

August 2018

*Majors in American politics should answer **ONE** question from part I and **TWO** questions from part II (2 hours for each question, 6 hours total).*

*Minors in American politics should answer **ONE** question from part I and **ONE** question from part II (2 hours for each question, 4 hours total).*

**PART I:** The purpose of this section is to examine your capacity to apply political science theory to general questions in American politics. In doing so, you are expected to demonstrate broad empirical and historical knowledge of the American political system. Be sure while doing so to answer the specific question asked.

1. On a topic of your choosing in the field of American Politics, select a book published more than fifty years ago and one published in the last ten years. Describe the theoretical and empirical advances of the more recent book. What aspects of the older work have held up over time and perhaps outshine more recent work?
2. A common starting point for thinking about democratic politics is that the median voter has significant influence over elections and indirectly affects outcomes of democratic decision-making. Discuss the theoretical and empirical literature regarding the median voter theorem. How does median voter theorem help (or not help) us understand the outcome of the 2016 election, current politics and policymaking, and optimal campaign strategy?
3. Choose at least two of the features of American politics that scholars of other advanced democracies might describe as unique to the United States. Describe how these features of American politics differ from politics in other democracies. Discuss the various explanations in the literature for why the U.S. has these unique features and the empirical evidence to support these explanations. How have these features shaped other aspects of American politics?

**PART II:** The purpose of this section is to examine your facility for applying political science theory and empirical knowledge to important questions about specific features of the American political system. Be sure to answer the specific question asked.

4. V.O. Key, Jr. concluded his now classic *Public Opinion and American Democracy* with “the position that the masses do not corrupt themselves; if they are corrupt, they have been corrupted.” Comment and analyze, feeling free to draw on historical as well as contemporary evidence and arguments in relevant literature.

5. Consider the role courts play in our system of "checks-and-balances." How much do the federal courts constrain the other branches? How much are they constrained by them? How powerful are the U.S. federal courts in policymaking? Should we expect the Supreme Court to play a significant role in checking the Trump administration and/or the Republican Congress? Are current judicial interventions with respect to Trump's policies the norm or unusual? Cite historical examples as appropriate.
6. How powerful of a tool is the presidential veto? What are the conditions under which we ought to expect it to be most and least beneficial to the President? In formulating your answer, please draw upon formal models of veto bargaining as well as the empirical and historical work on the American presidency.
7. During the 2016 presidential primary campaign, *The Party Decides*, which was written by several prominent scholars with connections to the UCLA political science department, attracted the attention of a number of political pundits. This book along with an article in *Perspectives in Politics* (Bawn, Cohen, Karol, Masket, Noel and Zaller (2012)) present a view of political parties that is sometimes referred to as the UCLA School of Political Parties. Discuss how this view of political parties differs from other theories and claims about political parties. Evaluate the extent to which the UCLA School of Political Parties is consistent with existing empirical findings about parties and elections in the American politics literature. What additional empirical evidence would help us evaluate this view of political parties?
8. Despite enjoying unified control of the national government since January 2017, President Trump and his co-partisans in Congress have enacted few major pieces of legislation. Why has so little been accomplished? In answering this question please draw upon relevant theoretical and empirical work in political science.
9. Write an essay with a wide lens on the topic of partisan polarization in America. Some see a difference between polarization, strictly defined, and partisan "sorting." Please offer some terminological discipline? Who's polarized? Elites? Masses? Or whose sorted, and how? Why does this matter for democratic politics in the United States. Discuss the arguments about the causes and consequences of polarization, and the interplay between "elites" and "masses." What is known, unknown, and in dispute?
10. What are some of the main roles that parties play in Congress and in congressional elections? Which accounts do you find most persuasive? In your answer evaluate both theoretical arguments and empirical evidence, and discuss how they bear on the upcoming 2018 midterm election.
11. Group identity and consciousness are concepts that has been used to explain homogeneity in public opinion within groups. These concepts have also been used to consider the strengths or weaknesses of group concerns if not solidarity. Much of the literature assumes that group identity and consciousness operates similarly across

different minority racial and ethnic groups in particular. Assess the viability of theorizing about identity and consciousness across different groups. To what extent has there been variation in these phenomena. To what extent have they had powerful effects on political behavior and outcomes?