

PO 111: Introduction to American Politics  
Prof. Claire Leavitt  
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Final Exam

You will have three hours to complete the exam. Remember, the exam is closed-book, which means no books, notes, computers or technology of any kind. All phones must be turned off during the exam. You will respond to 5 out of 7 short-answer questions and 3 out of 5 longer essay questions. The short-answer questions will be worth 8 points each, and each essay will be worth 20 points, for an overall raw score out of 100 points. Please plan your time accordingly.

**I: SHORT ANSWER:** Please answer 5 of the following 7 questions (*8 points each; 40 points total*)

1. Provide examples of two different principal-agent relationships that exist in the American political system.
2. Describe at least two ways that the media (newspapers, radio, TV and the Internet) may negatively influence American political life.
3. What is the basic structure of government agencies in the United States? What do we mean when we say that the US bureaucracy is “thickening”?
4. What do we mean when we say that Congress has become “polarized” over the past 30-plus years? What factor(s) might be responsible for increased polarization?
5. James Madison believed pluralism was an essential component of American democracy and would ensure the new nation’s long-term stability. Describe the concept of pluralism and why it is important.
6. Briefly discuss at least two problems with survey research (including the kind of polling done by newspapers and political campaigns) as a method for accurately discerning how Americans feel about particular political issues.
7. What is the “prisoner’s dilemma”? Why are its lessons important to students of political science?

**II: ESSAY QUESTIONS:** Please answer 3 of the following 5 questions (*20 points each; 60 points total*)

1. In David Remnick’s article about President Obama in *The New Yorker* magazine, Obama says: “At the end of the day we’re part of a long-running story. We just try to get our paragraph right. . . . The President of the United States cannot remake our society, and that’s probably a good thing.” What view of presidential leadership is Obama expressing in this quotation? What part of the president’s powers (whether they are officially inscribed in the Constitution or not) do you consider the most important? Does Obama do an effective job of exercising this particular

power?

2. Over the past 40-plus years, voter turnout in US presidential elections has declined from a high of approximately 68% in 1968 to a low of approximately 55% throughout the 1990s. Over the past three presidential election cycles (2004, 2008 and 2012), turnout has stayed relatively stable at approximately 58%. Discuss at least two reasons for the long-term decline in the proportion of eligible voters who actually go to the polls and at least one reason for the slight uptick in turnout over the last few election cycles. More generally, what do you think motivates Americans to vote? Is it “rational” to do so?

3. Scholars of American politics frequently talk about the importance of “American exceptionalism”—the idea that America is uniquely different from other Western nations, and especially European countries. Discuss at least three ways in which the United States is “exceptional,” according to the above definition.

4. Justices Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer—who represent the “conservative” and “liberal” ideological blocs on the US Supreme Court, respectively—each offer distinct judicial philosophies and differing interpretations of the US Constitution. Discuss each of these philosophies and explain how each man might apply his constitutional vision to interpreting the Second Amendment. More generally, what are the formal, “official” powers of Supreme Court justices in the American political system? In light of these powers, do you believe the Supreme Court should be considered a *political* institution? Why or why not?

5. In 1988, the George H. W. Bush presidential campaign approved an attack ad against Bush’s opponent, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. The ad was called “Weekend Passes” and featured a man named Willie Horton. What (ostensibly) was the Bush campaign trying to accomplish with this particular ad? Why has this particular ad become so important in American political history? More generally, why do political campaigns use negative advertising? What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of doing so?

### **III: EXTRA CREDIT (2 points)**

Which American political figure would you most like to have the proverbial beer with? Why?