

**American Politics Exams
Spring 2004**

Student ID _____

Direction: Do not print your name on the examination. For identification, please use your student ID number in the space indicated above and on your written exam. In all your answers, be sure to cite and discuss relevant literature. This is an in-class closed book exam.

M.A. Major: 4 questions (at least one from each section), 6 hours.

M.A. Minor: 3 three (one from each section), 4 hours.

Ph.D. Major: 5 questions (at least one from each section and no more than two from any section), 8 hours.

Ph.D. Minor: 4 questions (at least one from each section), 6 hours.

I. Political Institutions

1. The American political system of national institutions is posited on the tripartite divisions or separations of powers among the branched of government. Discuss the formal and the practical dimensions of this concept in connection with any two of the three branches of government, outline the formal separation as well as the overlap in policymaking between the branches of government that you analyze.

2. A major debate in recent years has centered on the health of political party organizations in the United States. Some scholars have argued that parties have been weakening and are in decline, while others argue that parties are gaining in strength and are evolving into a different type of party system. Discuss the parameters of this debate and provide a basis for its resolution.

3. A persisting question in studies of representation is the extent to which legislators faithfully represent the policy preferences of constituents. Some, especially economics, have contended that a significant amount of

"cheating" or "shirking" (i.e., not following voter preferences, rational ignorance) exists in representational relationships. Others, mostly political scientists, have sought evidence that some measure of constituency influence is evident in legislator's behavior. Describe the major arguments surrounding these positions, and then assess the empirical evidence of the responsiveness of legislators to their constituents' policy preferences.

II. Political Process and Behavior

1. American citizens are often said to lack basic political knowledge. Relatively few individuals, for example, appear to know who William Rehnquist, Bill Frist, and Tom Daschle are; many apparently do not even know the name of the current Vice-President. Given such findings, one might argue that citizens on the whole are simply unable to vote effectively during elections. Would you agree with this interpretation? Why, or why not?

2. Some political commentators have suggested that current trends in political participation may threaten American democracy. What are the trends in political participation over the last century? Compare and contrast explanations that have been given of Americans' aggregate, political-activity levels. Then discuss explanation of individual-level, political participation and differences between participation in presidential, congressional and primary elections. Finally, how does voting participation in the United States compare to other democratic countries and what are the sources of the differences?

3. Compare and contrast the forces affecting the decisional behavior of U.S. Supreme Court justices with the forces affecting the decisional behavior of members of the U.S. Congress. As you compose your answer, be sure to make mention of specific articles and/or books.

III. Democratic Theory

1. Many years ago, E.E. Schattschneider wrote that "political parties created modern democracy, and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political

parties." Critique Schattscheider's assessment. Is it possible to conceive of a well-functioning democratic system with political parties or is such a scenario truly "unthinkable?"

2. Despite good intentions, the task of exporting American democracy to other parts of the world has been anything but a sterling success. Why do democratic institutions have a difficult time surviving in some countries according to democratic theorists such as Robert Dahl (A Preface to Democratic Theory) and Buchanan and Tullock (The Calculus of Consent?).

3. Over the last decade, there has been an explosion of research on the nature and causes of racial attitudes in the United States. Until this recent growth in explanations, V.O. Key's theory of racial threat tended to predominate as the major explanation of racial discrimination and attitudes. Explain Key's theory of racial attitudes and contrast it with recent research in this area. What has led to the growth of explanations in this area?