

**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. A major line of research in political psychology and public opinion focuses on the relationship between short-term forces (aka contemporary information) and long-term forces (aka core predispositions or standing decisions) on public opinion and political behavior. First, discuss the distinction between short-term and long-term forces and explain why this distinction is important for understanding public opinion and political behavior. Second, make a case for which has more influence on political attitudes and/or behavior – short-term forces, long-term forces, or an interaction between the two. Make sure you discuss relevant works in public opinion and/or political psychology.

5. 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.

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?