

## **Comparative Field Exam – Fall 2020**

**3 Sections, answer 1 question from each section (answer 3 questions total)**

### **Section 1: answer 1 question**

#### **Question 1**

If all we needed to know to understand policy outcomes were citizens' preferences, we would all study public opinion. But this is not the case: preferences do not translate directly into policy outcomes. Why? How does the study of comparative politics help us understand whether, when, and to what extent citizens preferences translate into policy outcomes? What theoretical and empirical evidence do we have that can explain the link between citizen preferences and policy outcomes? What are the biggest unanswered questions in linking citizens preferences to policy outcomes? And what steps/directions can contemporary political scientists take to advance our understanding of the relationship between citizens' preferences and policy outcomes?

#### **Question 2**

What are the most effective democratic institutional arrangements to ensure the representation of traditionally under-represented groups in society, and why is representation important? Your answer should go beyond normative arguments regarding the value of representation to include empirical evidence of the impacts of representation. You should also consider a variety of types of groups that might be under-represented, and whether the same institutional arrangements will be equally effective in each case. Furthermore, you should discuss the extent to which other social or economic factors might limit the efficacy of institutions' ability to ensure representation. Be sure to support your discussion with concrete examples from the literature.

### **Section 2: answer 1 question**

#### **Question 3**

Although some scholars recognize the importance of informal institutions and seek to study them systematically, others contend that due to their informal nature, we cannot systematically study them, and eschew research on informal institutions. This debate raises the question: Can we systematically study informal institutions, and should we attempt to do so? To answer this question, consider the main challenges to systematically studying informal institutions and explain how scholars have attempted to surmount these challenges. If you conclude that we cannot or should not study informal institutions, defend your answer and explain what knowledge would be lost if previous scholars had reached the same conclusion as you. If you conclude we should attempt to study informal institutions, identify the biggest lessons we learned about how politics works from the study of informal institutions and suggest directions for future research. In answering this question, be careful not to conflate informal institutions with failed institutions or weak institutions.

#### **Question 4**

Scholars of comparative political institutions (CPI) are interested in understanding how the design of political institutions structure political outcomes. One of the biggest challenges to the study of CPI is endogeneity. What are the three main types of endogeneity and how do they threaten causal inferences in the study of CPI? Since institutions cannot be randomly assigned, what research designs/approaches can scholars take to address concerns of endogeneity in the study of CPI? Identify at least four different designs/approaches and for each discuss the main advantages and drawbacks of incorporating these designs into the study of CPI. Finally, give tangible examples of how these research designs can advance our current understanding of the political consequences of various institutional designs.

### **Section 3: answer 1 question**

#### **Question 5**

One of the fundamental roles of governments is to provide public goods and services. Yet the provision of public goods varies dramatically in states across the globe. Identify the prevailing theories from comparative politics that attempt to explain disparities in public goods provisions both across and within different regime types. Where does the current scholarship successfully explain this variation, and where does the literature fall short? Based on the current state of the literature what policy recommendations would you make for stakeholders who wish to design and implement new constitutions that will maximize the provision of public goods. When explaining how institutions influence the provision of public goods you should be careful to cite the most relevant literature on the topic, acknowledge conflicting findings or debates, and explicitly define any terms or jargon you use including the term public goods.

#### **Question 6**

Much research in comparative politics focuses on the impact of political institutions on elite and citizens' behaviors. At the same time, institutions do not always offer the best explanation of the phenomena that comparativists want to address. What do you see as the most persuasive line(s) of institutional research in comparative politics today—which provides the strongest case for the impact of institutions on elite behaviors; which provides the strongest case for the impact of institutions on citizen behaviors? What do you see as the limitations of the institutionalist perspective, and where do you see other theoretical perspectives being most fruitfully employed in comparative politics research today?