

## Política Comparada II, otoño 2013

### Examen final

¿Ha llegado la hora de reformar las disfuncionales instituciones de EE.UU.? Evalúe críticamente los textos siguientes. Puede trabajar solo o en equipo con otra persona del grupo. Piense bien su argumento y estrúctúrelo con claridad, el rollo será penalizado. Deberá entregar su trabajo el lunes 9 de diciembre a las 18 horas.

Carta al editor aparecida en *The Economist* a fines de octubre 2013

SIR – America's political deadlocks ("[Last-minutemen](#)", October 19th) are often attributed to bad politicians, poor leadership, infighting, ideological zealotry and so on. In any other country this would be called a constitutional crisis, but not in America, where it is still believed that the founders created a perfect system.

In fact, America's basic law is 225 years old and out of date. It is a delusion to ignore the improvements in the practice of democracy that have evolved elsewhere. The problems of lobbying, gerrymandering, pork-barrel politics, incumbency and campaign financing are products of the system; they cannot be fixed by replacing the politicians. America's political parties have no membership, weak leadership and little discipline or common purpose. The last time a new party came to power was 1860.

The voters are unable to throw the bums out because there is no means of holding accountable those who are responsible. Is it the president? The Senate? The House? The Tea Party? None of the above; it's the constitution, stupid.

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Editorial que apareció en el *Huffington Post*

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-a-baum/reflections-on-the-budget\\_b\\_4110766.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-a-baum/reflections-on-the-budget_b_4110766.html)

Reflections on the Budget Standoff: How a Political Conflict Becomes an Institutional Crisis

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Americans are in a sour mood, as a series of polls released last week make clear. According to a Gallup poll, Americans' satisfaction with their government has reached its lowest level since the firm began asking the question four decades ago. In an AP poll, only 5 percent of Americans approve of the performance of Congress, the lowest level on record. In a NBC/WSJ poll, only 14 percent of Americans believe the country is on the right track -- the lowest level of the past 25 years.

This spike in dissatisfaction comes at a time when the constitutional separation of powers arguably faces its greatest challenge since 1937, when President Franklin Roosevelt threatened to raise the number of Supreme Court justices to 15 unless the Court ceased blocking his New Deal programs. Although journalists and pundits casually toss around terms like "constitutional crisis" to describe the latest episode, they rarely consider the long-term consequences of dysfunctional institutions. It's something we ought to be worrying about.

For most of our history, Americans have confidently assumed that our governing institutions would continue to be there, functioning in more or less the same way, year in and year out. However much we might dislike the party in power or grumble about wasteful spending or mindless bureaucrats, we have retained a fundamental confidence in the enduring stability of our core governing institutions.

But what if our institutions of governance are no longer as secure as we might think? Institutions are fashioned not of brick and mortar, but of ideas and aspirations. This is the "dark matter" of politics, invisible to the naked eye but the element that holds it all together. If faith in our institutions falls below a critical threshold, they can falter, even wither.

The political scientist Juan Linz predicted that presidential systems would prove the least stable form of democracy because legitimacy was permanently divided across multiple, competing institutions. The United States has long stood out as the exception to Linz's rule. Most observers attribute this to the adaptive capacity of our two major parties. They have competed for the great middle of the electorate, positioning themselves to attract a voting majority. "Creatures of compromise," is how the historian Clinton Rossiter described our parties.

They have not been acting that way recently. The parties have been sorting themselves into more ideologically pure organizations, weeding out moderates and drifting to the extremes.

Of our two parties, the Republicans have pursued this strategy more aggressively and have achieved a level of ideological purity nearly unparalleled in the history of American politics. Whereas those who identify themselves as Democrats are rather evenly mixed between self-identified liberals and moderates, Republicans overwhelmingly -- seven out of ten -- are self-identified conservatives.

Therein lies the danger to the GOP's long-term viability. Although the budget showdown is apparently ending, the rightward shift and ideological narrowing of the Republican Party, combined with its demographic profile (heavily white, male, and southern), threaten to marginalize it. Sure, Republicans will continue to win some state and local elections for the foreseeable future. But it's unclear whether the party as currently constituted can for long continue to compete at the national level. Even the gerrymandering of House seats (recall that, though Republican candidates won a majority of House seats in 2012, they received a million fewer votes than their Democratic opponents) is at best a temporary answer to success at the ballot box.

What will happen if the Republican Party stays to the right, depriving itself of the support of moderates and the rising demographic groups? If Linz is correct, America's constitutional system will be the weaker for it. So long as both major parties remain viable, they balance and offset one another. The eclipse of the Republican Party will throw the American party system out of balance.

Gallup reports all-time lows of 28 percent favorability for the Republican Party and only 20 percent of the public identifying themselves as Republicans. This comes at a time when public confidence in democratic institutions is at its low point in the modern era. What happens if the GOP becomes a permanent minority party? If that were to happen, it's easy to imagine a range of adverse consequences, from a creeping institutional crisis in the form of long-term paralysis and gradual delegitimizing of the national government, to more immediately visible social unrest from right-wing extremists.

The political scientist E. E. Schattschneider famously said, "Political parties created democracy... modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties." America needs a vibrant center-right party. If the resolution to the current budget crisis results in the further erosion of the Republican Party's strength, any short-term victory President Obama and congressional Democrats achieve may prove pyrrhic. Whatever the Tea Party's followers claim, compromise is not a dirty word. In a two-party system, it's the key to viable parties and a well-functioning political system.

### **Referencias adicionales (en el mismo sitio que este documento)**

Kernell 1991 Facing an opposition Congress: The president's strategic circumstance.

LeLoup y Shull 1999 President and Congress.

Magar 2001 *Bully Pulpits* (cap. 1)