

**American Politics
Preliminary Examination
Fall 2005**

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. 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. 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?
2. Jeff Tulis has complained that research on the presidency too often engages in "institutional partisanship" that focuses on the chief executive with little or no attention given to other branches of government. A similar complaint could be made of legislative studies. Identify and analyze promising theories and bodies of research that examine institutional developments and dynamics related to the relations between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Evaluate the potential and some of the pitfalls of these approaches, focusing on at least 2 branches (executive, legislative, and judicial).
3. Discuss the nature of the relationships among the mass media, the mass public, and political elites and institutions, focusing on the ways in which they influence and shape one another. While some scholars seem to argue that the political system is characterized by elite responsiveness to the mass public's preferences, others seem to argue that the system is characterized by media and/or elite manipulation, e.g. via framing and persuasion, of the mass public. Given recent research on these relationships, what do you think is the most

accurate characterization—responsiveness, manipulation, or something entirely different?

PART TWO: SEMINAR QUESTIONS

Section A:

Answer **1** of the **3** questions listed below.

1. Political parties dominate any discussion of electoral, congressional, or presidential politics. Most voters claim a party identification as do almost all elected office holders. Why are parties so pervasive in American politics? What do voters and politicians gain from associating with a political party? What effects do parties have on political outcomes?
2. One of the main challenges in conducting research on interest groups and social movements is showing their impact on policy outcomes. Discuss and evaluate three approaches to assessing the policy impact of groups and movements. Which one do you find the most compelling or useful? Which one do you find the least compelling? Why? What additional operationalizations might be more effective?
3. “Social capital” is a concept that is in widespread usage throughout the social sciences. What is it and why it is important for the study of American politics? What features of the American political system can be explained by social capital? What roles do political institutions and political elites play in social capital? Finally, should we be concerned about the possible decline of social capital in the U.S.?

Section B:

Answer the following question:

Pick a literature that you're most familiar with, and answer the following questions: First, what is the most undertilled area of the literature, and why is it undertilled? Second, what is the most overtilled area, and why is it overtilled? Third, how might one go about tilling the undertilled?