

**Comparative Politics
Preliminary Examination
Summer 2006**

GENERAL 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 form in good English. This is an open book exam. Students may use notes or books, but they may not discuss the examination with anyone while taking it.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS: answer one question from Section I and one question from Section II. Be careful to write two distinct essays, avoiding substantial overlap between your answers.

I. General Questions (answer ONE):

1. Scholars of comparative politics are often expected to be generalists, seeking to build theory that can travel across time and space. To the extent that they specialize in any one country, or even a region, their theoretical claims are often met with skepticism. Discuss the merits and limits of country or regional specialization in terms of the goals of political science. In your answer, be sure to specify what you understand “the goals of political science” to be, and draw on specific examples from at least two subject areas in the comparative literature to support your answer. Note that there is room for a discussion of method in this question.
2. International relations and comparative politics are separated into two distinct sub-fields in our discipline, each with its own specific premises, debates, and specialized journals. How useful is this division of labor in terms of advancing our understanding of politics? Could greater cross-fertilization between these two sub-fields improve the quality of the debates in each, or would this only serve to “muddy the waters” theoretically? In your answer, be sure to offer specific examples of work which you feel has been or could be enriched by incorporating insights from the other sub-field, and be very clear about what those insights are and how they serve/would serve to enhance theory-building.
3. 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.

4. Most comparativists would agree that “political culture” exists, but there is strong disagreement regarding if/how it should figure in political science research. Where do you come down in this debate? Be sure to refer to a variety of works in the literature that address culture in some way, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses thereof.

Seminar Questions:

- 1) Contemporary politics is full of conflicts between state and family for authority over individual behavior, including marriage, sex, childbirth, political socialization, religion, and many other areas that most people feel are crucial to a meaningful existence. Considering different countries and different policy areas, can you identify patterns that might help determine under what conditions the state will succeed in asserting such authority and when it will fail?
- 2) Nancy Bermeo’s award-winning *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* addresses a number of crucial issues in the comparative socio-political change subfield. Critically evaluate her book on the basis of two of the following: its epistemology, its treatment of the structure-agency question, and the politics and process of democratization. Note: while the question requires that you discuss Bermeo’s book, do not neglect to refer to a variety of other relevant works in your essay. Be sure to support your argument with examples from at least one “developed” and one “developing” country.
- 3) Why do scholars care about the "number" of parties? What answers have political scientists provided to this question? What can we learn from the experience of one-party states that deepens, extends or reinterprets scholarly views on the political importance of the number of parties?