

**American Politics  
Preliminary Examination  
Summer 2006**

**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.

**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. Analyze the role of American political parties from three perspectives: in government, as organizations, and in the electorate. What is the relationship between these functions? Analyze changes in parties and the effects of party reforms since the early 1950s.
3. It has become standard political rhetoric to say that “everything changed” after the attacks of 9-11. Drawing on the literature in at least 3 subfields of American politics, evaluate this claim. Does its validity vary depending on whether you approach it from a behavioralist rather than an institutionalist perspective? In what ways?

**Question 2. Please answer 1 of the following 4 questions.**

4. In their article “Dynamic Representation,” Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson conclude that “[P]oliticians are keen to pick up the faintest signals in their political environment. Like Antelope in an open field, they cock their ears and focus their full attention on the slightest sign of danger.” First, is there an independent and “rational” public opinion for politicians to follow like “antelope,” according to work on individual cognition and aggregate public opinion? Second, what are the implications of the theory and research on elite-level representation and leadership for the “antelope” view of politicians? Would you expect this kind of high level responsiveness? Be sure to carefully define critical concepts (such as representation and leadership), concisely specify competing theoretical expectations, and substantiate your essay by specifically evaluating evidence regarding the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. To be clear, your essay on the “Antelope” interpretation of American politics should address both theoretical debates and the state of substantive research.

5. In what ways should a thorough understanding of public bureaucracies be informed by a study of individual bureaucratic decision-making? Do the decisions made by individual bureaucrats meaningfully impact the operation of the bureaucracies in which they operate? Why or why not? Please discuss these questions in relation to a few key works in the field.

6. For the last several decades, research in political psychology has focused on political information processing and cognition, including some emphasis on differences and similarities between experts and novices. (The study of agenda setting, priming and framing evolved largely from this cognitive perspective.) More recently, models of information processing, broadly defined, have been expanded to accord a more central place to affect, intuition and emotion. Discuss and evaluate how these earlier models have been used to assess both elite decision-making and the relationships between elites and the general public. Then speculate about how more recent advances in our understanding of affect and emotion could alter our understanding of how political framing affects elite cue-giving efforts and the responses of ordinary citizens to those efforts.

7. The study of institutions focuses on individual strategic calculations as well as on how institutional rules constrain behavior, whereas the study of political behavior focuses on the factors that shape and direct individual behavior in the political arena. What value (if any) does theory and research in political psychology offer to the study of institutions? And what value (if any) does theory and research in institutions offer to the study of political psychology? If there is value in merging these research areas, do you expect the analytic payoff to be unidirectional, bidirectional, or conditional? Your answer should be thoroughly grounded in existing research and applied to specific theories and research approaches in political psychology, as well as in the study of specific institutions such as Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, interest groups, and/or the courts.

**Question 3. Please answer the following question.**

8. Pick a literature that you're most familiar with, and answer the following. Describe what you believe will be the most significant advance in the literature in the next decade. What about the current state of the literature leads you to believe that this will be the most significant advance?