

*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. Drawing on relevant theoretical and empirical literatures, what did the 2024 elections reveal about the state of American republic and democracy? What would you emphasize as the most important aspects or themes for future research?
2. Democratic governance relies upon accountability between elected representatives and their constituencies. However, politics remains a peripheral concern for many ordinary citizens—a situation further complicated by the fragmented media environment. Given these challenges related to citizen competence and increasing news avoidance, can the mass public effectively constrain the actions of its elected officials? What role do misinformation and partisan media play in shaping this dynamic?
3. Among alternative conceptions of “institutions,” explain what is at stake in selecting the approach you prefer. To illuminate relevant analytical and empirical implications, choose an institution to discuss within the ambit of American politics.

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. Some political observers believe the old maxim that “all politics is local” is being replaced by a new maxim that “all politics is national.” What do scholars mean when they argue that U.S. politics become nationalized? Evaluate the evidence to support these arguments. Why might we expect, or not expect, variation in the nationalization of politics across states and/or localities?
2. To what extent has there been a shift in presidential power over the last two or more decades? To what extent, if at all, has it become more than the “power to persuade?”
3. Economic theories of voting suggest Democrats should have done better in the 2024 elections. GDP growth has been robust for the past several years and unemployment has been at or close to historical lows. Inflation has been one troubling economic indicator, but recent measurements suggest that it has essentially returned to approximately the Fed's target rate of 2%. Yet voter assessments of economic conditions and their outlook for the economy were negative. What explains why voters’ subjective evaluations of the economy were so different from the objective measures and what impact did this have?
4. Why do political parties sometimes take unpopular positions, even on high-profile issues? How might existing theoretical approaches to American political parties and voter behavior explain this phenomenon? Are these explanations convincing?
5. Voting advice applications are civic education tools used by governments around the world. In a VAA, voters disclose their positions on a set of issues and an algorithm generates a list of candidates that align with the voter. Proponents argue that VAAs ought to improve political knowledge, encourage voters to sort into political parties, and increase political participation. Implicitly, what model of voter behavior is invoked here? What does the empirical literature say about the performance of this model relative to alternatives?
6. Does the median voter theorem help us to understand modern electoral politics in America? In your answer, provide both theory and evidence.
7. Since Converse (1964), many scholars of US public opinion have argued that the majority of the electorate is “innocent of ideology” in that their policy preferences are loosely structured; few American voters, unlike elected officials, hold views that are consistently liberal or consistently conservative. Do you agree with this characterization – what evidence in favor or against this characterization strikes you as especially persuasive? And how does the public's ideological innocence (or the lack of innocence, if you think that's a more accurate characterization)

contribute to the growing ideological chasm between party elites over the past 40 years?

8. Decades of political behavior literature suggest that symbolic attitudes and sociotropic concerns often outweigh self-interest in shaping political behavior. However, the policy feedback literature highlights how public policies, once implemented, can reshape the political landscape by mobilizing beneficiaries, distributing resources, and influencing citizens' perceptions of government. How can these seemingly contrasting findings be reconciled?
9. "Congress has changed so much from 50 and 100 years ago so as to call into question generalized theories of institutional rules and their impact." Discuss.