

*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.

1. To what extent can the idea of “deliberation” be applied broadly to the workings American politics? A good answer will cover both institutional and mass behavioral processes.
2. Drawing on relevant theoretical and empirical literatures, what did the 2014 elections reveal about the state of the American republic and democracy? What would you emphasize as the most important aspects or themes?
3. What do you consider to be the three most important or interesting debates in the study of US politics? Discuss the central question and the major positions in the debate. Identify specific theoretical and empirical contributions in the political science literature that significantly influenced how we view these debates. Explain why these contributions were so influential. Why were these debates hard to resolve? Have these debates been resolved, or do puzzles remain?

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.

1. Path dependence is a central concept in American political development, yet it means different things to different people. Review the main theoretical frameworks for path dependence (e.g., Mahoney, Pierson, Thelen) and discuss how they have helped us understand institutional development in the U.S. What have been the major explanatory successes of these frameworks? What have been their failures?

2. Cynical observers of American politics are often surprised to learn that legislators' floor voting patterns are only weakly predicted by the amount of money they receive in campaign contributions from "special interests," such as PACs. Does this weak correlation imply that campaign contributions from special interests exert limited influence on legislative behavior and outcomes? Why or why not?

3. There is a political and policy debate regarding how the "new immigrants" will change the nation and/or the polity. Analyze arguments that empirically test the major views at play. Your response should begin with a review of the theoretical basis of the competing arguments and the theory that you would use to test and explain the impact of these "new immigrants." You are encouraged to be creative regarding the theoretical context within which you would develop your argument.

4. The literature on the American presidency is often criticized for lacking scientific rigor and theoretical sophistication. To what extent is this a fair characterization of research on the presidency? In what ways has this literature advanced over the past two decades? Describe two or three new developments and explain why they are important. Also, please identify an important question about the American presidency that remains unanswered. Discuss a plausible research design.

5. American local government is characterized by fragmentation. There are thousands of general and single purpose governments, some of which have overlapping jurisdictions. What does the literature say are the causes and consequences of this fragmentation? Identify an important (and unresolved) research question about either the causes or consequences of fragmentation in local government and propose a plausible research design.

6. A common argument in the literature on political polarization is that the policy positions of the elites have become disconnected from the preferences of the electorate. Discuss the empirical and theoretical literature regarding whether this disconnect exists. Are elites more or less disconnected from the electorate than in the past? If so why?

7. How does what Philip Converse and the Michigan scholars as well as the Lazarsfeld et al. Columbia studies found in the early voting studies compare with what we see today regarding ideological and partisan conflict in American public opinion? What explains the differences? To what extent does this past and present speak positively or negatively

(or not at all?) about the “democratic competence” of the mass public? What might V.O. Key have to say about this?

8. Choose either (a) *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius* (the “Obamacare” case) or (b) the same-sex marriage cases decided in term 2012-13. Evaluate the decision(s), in terms of at least two of the literatures on collegial court bargaining, hierarchy, and external pressures on the Court (from the public or other political actors). How might various specific theories and schools of thought connected to these literatures explain or seek to understand what happened?