

US Politics: Foreign Policy

FP-1) To what extent, does US policy toward other countries (allies, rivals, or enemies) depend on their type of regime—that is, on whether or how fully they are democratic? What accounts for the nature of this response or nonresponse to regime type? How and why has it varied over time? What are the respective roles of American national interests and domestic political pressures in these decisions, and how are the two factors related? Do the institutional arrangements of US foreign policymaking enter into the explanation of this response?

FP-2) What constrains the president in the making or execution of US foreign policy, and under what conditions do such constraints occur? Use political science literature to specify when and how the president is constrained, respectively, by Congress, interest groups, public opinion, executive agencies, and constitutional law? What do such constraints add up to: Do they have systematic effects on US foreign policy, international influence, or strategic success, or are their consequences merely episodic or marginal?

US Politics: The Presidency

P-1) A recent paper attempts to determine the effects of the president's prior career experience (as governors, legislators, military officers, lawyers, managers, and so on) on presidential success of various kinds and in general. The findings, reflecting correlations between career experience and various outcomes for 43 presidents over a period of 220 years, are not very trustworthy. But a more basic issue is important.

Review the literature on the presidency to address the question: what is the impact of the presidents' personal decisions, activities, and capabilities (as opposed to those of their aides) on their prospects for success? Consider at least three of the following areas: policy decision-making, legislative leadership, leadership of the public, administrative leadership, and popularity. For each area, you must first consider to what extent the conduct of the presidency (including the staff) actually matters to presidential success, and then consider how the behavior of the president, himself or herself, specifically matters. (Keep in mind that one activity of the president may be selecting and managing the staff.) In closing, offer and defend your own hunches about the relevance of prior career experience. How important is it likely to be? What kinds of experience should be most useful?

P-2) About 20 years ago Terry Moe argued that the presidency research was hampered by excessive attention to individual differences and psychology, and instead should focus on institutional imperatives and constraints and rational choice. In effect he argued for taking proper names (Carter, Reagan, etc.)—except for the names of the political parties—out of the study of the presidency. How does that argument stand up to the events and literature of the succeeding years? Discuss three areas of literature of your choosing. To what extent do institutional imperatives, constraints, and rational choice appear to account for the main findings? To what extent do the distinctive attributes of particular presidents (values, skills, personality, etc.) play a large role that requires analytic attention.

US Politics Comprehensive Exam Questions

Core, US Foreign Policy, Presidency

If this is your *minor* field, you must choose TWO (2) questions from the CORE and one question from your specific SUBFIELD list, for a total of THREE (3) questions. The questions are of equal value: The exam must be completed in FOUR (4) hours.

US Politics Core

- 1.) A simple definition of democracy suggests a strong relationship between citizens' preferences and public policies. On the other hand, the framers of the U.S. Constitution sought to limit the direct and immediate effects of public opinion. What does contemporary research and theory tell us about this debate: does it support the democrats' hopes, the Framers' fears, or some of both? Consider how citizens make policy decisions, their actual influence on policymakers, and whatever else influences policymakers, when citizens do not. From a practical standpoint, what advice would you offer to citizens and leaders on the basis of the research: Under what conditions should politicians be more or less responsive to public opinion? Under what conditions should citizens have more or less faith in policy-making by elites? What changes could be made to improve the quality of decision making by both citizens and elected officials?

- 2.) Studies of citizens, on the one hand, and of political institutions and elites, on the other hand, may ignore or talk past one another, thus losing sight of the critical relationships between them. Discuss some examples of research that incorporates both citizens and institutions and their relationship in a compelling fashion. Be sure to identify at least one example of institutions affecting citizens and one example of citizens affecting institutions. Are there important advantages to focusing on both citizens and institutions in the same study? How so, or why not?

- 3.) Imagine meeting for lunch with a scholar who studies US politics at the end of the 1970's. Provide him/her with some insight into the development of the US politics literature over the past 30 years. Be sure to identify examples of significant advancement along with areas where the central ideas put forward in the 1970's and earlier remain current. After a long lunch, what area of study might the two of you conclude is most in need of development? Why?

- 4) ... see next page...

4.) According to liberal commentator Paul Krugman, congressional Republicans have decided they do not want the government to work, unless they are the ones in charge of it; and since they now control the House, they can in fact prevent it from working during the next two years. By his account, the Republicans believe that if they can make President Obama a failure, they can win control of the presidency and both houses of Congress in 2012. They therefore have blocked expansion of the economic stimulus; have killed an arms control agreement favored by nearly all experts, just because it was sponsored by Obama; and may resist raising the debt limit next spring, potentially shutting down the government and causing a financial crisis. We can call this strategy, whether real or alleged, one of hard-line partisan obstruction (HPO).

Supposing for the sake of discussion that Krugman's suspicions are correct, review the political science findings on various pertinent topics to answer these questions: To what extent is this HPO strategy new? What accounts for the Republicans' adoption of it at this time? Finally, is the HPO strategy likely to succeed, and what possible obstacles, Democratic responses, or other factors will determine that success?

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US Politics Major Exam

Fall 2008

Core, Presidency, Bureaucratic Politics

Student: Tim Came

Committee: Campbell, Ellerman, Quirk,

Core

Answer two of the following.

1. The central trend in recent American politics is arguably the polarization of the political parties. Define this phenomenon and describe the evidence for its existence. Discuss how it affects two or three distinct parts of the political system (Congress, the Executive branch, the Judiciary, election campaigns, media, or other). Does polarization result in the U.S. having a political system much like a Westminster-style, two-party, parliamentary system? Discuss the similarities and the differences.
2. Compare leading theories or analyses that explain structural or behavioral change in three (3) different institutional settings, such as Congress, the bureaucracy, the presidency, the courts, political parties, the media, interest groups, campaigns, elections, or others. (Select no more than one of the three from the presidency and bureaucracy.) Spell out the logic of each explanation and mention some of the events or evidence supporting it. Then consider the normative implications of these analyses. To what extent are the forces that drive change a) systematically constructive, b) systematically perverse, or c) essentially random in relation to normative criteria for institutional performance (such as responsiveness, problem solving capability, or the like)? Put differently, do the theories suggest an Invisible Hand for political change? Are there plausible scenarios for serious deterioration or even collapse? (Speculate about one or two salient possibilities for the near future.)
3. Presidential candidate Barack Obama has promised "change you can believe in." Presumably he means policy change, leading to social and economic change. Use relevant literature to assess his ability to produce such change, if he has been elected. What circumstances matter? What methods and objectives of leadership are most feasible? What distinctions are relevant between different kinds of policies, and different legal instruments (laws, regulations, etc.) with respect to the opportunities for presidential leadership.
4. The U.S. faces enormously complex policy problems, such as rebuilding a failed financial system, dealing with climate change, and defending the country against possible terrorist attack. Compared with some generic developed democracy, to what extent does the U.S. manage to make intelligent decisions about those policies? Why or why not—that is, what are the bases for intelligent, deliberative decisions, and the main sources of failure to make such decisions, in the U.S. political system? What reforms, other institutional changes, or other developments might significantly affect U.S. government's ability to make intelligent decisions in the foreseeable future.

Presidency

Answer one of the following.

1. By most accounts, the George W. Bush administration has been a disaster. Yet, early assessments argued mostly that, if not brilliant, he was an excellent gamesman. This just provides an instance of the profession having competing views of competence. What do you see these as being? Thinking of incumbents since Carter, can you identify presidents who proved apt examples of one or more notions of competence? How about notably inept cases? Does some single conception of presidential competence emerge as superior? Does the nature of competence vary with the conditions faced by each president?.
2. A large body of literature has emerged in the last twenty years that tries to quantify more rigorously presidential actions. What have been some of the stimuli for this? Generally, has the effort produced the desired results? What works point up especially well the strengths of the approach? Are there any particularly weak uses of it? What do you see as the future for such approaches to presidential studies?

Public Management and Bureaucratic Politics

Answer one of the following.

1. One of the conundrums for students of public management is discerning the boundary between policy and management and assessing what the respective roles of politicians and bureaucrats are with reference to each. In the US, this debate has a long history. Outline this debate, with particular attention to the last twenty or so years. Does it appear that the discipline is achieving more or less balance in its perspective? What have been the most encouraging and disheartening developments in the relations between politicians and bureaucrats in recent years? Be sure to cite various works that support your points.
2. A major concern of recent literature on bureaucracy is accounting for the structures of government agencies and related institutions such as judicial review. Identify some major approaches to explaining these structures; spell out the logic of each approach; and provide some evidence or examples that support it. Traditional public administration literature largely assumed that bureaucratic structures are designed mainly to promote good performance (efficiency, fairness, responsiveness, etc.), somehow defined. Do the more recent, politically-oriented theories have a better explanation than the traditional view? How so, or why not?

US Politics Major Exam
Spring 2009
Core, Presidency, Bureaucratic Politics
Student: John McAndrews
Committee: Cutler, Jacobs, Quirk,

Core

Answer two of the following.

1. What motivates research on U.S. politics? Is it building and testing theory? Producing a normative assessment? Identifying strategies for reform? Responding to current events? Something else? Discuss this issue by considering the objectives of a two leading works on each of three parts of the political system (for example, the president, Congress, the media, and so on) No more than one of these should correspond to one of your subfields.
2. President Obama has said that Americans should seek to be, "not red states and blue states, but the United States." Explain his critique of partisanship, and assess both the potential value of substantially reducing partisan conflict, and the actual prospects for accomplishing it. Make sure to provide a thorough account of the causes of increased partisan conflict.
3. A good deal of research on U.S. politics uses a rational-choice perspective. Other research, however, is influenced by cognitive psychology. And some has no explicit assumptions about individuals. To what extent do the differences reflect competing approaches, complementary approaches, or the requirements of different areas of research?
4. Which constituencies matter most in policymaking in the United States? Compare interest groups, states and districts, public opinion, and possibly other constituency forces. Consider both the logic of their influence and the relevant evidence. Can definitive comparisons be made? If not, why not?

Congress

Answer one of the following.

5. Compare the notions of the role of the congressional parties in five major theoretical works or bodies of work presented respectively by Mayhew (*Electoral Connection*), Brady, Arnold, Krehbiel, and Cox and McCubbins. In doing so, make sure to clarify the alternative accounts of what parties do. Do any of the theories amount to the strong form of party discipline that exists in most parliamentary democracies? What bearing, if any, does party polarization have on the validity of these theories (for example, does it decide the debate)? What are the empirical difficulties in choosing among them?

**UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: UNITED STATES POLITICS
MINOR FIELD**

4 HOURS (PLUS 2 HOURS DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION)

April 5, 2007

Adam Waiser

You must answer a total of three (3) questions for this examination--two on the first day, one on the second. You will have six (6) hours in total. You must answer two (2) questions from the core section, in four hours on the first day, and one (1) question from the Presidency section, in two hours on the second day.

Section 1. CORE QUESTIONS. In your answer to any of the questions below, please refer to literature or examples concerned with at least two areas of U.S. politics (such as Congress, the presidency, elections, public opinion, and so on). Between your two answers, deal with at least three such areas.

1. Compare the institutional changes that have occurred, since the mid-20th century, in Congress, the presidency, and the mass media. Summarize the main changes in each institution. Are there any significant similarities in the forces or conditions that produce institutional change, or in the processes of change, in these different settings? What are the most important differences in those processes, and what accounts for them? Do changes in one institution lead to changes in the others? Do important changes in these institutions tend to enhance the performance of the political system (by some broad criteria); tend to undermine that performance; or have no systematic effect, positive or negative?
2. Explain and assess the debate about the political competence of the American public. Explain the optimistic and pessimistic views on this issue. What are their respective arguments about circumstances that assist or hinder citizens in their ability to political decisions? What kinds of evidence, if any, support each view? Can scholars address this question without merely imposing their own political preferences, and if so, how? Finally, how might we use the public's response to the Iraq War (including its support or opposition around the times of the 2004 and 2006 elections) as a test case? That is, are there apparent implications of this case for citizen competence? What research, analysis, or arguments can help define this significance.
3. Many scholars and commentators are alarmed about the severe partisan conflict in contemporary U.S. politics. Some, however, argue that the U.S. is merely evolving a form of party government, much like that of parliamentary systems. In what ways is the U.S. developing parliamentary-style party government? In what ways is it not? Are there fundamental barriers to the U.S. becoming *functionally* parliamentary? On

theoretical grounds, identify any likely differences in performance between a highly partisan U.S. system and a Westminster parliamentary system.

4. What are the most important barriers in the U.S. to governmental responsiveness to citizens' preferences? Explain several of these barriers, giving consideration to factors both within and outside political institutions. What kinds of reforms or other developments might improve the political system's performance in this respect?

ADAM WAISER APRIL 12, 2007

Section 2. THE PRESIDENCY SUBFIELD.

Answer one of the following. You will have two hours.

1. Fred Greenstein's book on Eisenhower makes the distinction between head-of-government and head-of-state roles of presidents. He noted that Eisenhower modulated his roles according to circumstances. How have Eisenhower's successors dealt with these roles? Have presidents differed in their relative stress on the two roles? What are the costs of this ambiguity and variation? Is there a discernible trend in presidents' emphasis on these roles?
2. Terry Moe's chapter on the role of the president published in 1985 has had possibly the greatest impact of any work on the presidency over the past 30 years. What is meant by the observation that it encouraged a neo-institutionalist approach to the presidency? Does a neo-institutional approach always involve public-choice analysis? Who are some of the recent "neo-institutionalists?" Do they all share Moe's interpretation? How successful has neo-institutionalism been in advancing our understanding of the presidency?

Section 2. SUBFIELD: Congress

1. How does Congress change? In particular, do congressional institutions change in response to the interests or preferences of individual members, of political parties, or of the general public? Illustrate by discussing at least three significant institutional changes within Congress, occurring during at least two periods of history.
2. Some commentators argue that the president has dispositions in policymaking (for example, with respect to serving narrowly based interests) that are substantially different from those of Congress. One skeptic, writing about forty years ago, argued to the contrary that "the presidency is just a Congress with a skin thrown over it" –that is, the president has all the same constituencies, and responds to the same political forces. Explain in detail the features of Congress that may make it respond differently than the president, and why they may have that effect. Is the structure of Congress designed to exaggerate those differences, to suppress them, or to do some of both?

Section. 3. SUBFIELD: Public Policy

1. To some extent, presumably, the policy agenda in U.S. politics is influenced by the importance of problems and issues for the U.S. public. Review the main theories and evidence about how the agenda is set to consider: What else influences the agenda? Explain the main alternative influences. Given the theory and findings, is the allocation of attention relatively rational and conducive to effective democratic policymaking, or is it frequently perverse?

2. Scholars debate the influence of different types of constituencies on policymaking in the U.S.—in particular, interest groups and public opinion. Review these debates and, in particular, explain why they are so hard to resolve. Are they ultimately intractable? How would you propose to address these issues more effectively?