

**American Politics
Preliminary Examination
Summer 2007**

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. Political scientists have examined this institutional check on federal power from many angles. In particular, scholars have assessed how the separation of powers affects relationships between the three branches of government, while generally ignoring the role that other actors, including the public, the media, and the federal system at large (i.e., states) play in this process. What role, if any, do these other institutions play in the separation of powers? What role, if any, should the public play in this interaction? What does political science research tell us about how the separation of powers – including actors beyond the main three branches – affects decisions made by our political leaders? Be sure to include a discussion of the conventional understanding of the SEPARATION OF POWERS in your answer, as well as a discussion what other actors (if any) may play a part in these interactions.

2. Almost since their inception, pluralist approaches to understanding American politics have come under attack. What are the major arguments against pluralist theories? Explain 3 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.

3. Representation is at the core of American democracy. How do American political institutions and elections ensure representation? In what ways do they fail to do so? How important are elections in facilitating representation compared to other factors, including (but not necessarily limited to) institutional design, institutional rules, political culture, political parties, and interest groups?

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

4. Analyze theories of congressional organization in the House of Representatives. First, explain leading theories of committees and parties, detailing their predictions and the empirical evidence that supports them. Then, assess which theory or theories best describe(s) committee and party organization in the House of Representatives in the contemporary era and from a historical perspective, providing evidence to support your claims.

5. 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.

6. 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?