

Schar School of Policy and Government

January 2024 Political Science PhD Comprehensive Examination

American Politics

Answer **one question** from Part One (Methods) and **two questions** 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 – select one

1. Modern polling has come under considerable scrutiny in recent years. If you were hired as a consultant to poll likely voters in a congressional district over candidates and issues, what are the most important features of the sampling, medium, question wording, and analysis that you would pay attention to in order to ensure valid findings? In addition, demonstrate your ability to write two complete survey questions on a topic of interest to some aspect of American political science (two questions on a broad topic). Defend your choices in crafting these questions in a paragraph. What are your questions intended to reveal about American politics?
2. Suppose you have estimated a linear regression model on a dataset ($N = 1,000$) in the following form:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon_i$$

If you estimated the model using ordinary least squares, what assumptions have you made about the distribution and statistical properties of epsilon (describe two or three)? How can you assess whether you have satisfied these conditions? For each of the two or three assumptions you've described, what are the consequences for violating the assumptions? Finally, what corrections or changes could you use to mitigate the violations?

American Politics Questions – select two

1. Which congressional institutions currently provide the most constraint on legislative outcomes? Describe and assess two or three common legislative reforms (e.g., multi-member districts, expanding the House, reducing the power

of the Senate, reducing the power of the Speaker, revising the federal budget process, etc.).

2. Compare and contrast the Madisonian ideal of pluralism with scholarship that criticizes the pluralistic ideal. Have lawmaking and electoral institutions in the US ever been consistent with Madison's vision? Has the US moved closer or further from these principals over time?
3. Write an essay analyzing the politics of the Supreme Court docket. Your answer should include information about the history of mechanisms the Court has used to discern its docket, and how and why those rules evolved. What is meant by the so-called "shadow docket?" What is its history and the current implications of the volume of cases decided in this manner?
4. Critical race theory has become a significant area of political interest on the American Right. Discuss the concept, being sure to devote appropriate attention to its creation and development. Also include in your discussion how the American Right defines and describes the concept, being sure to highlight discrepancies between how the concept is seen by its creators and its detractors.
5. The work of Richard Neustadt led scholars such as Sam Kernell to believe that a key aspect of success in a presidency was appealing above the heads of Congress to the public (going public). However, scholars such as George Edwards questioned empirically whether presidents had actually altered public support for their presidency by going public. These strands of scholarly insight were all developed in the television era, in which going public primarily meant going on TV. In your opinion, based on scholarly insights in media studies and in the presidency, how has the evolution of the media presidency changed how presidents can be successful? Is going public still wise? Possible? If yes, has it been altered?