

**Comparative Politics
Preliminary Examination
Summer 2008**

EXAM 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.
- **There is a 5,000 word limit for the entire exam.** Faculty readers will not read beyond that amount. Please use the word count function at the end and record the word count on the last page.
- The exam is OPEN note and open book, and you are allowed to access notes brought on a flash/thumb drive. However, students may NOT discuss the examination with anyone while taking it.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:

- Answer ONE question from Section I and ONE question from Section II.
- Read the questions carefully and **answer all parts** of the two you choose.
- Note that you must write two distinct essays, **avoiding substantial overlap** between your answers.
- Remember that we are looking for analytical essays that step back from and assess the comparative politics literature on particular issues. Be sure, then, to **make an argument**, drawing on the literature for examples and support, rather than simply reviewing or taking stock of the literature.

Section I: General Questions (Answer ONE)

For all questions, discuss with reference to specific topics in the literature and, where relevant, to cases.

1. What is rational choice theory, and what are its strengths and limitations?
2. There has been a fierce methodological critique of area studies over the past few decades. But do social science theories really travel? Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the area studies approach as compared to an area-agnostic approach.
3. Institutions are in vogue. But the definition of institution is broad: it could be a legal framework, pre-existing policy, a cultural norm, or an economic relationship. How

should analysts of comparative politics approach the study of institutions and (where) should they draw a line?

4. Political theorists have long debated the nature of the state – is it a social contract, an organization to protect the bourgeoisie, an expression of a rational coherent social order, etc? These different understandings of the state have colored the study of comparative politics, with scholarship on states rife with adjectives (nightwatchman, rentier, developmental, etc) symbolizing different ways of understanding the modern state. How do assumptions about the state shape the way scholars of comparative politics have approached it? The questions that they ask? The answers that they offer? How do you think the state should be conceived and studied?
5. How do single case studies fit into comparative politics. Are they comparative? What do they contribute? What do they lack? How can they be done well (if at all)?
6. A plague has wiped out Minnesota's comparative politics faculty. You can replace the faculty with any 8 political scientists in the country. Who would they be and why? (NOTE: this is your chance to reflect on what the field of comparative politics is, not write an ode to your favorites in the field).

Section II: Personalized Questions (Answer ONE)

For all questions: Be sure to answer the question in your own voice and with reference to at least two specific cases.

1. In recent years, debates about the welfare state have centered on the 'dependent variable' question, what is the welfare state and what is welfare state retrenchment? Why after years of study and countless articles do we have so much trouble figuring out if there has been welfare state retrenchment?
2. On the one hand, many theories of voting, the welfare state, and economic policy tell us class never, or no longer, matters in the OECD. Voting is more volatile, welfare policy follows from the interests of entrenched risk groups or employers in different industries,

and sectoral or factor based divisions matter for economic policy. On the other hand, in our everyday experience, it is hard to believe that 'class is dead.' What role does class play in the contemporary political life of industrialized democracies?

3. Define "political representation." In what ways does institutional design affect the nature and extent of political representation?
4. Since Hobbes and Locke, political scientists have explored the question of "How can a government powerful enough to rule be effectively controlled?" Assess political science debates about tensions between effective government and limited government, with particular attention to how the introduction of democratic forms plays into this question. (In other words, discuss what we know and still need to investigate about the relationship between state capacity, democracy, and the rule of law.)
5. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of structural vs. agentic approaches to the study of revolutions, transitions, social movements, or institutional change.
6. How does the literature on transitional justice and human rights in comparative politics relate to questions of democracy and democratization? In particular, which variables affect the choice of transitional justice mechanisms both at the domestic and international level, and how do those decisions, in turn, affect the stability and quality of new democratic regimes? Critically assess the arguments provided in the literature on these issues.
7. For the past decade or so a debate has raged about the role of religion in political mobilization and conflict. To what extent has religious identity been the basis of political mobilization in the "Muslim world" in the last 30-40 years? To what extent has religion been the cause of violence? Is Islam somehow unique in this respect? Be sure to address whether religious identity might explain the kinds of violence or the intensity or duration of violence; whether it has been a sole cause, one of several causal factors, or not a cause; and which theoretical approaches--constructivist, institutionalist, rational choice, ideational, and culturalist--are most useful for understanding the relationship between religious identity, mobilization and violence.