
Directions: You must respond to the general question; you must choose three of the remaining sections and write on one question from each.

You are expected to support your arguments with adequate citations to appropriate literature, but you are reminded to respond to the questions that are asked.

Section I. General - Choose one of the following:

1. The U.S. Constitution’s amending formula sets up several difficult hurdles for prospective amendments, and, as a result, the Constitution has been amended formally only some 27 times. Yet in the last two centuries the nature of American government has changed in fundamental ways, some of which, many acknowledge, conflict with the original constitutional design. This century alone, for example, has seen the rise of presidential power, the development of the bureaucratic state, a great expansion of federal authority over the states, and the development of individual constitutional rights, among other things. What, in your view, have been the most important changes? Which were authorized by constitutional amendment, and which not? Are the changes that were not authorized by formal amendment therefore constitutionally illegitimate? Why or why not? (Be sure to cite relevant literature where appropriate.)

2. One of the core questions of American politics remains the extent to which our politics actually reflect pluralism. Drawing on at least three distinct literatures within the USIP field, assess the extent to which the United States in the 1990s fits the pluralist mold.

3. What is the problem of “unequal participation” in American politics? In what ways have recent research and theory about this problem enhanced earlier and conventional understandings of participation in America? What can be done to address this problem? What additional research is required before political scientists can make informed prescriptions in this regard?

Section II. Congress and Presidency

1. Assess the “Congress and the Presidency” literature of the past decade (roughly from Mayhew’s Divided We Stand on). What do we know about divided government? About congressional-presidential relations now that we didn’t 15 years ago? What major questions remain to be explored? Choose one and outline how you would approach it.

2. Virtually all scholars agree that political parties have grown stronger in Congress since the 1970s. Trace the evolution of this strength. To what extent is this trend related to (a) electoral politics and (b) the state of parties in congressional districts and the states?

Section III. Political Behavior

3. Assess the state of the literature on the presidency. Has it proven capable of understanding the changing nature of the office in the past 50 years? What issues remain to be sorted out? Address one of these with appropriate specifics.
1. The ideal citizen in a democracy attends to political information, deliberates, and then renders a reasoned judgement about candidates, issues, and/or institutions. Much research, nevertheless, confirms that the vast majority of citizens are highly inattentive to political affairs and often lack the motivation to deliberate and render an informed judgement. Starting with Downs’ seminal work and moving forward, explain how an uninformed citizen approaches political affairs and the impact on political judgement (hint: heuristic process and cue taking are key). Further, under the larger rubric of democratic processes, discuss the implications of an uninformed citizenry. That is, what differences, if any, between informed and uninformed citizens bear on the question of democracy and its capacity to function effectively?

1. Recent research on campaigns and elections suggest that campaigns do not matter. Specifically, critical variables such as the state of the Gross Domestic Product, Disposable Income, and Presidential Popularity predict quite accurately the eventual winner of a presidential contest a full year before election day. In this sense, the electoral outcome is a function of events and circumstances outside the context of a campaign. Hence, campaigns do not matter. If this is so, why study campaigns? Explain why campaigns may in fact matter, and more fundamentally, discuss their function in democratic processes.

2. Recent public opinion research has focused on attitude inconsistency as a basis for understanding opinion change. That is, respondents often exhibit response instability – variable attitudes expressed in repeated interviews concerning the same questions. And, people are found to react strongly to the context in which a question is asked, the order of question presentation, and to nonsubstantive changes in question wording. These results do in fact suggest a rather inconsistent public. How does the recent focus on respondent inconsistency enhance our understanding of public opinion? In fact, does it provide a theoretical basis for modeling opinion formation and change?

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Section IV. Subnational

1. Much has been made of the “devolution revolution” and the implications for (re)turning more governing responsibilities from the federal government to state and local governments. What are the most important considerations that should be taken into account in assessing the prospects for devolution? (Hint: This is an invitation to discuss the most important strengths/assets of state and local government relative to the federal government and the most important limitations/problems of state and local government.) Is the wisdom/viability of devolution contingent upon the kind of function or programmatic responsibility that is at issue? If so, explain the contingency. If not, explain why not.

2. Is the impact of the “new institutionalism” evident in the study of local governments in the United States? Describe and discuss what you consider to be the two most theoretically grounded and best developed literatures on governing institutions at the local level in the U.S. Then, by way of contrast, suggest either one type of local governing institution that is not well understood or one important question about local politics that has not yet been adequately approached with an institutionalist perspective. Elaborate.

3. Over 150 years ago, Tocqueville emphasized the vitality and importance of associational life in local American communities. In what ways have urbanists incorporated, challenged, and/or modified Tocqueville’s views in their research and theories about local politics? Have urbanists achieved a satisfactory understanding of group life at the local level to replace Tocqueville’s observations and
assertions? What kinds of research in this area are most needed today?

Section V. Parties and Interest Groups

1. Journalists and reformers argue that political action committees are disproportionately powerful in affecting election results and legislative votes. Political scientists and politicians (strange bedfellows) disagree, noting that money often follows politicians, rather than influencing them. Who is right here? How important, in the end, have PACs proven to be within the entire fabric of American politics?

2. In their recent book on the state of the interest group field, Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech suggest that research on organized interests reflects “a literature that grows but does not accumulate.” Do you agree with the Baumgartner and Leech view of the interest group literature? Where is our knowledge most lacking in the interest group subfield? Are there any areas where knowledge has greatly advanced in recent decades? All things considered, where should our research priorities focus as we study interest group politics in the future?

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3. “The 1990s have witnessed another benchmark in relations between parties and organized interests, one that may presage an even more prominent role for both parties and organized interests in the electoral process, perhaps at the expense of candidate domination of campaign agendas…the candidate-centered system at that characterized electoral politics for more than half a century may face its most serious challenge to date.”

Write an essay on party and organized interests in the electoral process. What is the theoretical basis of the relationship? How has the relationship been altered in recent decades? Do you agree with the assertion in the quote that both parties and interest groups may become more prominent in future elections at the expense of candidate control of running for office? Does the trend strike you as a healthy one for American democracy?

Section VI. Public Law

1. Recently the dominant theoretical model of Supreme Court decision making, the attitudinal model, has come under attack. Assess the attitudinal model in light of the proposed alternatives and conclude with suggestions for future directions for theory development and research.

2. Gerald Rosenberg has argued that judicial decisions have little independent impact. In light of the expanding body of research inspired (and provoked) by his account, to what extent is he correct? What direction should theory development and empirical research take?

3. A prominent scholar of judicial politics has characterized judicial behavior as a “puzzle.” “[E]ven by a…lenient standard [of evaluation],” he writes, “our progress toward explanation of judicial behavior has been limited: what we do not know stands out more than what we do know.” This is a fairly harsh assessment. Is he, in the main, right? What do we know? What are the gaps in our understanding? And what should be done to fill those gaps?