

Political Economy Field Exam

August 2014

Instructions: Answer three of the following questions, choosing at least one from Section I (political economy as method) and Section II (political economy as substance). Choose questions to show the breadth as well as the depth of your knowledge. The exam is closed book, but feel free to refer to the political economy reading list for spelling.

Section I. Political Economy as Method

Question 1.

Governments often have a hard time committing to future policies. Discuss models of commitment including models of signaling type, credible commitment models and tying hands. How are these models similar and how are they different? Empirically how would we distinguish these models? What are the different predictions of behavior? Use examples from domestic or international politics.

Question 2.

Discuss the following statement: “The dominant approach in Political Economy, where social outcomes are the result of rational decision-making by individuals, is ultimately unsatisfactory because it fails to explain two of the most important phenomena: voting and revolutions.”

Question 3.

How are neoclassical and Marxist versions of materialism similar and different? With what consequences for understanding politics? Illustrate your answer with two or three examples.

Question 4.

How can legislative organization be understood as a market? Discuss two or three models of legislative organization, drawing attention to the different assumptions they make about the market for policies. How would you test these models empirically?

Question 5.

How do electoral rules shape policy outcomes? Consider two or three different arguments about the link between electoral incentives and policy choices, and lay out an empirical strategy for adjudicating among them.

Section II: The Substance of Political Economy

Question 6.

The Great Depression sparked waves of trade protection as countries raised their tariff barriers and competitively devalued their currencies. The Great Recession, on the other hand, led to little increase in trade protection or competitive devaluations. What explains why trade remained open through this crisis while it was closed during the Great Depression? Discuss institutional as well as interest group models of trade policy formation.

Question 7.

Is there an optimal sequence of economic development and political development (democratization)? Should one precede the other?

Question 8.

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of electoral versus interest group models of economic regulation. Draw on two or three policy areas to illustrate your answer.

Question 6

During the past few months America's government made its most dramatic interventions in financial markets since the 1930s. It has been suggested that the current crisis could redraw the boundaries between government and markets. For some, "freer and more flexible markets will still do more for the world economy than the heavy hand of government" whereas for others "big banking crises are ultimately solved by early and decisive government action and financial regulation." Evaluate these positions.

Question 7

Suppose you are trying to settle the debate between the swing and the core voter theories of distributive politics. What are the weaknesses of existing theories and empirical approaches? What alternative research strategies might you propose?