREE OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. NOTE THAT YOU MAY NOT ANSWER BOTH QUESTIONS #1 AND #2. BE SURE TO PROVIDE ILLUSTRATIVE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS.**

1. The disciplinary boundaries between comparative politics and international relations are based on a clear distinction between domestic and international politics. Given an accelerating trend of globalization, some argue that such a distinction is no longer tenable. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
  
2. The interface between international political economy (IPE) and comparative politics has gained importance both for students of advanced industrial as well as developing countries. Analyze how scholars of IPE have influenced questions asked by comparativists working on developed and developing countries.
  
3. Are elections effective instruments of political accountability?

4. “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.” Discuss.

5. How should we think about ethnic (or other) identity? To what extent is identity a useful variable for explaining political phenomena? Discuss with reference to one or more substantive issues in comparative politics.

6. Political institutions became a major focus of research in the 1990s, at least partly in response to the complexity and varying transition trajectories followed by new democracies. Select a sample of democracies in Asia, Latin America, post-communist Europe and/or Africa, and analyze the impact of different institutional configurations (e.g., executive-legislative relations, electoral systems, and, where relevant, varying formulas for coping with conflict in multi-national societies such as consociationalism or federalism) on the degree of “success” of the democratization process – in terms of regime consolidation, institutional performance, the effective safeguarding of minority rights, and/or any other dimension of institutional performance you deem appropriate. Are any of your findings sufficiently consistent as to emerge as potential “law-like generalizations” that would apply to all new democracies? Is there evidence, on the other hand, of interaction effects, in which contextual factors or path dependent processes produce notably different outcomes in different countries?

6. Discuss the relationship between political democracy and economic development. In particular, what progress have we made towards sorting out the potentially endogenous relationship between the two concepts?

7. One of the ongoing debates within political science involves the relative merits of structural versus agent-centered theories. How does this debate relate to the substantive interests of comparative politics? Discuss with respect to one or more topics within comparative politics (other than one you have selected for any other question on this exam). In the context of this literature, what do you think has been the best resolution of the structure/agency dilemma? In your answer be sure to show why this is a good resolution by contrasting it with less successful alternatives.