Political Behavior and Institutions  
Spring 08  

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. One of the dominant assumptions in political analysis is that politicians are motivated by the desire to be reelected. Critically analyze the value of the reelection motivation by discussing its benefits and limitations with respect to other assumptions for the study of political behavior and institutions. In addition, assess the effects of such motivations on the organization of political institutions, the content of public policies, and the behavior of politicians. Finally, identify important paradoxes or anomalies that appear to surface in the use of this paradigm.

2. Traditionally, judicial scholars have focused their attention on the U.S. Supreme Court. What are the strengths and weaknesses this "upper court bias" has produced with respect to our understanding of the decisional behavior of judges?

3. How important is the role of political party in the U.S.? Pick any three of the dimensions below in which to discuss the role of party and alternative explanations:
   a) the passage of major legislation
   b) political attitudes among elites and party identifiers
   c) the ability of the president to move his legislative agenda
   d) the basis of members' decision-making in Congress
   e) changes in the sources of power within the chambers of Congress from the 1950s and 1960s to the present

II. Political Process and Behavior

1. 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 citizens' attitudes by relying on the concept of ideology. (a) To what extent do citizens organize their attitudes along a liberal-conservative continuum? Describe the various controversies in the research regarding whether citizens are ideological. (b) Some scholars have concluded that it is more fruitful to study other factors (besides ideology) that influence how citizens organize their attitudes. Discuss the research on other factors that might shape citizens' attitudes.

2. Critically assess the effectiveness of various means (for instance, elections, ethics statutes and reforms) through which voters exercise influence or control over elected politicians at all levels of government.
The American electoral process is labeled a majoritarian system, which is characterized by single-member district, plurality elections. However, democracies in other parts of the world have structured their electoral contests in very different ways. In a well-organized essay, fully describe the operation of one of those very different electoral systems, compare its possible effects on election outcomes and party behavior in government with that of the U.S., and make the case to retain or change the American electoral system in light of your analysis.

III. Democratic Theory

1. Some scholars argue that political knowledge is a “democratic basis.” In other words, democracies cannot flourish if citizens are not knowledgeable about politics. Other scholars argue that democracies can function just fine without particularly well-informed citizens. Begin your essay by elaborating on these two theoretical perspectives. Next, review the empirical literature on citizen knowledge by addressing more, if not all, of the following questions: Are citizens knowledgeable? How do political scientists conceptualize and measure political knowledge? What are some critiques of the way in which political scientists often conceptualize and measure political knowledge? Which citizens are more likely to be knowledgeable and why? How does the political context or the information environment influence levels of political knowledge? What are the consequences of political knowledge (or the lack of political knowledge)?

2. Notions of pluralism dot most characterizations of American politics, in one way or another. Indeed, this paradigm seems ingrained in many of our textbook-treatments of politics. Recently, economists have called attention to many fallacies in pluralistic thought. For instance, the rent-seeking literature certainly does not see pluralism as benign as most pluralistic scholars, calling attention, instead, to the perversion to public policy induced by special interests. First, describe the evolution of pluralistic thinking and the contributions of pluralistic thinkers (e.g., Polsby) to our understanding of politics; then provide a thorough critique of the pluralistic approach to politics.

3. According to traditional “Madisonianism,” the U.S. Constitution ensures the rights of minorities through an elaborate system of checks and balances. Critics of the structural design argue that this is not the case. Some assert that the checks and balances system is misfiring (e.g., Dahl 1957), while others have gone so far as to suggest that Madisonianism actually retards minority policy-making power (e.g., Eberlidge 1991). Compare and contrast this debate. To what degree have the formal constitutional arrangements been successful in protecting minority rights?