

Political Behavior and Institutions
Spring 2010

Directions:

- Please put your Student ID number at the top of each page of your examination. **DO NOT** write your name anywhere on the examination
- Number your pages consecutively for the entire examination.
- Submit a cover page with your responses that lists the following: ID number, type of exam completed (e.g. MA major, MA minor, PhD major, PhD minor) and examination area. Please list the semester the examination is taken as well.
- Cite sources throughout your essay, where appropriate, using standard format and provide a single bibliography that includes all the materials used in preparing your answers.
- Clearly label each answer with the number you are answering.
- Budget your time carefully, including time to think and organize while preparing and writing your answers. Focus on preparing coherent, well-organized essays that not only demonstrate your mastery of the literature, but also indicate how the literature expands our collective knowledge.
- Students are expected to work independently on this examination and not discuss the essay items and responses with others. Any questions about exam procedures should be directed to the convener.

MA Minors—answer 3 questions from at least 2 sections.

MA Majors—answer 4 questions from at least 2 sections.

I. Political Institutions

1. Duverger's Law holds that in winner-take-all systems like the United States, a two-party system should emerge. In the U.S. today, however, there are dozens of "third" parties competing for power and influence. Is this a failure of Duverger's Law? In general, what factors bring about and sustain "third" parties in the American context? Do such minor parties facilitate representation in any important ways?
2. Why are legislative institutions organized hierarchically, like firms, rather than highly decentralized, like markets? Be specific and provide empirical evidence where possible?
3. A noted scholar of public administration, Norton Long, famously noted that the unresolved question of American government was "who is boss?" Discuss the implications of Long's observation for the status of the US administrative state and the relationships it has with the presidency and with Congress. A Swedish observer notes, in this regard, that in Sweden bureaucrats have been granted considerable authority over welfare policy. Is that similarly so in the U.S.? Why? Or why not? And, what does Long's comment suggest about that?

II. Political Process and Behavior

1. Political polarization is a much-discussed phenomenon in contemporary American politics. First, what is the evidence for this polarization? Second, what are the various explanations for it? Third, to what extent is it an elite-based phenomenon or not? What are the controversies here? Fourth, to what extent are there political and policy consequences from polarization? And, fifth, does party-based polarization necessarily mean that cleavages are more intense or divisive than when the party-based lines of political conflict are less crystallized?
2. A primary objective of a science of politics is to systematically explain the decisional behavior of political actors. Select 1 of the following political actors (the individual voter, the president, a member of the U.S. House, a U.S. Supreme Court justice) and design a model of the decisional behavior of that actor. As you specify your model, be sure (1) to identify your phenomenon of interest; (2) clearly and completely articulate your explanatory model's theoretical perspective; and (3) fully discuss each of the concepts you have chosen to include - i.e., how each concept is derived from your theoretical perspective, what each concept will contribute to the explanation of your dependent variable, and how each of the independent variables are related to one another. Obviously, you will want to draw on appropriate literature as you derive your model.

3. After presidential elections journalists often engage in interpretations of elections outcomes that emphasize shifts of the electorate to the left/liberal or right/conservative side of the ideological continuum. Political scientists tend to be more cautious about ascribing ideological motives to voting shifts among the mass public. Describe the research that surrounds the question of ideological and issue voting among the public including the major questions examined, the controversies that surround this topic, and the major findings in this area.

III. Democratic Theory

1. Madison warned of majority tyranny and, on paper, our Government is subject to control by majorities everywhere but Dahl (Preface to Democratic Theory) and others—for example, Lowi (The End of Liberalism), Olson (The Logic of Collective Action), Stigler (“The Theory of Economic Regulation”)—have raised counterarguments. Describe the arguments for why the U. S. is more subject to minority rather than majority rule. Now, summarize the empirical findings relating to the influence of the “median voters” preferences—i.e., the median voter as representative of the preferences of the majority.
2. Classic theories of the economic marketplace presume that individuals have perfect information regarding their choices. Yet, most studies of the ability of mass publics to comprehend actions taken by political decision makers reveal strong limitations regarding cognitive understandings. In view of this, to what extent -- if at all -- can it be said that voters are able to make rational choices? Are there cognitive shortcuts that voters might be able to take that allow for rational -- if not perfectly informed -- decisions? Or is there, alternatively, little or no capacity to hold the decision makers accountable?
3. Some theorists have argued that political parties are a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for a functioning democracy. Write an essay in which you develop a theoretical basis for accepting or rejecting this argument.