

Note: For Fall 2003, the American prelims were tailored to each of the 10 individuals taking the exam. Each student was given three thematics to pick from, and a selection of 6-10 course questions that varied depending on what courses they had taken. This document includes ALL of the questions that were asked on ALL the prelims. So the people taking the prelim each got a selection of the following questions.

**American Politics
Preliminary Examination
Fall 2003**

RULES AND DIRECTIONS: You will have eight hours in which to answer the required questions. **The exam must be handed in no later than 4:00 p.m.** Be sure to save some of your time for putting your answers into an organized, typed or legibly written version in good English. Also be sure that you answer all the parts of each question and that you refer to the appropriate scholarly literature in each answer. This is a “closed book” exam. Students may not use notes or books, nor may they discuss the examination with anyone while taking it.

Instructions: Please answer one question from Part I and two questions from Part II. Be careful to write three distinct essays, avoiding substantial overlap between your answers.

PART ONE: THEMATIC QUESTIONS

Please write on one (1) thematic question:

1. In the 1970s, many political scientists concluded that political parties were no longer relevant to understanding American politics. However, there is emerging evidence that pronouncements about the death of parties may have been premature. What is this evidence at the mass, organizational, and legislative levels? How can theories of party and party identification accommodate both rise and decline and rise again of party strength? What, if anything, have scholars argued has replaced parties at the mass, organizational, and legislative levels? What implications for representation and accountability do variations in party strength have?
2. Are political representation and leadership irreconcilably in conflict? The concept of “representation” has multiple and competing interpretations. Compare the conception adopted by the Framers of the Constitution with alternative interpretations, and use research on American political behavior, institutions, and public policy to assess the relative merits of each interpretation. Is American politics representative?
3. The framers created the separation of powers to guarantee that no single branch of

government can gain too much power over the others. In the past decade, scholars have derived models to explain the interaction that takes place among the three branches of government, and to predict how each of the branches will behave as they interact with one another. Do these models adequately capture the interaction among the branches? More generally, what have these models taught scholars about the separation of powers?

4. Discuss and evaluate the role of race in U.S. politics. How have scholars studied its role in a variety of different components of American politics, including policy-making, public opinion, and political culture? Is it, as some contend, the most powerful explanation for American exceptionalism, or is it merely one of many modest influences on our politics and policies? Provide as much empirical evidence as you can for your conclusions.
5. Social movements have been analyzed chiefly by using sociological theories like social anxiety and resource mobilization or by economic rational choice models. Have these approaches adequately captured the political dimensions and political significance of social movements? Discuss the relevant literatures.
6. In the 1970s, many political scientists concluded that political parties were no longer relevant to understanding American politics. However, there is emerging evidence that pronouncements about the death of parties may have been premature. What is this evidence at the mass, organizational, and legislative levels? How can theories of party and party identification accommodate both rise and decline and rise again of party strength? What, if anything, have scholars argued has replaced parties at the mass, organizational, and legislative levels? What implications for representation and accountability do variations in party strength have?
7. The popularity of decision-making models or paradigms taken from economics and psychology has left few areas of scholarship in American politics untouched. They have, however, influenced some areas or sub-fields more than others. What do you see as their intellectual strengths, and why has their influence varied among subfields? What models or paradigms do you see as alternatives to those from economics or psychology, and what do you think their strengths, their usefulness, and their prospects are now?
8. Several enduring debates in American politics revolve around the question of the degree to which U.S. citizens are competent and sophisticated. Trace these debates over time, evaluating the quality of the evidence brought to the task by various scholars and research programs, and present your own resolution to these debates.
9. Over the past 50 years, models of voting behavior have been drawn from sociology, social psychology, economics, and cognitive psychology (e.g., cue-taking or heuristics

approach). Describe major works from each approach, discuss the differences among the approaches, and explain which approach you think is best (or explain how you would go about integrating the approaches).

PART TWO: SEMINAR QUESTIONS

*Part II. Answer two of the following xxx questions. You may answer any combination of two of the xxx questions except the following: you may **not** answer x and x; x and x; or x and x...*

Reminder: do not answer both #1 and #2.

1. “American democracy is in disarray. Most Americans don’t learn about politics and fail to participate in elections.” Evaluate this statement by consulting the literatures on attitude constraint, turnout, and political participation.
2. Many political scientists have lamented the decline of trust in government and social capital. What are the causes of the decline? Is there any connection between the two trends? Should we be worried about it or are the fears overstated?

Reminder: do not answer both #3 and #4.

3. Consider the prospect of reforming a large public bureaucracy. How can a study of the theory individual behavior and decision-making within large bureaucracies contribute to a more informed, and hopefully more successful, approach to reform? To what extent do policymakers need to pay attention to the decisions made by individual bureaucrats? Your answer should be informed by reference to a specific policy area, such as education, anti-poverty policy, or another policy area of your choosing.
4. Consider the issue of leadership within public organizations. In what ways do theories of bureaucracy, policy, and public administration incorporate or fail to incorporate leadership in their models and predictions? Reflecting on two or three works that, in your opinion, pay significant attention to the idea of leadership, either 1) suggest how standard models of public organizations can benefit from a more careful consideration of leadership or 2) explain why the incorporation of leadership may not be useful to standard models of public organization and management.

Reminder: do not answer both #5 and #6.

5. Terry Moe suggests in “Presidents, Institutions, and Theory” that rational choice theory provides a “powerful theoretical framework... to help us work our way toward an institutional theory of the presidency.” Do you agree? Use Charles Cameron’s analysis of the structural incentives embedded in the American separation of powers system to evaluate the application of rational choice theory to the study of the presidency. Your essay should avoid sweeping generalizations and instead be grounded in empirical research and theory.

6. The Constitution's framers feared that direct presidential appeals to the public would undermine the operation of a republican form of government. Have historical and contemporary political developments shown that presidential leadership and representation are incompatible? Have presidential public appeals impeded or manipulated the public’s evaluation of the president’s job performance, or overridden or dictated the decisions of congress, executive branch units, or the media? Conversely, do presidential public appeals generate coherent direction and principled decisions that enhance democratic representation, as Woodrow Wilson suggested? Consider these questions in the context of both the mass public and the national governing process. Be sure to carefully define critical concepts (such as representation and leadership), concisely define competing theoretical expectations, and substantiate your essay by specifically evaluating evidence regarding the presidency's relationship with public opinion as well as with the executive and legislative branches. Your answer, then, should address both theoretical debates and the state of substantive research.

Reminder: do not answer both #7 and #8.

7. Amartya Sen argues in On Economic Inequality that the “almost single-minded concern of modern welfare economics with Pareto optimality does not make [it]... particularly suitable for investigating problems of inequality.” Use the fields of comparative and American public policy and theories about welfare state development to discuss whether Pareto optimality is a useful framework for explaining the causes and consequences of economic inequality. If you agree with Sen’s critique, what might represent a more “suitable” framework or set of frameworks and why. Your essay should be corroborated with evidence from research on public assistance, old age pensions, or health care, and based on well-defined concepts and theory.

8. Analysis of welfare state development has pointed to a number of different theories to explain the cause, direction, and degree of change in institutions and policy. Choose two of the following theories for careful critical analysis regarding their theoretical logic and

consistency as well as their substantive grounding in research on public assistance, old age pensions, or health care:

- Path dependency and policy feedbacks
- Power resources models
- Titmussian sectional interest models
- Marshallian citizenship theory
- Cultural interpretations of institutional change
- Social construction

Reminder: do not answer both #9 and #10.

9. The study of group politics is most commonly divided between studies of interest groups on the one hand, and social movements on the other. Recently, however, scholars have begun to take issue with this distinction, arguing instead that we should think of these forms of group politics and action on a continuum, along with other forms of group activity. What do you think? Is there still something to be said for the original distinction? What do we gain, and what do we lose, in expanding our conceptualization of group politics in the way these new works suggest? In answering the question, be sure to draw on authors other than those that advocate the new approach.
10. Some argue that the social movements of the 1960s were the most important political development in recent history. However, the 1970s and 1980s saw a marked reduction or even absence of social movement activity in the United States. Some social movement theorists argue that it has only been in the late 1980s and early 1990s that we can identify any significant reemergence of such activity under the label of identity politics and “new social movements.” Identify and describe the social, political and economic forces which might explain the peaking and waning of social movement activity described above. If you have a different interpretation of the history of social movements since the 1960s, please identify and describe.

Reminder: do not answer both #11 and #12.

11. Many of the issues regarding the nature and political role of ordinary citizens revolve around the distinction between long-term forces vs. short-term forces. Focusing on the

“citizen as individual” unit of analysis, elaborate and discuss the distinction between longer-term predispositions and shorter-term contemporary influences on public opinion and behavior. What sort of balance between the two types of factors does extant research suggest provides the most accurate portrayal? Use 9-11 and its political aftermath to illustrate your arguments.

12. Discuss the nature of the relationships among the mass media, the mass public, and political elites, focusing on the ways in which they influence and shape one another. Be sure to incorporate into your discussion such topics as framing, elite cue giving, and the importance of political sophistication and expertise. Use examples from the political aftermath of 9-11 to illustrate your arguments.

Reminder: do not answer both #13 and #14.

13. In his classic treatise on American race relations, An American Dilemma, Gunnar Myrdal (1944) argued that the contradiction between institutionalized racism and traditional American ideals -- embodied in the nation's liberal-democratic creed -- would eventually provide an impetus for changes in Whites' attitudes toward African Americans. Please evaluate this contention in light of subsequent research on racial attitudes in America. How significant have the changes in Whites' attitudes towards Blacks been? Have these changes been uniform across domains? What has changed and what has not? What explanations have researchers offered for the current pattern of White racial attitudes, and which do you think are the most plausible? (Be sure to cite relevant theory and research.) Finally, have traditional American ideals played a uniformly liberalizing role in the evolution in White racial attitudes over the last forty years? Please explain.
14. One of the most contentious issues in current research on racial attitudes is the debate about whether a "new racism" has arisen from the ashes of traditional "Jim Crow" racism. Please comment on this debate, citing relevant literature when necessary. First, what is the context of this debate? That is, why have researchers had to posit the existence of a "new" racism? Second, according to work in this area, what forms has the "new" racism taken? How do they differ from the old racism? Finally, is the argument for the existence of a new racism convincing? Why or why not? Be specific.
15. Select one major Supreme Court decision since 1900 you consider a "bad" or "terrible" decision, and one you consider a "good" decision. Explain the reasons for your choices. In your answer make reference to at least two jurisprudential theorists (either on or off the bench). Do not refer to more than one case you discuss in question #1.