Instructions:

In answering the following questions, you are expected to draw on as wide a range of literature, authors and cases as possible and to be systematic and detailed in your reference to them.

Morning session

Answer the following question:

1. You are in a new job teaching comparative politics. One of your classes, attended by a mix of advanced masters and PhD students, is a field survey course in which you instruct those students on the intellectual origins, development and current ‘state of the art’ of the comparative politics field. How would you organize the course; which particular strains of the literature would you emphasize; how would you communicate the diversity of analytical traditions and their associated methodologies; and how would you seek to enthuse the students: first in helping them understand the most important contributions of the field to social science over time, and second in showing how comparative politics, as practiced today, helps us comprehend the complex world in which we live? Are there also areas in which you would advise students to engage with other fields – e.g. international relations – where comparative politics, as traditionally defined, can provide only partial insights on its own?

Afternoon session

Answer two (2) of the following questions:

1. Extensive ethnic/identity-based, inter-religious or sectarian violence has rocked many countries in recent times, including the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nigeria and Sweden. How does the comparative politics literature – borrowing particularly on insights from social psychology – explain the salience of identity and the causes of ethnic violence in these and other countries? How extensive is the problem as revealed by large-N quantitative research on potentially conflictual dyads? What are the principal findings from scholarly research on the ways in which such violence can be potentially prevented or ameliorated? And where are the most significant knowledge gaps on the problem of identity-based violence?

2. Two grand claims have been made in the comparative politics literature about the impact of globalization on democracy. On the one hand there are those who claim that globalization triggers cultural changes are fueling a new wave of democratization, bringing ever greater numbers of citizens across the world into
the democratic process. On the other there are those who claim that globalization is actually disempowering the state and reducing the scope of governmental power in establishing and pursuing national policy priorities – one casualty of which is the quality of democracy itself, because the alternatives at stake in elections have been diminished, and citizens thereby alienated. At first glance these claims appear to be quite incompatible. What do you make of them? Are they flawed or accurate – and if the latter how can one be reconciled with the other?

3. Political scientists focus much of their attention these days on political structures such as institutions, demography, geography, regime types, economic development, and historical antecedents in shaping social outcomes. To what extent and under what conditions have they determined that ideas, ideologies, and culture, by contrast, also make a difference in determining major political outcomes?

4. The Middle East has undergone a series of dizzying changes ever since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011. At first it looked like a clear triumph for moderate Islamic fundamentalism. Now secular (together with military) forces appear to be doing better, as do more radical forms of Islamic fundamentalism. How can we explain these developments using classical and more recent theories of revolution? What are the strengths and deficiencies of those theories and what might you suggest to fill any lacunae? And what particularly is the utility of Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of revolution?

5. What can comparative politics teach us about the nature of power such as what it is, who has it, and how it is exercised? Has the field made any progress on this issue over the last several decades or is our understanding still murky? Please make sure to cite specific scholars and their various contributions.

6. There is a strong and vibrant literature in comparative politics on the requisite conditions for the emergence of state capacity and ‘good governance’ (a term also propagated by international organizations, in particular the World Bank). Indeed there has been considerable optimism about the roles of international intervention, and of lesson-drawing and policy learning across nations in diffusing both the idea of ‘good governance’ and the tools for its practical implementation. And yet corruption and state fragility remain rampant across the globe, and state capacity building in post-conflict situations miserably inadequate. What went wrong? Is the problem one of analytical weakness in the governance literature, a major mismatch between academic assumptions and reality, or hubris among policy makers and international actors?