

Assessment guidelines for STV4302, autumn semester 2022

General comment: The exam was a six-hour open-book exam, which means that the students had full access to the internet, lecture notes, lecture slides (if they had down-loaded them), and syllabus texts. The four questions in principle count equally towards the grade, but in practice the performance of the students on the chosen set as a whole will be decisive.

Exam set 1. (Please answer all four questions if you choose this set)

- a) What did the French historian Ernest Renan mean when he wrote that the nation is ‘a daily plebiscite’, and how is this similar to or different from Benedict Anderson’s conception of the nation as an ‘imagined community’?

This question calls for a comparison of Renan’s and Anderson’s nation concepts. To do so, it is necessary first to explain what the two authors meant by the nation as ‘a daily plebiscite’ and the nation as ‘an imagined community’, respectively. In the scholarly literature on nationalism both are cited as prime examples of a subjective or voluntarist nation concept, however, neither concept is exclusively voluntarist/subjective. Good students have read and understood both contributions and are able to explain why this is so.

Renan held his lecture [What is a nation?] in 1882, at a time when the prevalent conception of nationhood was still quite primordialist, and he polemized explicitly against the idea that certain ‘objective’ features constituted the nation. An obvious pitfall (if the student has not read the piece) is to exaggerate the voluntarism in Renan’s conception of the nation. It should be emphasized that Anderson’s conception of the nation as ‘imagined’ does not mean ‘imaginary’. An answer that does not make this point is not full. A good answer should list all the characteristics he included and explain what this means in his view.

- b) Choose at least two of the theories on the syllabus and discuss how they explain the emergence of nations, with special emphasis on agency versus structure, the importance of ethno-cultural foundations, and (various aspects of) modernisation.

Any combination of scholars is fine; however, it is probably better to choose scholars that differ on the dimensions students are asked to discuss. A minimum of two is required; some may choose to cover three or more. It is not recommended to cover all, both due to time constraints and because it is difficult to compare multiple theories in a systematic way, especially since we also ask the students to apply the theories to empirical cases.

It is probably necessary to start with an overview of each of the chosen theories, and then compare them with respect to whether they primarily emphasize agency or structure, the role they attribute to pre-modern ethnic roots or ‘proto-national ties’, and what aspects of modernisation they emphasize.

- c) Apply the chosen theories to at least two cases of nation forming. Drawing on the theories, discuss factors and processes that can account for their success or failure.

Students are asked to apply the chosen theories to empirical cases. This can be the Norwegian or the Central European cases that are covered on the syllabus, but other cases are also fine (Italy, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Russia or China, for instance). Plus for systematic, well-informed and well-argued accounts of differences and similarities and illuminating empirical examples.

- d) Compare Billig's banal nationalism to the concept of national indifference. Discuss to what extent these alternative approaches contradict each other.

Billig's banal nationalism is covered briefly in Özkirimli. National indifference is covered in four contributions: the introductory chapter of Ginderacter & Fox, and three empirical chapters: on the 'Tutejsi' in interwar Poland, on interwar Alsace, and on Rural Austria before the first world war. Both have been discussed in the lecture on alternative approaches. All should be able to get something out of the first part of the question.

Banal nationalism is about 'the everyday reproduction of nation' or the stuff that surrounds us, reminding us of nationhood, without anybody really promoting it. The scholars behind the term 'national indifference' questioned the mass character of nationalism in East Central Europe at the turn of the 20th century, arguing that ordinary people were indifferent, ambivalent, or opportunistic. Zahra argues that national indifference is NOT a premodern relic, but rather a response to modern mass politics: Competition between nationalist movements encouraged national indifference.

As for the second part of the question, this is more open. Ginderacter & Fox argue that there is a contradiction between national indifference and Billig's banal nationalism. According to them, Billig assumes that widespread nationalist discourses reflect (and constitute) an equally strong and widespread sense of national belonging, while scholars of national indifference argue that strong nationalist propaganda rather suggests the existence of nationally indifferent commoners who the nationalists want to win over to the national cause. However, as I pointed out in the lecture, their empirical point of departure is quite different. Plus for well-argued and nuanced discussions.

Exam set 2. (Please answer all four questions if you choose this set)

- a) What is nationalism? Discuss, using one of more contributions on the syllabus as a point of departure

There are different ways to go about answering this question. The obvious point of departure is Smith's 5 meanings of nationalism: nationalism as nation-building, nationalism as national(ist) movement, nationalism as ideology or discourse, nationalism as national symbolism, and nationalism as national consciousness. To this may be added Hroch's nationalism as excessive loyalty to the nation. However, it is fine to use other contributions as well, as long as the student reflects over the concept of nationalism – what could be included in the concept, what should be omitted, and why.

- b) Since Johann Gottfried von Herder, nationalists and scholars alike have emphasized the significance of language in nation-forming processes. Discuss how different scholars approach the question of language in the context of nation forming and nationalist mobilization.

This question explicitly ask how scholars (i.e. more than one) talk about language in relation to nationalism (broadly understood). Any combination of scholars is fine, as long as the candidate covers the approach of more than one scholar. However, it makes more sense to discuss scholars that have something to say about language. Anderson and Gellner are perhaps the most obvious choices, but also other approaches may work well, including Hobsbawm's chapter on proto-national ties (he also discusses religion) and Hroch's three phases (A-B-C). It is also possible to draw on empirical articles about the relationship between nation and language, like for instance Magosci or Lindstedt. It is perfectly fine to use examples, and it is a plus if students demonstrate that they also master the empirical part of the syllabus, but this should come in addition to, not instead of, theoretical reflections.

- c) What do Hobsbawm and Ranger mean by invented traditions? Provide at least two examples of invented traditions, and discuss what role the invention of tradition plays in nation-forming processes, drawing on the syllabus.

Here the student needs to explain what an 'invented tradition' is. This should not be difficult, considering that it was an open book-exam. This should ideally be combined with discussing the role of 'traditions'. The student should also list the three functional types of invented traditions. Examples are supposed to demonstrate that the student has understood what an invented tradition is in practice. Empirical examples can be taken from the syllabus, but other examples are also welcome. Based on the lectures and the syllabus, Norwegian 'bunad', flags, and national anthems are obvious choices.

The second part is quite open, but a possible option is to use Hroch as a point of departure. He argues that invented traditions are about 'how', not 'why' nations are formed. This may then be contrasted to Hobsbawm & Ranger.

- d) On December 7, twenty-five far-right activists, including a 71-year-old prince, a retired military commander, and an acting judge and former MP for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) were arrested in Germany for planning a violent overthrow of the state, including an armed attack on the parliament. Imagine that you are a researcher on the far right and have been contacted by the media. Using articles on the syllabus as a point of departure, how would you explain this event?

All the assigned readings on the far right are relevant here – Carter on ideology, Caiani and della Porta on different types of movements, Minkenberg on mobilization in East vs Western Europe, Mudde on theoretical explanations, and Muis and Immerzeel on empirical findings based on demand- and supply-side explanations. An excellent answer would incorporate all five readings, but should include at least Carter, Mudde, and Muis and Immerzeel.

Carter's definition of right-wing extremism/radicalism could be used to assess the ideology of those arrested, based on how they match the defining features and the accompanying features. A brief definition of each of these features would be good, but more importantly, students should mention that violent overthrow of the German state points to anti-democratic and authoritarian inclinations (it is telling that the arrested activists included a former military commander and a prince).

Based on Caiani and della Porta's chapter, students can argue that the far right mobilizes beyond electoral politics and includes social movement actors (like those arrested) who aim not at participating in elections and thus coming to power, but at an authoritarian vision of society that opposes democracy (their aim was to reinstate the pre-war version of Germany).

Based on Minkenberg, they can elaborate on how in Western Europe, strong parties often lead to weak but more violent movements, while in Eastern Europe, strong parties coexist with strong movements. Here, the fact that one of the arrested people was a former AfD member is telling, because one could argue that the party distanced itself from his extreme views, which made him more open to violent tactics outside the parliament.

Based on Mudde's and Muis and Immerzeel's contributions, students can discuss what could have led to the mobilization of this group, distinguishing between demand-side factors (factors stemming from rapid changes in society, like modernization, large-scale immigration, etc. that some people fall behind, becoming 'modernization losers' that want to bring a romanticized version of the past back – in this case, the pre-war German state) and supply-side factors (factors including external supply side, like political context and the behaviour of other political parties and internal supply side, like ideology and organization). An important argument is that demand-side factors by themselves cannot sufficiently explain far-right mobilization, and one should thus look at a combination of demand- and supply-side factors.