

Political Sociology Comprehensive Exam
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Committee members:

Robert Fishman

Erin McDonnell

Samuel Valenzuela

INSTRUCTIONS

During this two-day examination please answer your choice of FOUR of the following questions. Please do so in the most complete manner possible, with abbreviated references without full bibliographic details to all the relevant authors. Format your text with double spacing, with a reasonable font like this one (Times 12). Send a copy of your text by e-mail attachment to Ms. Rebecca Overmyer by the end of each day of the exam, indicating clearly the number of the questions you are answering.

Although you can organize your work however you wish, it is probably useful to select all four of the questions you will answer during the first hour of the exam, and to sketch out very briefly what you will write for each one before you begin the first response. Plan to reserve some time at the end of each day to proof read what you wrote.

QUESTIONS

1. All founding figures in sociology dealt in one way or another with the division of labor and its various consequences for the formation of larger social groupings that can affect politics in national societies. Let us suppose that you are asked to present a magisterial lecture on this aspect of foundational thought in the discipline touching on the work of Smith, Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel. You are expected to explain what drives the origins and formation of such social groupings according to these authors, and their expected or presumed political effects. You are also supposed to point out the similarities, if any, of their conceptions, the points in which the older ones inspired the subsequent ones, as well as their differences. Write a discursive outline kind of text of what you would say rather than a fully scripted lecture.

2. There are various approaches, as you know, in the study of transitions to democracy. Some scholars view these processes from the perspective of rational choice models, and postulate that they are driven by strategic calculations made by the contending political actors. Others see them as determined by opportunities for pro-democratic change generated by critical political junctures, some largely unexpected, in which the course of change depends on the organizational resources of the various actors who are involved in politics, and the institutional constraints, many influenced by path dependent legacies of past, in which they operate. And still others see them as the result of the broader religious, cultural, and/or socio-economic structural features of the national societies in which the possible transitions occur. These latter views, regardless of their emphasis, all

imply that the political processes of change themselves are actually epiphenomenal—or bound to occur at some point or other regardless of the specific circumstances and actors that set them in motion. Which one of these approaches, combination of approaches—or other possible approaches—do you think work best to explain the circumstances and, until now, the outcomes of the Arab spring? In developing your answer you may of course focus on all the Arab countries, but in particular do narrow in on a contrast between Tunisia and Egypt.

3. In referring to protesters in Spain and their counterparts in Italy as a result of the Euro zone crisis, a political scientist noted that the big difference between the two situations is that in Italy such protestors were channeled into the creation of a new "party," the "Five Star Movement," while this did not occur in Spain. Taking this observation as a given, you are asked in a Political Sociological meeting to explain the differences between a "social movement" and a "party." Beginning with a definition of each, is it indeed the case that a social movement can become a party? And what would or should happen to it eventually? Does it cease to be a social movement as it becomes a party? Or can a party still continue to be considered a social movement (and would that be possible given the definitions of the terms)? Finally, could parties that have aspects that seem to operate as social movements be presumed to be more longer lasting or more ephemeral than those that do not?

4. Various theoretical frameworks (Weber, Ertmann, Tilly, Finer, Scott, among others) have been proposed to explain the rise and consolidation of the early modern state in Europe. After summarizing and contrasting those you think are the most important, please indicate which one has—or which ones have when combined—the greatest relevancy and explanatory power to account for the characteristics of state-building in the regions of the world that broke away from colonial rule in the twentieth century. Elaborate your reasoning thoroughly by also indicating which one or ones you believe are the least relevant or useful for this purpose?

5. Do you see the study of globalization or of transnational political phenomena as: 1. Important enough to largely take the place of work that focuses on political processes shaped and bounded by national level determinants? 2. Important but only a complementary addition to national level approaches? Or 3. A very minor addition, at best, to older approaches? And if you believe that political sociology should engage in work at both levels of analysis, would you argue for research that examines interactions between the two levels, or research that focuses primarily on either one level or the other? Or does this all depend on how political power can be exercised at different levels of scale—city, regional, national, transnational and global? If so, discuss the implications that these alternatively scaled sites of politics have for national states. Do refer in your answer to specific works in the field and their ability to explain political outcomes.

6. An enduring theme in political sociology concerns the role of culture and ideas in shaping political phenomena. To simplify greatly, one could distinguish between classic theoretical statements on this matter (such as Tocqueville's or Weber's), early empirically oriented formulations (for example Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture*), and more

recent developments from the 1980s onward. In your view has this subfield achieved genuine progress contributing to our theoretical understanding of empirical puzzles and outcomes, or has it been just "spinning its wheels"—engaging in great efforts without really getting anywhere new? In your answer please make specific reference to significant works that you see as representatives of progress, or its absence, and if possible please also indicate what you see as examples of the real payoff—or absence of a payoff—from this line of work in explaining empirical outcomes.

7. You have been asked to address a conference of peace studies students on the usefulness of Political Sociology for understanding the origins and possible resolution or avoidance of political phenomena involving, or potentially producing, sharp conflict and violence. You are supposed to make some "large brush stroke comments" focusing on big currents within the sub discipline and their general contributions, as well as to provide some much more specific and illustrative comments drawn from the works of various authors. The organizers of the conference also want you to clarify whether works on late twentieth century revolutions and revolutionary movements has added significantly to the theoretical lessons drawn from the study of "classic revolutions" (those that took place from the eighteenth century to the mid twentieth century), or whether such works have only made empirical contributions without pushing forward our theoretical understanding of revolutions and revolutionary movements as well as their impact? Please make specific references to works in the field.

8. Two areas of work in Political Sociology in recent decades have been the study of networks and of narratives. Some scholars have sought to intertwine these two areas of study. Have their efforts been successful—and if so what have been their "payoffs"? Should the study of networks and narratives always be carried out in an interactive way—connecting networks and narratives to one another? Why or why not? What are the implications of your view for the existing literature in the field and for new research?

9. Please identify three great works written since 1960 that have made a really significant and enduring contribution to Political Sociology, and one WELL KNOWN WORK that you believe did NOT, at the end of the day, make an enduring contribution—or at least not a very compelling one. Do elaborate fully.

10. Write a critical review of the questions in this exam from the perspective of which important area or areas of Political Sociology are not represented, somehow, in it—if you think that there are indeed any. Prepare your own question that pertains to the neglected area—or to what you think is the most important one if you think that there are several of them—and answer it. (The assessment of your response will of course also focus on your preliminary discussion and on the quality of your resulting question.)