

Summer 2010
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. 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?

2. You are asked to review a paper employing the following data analysis strategy. For a variety of issues, individuals living in different House districts were surveyed on how they would have voted on a roll call that was considered in the previous session of the House. Those survey responses were then used to explain actual voting behavior by members of the House of Representatives, and a positive and statistically significant relationship was observed between both average and median survey response in a district and member voting. The author states “These data are strong evidence that members of Congress vote the way they do to avoid losing office.” (1) Discuss the different explanations for a concordance between district and member preferences. (2) What are the assumptions under which the measure of citizen voting on roll call measures discussed above is an accurate measure of underlying citizen preferences? (3) In light of this and other arguments, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this design?

3. In “Why is there so Little Money in U.S. Politics?” Ansolabehere, de Figuerido, and Snyder argue that:

The evidence that campaign contributions lead to a substantial influence on votes is rather thin. Legislators’ votes depend almost entirely on their own beliefs and the preferences of their voters and their party. Contributions explain a miniscule fraction of the variation in voting behavior in the U.S. Congress. Members of Congress care foremost about winning re-election. They must attend to the constituency that elects them, voters in a district or state and the constituency that nominates them, the party.

Their conclusions are based, in part, upon analyses similar to the following:

	Marginal Effect of Variable on Percentage (0-100) of Conservative Voting on Key Legislative Votes		
Variable (and Change)	(A)	(B)	(C)
Corporate	.32**	.07	.02

Contributions (+ \$10,000)			
Labor Contributions (+\$10,000)	-1.2**	-.44**	-.13
Members Party (Republican rather than Democrat)	32**	41**	n/a
Other notes on model specification:	Year Fixed Effects	(A) + District Fixed Effects	(B) + Member Fixed Effects

Note: Table entries are marginal effects from OLS regressions. Constant and other control variables omitted to save space. ** denotes $p < .01$; * denotes $p < .05$.

(1) Interpret the effect of an increase by \$10,000 in labor contributions on conservative voting in columns (A) through (C). (2) Why would including district and member fixed effects, as in columns (B) and (C), tend to reduce the effect of contributions on voting? (3) How persuasive are these results of the claim that contributions do not affect legislator behavior? (4) Assuming that these data are correct—that extant legislators don't alter their votes in response to receiving contributions—why do interest groups contribute? Discuss with reference both to the mechanisms by which contributions might affect policy outcomes and the data to support such arguments.

4. Political scientists have noted consistent relationships between individuals' race and ethnicity and their voting choices and other measures of political preferences. (1) What are the means by which either race or ethnicity might affect political preferences and/or voting? (2) What evidence exists to support these arguments? (3) What are the strengths and limitations of these arguments and data?

5. Suppose Democrats emerge from the 2010 midterm with a reduced majority in the Senate and having lost the House. What are the likely effects of this outcome on policymaking beginning in 2011 when the new Congress takes office? Your answer should describe (a) specific theoretical accounts of the policymaking process and (b) the evidence that supports them. It should then use those theories to describe exactly which sorts of laws/legislative decisions are now more or less likely to be passed.

SECTION B

1. In the United States, incumbent politicians win reelection at high rates. This pattern has led to extensive discussion of the "incumbency advantage." (1) How have political scientists defined the notion of the incumbency advantage? (2) Why is the incumbency advantage important? (3) Pick two particular aspects of incumbency advantage and discuss a method by which to estimate each. What are the limitations of the method(s) you suggested?

2. 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. (1) What key counterfactual would you examine and what are extant arguments

about its importance? (2) Explain how manipulating this event would inform existing theoretical arguments. Your answer should both be specific about the causal mechanism underlying the importance of the event and describe the conclusions you would reach depending on the outcome you observed.

3. Richard Neustadt described American government as a system of “separate institutions sharing powers.” Scholars continue to debate the effect of the constitutional principle of separation. (1) What are the principles of separation outlined in the Constitution? (2) Evaluate the contemporary and historical effect of the separation of powers on (a) foreign and (b) domestic policy making. (3) On balance, what are the effects on policy making of efforts to aggrandize presidential power in the name of separation relative to efforts to institutionalize power-sharing?

4. The Tea Party movement has sought to avoid becoming absorbed by the Republican party. One explanation for this behavior is that Tea Party leaders believe they can assert more influence on that party from the outside than from inside it. Evaluate this strategy in light of the movement-party relationship as we observe it more generally across American political development. In constructing your answer, be sure to identify (1) The political trade-offs involved in adopting one strategy or the other; (2) The evidence for or against the strategy of organizational independence; and (3) The long-term prospects for maintaining a political movement outside of the parties. In constructing your answer, you should also draw attention to any reasons that the lessons of past experiences would not be relevant for the Tea Party.

5. What role do parties play in the organization and operation of the U.S. House of Representatives? In answering this question, (1) identify dominant theoretical perspectives and (2) discuss the evidence deployed to advance those theories. A strong answer will distinguish between the effect of partisanship on observed legislative organization/behavior from the role of legislator policy preferences.