

**AMERICAN POLITICS FIELD EXAM  
AUGUST 2022**

Answer **THREE** of the following, **ONE** from **EACH** section. Choose questions to avoid repetition across your answers. Avoid contradiction as well.

**SECTION 1:**

1. *What are the causes and consequences of elite and mass polarization? In your response, consider the effects of at least three of the following: redistricting, primary elections, interest mobilization, campaign finance, social and news media.*
2. *In his foundational work on public opinion, John Zaller expressed concerns about “elite domination” of public opinion. To what extent are elites able to dominate public opinion in the United States? Under what conditions is elite domination most -- and least -- likely? What are the consequences of these dynamics and processes for understanding both “institutions” (e.g., how institutions of government operate) and “behavior” (e.g., how citizens form and express opinions)?*
3. *Canonical partisan priming experiments introduce a treatment in which an object (say a candidate, proposed bill, person, or political argument) is randomly labeled with a party. That label is often consequential. For example, people rate candidates whose partisanship aligns with their own more favorably than candidates whose partisanship is opposed to their own. One interpretation of this pattern is partisan motivated reasoning-- we react more favorably to stimuli from our in-party than to stimuli from the out-party -- distorting our reasoning. How persuasive is this account? Is there an alternative account? What evidence would allow one to distinguish between accounts?*
4. *To what extent do campaigns matter for election outcomes? In your answer, you should discuss the conditions under which political advertising, media coverage, or other campaign activity are likely to influence the way that voters behave. Why are campaign effects likely in some circumstances and for some people, but not others? What should future research on campaigns focus on?*

**SECTION II**

1. *Discuss the causes and consequences of the incumbency advantage in congressional elections. In your answer, be sure to address theories and evidence about this advantage, and how and why it has changed over time.*
2. *How have changes in the relationship between president and Congress affected the constitutional system of checks and balances? Has the modern presidency affected*

*Congress's role in governing? If so, how? To what extent is Congress still an effective check on presidential power?*

3. *Some argue that the country needs strong federal government intervention to address the large-scale challenges it faces, e.g. climate change and the degradation of voting rights. With Congress seemingly unable to provide bold action, would it be desirable to increase the President's ability to enact large-scale policy change through unilateral action? Why or why not? In formulating your answer to this question lay out (i) what the President's unilateral powers are right now; (ii) the constraints, if any, on the President's unilateral power; (iii) why you believe that those powers ought to be expanded or strengthened (or not). Be sure to address President Trump's alleged overreach in the exercise of unilateral power in your answer.*
4. *Nearly all policy decisions involve delegation of authority to unelected bureaucrats. This raises concerns that government actors without the proper 'democratic pedigree' (i.e., that weren't elected) have too much influence on the translation of public preferences into government policy, thereby severing democratic control of government. However, some have argued that these unelected bureaucrats have protected democratic norms when democratically elected officials would not (precisely because they need not worry about reelection). Formulate an argument either for or against the idea that bureaucracy fits with democracy. Provide an argument that bureaucracy can be reconciled with democratic ideals OR provide an argument that it cannot. Be sure to discuss the pros and cons of delegation, as well as whether or not the traditional modes of political control (judicial review, Congressional oversight, Presidential appointments, etc.) are sufficient to preserve the democratic connection.*
5. *Theories of representation have historically come from studies of the legislative branch. However, scholars continue to question representation—its quality and the extent to which it should be expected—from other branches of government, including the courts. There is also a societal expectation that judges should be impartial arbiters, seekers of truth and justice, rather than political representatives. While most foundational studies of the courts and judicial behavior are focused on the federal courts, where judges are appointed, 39 states use some form of election for at least some of their judges. Is the perception of judges as impartial arbiters accurate? Why or why not? How do considerations of judicial selection and retention mechanisms influence your assessment?*

### **SECTION 3:**

1. *Some scholars argue that American politics has become nationalized. What do they mean? What evidence supports this claim? Are these scholars correct?*

2. *"American Political Development perspectives help us understand contemporary patterns of political conflict in the United States." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your argument drawing on relevant theoretical and empirical work.*
3. *"[T]he available evidence suggests two conclusions. First, economic inequality has an impact on inequality of political influence. (America's rich very likely have more influence on policy decisions than the nonrich do.) Second, because there is a tipping point beyond which this effect diminishes, wealthy Americans may have roughly the same amount of political advantage nowadays that they did in the late 1970s or early 1980s." Evaluate this statement in light of extant research on the relationship between rising economic inequality, on the one hand, and unequal political influence, on the other. Be sure to define political influence and to specify the main ways in which "wealthy Americans" may individually or collectively wield political influence. Your answer should touch on at least two areas of substantive policy, such as taxation, financial and corporate regulation, and policies governing labor unions.*
4. *The claim that racism is "systemic" or "structural" looks beyond the prejudices of individuals to the effects of institutions and institutional arrangements. How would you go about disentangling institutional biases from incumbent preferences? Do institutions in the contemporary United States bias action apart from the individuals who occupy them? How so? Examine three institutions/arrangements in answering these questions. Based on your answers, what are the prospects for rooting out structural racism in the United States?*