

AMERICAN POLITICS FIELD EXAM
JANUARY 2023

Answer **THREE** of the following, **ONE** from **EACH** section. Be sure to respond directly to the questions asked. Choose questions to avoid repetition across your answers. Avoid contradictions as well.

SECTION I

1. “Ideology” is a core concept in the study of mass behavior, public opinion, and elections and voting. What is “ideology,” and how much and in what ways does it matter for decision making and outcomes? Frame your answer in terms of both classic and modern conceptions of these topics.
2. You have encountered two schools of thought about the influence of the economy on voting. One stresses the influence of economic considerations on vote choice and political behavior. The other emphasizes that people do not seem to be much influenced by their self-interest when they make political decisions or take political action. (1) Describe the theoretical basis and empirical support for each position. (2) How and to what extent can these schools of thought be reconciled?
3. Contemporary accounts of nationalization in American politics suggest that partisanship and party identity is the overwhelming force driving voting behavior in elections. As consequence, parties, candidates, and interest groups should focus their efforts on mobilizing party supporters, instead of persuading or contacting fence-sitters and out-partisans. What theoretical and empirical evidence is there for (or against) these claims?
4. Many observers credit decennial redistricting and primary election competition as major drivers of extremism and polarization among officeholders in the U.S. How persuasive is the theoretical and empirical evidence in support of these views? What are the major alternative explanations for elite polarization in the U.S., and how does the evidence fare for these alternatives?

SECTION II

1. We often read in the news that the majority of the nation's voters support a particular policy, but that Congress is nonetheless unlikely to pursue it. Is this true? If so, why do we often see Congress failing to pass policies that are supported by a majority of US voters?
2. Bawn (1995) notes that, “By delegating policy decisions to the bureaucracy, Congress creates a control problem for itself.” Why does Congress—or other political principals

such as the President—create this problem for itself, and what techniques does it have for addressing this problem (of political control)?

3. At his confirmation hearings, Chief Justice John Roberts insisted that the Court acts as an impartial umpire in constitutional disputes, just calling balls and strikes. Recently, Justices have been at pains to affirm the political neutrality of the Court in evaluating questions of law. How important is it that the Court's operations be seen as non-political? Evaluate the strength of various sources of support for those claims—institutional, structural, and professional. Are such claims in serious danger of losing their credibility? Why or why not?
4. Evidence points to a shift in the political foundations of presidential leadership in the 1970s when older pluralist strategies began to give way to contemporary plebiscitary strategies. Identify and discuss *three* important changes in the political and institutional environment surrounding the presidency that might account for a shift in leadership strategies around this time. How exactly does each change relate to the observed shift in leadership strategies? Have these changes made the president more or less effective in political leadership? Explain.

SECTION 3

1. To what extent do voters' choices in elections reflect their material interests versus other considerations, like social identity, gender, and race? How does the campaign environment affect the influence of these factors?
2. While most political observers believe that interest groups have significant influence on policy outcomes, the empirical evidence connecting interest group activity to policy outcomes has been difficult to uncover or has been met with considerable skepticism. What are the theoretical and empirical challenges with identifying the influence of interest groups on policy? Do interest groups have significant influence on policy outcomes?
3. Recent scholarship has inverted the old adage "all politics is local" to assert that today "all politics is national." Assess the scope and significance of the implied change as it is observed in the operation of *three* institutions: e.g. federalism, parties, elections, the House, the Senate, the presidency, the bureaucracy, etc. Is the case for the nationalization of American politics overstated? What remains of the traditional view? What are the implications of the change for American politics at large.
4. Scholarship on the contemporary American political economy has emphasized its distinctive elements, including institutional fragmentation (especially the fragmentation of governmental power), the relative weakness of encompassing labor and business

groups, and the centrality of race and racism to the structure of both the market and public policies. How do these unusual elements of the American political economy help us understand, or not, ONE of the following trends in American politics: (1) the decline of organized labor as an organizational, electoral, and lobbying force; (2) the lack of post-1990s updating of key areas of national public policy, such as infrastructure investments and policies supporting working families (e.g., child care and paid leave); OR (3) the movement of the Republican Party to the right on both economic and cultural/racial/religious issues. In your answer, you should feel free to challenge the emphasis on U.S. distinctiveness that marks this literature.