

**Comparative Politics  
Preliminary Examination  
Fall 2003**

**RULES AND DIRECTIONS:** You will have eight hours in which to answer the required questions. **The exam must be handed in no later than 4:00 p.m.** Be sure to save some of your time for putting the answers into an organized, typed or legibly written version in good English. This is a "closed book" exam. Students may not use notes or books, nor may they discuss the examination with anyone while taking it.

**Instructions:** Please answer ONE question from Section I and TWO questions from Section II. Be careful to write three distinct essays, avoiding substantial overlap between your answers.

**Section I: *Thematic Questions*** (Answer One)

1. A wide variety of meanings is attached to the term "comparative method." For some authors, the comparative method is similar to the statistical method, except that it deals with a small number of cases. Others question whether a "science" of comparative politics is possible at all, and advocate more interpretive forms of comparative history. Discuss the different meanings attached to the term "comparative method," survey the types of comparative research that result from these different understandings of comparative method, and conclude with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of these diverse approaches to comparative politics.
2. "Rational choice" and "Culturalist" scholars are typically trained according to very different criteria of what constitutes "good" research and a "good" explanation of political events. Recently, however, several scholars have suggested that rational choice methods can be used to explore questions of culture and cultural change. Discuss the merits and pitfalls of this effort relative to the alternative explanations of the same phenomena. Construct your argument with reference to specific cases.
3. The wave of redemocratization around the world has led to an important theoretical debate over its causes. In many ways, the new literature on redemocratization does not limit itself to understanding the recent wave of redemocratization, but also attempts to reopen the entire debate over the conditions for regime change more generally: "why do democracies emerge, mature, break down, and reemerge"? Discuss the literature on redemocratization, contrasting the different approaches to the topic, and discuss the implications of this literature for the broader debate over regime change.
4. The literature on revolution is torn between disagreements over whether to emphasize the

view from above (elite politics and state structure) or the view from below (mass attitudes and mass movements). What are the relative merits and drawbacks of each perspective? Have there been attempts to synthesize the two approaches? How might you synthesize them? In your answer be sure to refer to specific cases of revolution.

5. In the literature on development, the debate between modernization and dependency theory increasingly has been overtaken by events. Although a new debate continues, including such diverse approaches as rational choice, discourse analysis, and post-imperialism, no single competing theory of underdevelopment has emerged to take the place of either dependency or modernization theory. Assess the state of current theoretical debate over development in comparative politics in relation to changing global and domestic economic conditions, drawing on examples from the concrete development experience of at least three countries from two different regions.

## **Section II: *Seminar Questions* (Answer Two)**

1. Of what value is the neo-Marxist literature (e.g., the work of Przeworski and Wallerstein) in the study of comparative political economy?
2. To what extent does the literature on economic voting show that citizens have the abilities to hold elected officials accountable for economic policies?
3. Assess the advantages and disadvantages of the rational-choice institutionalist approach to studying the evolution of institutions. Provide examples.
4. Scholars of comparative politics have recently begun to focus more explicitly on issues related to women and gender. How has the study of women and gender contributed to existing debates and literatures in comparative politics? Has the work on women and gender unsettled debates within the literature in important ways, or do most scholars simply "add women and stir"? In your essay, be sure to distinguish between women and gender and to discuss at least two areas of research in comparative politics.
5. How has globalization affected women in China? Please offer a theoretically informed answer, not just a catalogue of the many changes that have occurred.
6. Answer either A.

or B., but not both:

- A. If you look at (1) actual patterns of state intervention in family affairs and (2) arguments by political activists about the state's right to intervene in the family, are there discernible patterns? Does it come down in the end to a conventional left-right ideological split, with the left favoring state power and the right favoring family autonomy? Is there some other pattern you can identify? Or is it more nearly random?
- B. Debates among children's advocates about improving the position of children in the world are marked by a deep lack of consensus. At the same time, there have been very few scholarly attempts to make sense of the apparent incoherence among pro-child forces. Please write an essay that maps out (1) what you see as the most significant contending diagnoses of children's plight in the world and (2) the most significant contending strategies for improving it.
6. One of the most salient characteristics of colonial rule in Africa was the distinction between indirect and direct rule. First, describe in broad outlines both forms of rule. Second, how has recent scholarship drawn on the distinction to understand the impact of the colonial experience on African's current reality? Lastly, how might the distinction help us to understand what may have been unique about colonial rule in Africa in comparison to colonial rule elsewhere in the world?
7. The study of African politics encompasses a vast array of theoretical and methodological traditions. Select any two such approaches and discuss both their strengths and weaknesses in making sense of Africa's political reality. To what extent do they help us understand what has come to be called the African tragedy'?
8. In the study of socio-political change how important in your opinion is the debate about the relative importance of structures versus agency? Sketch out, firstly, the history of the debate. Second, offer and discuss a couple of examples of works on the two sides in the argument. Finally, critically evaluate both sides based on these works and offer what you might regard as a resolution.
9. What are some of the major epistemological and methodological issues in the study of socio-political change? To what extent can the comparative method be of benefit? What are some of the challenges and opportunities in utilizing the comparative method? What works in your opinion illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of the comparative method for this field of inquiry? Finally, where do you come down on the issue of comparative analysis versus area studies and why?