

Winter 2015  
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. Scholars have debated the cause of the post-1960s transformation in punishment and surveillance in the United States and why, until recently at least, it faced so little resistance. Can we explain this American “exceptionalism” through distinctive political traditions and institutions, such as the powerful and independent prosecutor, the distinctive U.S. welfare state, the absence of liberal opposition, and federalism? Or does it have more to do with strategic and symbolic responses to perceived racial threats or the move away from local democratic control? Discuss these theories and offer critiques or amendments to them.
2. *The Federalist No. 78*: “... the courts were designed to be an intermediate body between the people and the legislature, in order, among other things, to keep the latter within the limits assigned to their authority. The interpretation of the laws is the proper and peculiar province of the courts. A constitution is in fact, and must be, regarded by the judges as a fundamental law. It therefore belongs to them to ascertain its meaning as well as the meaning of any particular act proceeding from the legislative body. If there should happen to be an irreconcilable variance between the two, that which has the superior obligation and validity ought of course to be preferred; or in other words, the constitution ought to be preferred to the statute, the intention of the people to the intention of their agents.

Nor does this conclusion by any means suppose a superiority of the judicial to the legislative power. It only supposes that the power of the people is superior to both; and that where the will of the legislature declared in its statutes, stands in opposition to that of the people declared in the constitution, the judges ought to be governed by the latter, rather than the former. They ought to regulate their decisions by the fundamental laws, rather than by those which are not fundamental.”

Consider scholarship from the legal academy and political science. How well do American courts fulfill these stated goals? Focus especially on how well the courts serve as “an intermediate body between the people and the legislature” and how well they “regulate their decisions by the fundamental laws.” Consider the following: how judges are selected, how much discretion they have, and how that discretion is exercised; how they decide cases and build precedents; and how responsive they are to public opinion and other branches (including judicial review). Which institutions bring the courts closer to this ideal, and which further?

3. Barack Obama has generated considerable controversy for acting unilaterally in matters of war, health care, and immigration. To what extent do these actions follow or depart from the pattern of modern practice? Consider the unilateral politics model associated with the work of Howell. Are the predictions of this approach confirmed or challenged by Obama's actions? Do we need to reevaluate this general approach to understanding unilateral action? If so, why and along what lines? Finally, how does the theory account for the heightened levels of political agitation over Obama's actions in Congress?
4. When policies persist despite widespread opposition to them, two prominent explanations in American politics research are (a) claims of path dependence and (b) claims that policy making is a non-majoritarian practice where certain actors can protect unpopular policies through their control of the agenda or their veto power. 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 area where changes, or lack therefore, in policy demonstrate that one explanation is superior to the other?) In making your argument, be sure to address the likely arguments of the other side.

## SECTION B

1. What evidence is there for polarization being driven by an elite- vs. mass-led process? Be sure to evaluate four major electoral or institutional explanations for polarization, and in doing so describe the evidence in support or against these explanations. How persuasive are these accounts of polarization?
2. Why does Congress have committees? Sketch a theory, address the major lines of argument in this area, and comment on conditions under which the committee system would flourish and under which it would decay.
3. Consider stipulations in the U.S. Constitution relating to election law, such as (a) eligibility restrictions for running for House, Senate, and President, (b) apportionment of districts to states, (c) the Electoral College, (d) filling of Congressional vacancies, (e) the schedule of terms for House, Senate, and President, (f) shared election administration authority between state legislatures and Congress, (g) the first amendment right to free speech and press, (h) enfranchising amendments related to 18-21 year olds, women, or African-Americans, (i) direct election of Senators, and (j) equal protection.

Choose four stipulations (these or others in the Constitution). Explain how each rule as set forth in the Constitution or amendments may affect candidate strategy, voter behavior, and policy outcomes..

4. Table 2 below comes from Ansolabehere, Gerber, and Snyder’s 2002 APSR article, “Equal Money, Equal Votes.” This is a county-level analysis with data from 1960. The dependent variable is the relative per capita funding that the state gives to the county. This is measured by taking the amount of money transferred from the state to the county, dividing that by the county population, and then dividing that by the average per capita amount provided to the counties in the state. The key independent variable, *Relative representation*, indicates how well the county population is represented in the state legislature. This is measured by first taking the number of legislative seats in a county divided by the population in the county, and then dividing this by the number of seats in the state over the state population. **Answer parts a-e (continues on next page):**

**TABLE 2. Cross-Sectional Analysis: Transfers and Votes (Dependent Variable: Relative per Capita Intergovernmental Transfers)**

Independent Variable	1960	1960
Relative representation	.34 (.01)	.17 (.01)
Population growth rate		-.19 (.03)
Average income		-.01 (.04)
% poor		.22 (.03)
% unemployed		.06 (.01)
% in school		.40 (.05)
% age 65 or older		-.03 (.02)
% black		-.02 (.02)
% turnout		.19 (.02)
% Democrat × non-Republican control		.04 (.03)
% Democrat × Republican control		-.02 (.04)
N	3,048	3,048
R <sup>2</sup>	.33	.50

*Note:* Dummy variables for each state included in all regressions.

- a) In 1960, many states violated the “one-person-one-vote” imperative because populations in some counties had more representation per person than populations in other counties. Make up a fictitious county in a fictitious state that is neither over-represented nor under-represented compared to other counties (i.e., it has a *relative representation* value of 1). List the county’s population, number of representatives, as well as the population and the number of representatives of the state. Calculate the *relative representation*. Show your work.
- b) Interpret the coefficient on *relative representation* in Table 2, column 1.
- c) When control variables are included in the regression, the coefficient value on *relative representation* changes. Why? Consider at least two statistically significant control variables. Theorize why they might have an independent effect on the dependent variable.
- d) Think about how this regression might produce biased estimates of the relationship between relative representation and relative transfers. Identify at least two possible threats to causal inference and how they might distort the findings.

- e) Following *Baker v Carr*, states were required to construct legislative districts that were apportioned according to the one-person-one-vote rule. Counties that were previously given relatively small amounts of transfers from the state began receiving transfers aligned with their population sizes. How does this finding contrast with other political science perspectives on the role of the judicial branch in effecting policy change?