

## **Comparative Politics Preliminary Exam, Spring 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 emphasizing a single country or many world regions. But keep in mind that the main function of country-specific material is to buttress arguments based on the general literature. Accordingly, a student should be 1) 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.

### **Section I: Theory/methods questions (answer one of the following three questions)**

1. Comparative politics scholars have long debated the relative merits of single case studies, comparative small-*n* studies, and statistical large-*n* studies for a theory of politics. First, consider the role of each of these methods in the generation of comparative theory, noting the strengths and weaknesses of single, small-*n* and large-*n* case studies in regard to theory building and theory testing. Second, is one method preferable to the others for either the building or the testing phase of comparative politics theory? Use specific examples from the comparative politics literature to support your arguments.
2. Scholars of comparative politics are often concerned with (1) estimating functional equivalence and (2) estimating concept formation and development of empirical indicators. Select one of these two, and provide three examples from the literature where authors have explicitly addressed the issue or have failed to take the issue into account in their research design. What lessons can be drawn from these examples for scholars of comparative politics?
3. In a recent analysis of the two leading comparative politics journals, Gerardo Munck and Richard Snyder bemoan the prevalence of single-country studies. Noting that nearly half of the articles in these journals were single-country studies, they argue that, "Most comparativists do not attempt to provide generalizations of even moderate scope." Using examples from the subfield, explain whether you agree or disagree with this assessment.

### **Section II: Choose two of the following three topics (political institutions, social politics, and political economy) and answer one question from each**

#### **A. Political Institutions.**

1. Assume you have similar multiethnic societies, one with a history of ethnic conflict and another without a history of ethnic conflict, that have begun a transition process from authoritarian rule toward democracy. Recommend an institutional design for these societies, specifically focusing on the choice of the executive and legislature, and the relationship between the two. In the essay, explain why your institutional design recommendations differ (or do not differ) for these two societies.

2. There have been many discussions in comparative politics regarding the influence of inherited institutions on democratic transitions. What role, if any, do inherited institutions play in democratic transitions? Provide one example where you can identify the (positive or negative) role inherited institutions played in the transition process.

## **B. Social Politics**

1. What, if anything, can we learn from a case study of a specific revolution (you pick a specific example) that can help us understand the more general phenomenon of revolutions? What, if anything, can we learn from a cross-national study of revolutions that can illuminate the specific case under analysis? Is it possible to integrate both approaches? If yes, how? If no, why not?

2. In 1978, David Snyder challenged the protest and repression researchers in 4 ways: (1) develop more fine-grained time-series data; (2) link levels of analysis; (3) develop a logically complete theory; and (4) model and test theories in disaggregated methods. How well have scholars of comparative politics met these challenges?

## **C. Political Economy**

1. Using empirical evidence, discuss the political implications of resource-rich economies. Be sure to discuss the impact of resource-rich economies on democratic practices, revolutions and civil unrest, and on domestic economic development. Are there problems with the empirical research that has been done so far, and what are your suggestions for future research in this area?

2. Public spending is an oft-used policy instrument to stimulate the economy and is also the preferred tool in political business cycles. However, the success of public spending is less clear: for instance, Krause (2005), Draven (2000), and Alesina et al (1997) find no consistent effects on growth and unemployment in their studies. Explain:

- a. Should we reject the possibility that public spending affects macroeconomic outcomes? Explain why or why not.
- b. Cite and describe findings in three studies of economic voting. Are these studies consistent in their findings with the findings cited here?
- c. If there is consistency, discuss what it means for future political-economy studies. If there is inconsistency, discuss what it means for future studies political-economy studies.
- d. In your answer, be sure to address what is political economy.