

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: COMPARATIVE POLITICS
MINOR FIELD
4 HOURS

November 23, 2007

Michael Cohen

You must answer a total of three questions for this examination. You have 4 hours to do so. You must answer one question from the core section and one question from your subfield section. Your third answer may come from either section.

SECTION 1: CORE QUESTIONS. In your answer to any of the questions below, please refer to empirical examples from at least two countries.

1. Methodological tensions exist within comparative politics. The tension is often described in terms of “qualitative versus quantitative.” Is this qualitative-quantitative division sufficient to capture the full range of the methodological debate in comparative politics? If it is, describe what the “qualitative versus quantitative” debate is about, and what’s at stake in adopting a purely qualitative or purely quantitative approach. If it is not, then describe what methodological issues and disagreements are overlooked by this debate, and how additional issues and disagreements have manifested themselves in the comparative politics literature.
2. Looking across the field of comparative politics, what do you see as the most successful efforts to develop causal *generalizations* about political life – claims that travel well across space and time? What makes these efforts successful? What do you view as the most misguided attempts to generalize, and why? How should scholars in comparative politics decide on the right scope for constructing and testing causal theories?
3. What does a comparison of Almond and Verba’s *The Civic Culture* and Putnam’s *Making Democracy Work* tell us about the changes in political science theory and methods between 1963 and 1993, and what do these changes suggest for our understanding of political culture?
4. “Although political scientists, like most humans, are more intrigued by change than inertia, they have been more successful at explaining inertia than change.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What methods of theorizing are most promising for explaining both political inertia and change in comparative politics?

SECTION 2. SUBFIELD: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS

1. What is the state? Is it best understood as a relationship of domination, a set of public institutions, a site of power, or an agent that organizes society? What makes it separate (or “relatively autonomous”) from society, and in what ways does it form part of society?
2. Why are some states developmental and others predatory or rent-seeking? What are the major theoretical perspectives—economic, institutional, sociological—used to explain this problem, and how do they differ? Which do you find most convincing?
3. Since the fall of Communism in the Russia and Eastern Europe, the concept and idea of civil society has come to pervade discussions about state-society relations. Is civil society a useful concept and frame of reference? What alternative ways of approaching the study of state-society interactions are available, and what is your evaluation of these?
4. Over twenty years have passed since the book *Bringing the State Back In* signaled the ascendance of the state-society relations perspective within comparative politics. Has this perspective proven useful, or have its shortcomings outweighed its strengths?

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November 23, 2007

Elena Fedetchkina

You must answer a total of three questions for this examination. You have 5 hours to do so. You must answer one question from the core section and one question each from your subfield sections.

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SECTION 2 SUBFIELD: STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS

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SECTION 3 SUBFIELD: COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY

1. If Hall and Soskice are right that coordinated market capitalism is both efficient and coherent as an interdependent system, why are key countries such as Japan, France, and Germany going ahead with major reforms of some components of the system? Are such reforms leading to the unraveling of coordinated systems or are they effective in just plugging some holes.
2. Has globalization transformed the role of the state in the management of advanced economies? Do we still need a state, when market mechanisms are more efficient? Why or why not? Use empirical examples.
3. Citizens and dominant interest groups support the post-war social contract in stakeholder systems like France, Germany, and Japan. Then, why are political leaders pushing for rapid programs of structural reforms? What is the political mechanism behind those reform processes?

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Adam Bower

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SECTION 2. SUBFIELD: ETHNIC POLITICS AND NATIONALISM

1. Fearon and Laitin point out what they believe is a key deficiency of the social construction approach, namely that it does not explain if or when ethnic violence will flare up. They believe that a rational choice approach is better at predicting ethnic violence. Do you agree or disagree with Fearon and Laitin? Explain these two approaches as they relate to ethnic conflict or its management in your answer. Use examples to support your argument.
2. Anthony D. Smith writes that the “systematic failure” of the modernists (the dominant paradigm) to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nations that emerged in the modern epoch thus precludes “any understanding of the popular roots and widespread appeal of nationalism,” and the devotion that “myths, memories, and symbols of the nation command”. In light of this debate, discuss and evaluate the following statement by Smith: “History and culture provide the motives for conflict as well as solidarity. They are not simply pretexts which can be manipulated nor are they simply invented traditions... History and culture are embedded into the fabric through which elites must forge their strategies.” Use empirical examples to support your argument.
3. Why should “ethnicity” or “ethnic politics” be counted as a major subfield of comparative politics? What holds this subfield together and gives it the right to be counted as being of equivalent status to other subfields, such as democratization, political institutions, and the state?
4. In China, four large ethnic minority groups are each concentrated in a particular region of the country. Each region is referred to politically as an autonomous region—the Tibetan Autonomous Region, for example. Two of these groups, the Tibetans and the Uighurs, have active separatist movements and evidence a great deal of dissatisfaction about being part of China. The other two groups, Koreans and Mongolians, do not have active separatist movements and show few signs of active dissatisfaction about being part of China. What possible explanations for this difference are found in the literature on ethnic politics? In other words, why do some ethnic minorities pursue separatism and others do not? You are asked to focus on what theory suggests and not on the particulars of the Chinese example, and to provide coherent theoretical explanations rather than a grab-bag of possible reasons.

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April 11, 2007

Ana Lukatela

You must answer a total of three questions for this examination. You have 5 hours to do so. You must answer one question from the core section and one question each from your subfield sections.

In your answers to any of the questions in this section, please refer to empirical examples from at least two countries.

Section 1 CORE QUESTIONS

1. We know a lot about theory-testing and the confrontation of hypotheses. However, what is/are the most successful method(s) for theory-building? How can theory-building and theory-testing be successfully integrated into one project?
2. "Quantitative methods are only tools to test the validity of broad correlations. Only the comparative method can systematically explore causal relationships." Do you agree with this statement? Please refer to concrete examples of various works in making your arguments.
3. Take two countries of your choice. Describe the main features of their political systems and show how these features explain important similarities or differences in political outcomes. Hint: Use this question as a vehicle to exhibit your knowledge of theories of comparative politics, the comparative method, and the cases in question.

Section 2 SUBFIELD: DEMOCRATIZATION

1. Today many political regimes that have formal democratic rules in place (such as Ukraine or Indonesia) share close resemblance with soft authoritarian regimes that do not hold competitive elections. To what extent do formal democratic rules really matter in shaping political behaviour and the ability of citizens to influence those who govern them?
2. To what extent is democracy possible in the presence of socioeconomic inequality? Does the expansion of democratic rules at the political level tend to exacerbate

socioeconomic inequality, thereby making political equality impossible? If so, is promoting democracy a wise idea at all?

3. During the 1980s and 1990s, observers of global political trends heralded the spread of democracy throughout the globe. A new age of democracy seemed to have begun. In recent years, however, democratic regimes in a variety of countries (most recently, in Thailand, for example) have either faltered (in terms of effectiveness, functioning, and/or legitimacy) or been replaced by essentially non-democratic regimes. What is going on? Are we seeing a new wave or de-democratization? Could it be that scholars had misjudged the degree to which countries had actually become truly democratic? To what extent does the literature on democratization provide a useful guide to understanding recent failures of democracy?

Section 3 SUBFIELD: EASTERN EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

1. Does it make any analytical sense to group all of the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union into a single category as a “region”, given all of the cultural, economic, and historical differences among them? Is the shared temporary experience of rule by Communist regimes, guided from Moscow, sufficient to warrant such a categorization?
2. How can we best explain the divergent economic and political trajectories of the post-Communist states? Have conscious choices of political elites or deep underlying structural patterns played the largest role? If the latter, does this mean that some countries are simply doomed to a fate of failed economies and/ or despotic rule?
3. How easily do political science theories originally developed to explain patterns in other regions travel to the post-Communist region? Do certain theories of political behaviour or the development of regimes and institutions transfer to the region better than others?