

## American Politics Field Exam

August 2018

Answer **THREE** of the following questions. You must choose at least one question from each part.

1. One of the biggest debates in congressional studies concerns the influence of parties on policymaking. At one extreme, congressional scholars argue that parties are cartels that empower their leaders to dominate the legislative process so that outcomes favor majority party interests. At the other extreme, scholars have argued that parties qua parties are largely impotent and merely serve as front organizations for individuals with similar preferences. Outline the terms of this debate and discuss the evidence in favor and against the different perspectives in the literature. Be sure to discuss methodological problems that hamper efforts to answer question about party influence and suggest possible research designs that would enable us to reach more definitive conclusions.
2. Identify and distinguish the different instruments and resources employed by each of the Constitution's three branches of government to control the bureaucracy. How effective is each branch at asserting control? What is the effect, for better or worse, of all these controls operating collectively? Does the bureaucracy retain significant power in its own right? What is the nature of that power, and does it pose an accountability problem?
3. One perspective in political science views judges as policy makers with fancy robes, while another perspective views judging as a task unique and distinct from policy making. Give an example of each perspective from the political science literature and describe and evaluate the evidence used to support it. Overall, which view comes closer to being correct in your view? How, if at all, is judicial decision making different from policy making and should we care?
4. 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 organization and 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 implications of the change for American politics at large?

### PART B:

1. In a democracy, voters should choose representatives who will implement good policies that voters like. If those representatives fail to do so, voters should "kick the bums out" and elect new representatives. Does American government today work in this way? You should rely on political science research to answer this question. You might keep in mind some of the following considerations as you do so (though you do not have to answer each one). Do elected representatives implement good policies that voters like? Are they voted out of office when they fail to do so? Are voters aware of what policies are implemented, and do they have clear preferences

over policy? How do voters evaluate incumbent performance? How do voters evaluate one individual's performance when policy is made by so many actors?

2. Morris Fiorina has described Anthony Downs' 1957 theory of two party competition as something close to a "master theory" in the study of American politics. What are the implications of the Downsian, or spatial, theory for candidate and party positioning in competitive elections in the American context? How well have these predictions held up against the evidence? Has the answer to this latter question changed in the decades since Down's famous book was written. If so, how and why?
3. There are two dominant theoretical views about the role of partisanship in mass political behavior. One view is that partisanship represents a summary of beliefs about appropriate politics and past party performance. An alternative view is that partisanship is more akin to a social identity than directly shapes preferences and attitudes. 1) Describe the theoretical underpinnings of each perspective. 2) What evidence is presented to support each perspective and what are the best criticisms of each view? 3) Overall, how important is each perspective for understanding contemporary American politics and why?
4. Why, under a formally democratic system and high inequality, does majority rule and universal suffrage not translate into greater demands for redistribution? Why do the poor not soak the rich? Based on income growth, the middle class has far more in common with the poor than the rich. Why, then, don't they form coalitions to demand redistributive policies?