

Department of Political Science, Yale University  
Field Examination in Comparative Politics  
August 2014

INSTRUCTIONS: This is a closed-book, no-notes exam, with only access to a clean copy of the reading list allowed. You are required to answer 3 questions. Each answer comprises one-third of the exam grade. The exam has a strict 21-page limit (double-space, 12 font). You have 7 hours.

1) Theories of political parties, state formation, ethnic politics, and collective action often rely on the concept of social cleavages as a building block. What are the principal arguments about when and how social cleavages become politically salient, and when they do not? In your answer please include your preferred definition of what constitutes a social cleavage, particularly as it pertains to the study of comparative politics.

2) Differences in the state-building process in Europe versus elsewhere are thought to have produced variation in the capacity of different states. Discuss how different authors conceptualize “strong states” and “weak states.” How have different conceptions of state strength contributed to our understanding of economic and political outcomes? What are the contributions and limitations of these approaches?

3) The literature on distributive politics makes an important distinction between programmatic politics and patronage-based or clientelist appeals. What are the theoretical differences upon which this distinction rests, and what are the challenges in empirically studying such distinctions in practice? What do we know about the conditions under which programmatic politics is likely to dominate electoral politics? And are the normative preferences for programmatic politics within much of the literature warranted?

4) Classic texts in the study of comparative politics rely on historical case studies to support their theoretical claims. Critics later questioned the validity of the inferential claims made in those works, pointing to issues such as the small-N and the potential for endogeneity. How have comparative politics methods changed as a result of these criticisms? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary alternative approaches. How have these approaches supported, undermined, or refined prior work? In your answer, focus on a few specific areas in the literature.

5) What is the relationship between authoritarian breakdown and democratization? What can theories of democratization learn from the burgeoning literature on authoritarian breakdown and resilience?

6) Students examining the roots of political instability and violence have focused on population characteristics (such as ethnic and class differences, among others), regime characteristics (such as regime type or particular institutions), and external shocks (such as interstate war or global economic crises). What do we know about the causes of civil upheaval? What questions remain? What are some promising avenues for future research?