

Social Movements and Collective Action Area Exam

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Spring 2019

Part I (Day 1).

Answer two of the following four questions.

1. Pick a field and topic in which the social movements literature has generally been ignored and explain how applying it would advance our understanding of that field and topic.
2. Social movement scholars are interested in determining whether movements succeed or fail. This research interest poses several methodological challenges. For example, how do we determine whether a movement has succeeded? What time frame should we consider when trying to evaluate success? Do these methodological problems have theoretical implications? Do the answers depend upon the type of movement being studied? Draw on the social movement literature to discuss how these issues have been handled in the past and consider how continued engagement with these questions could open up new lines of inquiry for social movement scholars.
3. Describe how social movement scholars have theorized people's motivation to participate in protest and related actions and how this has shifted over time as the social movement field has developed. Explain the significance of this shift for understanding why people participate in social movements of various causes.
4. Over the past couple of decades an enormous amount of attention has focused on the role of framing processes in social movements. Describe the key strengths and limitations of this research for explaining the emergence of collective action among disadvantaged groups in society.

Part II (Day 2).

Answer two of the following four questions.

1. Among the most important individual-level questions in the field of social movements is why certain people but not others participate in activism. Discuss how scholars of social movements have theoretically and methodologically approached this question. Then, evaluate existing theoretical and methodological approaches for investigating differential participation, discussing ways you would address any deficiencies.
2. Social movement scholars distinguish between institutionalized political action (such as voting, lobbying, running for office, giving campaign contributions), and extra-institutional political action (demonstrations and protests). How useful is this distinction? To what extent do the same types of political action have similar (or different) causes?
3. In recent years, we have seen a rise in violent acts carried out by individuals and groups affiliated with white nationalist or white supremacist belief systems. Draw on the social movement literature to explain the emergence of this form of extremist collective action.
4. It has often been noted that most of our theories of social movements have been developed with U.S. cases in mind—in particular, the American Civil Rights movement. Yet many scholars have studied social movement activism that takes place outside of the United States. What have we gained, in terms of theory development, from these studies of social movement activism outside of the United States?