

US Politics: Preliminary Examination September 2009

Directions: You must choose three of these sections and write on one question from each. Please be aware that your exam is evaluated both on the quality of the individual answers as well as on its overall quality. Please limit your answers to approximately 2500 words per question, not including bibliography.

You are expected to support your arguments with adequate citations to appropriate literature, but you are reminded to respond to the questions that are asked. It is not necessary to include a bibliography with your answers, but you need to submit a bibliography within 72 hours after submitting your exam.

I. General

1. Democracy has been central to American public philosophy, but its meaning and role in public life has varied over time. Drawing on the relevant literature, write an essay, “The Life and Times of Democracy in America” in which you discuss how American intellectuals, leaders, and citizens have understood democracy and how they have furthered and hindered the realization of democratic values and principles.

2. Linkage institutions play an important role in American politics. Choose two linkage institutions and assess their importance to the political system. Explain how these institutions can foster, as well as dampen representation. Do these linkage institutions present a problem for a representative democracy?

3. The 1960s and 1970s brought about a participatory revolution in American politics, characterized by a proliferation of interests representing virtually all sectors of American life, more open mediating institutions like political parties, extensive polling of citizens opinions on virtually all contemporary issues, and widespread information being made available to citizens about the activities of those that represent them in government. Generally speaking, why then has political trust tended to decrease over time and citizen participation tended to decrease or not improve a great deal over time? What theoretical explanations may be offered to explain the seemingly inverse relationship between a more open and representative political system and less citizen involvement?

II. National Institutions

1. From FDR (and maybe TR) on, the presidency has grown in power and scope; this trend has continued through chief executives of both parties. As of 2009, how has the balance of power between the presidency and the congress changed? What institutional and political elements best help us understand relations between the two branches.

2. The Constitution provided Congress with little guidance as to the rules and institutions it should establish, allowing the House and Senate to "determine the Rules of its Proceedings." Discuss the development of congressional rules and institutions. What factors led to the emergence of rules and institutions currently used by Congress. Compare and contrast institutional development in the House and Senate. How did these two bodies come to establish such distinct sets of rules and institutions?

3. In recent years, much scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the relationships among congressional committees, political parties, and floor majorities driven by the floor's median member. Identify the major questions driving the work in this area, discuss the theoretical approaches that have been employed, and evaluate the conclusions different scholars have reached.

III. Political Behavior and Elections

1. Some scholars have argued that citizens have little meaningful information about the political world. Other researchers argue that citizens are reasonably informed and competent to make decisions. Identify and discuss theories that support both perspectives. Which perspective do you find most convincing and why? Finally, how did the emergence of the "framing" literature affect this debate?

2. Identify and discuss three media effects on public opinion. Outline the relevant theories and the most prominent empirical findings. What do these findings suggest about our democracy, democratic practices, the role of the media, and citizens as informed citizens?

3. To the consternation of some scholars, research on biological foundations of everything from attitudes to partisanship appears to be growing. Discuss the debate over this literature and its utility for providing new understandings of politics.

4. How does the literature on gender and politics fit in with the campaign and election literature? Does the research on gender and politics build on this literature, or does it challenge the assumptions and conclusions of this literature? Identify any gaps in the gender and politics literature (with respect to elections and campaigns) and offer a direction for future research. Do you think it is necessary to parse out research on elections and campaigns according to gender?

IV. Parties and Organized Interests

1. With partisan divisions at apparent historical highs, make use of party and opinion literature to take a stand on Morris Fiorina's claim that the country is not divided along partisan or ideological lines.

2. Defend the assertion that interest groups facilitate representation and democratic governance?

3. Outline the basic tenets of the theory of electoral realignment. Why is the theory not held up in its attempt to explain the longitudinal patterns of American party/electoral history? Are there any competing theories that better explain party and electoral change over time? What theories, if any, are particularly useful in explaining party/electoral changes since the demise of the New Deal coalitions?

4. Discuss the role of organized interests in funding political parties and electoral campaigns since the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) and its amendments were passed in 1971 and 1974. How influential have political action committee (PAC) expenditures, soft money expenditures, and issue advocacy activity been in the electoral process? How has the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) changed interest group activity in elections? All things considered, what has been the impact upon the electoral and policy processes of interest group money in elections? Overall, have the impacts had a positive or negative effect upon the functioning of American democracy?

V. Subnational Politics

1. There is a significant tradition of normative debate and empirical scholarship on the question of the consequences of jurisdictional fragmentation in metropolitan areas. How does recent scholarship on metropolitan governance arrangements via institutionalized networking simply fit into this debate? Assess the empirical research that has been offered in support of the new perspective on “governance without government.”

2. Minorities and women have assumed greater leadership roles in American cities over the past quarter century. Among urbanists, what are the most important theories and research findings about such involvements? What important questions remain unaddressed? What kind of research would be most useful in filling in these gaps?

3. Do local communities provide settings for effective and strong democracy? In what ways do local communities enhance and undermine democratic performance? Do some sorts of communities have particularly effective (and ineffective) democracies? Be sure to cite the relevant literature when responding to this question.