

**American University Department of Government**

**M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

American Politics

Spring 2021

This exam consists of questions drawn from the field of American Politics and our Applied Politics concentration offered through the Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute and the Campaign Management Institute.

**DIRECTIONS:**

*You will write three essays. Be strategic in your selection of questions, choosing those that allow you to show the greatest breadth and depth of your knowledge. Notice that, in almost every case, you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge by drawing on a range of appropriate scholarship. When doing so, be sure to cite the scholarship you are drawing upon explicitly.*

**All students must answer one question from Section I.**

**Applied Politics students must:**

- Answer one question from Section II and one question from Section III.

**Students *not* in Applied Politics may either:**

- Answer two questions from Section II, OR
- Answer one question from Section II and one question from Section III.

*Clearly identify the questions you choose to answer. Please use 12-point font, double-spacing, and standard margins when preparing your essays.*

## **SECTION I**

1. Using Kingdon and Kraft and Furlong, discuss the problem-definition and agenda-setting stage of policy making. What are the factors that shape how a problem may be defined? Discuss an example of a public problem that has been framed in varying ways by opposing groups. What facilitates the movement of certain issues (or problems) onto the agenda?
2. Compare and contrast the differences between qualitative and quantitative research designs. Begin by defining and characterizing these approaches. Then, describe the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, with particular interest in how qualitative and quantitative designs can aid researchers in learning about the world. Use examples and cite relevant literature as appropriate.

## **SECTION II**

1. Describe in detail the process for eliminating the legislative filibuster in the Senate. Discuss whether this parliamentary maneuver would be a logical extension of the “institutional innovation” that Frances Lee argues has resulted from the “current impasse between the parties and the constitutional system,” or a radical departure that would fundamentally alter the character of the Senate.
2. What strategies can presidents employ to make the executive branch more responsive to their agenda? What are the benefits and the costs? Illustrate with examples from the Trump and Biden presidencies. Be sure to cite the relevant literature.
3. Explain the determinants of vote choice, including partisanship and incumbent performance, using theories and readings discussed in the class. After this discussion, answer the following question: what, in addition to (1) partisan affiliation and (2) incumbent performance, do you think influenced the 2020 primary/general presidential vote choice? Discuss.

### SECTION III

1. You have been invited to interview for a position on one of the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial campaigns. What position would you want to be considered for, and why? You should assume in the interview you will be asked what you think the overall strategy and message of the campaign should be. What will be your advice?

(You can pick a specific candidate, or more generally talk about any race. You should, however, come at this question from either the Democratic or Republican perspective.)

2. Describe the major dimensions of issue advocacy/lobbying campaigns in U.S. politics using examples from lectures and the academic literature. Use a specific policy or program advocacy campaign when answering this question. Has President Biden and the Covid pandemic changed lobbying campaigns? If so, how? If not, why? Make sure you refer to the relevant academic literature, lectures, and primary sources in your answer.