

**American Politics
Preliminary Examination
Fall 2007**

#7

GENERAL 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 the answers into an organized form in good English. This is an open book exam. Students may use notes or books, but they may not discuss the examination with anyone while taking it. You are required to answer three questions along the lines indicated below.

Question 1: Please answer 1 of the following 3 questions.

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. The framers of the *Constitution* included several features—two-year term, small districts, and direct election by citizens—to help make the U.S. House of Representatives responsive to the popular will. Yet the current state of congressional politics in the United States leaves scholars, pundits, and citizens alike questioning the responsiveness of the U.S. House. It has become commonplace for more than 90 percent of House members to be reelected despite low public approval of the job Congress is doing. In a well-developed essay explain the disconnect between high reelection rates and low job approval in the U.S. House. In forming your answer be sure to discuss the role of House members, voters, and institutional rules in this phenomenon.

3. Almost since their inception, pluralist approaches to understanding American politics have come under attack. What are the major arguments against pluralist theories? Explain three main lines of dissent from pluralism, and discuss which one you believe does the most to undermine the main tenets of the pluralist approach to understanding politics in the United States. Your answer should address whether politics in the U.S. is closer to the pluralist heaven, farther away from it, or stayed the same since this approach dominated the study of American politics.

Question 2: Please answer 1 of the following 3 questions.

4. The Michigan model of public opinion was developed in *The American Voter* by Campbell et al. in 1960 and the classic belief systems essay by Converse in 1964. Describe the major claims put forth by this model with respect to voting behavior, opinion formation, core predispositions, and mass sophistication. To what extent have these claims survived revisionist challenges over the years? To what extent does the Michigan model need to be revised?

5. Consider the possibility of an “effective” bureaucracy. There are many sometimes-contrasting, sometimes-congruent theories of bureaucracy, bureaucratic function, and bureaucratic behavior. Please choose *two approaches* to the study of bureaucracy that you feel are the most crucial to our understanding of bureaucratic function. Briefly discuss these two theoretical approaches, and argue why you think these approaches are necessary to a thorough understanding of bureaucratic function and performance. In addition, consider these two approaches in light of each other, the ways in which they reinforce, add to, or contrast with each other in developing an understanding of the prerequisites to and challenges of a successful bureaucracy.

6. 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 and that these changes would, in turn, lead to increased social, economic, and political equality among Whites and Blacks. Please evaluate this contention in light of subsequent research on racial inequality 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.) Moreover, have traditional American ideals played a uniformly liberalizing role in the evolution in White racial attitudes over the last forty years? Finally, have attitudinal changes had the predicted effects on alleviating inequalities in the social, economic, and political conditions of Blacks and Whites? What has research suggested are some of the other barriers to racial equality? Please explain.

Question 3: Please answer the following question.

7. Choose a literature in American politics about which you feel you have expertise. Please answer the following questions with regard to the literature you've chosen. What is the most undertilled area of the literature, and why is it undertilled? What is the most overtilled area, and why is it overtilled? How might one go about tilling the undertilled?