Comparative Comprehensive Exam
January 2015

Instructions

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Part I: Core

Answer one of the questions below.

Current Canon:

What is "middle-range theory"? Are there alternatives to middle-range theory? Give examples from the applied literature of different approaches to theorizing. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?

Comparative Methods: In order to assess whether scientific progress is being made in comparative politics, it is necessary to specify the criteria by which progress may be assessed. What is or are the best ways to assess progress political science? According to which standards has progress taken place? According to which standards has little or no progress been made? Be sure to distinguish between progress as improvement and mere change as differences over time.

Part II. Cross-regional Theme: The State

“All around the world, it is the ability to control violence that explains success versus failure in building state strength.” Do you agree with this statement? Anchor your analysis with two world regions.
Part III Regional Analysis: Regimes

The military regimes in Brazil (1964-85) and Chile (1973-90) and the Fujimori regime in Peru (1990-2000) generated important authoritarian successor parties -- parties created by high level leaders of those authoritarian regimes, but that continued to be important contenders under democracy for a long time. Discuss why these regimes were able to generate relatively successful authoritarian successor parties and the positive and negative consequences of their relative success for democracy.

Part III: Regional Analysis: Political Conflict: (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo)

Dominant cross-national explanations of political violence in economics and political science suggest that poverty and state capacity are key explanatory factors of the outbreak of civil wars. In some of the most influential accounts, ethnicity has no explanatory role. How useful are these predictions to explain dynamics of conflict and peace in your three countries? In what ways would a close reading of these three countries identify important omissions and suggests corrections in the cross-national literature?

Part II: Cross-regional Theme: Political Conflict

Canonical studies in the cross-national literature on civil wars argue that state capacity reduces the probability of political violence. Yet a significant literature in repression studies shows that state policing and repression sometimes deter the outbreak of armed rebellions but others actually lead to the escalation of peaceful mobilization into violent rebellion, including civil war. How can we reconcile the macro findings of the cross-national literature with the micro arguments of the repression literature? Please discuss.

Part III. Regional Analysis: Regime Change: Egypt, Turkey and Algeria

Discuss similarities and differences among the political regimes of Turkey, Egypt, and Algeria. On balance, which is the most democratic and which is the most authoritarian? Justify your summary judgment. What are the criteria scholars should use to assess whether one country is more or less democratic than others?

Part III: Regional Analysis: Institutions

"Comparativists are sometimes tempted to study political institutions in a static, ahistorical fashion. The problem with this approach is that these institutions have histories. If we ignore this fact, we can neither understand a specific state's parties nor engage in fruitful comparison of them in different states."
Assess the significance of the above claim by considering the evolution of a prominent political institution of your choice in your countries of interest (Germany, Italy, France).

Part III: Regional Analysis: Regimes

In the 1980s, Guatemala and El Salvador, along with Peru, had the most severe violent internal conflict of any countries in Latin America. Colombia probably ranked fourth on this undesirable list--though its severe internal conflict has continued to the present (although it appears that it could finally be on the verge of resolution).

Based on the examples of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia, discuss whether a recent (or even current in the Colombian case) history of severe violent internal conflict generates some distinctive dilemmas in the process of attempting to build democracy. Does this history create some distinctive challenges compared to other Latin American countries that share with these three countries past histories of authoritarianism, social exclusion, and economic inequality? If so, what are the challenges created by a recent history of violent internal conflict? How fully have Guatemala and El Salvador addressed the challenges that stem specifically from this history of violence?

(Note: Unlike El Salvador and Guatemala, Colombia underwent a transition to a competitive regime in 1958--but in terms of social exclusion and economic inequality, it is not radically different from the other two).

Part III: Regional Analysis: Regimes

Discuss similarities and differences among the political regimes of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. On balance, which is the most democratic and which is the most authoritarian? Justify your summary judgment. What are the criteria scholars should use to assess whether one country is more or less democratic than others?

Part III: Regional Analysis: Political Conflict (Liberia, Uganda and Rwanda)

Dominant cross-national explanations of political violence in economics and political science suggest that poverty and state capacity are key explanatory factors of the outbreak of civil wars. In some of the most influential accounts, ethnicity has no explanatory role. How useful are these predictions to explain dynamics of conflict and peace in your three countries? In what ways would a close reading of these three countries identify important omissions and suggests corrections in the cross-national literature?
Comprehensive Examination in Comparative Politics
September 2014

Instructions

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Core

Answer one of the questions below.

A. Our field of comparative politics studies the domestic politics of individual countries, yet we know that influences from outside a given country can sometimes be the most important ones. What have been the most influential ways for analyzing international influences on domestic politics? Which major theories in comparative politics have done a good job incorporating international factors, and which have not?

B. Take a "classic of comparative historical research" (e.g., Skocpol, Moore, Lijhardt, Collier and Collier, Linz or another influential work) and analyze the case selection strategy of that book. For example, what was the explicit or implicit rational for choosing cases? Are there weaknesses in the selection strategy? Are there cases or kinds of cases which should have been included? (This is not an exhaustive list of things to consider. Depending on the work other questions might be relevant.)
Cross-Regional

Political Conflict: The cross-national quantitative literature on civil war relies on structural (GDP per capita or income inequality) and time-invariant (mountainous terrain) factors to account for the outbreak of domestic wars. Scholars have noted the paradox of explaining a dynamic process – the decision to go to war – with structural/time-invariant factors. How could theories of social movements and state repression, which emphasize social and political processes, contribute to outline a more dynamic explanation of the onset of civil war? Please discuss.

Cross-Regional

Political Parties: Some scholars have argued that political parties are vote or seat maximizers. Identify at least one pivotal work in this tradition. What is the logic for making what is obviously a simplifying assumption? Other scholars have argued against the assumption that parties’ sole objective is to maximize votes or seats. Identify some of these scholars and discuss the reasoning behind their arguments on this point.

Cross-Regional

Parties and Elections: Some scholars have argued that political parties are vote or seat maximizers. Identify at least one pivotal work in this tradition. What is the logic for making what is obviously a simplifying assumption? Other scholars have argued against the assumption that parties’ sole objective is to maximize votes or seats. Identify some of these scholars and discuss the reasoning behind their arguments on this point.

Area Studies

Answer one of the questions below.

A. What are the likely implications of the new government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is described by many as a Hindu nationalist party, for conflict and peace in South Asia? You can answer this question by concentrating on only one interstate or within-country conflict.

B. Does the fact that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have all had women as Prime Ministers reflect adequately the position of women in society? In your answer please discuss the cases of at least two of the three countries.
Institutions and Institutionalism in Latin America: Under authoritarian rule, Chile (Pinochet), Peru (Fujimori) and Mexico (different presidents) had political systems with strong executives and weak checks and balances to executive power. Did presidents continue to have such unlimited power under democracy? Please discuss the different trajectories of presidential power in post-authoritarian Chile, Peru and Mexico and account for differences across countries.

Identity, Ethnicity, Culture and Religion: How can we account for the fact that religious institutions exercise such different levels of impact on contemporary democratic politics? Pick a single controversial issue and use it to answer this question from a comparative perspective in the cases of the UK, US, and Germany.

Ethnicity, Identity, Culture and Religion: “Diversity in ethnic, cultural and religious identities is the root cause of the rocky roads to democratization in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.” Comment on this statement.

South Africa has a single-party dominant system. Since 1994, only one political party in South Africa has formed governments. Of course, that party is the Africa National Congress [ANC]. In Kenya, no party has dominated the presidency or the parliament since the return multiparty elections there in 1992. Despite the fact that Kenya has had more party turnover in government/the presidency than South Africa, most observers and organizations consider South Africa to be more democratic than Kenya. Why might observers consider South Africa to be more democratic than Kenya? How can a country, ruled by only one party for over 20 years, be considered more democratic than a country where several parties have come into and gone out of power? What are the conditions that may explain why democratic institutions are more 'developed' in South Africa than in Kenya?
I. Question #1: (for all three students).

Please Respond to either #1 or #2

1. What are the theoretical frameworks explaining modernization? How would these theories help us characterize the relationship between economic development and democracy in modernizing countries? To what extent can previous paths to democracy help explain the different paths that are being taken in countries in the contemporary period?

2. In the “Notre Dame Comparative Politics Canon,” only 6 of 18 required readings are from the 2000s forward. (In contrast, the Methods Reading List has only 3 total works published before 2000.) Do you think that the Notre Dame Comparative Politics Canon should be updated? If so, please recommend 3 post-2000 publications for inclusion on the canon. Justify why they should be included. If not, explain why the existing works are superior to literature that has been produced more recently with at least 3 examples.

II. Question #2:

What does the so-called East Asian model of development imply for the general debates on: (1) the role of the state and markets in development; (2) trade policy for development; (3) the implications of democracy for development; and (4) the importance of human development? Evaluate briefly the extent to which these implications are relevant for low income countries of today.

Imagine that you could moderate a debate between Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, on one side; and Anthony Downs, on the other. The purpose of the debate is to determine which book—Party Systems and Voter Alignments or An Economic Theory of Democracy—is more useful for understanding the current state of party systems outside Western Europe. Further imagine that all three authors are alive and in their prime. You may ask them to address any questions you like in order to ascertain their areas of agreement and disagreement. Write a transcript of this debate, including the questions you put to them.

Aviner Greif claims that institutions can be studies as equilibria or as rules of the game. Use an empirical example to compare and explain the advantages of one approach over the other. Do any of these approaches alleviate some of the problems of studying institutions identified by historical institutionalists?
III. Question #3:

“It is argued that dictatorship is better at promoting economic growth and so supporting dictatorship today could be conducive to democratization in the future. Although general theorists such as Przeworski consider such a view ‘dubious,’ scholars of East Asia have demonstrated its validity.” Comment on this statement.

“Institutions Matter.” Using electoral institutions as examples, evaluate this statement by specifying the conditions when electoral institutions matter most and the conditions why they matter less than one would think. Use specific examples from the cases of Brazil, Venezuela and Bolivia. Identify a case where the choice of electoral institutions affected the fundamental trajectory of a state’s political and economic development.

Scholars of PostCommunist Europe have identified a phenomenon they call the "Regime Divide" that explains much of elite conflict, particularly in the early transition years. Building on the existing literature as well as your own insights, explain what the regime divide is. Can you suggest reasons why in some countries this divide has persisted longer than in others? You are encouraged to use examples from the region to illustrate your argument.
Part I: Core (Please respond to the following question.)

"King, Keohane, and Verba's Designing Social Inquiry attempted to establish a common set of methodological standards that would apply to both quantitative and qualitative research. A vigorous debate ensued. What conclusions do you draw from this debate? Can quantitative and qualitative research be evaluated by the same standards?"

Part II: Cross Regional (Please respond to the following question.)

Some theories of protest make no distinction between the peaceful or violent nature of the activities. They try to explain mobilization, whether that mobilization is violent or nonviolent. Other theories of protest are instead concerned exclusively with explaining violent mobilization or exclusively with peaceful political mobilization. Still other theories distinguish between peaceful and violent protest and focus on the factors that make one type evolve into another. In your view, should we seek to explain violent and nonviolent protest with the same variables and hypotheses? Are some variables useful for explaining mobilization, whether violent or nonviolent, while other variables are useful for explaining only one or the other? Which variables or hypotheses do you think are most convincing?

Support your answer with empirical examples from at least three different social movements, protests, or revolutions (or situations that were ripe for protest where protest nevertheless did not materialize). Be sure to provide clear definitions of all terms and concepts.

Part III: Area Studies (Please respond to the following question.)

“Ethnic and religious conflicts are as prevalent in China as in India and Pakistan. The only difference is that a stronger Chinese state has managed to repress identity expressions by minorities.” Comment on this statement.
Part I: Core (Please respond to one of the following questions.)

Question 1:

There is a lot of talk about “multimethod” research in comparative politics these days. However, at one extreme, some interpret this as a recommendation that everyone should use every major approach—quantitative, qualitative, and rational choice. At the other extreme, others suggest that researchers should continue to specialize in one of these approaches but make more of an effort to read other kinds of scholarship. Where do you stand? What would be the risks and potential benefits of going toward either extreme? Support your answer with at least four examples taken from the core or methods reading list that illustrate the pitfalls and benefits of multimethod research.

Question 2:

Seminal works are labeled as such because they introduce new ideas that influence future research. Sometimes the future research builds on insights that largely prove correct; other times the future research debunks the earlier findings. Discuss three seminal works in comparative politics, their initial contributions to knowledge, and the research they have inspired. (Cite specific work.) Which insights have endured until today, and which insights have largely proven wrong? In your opinion, are these works worthy of the attention they receive? Why or why not? What are the key unanswered questions remaining for the research agenda inspired by each work?

Part II: Cross Regional (Please respond to the following question.)

You are a new assistant professor at a good university and you have been assigned to teach a graduate class for the Fall 2014 semester: “Regimes and Regime Change.” Please provide a syllabus for the course including (1) a rationale for the course; (2) the most important reading assignments, in appropriate weekly sequence; and (3) some comments about why and how these assignments serve the objectives of the course.

Part III: Area Studies (Please respond to the appropriate question.)

Question A:

How should the similarities and differences among the political economies of Germany, France, and the UK be understood? As “varieties of capitalism” (CME vs. LME)? Are other interpretive schemes needed? In what ways, if any, have the similarities and differences you identify
influenced the ways that these countries have responded to the financial crisis over the past five years?

*Question B:*

“East Asian states share the same Confucian civilization but have different regime types. Culture clearly plays little role in explaining regime types, regime stability or regime change in East Asia.” Discuss this statement.
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When answering each part of the comp, students are advised to consult the relevant grading standards for that part. The standards are available at http://politicalscience.nd.edu/assets/89297/compgradingstandards.pdf.

Part I: Core
Answer one of the two questions in this section.

A. Michael Coppedge has made the argument that an ideal comparative theory ought to be generalizable, thick, and integrated. Explain how scholars relying on field research methods can aspire to satisfy these standards. What specific challenges do they face, that scholars using formal methods, quantitative methods, or historical institutionalism do not, and how can they overcome them?

B. Consider the relationship between comparative politics and a neighboring discipline (such as economics, sociology, psychology, or history). What role has the selected discipline played in the development of our field? You should consider research questions, concepts, theories, research methods, and data or other information used in comparative politics. Given your analysis of the debts owed to this other discipline, what contributions derived from works in comparative politics that were not already present in the other discipline? Again, you should consider research questions, concepts, theories, research methods, and data or other information. Be sure to discuss at least three specific works from the canon list to illustrate your argument.

Part II: Cross-regional
In this section, please answer the question below. (There is no choice.)
A. Regimes and Regime Change
The democratization literature often makes reference to “waves” of democratization, especially the Third Wave. Of the dozens of hypotheses about democratization, which have the greatest potential to account for its wave-like nature? Which hypotheses, if any, would lead you to doubt the existence of waves of democratization? Which hypotheses, if any, fail to address waves? Refer to at least nine hypotheses in your answer.

Part III: Area Studies
In this section, please answer the question below. (There is no choice.)

A. Political Conflict in Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay)
Scholars of social movements and social protest in the developing world typically “apply” social movement theories produced in Western Europe and the United States to explain dynamics of protest in their own countries. If we test, rather than apply theory, do canonical explanations of social movements and social protest find strong support in Latin America? Please discuss Latin America’s authoritarian period and the post-authoritarian era. While we are expecting you to focus on the three countries of your choice, you may also use the cross-national quantitative literature on social protest in Latin America.