The American Comp is a take-home exam with 48 hours allowed for completion by native speakers of English and 58 hours allowed for non-native speakers of English. For native speakers, the exam must be e-mailed to Matt Hall and the DGS by 9:30 a.m. on Monday, Jan. 19. For non-native speakers, the exam must be e-mailed to Matt Hall and the DGS by 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 19. A hard copy of your exam answers is due to the DGS by 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 20. A maximum of 4800 words is allowed in response to each question.

American Politics General Questions

Choose two questions to answer from the following four questions:

1. The role of political parties is a major source of debate in the study of American institutions and behavior. On the institutions side, scholars have debated whether parties affect legislator behavior. In the area of behavior, scholars have reached different conclusions about the importance of party identification. Yet, for all the research that has been done, there are still many unanswered questions. Identify one question that has been studied but for which we still seek clear answers, explain why the debate continues, and discuss how progress might be made in answering this question. In your response, be sure to give sufficient attention to all parts of the prompt (i.e., the discussion about progress should be longer than a couple of paragraphs).

2. This Ngram confirms that polarization has become a major—perhaps the primary—theme in contemporary discussions of American politics, and what ails it. However, there is healthy debate over the definition, extent, causes, and consequences of polarization.

Based on the existing literature, what is polarization? How do we know when we see it?
Using your definition, is the mass public polarized? What about political elites? Be sure to
discuss BOTH.

If so, what are the institutional features of the U.S. political system that have contributed to
polarization? Are there other explanations? In other words—why now?

If you do not think there is polarization, why do so many observers have that perception? Again,
what are the institutional features of American politics that lead to that perception? And are there
other explanations for that perception?

Normatively, should we be concerned about either the reality or perception of polarization? Are
there positives to it? Carefully consider both sides of the question.

Finally, what—if anything—might be done about the reality or perception of polarization? In
particular, are there institutional reforms that might lead to a change? Would such reforms have
other potential consequences?

3. V.O. Key famously observed that “unless mass views have some place in the shaping of
policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense.” Drawing from the literature on both mass
behavior and institutions in American politics, assess the current quality of American democracy
by this standard of mass opinion shaping public policy.

4. What role (or roles) do national political institutions play in the American system of
government? In answering this question, you should (1) adopt and defend a particular viewpoint
or combination of viewpoints about political institutions, (2) elaborate your view in the context
of the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary (you may also consider the bureaucracy or
political parties), and (3) consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies.

Subfield Questions: Civic Engagement
Choose one question to answer from the following two questions:

1. What, if anything, have we learned from the political science literature on social capital?

Write an essay that addresses the following:

What is social capital? That is, offer and defend a definition of social capital that is both
measurable and plausibly related to one or more political phenomena.

Then, apply your definition of social capital—either as a dependent or independent variable, or
both—to politics. What can it explain? What explains it?

Finally, propose an original study that employs social capital. What else might it explain, or
might it be explained by? You are encouraged to be creative!
2. In *Hearing the Other Side*, Diana Mutz writes:

“[I]t is doubtful that an extremely activist political culture can also be a heavily deliberative one.” (page 3)

Based on your reading of the existing literature, is she right? Discuss the evidence for and against her argument. What are the normative implications of the extant literature on crosstalk for different conceptions of democracy?

Next, discuss a further empirical test that could be done to evaluate her thesis. In other words, propose an original study that examines whether there is tension between deliberation and participation, under what conditions such tension might arise, etc. In addition to the empirical conclusions that would be drawn from your study, how would it shed light on the normative implications you have discussed?

**Subfield Questions: Congress**

Choose one question to answer from the following two questions:

1. Over the past several years, conflict within Congress over executive and judicial nominees has resulted in what many observers and commentators view as a broken nominations process; vacancies persist for longer periods of time, nominees are confirmed at lower rates, and the rate at which nominees are filibustered is at an all-time high. Moreover, there have been several failed attempts to invoke cloture on nominees put forth by both Presidents Bush and Obama. This last fact is arguably—at least in part—responsible for the commencement of discussions regarding the removal of the filibuster for at least certain types of nominations, and the eventual removal (in November 2013) for all nominees except for those to the Supreme Court. In the minority at the time, many Republicans vowed to restore the requirement should they regain the majority (which they did in the 2014 elections).

   - Discuss the importance of the cloture requirement on lawmaking generally.
   - Discuss the importance of the cloture requirement on the nominations process specifically.
   - Any possible electoral implications aside, and speaking solely in terms of policy, would restoration of the filibuster requirement for nominees in the 114th Congress have any effect on the nominations process? Why or why not? If so, how? If not, under what conditions—if any—would we expect it to have an effect?
   - Suppose the cloture requirements for all legislation and nominations were reduced to a bare majority of those present, instead of 3/5 of those sworn. What would be the effects on American politics generally, including the likelihood of responsible party government?
   - How would you test these questions empirically?

2. In the context of studying American political development, students of legislative politics often remark that a zero-sum relationship exists between congressional committees and political parties. Indeed, in earlier eras when political parties in Congress were quite strong, committees were considered to be much weaker in terms of their role in the legislative process. As the power of party leaders has receded over time, however, most scholars agree that this ushered in an era of "committee government." Discuss the nature of the relationship between congressional
committees and parties over the course of congressional history. To what extent is it accurate to characterize this relationship as zero-sum? Under what conditions might committees and parties be working toward the same legislative goals?
American Field Comp
May 2014

General: Choose Two

1. The goals of political actors, and the ways in which their actions and behaviors in pursuit of those goals shape the operation of American government, are recurring themes of the literature on American politics. Describe and discuss/critique the goals scholars have imputed to different political actors (e.g., members of Congress, presidents, Supreme Court justices), how those actors' strategies and tactics are shaped by their goals, the ways in which American political institutions shape and constrain these actors' goals (and their pursuit of them), and the implications of this work for our understanding of the functioning of American government, especially vis-à-vis democratic principles.

2. Party identification is one of the central concepts in the literature on American political behavior. There are multiple theories about what party identification is, how it develops, and its role in the process of attitude formation and electoral choice. Discuss and critically evaluate these competing theories. Does the empirical evidence support one theoretical perspective more than the others?

3. Describe how and why individuals' demographic characteristics, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, class and religious identification, shape the political behavior among citizens. Do the various demographic characteristics function in similar ways (e.g., does race matter in the same way that gender matters?) or do they matter in different ways and for different reasons? How do these characteristics interact? What does the evidence tell us about the influence of demographic characteristics on the behavior of political elites? Should we expect to find the same effects of demographic characteristics among elite actors as we do among the masses?

4. The religion and politics literature clearly establishes that religion affects voting behavior, but it typically does not situate its discussion of religion's impact on the vote within the major theoretical traditions in voting behavior research. The three main theoretical perspectives on voting are the sociological (or Columbia) model, the social-psychological (or Michigan) model, and the economic (rational choice, Downsian, Rochester) model. Write an essay in which you discuss the electoral impact of religion from the perspective of each of these theoretical traditions. How does voter religion "fit" into each of the three models? Finally, is religion's impact on voting behavior best explained by a particular theoretical approach, or can the electoral impact of religion be explained just as well by any of the three perspectives?
Participation: Choose One

1. Political participation in the United States appears to many as a paradox. On the one hand, American voter turnout ranks near the bottom among the world’s democracies. But on the other hand, by international standards Americans engage in other forms of participation, like contacting elected officials, at very high rates.

First, what explains this apparent paradox? Why are Americans (a) less likely to vote but (b) more likely to engage in other forms of political activity than citizens of other democratic nations? Contrast the differing perspectives on this issue within the political science literature, and argue for the explanation(s) you find most convincing.

Second, what are the implications of this paradox for representative democracy in the United States? How does operating in an environment with low turnout but high rates of non-electoral participation affect the actions of elected officials in the United States? How does it affect the substance of public policy? How might the policy landscape be different if the U.S. had high voter turnout but low rates of other forms of political participation?

2. Most of the seminal studies of voter participation begin with the premise that voters participate less than they did in the past. Recent elections, however, reveal a strong reversal in these trends. Describe and assess the major theories of voter participation. Are they able to explain the recent resurgence in voter turnout? If not, how might one explain recent participation increases in national level elections?
American Politics Comprehensive Exam  
January 18, 2014

General American Politics
Choose two to answer from the following four questions:

1. V.O. Key famously observed that "unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense." Drawing from the literature on both mass behavior and institutions in American politics, assess the current quality of American democracy by this standard of mass opinion shaping public policy.

2. Among the general public, the U.S. House of Representatives is often criticized for being unresponsive to public opinion. Yet it was designed by the Framers to be the most responsive institution. Based on the literature within political science, is the House of Representatives highly responsive to the public opinion, as was intended? Or is it unresponsive, as most Americans think? (In your essay, be sure to define "responsive to public opinion"). In your essay, be sure to refer to more than the Congress literature as it is conventionally defined. How can the literatures in public opinion, political participation, or campaigns and elections speak to this question?

3. In recent years, scholars and popular commentators have debated whether ‘race matters.’ The first decade of the Twenty-First century began with the highly controversial Bush v. Gore 2000 Presidential election, was followed by the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain, and ended with the rise of the Tea Party in 2010. While the ‘race matters’ idea has been an important focus in the Race and Ethnicity subfield of American Politics for some time, write an essay that assesses its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of the question of whether ‘race matters’ for the American Politics field, including national institutions, public opinion, and partisan politics.

4. In the framers’ understanding, Congress held the substantive powers of government. The presidency was designed as “an effectual check” upon the legislature. Yet, the 20th century saw a shift of that institutional balance with increasing presidential power and prominence in American politics and governance. What are the causes of this apparent institutional reversal? Along with presidency research, consider how the literatures on political parties, elections, and Congress can inform your essay.

Immigration
Choose one of the following two questions.

1. The newest wave of immigration in the United States, comprised by immigrants from Latin America and Asia, has rapidly transformed the American demography. Despite significant bloc voting for Obama in 2012, many pundits and scholars assert that Latinos and Asians seem to have a less coherent political identity because immigrants were not socialized into notions of pan-ethnic solidarity. Do you agree with this assessment, or is this an overly simplistic account of group behavior? Drawing on the relevant literature discuss how the continued growth of the Latinos and Asians, from both immigration and native births, will affect the political integration of these groups in the decades to come.

2. Both George W. Bush and Barack Obama have called on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform, with limited consequences in the legislative process. A key consideration with respect to immigration policy is its relationship with public opinion. Softening public opposition to unauthorized immigration would suggest a democratic mandate to pass immigration policy to address the presence of undocumented immigrants. Yet, the federal level has failed to pass such legislation, while some states have pursued restrictionist policies designed to encourage self-deportation. Discuss the diverging paths of policy-making and public opinion about immigration, particularly at the state-level. Why do some states enact tough restrictions on immigrant rights while others provide social welfare and cultural recognition? What role does public opinion have on this relationship, and is this unique to immigration policy?
General American Politics
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3. In recent years, scholars and popular commentators have debated whether ‘race matters.’ The first decade of the Twenty-First century began with the highly controversial Bush v. Gore 2000 Presidential election, was followed by the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain, and ended with the rise of the Tea Party in 2010. While the ‘race matters’ idea has been an important focus in the Race and Ethnicity subfield of American Politics for some time, write an essay that assesses its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of the question of whether ‘race matters’ for the American Politics field, including national institutions, public opinion, and partisan politics.

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Judicial Politics

Choose one of the following two questions.

1. Alexander Bickel argued that judicial review suffers from a counter-majoritarian difficulty because, “when the Supreme Court declares unconstitutional a legislative act or the action of an elected executive...it exercises control, not in behalf of the prevailing majority, but against it. Robert Dahl disagreed; he claimed that, “[e]xcept for short-lived transitional periods...the Supreme Court is inevitably a part of the dominant national alliance... [and] of course supports the major policies of the alliance.” Based on modern empirical scholarship, which of these views is more accurate? In forming your response: (1) consider alternative definitions of the “majority” and (2) consider the theoretical reasons why the Court might support or undermine the majority and the empirical evidence to support those theories.

2. For decades, the judicial politics literature has been preoccupied with a debate between the “attitudinal” and “legal” models of judicial decision making; yet, as early as 1994, prominent judicial politics scholars declared the legal model to be a “straw man” argument that no judge or scholar actually believes. What is the status of the “legal model” today? That is, what is the current state of empirical evidence regarding the role of “law” in American judicial decision-making? In forming your response: (1) consider alternative perspectives on what it means for judges to follow the “law” and (2) consider strengths and weaknesses of the “legal model” and its modern incarnations.
American Politics Comprehensive Exam
January 18, 2014

General American Politics
Choose two to answer from the following four questions:

1. V.O. Key famously observed that "unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense." Drawing from the literature on both mass behavior and institutions in American politics, assess the current quality of American democracy by this standard of mass opinion shaping public policy.

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3. In recent years, scholars and popular commentators have debated whether ‘race matters.’ The first decade of the Twenty-First century began with the highly controversial Bush v. Gore 2000 Presidential election, was followed by the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain, and ended with the rise of the Tea Party in 2010. While the ‘race matters’ idea has been an important focus in the Race and Ethnicity subfield of American Politics for some time, write an essay that assesses its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of the question of whether ‘race matters’ for the American Politics field, including national institutions, public opinion, and partisan politics.

4. In the framers’ understanding, Congress held the substantive powers of government. The presidency was designed as “an effectual check” upon the legislature. Yet, the 20th century saw a shift of that institutional balance with increasing presidential power and prominence in American politics and governance. What are the causes of this apparent institutional reversal? Along with presidency research, consider how the literatures on political parties, elections, and Congress can inform your essay.

Political Participation
Choose one of the following two questions:

1. Perhaps the most frequent recommendation within the civic engagement literature is for enhanced civic education, most commonly through formal schooling. What do we know about the effect of education on civic engagement—whether defined by attitudes or behavior?

   First, adjudicate among the competing arguments regarding the effect—or absence thereof—of a causal link between educational attainment and civic engagement. Be sure to describe, analyze, and evaluate the different types of evidence that have been brought to bear on this question.

   Second, discuss what is known about the efficacy of civic education—whether curricular or extra-curricular. Drawing on one or more theories within the civic engagement literature, explain why you would, or would not, expect civic education programs for youth to have an effect on their life-long civic engagement.

2. Contemporary voters are able to register and vote in more ways than any point in history (e.g., vote by mail, early voting, election day registration, on-line registration). Proponents of these laws intended these alternatives to showing up at a given polling place on Election Day to increase voter turnout. The academic literature suggests the passage of new laws has met with mixed success at best. This question consists of three parts. Thinking theoretically, what sub-populations should benefit from convenience voting reforms (or should it benefit all groups equally or no group at all)? Next, critically evaluate the extent to which the existing literature supports or refutes your theoretical expectations. Finally, propose a research design to collect better data to test your theory.
Part I. General Questions
Choose two (2) of the following four (4) questions to answer. Be clear about which questions you are answering.

1. Recent years have seen a turn toward experimental research in American politics, both in the field and the lab. Not everyone agrees that this trend is a positive one. What have been the positive and negative consequences of the growing trend toward experimental research? How has it affected the sorts of questions political scientists ask? How has it affected the answers they reach? If forced to make (an admittedly overly simplified) summary judgment, would you argue that experimental research is merely a methodological fad that (like prior fads) should recede into the background, or does it represent a true methodological advance that promises a brighter future for the field?

2. V.O. Key famously observed that “unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense.” Using this criterion of mass opinion shaping policy, assess how democratic contemporary American politics is.

3. Why did Republicans do well in the midterm elections of 2010 but then lose the 2012 presidential election? Party identification is the strongest predictor of the vote and is highly stable, and yet these two elections produced very different outcomes. In answering this question, do not focus only on the specific contexts and candidates of 2010 and 2012, but rather on general factors, including but not necessarily limited to the nature of midterm vs. presidential elections, presidential incumbents vs. challengers, and the constraints imposed by the nomination process.

4. The literature on parties has long been dominated by the idea of electoral (re)alignments. Provide a brief critical overview of this literature, focusing on the main foci of theoretical and empirical contention. In the end, what is your judgment of the utility of this entire approach, offering in particular an assessment of the charge by David Mayhew in his "Critique of an American Genre" that the realignment perspective is no longer especially useful or relevant.

Part II. Subfield Questions
Choose one (1) of the two (2) questions from the subfield relevant to you. Be clear about which question you are answering.
Religion and Politics

1. Religious affiliation in the United States is very fluid, as many Americans switch religions over the course of their lives and, increasingly, drop having a religious affiliation altogether. What are the political consequences of religious switching? What might be the political causes of it?

2. An ongoing debate among scholars of religion and politics is whether there should even be a subfield dedicated to religion. Unlike sociology, where religion is often studied for its own sake, in political science we study religion and something else: parties, public opinion, the presidency, the courts, and so on. Therefore, the argument goes, there is no original theoretical contribution to be made by focusing on religion per se. Overall, is the study of American politics better off because there is a religion and politics subfield? Or would the study of religion (paradoxically) be better off if there was no subfield dedicated to the topic? In particular, has the subfield led to theoretical and/or empirical advancements in the study of American politics that would not have been made otherwise?

Race and Ethnicity

1. Latinos surpassed African Americans as the second largest racial minority in America in 2000 and Asian Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in the population. Despite significant bloc voting for Obama in 2012, many pundits and scholars assert that Latinos and Asians seem to have a less coherent political identity as minority groups, compared to African Americans. What factors might account for the differences? Does this affect the possibility of coalitions among and across these groups? Drawing on the literature as appropriate, discuss how the continued growth of the Latinos and Asians, both from immigration and native births, will affect the dynamics of racial politics in the decades to come.

2. Some empirical theories of race/ethnicity in American politics include pluralism, individual assimilation, class stratification, and racial hierarchy. Based on your interpretation of the research reported in the race and ethnicity literature, critically consider which of the theories you would argue is most supported by the empirical evidence. Carefully explain why you favor the theory you do, and the shortcomings of the theories you do not favor, with appropriate citation to and discussion of the relevant literature. Your survey of that literature should consider a variety of substantive topics (e.g., historical development, attitudes, political participation, institutions, policies, etc.) and more than one specific racial/ethnic group (e.g., African-Americans, Latinos, Asians).
Each essay (i.e., the response to each question) should be a maximum of 4,800 words. You have 48 hours to complete your exam; an additional 10 hours are allowed for non-native English speakers.

Part I. General Questions
Choose two (2) of the following four (4) questions to answer. Be clear about which questions you are answering.

1. The Constitution outlined a government with majoritarian tendencies (e.g., popular elections; apportionment in the House being decided by population) and anti-majoritarian tendencies (e.g., the Supreme Court; the electoral college; the Senate). The past 4 years have witnessed historically high levels of the use of the filibuster in the Senate and historically low numbers of significant laws being passed. Critics point to these two facts as evidence that the system is broken and reform (either the Constitution or Senate rules) is needed. What electoral and/or institutional dynamics have created this gridlock? Does this legislative inactivity mean that people are better or worse represented than they were 10 years ago when laws passed Congress relatively frequently? Which people are better represented and which people are represented worse?

2. In his official address as president of the APSA in 1996, Arend Lijphart argued for the drastic step of introducing mandatory voting to the United States as the best method for solving the “serious democratic problem” of chronically low levels and biased nature of electoral participation in the United States. The particulars of his analysis aside, comment on the causes and consequences of low and biased turnout in the United States. (Your discussion of bias may include attention to such factors as class, race, ethnicity, and so on). Would you agree that, empirically and normatively, the U.S. faces a “serious democratic problem” due to low and biased turnout?

3. V.O. Key famously observed that “unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense.” Using this criteria of mass opinion shaping policy, assess how democratic contemporary American politics is. At minimum, be sure to consider: What does the literature in American politics say about the process by which citizens formulate policy opinions and choose representatives? In what ways and to what extent has mass opinion and behavior been shown to affect the behavior of candidates and incumbents across the three branches of government, and the policy outputs of political institutions? What, if any, conclusions about the state of democracy can be drawn from our current understanding of these phenomenon?

4. Scholars disagree about the answers to the following questions: What is a party? What is partisanship? How, if at all, does party influence the behavior of
legislators and legislatures? Detail each of these debates and explain which answer to each question you find most compelling and why.

**Part II. Subfield Questions: Religion and Politics**

Choose one (1) of the following two (2) questions to answer. Be clear about which question you are answering.

1. Two of the central theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of religion and contemporary political behavior in the U.S are the social-psychological perspective exemplified by the work of Green, Guth, Kellstedt, and Smidt, and the sociological approach represented by the work of Djupe and Gilbert. Write an essay in which you gauge the strengths and weaknesses of these two perspectives on religion and American political behavior. What assumptions about the nature of religion and of political behavior are made by the two perspectives, and which set of assumptions rests on firmer ground? Which approach does a better job of identifying and explaining the causal mechanisms that link religious orientations to political attitudes and behavior? Which does a better job of identifying and explaining general patterns across a wide range of religious and political contexts? Is there a way in which the two approaches might be combined to create a more satisfying methodological and theoretical account of religion and political behavior?

2. Scholars such as Kenneth Wald have argued that the theory of “culture wars” has dominated the study of religion and politics in the U.S. to too great an extent. Do you agree or disagree with this critique of the religion and politics literature? What political developments have been effectively explained by culture wars theory? What political developments have been missed or not understood well enough by the focus on the culture wars? What types of theoretical approaches (e.g. social movement theory, cultural theory, rational choice theory, secularization theory) might better explain these phenomena? How might culture wars theory be integrated into a broader and more satisfying theory of religion and politics?