

Morning Questions: CHOOSE 1

1. The American federal government is comprised of three distinct branches. Discuss the factors central to the institutional development of each branch of the American federal government. How have these changes altered the stability and relative power of each branch of the federal government? How can each branch seize power from the others? In what ways can each branch of government delegate its power willingly, and why does this occur? To what extent are these shifts in interbranch relations influenced by short-term and long-term changes in the electorate including critical elections, secular realignments, and political polarization? Be sure to provide examples from American political history.
2. What can we conclude about the relationship between mass attitudes & opinions and the behavior of policymakers? On the one hand, there is considerable evidence of congruence between the behavior of policymakers and mass public opinion. As evidence, consider that (1) changes in national public opinion tend to correspond to similar changes in public policy, (2) the ideology of the mass public in states tends to match the ideology of state policies that are enacted, and (3) the voting patterns of members of Congress tend to align with the ideology of their home district. On the other hand, the public generally dislikes Congress, distrusts government, and large segments of the population do not follow or actively participate in politics. How do you make sense of these findings? Does the public have policy preferences and do elites follow those preferences? Or do elected officials lead mass opinion? How effectively does (or can) the public hold elected officials accountable for their actions in office? Explain why, theoretically, you believe your answer to be true. How has existing evidence weighed in on this question? What additional empirical tests would you want to use to answer this question?

Afternoon Questions: CHOOSE 2

1. What are the key factors that drive group solidarity among racial groups in the United States? For example, Latinos have surpassed African Americans as the second largest racial minority in America yet they seem to have a less coherent political identity as a minority group. Why do we see this difference? How might the continued growth of the Latino population affect the dynamics of racial politics in the decades to come?
2. The Michigan model of mass political behavior was developed in *The American Voter* by Campbell et al. in 1960 and in the classic belief systems essay by Converse in 1964. Describe the major claims put forth by this model with respect to ideological reasoning, political sophistication, opinion formation, and voting behavior. To what extent have these claims survived challenges from public opinion scholars and political psychologists over the years? To what extent does the Michigan model need to be revised?

3. The “personal vote” has long been a central pillar of how scholars understand congressional elections in the United States. Define, discuss, and evaluate the personal vote in congressional elections. How have the rise of polarization and/or nationalization affected the personal vote? Is it still useful to think of the personal vote as an important feature of congressional elections?
4. Scholars argue that there are currently three major approaches to the study of judicial politics: the legal model, the attitudinal model, and the strategic model. Compare and contrast these three models of judicial decision making. As part of your analysis, you should explain the similarities and differences that underlie these perspectives and discuss how empirical scholars have tried to test for the operation of these models in governing judicial behavior (hint: think about research designs used by scholars). You should address any significant critiques present in the way that each model is conceptualized by scholars. In addition, your answer should address how effective each of these perspectives is in explaining judicial decision making at different levels of judicial hierarchies in federal and state court systems (i.e., not just the U.S. Supreme Court). Finally, assess the extent to which these three approaches may be bridged or combined so that we can gain a more complete and rich understanding of judicial politics in the future.
5. 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.