

Summer 2012
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. Many variables are correlated with voter turnout, including education, union status, and campaign contacts. Select one variable that predicts turnout and describe the theoretical and empirical literature regarding the relationship. Focus on the key methodological challenges to accurate measurement of the causal effect of the variable.

2. You are asked to review an article that presents the following regression table:

	Percentage of president's agenda that is adopted (0-100)	
	(1)	(2)
Presidential Popular Vote (50-100%)	1.65 (0.35)	0.05 (0.78)
President's party different than last president's (0=Same Party, 1=Different)	25.02 (12.1)	8.12 (6.12)
Presidential Popular Vote* President's party different than last president's		3.02 (1.72)
Constant	25.0 (12.0)	18.2 (9.0)

N=20. OLS Coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Each observation is a president when first elected. These are pretend data, so don't even begin to think about issues of measurement.

(A) Interpret the effect of an increase by 10 percentage points in the president popular vote on the percentage of the president's agenda that is enacted. Do this for the column (1) regression, as well as for the column (2) regression when (a1) the president is the same party of as the prior president or (a2) of a different party. Make sure you both identify the point estimate for the prediction and its statistical significance.

(B) What does the interaction coefficient presented in column (2) tell us about the conditions under which the president's popular vote performance affects the likelihood his agenda is enacted?

(C) On the basis of this regression, the author concludes: "These results show that the president's popularity has a direct effect on the likelihood his legislative agenda is enacted. Contrary to claims that mandates are dead, presidents win more often when they do better in the popular vote after replacing a president of a different party." How persuasive is this argument? In addressing the limits of the data as presented, analyzed, and interpreted, make sure to engage with theories about policymaking and presidential authority.

3. A great deal of attention focuses on the alleged influence of lobbyists in shaping the policymaking process. (A) What are the dominant political science theories about the role of lobbyists (what, in short, do they do, and how does it affect policy outcomes)? (B) What evidence is there to support these or alternative accounts of the role of lobbyists? (C) Engage the counterfactual: Lobbying is banned. How do policy outcomes change?

4. The simple Downsian model of one-dimensional spatial competition is a common starting point for analysis of political competition. (A) Describe the basic model and its predictions. Evaluate the key features and predictions of the model. How well, in general, does the model do empirically? (B) In light of the increasing concentration of wealth and earnings in America, how well does the original Downsian model fare in understanding contemporary American politics? What deficiencies, if any, in the model does your answer to the prior question suggest, and what are the most promising theoretical extensions of the model for explaining the apparently greater political influence of the wealthy?

5. Political parties in the United States are institutionally weak. And yet, the last three decades have seen startling increases in party polarization in the U.S. Congress. (A) Given the apparent weakness of American parties, what are the different theoretical explanations for why members of Congress vote with their party? (B) Which theory is best and why? (C) How do those theories help to understand the relative increase in party polarization in the last three decades?

SECTION B

1. In the *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* decision announced this summer, Chief Justice John Roberts joined his more liberal colleagues in the 5-4 majority that upheld the individual mandate provision of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, an outcome that surprised even veteran Supreme Court watchers. (A) What light, if any, do the three dominant models of Supreme Court behavior (attitudinal, strategic, and judicial/legal) shed on this event? (B) What sort of tests would allow you to distinguish among these accounts?

2. In the event Congress and the president are unable to come to an agreement about spending reductions, current laws authorizing tax cuts (the so-called Bush tax cuts) will expire near the end of 2012. This will raise taxes across the board. In light of this unpleasant reversion in the absence of legislative action, how does it affect bargaining between, say, a recently re-elected Democratic president (Obama) and a marginally Republican House and Senate in shaping tax policy? (Please note: In answering this question, you can pretend that the spending cuts also in place are not going to happen. Rather, the tax cuts alone will expire.) In answering your question, be explicit about the model of policymaking you are describing and the sources of utility for different actors.

3. In certain models of “political time,” a key role exists for president to alter subsequent political conflict by shaping the formation of long-term political coalitions. Part I: Identify (A) the conditions necessary for a president to exercise leadership in shaping political coalitions, (B) the mechanism and powers by which presidents are able to do so, and (C) the consequences of this activity for subsequent political conflict. Part II: Identify a falsifiable test of this theoretical perspective and a case that can be used to employ this test.

4. When scholars say that American political development is “racialized,” they mean to suggest that race is not just one topic of interest among others, but that American politics in all its various elements is continually, reproducing, negotiating, and altering ideas of race and configurations of racism. Is race the one massive inescapable fact of our political history and development to which all issues are more or less directly related, or is the case overstated? To address this question, identify three issues of pressing importance in American politics today that do *not* have an explicit racial component and (A) explain their relationship to the racialized pattern of American political development and (B) assess the importance of this history relative to other factors in explaining contemporary politics. Make sure your answer incorporates an overall evaluation of the relative importance of race compared to other historical and contemporary factors in understanding American politics.

5. Richard Neustadt famously described presidential power as “the power to persuade.” Recent scholarship, however, has cast serious doubt on that proposition. (A) What is the current state of the literature on the nature of the ability of the president to persuade the mass public and members of Congress to enact his agenda? (B) What other sources of power do presidents have, and how does the power to persuade stack up against them?