

**American Comprehensive Exam**  
**Kasey Swanke**

**Part One: General**

**Answer two of the following questions. Indicate clearly which question is answered by each essay.**

1. The political representation and incorporation of traditionally excluded groups in American politics (what has been termed “democratic inclusion”) has been a recurrent challenge and concern throughout American history. Drawing from the literature on American politics, how would you describe the current state of democratic inclusion for women and people of color? Where has progress been made, and where is progress still necessary? How do you explain the uneven and incomplete nature of inclusion? Or would you argue that inclusion is complete? Your answer should consider such facets of democratic inclusion as political participation, representation, and influence over political and policy outcomes.
  
2. Discuss the role of elections in a representative democracy, including work on elections and accountability, political knowledge and interest among the mass public, the effects of campaigns, etc. Be certain to incorporate empirical studies as well as work on democratic theory.
  
3. How do citizens formulate their orientations toward public policies and political issues? In other words, do people respond to political controversies on the basis of self-interest, rational benefit/cost calculations, emotional reactions, long-term predispositions, or what? And, what is the “quality” of the resultant issue attitudes? That is, are mass preferences well-formed, consistent, reasoned judgments? Or, are they shallow, disorganized, and fragmentary reactions to superficial messages from the “political world?” Your essay should be constructed around prominent concepts in the field of public opinion; however, it would also be useful if you can illustrate your general arguments with evidence pertaining to mass attitudes on specific political issues.
  
4. In a political system purported to be (highly) democratic -- such as the United States -- public opinion should presumably matter a great deal in the policy decisions of government. Is this actually the case? Address this question by summarizing and assessing some of what you deem the most relevant and important research literature on public opinion and policy responsiveness in U.S. national and/or state politics. To the extent there is responsiveness, explain how and why this occurs, as argued in major scholarly analyses. To the extent it is not the case, how and why is that so? That is, to the extent the U.S. political system does, or does not, achieve “full” or authentic democracy as indicated by the importance of public opinion on political outcomes, explain that by carefully drawing on and analyzing research that speaks to these questions.

## **Mass Behavior and Public Opinion Sub-field**

**Answer one of the following questions, indicating clearly which one you have chosen.**

1. After a long period of neglect, more and more research empirical research has been dedicated to the ways in which religion affects both behavior and public opinion. Write an essay in which you discuss at least one (but preferably more than one) general theoretical question in the behavior/public opinion literature which a study of religion, religious institutions, etc. has helped to answer, or can help to answer.

2. Political behavior relies heavily upon surveys to measure behaviors, motivations, and opinion. Unfortunately, response rates to surveys are often low and people worry that respondents and non-respondents differ in important ways. Please explain theoretically which topics are confounded by non-response bias and which topics are largely immune to the problem. Then, describe how non-response bias would affect the established empirical results of at least one important literature in American politics.