17.251
Spring 2015
Midterm Answers

Part I.

The intended answer is that the President can impose his ideal point, and it is immune from veto. However, I recognize that an alternative reading of the question could result in another outcome. I don't think the alternative reading is exactly right, so I didn't give full credit for it, but I gave a little more credit than I would have otherwise.

The idea is this: the president picks a policy that describes the deal with Schmiran. Congress can overturn it by passing a bill to undo the deal. The president can veto the bill. If the veto over-ride is successful, the bill prevails. Otherwise, the president gets his way.

A few basic points.

First, I recognize that I was vague about what it means for the bill to "undo the deal." I intended for "undo the deal" to mean that policy reverts back to the status quo. However, upon reflection, I see that this could also be interpreted as Congress passing another policy that is not ϕ, but is not the president's ideal point, either. I will work through the problem both ways.

Second, the veto constraint means that 2/3 of the legislature is necessary to override the veto. With 11 members, 2/3 of 11 is 7 1/3, which rounding up is 8. That makes the two positions marked $\underline{V}$ and $\overline{V}$ as the lower- and upper-veto pivots, respectively. Because the relevant veto pivot is the one closer to the president, we really care about $\underline{V}$. (I've also indicated the median with M.)
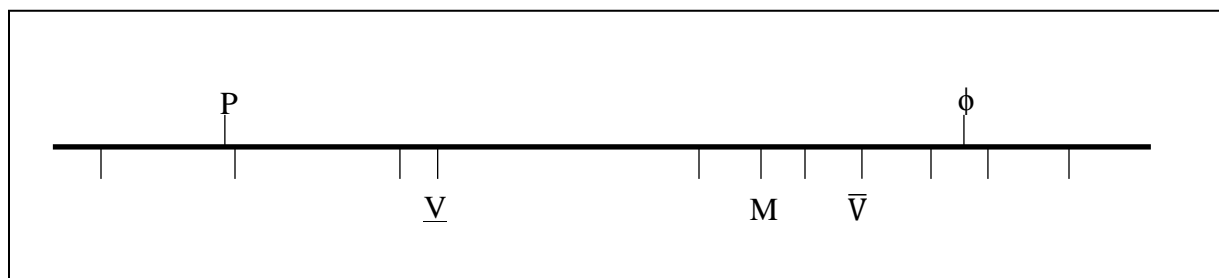

1. Assuming that "undo the deal" means that policy reverts to ϕ if the bill fails, we need to know the president's best policy location that's within $\underline{V}$'s preferred-to set. Below, I have drawn the preferred-to set for $\underline{V}$. Notice that the president's ideal point is in the set. (The preferred-to set extends beyond the left side of the figure, which is indicated with the left-hand arrow.) Thus, the president announces P as the policy. The median voter will want to overturn this, and so will propose a law to overturn the deal and return policy to ϕ. Everyone for whom ϕ is better than P will vote for the bill. The vertical dashed line in the figure shows the boundary of the region that divides people who support ϕ and who support P. (This is called the "cut-line.") Note that 7 members of the legislature support ϕ and 4 prefer P. Thus, the bill passes. However, the

president vetoes the bill. Because less than 2/3 prefer ϕ to P, the veto is sustained, and the president gets his way.
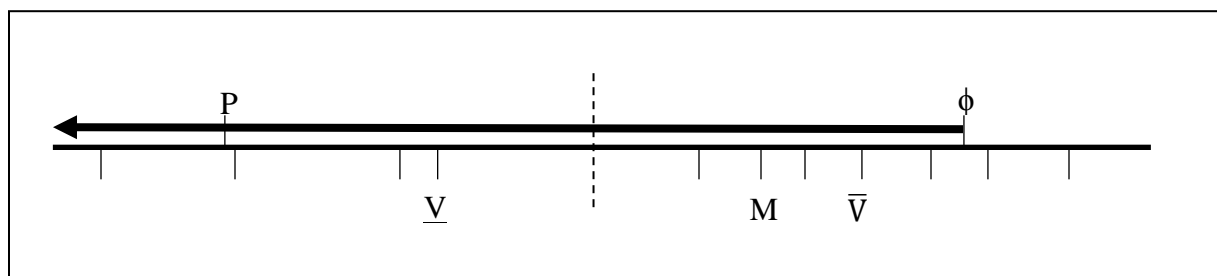
2. Assuming the bill can name an alternative deal with Schmiran, is there one that would pass that would survive a veto? Yes. Here, we just have to make sure there is at least one bill that both M and $\underline{V}$ would prefer compared to P. To find the location of this bill, we now need the preferred-to set of both M and $\underline{V}$ against P. Those two preferred-to sets are drawn below. The shorter preferred-to set is associated with $\underline{V}$. The far right of $\underline{V}$'s preferred-to set is still within M's preferred-to set. Thus, a bill at this point, labeled B, could pass the legislature. The president vetoes this bill. Because B is within $\underline{V}$'s preferred-to set, the veto is overridden.
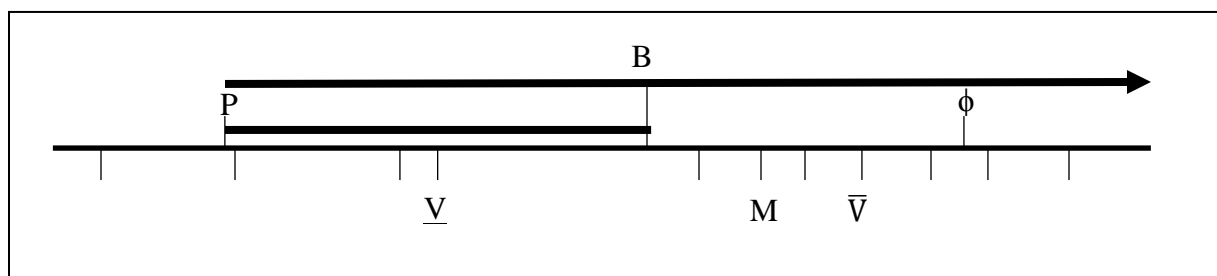
Part II.

1. The Condorcet winner is a policy proposal that beats all other policy proposals in a one-on-one pairing.

2. The presentation clause of the Constitution requires bills passed by Congress to be "presented" to the president, so that he can either sign it or veto it.

3. The Reed Rules were a series of rules changes in the House in the 1890s associated with Speaker Reed. They made minority obstruction more difficult and facilitated majority control of the institution.

4. The incumbency advantage is the share of votes received by an incumbent due purely to incumbency, per se. This is on top of votes received by virtue of impersonal factors, most importantly partisanship.

5. *Baker v. Carr* established that redistricting could be considered by the courts, and that population equality was a factor that could be considered in court cases. (While several people made reference to it, the phrase "one person, one vote" does not appear in *Baker v. Carr.* This phrase, and others close to it, appears in other districting cases during this period.)

Part III.

There were three parts of the essay. I expected certain things in the first and third parts. In the seond part, I expected to see an application of the readings/lectures to the particular case you chose. Simply repeating analysis that you may have read in the news that was not linked to the readings and lectures did not necessarily help you a lot.

The first part (general candidate choice) really needed you to talk in a little detail about the cost-benefit analysis that candidates use to decide whether to run. The best answers explicitly cite the equation $E(U) = pB - c$, then talked about each element of the right-hand side explicitly. Some answers just listed a bunch of general considerations, such as money or incumbency, which was fine, but not as fine as an answer that paid close attention to the expected-value calculation.

The second part required you to apply your answer in the first part. Again, the answers that discussed the expected-value calculation in the context of their district (or state) were the best. The best also addressed both incumbents and possible challengers. Not all answered this. Those that did not got marked down. (If nothing else, you needed to identify where a candidate from the opposite party of the incumbent might come from, and the calculation such a candidate would undertake in deciding whether to run.)

The third part invited you to think about voters generally. All you needed to do here was to invoke incumbency and partisanship, and perhaps ideology. Again, simply repeating what you might have read in the news was not sufficient if it did not seem informed by the readings and lectures. You could embellish the incumbency+partisanship+ideology story, but if you didn't include elements of i+p+i, I wondered whether you had internalized the readings and lectures.

Grading

I assigned points to each answer to help me keep track of how close to a perfect answer you gave to each question. A perfect answer would receive 20 points for Part I, 8 points for each question in Part II, and 56 points in Part III. I then summed the points. This allowed me to rank-order each of the exams from the top (92) to the bottom (72). I then decided where the A/B/C divisions were, according to my adaptation of the rules of the faculty for letter grades (see below). I further assigned pluses and minuses to indicate how close you were to the letter-grade boundary.

The following are MIT's grades, as described by section 2.62.1 of the Regulations of the MIT Faculty:

- **A** Exceptionally good performance, demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.
- **B** Good performance, demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.
- **C** Adequate performance, demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to more advanced work in the field.
- **D** Minimally acceptable performance, demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

In adapting these grades to the midterm, I focus on the first adjective in each sentence. An "A" exam is "exceptionally good," a "B" exam is "good," a "C" exam is "adequate" and a "D" is "minimally acceptable." If you received a B and think it is a mistake, consider whether you think your exam was exceptional. If you can make the argument with a straight face, I will listen to it. I will probably also remind you that good is still good. (If I made an outright grading error, please bring that to my attention irrespective of the letter grade. That is a different issue altogether.)