

## Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination, Fall 2011

Introduction: Preliminary examinations are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to preliminary examination 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 the 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 and/or a case or cases of their own choosing.

Answers for each question should be no more than 2,500 words. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your examination. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

**All students will answer one question from section 1.**

**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 examination 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 her or his research to the field of comparative political behavior and social politics (Section IV) for the essay pertaining to Section V, and then each student should 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. Culture and rationality have typically been posited as rival paradigms in comparative politics research. Is this notion of paradigmatic rivalry appropriate? Address this question via an examination of a single research topic in comparative politics: does the research in this area buttress or undermine claims that culture and rationality are rival approaches.

2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of single case, small-N and large-N studies in comparative politics research in terms of theory building and theory testing. In your answer, be sure to refer to both classics and recent publications to support your arguments about the merits of each.

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

1. Based on empirical evidence in the literature, what type of political system would you recommend for a country undergoing a transition from a personal dictatorship to democracy that has had significant ethnic and regional divisions? Please discuss the strengths and weaknesses of presidential, parliamentary or semi-presidential systems.
2. There has been extensive research regarding how the structure of electoral systems and quotas can influence the participation of underrepresented groups in legislatures. What have we learned from this literature? What questions remain?

### **Section III: Political Economy**

1. A large literature describes the effects of regime type on economic development. Cite five or six studies in this milieu (that is, describe their arguments, findings, weaknesses), identify and explain some of the most important contributions of regime type studies, and discuss how current research into political economy builds upon these contributions or addresses their weaknesses.
2. What are the essential arguments of state-led political-economy models? Describe no less than four studies of state-led political-economy models, noting their approach, assumptions, contributions, and weaknesses (if any). Describe two alternative approaches to state-led political-economy models and clarify how they treat the state. Include in your discussion whether these alternative models how current research into political economy builds upon these contributions and address the weaknesses of state-led models.

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

1. West European party systems have undergone what is sometimes described as a fundamental transformation of the voter-party linkage. Some analysts even discuss the possibilities of a far-reaching realignment between parties and their constituencies. In your essay, discuss and evaluate the debate concerning the nature of the party-voter linkage. First, what are the social foundations of West European party systems? What, for example, provides the basis for European party systems according to such analysts as Lipset, Rokkan, Lijphart, or Rose? In a second step, describe the recent changes that have occurred since the early 1970s. In what ways, if at all, did the nature

of the voter-party linkage change? What are some of the main theoretical explanations for these developments? What factors might explain some of the crossnational variation of partisan realignments within the West European context? Finally, what do these developments imply for the validity of competing theoretical models of electoral behavior in advanced democracies (e.g., psychological approaches, spatial, directional, or cleavage-based models)?

2. Collective action theory, say from Mancur Olson's version, has developed several varying forms. What forms has the theory taken? Discuss whether collective action theory has been strengthened or weakened by these developments.

### **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.