

## **American Politics Field Exam – Fall 2020**

### Instructions

Answer three questions total, including at least one from each section.

### Section 1 – Institutions

1. One constant theme in the presidential literature relates to presidential power. Some scholars argue that presidents have too much power. Others believe the presidents do not have enough power. Citing the relevant literature, is it possible to reconcile these different approaches to presidential power?
2. Institutional Rational Choice and game theory are theoretical approaches that have had a major impact on the study of American Politics. Explain what these theories entail and how they have contributed (or not) to our understanding of the politics of the presidency, the Congress, and the courts. How does this literature diverge from previous literature on these three institutions? Are they consistent with prior findings or do they suggest new avenues for the development of institutional theory?
3. Scholars have offered many theories for understanding judicial behavior, which theory provides the best explanation of Supreme Court decision making? Are there any new approaches that seem promising for pushing our understanding in a new direction?

### Section 2 – Parties and Behavior

1. Thinking about the role of political parties in American politics, some people have argued that parties have become less relevant while others have argued that parties have become indispensable in understanding American politics. Starting with the conception that political parties consist of three parts – the party in government, the party organization, and the party in the electorate – which argument do you think best describes the role of political parties in American politics? Be sure to address all three facets of the conception of political parties.
2. “American democracy is in the middle of a crisis. Most Americans don’t learn about politics and fail to participate in elections.” Evaluate this statement by consulting the literatures on voter competence and political participation.
3. As election officials have worked to adapt procedures in light of the coronavirus pandemic, evidence suggests that Americans have become polarized on aspects such as vote-by-mail and government responses to the virus more generally. Why might this be the case, and what are the implications for American politics and democracy? As you answer, consider how scholars have conceptualized and accounted for the phenomenon of polarization in modern American politics.