

17.251

Congressional Elections I

Fall 2000

Midterm examination

This examination has three parts. Follow the instructions in each.

I. *Formal models of legislature.* (20%) Answer the following question.

You are hired as a consultant to advise the new State of Puerto Rico (the 51st state of the Union) on writing a Constitution. Everyone in the Constitutional Convention agrees that the state legislature should only be allowed to meet for 30 days each year, with no provision for calling the legislature into special session. ***The Constitutional Convention is also composed only of fiscal conservatives who want to keep overall government spending as low as possible (but presumably still significantly greater than zero).***

Because the legislature must adjourn after sitting for 30 days, a question naturally arises about what to do with appropriations if the unicameral legislature is unable to agree on an appropriations bill. One faction of the legislature believes that spending should default back to the amount spent in the previous year. A second faction believes that spending should default back to 90% of the amount spent the previous year. A third faction believes that spending should default back to \$0.

Assume the following: (1) the amount passed by the unicameral legislature becomes law (i.e., there is no governor who must approve appropriations bills), (2) the median spending preference of the legislature will be greater than that of the Constitutional Convention, (3) there is an appropriations committee with gatekeeping power whose median member prefers more spending than the median member of the state legislature, (4) the chamber will adopt appropriations bills under a closed rule (i.e., the bill can't be amended), and (5) in the first year of statehood the default level of spending will be set to zero.

Using the unidimensional spatial model to illustrate, advise the Constitutional Convention about which default (reversion) spending level to choose. Which would be the best choice, among the options favored by the three factions? Which would be the worst choice?

II. *Short answers.* (40%) Answer *two* of the following questions.

1. What is sophisticated voting?
2. Which were the two major political parties that dominated Congress from 1828 to (roughly) 1860, and what did they stand for?

3. How do opportunity costs affect the career decisions of candidates (or potential) candidates for Congress?
4. What distinguishes the "personal constituency" from the "primary constituency"?

III. *Essay (40%) Answer one of the following essay questions.*

1. Candidates for Congress—incumbents, challengers, and open seat candidates—have many reasons to feel ambivalent about the political parties. Discuss the benefits and costs that members of Congress face because they must affiliate with one of the political parties. (In this answer focus on electoral factors, not internal factors.)
2. One possible outcome of the 2000 election is unified control of Congress, plus the presidency, by the Republicans. However, even if this unified control does occur, it will be associated with the closest of margins separating the parties. What would be the implications of this razor-thin Republican majority, with George W. Bush in the White House? In writing this essay, make sure you touch on the following two subsidiary questions:
  - a. Relying on past history, what are internal congressional dynamics likely to be like if both chambers of Congress are controlled by a razor-thin Republican majority, with George W. Bush in the White House?
  - b. How would this razor-thin major affect the electoral environment in the 2002 congressional election?

[Note: This question is inspired by an interview I will do with CBS News on Monday about this scenario.]