Political Behavior and Institutions
Fall 07

Directions:

• Please put your NEW 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. Critics of presidential candidate selection rules within the Democratic and Republican parties often charge that the nomination reforms enacted in the 1970s (following the Democrats' disastrous 1968 convention) hurt the two major parties. Drawing as fully as possible on the research literature in political science, assess this claim. How have these nomination reforms affected the party system? Is there evidence that political parties are now weaker as a result of the post-68 reforms?

2. Design a model of the decisional behavior of judges. As you specify your model, be sure (1) to clearly and completely articulate its theoretical perspective, and (2) 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. Finally, is your proposed model likely to be properly specified for all levels of the judiciary in the United States? Why or why not? You will of course make abundant use of the appropriate literature in your answer.

3. Much of the judicial decision making literature focuses on the effects of forces internal to the courts themselves. For example, studies look at the effects of judicial attitudes on the votes of individual justices or judges or at the effects of small group forces on a court's decisional outputs. But certainly forces external to the court have a bearing on the decisional behavior of courts as institutions or the individuals sitting on the bench. Two such forces are public opinion and competing political institutions. Fully describe and discuss the nature of these forces' effect. Can you envision a way in which they are interrelated? In your essay, be sure to comment on the research literature's conclusions concerning these forces, paying particular attention to the methodological strengths and weaknesses associated with these findings.

II. Political Process and Behavior

1. Americans appear to know very little about political processes and issues. Many commentators bemoan this fact; some, such as Jay Leno, laugh about it. Are levels of information about politics within the U.S. mass public truly that low? If so, what accounts for these gaps in public understanding? In general, are American citizens knowledgeable enough about government to hold leaders accountable and shape the course of policymaking? Or is this a hopeless cause?

2. 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?

3. Corruption in politics is often viewed as one of the important, but pernicious, consequences of self-interest in politics. Even so, there are ways in which this scourge on democracy can be controlled, such as through ethics laws and elections, to mention just two; yet, there remains significant debate about the effectiveness of many of these mechanisms of control.

Develop an analytic essay that describes several ways in which the illegal or quasi-legal behavior of politicians is constrained, and then evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques. Be sure to refer the extant literature and empirical data where possible.

III. Democratic Theory

1. Much of the research on political institutions and behavior assumes that actors behave rationally. In general, what are the core assumptions of the ‘rational actor’ model? In practice, it is not difficult to encounter actors in politics (e.g., citizens, heads of state, lawmakers) who are under-informed, short-sighted, misguided, and perhaps even delusional. Does this call into question the usefulness of the ‘rational actor model’ in political science? Why, or why not?

2. A common mantra in economic and rational-choice studies of politics is the relevance of the gains arrived at through exchanges between and among politicians, or simply, “gains from exchange,” in explaining political institutions and the behavior of those within. Such “gains” are viewed as the driving force behind the construction of constitutions, the functioning of legislatures, the formation of governments in parliamentary democracies, the relationships between politicians and special interests, and the like.

Develop a general, well-structured, essay that describes several ways in which cooperation in politics occurs because of the gains obtained, and the exact nature of the exchanges among cooperating parties, for instance, campaign contributions by special interests in return for legislator assistance. Substantive literature should be incorporated into your essay to support your arguments about the ability of the exchanges to induce cooperation, and the nature of the exchanges themselves.

3. The media frequently portray government as “in the hands of special interests,” but groups are important to democracies. In what ways do groups benefit democracies; now, assess their negative influence empirically. You will, of course, draw upon the relevant literature to support your answer.
Directions:

- Please put your NEW 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

MA Minors – 3 questions from at least 2 sections

MA Majors – 4 questions from at least 2 sections
A. Political Institutions

1. 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) identify the important questions that have guided the paradigms over time; (3) 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.

2. Third parties have always been a part of American politics, but typically they are just minor players in elections and governance. In general, why are third parties in the United States so weak? In spite of their weaknesses, do such parties contribute to political representation in any significant or meaningful ways?

3. Realignment theory has been used in American politics to characterize the nature of the party coalitions in the electorate and the electoral consequences of that state of affairs. Yet recently realignment theory has been criticized as a theory that ought to disappear because of its failure to help us understand and predict electoral politics. Trace the development of realignment theory and discuss the nature of the criticisms of the theory.

B. Political Behavior

1. 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.

2. Scholars have long debated the media’s effect on citizens’ attitudes and behavior. Describe and explain the three models of media effects: the hypodermic model, the minimal effects model, and the subtle effects model. Assess the evidence for each model and analyze the influence of different research designs on our understanding of media effects.

3. Much has been made in recent years of the decline in “social capital.” Assess the evidence for this thesis. Has there been a significant drop in “social capital”? If so, how might this decrease affect policy-making processes in the United States?
C. Democratic Theory

1. 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 fisherman, 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?

2. Fully describe the role of the U.S. Supreme Court – a non-elected, life-tenured institution – in our democratic system. Is the design and operation of the Court 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.

3. In democracies all around the world, individuals go to the polls to elect leaders. In theory, citizens are expected to make reasonable decisions about candidates and policies. But is it even "rational" to turn out to vote? Explain.