Political Behavior and Institutions  
Fall 2009  

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. 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. Interest groups have been historically heralded by pluralists as beneficial to society. How so? On the other hand, economists, such as Stigler, Buchanan, Tullock, Peltzman, Olson, Posner, Downs, and Becker to name a few, are far more skeptical of the benefits of groups in American politics. Briefly describe the major theories used by economists to characterize the role of interest groups in American politics. Now, describe what insights these interest-group theories provide about the operations of Congress, legislative process, Supreme Court, and the federal bureaucracy. That is, what “things” do these theories reveal about our major political institutions?

2. At least since E.E. Schattscheider's classic writings in the 1940s, political parties have been thought to be essential for democratic inclusion and governance. Much research has been done to assess the strength of the U.S. party system. Critique this literature. Are political parties today weaker than in Schattschneider's day?

3. What concepts should be included in a model explaining the decisional behavior of judges? As you specify your model, be sure to fully discuss each of the concepts you have chosen to include - i.e., 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 judiciary in the United States? Why or why not? You will of course make abundant use of the appropriate literature in your answer.

II. Political Process and Behavior

1. Recent declines in Barack Obama’s popularity have brought the inevitable ad hoc explanations of such declines. How do political scientists explain trends in presidential popularity?

2. 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.
3. Some scholars argue that political knowledge is a "democratic basic." 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 most, 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)?

III. Democratic Theory

1. There are numerous dilemmas in the economic study of consumers and producers that have counterparts in politics—principal-agent problems (for example, shirking), bargaining problems (for example, reneging on agreements, costs of [vote] trading), asymmetries in information (e.g., rational ignorance, moral hazards, adverse selection), the existence of appropriate rents, provision of public goods, and the hold-up problem. Describe each of these problems; provide practical examples drawn from the world of politics; and indicate the types of solutions, especially economic-related ones, which have been proposed to curb these political problems.

2. Every form of democratic governance values the theoretical concept of representation, and yet there are varying ideas about what constitutes the most desirable manifestation of representation. Those different theoretical notions of representation result in a variety of institutionalized election procedures. In a well organized essay, fully describe (1) the operation of at least two very different electoral system types, and (2) the variant of representation they are designed to maximize.

3. Is Judicial Review justifiable under the principles of Democratic Theory? Discuss arguments for and against the Supreme Court’s exercise of judicial review, and explain how (or whether) this can be reconciled with the majoritarian principles of the U.S. Constitution. Be sure to consider the forces that affect the Court’s use of the power.