

**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. This is a “closed book” exam. Students may not use notes or books, nor may they discuss the examination with anyone while taking it. 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. 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.
2. Since Gunnar Myrdal coined the phrase, many scholars have agreed that an “American Creed” has dominated American political thought since the Revolution, shared in some way by virtually all Americans regardless of their class, race, gender, or partisan politics. Do you agree? If so, what is the creed, and why has it been embraced by writers in different periods, holding different places in American economic, racial, sexual, and political hierarchies? If not, what contrasting “creeds” or ideologies do you see in American political thought, and why do you think these contrasts have so often been missed or minimized?
3. 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?

## **PART TWO: SEMINAR QUESTIONS**

Answer **2** of the following questions.

Do not answer both **4** and **5**.

Do not answer both **7** and **8**.

4. There has been a significant amount of disagreement over how Supreme Court justices reach decisions. Some scholars have argued that justices base their decisions on a set of principles (precedent, intent of framers, etc.) that help to guide them in interpreting the Constitution and arriving at outcomes. In contrast to this legal school of thought, others have asserted that the view of justices as principled decision-makers is completely inaccurate. They argue that personal policy preferences largely determine how the justices decide cases. Still others argue that justices are strategic actors whose decisions are based on their policy goals, their beliefs about other actors' preferences, and institutional rules. First, explain each of these theories in detail, assessing the merits and shortfalls of each (be sure to cite relevant literature for each theory). Second, make an argument about which theory offers the best explanation of how justices decide, as well as which is best for making predictions about their future behavior.
5. Even before *Bush v. Gore* (2000), the Supreme Court played an integral role in the 2000 presidential campaign. Indeed, both candidates warned that the other would pack the Court with extremists who would make bad decisions concerning abortion, states rights, civil rights, and the like. As such, both major party candidates declared that they would put the right type of justices on the Court. This begs the question: how does the president decide whom to nominate to the Supreme Court? Using relevant literature, first explain the nomination process, and what factors president invokes when decided who to nominate. Second, explain the confirmation process and the factors that the Senate considers when deciding whether to accept a nominee. Can the president nominate anyone he sees fit, or is he constrained in his choices? Why or why not? Which has more power over the confirmation process: the Senate or the president? Why?
6. Does Richard Neustadt's account of presidential power remain theoretically relevant and empirically useful in analyzing the public presidency, interbranch relations, executive branch politics, and unilateral actions? Your discussion of

whether and how Neustadt remains relevant (or has become irrelevant) should offer a clear and precise presentation of (1) competing theoretical expectations; (2) alternative methodological approaches; and (3) at least 2 areas of substantive research.

7. Many issues regarding the nature and political role of ordinary citizens revolve around the distinction between long-term influences vs. short-term forces. Focusing on the individual citizen, elaborate and discuss the distinction between, and relative importance of, longer-term predispositions and shorter-term contemporary influences on public opinion and behavior. Provide specific examples, drawing on recent research in one of the following areas of work: racial attitudes and behavior; affect vs. cognition; or authoritarianism and altruism.
8. 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 cover topics such as framing, elite cue giving, and the importance of political sophistication and expertise

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