

January 2019

AMERICAN POLITICS FIELD EXAM

Answer THREE of the following questions, but no more than TWO from SECTION A or SECTION B. All answers must be typed.

SECTION A

1. In recent years, a new “theory of parties” advanced by John Zaller and coauthors (see Bawn et al. 2012 and Karol et al. 2008) has gained traction in political science. Identify and explain the main features of this theory. How, if at all, does it differ from other major theoretical perspectives on parties? What are its key testable implications? How well has it met these tests? In your answer, be sure to discuss both the Republican and Democratic parties and the 2016 presidential election.
2. The president is said to have three “structural” advantages when interacting with the other branches: a first mover advantage, a collective action advantage, and an information advantage. But what happens when presidents disregard, and are known to disregard, the knowledge-based resources of the executive branch? What is the current state of the information advantage? How might the erosion of that advantage affect the other two? And how might this erosion alter inter-branch relations generally?
3. Policies sometimes persist despite widespread opposition to them. Two prominent explanations in American politics research for this are a) claims of path dependence and b) claims that policy making is non-majoritarian where certain actors use control of the agenda or veto power to prevent legislative change. What are the microfoundations of each explanation? How could you test the efficacy of each model and/or distinguish between the two? Is there a particular instance in which changes, or lack thereof, in policy demonstrate that one explanation is superior to the other? When comparing the two explanations, be sure to address likely criticisms of each.
4. Suppose one could go back in time and alter some pivotal political event in American history to realize an important counterfactual that has been the subject of prior scholarly debate in political science. What key counterfactual would you examine and what are extant arguments about its importance for American Politics? Explain how manipulating this event would inform existing theoretical arguments. Your answer should both be specific about the causal mechanism(s) underlying the importance of the event and describe the conclusions you would reach depending on the outcome you observed.

SECTION B

5. Individuals' belief systems are said to exhibit "ideological constraint" if observing their policy attitudes on some issues allows us to predict their policy attitudes on other issues. First, how has political science sought to measure ideological constraint? What do we know about how the level of ideological thinking varies in the population and does what we think we know depend on how we measure attitudes? Second, what implications does the research on constraint, including contemporary debates about measurement, have for democratic accountability, policy responsiveness, and opinion leadership by elites?

6. American representative democracy is fundamentally based on delegation of authority. Voters delegate authority to elected representatives: members of Congress, the President, state judges (in some states), etc. Congress and the President delegate policymaking tasks to bureaucratic agencies. This reality raises concerns for democratic/political accountability. Discuss two different domains in which delegation is central, and highlight the costs and benefits associated with this delegation (i.e., describe the trade-offs in the two domains you have chosen). What evidence do we have about the implications for accountability and other values affected by delegation?

7. Both the committee and party systems are fundamental explanations for congressional (House) outcomes. To what degree do these institutions substitute for one another, complement one another, and potentially act in hindrance to one another in the production of collective goods? In constructing your answer, identify relevant theoretical perspectives and discuss empirical evidence.

8. In 2018, the President, House, and Senate were all controlled by the Republican Party. In 2019, the Democrats will control the House. What does political science say about the likely consequences of this change? Discuss different theoretical predictions, including their microfoundations, with respect to different outcomes. How would your answer differ if Democrats had also taken the Senate (51 seats to 49)?