

AMERICAN POLITICS COMPRESHESIVE EXAMINATION

SPRING 2018

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. As observed during the 2016 presidential election season, predictive forecasting models have become a staple of commentary and analysis by political scientists. These models have even infiltrated popular culture via online news sources. These forecasting models tend to be relatively accurate when predicting the popular vote. Given that these parsimonious models can predict the outcome of national elections without accounting for any specific campaign effects, how important are candidates and campaigns? What are the arguments supporting and opposing the impact of candidates and campaigns on election outcomes? How can political scientists measure the impact of these factors? In what ways are forecasting models limited?

2. We have a separation-of-powers political system. We increasingly have a highly polarized electorate and an even more polarized legislative branch, with partisan voting patterns that approach those in parliamentary systems. We have major policy/structural issues before us, including but not limited to health care spending and delivery, immigration, climate change, and entitlement reform. What does the political science literature tell us about whether and how our politics can address policy stalemate? The United States currently has unified party control of the elected branches. Do what extent does that condition guarantee successful resolution of major national issues? Are there institutional fixes for our inability to address these issues? If so, what are they? If not, why not?

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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. 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?

2. Although written nearly 40 years ago, David Mayhew's (1974) *Congress: The Electoral Connection* is still widely read by students for insights into congressional and electoral politics. In this seminal book, Mayhew offers an explanation grounded in rational choice theory that seeks to explain the organizational structure of Congress based on the desire of individual members for reelection. Discuss and evaluate the principal components of Mayhew's analysis as it pertains to legislative behavior and the organization of the congressional institution. Which features of his argument have largely stood the test of time? Which have not (and why)?

3. Some scholars argue that voters have little meaningful information about the political world. Downs, for example, argued that "rational ignorance" is suitable for many citizens. 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? What factors determine the political views held by the electorate? How do the demands on voters vary in the different models of voting used by scholars?

4. There is an ongoing debate in the political behavior literature regarding the nature of partisanship. Some scholars argue that partisanship is instrumental in nature while others advocate for an expressive model. What are the central theses of these two strings of research? Citing the relevant literature, evaluate the strength of the evidence for each thesis. Particular attention should be given to questions concerning the measurement of partisanship. What are the normative implications of these two distinctive partisanship models for our theoretical ideal of democracy?