

American Comprehensive Exam
September 8, 2006

1. Academic books and journals are replete with analyses about the connections they see between institutional designs (rules of the game) and individual behavior. Describe the rules that attract the most serious scholarly attention and write a thoughtful essay on the consequences these rules hold for: individuals' careers and accomplishments, deliberating processes and policymaking outcomes. Cite relevant literature in your essay.
2. Reflecting on the full sweep of interest group scholarship, first categorize the types of questions that investigators pose. Label and explain the distinctions you observe. In each category that you create, name one or two contributors and the name of the work (article or book) that best illustrates this area of focus. Briefly justify why you include this as a major work. As you look at your list and the advances that scholars have made over the years, consider the following: Are some questions asked more often than others? If so, why? Using your essay as a review of the literature in this subfield, list one question that is important to our understanding of interest group politics yet is rarely addressed by scholars. Offer an explanation for the limited work in the field you identify.
3. Almost fifty years ago, Richard Neustadt defined presidential power as "the power to persuade," and most empirical political scientists continue to use this definition. Is it sufficient to capture the essence of presidential power? Explain why/why not. What is the relationship between the definition of presidential power and the conclusions political scientists reach about its scope and consequences? Be sure to cite significant, relevant literature.
4. For the last thirty years, there has been a debate among political scientists as to whether the electorate has undergone dealignment, realignment, or neither. Recently, the value of the concept of realignment itself has been called into question. Discuss the arguments and evidence in this debate. What arguments and evidence do you find most persuasive, and why?
5. Methodologists have debated the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly in reference to the strengths and weaknesses of cases studies. Some qualitative researchers say that only case studies can explain the richness and complexity of political phenomena; some quantitative researchers counter by arguing that generalizability is limited by in-depth studies of political phenomena that may be unique. First, identify the subfield in American politics where, overall, case studies have been used most productively, and explain why. Second, identify the subfield in American politics where, overall, case studies have been used least productively or even counterproductively, and explain why. Justify your answer with specific references to the "runners-up" if you had difficulty choosing the best example in either case.