

January 22, 2010

Directions

Time allowances. You have eight hours to complete this examination. You must submit three answers in all.

Format requirements. The answers to all questions combined may be no more than twenty double-spaced pages, with one-inch margins all around and a twelve-point font.

Content requirements. For each question, make sure that you answer it fully, draw on the relevant literature and pay particular attention to any relevant controversies with the literature, discipline, and subfield. The material used in the answer to any question should not substantially overlap the material used in other questions.



Congress

1. The House and Senate are in negotiations toward final passage of a healthcare reform measure that will profoundly alter the status quo. A recent poll (Rasmussen Reports, January 7, 2010) shows that only 39% of voters nationwide support the plan, and 58% oppose it. Should this level of opposition be true, how do you explain Congress' capacity to garner the votes necessary for passage even in the face of serious, sometimes organized resistance? Draw on the Congress literature to explain this successful episode of non-incremental policy change. Make sure to consider both classic and recent scholarship.
2. Mounting party polarization in Congress seemingly alters the process and products of lawmaking. Draw on classic and current work to assess the truth-content of this assertion.

Presidency/Executive

3. Reflecting on the full sweep of presidential scholarship, first categorize the types of questions that investigators pose. Label and justify your categories. In each category that you create, name two or three contributors who are most responsible for advancing knowledge in this area of focus. As you look at your review, consider the following: Are some questions asked more often than others? If so, explain the variation. Why are some questions pursued more than others? Be sure to cite relevant literature to support your arguments.

Political Behavior

4. There is a long and storied history, both inside and outside the academy, of denigrating the American voter as irrational, uninformed, unaware, and uninterested. Critics charge that, among other things, voters are too easily swayed by emotion and inconsequential events and do not know enough about "the issues" to vote correctly. In contrast, a number of political scientists have asserted the American voter's basic rationality by elaborating models of retrospective voting, heuristics-based decision-making, on-line processing, and others. Review the evidence on both sides (classic and current research) and answer the question: can we rehabilitate the sullied reputation of the American voter?

5. Democratic theory suggests that mass opinion can be faithfully translated by government officials into responsive public policy. How is this possible when public opinion polls all too often produce rapid fluctuations in what people claim to want from their government? At a given point in time people may even appear to support contradictory positions--e.g., people regularly want more government programs and to pay less in taxes. Draw on the public opinion literature to explain these inconsistencies. Make sure to consider classic work as well as more recent theories and findings.