Schar School of Policy and Government
August 2023 Political Science PhD Comprehensive Examination
American Politics

Answer **one** question from Part One — Methods and **two** from Part Two — American Politics. Please clearly indicate which question you are answering. In each answer, you should develop a coherent argument in response to the question; your answer should critically engage and analyze, rather than simply review the literature. Use this as an opportunity to demonstrate the breadth and depth of your understanding of multiple literatures and their connections, as well as of major theoretical issues, scholars, methodological approaches, and cases. In all your answers, please be sure to reference specific scholars as appropriate.

Methodology

1. Suppose you want to study political mobilization among a target American subpopulation. You seek to understand the conditions under which this subpopulation is motivated to engage in civic activity, like voting, attending civic meetings, being attentive to local governance, and so on. How would you design a study to understand the political behavior of this group? Use archive data? Collect observational data? Design an experiment? Expert interviews? A survey? Select a research design strategy and justify your choices. Describe how your approach will help you answer at least one primary research question about the group. (You can invent features about the population if it is helpful for justifying your design.)

2. Suppose you are analyzing a dataset of individuals over time. There are N = 4,000 individuals and T = 10 time periods, but individuals are not equally represented in all time periods. Many individuals occur in multiple time periods. These data might represent federal employees in an agency, legislators, or a sample of voters. You develop research questions about individual-level behaviors, outcomes which are measured in the dataset. How would you approach a statistical analysis for data of this type? What properties of the data do you need to account for in your development of a model for statistical inference? (You can invent variables or make up other hypotheticals about the data in your response if it is helpful, but it is not necessary.)

American Politics Questions

1. What is the purpose of legislative political parties? How have they evolved in the United States (Congress or state legislatures)? How has political science's understanding of the role and function of these institutions evolved over time?

Use an example from legislative politics to illustrate the primary challenges that party leaders face. What are the most important questions in the field of legislative politics and political parties today?

2. Evidence suggests that the United States is currently experiencing democratic backsliding, or a broad uptick in sympathy for authoritarian governance. How does the contemporary balance of democratic and anti-democratic forces in the United States compare to other periods in US history where authoritarian forces were regionally or generally favored? What does history tell us to expect about the consequences of backsliding? Ground your response in theoretical and/or empirical evidence from the literature that helps to contextual the strength of democratic institutions.

3. Scholars have identified the countermajoritarian dilemma as one of the key institutional challenges faced by the American judiciary in general, and the Supreme Court in particular. Define and describe this dilemma in general terms. Then, take a high profile decision by the Roberts court, and analyze whether the court is affected by this dilemma in its decisionmaking. Also analyze whether the dilemma is affecting how the decision is playing out politically. Are there institutional reforms that would lessen this dilemma for the Roberts court, and if so, would those have any drawbacks?

4. Briefly describe the emergence and evolution of Black nationalism in American politics. Pay particular attention to its relationship to White Nationalism/Supremacy. Then, construct a dialogue between an advocate of a modern form of Black nationalism, and a thinker who takes a more accommodationist attitude towards American democracy. You may construct this as an actual Socratic dialogue, putting words into the mouths of two real thinkers, or you may be more traditionally academic, and lay out the main claims that would be made in such a dialogue. Make sure that your essay addresses some (at least 2) of the large issues facing Black Americans today, such as reparations, affirmative action, policy brutality, resilient inequality, evidence of surging White prejudice, and efforts to erode Black access to voting. Feel free to add an issue not on this list.