

QUALIFYING EXAM

Social Movements-Spring 2026

The questions below are the qualifying exam in the area of Social Movements. You must answer one question from each of the three sections below in an essay format. Each answer should be a self-contained essay approximately 8–10 pages long (i.e., 2,000–2,500 words). In the essay, you must cite referenced works and include a bibliography. One comprehensive bibliography for all three questions will be sufficient. You may consult materials from the reading list you've been provided, as well as any other scholarly sources you've read during the exam period.

Section A

Choose and answer one of the following questions:

1. The scholarship on social movements offers no single, unified explanation for why movements take shape or how they unfold. Instead, we have a set of partial theories (i.e., grievances, resources, political opportunities, culture, emotions), each illuminating different pieces of the puzzle. Drawing on these major approaches, critically evaluate how they account for the emergence, persistence, and decline of social movements. Where do these frameworks complement one another, and where do they fall short when applied to concrete cases?

2. As social movements increasingly organize across borders, they confront both new possibilities and new vulnerabilities. Assess the promises and limits of transnational activism, paying particular attention to how activists forge solidarities across asymmetries of power, culture, and organizational capacity. What meaningfully distinguishes transnational movements from domestic ones? What core dynamics remain largely unchanged?

Section B

Choose and answer one of the following questions:

1. Studying social movements has always posed methodological problems about how to study a political process which is almost by definition outside the mainstream. An even thornier problem is how to measure movement success. How should sociologists gauge success? In what ways has this yardstick shifted over time and why?

2. Social movements have been studied both from the point of view of external constraints / opportunities and internal dynamics. Compare these features as discussed in the literature and which do you think offers a more compelling perspective for analyzing movements?

Section C

Choose and answer one of the following questions:

1. Following the structuralist turn from the psychologically-informed theory of Collective Behavior, social movement theory remained largely devoid of a concept of 'emotion'. However, in the past few years 'emotion' has made a comeback as a significant analytical theme. Is this a welcome development? Why? What does the element of emotion add to the social movement perspectives? Is this not a return to the old-fashion Collective Behavior perspective and its pitfalls? How is the recent emphasis on 'emotion' different from the one which was used in the Collective Behavior paradigm? Discuss.

2. The new Information Technologies/social media are suggested to have significantly transformed the dynamics of the social movements. Discuss how Information Technologies/social media have affected social movements. Are they cure or curse for a social movement? In other words, what are the advantages and drawbacks of the Networked Movements. Discuss by giving examples.