

AMERICAN POLITICS

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

October 2016

Rules and Instructions

- You have 72 hours to complete this examination.
- Please answer 3 questions – each from a different section.
- The answers to all questions combined may be no more than 20 double-spaced pages (with one-inch margins all around and a twelve-point font).
- Make sure to answer the questions you choose fully – you should draw on the relevant literature, provide examples, and pay particular attention to relevant controversies in the literature, discipline, and subfield.
- The material you use and cite in the answer to any one question should not substantially overlap the material you use in other questions.
- Because it's a take home exam, your answers should be relatively polished and well-substantiated.
- You should include a Works Cited section (which does not count toward the page limit).

A Couple of Things to Keep in Mind

- It will work to your advantage if your responses include: a clear thesis/argument; a well-defined structure; a capable, comprehensive, yet concise summary of arguments; appropriate citations; an effective synthesis of disparate topics; analytical insight; and a clever application of current events to theoretical arguments
- It will likely work to your disadvantage if your responses are: unnecessarily wordy; hyper-specific with respect to authors' arguments; too heavily reliant on summary, as opposed to analysis; larded up with tangential discussions of current events

Good Luck!

Political Behavior (Choose one)

1. In an *Annual Review of Political Science* article published in 2000, Philip E. Converse once again defended the main findings of his 1964 article on belief systems in mass publics. Summarize Converse's core findings and describe their enduring relevance to the study of public opinion (pay particular attention to distinguishing between the conceptions of Converse and Zaller). Then, re-assess Converse's arguments in light of political developments since 2000. In other words, would Converse defend his argument as strenuously in 2016 as he did in 2000? Be sure to cite clear scholarly evidence – published after 2000 – as evidence for your claims.

2. What do existing theories of political behavior suggest about Donald J. Trump's meteoric rise to the top of the GOP, as well as his likely defeat in the general election? In developing your answer, consider four broad elements: (1) the motivational bases of Trump's support; (2) Trump's substantial immunity to an endless parade of negative revelations about his business, personal, and political life; (3) the intervening role of mass media; and (4) predictors of voter turnout and political participation more generally. In crafting your response, be careful not to get too stuck in the weeds of Trump's campaign. Rather, you should be focused on political science literature to explain what has happened and what will likely happen on November 8th.

Political Institutions (Choose one)

1. At the elite level, partisan polarization is at an historic high. Begin by explaining the extent to which the electoral process (rules, candidates, campaigns, voters) affects the level of partisan polarization in the contemporary Congress. What other reasons does the literature suggest as contributing to this phenomenon? Then, turn to its implications for: (1) inter-branch relations; (2) policy making; and (3) the permanent campaign.
2. Institutional theory is more fully developed in the study of Congress than it is in the study of the presidency. Why is this the case? In answering this question, be sure to pay attention to various approaches to the study of Congress and the presidency and assess their overall theoretical contributions to the field. Conclude your response with at least three suggestions for how to bring to the study of the presidency the type of theoretical and empirical rigor that is now standard in the study of Congress.

Approaches to the Study of American Politics (Choose one)

1. Disciplinary emphasis on causal identification has led many scholars to embrace research designs premised on either regression discontinuity or experimentation. Some view this development negatively, as it privileges the study of phenomena too parochial and narrowly-defined to contribute meaningfully to our understanding of politics. Others respond that our entire enterprise rests on causal identification and that, as Guido Imbens and colleagues have it, "Better LATE than Nothing." Which side is more convincing? Critically assess this debate using specific examples drawn from scholarship on both American political behavior and American political institutions.
2. Compare and contrast the merits of employing rational choice theory to study American political institutions versus American political behavior. In developing your argument, consider not only where rational choice has been especially powerful and productive, but also where it has taken us down inappropriate paths. Conclude the essay with suggestions for how to improve applications of the rational choice framework for the study of both political institutions and political behavior.