

Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination
Department of Political Science
Graduate Program
April 5, 2002

This examination is designed to evaluate your basic mastery of the “comparative politics canon.” Most of the questions encourage you to use the ideas in classic texts to help you analyze a real-world problem, just as you will do in your own research later. A few questions ask you to provide guidance to others, based on your understanding of the literature in the field.

In most cases you should show that you are aware of the debates to which the questions allude, sketch alternative views, and discuss pros and cons. That is, stating only one view without indicating familiarity with the relevant controversies does not signify “mastery.” When you refer to an argument someone else has developed, you should acknowledge the author of that view by name, but you need not provide a footnote. Solid original thinking generates extra points.

The exam begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. Exams are due to Lili Kivisto at the Department of Political Science. Students with disabilities and students whose main language is not English may submit their exams at 5:30, but these exams should be given directly to Jennifer Widner (4257 ISR).

Here are the rules:

1. If comparative politics is your major field, you **must** select **one question** from **each of three lists** (for a total of three questions). If comparative politics is your minor field, you **may** select two questions from the same list and a third from a second list, or you may choose one question from each of three lists, for a total of three questions.
2. Exams should be handwritten on one side of the page only. Please write legibly.
3. You may consult your notes during the exam, but you should not expect to spend much time doing so. **You may not speak about the exam with anyone**—not with friends, family, or faculty—until Saturday, April 6. This rule ensures that students who have extra time to complete the exam don’t hear about your answers until after they have submitted their work.
4. The time for completion includes travel and breaks you may wish to take. That is, you do not get extra time just because you have decided to write the exam in a remote location.
5. A follow-up oral of one hour’s duration will take place approximately one week after completion of the written exam. Examiners may ask you to amplify your responses to the written questions or to extend your analysis to your own research interests.

Good luck!

List One (Building States & Nations; Political Development; Political Regimes and Democratization; Second Image Reversed)

1. Discuss the place of political culture in the study of democratization in developing and post-Communist countries. What has empirical research shown about 1) the nature and significance of salient political beliefs and values; 2) factors that either promote or retard the emergence of these political orientations; and 3) the degree to which the same variable relationships have explanatory power in different political and cultural settings.
2. How has the influence of modernization theory evolved during the last four decades? To what extent, and in what ways, are the concerns and insights of modernization theory receiving attention from political scientists at the present time? To what extent does present-day research either replicate or avoid the problems for which early research on modernization was criticized?
3. Some scholars attribute the fragility of government in parts of the developing world to a change in the character of state formation. Offer two possible explanations for the rise of the territorial nation state and say which you find most persuasive and why. Then offer some reasons why or why not the competitive advantage of the territorial nation state is under challenge. Is a return to a variant of the old logic politically feasible?
4. In an analysis of democratization, Robert Bates suggests that any good explanation must include accounts of a) grievance, b) collective action, and c) why governments fall in the face of collective action. Discuss whether this standard is useful and either a) how well analyses of democratization (classics or recent studies or both) stand up in light of this admonition or b) what Bates could learn from these works.

List Two (Constitutions, Interest Groups and Interest Intermediation, Political Parties and Elections, Accountability)

1. “[Political parties are] potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government.” -- George Washington

In spite of Washington’s warning political parties quickly emerged in the United States and are features of virtually every modern democracy. What purpose do parties serve? Are political parties a necessary feature of stable democratic government? How might the roles parties play vary across polities? How do societal and institutional factors shape the nature of a polity’s party system?

2. Scholars of comparative democratic politics have long debated the relative merits of the majoritarian parliamentary, the proportional parliamentary, and the presidential models of democratic politics. Which systems foster the most accountable government?

Define each system by its key elements and define accountable government as you intend to use the concept in answering this question. What aspects of each system most contribute to the production of that type and degree of effective accountability?

3. Scholars of comparative democratic politics have learned much about the impact of electoral systems on party systems, partisan electoral competition, and democratic policymaking. Two key dimensions along which electoral systems vary are 'district magnitudes' and degrees of 'malapportionment.' Define each quoted term and explain how and why each might affect the propensity of democratically elected policymakers to produce distributive (pork barrel) policies and describe the type of pork or public-good provision each might foster.

List Three (Political Culture, Participation and Collective Action, Rebellion & Revolution, Ethnicity and Identity Politics)

1. Some scholars say that ethnic identities are deeply ingrained in human nature. Others believe that these identities are imagined and constructed under particular circumstances. Discuss and compare these two approaches. How do they affect the way you would construct a model about culture's influence on political behavior? Illustrate your argument with reference to two cases of ethnic conflict.

2. Marxists, western social scientists, and European/American liberals expected ethnic consciousness to fade with modernization. Has it? Why (not)? What are the political, economic, and social forces weakening and strengthening ethnic awareness today?

3. If we take Mancur Olson seriously, we would probably expect to see only very low levels of collective action in the world. Yet in fact we see many examples of the kinds of organization Olson analyzes. Explain the collective action problem, what causes such problems, and what steps or conditions may make collective action possible. Point to the usefulness and limitations of Olson's approach. Finally, consider whether all "collective behavior" be understood under the rubric of "collective action" and under what circumstances we should pay attention to collective action problems in our efforts to account for behavior or institutional change.

List Four (Policy; States, Markets & Prosperity; Governmental Performance)

1. There are many definitions of "good governance" but many would agree that, at a minimum, "good governments" have the following characteristics. 1) They are able to pass necessary policies in a timely manner. 2) The policies they pass are stable/credible. Do you agree? What sorts of institutional and policy making environments facilitate timely policymaking? What sorts facilitate policy credibility and stability? Is there a tension between these two characteristics of good government? Pick two countries and discuss where they sit in relation to these two characteristics.

2. “It is impossible to understand policy making without understanding context and history.” React to this statement. Do you agree or disagree? What are the intellectual matters at stake in this discussion? Explain how the literature on policy making addresses these concerns. (Hint: Be specific and pay attention to terminology.)

3. Some formerly Communist countries moved further than others toward market economies. Even if you are unfamiliar with these countries, what KINDS of explanations would you seek to account for the differences among countries that had very similar economic and political systems, in some cases for 70 years and in others for about 45?