

American University Department of Government

M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American/Applied Politics

Spring 2024

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 and depth of your knowledge. Note 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. Include a reference list following each question you answer.

All students must answer one question from Section I.

Applied Politics students must in addition:

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

American Politics students (i.e., those *not* in Applied Politics) in addition 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 standard font size (11 or 12 point) and margins (1 inch) and double-space your essays. While essay length will vary depending on the question and exam taker, successful responses are typically 3-4 pages for each essay question.

NOTE: Exam takers must abide by American University's Academic Integrity Code. Exam takers must work independently and must not use others' work without attribution. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist writing the exam is prohibited. All exams will be checked for plagiarism.

SECTION I

1. What political factors contribute to—or impede—the creation of public policy? Discuss the process by which an initial policy idea becomes law and then illustrate this process with a specific real-world policy case.
2. Suppose you were handed an analysis of data that observed that locations that had more strict COVID-19 protocols (e.g., shutdowns, mask mandates) had higher COVID case rates. You can assume the analysis is of a cross-section of locations. Thus, the researcher concluded that stricter COVID-19 protocols caused greater spread of COVID-19 and concludes that future policies should not use strict protocols.

Are there problems with this policy recommendation? In your answer, discuss fully the necessary assumptions for causal inference, confounding, and potential flaws in the above example. How would you design a study to test the hypothesis that different COVID-19 protocols caused variation in case rates?

SECTION II

1. Describe in detail the process for eliminating the legislative filibuster in the Senate. Discuss whether this parliamentary maneuver would be a logical extension of the “institutional innovation” that Frances Lee argues has resulted from the “current impasse between the parties and the constitutional system,” or a radical departure that would fundamentally alter the character of the Senate.
2. Political polarization has been a factor in elections in recent decades, but political scientists John Sides, Chris Tausanovitch, and Lynn Vavreck have discussed the phenomenon they call “Calcification” (or “Polarization-plus”). What is their Calcification theory? In what ways is “calcification” a departure from how previous scholars explained elections and voting behavior? How do they say calcification can be seen in the presidential elections in 2016 and 2020?

3. Several scholars have developed frameworks to attempt to explain the evolution of presidential power and what presidents ought to do to succeed in their political context, including Jeffrey Tulis (*The Two Constitutional Presidencies*), Richard Neustadt (*Presidential Power*), Samuel Kernell (*Going Public*) and Stephen Skowronek (*Presidential Leadership in Political Time*). Choose ONE (1) of those scholars and theories which you believe most applies to the presidency today, explain the scholar's theory, and illustrate how you believe it applies with an example of a recent president.
4. When analyzing women and politics, it is important to recognize that women are not a monolith. Multiple identities inform how women think and act politically. A term coined by Kimberle' Crenshaw - but developed and described by many others – is Intersectionality. In our textbook for the course, Paxton, Hughes and Barnes' book Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective, the authors describe ways that intersectionality and women's political participation are linked.

What is Intersectionality? What are some ways that intersectionality pertains to women and politics? In your final paper for the course, how did you use an intersectional lens to explore your research question, and thesis? What were your findings/conclusions? What are some of the challenges and opportunities when trying to be intersectional in the study of women and politics?

SECTION III

1. There is an expectation that the 2024 presidential and congressional elections may come down to turnout for both Democratic and Republican candidates. Do you think this is true, and why or why not? If you were advising a candidate in a competitive race, what would be your advice? Would you focus on turnout, or something else, and, if something else, what would that be?
2. Coalitions are often built and leveraged for issue advocacy campaigns; however, they require their own strategy and management to be effective. What are the benefits and challenges to coalition building? How do you cultivate buy-in and cohesive action? What advice would you give to manage the coalition and implement a successful strategy?