

Pol 157: Midterm Review Exam Sheet

Spring 2019

American Public Opinion

This midterm exam review sheet is designed to provide a framework and road map for effective studying. The exam format will be multiple choice, short answer, an analytical question, and essay question. The analytical question will ask you to interpret a graph or table and discuss the implications of the data you analyzed. Thus, it is important to understand and accurately interpret the empirical evidence and how this evidence relates to course concepts. This can be found in the slide sets.

General comment: Think critically as to how each of the unit topics relate to one another and to the main conceptual theory discussed in the course. Pay close attention to the “big picture” general questions articulated under each section header of the syllabus.

1 Madison’s Republic: Defining the “Ideal” Citizen

- Why are theoretical models important in the social sciences, particularly political science?
- What’s the fundamental problem of human nature, according to Madison?
- What is the logic behind Madison’s “Theory of the Republic”? Specifically, what does the theory posit for the role of citizens in a democracy?
- Why do contemporary political scientists *dispute* Madison’s model of representation?
- What is Bernard Berelson’s argument as to the “Fundamental Requirement of Democratic Politics?” What are the outcome of elections, according to both Madison & Berelson?
- Why are surveys important for political scientists and public opinion scholars?
- Why is “survey research” hard when it comes to studying the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of respondents?
- What’s the key concern behind survey research in American political behavior? Why is this a key concern?

2 Measurement of Public Attitudes and Stability of Political Opinion

- What are “preferences” according to political scientists?
- What does it mean that political preferences can be cognitive and reflective of prior experiences with stimuli?

- What does it mean that preferences can be “multidimensional?” How does this fit in with respect to preference ordering?
- What are “memory-based” models of preference formation? What is an example of this and what are the implications of such models for the “ideal-type” citizen?
- What are “on-line” models of preference formation? What is an example of this and what are the implications of such models for the “ideal-type” citizen?
- What does Bayesian updating mean with respect to public opinion formation?
- How does Zaller’s *Top-of-the-Head* model specify preference formation in the mass public? Be able to carefully explain the model (i.e., the axioms, how the model works), the observable predictions generated by the model, and the implications of this model on the “ideal-type” of democratic citizen.
- Why is **non-response** and **reporting “error”** a fundamental concern for survey political researchers? What is the role of survey mode? What are the implications of this measurement error for Zaller’s *Top-of-the-Head* model?

3 How Do Citizens “Reason” about Politics and “Learn” in a Political Context?

- What do political scientists mean about the “group-basis” of politics?
- Why was “geographic context” used a proxy for measuring network heterogeneity in early studies?
- How should political scientists study the effects of information & persuasion on citizen political behavior?
- What is the *ecological fallacy problem*?
- Be able to distinguish between ecological and individual fallacies and how this relates to the study of social networks.
- There is little evidence to suggest that individuals are uncomfortable to acknowledge political disagreement—why?
- Why would citizens that are engaged in politics less bothered by disagreement?
- What do social networks look like in contemporary American politics?
- What about the role of networks in solving collective action problems in terms of political participation?
- Why would the ability to “reason” about political affairs vary by an endogenous preference, such as income?

- Be sure to explain the exception to the rule, in that why are low-income senior citizens motivated to participate in politics (think about social security)? What is the role of rational self-interest in this case? What is the mechanism that Campbell (2002) identifies that motivates low-income elderly citizens to be involved in politics?
- Fundamental distinction between misinformation & uninformed—what do you think this distinction is and why would this matter? Do prior beliefs about politics dampen the ability of citizens to “learn” about politics?

4 Variation in Citizen Participation: Resources & Free-Riding Incentive

- What critical assumption does Madison’s Theory of the Republic make with respect to citizen participation in politics and why do contemporary political scientists refute this assumption? If Madison’s Theory of citizen participation in politics is correct, what should we empirically observe?
- How do political scientists think of participation costs in politics? What does it mean for citizens to “free-ride” in American political life? What variables predict variation in the ability to pay these costs and participate in politics?
- What are the implications of the resource bias in political participation for Madison’s Theory of the Republic? Does the relationship between citizens and their elected representation posited by Madison exist in contemporary Congressional representation?

5 Are Citizens to Develop Coherent Ideological Preferences?

- What is the *consensus* of political science research regarding the coherency of policy preferences among the American mass public? What does it mean to have “coherent” preferences?
- Why would mass public “elites”, such as incumbent legislators and candidates for political office, show greater ideological consistency across issues than the average person? What does it mean to have “greater consistency across issues” with respect to political ideology?
- Why should we be skeptical that citizens who fail to grasp ideological thinking still holding meaningful preferences on policy? What does it mean to hold “meaningful” preferences?
- What does Converse (1964) find with respect to the consistency of political issues?
- What does Ezra Klein argue, in his article, as to what drives citizen variation in the capacity to think “ideologically?” Why would the mass public (voters) not possess the same level of political knowledge as political elites? What role does the “rational incentive” play in this?

- What does the phrase “what goes with what” mean with respect to forming ideological preferences?
- Why do Freeder, Lenz, & Turney theorize that “those with high knowledge and with agreement with party elites are more likely to engage in coherent issues beliefs?”
- Be able to sum up the findings of Freeder, Lenz, & Turney with respect to issue stability among those with low and high political knowledge. Is there variation across policy issue domains?
- What is the relevance of the findings presented by Freeder, Lenz, & Turney with respect to the *democratic dilemma* and *resource bias* in American politics? How do you think political institutions can cut-down on information costs paid by the mass public in political participation and decision-making?

6 Models of Partisanship & The Role of Partisanship in Behavior

- How do parties solve collective action problems within the electorate? What does *collective responsibility* mean and how does this relate to the salience of “partisan brands?”
- How do parties (i.e., the party **brands**) help solve the collective action problem of free-riding (i.e., rational abstention & ignorance concerning politics) in the mass public?
- What did the Columbia researchers find with respect to partisanship in the 1940’s? What about the Michigan team behind the *American Voter*?
- What does it mean that the Michigan team, and their model, predicts that partisanship is “durable?”
- According to the Michigan model, what predicts an individual’s partisanship? Is this a “rational-based” model or an “identity” model?
- How does social context “reinforce” partisanship according to the Michigan team?
- According to lecture, what *social identities* underpin partisan affiliation in the mass public?
- What effects does partisanship exert on political evaluations, such as candidate valence and retrospective economic assessments?
- What does Zingher (2018) posit as the two mechanisms causing shifting allegiances among white voters away from the Democratic Party?
- Why would changing & growing coalitions with the parties change issue positions?
- What explains the almost uniform decline in identification with the Democratic party among white southerners? Why is the decline gradual rather than rapid (i.e, why would the Michigan model be relevant here)?

- What are recent trends in partisan affiliation in contemporary American politics? Specifically, are there “stronger” and more “loyal” partisans today than decades ago? Why would this be the case?
- Why, according to Barber & Pope, does party trump ideology? Why does Donald Trump provide an opportunity to study whether citizens hold “sincere” ideological preferences or whether citizens simply “follow the leader” with respect to their policy preferences? Do the experiments provided by Barber & Pope find that citizens hold sincere policy preferences? What are the implications of their experimental results with respect to Madison’s model of the “ideal-type” citizen?