

## **Comparative Politics Preliminary Exam, Fall 2009**

**Introduction:** Prelims are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to prelim questions 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.

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

1. If the proponents of a particular theory in comparative politics agree that it is invalid, should that theory nonetheless continue to be used by scholars? If we created a repository of “failed theories” in comparative politics, what theory might you put in that repository and why?
2. Scholars of comparative politics are often concerned with the concept of equivalence. After defining equivalence, provide three examples from the literature where authors have explicitly addressed the issue or have failed to take equivalence into account in their research designs. What lessons can be drawn from these examples for scholars of comparative politics?
3. Comparative politics research often draws upon core literature in American politics to gain theoretical insights, generate hypotheses, and construct analyses. In your essay, identify three published works in comparative politics that have drawn inspiration from American politics. Discuss if/how researchers have modified the assumptions or approaches in American politics as they apply these ideas outside the original context. Assess how well the authors have addressed issues of conceptual stretching.

### **Section II: Choose two of the following three topics (Political Institutions, Social Politics, and Political Economy) and answer one question from each topic.**

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

1. All democratic and many authoritarian states hold elections. However, the design of election rules, their implementation during campaigns, and voting outcomes differ across regime types. In your essay:
  - a) discuss the purpose of elections in democratic and authoritarian societies;
  - b) identify how differences in regime type may affect the translation of votes into seats;
  - c) provide an example of at least one election in a democracy and an authoritarian society to illustrate your points.

2. In 1999, Barbara Geddes wrote “What do we know about democratization after twenty years?” Ten years later, what can we say about democratization in 2009? Has the literature addressed issues such as the rise of illiberal democracies and problems associated with democratic consolidation? If so, what are the strengths and weakness in this current literature (within the last ten years)?

### **B. Social Politics**

1. Compare and contrast how collective action theory and mobilization theory may each work in the cases of: (1)civil war; and (2)terror.
  
2. Given the rise of domestic civil conflict in the last 20 years, many countries are developing new strategies for building sustainable peace and fostering reconciliation, from criminal tribunals to truth commissions to indigenous ceremonies to traditional justice systems. Evaluate several of these contrasting strategies using specific cases. The cases may be from one region or several regions. Pay particular attention to the role of and impact on social movements and civil society in these systems.

### **C. Political Economy**

1. Political economy as a subfield incorporates both substantive and analytical approaches.
  - a. Describe no less than four works that characterize the substantive approach (that is, show arguments, contributions, and weaknesses (if any)) and explain how they typify the substantive consideration of political economy.
  
  - b. Also describe no less than four pieces of work that use political economy as an analytical framework (show arguments, contributions, and weaknesses (if any)) and explain how they typify using political economy as an analytical approach. Based on your selection, clarify if the distinction between substantive and analytical approaches is important.
  
2. What is political economy? Describe four works on political economy that captures your depiction of political economy. Also, describe four political economy studies on government policies. Using these four works, identify and explain three important considerations that political economy has brought into the study of policymaking.