

# AMERICAN POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

SPRING 2022

## 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. Scholars and political commentators frequently assert that the electorate is polarized, with distinct ideological camps in disagreement about the nation's most pressing political problems and how to solve them. How do political scientists explain the emergence and persistence of political polarization in the electorate? What are the consequences of political polarization for (1) citizens' participation in politics, (2) electoral politics, (3) national policymaking, and (4) filling vacancies in government? To what extent can these consequences be overcome by unified party control of the national government? Provide both references to literature and examples from contemporary American politics.

2. Since the landmark voting studies of the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., *The American Voter*), scholars have analyzed extensively the factors that influence voting in presidential elections. Discuss the impact of several aggregate level and/or institutional factors that influence the outcomes of national elections. How do these factors interact with individual-level factors? Explain the relationship between these changes and changes in the party system (stability, realignment, etc.). How do the elections of the past 20 years support or refute your explanation?

# AMERICAN POLITICS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

SPRING 2022

## 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. The American government is frequently described as “democratic” with policymakers responding to the preferences of their constituents. Nonetheless, some policies with widespread public support fail to be enacted by lawmakers (e.g., marijuana legalization, universal background checks for firearms purchases, reform of qualified immunity for police officers). How does the political science literature explain the failure of these and other policy initiatives with public support? Under what conditions might advocates for these policies achieve future success?

2. 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?

3. While relatively few observers would dispute the notion of an incumbency advantage in Congress, there is much less agreement among congressional scholars over the sources of that advantage for incumbent legislators. Discuss and evaluate the most important factors that scholars have identified during the past few decades as contributing to the incumbency advantage. In your answer, be sure to acknowledge limitations associated with existing explanations as well as why certain factors may not help us fully understand the advantages accruing to incumbents.

4. Scholars frequently examine the political behavior of citizens in American democracy. Key components of this literature examine voters' decisions to take part in elections and which candidate to support. Scholars have offered numerous explanations for these phenomena. What factors influence whether a citizen decides to take part in democratic politics via voting, campaign donations, or becoming a candidate? Do these factors have similar effects across all types of elections? How do citizens choose which candidates to support?