

McMASTER SOCIOLOGY
POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
PH.D.COMPREHENSIVE QUESTION BANK

April 2024

Section A – Political Sociology

1. What is the state? What are the similarities and differences in the theoretical treatment of the state by classical theorists such as Marx and Weber? How do more contemporary theorists of the state articulate the state as an object worthy of analysis?
2. What is the power of the state? From what source(s) is this power derived? Draw from a variety of perspectives on the state and power from the reading list, including Marx, Weber, Mills, Foucault, and Skocpol.
3. Explain the categories of the welfare state as understood by Esping-Andersen and the gender-based critique of this offered by Ann Shola Orloff. Imagine a similar critique of Esping-Andersen based on racialization and/or national origin. What criteria should be included to account for these social categories in the welfare state literature?
4. What is autonomy of the state? How do various theorists either explicitly or implicitly deal with state autonomy as a foundation of their understanding of the role of the state in organizing the social world?
5. How is the state a source of inequality? What are some important political, governmental, and bureaucratic processes that increase or decrease race, class, and gender inequality?
6. How can we understand the state to be racialized and/or gendered? That is, in what ways does the state rely on, and become defined by, racial and gender-based projects of state formation?
7. What is the state? What is government? What is policy? What is bureaucracy? How do each of these work--either together or at odds--to organize the social world, produce or reduce inequalities, and constrain the range of choices of individuals?
8. Works that compare the political cultures of Canada and the United States feature prominently on this reading list. What are the various sides of the debate about the political origins of cultural outcomes? What is the evidence for each side? Which work(s) do you find most convincing?

9. Many of the works on this list rely on historical institutionalism to explain policy outcomes. Explain what historical institutionalism is, and give several examples of its application. How is it useful in comparative analysis?
10. Cultural processes that support social change are theoretically distinct from, but intrinsically tied to, institutions and structures. What are some of the institutional and structural infrastructures that support cultural processes? How have they changed over time, and how have these changes altered the possibilities for cultural processes in support of social change?

Section B – Globalization and Social Movements

1. What is neoliberalism? What is the relationship between neoliberalism and globalization? What are the specific policies tied to neoliberalism, and how do they alter the political landscape, change the dynamics of inequality, and produce social outcomes?
2. In what ways are race, class and gender inequality global phenomena? What global social processes produce and maintain these inequalities? How can states either reduce or exacerbate them? What role do supranational institutions play?
3. What are some of the conditions under which social movements are effective agents of social change? Which of these are under the control of activists and which are external? How much social change do you think is likely to result from social movements?
4. Explain resource mobilization theory, political process theory, and cultural theories of social movements. Do these theories complement each other, or are they at odds with each other? What would you argue are the most important aspects of social movements theory?
5. Comparative analyses of social movements suggest that political contexts matter to outcomes. Discuss the important aspects of political contexts regarding the potential for social change.
6. Cultural processes in social movements have been identified as important to social change outcomes. Explain these and other aspects of culture that social movements theorists have articulated as important: hegemony, collective identity, framing, emotions, and discourse. How might you describe the current state of the field of cultural approaches to social movements?
7. What is a social movement society, and how is it different from other societies? What aspects of the political context are important to understanding social movement societies and how they produce or resist social change?
8. How does a “multi-institutional politics” approach to social movements differ from traditional approaches? What aspects of social movements does it explain better, and what might it miss? Discuss the state of the field of social movements theory from a multi-institutional perspective.

9. The Occupy, Black Lives Matter and, to some extent in Canada, the Idle No More movements have highlighted the role of disruptive political protest outside of mainstream parliamentary and union-organizations based dissent. Evaluate the Piven thesis on the disruptive power of the powerless in light of recent world events and in light of competing social movement theories.