

AU GOVT Comprehensive Field Exam in Comparative Politics – September 2019

Directions: You have 72 hours to answer THREE (3) of the following questions: one question from Part I, and two question from Part II. 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 12-point Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman font, with one inch margins. Please number the pages.

PART I (answer one and ONLY one question)

- 1) There is considerable commentary these days about how resilient formal democratic institutions are when major political actors violate informal democratic norms and traditions. This discussion echoes earlier debates in political science about whether democracy can be achieved and consolidated in the absence of a “civic culture.” What does research on democratization and democratic breakdown have to say about the relationship between institutional structures and informal norms and practices?
- 2) When explaining important political outcomes, some scholars point to strategic bargaining between actors, while others see actors’ actions as strongly shaped by the past. What is your take on this debate? Are there particular questions for which historical institutionalism has more or less leverage?

PART II (answer two questions)

- 1) Democratic regimes sometimes break down, and so do authoritarian ones. How similar are the dynamics of regime breakdown for these two regime types, or are they entirely different?
- 2) Though most countries have now instituted multiparty elections, accountable governments are rare. What do you see as the major obstacle to accountability, and are there social, institutional, or economic factors that make government accountability more likely?
- 3) Mancur Olson famously described early states as the evolution of roving bandits into stationary ones. Do you agree with this model of state formation, or are there others that should also be considered? What factors do you view as most crucial in explaining variation in the strength and success of states?

- 4) Social movement theories that focus on political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, and framing, advance very different claims about why social movements arise and whether or not they succeed. Discuss the differences among these three approaches and whether they are fundamentally incompatible or actually complementary.