

American Politics Comprehensive Exam
Fall, 2006

Day One Exam

General instructions: You have six hours to answer two questions. Your answers on the Day One and Day Two exams will be evaluated together, so be sure to avoid substantial overlap between the two days in the materials and ideas you discuss. **This is your opportunity to demonstrate in depth your knowledge of the major theoretical issues, scholars, literature, and methodological approaches of the discipline.** Thus, you should take care to cite a wide variety of specific authors and works to support your answers. All of your discussion of specifics should also illuminate broader points about the field of American Politics, using what you know from the literatures you have read on American Political Development, American Political Behavior, and American Institutions.

Answer two of the following four questions.

- 1) A great deal of recent scholarship in American Politics takes note of important changes in the party system. Most scholars agree that the Democratic and Republican parties have become more polarized during the past thirty years. But there is much less agreement about the sources and depth of this partisan divide. Scholars also disagree about the consequences of partisan polarization. On what grounds have scholars argued that America is polarized? What factors have contributed to this polarization? Is there evidence that this polarization is rooted in a "culture war"? How have the changes in the party system over the past three decades affected governance in the United States? Is contemporary partisan rancor a new development or part of a reoccurring historical pattern?
- 2) Scholars such as Theodore Lowi, Theda Skocpol, Stephen Skowronek, Jacob Hacker, and Paul Pierson have written about the development of an American "State." And yet, very little political science scholarship carefully delineates the major features and principal dynamics of the "State". Does America have a State, as distinguished from the major institutions of government? What are its distinguishing characteristics? Has state building transformed in any fundamental way the principles and institutional arrangements of American politics? Does the development of the state follow inexorably from modernization or has state power been contested throughout American political history?
- 3) In contemporary American politics, the ongoing struggle for power between Congress and the presidency has shifted toward the executive. How would political science scholarship explain the current state of this power struggle? Be sure to consider, in addition to external events, the structure and history of the institutions themselves, as well as the role of some other actors (e.g., parties, the courts, interest groups, the public, the mass media).

4) Throughout its history, political science has “poached” from other disciplines such as biology, sociology, psychology, and economics. Taking account of the major contemporary traditions of empirical research in the field of American politics -- survey-based political behavior, rational choice modeling, historical-, and non-historical institutionalism, and public policy -- consider the degree to which these fields have relied on theories of other disciplines. To what extent have these traditions contributed to the development of a distinctive *political* science? (Discuss at least 3 empirical traditions). Using specific examples, consider the advantages and disadvantages of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of politics.