

## American Politics Comprehensive Exam

Fall 2014

### Part I: General (Morning) Questions

**Answer one of the following two questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.**

1. 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?
2. French economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century* reached number one on the New York Times bestselling hardcover fiction list in May of 2014. In it, Piketty argues the ratio of wealth to income is rising in the United States and other countries and that we should expect this trend to continue. This is, in part, due to economic policies that disproportionately favor the wealthy. Piketty's argument appears to contradict the basic tenets of spatial theory as it is applied to American politics. Using literature on American elections and lawmaking explain this disconnect.

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### Part II: Subfield (Afternoon) Questions

**Answer two of the following four questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.**

1. Over the last few decades, the influence of party on legislative behavior and policy outcomes has become the most important problem in the study of Congress. Write an essay that (1) outlines the major theses of that literature, (2) evaluates the strength of the evidence for each thesis and (3) identifies the research that remains to be done. Cite the relevant literature.
2. For much of the subfield's history, the literature on the Presidency was dominated by Richard Neustadt's work on presidential power. What was Neustadt's central thesis? Citing the relevant literature, explain how and why scholars have questioned Neustadt. Particular attention should be given to institutional tools the President can utilize to bypass Congress. Given this recent literature, is Neustadt still relevant today?
3. Since the 1970s there have been a number of significant changes in American presidential campaigns and the forces that shape them. Areas of change include the scheduling of primaries and caucuses, the nature of the news media, the rules and procedures governing delegate selection, the manner in which electoral campaigns are financed, and the technology used to conduct electoral campaigns. How have these cumulative changes altered the nature of campaigns and elections? How have these changes impacted on political groups and individuals? Have they altered the nature of democracy in the United States?
4. Some scholars have argued that voters have little meaningful information about the political world. Other researchers argue that voters are reasonably informed and competent to make decisions. How well developed and coherent are the political belief systems of voters? Are voters capable of choosing candidates effectively? How do the demands on voters vary in the different models of voting used by scholars?