

U.S. Government

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, PAPERS, DEBRIEFING PRESENTATIONS AND EXAMS

NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: The following questions can be used for in-class discussion, as prompts for papers, group debriefing presentations or as prompts for essay questions on exams. Each question has several components, which can be selected individually as the topics for discussion or brief essays. The goal of these questions is to encourage students to think critically about empirical and normative issues in American Government, and to promote comprehension and retention by integrating students' vivid and memorable simulation experiences with knowledge gleaned from lectures and readings.

****A note to instructors concerned about needing to switch online this Fall - It is recommended to utilize the debriefing presentation assignment and allow students to form 3 person groups consisting of students from different parts of the political system to record a 10 minute video going over one or more of the below topics from each of their perspectives. Once showing the 10 minute video on Zoom (or another web conferencing tool) the students will then be given the floor for a 5 minute QA with the class. This was a highly effective method of both debriefing the simulation and driving important course learning objectives home while online during the Spring*

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- **What civil rights and liberties are guaranteed in the 4th, 5th, and 6th amendments to the Constitution? What kinds of surveillance and counterterrorism policies are potentially in tension with these liberties? (Be specific, citing examples from your simulation). If you were a national security policymaker, how would you resolve these tensions?**
 - **How did your simulation illustrate the tensions and conflicts inherent in a federal system of government? Specifically, which state and federal officials clashed in your simulation and why? How were these conflicts resolved and which side "won," if either?**
 - **What role did political parties play in your simulation? How did they help to organize, channel, or constrain actors' behavior? (You may find it useful to talk to students who played members of Congress). Overall, how influential were political parties in the**



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simulation? Did ideological views seem to align closely with political parties, or not? Give examples to support your claims.

- As bills in your simulation moved toward becoming a law, what roles were played by committee chairs, party whips, and party leaders (e.g., the Speaker of the House) in the House and the Senate? Be specific about these roles and processes: who were the key players and what were the pivotal decision points that would determine whether a bill moved toward passage or not? With this background established, briefly explain why certain bills passed or did not pass in your simulation.
- What “war powers” (both explicit and implied) does the Constitution give to the president? To Congress? Be specific, citing the exact language. How might some of this language be viewed as ambiguous (especially for limited military intervention) and responsible for disagreements between the president and Congress in the realm of war powers? How did these disagreements play out in your simulation? Be specific, citing presidential actions, legislation, and arguments as relevant.
- In the arena of foreign policy, the president has historically been the dominant actor, with Congress often simply deferring to presidential wishes. What are the domestic political, practical, and national security related reasons why Congress would routinely defer to the president? What examples from your simulation illustrate these dynamics? Evaluate the validity of these reasons: which ones (if any) justify presidential dominance, and which ones (if any) don’t?
- In your simulation, what methods did interest groups use to influence Congress, the executive branch, and the general public? How effective were these efforts? Did their effectiveness depend on the institution targeted (e.g., executive agencies vs. Congress) and the party of the officials targeted (Democrat vs. Republican)? If so, explain why.
- What Constitutionally based checks and balances did you observe between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government in this simulation? For example, were there cases in which one actor (e.g., the president) was trying to accomplish something but was blocked by another actor due to these institutional rules? What checks and balances seemed to be particularly important in shaping outcomes in your simulation? Did any of these seem too strong or weak? If so, what are the implications for the U.S. system of government?
- Observers often complain about “gridlock” in Washington: the inability of different parties, and different branches of government, to work together and make progress on key national priorities. If you experienced gridlock in your simulation, analyze its causes in detail. If you gridlock was minimal, explain what factors led to agreement despite structural conditions favoring gridlock. What are the implications for the real world?



- In your simulation, how much effort, time, and resources did the president and members of Congress devote to their reelection campaigns? What kinds of strategies did they use to try to increase their approval ratings and win reelection? What factors seemed particularly important in driving gains and losses in candidates' approval ratings? Which of these factors were within their control or beyond their control?
- What kinds of news stories were considered "high impact" and "low impact" in your simulation, in terms of the Level (from 1 to 5) attached to them? (If you were not in the news media, you may need to talk to students who played these roles). Is this an accurate reflection of news in the real world, and if so, why do you think the news media favors these types of stories? What tradeoffs were there between accuracy and speed of publishing among media players in your simulation? How did the media players deal with this tension? (Again, speak with students who played these roles if the answers are not apparent to you).
- Describe the relationship between the media and the government in your simulation. What kinds of interactions, negotiations, and agreements occurred? (You may need to speak with students who played these roles to answer these questions). What benefits did each side (media and government) get out of this relationship? Assuming this happens in the real world, what are the pros and cons of these sorts of relationships?
- In what ways can the news media shape the national debate and affect public approval of specific political leaders and policies? Think about both (a) the media's decisions regarding *what* topics/events to cover and (b) the media's decisions regarding *how* to cover these topics. Give specific examples from your simulation of ways the news media influenced political outcomes or failed to do so.
- When members of the news media are considering whether or not to publish classified (or otherwise sensitive) information, what dilemmas do they face in terms of 1. national security, 2. law/ethics, and 3. the requirements of democracy? If you were the editor of a major newspaper, how would you navigate these dilemmas and what would be your approach to publishing classified or sensitive information?
- In your simulation, did the executive branch behave as a unitary rational actor, or did you find organizational interests and bureaucratic politics affecting decisions? (If you were not a member of the executive branch, you may need to speak with students who were playing these roles to get their insights). Give specific examples from the simulation to support your claims.
- What role are military and civilian officials expected to play in a democracy with healthy civil-military relations? Think about lines of authority and the autonomy or subservience of various actors. How well did the civilian and military players in your simulation approximate this model? Explain why, using specific examples.



- Compare the role played (or not played) by Congress in authorizing military action in three of these historical cases: Korea (1950), Vietnam (1964), Grenada (1983), Persian Gulf War (1991), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011). Now describe how the role played by Congress in your simulation compares and contrasts with your chosen historical cases.
- What did the 1973 War Powers Resolution say? What problem do you think it was intended to remedy? In your simulation, how well did the president adhere to the requirements of the War Powers Resolution? Be specific. Why did the president follow or defy these restrictions, and what are the implications for the real world?
- Rigid organizational routines, or standard operating procedures (SOPs) are sometimes inappropriate to the situation and can therefore result in unintended consequences. What examples of military routines or SOPs were evident in this simulation, and how did they lead to unintended consequences? (You may need to talk to students who played the roles of military officials to answer these questions).
- What is the difference between preemption and preventive war? Is one of these more defensible than the other in terms of ethics and international law? Explain your reasoning. In your simulation, was the potential military action against ISIS best described as preemption or preventive war, and why? Why might the line between the two not always be clear?
- In your simulation, what challenges did you face when seeking to evaluate intelligence? Specifically, how complete, certain, and consistent were the reports you received, and did you find it difficult to separate “signal” from “noise”? Give specific examples to support your arguments. (You may need to speak with students assigned to intelligence roles to answer this question). What incentives did intelligence officials have to either (a) warn policymakers about potential threats or (b) wait to warn policymakers until further information was available?
- What is the difference between an executive order and a presidential directive? In your simulation, were you aware of any presidential directives? (If not, ask the president about these). What are the pros and cons of the president relying on presidential directives to make policy in the realm of national security?
- Explain the Just War Theory principles of Just Cause, Discrimination, and Proportionality. How was each principle relevant to the events of your simulation involving military action against the ISIS base? Do you think the decision-makers in your simulation appropriately adhered to these guidelines in making decisions? Why or why not?

