

17.251/2  
Congressional Politics  
Fall 1997  
Midterm examination

*Instructions.* There are three parts to the midterm. Follow the instructions within each.

Part I. Formal models of legislatures.

*Instructions.* Answer the following question. 20% of the grade.

Congress consists of five members, with ideal points labeled on the attached figure as L1, L2, and L3. There is a president located at P, a status quo located at  $S$ , and a bill passed by Congress, located at B. The axes are labeled Guns and Butter. Indifference curves are assumed to be circular.

Under the constitution of this fictional country, the president has a line-item veto, meaning he may either sign a bill (and it becomes law) or he may return the bill to the legislature. If he returns the bill to the legislature, he may object to (1) the whole bill or (2) any portion of it. If the veto is sustained on a dimension, then policy reverts to the status quo on that dimension. (Needless to say, if the whole bill is vetoed and it is sustained, policy reverts to the status quo on *both* dimensions.) It takes  $2/3$  vote of the legislature to override a presidential veto.

When the president is presented this bill, what should he do? Use the figure to illustrate your answer. (I've included two copies of the figure so that you can doodle on one of them.)

Part II. Short answers.

*Instructions.* Answer *two* of the following four questions. Each question you answer is worth 20% of the grade.

1. What is a *killer amendment*? What difference does it make for the outcomes in voting on killer amendments if legislators are sincere or sophisticated? Illustrate your answer using either a spatial diagram or a voting tree (or both).
2. List two constitutional features that were different between Congress under the Articles of Confederation and Congress under the Constitution and discuss what difference it made from the perspective of either (1) policymaking or (2) the stability of the political system (or both).
3. When did the *big bang* occur in the institutionalization of the House of Representatives? What were some of the signs that something different was afoot before and after the big bang?

4. What are the two major cues that voters use in making decisions about whom to support in congressional elections? How are these cues consistent or inconsistent with formal models of electoral choice?

Part III. Essay.

*Instructions.* Choose *one* of these essay question to respond to. 40% of the grade.

1. In Nelson Polsby's article on the institutionalization of the House of Representatives, there is implied a model of how organizations—and particularly the U.S. Congress—evolve over time. In the first half of the class we have been emphasizing—in lectures, readings, and class projects—the power of the career calculus of members of Congress (or those who want to become members of Congress). Write an essay in which you discuss the degree to which Polsby's understanding of how the House has evolved over the past two centuries is consistent or inconsistent with the career calculus of legislators as we have been considering them.
2. Jacobson and Kernell's *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections* puts forward an argument about how elites make decisions that alter fundamentally the dynamics of House elections. They say very little about Senate elections. Write an essay in which you apply Jacobson and Kernell's argument to Senate contests.

