

## AU GOVT PhD Comprehensive Field Exam in Comparative Politics – December 2017

**Directions to first field students:** 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.

**Directions to second field students:** You have 48 hours to answer TWO (2) of the following questions: one question from Part I, and one question from Part II or Part III.

**Directions for all test-taking students:** 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) How 'durable' is authoritarianism? As governments succeed in limiting civil society in many parts of the globe, should we understand authoritarianism from a structural viewpoint, an institutional one, or an ideological perspective, among others?
- 2) Which is stronger: the state or civil society? Take a stand on this issue, focusing the bulk of your response on one important political outcome (e.g, democratization, state formation, etc.). Make sure to discuss both state- and society-centered approaches to explaining your chosen outcome.
- 3) What is the relationship between globalization, inequality, poverty, and political movements? How can we measure the important related variables? Be sure to explain an integrated means of explaining all of these variables, and then critique whether the explanation is convincing and whether alternative explanations are available.

### PART II

- 1) Please explain what you consider to be the most useful approaches to understanding the persistence of political inequality, its consequences for the potential strength of democratic governance, and the effectiveness of strategies aimed at diminishing differences in political resources and power. What would you identify as the most noteworthy differences in the ways that political inequality is manifested -- for example, along lines of gender, income, race or religion -- in the developing world in contrast with developed nations?
- 2) "When trying to understand collective action (social movements, protests, communal violence), the social networks emphasized by sociologists are far more important than the factors emphasized by political scientists, such as individual rationality or state strategies." Agree or disagree. Support your argument with reference to at least one case study.
- 3) Many scholars argue that ethnic diversity increases the likelihood of violence between groups, but they disagree about the root causes of this correlation. Do you believe that ethnic differences always lead to mistrust and increase the possibility of "sparks" that can set off conflict, or are there factors that make ethnic conflict in diverse societies more or less likely?

### **PART III**

- 1) Scholars have argued that political polarization has been on the rise over the last few years, as exemplified, for example, by the Brexit vote, and recent national elections in the US, France, and Germany. Using theories of comparative politics, explain some of the specific causes of the rise of this new nationalism. Is this caused by political institutions? Political attitudes and political culture? Socio-economic causes? Please cite a range of theories and readings in your explanation.
- 2) What are the principal factors that impede democratization in the Middle East, and to what extent do these vary across sub-sets of countries in the region? To what extent are positive trajectories of development achieved by some democratic and authoritarian political systems elsewhere in the Global South indicative of potential pathways to democracy in the Middle East? What accounts for the possibility that lessons from other regions may or may not travel well to the Middle East?
- 3) A growing literature on democratic transition focuses on the distributional implications of democratic vs. non-democratic regimes, as well as how structural features like inequality may moderate such distributional effects. Given the literature, how will you assess the prospects for democracy in today's China, given its growing economy and inequality?