

Comparative Preliminary Exam Spring 2009

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.

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

1.) Some scholars in comparative politics argue that there are no universal laws of human or institutional behavior especially in a cross-national or cross-cultural context. Do you agree with this statement? Please provide at least one empirical example to support your answer.

2.) Choose a prominent finding in comparative politics that recently has been challenged. Explain how important or unimportant this challenge has been. What does this finding and challenge tell us about the role of theory development in comparative politics?

3.) Many scholars have urged their colleagues to think more deeply and systematically about the relationship among subfields in political science. In your essay, discuss:

a) the theoretical and empirical arguments in favor of maintaining the distinction between comparative politics and the subfields in political science (i.e. international relations or American politics);

b) those literatures and calls for integration between comparative politics and subfields (i.e. international relations or American politics).

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.) Using theory and empirical evidence, discuss how important federalism is in decentralizing concentrated governmental power.

2.) Many states face the task of establishing a political system that protects the interests of under-represented and minority groups while creating a structure that is stable but not rigid. What institutional rules are best able to accomplish these goals? Provide examples that appear to have successfully met this challenge.

B. Social Politics:

- 1.) Has the notion of “new social movements” been useful in helping us understand democratic politics? Explain what a new social movement is and whether (and how) you think this concept has advanced our understanding of civil society in democratic/democratizing societies.
- 2.) Some contend that the process of mobilization is rational, while others hold that it is decidedly not rational. How might we decide which of either contentions is correct?

C. Political Economy:

- 1.) Discuss three studies that evaluate the effects of economics on politics. Also discuss three studies that evaluate the effects of politics on economics. Discuss if and how these studies fall under the study of political economy in comparative politics. In your answer, be sure to address what is political economy. Given the discussion, show the contribution of political economy to comparative politics as a discipline. How is political economy related to the real world?
- 2.) Culture has been used in political-economy studies to explain economic development. Using no less than five studies, discuss the evolution (or development) of culture as an explanation in political economy studies. In the process, be sure to address the theoretical and empirical strengths of culture as a political economy explanation. Also, be sure to address what is political economy. Given these considerations, how useful is culture as a theory in political economy studies? How is political economy related to the real world?