

## Comparative Politics Preliminary Exam, Fall exam 2010

Introduction: Prelims are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to prelim questions can illustrate critical points with examples from single or many countries; there is no orthodoxy in favor of one or the other. But: always remember that the main function of case material (regardless of how many countries it involves) is to buttress theoretical arguments based on the general literature. Accordingly, an essay conveys that a student 1) is well-versed in the key literature and 2) able to knowledgeably summarize and support the theories in this literature using the cases employed in the literature and/or a case(s) of their own choosing.

Answers for each question should be no more than 2500 words. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your exam. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

**All students will answer one question from section I.**

Then, for sections II-V, students have a choice between options A and B. Clearly indicate at the top of the first page of your exam which option you select.

**Option A:** You will select two questions as they are written from sections, II, III, and IV. The questions cannot be from the same section. Write an essay on each of the two questions.

**Option B:** Answer one of the questions in sections II-IV as written. In your second essay in option B, you select Section V, which asks you to relate your personal research area to one field as defined in sections II, III, or IV. Note that the two essays in option B may not relate to the same section. For example, a student might relate their research to the field of comparative political behavior and social politics (Section IV) for the essay pertaining to Section V, and then the student would answer one question as written from Sections II or III. The purpose of this section is that you demonstrate a strong command of the research literature in your area of expertise *and* the chosen section.

**Section I: Theory/Methods Questions (answer one of the following two questions).**

1. Appropriate research design takes into account issues of validity. Scholars who employ qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate data are confronted differently by these challenges. Compose an essay that:
  - a) defines the concepts of validity;
  - b) outlines the specific challenges faced by researchers employing qualitative approaches;
  - c) outlines the specific challenges faced by researchers employing quantitative approaches;
  - d) discusses at least one example each of qualitative and quantitative research that meets, or fails to meet, these challenges.
2. An oft-stated objection to positivism in the social sciences is that it has proved incapable of yielding law-like predictions, akin to those found in the hard sciences. How compelling an indictment is this compared to some of the other criticisms? Do these criticisms suggest a need to rethink the widespread commitment to positivism among political scientists? Why or why not? Use examples

from a specific research topic in comparative politics to illustrate your argument, whatever your response to this issue.

3. Some have argued that comparative politics research is neither very comparative nor very theoretical. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Provide examples from recent research within the subfield to support your position.

## **Section II Comparative Institutions and Government**

4. Accountability is featured in many definitions of democracy, and scholars of political institutions have increasingly investigated mechanisms to hold officials accountable for their actions. Compose an essay that:
  - a) Defines the concept of accountability;
  - b) Discusses electoral and non-electoral accountability tools;
  - c) Discusses the findings of at least three important publications related to accountability (and indicates why these works are important).
5. The study of institutions within comparative politics is generally dominated by rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism. Describe the assumptions and methods of these two approaches. Do you think the two approaches are compatible with each other or are they mutually exclusive? Provide support for your position via examples from a research program within comparative politics.

## **Section III: Political Economy**

6. Using no fewer than 6 studies, clarify the following:
  - a) what characterizes these studies as state-led political-economy models, that is, what is the theory and assumptions?
  - b) within state-led political economy studies, what additional distinctions/variations are made, that is, are there different approaches, variations of theory, assumptions, etc.?
  - c) what are the contributions of state-led political economy studies?
  - d) what are the weaknesses?
  - e) given the contributions and weaknesses, what is the direction for future research?

In your answer, be sure to address what is political economy.

7. You are invited to a university to give a presentation on political economy. Using no fewer than 6 studies in political economy,
  - a) explain how these studies are important, representative works of the sub-field
  - b) explain how these studies show the relevance of political economy to comparative politics
  - c) explain the evolution of political economy as a subfield, clarifying major contributions and weaknesses as embodied or referred by these studies;
  - d) explain the direction of future research.

In your answer, be sure to address what is political economy.

#### **Section IV: Comparative Political Behavior and Social Politics**

8. That poor people generally do not mobilize is widely recognized within the protest and repression literature, even by the relative deprivation conjecture. How is this lack of mobilization explained by collective action theory? When poor people are mobilized, how is it accomplished?
9. Students of political parties in mature democracies have developed a huge literature that deals with various aspects of parties. A recurring theme in this field is to describe their characteristics, such as their ideological stances, organizational forms, and their presumed motivations. In your essay, discuss the extent to which this literature can be used to explain the character of parties in newer democracies around the world. (If you wish you may broaden the discussion to consider party-voter linkages, but only to the degree that it primarily contributes to an understanding of the qualities of parties.)

#### **Section V: Research Agenda in Comparative Politics**

Pick one of the subfields of comparative politics in Sections II-IV and write a coherently organized and analytically rich discussion of how your personal research agenda relates to that subfield. Moreover, this research essay may not relate to the same section as your second essay under option B.