

# American Politics

## Past Comprehensive Exam Questions

(Note: you may see duplicate questions)

### January 2008

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.

### **Political Parties Sub-field**

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

1. Scholars continue to debate whether American political parties are in a period of decline or resurgence, and the extent to which strong parties help make our political system more democratic. Review the arguments for party decline and party resurgence, focusing on how this literature evaluates the roles that parties play in facilitating the representational relationship between citizens and their government. Are American parties declining or resurgent? Then assess the consequences for American politics of strong or weak parties. Are stronger parties better for American democracy? Why or why not?

2. Political parties are relevant to understanding the nature and extent of democracy and representation in U.S. (national) politics as well as in the American states. Critically assess -- i.e., systematically compare and contrast -- the research literature on parties at the national and state levels. Identify how the questions addressed, the major findings, and the implications thereof are similar and/or different when we consider national and state party systems. In your estimation, what does this mean for the role and importance of parties and for democracy in the larger political system? Explain carefully.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

### **Public Law Sub-field**

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

1. “Originalism” emerged as a normative theory of constitutional interpretation in reaction to leading decisions of the Warren Court. Different understandings of originalism developed over the years,

however, and now some originalists defend the Warren Court. Outline at least three understandings of originalism and show which ones can and cannot serve as platforms for criticizing the Warren Court.

2. Assess the strengths and/or weaknesses of the attitudinal model of decision-making on the Supreme Court in the light of your knowledge of American constitutional doctrine and the methodologies employed by the justices to decide cases and controversies arising under the Constitution.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

### **Parties and Interest Groups Sub-field**

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

1. Scholars continue to debate whether American political parties are in a period of decline or resurgence, and the extent to which strong parties help make our political system more democratic. Review the arguments for party decline and party resurgence, focusing on how this literature evaluates the roles that parties play in facilitating the representational relationship between citizens and their government. Are

American parties declining or resurgent? Then assess the consequences for American politics of strong or weak parties. Are stronger parties better for American democracy? Why or why not?

2. Citizens and presidential candidates alike bemoan the influence of “special interests” in American politics, yet political scientists have often struggled to produce systematic evidence of interest group influence on political decision making in the United States. Review the research on the form and consequence of interest group influence in American politics. What are the conclusions we can draw from this literature, and what are the roadblocks to greater progress in this research area? Then propose your own research design for answering the question, Do interest groups influence the outcome of American public policy?
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

### **Public Law Sub-field**

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

1. "Originalism" emerged as a normative theory of constitutional interpretation in reaction to leading decisions of the Warren Court. Different understandings of originalism developed over the years, however, and now some originalists defend the Warren Court. Outline at least three understandings of originalism and show which ones can and cannot serve as platforms for criticizing the Warren Court.
2. Assess the strengths and/or weaknesses of the attitudinal model of decision-making on the Supreme Court in the light of your knowledge of American constitutional doctrine and the methodologies employed by the justices to decide cases and controversies arising under the Constitution.

## May 2008

1. Which party will win the 2008 presidential election? Write an essay in which you discuss what the *American politics literature* can (and perhaps, can not) tell us about the prospects for the upcoming election.
2. How would James Madison *explain* the development of the current American political system as it has developed? How would Madison *assess* the current American political system?
3. Historically oriented political scientists often segment the American political experience into four periods, each entailing a different structure of political relations. These are the patrician period, the party period, the pluralist period, and the plebiscitary period.

To be meaningful for our understanding of American political development, there must be characteristics distinctive to each that affect the distribution of power in that period. Consider the institutional features of each period, the structures of the political system such as parties, interest groups and communications media as well as governmental institutions. What does political science research teach about the dominant institutional relations of each period? What light can political science shed on the political dynamics that cause the transitions from one period to the next?

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?

## Democratic Theory

1. Several of the authors considered to be important democratic theorists are, strange to say, economists (e.g., Schumpeter, Lindbloom, Downs). Do the economists share a common approach to and conclusions about democracy? Why are economists such a large presence in this field?
2. One of the major divides among democratic theorists is that between "populist" and "elitist" democrats. What is this debate really about? Who (if anybody) wins?

3. Which party will win the 2008 presidential election? Write an essay in which you discuss what the *American politics literature* can (and perhaps, can not) tell us about the prospects for the upcoming election.
4. How would James Madison *explain* the development of the current American political system as it has developed? How would Madison *assess* the current American political system?

Historically oriented political scientists often segment the American political experience into four periods, each entailing a different structure of political relations. These are the patrician period, the party period, the pluralist period, and the plebiscitary period.

To be meaningful for our understanding of American political development, there must be characteristics distinctive to each that affect the distribution of power in that period. Consider the institutional features of each period, the structures of the political system such as parties, interest groups and communications media as well as governmental institutions.

- a) What does political science research teach about the dominant institutional relations of each period? What light can political science shed on the political dynamics that cause the transitions from one period to the next?

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?

## **Religion and Politics**

1. In 1960, John F. Kennedy won the Catholic vote overwhelmingly. In 2004, John Kerry split the Catholic vote with George W. Bush, and lost to Bush among church-attending Catholics. Write an essay in which you discuss:
  - a. the changes in American politics, and religion, that have led to this turn-about
  - b. the likelihood that church-attending Catholics will continue to favor Republicans in presidential elections to come
2. America is characterized by a robust religious "marketplace" and a political system in which religion has historically played an important role. Is there a connection between these two characteristics of American society? In your response, be sure to discuss the historical development of the American religious landscape. Also, your essay should address religion's place in national politics, both in the present and the past.

---

---

## May 2009

1. Drawing on the literature on economic performance and Presidential vote share, incumbency effects, the Electoral College and demographic trends in the United States, is there anything John McCain could have done to win the Presidency?
2. In the 1990s, a lot of political science research in American politics described and explained declining rates of civic and political engagement. In the 2000s, a dominant theme in American politics has been commentary and debate over whether there has been a rise in partisan polarization—whether in Congress or (more controversially) among voters. Assume that:
  - a. there has indeed been a decline in many forms of civic engagement
  - b. there has been an increase in polarization.
    - i. Write an essay in which you discuss whether (a) could be a cause of (b), and then propose a research design to test whether there is a connection between them. In doing so, you will need to define your key terms: civic and political engagement, and polarization, including whether you are describing the elite or mass level, or both (you choose).
3. Does the American political system, *as it actually functions*, fulfill the standards of republican democracy, particularly with regard to political equality and representation? Drawing from the empirical literature in American politics, your answer should address the ways in which American political institutions, organizations, and mass behavior do and do not function in ways consistent with generally-accepted norms of democracy. Note that we are not interested in a theoretical defense of certain democratic norms or theories over others (choose a few general standards and move on) but rather on what political science has suggested about how the system actually functions and whether those findings are consistent with general expectations for an ideal democracy. Finally, your essay should identify new directions in which future research might go to better our understanding of the equality of political representation.
4. John Hart Ely argues that the key to a proper understanding of the constitution and of constitutional history is the idea of “democracy enhancement” as captured in shorthand in the Carolene Products footnote. Prepare an essay in which you test his theory against (a) the original Madisonian theory of the constitution and (b) the history of Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution.

### **Subfield (Presidency)**

1. At the beginning of the American republic the presidency was designed to be a counter-majoritarian institution. Explain what it was about the office’s design that indicates it was aimed to restrain democracy. Does the presidency remain counter-majoritarian today? Identify at least three contributions to research on the presidency that contribute to answering this question. Your essay should be clear on what constitutes democratic politics and how it applies to the presidency.
2. Stephen Skowronek’s typology characterizes Lincoln and Roosevelt as “reconstructive” presidents. Yet these presidents are temporally far apart in American history, and they addressed quite different challenges. What is the analytic utility of classifying Lincoln and Roosevelt as occupying the same kind of political role? Finally, explain how the “emergent pattern” in American politics imposes very different contexts on these two cases of reconstructive leadership.



---

**January 2010**

Political Science Comprehensive Examination

American Field

Saturday, January 23, 2010

**General Questions:**

1. 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 and ended with the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain. 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 assess its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of this question of whether ‘race matters’ for the American Politics field, including institutions, public opinion, and Sub-national/State and Local Politics.
2. Does democracy depend upon a politically-attentive and active citizenry? Or, can democracy function well with a public that is largely disengaged from the political process? Does your answer depend on your theoretical perspective and your definition of democracy? Based on what we know about the political attentiveness, knowledge, and participation of American citizens, can the United States sustain a well-functioning democracy? What responses do different theoretical perspectives provide to this last question?
3. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a “more responsible two-party system.” What did the APSA committee mean by “more responsible” political parties? Given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
4. Much of the study of American politics is motivated, implicitly or explicitly, by a theory of democracy. Is there one theory or are there a variety of such theories? Be as explicit as you can in laying out the theory or theories. What can be said in favor of the theory or in favor of one among the alternative theories? What impact does this theory have on the kind of empirical research that is done in the field? Would some other theory produce different kinds of research?

**State/Local Questions:**

1. The American federal system is constructed to assign differing types of responsibilities and powers among the distinct branches as well as levels of government. In recent decades the dynamics of partisan conflicts intersecting with decisions on taxation limits, have offered increasing challenges at the state and local levels of governments. Write an essay exploring the developments prompted at the outset by the passage of California’s Proposition 13 in 1978, and followed by their spread to other states, and more

recently to the National level. Discuss the substantive policy issues and the structural consequences of the increased attention to balanced budgets for sub-national and state and local governments? How have partisan factors shaped and been shaped by these developments.

2. While most research in American politics emphasizes the national arena, explicitly and/or implicitly, the U.S. is, of course, a federal system. This means the state (and local) governments are also important, and analyzing 'subnational' politics is thus significant in various ways. What important theoretical questions about American politics do we and can we learn about and/or understand differently, maybe even "better," regarding American politics by systematically bringing in State (local) politics than we do without attention to State (Local) politics, i.e., if we focus only on national politics. Be as specific as possible and *explain* and support your arguments carefully with respect to how we understand and study American politics.

### **General Questions:**

1. 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 and ended with the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain. 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 assess its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of this question of whether 'race matters' for the American Politics field, including institutions, public opinion, and Sub-national/State and Local Politics.
2. Does democracy depend upon a politically-attentive and active citizenry? Or, can democracy function well with a public that is largely disengaged from the political process? Does your answer depend on your theoretical perspective and your definition of democracy? Based on what we know about the political attentiveness, knowledge, and participation of American citizens, can the United States sustain a well-functioning democracy? What responses do different theoretical perspectives provide to this last question?
3. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a "more responsible two-party system." What did the APSA committee mean by "more responsible" political parties? Given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
4. Much of the study of American politics is motivated, implicitly or explicitly, by a theory of democracy. Is there one theory or are there a variety of such theories? Be as explicit as you can in laying out the theory or theories. What can be said in favor of the theory or in favor of one among the alternative theories? What impact does this theory have on the kind of empirical research that is done in the field? Would some other theory produce different kinds of research?

### **Public Opinion Questions:**

1. To the extent that the American public can agree on anything, the concept of public opinion may be somewhat of an artificial construct. And, when there is a consensus, such attitudes may be more of a function of social desirability or nonattitudes than a coherent value system. How can we know when

there is a “true” attitude at the individual level and at the aggregate level? Using evidence from the public opinion literature, what are the areas where we can be confident that public opinion exists?

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?

### **General Questions:**

1. 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 and ended with the 2008 election of Barack Obama over John McCain. 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 assess its importance for the American field more broadly. Explore the significance of this question of whether ‘race matters’ for the American Politics field, including institutions, public opinion, and Sub-national/State and Local Politics.
2. Does democracy depend upon a politically-attentive and active citizenry? Or, can democracy function well with a public that is largely disengaged from the political process? Does your answer depend on your theoretical perspective and your definition of democracy? Based on what we know about the political attentiveness, knowledge, and participation of American citizens, can the United States sustain a well-functioning democracy? What responses do different theoretical perspectives provide to this last question?
3. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a “more responsible two-party system.” What did the APSA committee mean by “more responsible” political parties? Given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
4. Much of the study of American politics is motivated, implicitly or explicitly, by a theory of democracy. Is there one theory or are there a variety of such theories? Be as explicit as you can in laying out the theory or theories. What can be said in favor of the theory or in favor of one among the alternative theories? What impact does this theory have on the kind of empirical research that is done in the field? Would some other theory produce different kinds of research?

### **State/Local Questions:**

1. The American federal system is constructed to assign differing types of responsibilities and powers among the distinct branches as well as levels of government. In recent decades the dynamics of partisan conflicts intersecting with decisions on taxation limits, have offered increasing challenges at the state and local levels of governments. Write an essay exploring the developments prompted at the outset by the passage of California’s Proposition 13 in 1978, and followed by their spread to other states, and more recently to the National level. Discuss the substantive policy issues and the structural consequences of the increased attention

to balanced budgets for sub-national and state and local governments? How have partisan factors shaped and been shaped by these developments.

2. While most research in American politics emphasizes the national arena, explicitly and/or implicitly, the U.S. is, of course, a federal system. This means the state (and local) governments are also important, and analyzing 'subnational' politics is thus significant in various ways. What important theoretical questions about American politics do we and can we learn about and/or understand differently, maybe even "better," regarding American politics by systematically bringing in State (local) politics than we do without attention to State (Local) politics, i.e., if we focus only on national politics. Be as specific as possible and *explain* and support your arguments carefully with respect to how we understand and study American politics.
- 

**May 2010**

### **American Comprehensive Exam Questions Spring 2010**

#### **General Questions**

1. Identify what you deem to be the most important issue(s) which are understudied or not studied very well – theoretically and/or substantively and/or empirically and/or normatively -- in the analysis of American Politics. After briefly explaining the limitations of that research, lay out a reasonably specific research agenda to address the shortcomings. Carefully explain the theoretical grounding for your agenda as well as the necessary evidence to pursue these and specify how you would go about applying your theory and evidence to advance the research in this area. Cite all relevant literature.
2. One of the central questions in research on American political behavior has been the extent to which citizens are "politically sophisticated." What are the central findings of this literature? Are these research findings dependent on the various ways in which scholars define and measure political sophistication? To what extent have Americans become more or less sophisticated over time? Does it really matter? Explain.
3. If you could implement three policy reforms to increase voter turnout, what would they be and why? Write an essay in which you explain what effect you would expect each reform to have, and why.
4. Does democracy depend upon a politically-attentive and active citizenry? Or, can democracy function well with a public that is largely disengaged from the political process? Does your answer depend on your theoretical perspective and your definition of democracy? Based on what we know about the political attentiveness, knowledge, and participation of American citizens, can the United States sustain a well-functioning democracy? What responses do different theoretical perspectives provide to this last question?
5. What place does and should the study of constitutional law, constitutions, and constitutionalism have in the study of American politics?
6. How has the selection process for presidents changed from the election of George Washington to today? What are the causes of these changes, and are those changes related to changes in the presidency's role over the course of American political development? Be attentive to identifying the scholarship that is most relevant to this question.

7. What place does and should the study of constitutional law, constitutions, and constitutionalism have in the study of American politics?
  8. A long standing jurisprudential debate exists between “originalism” and “living constitutionalism.” Explain the parameters of this dispute, citing the relevant literature. Also, explain how this dispute has manifested itself in First Amendment religious liberty jurisprudence.
  9. Political scientists have found a positive relationship between religiosity (particularly traditional religiosity) and conservative attitudes on policy issues. Write an essay in which you discuss various explanations for that relationship. Is the relationship causal? If not, then why not? If so, then what is the most likely direction of causality? Finally, propose a research design to test your explanation.
  10. The study of religion in American politics has gained increasing attention in recent years. Write an essay in which you identify at least two contributions that the study of religion can make, or has already made, to our general understanding of American politics. Finally, identify one key direction for future research that would enable the subfield of religion and politics to contribute more broadly to our general understanding of American politics.
- 

## **January 2011**

### **American Field Comprehensive Examination**

January 22, 2011

#### **General Questions (PICK TWO)**

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of America’s two-party system? Write an essay in which you either defend or critique the current party system—or a combination of both. Feel free to think broadly as you consider advantages and disadvantages, and thus draw on multiple literatures.
2. Facebook has been widely praised as an engine political parties and campaigns can use to mobilize and organize supporters. Please address the following:
  - a. Propose a research design by which the effect of social networking sites like Facebook can be measured and compared to other campaign tactics.
  - b. Do you think Facebook is more or less effective than traditional modes of organization. In what sense?
  - c. If you think Facebook is effective, what is the primary mechanism by which it operates?
  - d. How does your research design allow for a test of this proposed mechanism?
3. In the popular press, "leadership" is often discussed and dissected when explaining politics, but leadership is rarely a focus of political science. The major exception to this rule is the study of Presidential politics (e.g., Neustadt, Skowronek). Explain why the discussion of leadership is usually confined to Presidential politics. In answering this question, you might consider:
  - a. How political science differs from horse-race punditry;
  - b. How the Presidency differs from other parts of government or politics;

- c. The degree to which other subfields like political psychology (e.g., likes/dislikes) or spatial modeling (e.g., the assumption of political entrepreneurs) incorporate leadership;
4. The plural-elite model of democracy (associated, in part, with Schumpeter and the early work of Dahl and Lindblom) is frequently regarded as the working model of American democracy. Articulate the core theoretical structure of this approach to democracy, noting in passing how it was argued to be preferable to the "classical theory of democracy." Appraise the theoretical integrity and empirical utility of the plural-elite model against the arguments typically arrayed against it by its various critics.

Area of Focus: Campaigns and Elections (PICK ONE):

1. Was the Republican party helped or hurt by the Tea Party Movement during the 2010 General Election? That is, in the absence of the Tea Party as an organization, would the Republican party have won more or fewer seats?
2. Does campaign advertising make a difference? When, how, and under what circumstances? In writing your answer, critically evaluate the strategies used by authors advancing empirical claims.

**January 2012**

**American Politics Comprehensive Exam  
January 2012**

There are two sections to this exam. Answer two questions from the first section and one from the second section. For each answer, please be sure to identify the question you are answering.

**General Questions: Answer two of the following four questions**

1. There are many different ways to organize a legislature. Why has the current national legislature adopted the salient practices we associate with it: a committee system, roll call votes, seniority, party leaders, professionalization, bicameralism, floor speeches, parliamentary rules, etc.? Discuss the competing possibilities to explain these decisions, including their strengths and weaknesses. Can they be reconciled?
2. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a "more responsible two-party system." What did the APSA committee mean by "more responsible" political parties? To what extent do the American political parties currently approximate the responsible parties model? Finally, given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
3. Discuss the institution of the franchise in the context of the United States. How has it evolved over time? What have been the primary factors driving the expansion or contraction of the franchise? Why might current voters support or oppose the expansion of the franchise to new voters? What have been the implications of changing voting eligibility? What are some of the modern discussions about access to the ballot and election administration and what strategic, normative, and theoretical issues do they raise?

4. Political scientists have provided us with at least three perspectives on voting: the sociological model, the social-psychological model, and the economic (or rational choice) model. Discuss and critique the key assumptions of each model. Which one of the models provides the most satisfactory account of voting behavior? Finally, if you were to take the most persuasive parts of each theoretical tradition and combine them into a comprehensive model of vote choice, what would such a model look like?

**Subfield Questions (Religion and Politics): Answer one of the following two questions**

1. Looking at the contemporary political landscape, is the Christian Right still a force in American politics? To answer this question, you will need to define what you mean by the Christian Right, as well as how we might gauge its influence within the electorate, as well as different political institutions (including, but not necessarily limited to, parties, Congress, presidency, courts).
2. In the 2008 presidential election, Democratic candidates, including Barack Obama, engaged in extensive outreach to religious voters. John McCain, on the other hand, was very uncomfortable talking about religion, and GOP efforts to mobilize churchgoers were far more restrained than during the Bush years. And yet, religious voters were just as likely to vote Republican in 2008 as 2004. Why did the “God gap” persist in 2008? Why are most religious voters likely to vote Republican? Which religious groups are the exception, and why?

**American Politics Comprehensive Exam Questions  
January 2012**

There are two sections to this exam. Answer two questions from the first section and one from the second section. For each answer, please be sure to identify the question you are answering.

**General Questions: Answer two of the following four questions**

1. There are many different ways to organize a legislature. Why has the current national legislature adopted the salient practices we associate with it: a committee system, roll call votes, seniority, party leaders, professionalization, bicameralism, floor speeches, parliamentary rules, etc.? Discuss the competing possibilities to explain these decisions, including their strengths and weaknesses. Can they be reconciled?
2. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a “more responsible two-party system.” What did the APSA committee mean by “more responsible” political parties? To what extent do the American political parties currently approximate the responsible parties model? Finally, given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
3. Discuss the institution of the franchise in the context of the United States. How has it evolved over time? What have been the primary factors driving the expansion or contraction of the franchise? Why might current voters support or oppose the expansion of the franchise to new voters? What have been the implications of changing voting eligibility? What are some of the modern discussions about access to the ballot and election administration and what strategic, normative, and theoretical issues do they raise?
4. Political scientists have provided us with at least three perspectives on voting: the sociological model, the social-psychological model, and the economic (or rational choice) model. Discuss and critique the key

assumptions of each model. Which one of the models provides the most satisfactory account of voting behavior? Finally, if you were to take the most persuasive parts of each theoretical tradition and combine them into a comprehensive model of vote choice, what would such a model look like?

**Subfield Questions (Political Parties): Answer one of the following two questions**

1. The most common theme in research on American political parties in recent years has been “polarization.” Write an essay in which you define party polarization and discuss its causes and consequences. Has party polarization taken shape at all levels of politics? What is the relationship between polarization at different levels (i.e. does polarization at one level cause polarization at another level)? What are the primary causes of party polarization in the U.S.? What are the consequences of party polarization for American politics?
2. The principal theme of parties research in the 1970s and even into the 1980s was the “decline of parties” in the U.S. Today, most scholars argue that the American parties have become much stronger. Do you agree or disagree? Does your answer depend on how you define party “strength”? Discuss how the parties atrophied in the 1960s and 1970s and whether they have been “revived” in later years? If you believe that parties have become stronger, discuss why this has happened and provide examples of increasing party strength. If you disagree, provide evidence for your argument and suggest why parties have remained weak.

**American Politics Comprehensive Exam Questions  
January 2012**

There are two sections to this exam. Answer two questions from the first section and one from the second section. For each answer, please be sure to identify the question you are answering.

**General Questions: Answer two of the following four questions**

1. There are many different ways to organize a legislature. Why has the current national legislature adopted the salient practices we associate with it: a committee system, roll call votes, seniority, party leaders, professionalization, bicameralism, floor speeches, parliamentary rules, etc.? Discuss the competing possibilities to explain these decisions, including their strengths and weaknesses. Can they be reconciled?
2. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a “more responsible two-party system.” What did the APSA committee mean by “more responsible” political parties? To what extent do the American political parties currently approximate the responsible parties model? Finally, given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
3. Discuss the institution of the franchise in the context of the United States. How has it evolved over time? What have been the primary factors driving the expansion or contraction of the franchise? Why might current voters support or oppose the expansion of the franchise to new voters? What have been the implications of changing voting eligibility? What are some of the modern discussions about access to the ballot and election administration and what strategic, normative, and theoretical issues do they raise?



4. Political scientists have provided us with at least three perspectives on voting: the sociological model, the social-psychological model, and the economic (or rational choice) model. Discuss and critique the key assumptions of each model. Which one of the models provides the most satisfactory account of voting behavior? Finally, if you were to take the most persuasive parts of each theoretical tradition and combine them into a comprehensive model of vote choice, what would such a model look like?

**Subfield Questions (Political Participation and Civic Engagement): Answer one of the following two questions**

1. Throughout the 1990s, a lot of political science literature highlighted a decline in political participation, including voter turnout. In recent presidential elections, however, we have seen that decline reversed. First, why did the long-term decline seemingly stop in the last two presidential elections? Was it because of the way the campaigns were run? Demographic factors? Still other factors? Second, what is your prediction for voter turnout in the 2012 presidential election? Will it be higher, lower, or the same as 2008? Why?
2. Compare the Millennials (people currently under 30) to under-30s of previous generations. Are today's young people more or less likely to be politically engaged than previous generations? Be sure to describe any variation across types of political activity. What explains the current level of political involvement among the young? Is it better explained by age, period, or cohort effects? Be sure to explain the differences between the three types of effects.

**American Politics Comprehensive Exam Questions  
January 2012**

There are two sections to this exam. Answer two questions from the first section and one from the second section. For each answer, please be sure to identify the question you are answering.

**General Questions: Answer two of the following four questions**

1. There are many different ways to organize a legislature. Why has the current national legislature adopted the salient practices we associate with it: a committee system, roll call votes, seniority, party leaders, professionalization, bicameralism, floor speeches, parliamentary rules, etc.? Discuss the competing possibilities to explain these decisions, including their strengths and weaknesses. Can they be reconciled?
2. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a "more responsible two-party system." What did the APSA committee mean by "more responsible" political parties? To what extent do the American political parties currently approximate the responsible parties model? Finally, given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one? Or, does American democracy function best with less-responsible parties? Explain by way of comparison with other types of governmental and electoral systems.
3. Discuss the institution of the franchise in the context of the United States. How has it evolved over time? What have been the primary factors driving the expansion or contraction of the franchise? Why might current voters support or oppose the expansion of the franchise to new voters? What have been the implications of changing voting eligibility? What are some of the modern discussions about access to the ballot and election administration and what strategic, normative, and theoretical issues do they raise?

4. Political scientists have provided us with at least three perspectives on voting: the sociological model, the social-psychological model, and the economic (or rational choice) model. Discuss and critique the key assumptions of each model. Which one of the models provides the most satisfactory account of voting behavior? Finally, if you were to take the most persuasive parts of each theoretical tradition and combine them into a comprehensive model of vote choice, what would such a model look like?

**Subfield Questions (Mass Behavior and Public Opinion): Answer one of the following two questions**

1. 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?
  2. One of the central questions in research on American political behavior has been the extent to which citizens are “politically sophisticated.” What are the central findings of this literature? Are these research findings dependent on the various ways in which scholars define and measure political sophistication? What are the causes and consequences of political sophistication? To what extent have Americans become more or less sophisticated over time?
- 

**January 2013**

**General Questions [Choose 2]**

1. Since its early days in the 1940s, the literature on electoral behavior in America has evolved to reflect both newer approaches and methods and a changing empirical reality. To what extent, and in what ways, is the empirical explanation of American electoral behavior hindered by the fact that the literature draws its observational data only from the American context? What aspects of American electoral behavior might be better explained or understood if the literature drew directly on data from other countries? Illustrate your argument by reference to specific explanations of electoral behavior (including voting) concerning past or recent American elections.
2. Scholars are frequently inclined to see two strains in American political thought (which in turn might be argued to reflect two wider, more generic strains of democratic theory). Robert Dahl and William Riker, for instance, both make essentially this claim, in slightly different ways, creating models that contrast, on the one hand, liberalism or Madisonian democracy, with populism or populist democracy on the other. Briefly describe and contrast these competing theories of democracy, being sure to highlight the distinctions between them. Making reference to the literature as appropriate in appraising each. That is, to what extent does the contemporary literature on American politics commend one vs. the other as an appropriate interpretation of American politics?
3. The connection between law makers and constituents is viewed as central to democracy. By and large, political science demonstrates that the views of legislators and voters match up well, but there is little agreement on why this is the case. A large number of potential causes for this observed correlation have been put forth (e.g., poll following by legislators, selection through elections, cue taking by voters, responding to external events and alternative cues). Critically evaluate the theoretical and empirical bases for potential explanations of the electoral connection.

4. In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association called for a “more responsible two-party system.” What did the APSA committee mean by more responsible” political parties? To what extent have the American political parties become more “responsible”? Please be specific, focusing on government, party organizations, and elections. Given the American constitutional framework, and the way in which American political institutions, culture, and electoral rules have evolved, do you think that the call for responsible parties was a wise one?

Specific Area (Mobilization) [Choose 1]

1. Experimental methodology has become an important development in the mobilization literature. Please evaluate whether it is a passing fad or a serious methodological innovation. In the course of answering this question, please: explain the advantages of experiments for studying mobilization; identify the most significant works in mobilization using experimental methodologies and discuss their unique contributions that could not have been revealed with other forms of methodologies and approaches; discuss the nature of the types of questions that experiments cannot answer. Bonus points for making a prediction on the next hot topic in the study of mobilization and explaining the rationale behind that prediction.
2. Among the most discussed issues in electoral participation is the class bias associated with voter turnout in the United States. How does electoral mobilization exacerbate and/or ameliorate this class bias in turnout? Does a potential interaction between socio-economic status and mobilization have political consequences?

---

**January 2014**

**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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **Religion and Politics**

Choose **one** of the following two questions:

1. Over the last twenty years, there has been a dramatic rise in the percentage of Americans, especially “Millennials”, who disclaim a religious affiliation. While less dramatic, there is also other evidence that secularism is on the rise in the United States. Much has been written on the potential political *causes* of rising secularism, but in this essay you are asked to consider its political *consequences*. Write an essay in which you anticipate the likely implications of rising secularism for at least two aspects of American politics, including but not limited to (a) voter behavior; (b) political campaigns; (c) political parties (including the parties’ coalitions); (d) judicial behavior; and (e) interest groups. (To be clear: you are not limited to this list).
2. The dominant theoretical paradigm in the subfield of religion and politics, at least as applied to the U.S., has been “religious restructuring” (aka “culture wars,” “the new religion gap,” and “the coalition of the religious”). As you know, the argument advanced by Wuthnow, Hunter, Layman, Green, Putnam and Campbell, Leege et al. and many others has been that restructuring has supplanted the older, ethno-cultural divisions in American politics. And yet in spite of the restructuring thesis, evidence of ethno-cultural divisions continues to appear.

First, identify any existing ethno-cultural divisions in American politics.

Second, explain the persistence of these ethno-cultural divisions in the face of religious restructuring.

Third, discuss whether the persistence of ethno-cultural divisions threatens the validity of the restructuring paradigm. Can the restructuring and ethno-cultural approaches co-exist? Or is there a “third way” that incorporates both the old (ethno-cultural) and new (restructuring)?

## **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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Religion and Politics**

Choose **one** of the following two questions:

1. Over the last twenty years, there has been a dramatic rise in the percentage of Americans, especially “Millennials”, who disclaim a religious affiliation. While less dramatic, there is also other evidence that secularism is on the rise in the United States. Much has been written on the potential political *causes* of rising secularism, but in this essay you are asked to consider its political *consequences*. Write an essay in which you anticipate the likely implications of rising secularism for at least two aspects of American politics, including but not limited to
  - a. voter behavior;
  - b. political campaigns;
  - c. political parties (including the parties’ coalitions);
  - d. judicial behavior;
  - e. interest groups.(To be clear: you are not limited to this list).
2. The dominant theoretical paradigm in the subfield of religion and politics, at least as applied to the U.S., has been “religious restructuring” (aka “culture wars,” “the new religion gap,” and “the coalition of the religious”). As you know, the argument advanced by Wuthnow, Hunter, Layman, Green, Putnam and Campbell, Leege et al. and many others has been that restructuring has supplanted the older, ethno-cultural divisions in American politics. And yet in spite of the restructuring thesis, evidence of ethno-cultural divisions continues to appear.
  - a. First, identify any existing ethno-cultural divisions in American politics.
  - b. Second, explain the persistence of these ethno-cultural divisions in the face of religious restructuring.

- c. Third, discuss whether the persistence of ethno-cultural divisions threatens the validity of the restructuring paradigm. Can the restructuring and ethno-cultural approaches co-exist? Or is there a “third way” that incorporates both the old (ethno-cultural) and new (restructuring)?

## **American Politics Comprehensive Exam**

**January 18, 2014**

### **General American Politics**

Choose **two** to answer from the following four questions:

4. 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.
5. 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?
6. 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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?

## **January 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **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.

## January 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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?
    - a. 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.
    - b. 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.
- 

### September 2014

1. Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retake the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.
2. All students taking the American politics comprehensive exam must have completed three graduate courses in American politics at Notre Dame, not including directed readings. A maximum of one course may be fulfilled by transferring credit from another political science graduate program, at the discretion of the Director of Graduate Studies.
3. The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two parts:
  - a. **Part One** asks general, broad questions that bridge or cross sub-areas of the field. They are designed for generalists in American politics. Students receive four questions of which they must answer two. Everyone taking the exam receives the same questions.
  - b. **Part Two** is an area of specialization chosen by the student prior to the exam. These may be any of the topic areas listed or something similar with the approval of the field chair. Everyone choosing the same area of specialization receives the same questions. There are two questions of which students must answer one.
    - i. ☐ Mass Behavior and Public Opinion
    - ☐ Political Participation
    - ☐ Race and Ethnicity
    - ☐ Religion and Politics

- ☐ Political Parties
- ☐ Interest Groups
- ☐ State and Local Politics
- ☐ Congress
- ☐ The Presidency
- ☐ Judicial Politics

4. The American politics comprehensive exam is graded by a committee of faculty members, which will change for every administration of the exam.

### **Preparing for the Exam**

In order to prepare for the American politics comprehensive exam, students are encouraged to:

1. Take a range of courses on American political institutions and behavior and become familiar with the literature covered in those courses.
2. Consult with faculty members about the literature on topics in which those faculty members specialize (especially if the student has not taken course work that covers those topics) and about the nature of exam questions and faculty expectations for students' answers to those questions.
3. Consult copies of past exams to gain a sense of the types of questions asked. Compose answers (or at least outlines of answers) to those questions to gain practice in answering exam questions. Remember that faculty members are not simply looking for a vast recollection of citations, but rather for the ability to integrate those citations into a logical and coherent argument about the literature on a particular topic.
4. Become very familiar with the seminal works in American politics, as well as the most important and influential recent books and articles. To do so, students should consult the syllabus for the American Politics Field Seminar, the syllabi for other graduate courses in American politics, and the syllabi for graduate courses in American politics at peer institutions. Students are also encouraged to regularly read journals such as the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and the *Journal of Politics*, and stay abreast of new articles on American politics in these journals.

If you have further questions, please contact the American politics field chair.

---

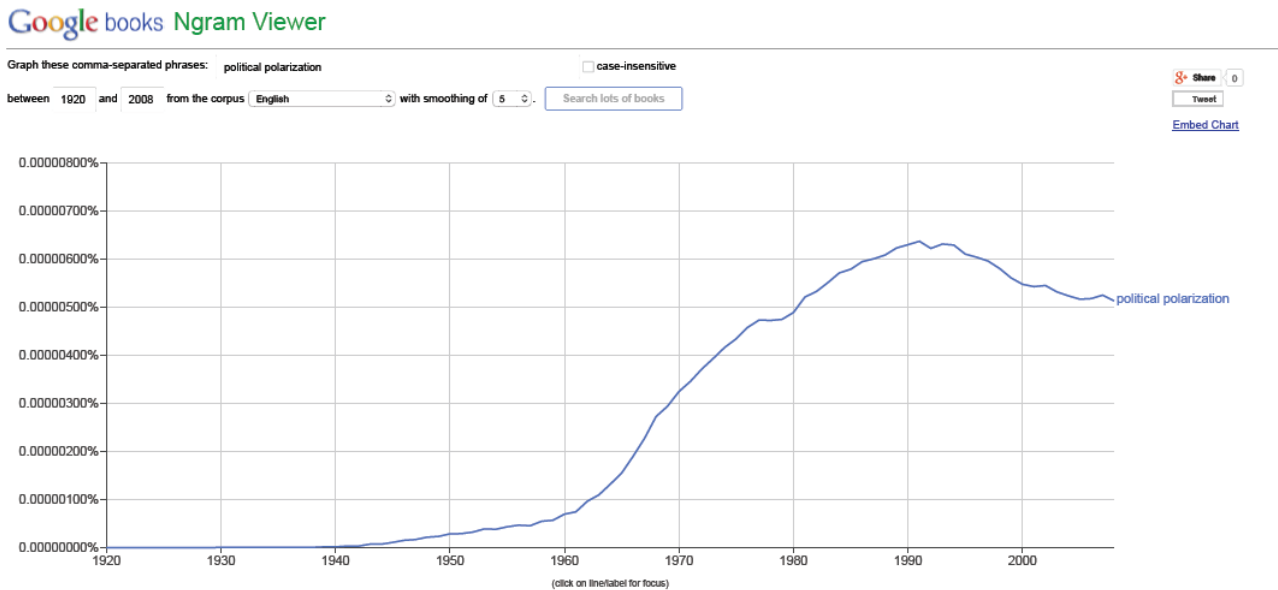
### **January 2015**

#### **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?

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. 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!

---

### **May 2015**

The American Politics comprehensive exam is a 48-hour, open-book exam. Please return your answers to Geoff Layman and Matt Hall by 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 21.

There are two sections to the exam. Answer two questions from the “general questions” section and one question from the subfield section designated for you. For each answer, please be sure to identify the question you are answering. A maximum of 3,500 words is allowed in response to each question.

**General questions:** Answer two of the questions in this section.

1. What is the most influential book published in American Politics in the last three years? Describe in detail what makes this book influential. Equally important, does the publication of this book reflect a prior weakness in American Politics? Explain.
2. 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 in 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, and 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 the pursuit of them), and the implications of this work for our understand of the functioning of American government, especially with regards to democratic principles.
3. A continuing theme in American politics, dating back to at least V.O. Key and E.E. Schattschneider and continuing into the contemporary literature associated with scholars such as Martin Gilens, is how democratic our government really is, in so far as we equate democracy with a strong connection between the opinions or preferences of ordinary people and policy outcomes. Review and critically analyze this general field of research. In your view, where does this leave us in terms of an agenda for future research?

4. Polarization is widely argued to be the most salient issue in contemporary American politics. Review and analyze this literature, highlighting disagreements over relevant factors (e.g., the extent of polarization, the elite vs. mass issue, and causal arguments) and offer your own appraisal of polarization in the current era.

**Public opinion and mass behavior (Nate Huston):** Answer one of the questions in this section.

1. The application of experimental methodology has become an important development in the public opinion and behavior literature. At the moment it is not clear if this is a passing fad or if it is a serious methodological innovation. Identify the most significant works in public opinion using experimental methodologies. Discuss their unique contributions that could not have been revealed with other forms of methodologies and approaches.
2. One of the things that has long troubled public opinion researchers is “response instability”: the fact that many, and in some cases most, survey respondents do not provide the same answers to the same survey questions asked at two or more points in time. What are the competing explanations that the literature offers for response instability? Which do you find to be most compelling? What do the various explanations tell us about the democratic capacity of the American electorate?

**Congress:** Answer one of the questions in this section.

1. Perhaps the most remarked upon (and lamented) feature of the modern Congress is the degree to which it has been characterized by substantial, and growing, partisan polarization over the last 30-40 years. What evidence supports the claim that Congress is more polarized than in the past? What factors do, and do not, explain these developments? That is, why has Congress polarized? Finally, what appear to be the consequences of increasing partisan polarization for the functioning of Congress and of the American political system?
2. Article I of the United States Constitution provides Congress with the power to make laws. However, despite the primacy of Congress when it comes to writing and passing laws, implementation per se generally resides within the purview of the executive branch, as Article II requires that the executive branch “take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” In practice, executive agencies are generally responsible for transforming broad Congressional mandates into specific regulatory provisions. How does Congress ensure executive compliance with its legislative goals, especially when the president is also exerting influence on the implementing agencies? When is Congress more or less effective in doing so? How and why might the division and/or redundancy of oversight responsibilities within Congress strengthen the institution relative to the executive branch and implementing agencies? How and why might it weaken it?

---

**September 2015**

### **American Field Comprehensive Exam**

**September 2015**

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 Gary Hollibaugh and the DGS by 9:30 a.m. on Monday, Sep. 14. For non-native speakers, the exam must be e-mailed

to Gary Hollibaugh and the DGS by 7:30 p.m. on Sep. 14. A hard copy of your exam answers is due to the DGS by 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Sep. 15. 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. 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.
    - a. In answering this question, do not focus only on the specific contexts and candidates of 2010 and 2012, but rather on the general factors affecting, including but not necessarily limited to midterm vs. presidential elections, presidential incumbents vs. challengers, and the constraints imposed by the nomination process.
  2. The re-election of Obama in 2012, having lost the white vote by the largest margin of any winning presidential candidate, triggered a debate among pundits and campaign strategists. The key question facing candidates in 2016 centers on whether Obama's lackluster performance represents a structural Democratic decline among whites likely to continue, or a floor from which Democratic candidates can improve. Should Republican candidates focus more on getting out the vote among their strongest supporters, white males without a college education, or on attracting undecided young and minority voters? Conversely, should Democratic candidates focus on mobilization of young minority voters, who are less likely to turn out in a typical election, or on recruiting white women back to the Democratic Party? Given the literature in political science on partisanship and mobilization, and the likelihood of voting among different constituencies what would you advise Democrat or Republican candidates in 2016 to do? Should they mobilize their base or direct their attention to recruiting new partisan voters? Please provide a strategy that is based on and references the voting and partisanship literature in political science.
  3. 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), (3) consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies, and (4) propose a research design that would allow you to test your viewpoint.
  4. At its most basic level, most of the empirical work on American politics is concerned with the question of whether the American political system actually functions according to democratic ideals. In particular, representation is a central concern. According to the empirical literature on American politics, does the American political system represent the interests of the American people? How and why? How and why not? Your answer should consider the potential for, evidence of, and mechanisms for representation. What does theory and empirical evidence suggest about the quality of representative democracy in the United States? Finally, propose a reform that would improve representation (by whatever metric you define) as well as a potential way to test if such a reform would actually be successful.
-

### Subfield Questions: Religion and Politics

Choose one question to answer from the following two questions:

1. The dominant, although not universal, paradigm for understanding the political effects of religion is the “3 B’s”—belonging, believing, and behaving. Write an essay in which you (briefly) discuss what these terms mean and how they are measured. Then, consider whether, overall, the 3 B’s have done more to illuminate or obscure the religious landscape. What are the advantages of this framework? What are its drawbacks? Finally, discuss the pros and cons of any alternative theoretical frameworks. Throughout the essay, be sure to cite examples of studies that employ one or more of the frameworks you discuss.
2. What are the potential political implications of the papacy of Pope Francis? Specifically, is he likely to cause a shift in the political opinions of U.S. Catholics (or, for that matter, non-Catholics)? Write an essay in which you distill the literature to make an argument about the potential for a Francis Effect, or not. Then, imagine that you were writing a grant proposal to test your hypothesis. How would you design a study to test for a Francis Effect?

---

### January 2016

#### American Field Comprehensive Exam

#### January 2016

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 Gary Hollibaugh and the DGS by 9:30 a.m. on Monday, January 18. For non-native speakers, the exam must be e-mailed to Gary Hollibaugh and the DGS by 7:30 p.m. on January 18. A hard copy of your exam answers is due to the DGS by 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, January 19. 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. At the beginning of the American republic, the U.S. Supreme Court and the presidency were counter-majoritarian institutions designed to constrain democratic impulses. Do these institutions remain counter-majoritarian today? How and why? Address this question in light of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century developments in American politics. Your essay should clearly identify criteria for determining what constitutes democratic politics, and it should consider how these criteria apply to the functions of the Supreme Court and presidency.
2. Which party will win the 2016 presidential election? Write an essay in which you discuss what the *American politics literature* can tell us—as well as what it **can not** tell us—about the prospects for the upcoming election.

3. Much work in political science emphasizes the degree to which political actors must be strategic in the pursuit of their goals. The essential interdependency of politics (outcomes are a function of collective, rather than individual, action) means actors must consider the goals and actions of other actors when trying to achieve their aims. At the same time, political actors exist within specific institutional settings that both constrain their behavior and offer opportunities for action. Drawing from the literature on American politics, how do institutions and interdependency shape the behavior of members of Congress, Supreme Court justices, and presidents? How are institutional constraints/opportunities and interdependency similar across the three branches and how are they different? What are the consequences for the functioning of American democracy?
4. To what extent does the contemporary American political system meet the standards of democracy in regard to political equality and representation? Drawing from the empirical literature in American politics, your answer should address the ways in which American political institutions, political organizations, and mass behavior do and do not succeed in meeting democratic norms. Note that we are not interested in a theoretical defense of certain democratic norms over others (the question enumerates the two we would like you to focus on) but on what political science has to say about how the system actually functions and whether those conclusions are consistent with our expectations for an ideal democracy.

---

---

*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).



- a. Discuss the importance of the cloture requirement on lawmaking generally.
  - b. Discuss the importance of the cloture requirement on the nominations process specifically.
  - c. 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?
  - d. 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?
  - e. 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?

---

**May 2016 – no exam questions**

---

**September 2016 – no exam questions**

---

**January 2017 – no exam questions**

---

**May 2017 – no exam questions**

---

**September 16, 2017**

**American Politics Comprehensive Examination**

**September 2017**

This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. *The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list only your student identification number on your exam.*

Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). *It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due.* The bibliography should also list only your student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.

Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.

Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student's primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.

### Section 1: American political institutions

1. Most studies of American political institutions adopt a theoretical perspective (either implicitly or explicitly) regarding the motivations driving behavior within those institutions. Write an essay comparing and contrasting at least two of these theoretical perspectives. For each theory considered, (a) describe examples of the theory as applied to two or more branches of government and (b) identify the strengths and weakness each theory offers for predicting political outcomes in those institutions.
2. An ongoing debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g., Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive, the Executive and the Courts) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the executive) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the executive)? To what extent is this expectation met?
3. Researchers have long used variation between the American states to gain analytic leverage on questions related to the role of institutions in American politics. These studies examine how institutions structure decisionmaking, policy, and other political outcomes. Select one feature of a political institution that varies across the states and describe the current state of knowledge about how that institutional variation impacts American politics. Do we have a better understanding of the institution in question due to research that examines state-level variation? Or is our understanding complete solely by looking at the federal government? Explain your answer.

### Section 2: Political behavior

1. Since 2000 there has been an explosion of state-based laws and other policies related to immigration. It has been argued that changes in demographics, voting, public opinion, partisanship, and representation have contributed to the patterns we observe across states. Make a case for the three changes that are most important to explaining state activity in this area of policy.
2. In 2008, Michael Lewis-Beck and his colleagues published a book called *The American Voter Revisited*. The book employs the identical theory and almost the exact same methodology to examine voting behavior in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections that Angus Campbell and his colleagues used to examine voting behavior

in 1952 and 1956 in their 1960 classic *The American Voter*. The premise of *The American Voter Revisited* is that the social-psychological theory of voting behavior that Campbell et al. employed still works as well to explain contemporary voting behavior as it did in explaining voting behavior in the 1950s. One potential implication of this conclusion is that we knew all we really needed to know about voting behavior in U.S. presidential elections in 1960—all of the research on voting behavior that has been done in the decades since has contributed only marginally to our ability to understand citizen vote choice. Do you agree or disagree with that implication? Did *The American Voter* and the work that preceded it essentially tell us everything we needed to know? Or has voting research since 1960 substantially improved our ability to explain the presidential votes of individual citizens?

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. The second decade brought the re-election of Obama followed by the defeat of Hillary Clinton and election of Donald Trump in 2016. 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, especially as it relates to public opinion and partisan politics.

---

## January 2018

### American Politics Comprehensive Examination

## January 2018

This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. *The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list only your student identification number on your exam.*

Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). *It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due.* The bibliography should also list only your student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.

Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.

Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior

to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student's primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.

### Section 1: American political institutions

1. Researchers have long used the American states to gain analytic leverage on questions related to the role of institutions in American politics. Choose one institutional feature that varies across states to use as an example. Possibilities include legislative or gubernatorial term limits, legislative professionalism, judicial selection mechanisms, or direct democracy. Then write an essay explaining how variation among the states on that feature contributes to our understanding of the institution in question. Alternatively, is our understanding of that institution complete solely from research on the federal government? Explain your answer.
2. Compare and contrast “behavioralist” studies of American national political institutions with “rational choice” studies of these institutions. Specifically, what are the key differences in their theoretical assumptions regarding (1) the motivations of political actors, (2) the role of political institutions, and (3) the factors that ultimately determine political outcomes? Support your discussion with specific examples from studies of the U.S. Congress, presidency, and judiciary.
3. Are U.S. presidents powerful? Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on presidential power. On balance, would you characterize presidents as possessing unilateral power to secure their policy goals or do you see them as constrained actors dependent on other Washington actors? Be sure to provide evidence suggesting you are correct and evidence suggesting you might be wrong.

### Section 2: Political behavior

1. In 1994 Michael Dawson made the argument that race was still a fundamental part of American politics because “linked fate” explained how African Americans understood themselves in U.S. society. In what ways has the role of “race” changed in understanding fundamental parts of American politics since 1994? What does more recent research tell us about race, ethnicity, and immigration regarding the continuing role of group identification in understanding important aspects of American political behavior, attitudes, and outcomes?
2. One of the key debates in the literature on party polarization is about the extent to which the American mass electorate is polarized. Write an essay in which you evaluate the literature on mass polarization. What are the theoretical arguments and methods employed by the two sides of the debate (the American public is highly polarized and public polarization is increasing vs. the public is not very polarized and public polarization has not increased much)? Which side do you agree with?
3. A key criticism of the rational choice model of voter turnout is that, by the logic of the model, it is never rational for an individual to turn out to vote. Why have critics of the rational choice perspective made that

claim? Is it a valid criticism? Does it remain a valid criticism of rational choice accounts of voter turnout, or have scholars working from a rational choice perspective solved the “problem” of it never being rational for an individual to vote?

## **May 2018**

This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. *The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list only your student identification number on your exam.*

Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). *It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due.* The bibliography should also list only your student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.

Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.

Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student’s primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.

### **Section 1: American political institutions**

1. Researchers have long used the American states to gain analytic leverage on questions related to the role of institutions in American politics. Choose one institutional feature that varies across states to use as an example. Possibilities include legislative or gubernatorial term limits, legislative professionalism, judicial selection mechanisms, party systems, interest groups, or direct democracy. Then write an essay explaining how variation among the states on that feature contributes to our understanding of the institution in question. Alternatively, is our understanding of that institution complete solely from research on the federal government? Explain your answer.
2. What role (or roles) do national political institutions play in the American system of government? In answering this question, you should complete all of the following objectives:

- a. Adopt and defend a particular viewpoint or combination of viewpoints about the role of American political institutions
  - b. Elaborate your view in the context of the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary (you may also consider the bureaucracy or political parties if you wish).
  - c. Consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies.
3. There is a fast-growing body of work that attempts to measure the preferences either of individual bureaucrats or of agencies within the executive branch. Suppose for a moment that we could, in fact, develop a technique that would provide consistent estimates of the preferences of officeholders in the executive. What are the important theoretical questions regarding either bureaucratic politics or the U.S. executive that such data could help to settle? Alternatively, is it actually the case that measures of the preferences of individual bureaucrats or of agencies would not be especially useful for illuminating the major theoretical puzzles in the field? Note that it is up to you to first identify what you consider the most important theoretical questions.

## **Section 2: Political behavior**

1. Early research on political behavior suggested that the American public was mostly ideology free—ideology played relatively little role in structuring the public’s opinions or shaping its voting behavior. Write an essay in which you assess whether that conclusion was true and whether it remains true today. In your essay, be sure to address each of the following three questions:
  - a. How did early researchers go about their search for ideology in the American electorate, and what did they find?
  - b. Have there been theoretical or methodological developments in research on mass ideology that have improved political scientists’ ability to search for and uncover ideology in the mass electorate?
  - c. Have American citizens grown more ideological over time? Why or why not?
2. In 1950, the American Political Science Association convened a “Committee on Political Parties” to assess the American two-party system. The Committee concluded that the American parties fell far short of the standard of “responsible parties” and called for a “more responsible two-party system.” If the APSA were to convene a “New Committee on Political Parties” in 2018, what do you think the committee would conclude? Are today’s Democratic and Republican parties more “responsible” than the parties in 1950? Why or why not?
3. Using relevant literature describe the influence of economics, psychology, and sociology in understanding American political behavior. What, if anything, have political scientists offered that furthers our understanding of behavior beyond what these other disciplines provide? What, if anything, would we miss without political scientists’ perspective on political behavior?

---

**September 2018**

## **Section I. American Political Behavior**

1. From the earliest days of political behavior research, political scientists have found a close link between citizens’ social and political identities. We traditionally have assumed that the causality in this relationship is unidirectional. Social identities and characteristics shape political orientations— people base their political identities in their social identities—and not the reverse. However, there is now a

growing body of work claiming that social orientations are endogenous to political orientations. Citizens' party ties and other political identities are not just linked to their religious identities, residential choices, preferences in marital partners, and other social identities, but actually cause them. People bring their social preferences and identities into line with their political identities.

Focusing on the recent literature on the political causation of religious identities and preferences, write an essay in which you evaluate the argument of social endogeneity to politics. Are there sound theoretical bases for believing that religious orientations might be endogenous to political orientations? Do you find the evidence that political identity shapes religious identity and preference to be convincing? If so, is the phenomenon of politics as a causal mover of religion a recent one or one we just never looked for before? Finally, if political orientations do shape religious orientations, what does that tell us about the nature of religious identity and the nature of political identity?

2. In recent years, there has been a healthy scholarly debate about the fundamental nature of American political parties. One camp has championed the view of the "office-seeking" party, with political candidates and office-holders as the principal actors in political parties and the goals of these office-seekers as the principal objectives of parties. Another camp has touted the idea of the "policy-demanding" party. From this perspective, "intense policy demanders" are the principal partisan actors and the achievement of the ideological and policy goals of policy-demanding individuals and groups are the parties' primary goals.

Which of these perspectives on the fundamental question of "what are political parties" do you think is right? Are the theoretical bases for the claims about parties sounder for one theory than for the other? Does the empirical evidence about parties, their actors, and their actions line up clearly on one side or the other of this debate? Does one of these perspectives provide a satisfactory understanding of American parties, or is a different model of parties—perhaps a hybrid of the office-seeking and policy-demanding perspectives or a different model entirely—more appealing?

3. In his pioneering book, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics* (1994) Michael Dawson develops a theory of group identity and interest that emphasizes perceptions of "linked fate" for African Americans. For nearly 25 years, his theory has been used to examine a wide-range of political behaviors and public opinions for Blacks. Some question the continued applicability of this theory for Blacks in the United States because of changes within the African American community in the United States, including the possibility of upward social mobility and political incorporation, but also due to the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean and African countries. Moreover, efforts to apply the same theory of group identity to explore the social and political realities of Latinos, Asian Americans, and Whites has yielded mixed evidence. Is the conceptualization of linked fate still useful for understanding black political behavior? To what extent does linked fate work the same way for various immigrant, ethnic groups, and identity types?

## **Section II. American Political Institutions**

Various studies portray national political institutions as playing distinct roles in the American system of government, such as channeling the individual preferences of political actors, constraining the strategic choices made by political actors, or structuring the opportunities available to political actors.

1. Which of these depictions of American political institutions is most persuasive and why? In answering this question, you should (1) adopt and defend a particular viewpoint or combination of viewpoints about the role of American 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 if you wish), and (3) consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies.

2. 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 the role of American 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 if you wish), and (3) consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies.

3. Most studies of American political institutions adopt a theoretical perspective (either implicitly or explicitly) regarding the motivations driving behavior within those institutions. Write an essay comparing and contrasting at least two of these theoretical perspectives. For each theory considered, (a) describe examples of the theory as applied to two or more branches of government and (b) identify the strengths and weakness each theory offers for predicting political behavior.

**May 2019**

### **Section 1: American Political Institutions**

1. Are U.S. presidents powerful? Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on presidential power. On balance, would you characterize presidents as possessing unilateral power to secure their policy goals or do you see them as constrained actors dependent on other Washington actors? Be sure to provide evidence suggesting you are correct and evidence suggesting you might be wrong.
2. An ongoing debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g., Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive, the Executive and the Courts) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the executive) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the executive)? To what extent is this expectation met?
3. There is a fast-growing body of work that attempts to measure the preferences either of individual bureaucrats or of agencies within the executive branch. Suppose for a moment that we could, in fact, develop a technique that would provide consistent estimates of the preferences of officeholders in the executive. What are the important theoretical questions regarding either bureaucratic politics or the U.S. executive that such data could help to settle? Alternatively, is it actually the case that measures of the preferences of individual bureaucrats or of agencies would not be especially useful for illuminating the major theoretical puzzles in the field? Note that it is up to you to first identify what you consider the most important theoretical questions.

### **Section 2: Political behavior**

1. Using relevant literature describe the influence of economics, psychology, and sociology in understanding American political behavior. What, if anything, have political scientists offered that furthers our understanding of behavior beyond what these other disciplines provide? What, if anything, would we miss without political scientists' perspective on political behavior?
2. In 2008, Michael Lewis-Beck and his colleagues published a book called *The American Voter Revisited*. The book employs the identical theory and almost the exact same methodology to examine voting behavior in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections that Angus Campbell and his colleagues used to examine voting behavior in 1952 and 1956 in their 1960 classic *The American Voter*. The premise of *The American Voter Revisited* is that the social-psychological theory of voting behavior that Campbell et al. employed still works as well to



explain contemporary voting behavior as it did in explaining voting behavior in the 1950s. One potential implication of this conclusion is that we knew all we really needed to know about voting behavior in U.S. presidential elections in 1960—all of the research on voting behavior that has been done in the decades since has contributed only marginally to our ability to understand citizen vote choice. Do you agree or disagree with that implication? Did *The American Voter* and the work that preceded it essentially tell us everything we needed to know? Or has voting research since 1960 substantially improved our ability to explain the presidential votes of individual citizens?

3. One of the key debates in the literature on party polarization is about the extent to which the American mass electorate is polarized. Write an essay in which you evaluate the literature on mass polarization. What are the theoretical arguments and methods employed by the two sides of the debate (the American public is highly polarized and public polarization is increasing vs. the public is not very polarized and public polarization has not increased much)? Which side do you agree with?

## **September 2019**

### **Section 1: American political institutions**

1. What is the value of cosponsorship in legislative politics? One perspective suggests that it is symbolic and similar to “cheap talk” while another argues that it is a credible sign of commitment. Discuss literature supporting these (or other) perspectives and make the case for whether cosponsorship is a valuable element of legislative behavior.
2. An ongoing debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g., Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive, the Executive and the Courts) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the executive) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the executive)? To what extent is this expectation met?
3. Some scholars of American political institutions are really studying elite political behavior; that is, the topic of their study is the behavior of actors in American political institutions rather than the institutions themselves. In contrast, other scholars are truly “institutionalists” in the sense that they view institutions as playing an active role in shaping political outcomes rather than merely serving as the context for elite political behavior. Compare and contrast these two perspectives: What are the key differences in their philosophical assumptions, empirical predictions, and normative implications? For your essay, you should draw on the work of at least three studies in each of the two traditions.

### **Section 2: Political behavior**

1. In recent years, the literature on American political behavior has focused a good bit of attention on the question of the degree to which the U.S. electorate is “polarized”? Some scholars have argued that in stark contrast to political activists and elites, the mass public is, for the most part, not polarized. Others claim just the opposite: that polarization in the electorate is sharp and growing. A third group contends that while there is not much evidence for ideological polarization in the mass electorate, there is a high and increasing level of “affective polarization” among ordinary Americans. Of course, other scholars suggest that there is both ideological and affective polarization in the electorate. Write an essay in which you describe these various perspectives on

mass polarization and identify which perspective is most compelling from both a theoretical and empirical standpoint.

2. At present, the “hottest” idea in research on American political behavior is that it all comes down to identity. Recent research tells us that the idea that Americans’ political evaluations and voting decisions are based in “rational” factors such as ideology, views on policy issues, and economic and government performance assessments is largely wrong. Instead, citizens form political judgments and make voting decisions largely on the basis of deep-seated political and social identities. What do you think of this newly popular argument? Does it make sense theoretically? Does the empirical evidence support it? Or, are there reasons to believe that this recent work has understated Americans’ capacity for making “rational” political decisions and that we might see a renewed focus on policy and performance rationality in political behavior research?
3. In his pioneering book, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African American Politics* (1994) Michael Dawson develops a theory of group identity and interest that emphasizes perceptions of “linked fate” for African Americans. For 25 years, his theory has been used to examine a wide-range of political behaviors and public opinions for Blacks. Some question the continued applicability of this theory for Blacks in the United States because of changes within the African American community in the United States, including the possibility of upward social mobility and political incorporation, but also due to the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean and African countries. Moreover, efforts to apply the same theory of group identity to explore the social and political realities of Latinos, Asian Americans, and Whites has yielded mixed evidence. Is the conceptualization of linked fate still useful for understanding black political behavior? What are the theoretical and methodological possibilities and limitations of “linked fate” for our understanding of group identity in American political behavior and public opinion?

**January 2020**

### **Instructions**

This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. *The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list **only your student identification number** on your exam.*

Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). *It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due. **The bibliography should also list only your student identification number.*** The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.

Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam. Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student’s primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.

### **Section 1: American Political Institutions**

1. What is the value of cosponsorship in legislative politics? One perspective suggests that it is symbolic and similar to “cheap talk” while another argues that it is a credible sign of commitment. Discuss literature supporting these (or other) perspectives and make the case for whether cosponsorship is a valuable element of legislative behavior.
2. Studies of American Political Development (APD) incorporate ideas from other traditions, including behavioralism, rational choice, and sociological institutionalism. Discuss at least three ways in which scholars draw on any of these other traditions and at least three aspects of APD scholarship that is unique to that tradition.
3. Various studies portray national political institutions as playing distinct roles in the American system of government, such as channeling the individual preferences of political actors, constraining the strategic choices made by political actors, or structuring the opportunities available to political actors. Which of these depictions of American political institutions is most persuasive and why? In answering this question, you should (1) adopt and defend a particular viewpoint or combination of viewpoints about the role of American 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 if you wish), and (3) consider alternative viewpoints and explain their deficiencies.

### **Section 2: Political Behavior**

1. In 2016, Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels published a highly influential book called *Democracy for Realists*. A very brief (and perhaps superficial) summary of the book might be that there is nothing rational about American political behavior. Do you think that summary squares with the argument and evidence that Achen and Bartels present? Is their argument supported by the bulk of the evidence political scientists have gathered about American political behavior? If political behavior is not rational, then how should we understand elections, voting behavior, and citizen political participation?
2. In recent years, the dominant argument in the literature on mass-level political polarization has been that the American public is characterized by “affective polarization,” but not “ideological polarization.” What is the difference between affective polarization and ideological polarization? What is the theoretical rationale behind the idea that Americans are affectively polarized, but not ideologically polarized? Are there theoretical reasons to believe that ideological polarization also may be increasing in the U.S. public? What does the empirical evidence say about affective and ideological polarization in the American electorate?
3. Since the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, there is increased discussion of African American politics, an Asian-American politics, a Latino politics, and recently a multiracial politics as though these phenomena are inevitable. During this same time period, there has been hesitation to discuss the existence of White American politics. The issue of White identity, as measured in the 2012 ANES, is important because it is associated with a variety of outcome variables – even when controlling for racial resentment. This list includes immigration attitudes, ethnocentrism, evaluations of Obama, and most importantly vote choice. Discuss the utility of the identity-to-politics link. To what extent does this help us understand American political attitudes and behavior? Does identity help us understand how and when group-based politics will emerge and organize? Is it more applicable to certain groups? Why? Does the expectation that identity is consequential for political attitudes and behavior potentially distort the understanding of race and ethnicity?

**June 2020**

**Instructions:**

This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. The standard time frame is 9 hours, with an additional 2 hours being granted because of COVID 19, for a total of 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. *The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list **only your student identification number** on your exam.*

Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). *It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due. **The bibliography should also list only your student identification number.*** The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.

Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.

Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student’s primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.

The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.

## **Section 1: American Political Institutions**

1. Among the most significant relatively recent developments in the study of American political institutions are rational choice theory (RCT) and historical institutionalism. Define each of these approaches. Explain what new perspective they brought to the study of American political institutions. What are the primary strengths and weaknesses of each methodological approach? How would you modify these approaches to build an understanding that utilizes the strengths of each approach?
2. How has the study of individual personalities, backgrounds, ideologies, and related values influenced the contemporary study of Congress, the Presidency, and the judiciary? Do you find these individually focused approaches convincing? Why or why not? What do you see as their primary strengths and weaknesses of these approaches? How have they led us to better understand American political institutions generally?
3. Considerable efforts have been made to understand the effects of state-visibility on modern conceptions of citizenship, political trust, the formation of political interests and preferences, and general attitudes toward government. The impetus for this has stemmed not only from a discernible decline in levels of citizen trust in government, but from a perception of receding state-visibility. Here, scholars argue that the further obscured the role of the state becomes to the public, the less likely they are to both hold positive attitudes toward government, and assume political identities. Evaluate the core assumptions of this body of literature. Has the state receded from public view? And if so, for whom? What does research on state-contact tell us about the experience of citizenship (or lack thereof) in the United States? Address the role of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and place in individuals' encounters with the state, and explain what, if anything, such patterns have to tell us about the future of democratic politics and its institutions

## **Section 2: American Political Behavior**

1. Since the early days of political behavior research, scholars have been concerned about whether American citizens know enough about politics and policy to participate meaningfully in a democratic polity. Write an essay in which you evaluate the literature on political knowledge and the ways in which citizens make meaningful political decisions with or without high levels of knowledge. What does the evidence tell us about Americans' political knowledge levels and whether they are getting better or worse? Are there ways in which citizens' might engage meaningfully in democratic decision-making without having a great deal of political knowledge or are there reasons to suspect that there really are not effective shortcuts to political information? What next steps does research on citizen knowledge and decision-making need to take?

2. Over the past two decades, there has been a great deal of scholarly debate about the degree to which the American mass electorate is “polarized.” Some scholars say the mass electorate is highly polarized and is growing more polarized. Others disagree and argue that there is limited evidence either for polarization or growing polarization. Still other scholars contend that while the electorate is not very ideologically polarized, “affective polarization” is strong and growing. Write an essay in which you discuss these three schools of thought on mass political polarization. What are the major theoretical and empirical arguments of the three camps? Which camp do you think comes closest to being right? Where do you believe the literature on mass political polarization needs to go over the next several years?
3. While the extant research on racial attitudes has been around for multiple decades, the most commonly used measure focuses on white racial attitudes and racial resentment proposed by Kinder and Sanders (1996). Since then, a contentious debate about the utility and validity of the racial resentment measure has focused on disentangling the effects of racial attitudes on both racial and non-racial policy preferences, as well as the extent to which this measure overlaps with individualism and conservatism. The debate about the validity and utility of the racial resentment measure is an important one, but takes for granted that racial resentment is similarly activated when any racial minority is the reference group. Does it make sense to use this measure of racial attitudes given the significant changes in racial composition over the last 25 years? Has the measure of racial resentment decreased in utility? Should we question the initial premise of applying the same measure of racial attitudes when discussing the growth of Latinos, Asian Americans, multiracial populations, etc? Given that the racial resentment measure also focuses primarily on white racial attitudes, does this limit the ways in which we discuss racial attitudes more generally? If racial resentment measures are no longer useful, explain why. If it simply requires changes in the measure, how would these revisions overcome the initial complaints about the validity of the measure?

September 2021

## **Instructions**

*This exam is an open book/note exam that students have 9 (+2) hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 (+2) hours to complete the exam.*

*Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. The exam will be graded anonymously. **Please list only your student identification number on your exam.***

*Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). **It is due by email to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due.** The bibliography should also list only your student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.*

*Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.*

*Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student’s primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.*

*The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.*

## **Section 1: American Political Institutions**

1. Studies of American Political Development (APD) incorporate ideas from other traditions, including behavioralism, rational choice, and sociological institutionalism. Discuss at least three ways in which scholars draw on any of these other traditions and at least three aspects of APD scholarship that is unique to that tradition.
2. Compare and contrast “behavioralist” studies of American national political institutions with “rational choice” studies of these institutions along two dimensions: (1) What are the key differences in their theoretical assumptions? and (2) What are the key differences in their empirical predictions/findings? Support your discussion of both dimensions with specific examples from studies of the U.S. Congress, presidency, and judiciary.

3. An ongoing debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g., Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive, the Executive and the Courts) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the executive) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the executive)? To what extent is this expectation met?

## **Section 2: American Political Behavior**

1. Since the 2020 Presidential election, significant questions are being raised about the viability of democracy and the individual commitment to American democracy. Fortunately (or unfortunately), public opinion and political behavior scholars have a great deal to say about the viability of democracy among individual citizens. Trace the evolution of the individual support for democracy, highlighting the major controversies and developments. How viable is American democracy among individual citizens? How much should we be worried about the willingness of so many American citizens willingness to circumvent democratic rights and civil liberties?
2. The past twenty years have seen a “causal revolution” in American politics. More attention is now paid to causal identification, especially the use of experiments. What have been the benefits of this attention to causality and increasing use of experiments? Specifically, what theoretical advances have come from the popularity of experiments of all types —field trials, survey experiments, lab experiments? Have there been any drawbacks to the focus on experimentation as a method of inquiry? Looking forward, what do you see as the future of experiments in American politics?
3. What are racial spillover effects, and how is it conveyed methodologically (or how do you know it when you see it)? How useful is it as a theory and analytical construct? What other psychological theories can account for the results?



**Saturday, January 22, 2022**

### **Instructions**

*This exam is an open book/note exam that students have 9 (+2) hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 (+2) hours to complete the exam.*

*Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. The exam will be graded anonymously. **Please list only your student identification number on your exam.***

*Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). **It is due by email to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due.** The bibliography should also list only your student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.*

*Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retakes the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.*

*Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student’s primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.*

*The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.*

### **Institutions**

1. Compare and contrast “behavioralist” studies of American national political institutions with “rational choice” studies of these institutions along two dimensions: (1) What are the key differences in their theoretical assumptions? and (2) What are the key differences in their empirical predictions/findings? Support your discussion of both dimensions with specific examples from studies of the U.S. Congress, presidency, and judiciary.
2. How do strict voter identification (ID) laws impact the American electorate? What specific outcomes have scholars examined in answering this question and what are their conclusions? Finally, where should this literature go next? In your answer please be sure to discuss methodological issues that present challenges for identifying the effects of these laws.

3. Congressional scholars spent much of the 1990s and early 2000s debating whether partisanship or ideological preferences structure decision making in the House. Summarize this debate, focusing on major works from both sides. Then make a case for which argument you find more convincing. Finally, where should this literature go next? What evidence would be useful in resolving the “parties or preferences” question?

## **Political Behavior**

1. In the political science literature, religiosity—whether belonging, behaving, or believing—has almost always been treated as an independent variable, thus *causing* political phenomena. Recently, however, a small but growing number of studies have treated religiosity as a dependent variable, and thus *caused by* political phenomena. Write an essay in which you:
  - a. Describe and evaluate one or more of the key works that argue for religiosity as a dependent variable. What is the argument and evidence?
  - b. Propose a study of other political phenomena that might plausibly have an effect on religious belonging, behavior, or beliefs. What is your hypothesis? What data would you need to test that hypothesis? What empirical test(s) would you employ?
2. What book in public opinion and political behavior published in the past five years comes closest to a paradigmatic shift in the field? Why? What are your criteria for a paradigmatic shift in the political behavior literature?
3. It is often assumed that various theories, constructs, and measures in political behavior are transportable or that mean the same to different racial and ethnic groups. Identify the areas in political behavior where this assumption is most egregious? Explain how the original construct might have led to different conclusions if race and ethnic had been considered?

**Tuesday, May 23, 2023**

**Instructions**

*This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. During COVID, students have an additional 2 hours to complete their exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest.*

*Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list only your ND student identification number on your exam.*

*Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due. The bibliography should also list only your ND student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.*

*The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.*

**American Political Institutions**

1. In the 1970s, many political scientists concluded that political parties were no longer relevant to understanding congressional politics. However, there is now ample evidence that pronouncements about the death of parties may have been premature. What caused scholars to assert that parties had lost relevance? What factors produced the resurgence in congressional parties? What role do parties play in contemporary politics? How do theories of party influence explain variations in party strength?
2. One of the key takeaways in the literature on Congressional elections is that member behavior is primarily driven by electoral incentives – MCs condition their actions based on what the implications are for their chances at reelection. However, much of the literature in public opinion argues that changes in party positions, polarization, and realignments (issue evolutions, conflict extension, etc.) come about as the public adjusts to the positions newly adopted by the elite of their party, especially elected officials. How can both be true? First (concerning elected officials), how do representatives behave in a manner that will further their reelection interests if their constituents do not seem to know much about major legislation or key political figures? And second (regarding the mass public), are voters really only reacting to the policy positions of their already preferred elected officials? In other words, on what factors are they basing their vote?
3. Compare and contrast “behavioralist” studies of American national political institutions with “rational choice” studies of these institutions along two dimensions: (1) What are the key differences in their theoretical assumptions? and (2) What are the key differences in their

empirical predictions/findings? Support your discussion of both dimensions with specific examples from studies of the U.S. Congress, presidency, and judiciary.

### **American Political Behavior**

1. Write an essay in which you evaluate the following statement: “Social identity theory has become the dominant theory of mass political behavior in the United States and this has hindered our ability to understand American political behavior.”
2. Many political scientists (and others) had long pointed to low levels of voter turnout and other forms of political activity as an indicator of an unhealthy democracy. In recent years, however, participation—turnout in particular—has grown. Yet now there is even greater concern about the health of American democracy. Write an essay in which you explain why higher participation has not led to greater confidence in the nation’s democratic system. Have the recent threats to American democracy come because of greater participation or in spite of it?
3. Nearly everyone agrees American politics is more polarized now than it has been in decades, perhaps even since the Civil War. However, political scientists disagree vigorously about whether the American mass electorate is polarized, the degree to which it is polarized, and the manner in which it is polarized. Based on the growing literature on mass-level political polarization, how would you answer the following questions: Is the American mass public polarized? In what ways is it polarized and in what ways is it not polarized? What are the most important reasons for why it is polarized (or not polarized)?

**University of Notre Dame**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**American Politics Comprehensive Exam**  
September 2023

**Instructions**

*This exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest.*

*Students should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second. The exam will be graded anonymously. Please list only your ND student identification number on your exam.*

*Students must also turn in a bibliography listing all citations from their responses. This bibliography should be formatted according to a common citation style (e.g., APA, APSA, Chicago). It is due by e-mail to the Director of Graduate Studies 48 hours after the exam is due. The bibliography should also list only your ND student identification number. The exam will not be graded if the bibliography is not received in the allotted time.*

*The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.*

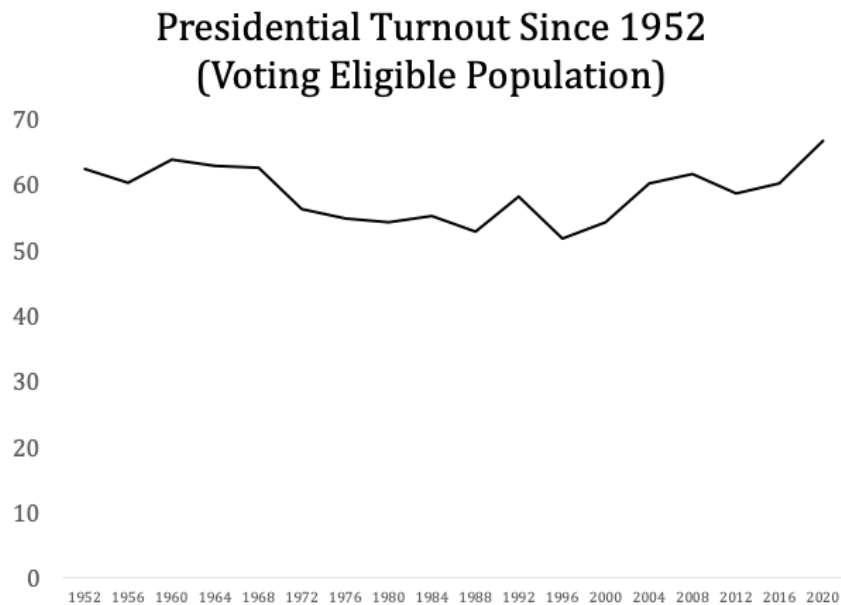
**American Political Institutions**

1. David Mayhew famously suggested that we might think about members of Congress as if they were single-minded seekers of reelection. Given the development of scholarship on this topic over the last few decades, do you think this view is still accurate, is it inaccurate, or does it need to be qualified? Take a position on this question and marshal evidence to support your view.
2. Political institutions constrain individual choices and provide incentives for action. Select two political institutions (for example, the presidency, the judiciary, state legislatures, the Congress, electoral rules, the press, the bureaucracy, etc.) and discuss how institutional rules shape the strategic behavior of the relevant political actors, consequent outcomes, and the strategies political actors use to redesign institutions. What conditions limit politicians’ ability or desire to re-shape these institutions? Under what conditions should we expect these institutions to change?
3. An ongoing debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g., Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive, the Executive and the Courts) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the

executive) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the executive)? To what extent is this expectation met?

### **American Political Behavior**

1. As seen in the graph below, presidential voter turnout has been increasing in recent elections. Why? Specifically, how can the literature on voter turnout explain the rise? Be sure to consider both changes in the institutional features of the U.S. political system and any differences in the political context. Also, consider whether the increase in turnout has changed who votes. In particular, has higher turnout led to more equal turnout—by socioeconomic status, race, age, ideology, or any other characteristic?



2. A central concept in the literature on American public opinion and voting behavior is the idea of “heuristics.” What are heuristics and why are they important for understanding how citizens form political opinions and make voting decisions? What are some of the most widely used heuristics in American political behavior? Do heuristics help citizens make more rational political decisions? Do they allow citizens with lower levels of political information to make political decisions as if they had higher levels of political information?
3. What book in public opinion and/or political behavior published in the past two years comes closest to a paradigmatic shift in the field? Why? What are your criteria for a paradigmatic shift in the political behavior literature?