

**American Politics
Preliminary Examination
Summer 2008**

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. Discuss and evaluate the role of race in U.S. politics. How have scholars studied its role in a variety of different components of American politics, including policy-making, public opinion, and political culture? Is it, as some contend, the most powerful explanation for American exceptionalism, or is it merely one of many modest influences on our politics and policies? Provide as much empirical evidence as you can for your conclusions.

2. 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?

3. Are political representation and leadership irreconcilably in conflict? The concept of “representation” has multiple and competing interpretations. Compare the conception adopted by the Framers of the Constitution with alternative interpretations, and use research on American political behavior, institutions, and public policy to assess the relative merits of each interpretation. Is American politics representative?

Question 2: Please answer 1 of the following questions.

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

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 deciding 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. A major line of research in political psychology focuses on the relationship between short-term forces (aka contemporary information and emotions) and long-term forces (aka core predispositions or standing decisions or demographic/ability characteristics) on public opinion, information processing, 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, information processing, and political behavior. Second, make a case for which has more influence on political attitudes, information processing, and/or behavior – short-term forces, long-term forces, or an interaction between the two. Make sure you discuss relevant works in political psychology.

7. An enduring debate in political science concerns the extent to which electoral campaigns matter. In this essay describe, compare, and contrast (1) the major claims put forth by those who posit that campaigns matter and (2) the counter claims advanced by those who posit that campaigns have minimal effects. Focus on presidential and Senate campaigns and make sure you discuss the roles played by the candidates, parties, media, and voters. Make sure you discuss the relevant political science literature.

8. Organization in the U.S. House of Representatives centers on parties and committees. Since the 1970s, the balance of power between parties and committees in the House has shifted. **How has the shift in power between parties and committees affected scholars' understanding of the role of parties and committees in the House?** In your answer, detail key theories of committee organization and partisan theories in the House. Explain how and why the balance of power has shifted, and explain which theory or theories best explain this shift in power and members' behavior in the contemporary era, providing evidence to support your analysis.

9. In Federalist Paper 70, Alexander Hamilton made the case for an “energetic” executive. More recently, William Howell argues that the “president sits alone atop his governing structure and is free to set policy on his own.” Describe and critically evaluate this Hamiltonian interpretation of presidential power based on theoretical and empirical analyses of structure, influence, and personal resources.

10. One of the main challenges in conducting research on interest groups and social movements is showing their impact on policy outcomes. Discuss and evaluate three approaches to assessing the policy impact of groups and movements. Which one do you find the most compelling or useful? Which one do you find the least compelling? Why? What additional operationalizations might be more effective?

11. Consider the relationship between public policy and public organizations, either in policies that target the organizations themselves, or in policies that rely on public organizations to carry them out. We studied several approaches to this issue. One emphasized individual decision-making. Another, the organizational culture of the public organization. Still another, the role of incentives and agency. What do you think about these broad approaches? You may supplement your theoretical discussion with examples from specific policies as you see fit.

12. One of the core issues in understanding the larger meaning of mass participation in the U.S. political system is the role of political (un)sophistication. What insights to this issue have been contributed by studies of public opinion, electoral behavior, political cognition and information processing, political knowledge and information, the role of values, and of affect and emotion in politics? Are these insights contradictory or reinforcing? Does this body of research suggest that institutional reform could improve levels of sophistication or that it would most certainly fail due to inherent limitations amongst the public?

13. The concept of social capital has enjoyed enormous popularity in virtually every social science discipline. What, in our view, explains why its use is so widespread? What are the ways in which social capital has been conceptualized and measured in the research literature? Are there any tensions among its various usages? In the discipline of political science, what kinds of phenomena does social capital purport to explain? (Please use specific examples drawn from the political science literature). Where should research on social capital head next?

14. 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.

15. The study of group politics is most commonly divided between studies of interest groups on the one hand, and social movements on the other. Recently, however, scholars have begun to take issue with this distinction, arguing instead that we should think of these forms of group politics and action on a continuum, along with other forms of group activity. What do you think? Is there still something to be said for the original distinction? What do we gain, and what do we lose, in expanding our conceptualization of group politics in the way these new works suggest? Where do third parties fit in? In answering the question, be sure to draw on authors other than those that advocate the new approach.

16. Critics of President Bush complained during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 that he was using public appeals to impede or manipulate public debate and the deliberation of Congress. Evaluate this complaint in the context of the concern of the Constitution's framers that direct presidential appeals to the public would undermine the operation of a republican form of government. Consider the alternative view offered by Woodrow Wilson (among others) that presidential public appeals generate coherent direction and principled decisions that enhance democratic representation. Anchoring your essay in theoretical and empirical analyses of the presidency, consider these contending interpretations in the context of the president's interaction with both the mass public and the national governing process. What analytic leverage does presidential research provide in evaluating President Bush's handling of the Iraq War?

Question 3: Please answer the following question.

17. 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?