

Political Behavior & Institutions
Spring 2011

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) and examination area, as well as the semester in which you are taking the exam.
- 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 of question you are answering.
- Budget your time carefully, including time to think and organize while preparing and writing the 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 Majors – please answer four questions, at least one from each section.

Section 1 – Theory

1. Madison warned of the tyranny of the majority. In theory, American government is subject to control of majorities. However, Dahl (*A Preface to Democratic Theory*), Olson, (*The Logic of Collective Action*) and Stigler (*The Theory of Economic Regulation*) all contest this supposition and have constructed counterarguments to majority rule. 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. Consider the following puzzle: (i) a number of political scientists (see Poole, Rosenthal & McCarty; Abramowitz; Levendusky; and others) have clearly shown the development of a very high level of political polarization by party, especially amongst those who are the most politically attentive and amongst the political elite; (ii) yet, major legislation, according to Mayhew, occurs during times when the political institutions are divided by party as much as when they are unified; (iii) and, furthermore, some analysts (see Cameron; Epstein and O’Halloran; and Brady and Volden) suggest that inter-chamber differences in Congress are more relevant than party-based differences. Your “mission impossible” assignment is to explain how all three of these conditions might cohere from the standpoint of a theoretically-based, not ad hoc, explanation of how American politics works.
3. The populist Tea Party movement has attracted a great deal of attention in the media and is credited with energizing 2010 election voters to support Republican candidates, giving the Republicans greater control of the House of Representatives and greater dominance in state governments as well. In a well-organized essay comparing the Tea Party to other populist movements in American politics, (1) choose two such movements and describe their policy positions and political activity, and (2) compare and contrast those two movements with the Tea Party.
4. Though the American political system is often described as “democratic”, there are significant countermajoritarian elements affecting its operation. Pick any one of the national political institutions (i.e., the Presidency, Congress, or the federal judiciary) and discuss both its majoritarian and countermajoritarian aspects. Is the design and operation of the institution you have selected justifiable under the principles of democratic theory? In your answer, be sure to fully explicate the case, both for and against, the institution’s design and performance.

Section 2 – Political Behavior

5. There are a long list of heuristics that political scientists have devised to explain how citizens manage to operate within the political system with very low information and a lack of ideology.

What are these heuristics? How successfully are they in helping the public deal rationally with politics? What criticisms have been made about the use of heuristics? How has Converse contributed to this discussion? What major questions remain unresolved in regard to the role of heuristics?

6. The American citizen has frequently been noted for lacking political information. Consequently, voter ignorance is a core concept in economic (e.g., Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*) and political analysis. Discuss voter awareness of political issues, impediments to that awareness, the extent to which voters' decisions seem to be informed or uninformed with respect to their choices of candidates, and the effects of voter ignorance on the influence of interest groups on policy-making.
7. In discussing patterns in voting behavior over time, it has been popular to use the concept of realignments to explain significant changes in voting patterns. Recently, however, David Mayhew has written a significant critique of these theories. Explain the most important literature employing the realignment concept, and the major critiques of those explanations. Evaluate the effectiveness of the realignment theories in explaining voting patterns over time.
8. A primary objective of a science of politics is to explain the decisional behavior of political actors. Select one of the following political actors – the individual voter, the president, a member of Congress, or 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. You should draw on appropriate literature as you derive your model.

Section 3 – Political Institutions

9. As you know, Egypt has recently experienced mass protest against its entrenched political establishment. Protestors wanted the President, Hosni Mubarak, to step down so that the regime could be replaced with one that is more democratic. The editor of *Democracy Review*, Hala Mustaf, claims that Egypt needs a “new constitution and complete changes in the whole political scene,” noting, in his view, that the Mubarak regime lacked representative legitimacy. Let us assume that a new constitution must establish a new electoral system. As a political scientist, you have been called upon to create a new electoral system to address the concerns of pro-democracy Egyptians. In doing so, (1) Explain the structure and mechanics of the electoral system you have designed, and (2) Provide a democratic justification for the system you are putting in place.

10. Some observers argue that the U.S. presidency has become “imperial” and imperious. Others, however, see the presidency as being “imperiled”. Provide evidence and arguments for each assertion. How do you balance these different arguments, i.e., where do you stand? Explain your position carefully.
11. Interest groups have been historically heralded by pluralists such as Truman and Polsby as beneficial to society. On the other hand, economists such as Stigler, Buchanan, Tullock, Peltzman, Olson, Downs and Becker along with some political scientists such as Lowi and jurists such as Posner to name a few, are far more skeptical of the benefits of groups in American politics. Briefly describe these different arguments and the major theories used to characterize the role of interest groups in American politics. Now, summarize the insights these interest-group theories provide about the operations of the *legislative process*, *Supreme Court*, and the *federal bureaucracy*. That is, what do these theories reveal about our major institutions?
12. Principal-agent theories of accountability and responsiveness imply a clear chain of command between the principal and agent. Explain the connection (or disjunction) between principal-agent theory and the U.S. system of separated powers. How is this manifested in the relationship between the federal bureaucracy and the political executive (the White House and its political appointees in the agencies), the Congress, and the courts? To what extent does competition between the political and judicial overseers narrow or widen bureaucratic discretion? To what extent does bureaucratic discretion work in favor of the political executive? To what extent does legal constraint on bureaucratic discretion work in favor of the legislative branch? To what extent does competition between the political institutions affect managerial efficiency in the bureaucracy? How and why? Please be sure to cite relevant literatures.