

COMPARATIVE POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

August 2006

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS: This is a closed book, closed notes exam. No materials outside of what you have stored in your head may be used to assist you in writing essays in response to the following questions.

Students taking this exam as a MAJOR have six hours to answer one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and two questions from Part III. Students taking the exam as a MINOR have four and one-half hours to answer one question from Part I and either one question from Part II and one question from Part III or two questions from Part III.

All Students will be evaluated according to the following criteria: 1) the extent to which they address the issues raised by the questions; 2) the breadth and depth of their knowledge of the relevant literature; and 3) their ability to critically analyze this literature.

Part I: General Theory

- A. Compare and contrast the explanations provided by the following three analytical perspectives: rational choice, structuralism, and cultural or constructive perspectives. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches.
- B. Fundamental to Karl Marx's approach to political analysis was to argue that people's interests could be deduced from their economic position and that ultimately, people's engagement in politics was determined by their economic interests. Drawing on a range of theorizing in comparative politics, assess whether Marx's position remains a useful one.

Part II: Methodology

- A. Is the concept of the "small n problem" a useful way to organize methodological debates?
- B. Explain the significance for qualitative methods of causal realism.

Part III: Applied Theory

- A. Stephan Haggard (2000 p. 22) states that there is a great debate on "the advantages of concentrated authority and the 'insulation' or 'autonomy' of government as opposed to decision-making processes that provide for multiple veto gates ('checks and balances') and consultation of various sorts." Critically consider the advantages and disadvantages of autonomy and consultation in the politics of economic reform.
- B. James Fearon and David Laitin (2003 p. 75) contend, "The factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favor insurgency. These include poverty – which marks financially

and bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment – political instability, rough terrain, and large populations.” Critically assess Fearon and Laitin’s argument in the context of the literature on ethnic violence and civil war.

- C. Does the Asian Financial Crisis and its impact on various countries raise questions about some of the classic theories explaining patterns of economic development?
- D. What best explains patterns of democratization and democratic breakdown between 1850 and 1950?
- E. What best explains the rise of the modern state?
- F. At the end of the twentieth century degenerative forms of democracy multiplied, and political scientists struggled not only to describe and categorize their many forms, but to define and measure their democratic quality. Provide a critical review of the approaches that you think are most fruitful for analyzing the “quality of” democracies, paying special attention to the analysis of those regimes that are “hollowed out” and therefore are assessed as having a low quality of democracy. Give specific empirical examples to support your points.