

American Comprehensive Exam
January 20, 2006

1. Over time, many political scientists have theorized as to the causation of interest groups and social movements. Political scientists, sociologists, and economists have been particularly interested in questions of how and why interest groups or social movements form, what factors are necessary to their success and how they attract and keep members. Drawing on this extensive literature, discuss the factors that have been offered to explain why and how these groups or movements form, how they attract and keep members, and difficulties that they must overcome to sustain themselves. Once you have identified these factors, use examples from relevant interest groups or social movements to illustrate how the theories offered by social scientists can be supported.
2. Those in the media have a symbiotic relationship with officials in government (Cook 1998, Overholser and Jamieson 2005, Patterson 1994, West 2001, and Yeric 2001). What evidence do you find that suggests the media has the upper hand in the relationship? What arguments counter this claim? Is the balance of power you describe in flux? If so (not), provide the argument with reference to scholars.
3. Describe, discuss, and analyze the literature on Congress by discussing two of the following: theory, parties and leadership, committees, individual decision making, and/or structure and rules. What changes have occurred in this literature in theory, approach, topics, methodology, or in other areas? Do you consider these changes similar to, or different from, changes in congressional literature overall? Why or why not? What are the strengths and weaknesses in the areas you are discussing? Where are we in our understanding of these topics? What further research would be useful? And, finally, assume you have been asked to write an article in one of these areas. Develop a research design for this article, justify why you chose to research this topic, and explain how it will advance the literature and readers' understanding of Congress.
4. What is new institutionalism and how has it challenged traditional approaches to the study of political science? How has research employing new institutional approaches influenced the way political scientists ask and answer questions? Consider multiple subfields in American politics in your answer.
5. The constitutional structure of separated powers is a unique feature of the American political system that often sets Congress and the president at odds with one another. Evaluate the nature of the relationship between the president and Congress in periods of unified and divided government. What tools does the president possess when bargaining with Congress? How effective are these tools? Who, if anyone, has the upper hand in this relationship?