

Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
September 2011

Directions:

Please respond to **four (4)** of the following including **two (2)** from Part I and **two (2)** from Part II. You have up to eight hours.

Keep the following in mind when writing your essays. First, you should articulate a coherent argument in answering each question. Merely demonstrating that you have read a lot is insufficient for answering these questions. Second, you should view the exam as an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the multiple literatures in American politics. Because your exam will be evaluated on its overall comprehensiveness, you should select questions and formulate responses that demonstrate the breadth of your knowledge. Third, rough cites to prominent works (for example, "Mayhew's 1991 book on divided government") are acceptable.

Part I: Please respond to **two (2)** of the following questions:

1. In recent decades, we have witnessed an "institutional turn" in political science. What has this institutional turn taught us about the selection and impact of political institutions in American politics, and what don't we still know?
2. Rational choice models pervade the study of American politics. What have been the benefits and costs of our reliance on economic modes of thinking and what improvements (if any) in our understanding of politics have been offered by borrowing theoretical approaches from other disciplines?
3. What is political power and where is it exercised in the U.S.? And how do we know?
4. "All politics is collective action." Evaluate this statement, drawing on the literature from the study of political behavior and political institutions.

Part II. Please respond to **two (2)** of the following from this section.

5. Is the public's voice drowned out by moneyed interests? In answering this question, draw on research from the study of both public opinion and interest groups.
6. What are the foundations of presidential power? Review competing accounts of presidential influence, and evaluate their theoretical and empirical rigor. Should we consider the presidency a powerful institution? Why or why not?
7. How have scholars evaluated the democratic competence of the mass public? How *should* we evaluate it? Discuss possible standards and the evidence we have for how well the public lives up to those standards.

8. The term “incrementalism” has long been used to describe American public policymaking. And yet, health care and financial regulation reform are far from incremental. Why and how do public policies change in the U.S.?

9. Nearly twenty years ago, Keith Krehbiel threw down the gauntlet to legislative scholars with the question: “Where’s the Party?” How well have students of Congress established the relevance and impact of parties theoretically, empirically, and methodologically in the intervening years?

10. Are Congress and the Supreme Court majoritarian institutions?