American Politics Examination
FALL 2005

Student ID#

Please circle the type of examination you are taking:

M.A. Minor: 3 questions from 2 sections, 4 hours
M.A. Major: 4 questions from 2 sections, 6 hours
Ph.D. Minor: 4 questions, but you must answer a question from each of the 3 sections, 6 hours
Ph.D. Major: 5 questions, but you must answer a question from each of the 3 sections, 8 hours

Directions

1. Number your pages consecutively throughout the entire examination.

2. Cite relevant sources (name of author or authors and title of article or book will suffice, but year alone will not) throughout your essay.

3. Clearly label each essay with the number of the question you are answering.

4. Place your student id at the top of each page of your examination.

5. Remember to circle the type of examination you are taking (at the top of this page).

6. Your essay will be judged on your ability to integrate relevant literature into your essay and your skill in addressing the substance of the questions. When citing literature, be sure to show how that literature relates to the problem or issue you are analyzing.

7. Do not print your name on this examination; please, instead, write your student identification number in the space indicated above on the written exam.
A. Political Institutions

1. Over the last few decades, we have experienced distinct periods of "divided government," where one party controls one branch, and the other party controls the other. In what ways, if any, do policy outcomes differ under divided and unified government, and why or why not?

2. Paradigms guide the study of politics, and in particular, the study of political structures and institutions. Select one institution from the following political structures—interest groups, the presidency, bureaucracy, political parties, Congress, or the Supreme Court—and describe: (1) the major paradigms that have structured research in the area; (2) the important questions that have guided the paradigms over time; (3) the important controversies that have evolved; (4) significant concepts and theories within the paradigms; and (5) anomalies (departures from expected findings) that appear in some of the empirical research done in this area.

3. The observation and dedication of the "Rochester School", led by the late William Riker, to the notion that institutions structure political choices, have resulted in widespread interest in the ability of institutions to shape political outcomes. Assess the impact of this fascination with political institutions in the formation of theories and concepts; the types of questions addressed, the methodologies employed; the controversies that have emerged; and the findings that have resulted.

4. Much has been written about "the decline of political parties". What empirical evidence is there that the importance of political parties has diminished? What arguments and data have been offered to refute this proposition? What factors are viewed as underlying the decline of political parties?

5. It often goes unchallenged to say that the U.S. Congress is a representative institution, but in some regards—that is, by some standards—it isn't very representative. Evaluate the extent to which Congress is "representative" and "unrepresentative" of the American populace. Describe the factors and forces promoting and inhibiting representation in the U.S. Congress. Now, compare and contrast the U.S. Congress to the representativeness of another legislature or parliament.

B. Political Behavior

6. Judicial scholars have used a variety of approaches to analyze judicial decision-making (e.g., attitudinal, small group, role theory attributes,
rational choice). Compare and contrast any 2 of them in terms of their core methodological assumptions, and their strengths and weaknesses.

7. What forces should be included in a general model explaining legislative roll-call voting? Be sure to discuss the theoretical and/or conceptual relevance of each of your variables and how they interrelate (a causal diagram might be useful). Finally, how might subnational politics and political systems (states, cities, etc) affect your voting model?

8. Voting behavior has been a central area of study in American politics. It is an area rich in theory and concepts. A central work to the study of voting behavior is, of course, The American Voter. Describe the important theories and concepts associated with this work and how they have shaped latter research. What controversies have resulted, challenging the central propositions of The American Voter? Now, assess the impact of this book on scholarship in the area. Describe the most important alternative theory or theories to The American Voter and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

9. The American citizen has been “attacked” so often for his or her lack of information that voter ignorance has become something of a mainstay in economic (see, for instance, Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy) and political argument and analysis. Discuss voter awareness of political issues, impediments to that awareness—such as rational ignorance—the extent to which voters’ decisions seem to be informed or uninformed with respect to candidate choices, and the effects of voter ignorance on the policy-making process.

10. A major issue in the study of American politics is the effect of the mass media on political attitudes, whether the issue is candidate choice, support for public policies, or presidential initiatives. The question of the effects of the mass media has produced considerable controversy. Critically evaluate findings used to support one position—say, that the media has a pronounced effect on political opinions—against the other, such as the media has no significant effect. If you were to design a study to test for the effects of the mass media, how would you go about it—that is, what would your research design look like and why?

11. Although much of the elite political discourse in this country is couched in terms of a liberal-conservative ideological continuum, many researchers have questioned the value of trying to account for mass attitudes and behaviors by relying on the concept of ideology. To what extent do citizens organize their beliefs along a liberal-conservative continuum? In what other ways are belief systems organized, or perhaps, there is no organization to mass belief systems? Is the concept of ideology useful in the study of mass behavior? Why or why not? Describe the various
controversies over the ideological nature of the mass public. Can you envision other means through which voters could make some sense of politics in the absence of ideological thinking on the part of citizens? Explain.

12. Select any one area in the study of political behavior from the following topic areas—voting behavior, public opinion formation, mass media, and political participation—and (1) describe the major questions and paradigms that govern this area of study, or that have done so in the past; (2) the major concepts and theories underlying inquiry in this area; (3) the central controversies that have arisen over time; and (4) anomalies that have arisen in the empirical research done in this area.

C. Democratic Theory

13. While demonstrably a democracy, elements of countermajoritarian rule infect the American political system. Describe any three of these elements of countermajoritarian rule, and their impact on the policy process, the behavior of voters, and those seeking to influence government.

14. Over 50 years ago, a team of Political Scientists led by E.E. Schattschneider called for "more responsible" political parties. What are the characteristics of a responsible party system, and how and why does the U.S. party system depart from this "model"? What are the benefits and costs associated with a "responsible party government" system?

15. There are at least two major problems that confront most political systems. First, how to balance the equality of vote with the protection of minority rights, since under equality, majorities rule and minorities rights may be suppressed, but when minorities rule, such as oligarchies, majorities are frequently disadvantaged. Second, what should be "private" (in the realm of individual action) and what should be public (within the purview of government and collective rather than individual choice). What solutions could you envision to these twin problems: protecting the rights of minorities, such as farmers and fishermen as well as social groups in society, while ensuring majorities rule, and determining what should be in the public realm and what in the private?

16. The assumption of rationality has led to some rather perverse predictions and explanations about the behavior of voters and politicians, many of which have nonetheless been found to have empirical support. Describe some of the ways that the rational behavior of politicians, political parties, voters, and interest groups result in outcomes detrimental to normative views of democracy.
American Politics Examination
Spring 2005

Student ID#________________

Directions

1. Number your pages consecutively.

2. In each essay, be sure to cite the relevant literature using the standard format—dates are unnecessary, but titles of articles and books are essential and should be noted.

3. Clearly indicate the number of the question that you are answering in the first line of your answer.

4. Your student ID number should appear at the top of each page of your examination; your name should not appear anywhere in your examination.

5. The first page of your examination should contain the following information: (1) ID number, (2) field or area (i.e., American), and (3) type of examination (i.e., MA major, MA minor, Ph. D major, Ph. D minor).

6. Emphasize organization in presenting and developing your ideas, and coherence and logic in your answers.

7. Think, think, think.

8. Type of examination, number of questions, and time allowed:
   
   MA Minor = 3 questions from 2 sections, 4 hours.
   
   MA Major = 4 questions from 2 sections, 6 hours
   
   Ph. D Minor = 4 questions (you must answer a question from each of the 3 sections), 6 hours.
   
   Ph. D Major = 5 questions (you must answer a question from each of the 3 sections), 8 hours.

9. Good luck!
A. Political Institutions

1. Many scholars have suggested that political parties are essential for a smooth running democracy. What functions do political parties serve within a democracy? Describe the controversies over the significance of political parties in the American political system. How would policy outcomes and political processes differ in the American political system, if political parties were absent? Discuss concepts, theories, and relevant empirical research in formulating your answers.

2. Paradigms guide the study of politics, and in particular, the study of political structures and institutions. Select one institution from the following political structures—interest groups, the presidency, bureaucracy, political parties, Congress, or the Supreme Court—and describe: (1) the major paradigms that have structured research in the area; (2) the important questions that have guided the paradigms over time; (3) the important controversies that have evolved; (4) significant concepts and theories within the paradigms; and (5) anomalies (departures from expected findings) that appear in some of the empirical research done in this area.

3. Historically, political scientists have had a fascination with the actual structure or formal organization of political institutions. But, as paradigm changes would have it, a shift occurred with the emergence of the behavioral revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, so to speak. Now, there seems to be, once again, a return to the study of the formal organizational nature of political institutions, such as the “new institutionalism” in the study of legislative institutions. Why has this change transpired, and what impact has it had on how and what political scientists now study, and the questions they ask?

B. Political Behavior

4. Voting behavior has been a central area of study in American politics. It is an area rich in theory and concepts. Drawing upon both—that is, theories and concepts—develop a model to explain voting behavior. Explain (1) the logic underlying each factor or variable in your model, (2) empirical references (to the literature) that supports its—the variable’s—inclusion in the model, (3) and how the variables relate to one another causally.

5. The American citizen has been “attacked” so often for his or her lack of information that voter ignorance has become something of a mainstay in
economic (see, for instance, Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy) and political argument and analysis. Discuss voter awareness of political issues, impediments to that awareness—such as rational ignorance—the extent to which voters’ decisions seem to be informed or uninformed with respect to candidate choices, and the effects of voter ignorance on the policy-making process.

6. A major issue in the study of American politics is the effect of the mass media on political attitudes, whether it be candidate choice, support for public policies, or presidential initiatives. The question of the effects of the mass media has produced considerable controversy. Describe the various positions on this question, the research and findings used to support one position—say, that the media has a pronounced effect on political opinions—against the other, such as the media has no significant effect. If you were to design a study to test for the effects of the mass media, how would you go about it—that is, what would your research design look like and why?

7. Although much of the discourse on the part of political elites is couched in terms of liberalism and conservatism, many social scientists have questioned the use of ideology in trying to account for mass attitudes and behavior. Is the concept useful in the study of mass behavior? Why or why not? Describe the various controversies over the ideological nature of the mass public. Can you envision other means through which voters could make some sense of politics in the absence of ideological thinking on the part of citizens? Explain.

8. Select any one area in the study of political behavior from the following topic areas—voting behavior, public opinion formation, mass media, and political participation—and (1) describe the major questions and paradigms that govern this area of study, or that have done so in the past; (2) the major concepts and theories underlying inquiry in this area; (3) the central controversies that have arisen over time; and (4) anomalies that have arisen in the empirical research done in this area.

C. Democratic Theory

9. While demonstrably a democracy, elements of countermajoritarian rule infect the American political system. Describe any three of these elements of countermajoritarian rule, and their impact on the policy process, the behavior of voters, and those seeking to influence government.

10. The American electoral system reinforces the two-party system. Why? Discuss the democratic principles promoted and impeded by the American political system. Now design an alternative political system and explain
how it would remedy what you see as deficiencies in the American political system.

11. A major problem for political systems is how to balance the equality of vote with the protection of minority rights, since under equality, majorities rule and minorities rights can be suppressed; alternatively, when minorities rule, such as oligarchies, majorities are frequently disadvantaged. How does the American political system deal with this problem of protecting the rights of minorities, such as farmers and fisherman as well as social groups in society, while ensuring majorities rule (or does it)?

12. The assumption of rationality has led to some rather perverse predictions and explanations about the behavior of voters and politicians, many of which have nonetheless been found to have empirical support. Describe some of the ways that the rational behavior of politicians, political parties, voters, and interest groups result in outcomes detrimental to normative views of democracy. Be sure to cite the relevant literature.