

*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 knowledge of the American political system. However, your first priority should be to answer the specific question asked.

1. Is America a dying democracy? What theories would help us understand the health of American democracy and diagnose whether or not it is in decline? Is it an issue with institutions, behavior, or both? What would you point to empirically to support the argument that it is dying, or at least not terribly healthy? How might we save the patient?
2. To what extent has the election of Donald Trump as president and the first year of his second presidential term upended what political scientists should emphasize in the study of American politics -- in the study of institutions and political behavior?
3. In recent years, students of international relations and comparative politics have been exploring the mutual constitution of their subjects, with a focus on how domestic politics shapes global issues, and the reverse. To what extent do similar exchanges appear within studies of American politics? How do you assess the status of such efforts, and where might they go productively?

**PART II:** The purpose of this section is to test your ability to apply political science theory and empirical knowledge to important questions about specific features of the American political system. Be sure to answer each part of the question.

1. Many prominent scholars argue that local politics has become increasingly nationalized in recent years. During this same period, public opinion surveys show a growing gap in public trust and confidence in the federal government versus the local government. Discuss the theoretical arguments and empirical findings in the literature that might explain why local governments do not appear to have suffered the same decline in public trust as the federal government, despite the increasing nationalization of local politics. What gaps remain in the existing literature that limit our understanding of the relationship between these trends?
2. How has the use of experiments advanced what we know about highly important theories about cause and effect in American politics? To what extent have experiments devoted too much attention to questions of lesser importance?
3. One characterization of public opinion is that the partisans “follow the leader” insofar as they take their issue positions from the president or the opposition (e.g., Republicans grow more hostile/sympathetic to support for Ukraine depending on Trump’s current actions). Another is that “public mood” is “homeostatic” insofar as the public tends to sour on the initiatives that the president pursues (e.g., the public grows more sympathetic to immigration when immigration policies are tightened). What are the limits to “follow the leader” and “homeostatic” hypotheses about public opinion? Are there issue domains in which these conjectures about public opinion dynamics fail to hold? Are these conjectures becoming more accurate or less accurate characterizations of American public opinion over time?
4. Does Neustadt remain a fundamental work? How has the literature on the presidency transcended his questions, approach, and answers?
5. Characterizing the degree of bias in information processing is a central thread in political psychology. On one end, a strong version of motivated reasoning posits that politically congenial information is actively sought and accepted uncritically, resulting in minimal opinion change. On the other end is the Bayesian ideal, where incongruent information can still shift opinions, with effects varying based on the strength of one’s prior beliefs. Assess these two approaches across various dimensions. Which is more useful for understanding how voters respond to information?
6. Much scholarship on American institutions focuses on the presidency, Congress, and the courts. In that light, to what extent is the bureaucracy essential for understanding American politics?

7. In contemporary politics, attention is often described as the most valuable currency, shaping how political actors strategize, how media platforms operate, and how citizens engage with information. How has the shift toward an attention-driven political landscape reshaped democratic processes and political accountability? Discuss theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, considering both positive and negative implications of politics driven by competition for attention.
8. Scholars debate whether mass polarization in the U.S. today primarily reflects deep ideological divides on policy issues or is largely symbolic and identity-driven. How can we differentiate between these two forms of polarization, and what role does media play in promoting symbolic versus policy-based polarization?
9. Forecasting models of US presidential elections point to GDP growth, rather than to unemployment and inflation, as the best predictors of outcomes. Annualized third quarter GDP growth in 2024 was 2.8%. Was the outcome of the 2024 election consistent with this level of growth? Did inflation play a bigger role in the outcome? If so, how is this consistent with the theory and empirics behind forecasting models?