

POSC 10 – Introduction to American Politics
Paper Assignment

From the following list, selected one to write a paper, which should be five (5) pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins all around. You should use 12 pt. Times New Roman font and use an accepted formatting style (e.g., APSA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). Please note that footnotes, endnotes, references, and title pages do not contribute to your total page count nor does excessive white space. Your TA may have further requirements that they will specify in class. Avoid unnecessary and block quoting at all costs. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!!

1. Most Americans believe in personal liberty – that we should be able to do what we want to do without government intervention. At the same time, most Americans endorse federal policies like the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act designed to bring about greater protection for minorities. Discuss the evolution of civil rights – broadly -- and how federal laws affect civil liberties. Can civil rights and civil liberties co-exist? Or does one come at the expense of the other?

2. Americans are generally uninformed about current events, policy debates, and the politics of Capitol Hill, yet social scientists and politicians ask their opinions on many political and social phenomena. Can we trust public opinion results? Why or why not? In answering, be sure to examine the features of public opinion polling that may make it more (or less) reliable and support your thesis with specific evidence.

3. Describe the differences between pluralist and elite views of democracy. Which theoretical form of democracy better explains the role of interest groups in American politics? Is the pluralist framework normatively appealing, why or why not? What are potential problems and/or implications with pluralist views of American democracy?

4. George Washington famously abhorred political parties, stating that “they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people” (Washington Farewell Address, 1796). Yet political parties have since played a central role in American politics. Do you think political parties are a good thing for American politics? Why or why not? In your answer, consider the faults with political parties, but also consider the centrality of parties as key organizing units both within institutions (i.e., Congress) but also among the mass public.