American Politics Field Exam
January 2008

Answer **three** of the following questions, **but no more than two from either Part A and Part B**. All answers must be typed.

Part A:

1. An article you are asked to review presents a statistical model in which the dependent variable is the quality of the challenger who runs against an incumbent members of the US House. Here is the regression Table:

	Challenger quality (scaled 0 to 100)
Incumbent Vote Share in Previous Election (0 to 1)	-3.72 [1.129]
Partisanship of District (-1 to 1, Positive values indicate voters are aligned with incumbent's party)	-1.55 [.820]
President's Popularity x Incumbent Party (-1 to 1, Positive values indicate popular president of incumbent's party or unpopular president not of the incumbent's party. Measured 1 year prior to general election.)	-2.32 [.822]
Trips to District by Incumbent (Number)	-.920 [.115]
Bills Co-sponsored by Incumbent (Number)	-.045 [.221]
Incumbent's number of terms in office	-2.700 [.201]
Incumbent's war chest (Cash on hand 1 year prior to general election, in $/1,000)	.340 [.010]
Notes: (1) N=1012. (2) OLS Coefficients with Huber/White standard errors in brackets. Results are substantively similar if functional form is instead Tobit, with challenger quality truncated at 0 and 100. (3) Data are for all incumbents running for re-election in midterm elections between 1990 and 2006. Results are substantively identical if include cases where incumbent retired and include quality of opposite party's candidate in open seat election. (4) Coefficients for incumbent's age, incumbent's age squared, separate year-effects, and constant not reported save space.	

Building on the well-known finding that incumbents are far more likely to lose when challenged by high quality candidates, the author is interested in testing the argument that incumbents can

ward off such challengers if they devote greater attention to fundraising . On the basis of the above regression, however, the author concludes:

> There is no evidence that incumbent members of Congress can improve their electoral fortunes (by scaring off stronger challengers) if they take time to build up a war chest. In fact, contrary to the conventional wisdom, we demonstrate that incumbents who raise large sums of money are more likely to face quality challengers. We believe this is because challengers wisely recognize that fundraising is not a good indicator of efficacious legislative behavior. Members would be better served cosponsoring bills, visiting their district, or working diligently in committee on behalf of their district if they wish to deter such challengers.

Part I:

Answer these questions about the regression output displayed in the table:
1) According to the regression output reported in the table, holding all variables constant, how does a $2000 change in *Incumbent's war chest* affect the predicted *Challenger quality*?
2) Is the coefficient estimate for *Incumbent's war chest* statistically significant? How can you tell?
3) What does statistical significance mean?

Part II:

Assess this article. Make sure to address these three questions:
1) How well does the author characterize the conventional wisdom?
2) How well does the author's recommendation for alternative legislator behavior comport with the state of knowledge?
3) How appropriate/convincing is the data analysis, and why?

2. Suppose the Constitution were amended to provide for a presidential line-item veto for appropriations bills. This would allow the president to veto specific lines of appropriations bills instead of accepting or vetoing the whole bill. How would this institutional change likely affect the behavior of the *House of Representatives*, and what would this change reveal about the varying explanations that have been offered for how Congress is organized and run? In answering this question, be sure to address the competing theoretical explanations for the operation of the committee system and committee agenda control powers.

3. It is common in the analysis of public opinion and political behavior to include measures of a respondent's partisanship as a causal variable. What are the theoretical underpinnings of doing so? What, in general, is the state of knowledge about the role of partisanship in explaining opinion and behavior, and how persuasive is this evidence of a causal relationship? Discuss with reference to at least one specific behavior and one area of opinion.

Part B:

1. 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.

2. Some have argued that the foundations of presidential power have shifted dramatically since the Constitution was written, and that the "modern presidency" operates at a considerable distance from original understandings. Others argue that the original structure of checks and balances is still binding and that the accouterments of the modern presidency make a difference only "at the margins." Still others argue that the original Constitution provides all the support incumbents need to sustain presidential preeminence in the modern state. Who has the better of this argument, and why? Is there any way to reconcile them? What are the implications of each position for American politics at large?

3. It is claimed that American political life has grown more polarized during recent decades. What might that claim mean, exactly? How would we know if it is correct? In considering the claim, what are the conceptual difficulties? What are the measurement difficulties? To date, how successful has the scholarship of political science proven to be in expressing and testing this claim? In answering this question, be sure to be specific about what sort of data has been used to support claims of polarization.