

American University Department of Government MA Comprehensive in Comparative Politics  
Spring 2015

Directions: Answer THREE (3) questions: one question from Part I, one question from Part II, and one question from Part III. Your answers will be judged for their responsiveness to the specific question, their skilled and ample citation of the relevant literature, and their clarity of organization. Any arguments you advance should be defended against plausible counter-arguments. The material used in your answer to any question should not substantially overlap with the material used in other questions. Organize your answers, and allocate your time evenly.

**Part I Synoptic Questions on Field (Answer ONE and only one question from this section)**

1. What are the differences and similarities between rational-choice, historical, and sociological institutionalism?
2. "Transaction costs" is a critical concept used by economists and political scientists to study institutions. Provide your definition of transaction costs and examine the relevance of this concept for contemporary literature on institutions.
3. "Few relationships between social, economic, and political phenomena are stronger than that between the level of economic development and the existence of democratic politics. The correlation implies that transitions to democracy should occur primarily in countries at the mid-level of economic development. Discuss the empirical evidence on this thesis.
4. Select one sub-field in comparative politics, such as democratization, political behavior, institutions, dependency theory, development, social movements, etc., and lay out its main contributions, its major theoretical and methodological debates, and its changes over time.

**Part II Specific Topic Questions (Answer ONE and only one question from this section)**

5. Timothy Mitchell in "*Carbon Democracy*" argues that activists must find "points of vulnerability, where movements [can] organize and apply pressure" . . . and "interconnected sites at which a series of claims for political freedoms and more egalitarian forms of life [can] be fought." What are some of the most promising "points of vulnerability" and "interconnected sites" that you can identify in the contemporary Middle East, or any other geographic region, for democratization and reducing economic inequality.

6. Scholars like Greif, Kuran, and Mahoney have proposed new theories to explain the long-term influence of socioeconomic and political institutions in different regions of the world. Please evaluate these arguments and their contribution to relevant literature.
7. Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968) and Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) defined the origins of modern comparative politics. Compare and contrast their theories, and those theories' impact on subsequent research in the field.
8. "When trying to understand collective action (social movements, protests, communal violence), the social networks emphasized by sociologists are far more important than the factors emphasized by political scientists, such as state institutions and state strategies." Agree or disagree.

**Part III Practical Applications (Answer ONE and only one question from this section)**

9. In December 2010 a series of protests spread across the Middle East which were eventually called the Arab Spring. Using the full range of literature available in the field of comparative politics, discuss the fit between theories and these events. Does the Arab Spring challenge existing understanding of democratic transition?
10. For a country of your choice, analyze its past and present political history, using at least three major theoretical frameworks in comparative politics (such as culture, institutions, and choice-theoretic individualism). Which do you feel is most effective? Discuss.

**Remember to Answer Three  
Questions  
One from Part I, One from Part II, and One from Part  
III**