

AU GOVT Comprehensive Field Exam in Comparative Politics – May 2015

Directions: You have 72 hours to answer THREE (3) of the following 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. Take time to organize your answer. You may consult other sources, but we expect you to compose the answer yourself (and needless to say you should cite all other sources in text and in a bibliographic entry). Your entire exam should not be longer than 25 double spaced pages in Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman font, with one inch margins. Please number the pages.

Part I

- 1) Is the literature on “subnational” democracy and authoritarianism credible? Why or why not? Aren’t regimes driven entirely by national politics? How can we theorize regimes at the subnational level? Elaborate with extensive reference to at least two concrete cases.
- 2) If you were a leader of a protest movement, what are the first steps you would take to build a membership and ensure participation in your protest events? What factors or events would be most important in determining your success? Answer with reference to modern social movements theory.
- 3) Climate change has been considered, in a recent piece in *Perspectives on Politics*, as the “most important issue not addressed by political science.” Climate change has been tackled some by international relations theorists, but not by comparative politics. Why? What variables might we use to help explain national policies regarding climate change on a comparative basis? Please be explicit.

Part II

- 1) “Identity – whether ethnic, religious, or national – is just a cloak that an individual puts on. It can be tossed aside, picked up, or pieced together from the barest scraps of fabric.” Agree or disagree with this statement. Address the implications of your argument for the theories of ethnic and nationalist conflict.
- 2) “Thin models of rationality are insufficient to explain individual participation in violence or social movements.” Evaluate this claim, exploring both rationalist and other approaches to participation.

- 3) Please discuss the strengths and weaknesses of structuralist and agency-centered approaches to the study of democratic transitions (and address variants within each of these approaches). To what extent can these be reconciled, and how do these modes of analysis reflect broader evolutions of thinking in political science during recent decades?
- 4) What's all this fuss about how we measure democracy? Do the various measures available carry normative assumptions about this loaded concept? Which measures are better and which ones are worse? Why? What is a democracy measurer to do? Be sure to cite a range of readings and measures.

Part III

- 1) In *Why Men Rebel* (1971), Ted Gurr argued that rebellion and popular mobilization arise when there exists a gap between individuals' expectations and their capabilities. Much of modern social movement theory has been devoted to discrediting this claim. On what grounds does social movement theory attack Gurr? In your opinion, are these criticisms valid, or do grievances remain an important factor explaining participation in social movements or violence?
- 2) To what extent might regime type shape the capacity of states to confront what economists refer to as the middle-income trap, and the strategies through which they might do so? How might this vary across different states and regions of the world economy, and what are the implications for democracy and development in the Global South?
- 3) Please discuss competing explanations of the "Left Turns" in Latin America and the factors that will determine their durability. To what extent has the field of comparative politics generated analytical approaches that enrich understanding of the future of left-leaning political projects in the region?
- 4) How well do US-developed theories of congressional behavior explain legislative behavior in other presidential systems? Taking at least one other nation as an example, critique US-centered theories and how well they apply. Can they be adapted or are entirely new theories needed to explain legislative behavior in the nation of your choosing?

