

Ph.D. Examination, American Politics, August 2013

Instructions: Pick and write on one question from each section. For each of the three questions, please attach the notes on which you have based your answer.

Section One. These questions focus on the individual-level of politics.

1. Are social and political values important for public opinion? Define values, taking care to distinguish between the terms value, beliefs, affect, and attitude. Make an argument about the role of values in structuring political opinions. What happens when values come into conflict?

2. What variables influence an individual's decision to vote? Please discuss historically important models of voting behavior, their current conceptualizations, and recent/new developments?

3. In some versions of democratic theory, the citizen's political beliefs and behaviors are said to be guided by an abstract political ideology. Much of contemporary empirical research has not been kind to this theory. Review the evidence for and against the assertion of "ideological innocence". How do you resolve the conflicting claims? What are some of the major alternatives to the theory of an ideologically sophisticated public?

4. "One of the central questions in research on American political behavior has been the extent to which citizens are "politically sophisticated." What are the central findings of this literature? Are these research findings dependent on the various ways in which scholars define and measure political sophistication? To what extent have Americans become more or less sophisticated

over time? Does it really matter? Explain.”

5. In the last fifty years there has been a drastic racial demographic shift in the United States. How has this shift in demography affected racial attitudes and racial policy attitudes over time for American citizens? Do these changes warrant new measures of racial attitudes and policy? If so, what should these measures look like and why are old measures insufficient?

Section Two. These questions focus on institutions in politics.

6. To what extent has the political process been responsible for growing economic inequality in the United States?

7. What, if any, effect does the Supreme Court have on Congress and the executive branch? If not, why not?(I): What tools do political parties use to shape the legislative process in both the House and the Senate, and to what extent can party leaders succeed if their goals conflict with the preferences of the median voter in each house?

8. Who, if anyone, controls the bureaucracy in American politics? Is it the Congress? Why or why not? Is it the judiciary? Why or why not? Is it the president or the executive branch? Why or why not? Is it organized interests? Why or why not?

9. What are the causes and consequences of the incumbency advantage in American legislative elections?

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of the median voter in each house?

Section Three. In these items you should bring together your knowledge of institutions and behavior.

11. What is the nature of the relationship between the opinions of citizens, their leaders, and the policies their leaders enact? Why do leaders respond to the “will of the public,” if they do? Should they, or can one make the case that leaders should operate relatively free of the direct influence of public opinion?

12. Is growing polarization U.S. politics the result of changing voter preferences or a top-down process driven by elites? If it's the latter, how has it been sustained under a system of regular, frequent elections? What are the consequences of polarization for democracy?

13. Many scholars argue that the political impact of the mass media is "minimal" at most. What are the major theories about the political influence of the mass media, and what is the evidence? Compare and contrast the impact of the mass media with the impact of political campaigns.

14. What information do U.S. voters use when deciding among candidates? Identify both political and non-political factors in your answer. What does your answer suggest about the functioning of democracy, the design of political institutions, and individual voting behavior?

15. Does federalism in the United States strengthen the link between voter preferences and government policy or does it weaken the ability of constituents to keep government responsive to their needs and wants? What are the consequences of federalism?