

Yale University
Department of Political Science
Comprehensive Field Examination in Comparative Politics
August 2021

Instructions: Answer 3 of the 7 questions below. Choose questions that show the depth and breadth of your knowledge. Each answer comprises one-third of the exam grade. The exam has a strict 21 page limit (double-space, 12 font). You have 7.5 hours to complete the exam. This exam is not open-book, but you can use up to 30 single spaced pages of notes using a standard 12-pt font size and a clean copy of the reading list.

Questions:

1. In recent years, comparativists have begun to pay increasing attention to “democratic backsliding”. Assess the concept of democratic backsliding, its measurement and prevalence, its causes, and the mechanisms that help us understand its occurrence.
2. Tilly’s classic argument about state formation in Western Europe (“war made the state and the state made war”) focuses on the role of external conflict. What is the role of domestic conflict in state building? Does it differ from that of external conflict? Does it differ by type of domestic conflict?
3. John F. Kennedy famously said, “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” On the other hand, Tocqueville argued that “the most dangerous time for a bad government is usually when it begins to reform.” What does the literature on comparative politics say about the relationship between political reform, rebellion, and revolution?
4. Many syllabi in comparative politics (not to mention our Comparative Politics Reading List) divide the literature into comparative political behavior (“Political Parties, Participation, and Mobilization”) and contentious politics (“Social Movements, Protest, and Revolution”). What is the connection between these? Are institutional (e.g., voter mobilization, legislative bargaining) and extra-institutional (e.g., rebellion, civil disobedience) political strategies complements, substitutes, or some combination?
5. In *The Politics of Property Rights*, Haber et al. highlight a fundamental commitment problem in property-rights protection: “any government strong enough to define and arbitrate property rights is also strong enough to abrogate them for its own benefit” (p. 2). How have authoritarian or unstable governments addressed this commitment problem? What are the implications for the relationship between regime type, economic stability, and growth?

6. An increasing number of non-democratic regimes hold elections and permit opposition parties to contest them. When and why do authoritarian regimes adopt electoral institutions? Under what conditions are these institutions more likely to lead to meaningful liberalization or democratization? Alternatively, how can these institutions strengthen an authoritarian regime?
7. What is the “comparative method” (a.k.a. structured-focused comparison or ‘small-N’ analysis)? What role does it have in modern comparative politics, where causal identification and big data are increasingly valued? Whatever your answer, describe and evaluate the contributions of at least three exemplar examples of this method from the comparative canon.