

George Washington University  
Political Science Department  
Spring/Summer 2009  
Public Policy  
Minor field comprehensive examination

**Directions:** Read and follow the directions in each section. You have five hours to complete the exam. You are required to answer two questions (one in each section) to complete the exam.

**Section One:** Answer the following question.

1. Much of the literature about the policymaking process explains why policies are not rational. A rational policy is one that reflects a well-informed understanding of the problem and the choice of a solution that is likely to be instrumentally effective. However, the policymaking process literature provides various reasons why rational policies are not often realized. :
  - Outline and briefly explain the steps in the rational decision making model. Now select three or more reasons why policy decision making may deviate from that model. Using the explanations you selected, discuss how and why the literature on the policymaking process is inconsistent with the rational decision making model. Please be specific about how your examples constitute specific deviations from the expectations or assumptions of the rational model.

**Section Two:** Answer one of the following questions.

2. How do institutions structure political behavior in the policy process? What is the relationship between rational choice and institutional theory? Choose at least two different institutions at either the local, state, or national level of government (either in the US or in another country if you wish) and describe how the differences in institutional structure (including institutional selection mechanisms, rules, and norms) affect and condition the motivation of institutional members and how these differences in motivation in turn affect the public policy outputs of the institutions.
3. Political scientists who study public policy are interested in the ways in which policy affects politics. The “path dependency” literature suggests that policy feedback is an important concept that creates possibilities and limitations for reform. Discuss path dependency and explain how and why the development of policies may in turn create a series of political opportunities and constraints. Using a substantive example you are familiar with, explain how the policy decisions of the past have shaped and influenced the policymaking process that exists today. Given your analysis of path dependency in this case, explain how

this literature could guide policymakers to craft policy reforms that are likely to be politically feasible.

4. Journalists and politicians have often expressed the view that divided government is a source of gridlock that prevents the development of solutions to pressing national problems. Alternatively, divided government has been viewed as an important institutional check on the power of the president. Outline and explain the main elements of the argument that split party control affects the production of public policy. What does political science research have to say about this argument, both in the affirmative and to the contrary? In answering this last question, consider the idea and evidence that intra-branch divisions, as well as inter-branch conflicts, may impact the way in which the policymaking process unfolds.