

**American University Department of Government**  
**M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

American Politics  
Spring, 2017

This exam consists of questions drawn from the field of American Politics and questions drawn specifically from our Applied Politics concentration offered through the Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute and the Campaign Management Institute.

**DIRECTIONS:** You will write three essays. Be strategic in your selection of questions, choosing those that allow you to show the greatest breadth of your knowledge. Notice that in almost every case, you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge by drawing on a range of appropriate scholarship. When doing so, be sure to cite the scholarship you are drawing upon explicitly.

**All** students must answer **one** question from **Section I**.

Applied Politics students must:

- Answer **one** question from **Section II** and **one** question from **Section III**.

Students **not** in the Applied Politics may either:

- Answer **two** questions from **Section II, OR**
- Answer **one** question from **Section II** and **one** question from **Section III**.

Clearly identify the questions you choose to answer. Please use 12-point type, double-spaced, and standard margins when preparing your essays.

### **SECTION I**

1. Many argue that partisan polarization has led to dysfunction within Congress and between Congress and the president. What are the sources of polarization? How does polarization influence the development and implementation of public policy? Provide evidence from the lectures and scholarly literature (e.g. *American Gridlock*) and examples from recent policy debates. What was the impact of the 2016 election on polarization?

2. Scholars may focus on the “causes of effects” or “effects of causes” in their respective research. What are the methodological differences between these two approaches of research? Please elaborate with examples.

### **SECTION II**

1. What are the costs and benefits of presidential efforts to politicize the executive branch? Explain. Does the phenomenon of politicization challenge or confirm the conventional wisdom about presidential power as the power to persuade. Explain and illustrate with examples from the Obama presidency.

2. Given the ideological polarization of our political parties, has the right to filibuster legislation in the United States Senate become a de facto "veto" power for the minority party, allowing for

unreasonable obstruction of the majority's will? Or is the right to filibuster an essential tool to force some level of bipartisan consensus in support of legislation?

3. The internet and the expansion of media options were expected to provide more political information and analysis and thereby increase public knowledge about public affairs, issues and candidates. Has that happened? Was the limited media landscape more conducive to political knowledge and participation? Explain.

4. Explain why in the years following certain Supreme Court decisions related to abortion rights, a majority of states established restrictions on when, where, and how abortions may be obtained. What was the legal foundation and political strategy behind the passage of these laws and why has that strategy proved so successful?

### **SECTION III**

1. Traditional field and GOTV activities continue to play a role in elections. However, beginning with the 2008 presidential election, modeling has also begun to play a role in GOTV and field operations. Do the two approaches complement each other or pose potential problems for GOTV and field operations? Provide examples to support your arguments.

2. Describe the major dimensions of issue advocacy/lobbying campaigns in U.S. politics using examples from lectures and the academic literature. President Obama has attacked “the way Washington works” and promised to change the nature of lobbying campaigns. Candidate Trump attacked lobbyists and promised to “drain the swamp”. What were President Obama’s and are President Trump’s major criticisms of lobbying and what were their primary reforms after taking office? Have they succeeded in changing the way lobbying campaigns work in Washington? Why or why not? Refer to the relevant academic literature, lectures, and primary sources in your answer.