

17.251
Fall 2008
Midterm exam

Part I: Formal Models of Legislatures (20%)

Directions. Do the following problem.

Congress passes a law that allows the Secretary of the Treasury to “bail out” financial institutions by giving tax money to banks that may only be used to loan money to home buyers. According to the law, once the Secretary has made the allocation, he must wait 30 days. During that time, Congress may pass a law allocating another amount, subject to the president’s veto. For the sake of this exercise, assume that if the president vetoes the bill, it dies.

Ia. Ideal points are these: House: \$500 million; Senate: \$400 million; President: \$100m; Treasury Secretary: \$250 million. As far as the Treasury Secretary is concerned, what is the best amount he can allocate to this program and not be overturned by Congress?

Ib. There is an election that moves the ideal point to here: House: \$550 million; Senate: \$650 million; President: \$600 million.; Treasury Secretary: \$500 million. If *this* Treasury Secretary got to make the allocation, what is the best he could do without being overturned?

For both parts of this question, assume symmetrical utility curves. Draw a picture to illustrate the answer to each question.

Part II: Short answers (24%)

Directions. Answer *three* of the following short answer questions.

1. What is a *supermajority*? What is one example found in the U.S. Constitution?
2. What is *Article I, section 8* of the Constitution called, and what is its significance?
3. What is the *Australian ballot*?
4. What is the *incumbency advantage*, and what accounts for it?
5. What was the *Baker v. Carr* Supreme Court decision, and what principle did it establish?

Part III: Essay (56%)

Directions. Write an essay on the following topic. Please write on only one side of the blue book.

Tomorrow will be a presidential election that some have argued will be one of the most significant in American history. Congress is also up for election tomorrow, too. Write an essay in which you address each of the following questions:

(1) What will be the most important outcome(s) of the congressional election tomorrow, and what will account for those outcomes? (Note that you will need to define by what you mean by “important outcome” and then argue about why you think it will happen.) In other words, predict what the first few paragraphs in news reports will be tomorrow, and provide an analysis that explains why the outcome occurred.

(2) Taking your answer in part 1 as given, think about the midterm election in 2010. What do you predict will be the most important things that pundits, the press, and political scientists will be talking about when they start covering that election?

You should avoid making an argument that draws on hopeful partisan thinking. Rather, discuss what, in general, determines the outcomes of congressional elections, how the determinants of congressional election outcomes have changed in recent years, and what this all means for the outcomes in 2008 and 2010. Draw on as much material you have read in this class in writing your answer.