

Course Overview & “First Attempts” at American Democracy

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Agenda

- 1 Course Overview
- 2 What is Political Science?
- 3 Solving Collective Action?

Syllabus & Course Materials



Course Logistics & Structure

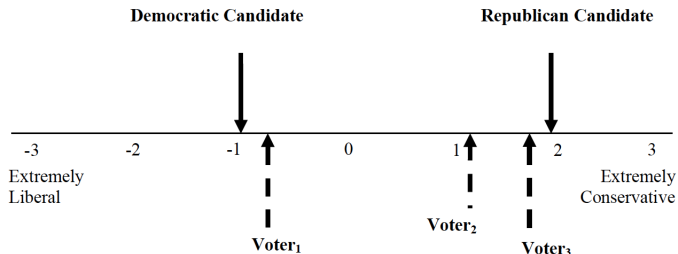
- ▶ GitPage: <https://calgara.github.io/pol1f2017.html>
- ▶ Canvas: <https://canvas.ucdavis.edu>
- ▶ Reading political science articles example: [Zaller 1992](#)

What is Political Science?

- ▶ Participation Question: What do you think political science entails & how does it differ from civics?
- ▶ Importance of *theoretical models* to explain observed political phenomena
- ▶ Scientific method to evaluate models:
 - ▶ Observables
 - ▶ Formulating hypothesis explaining phenomena: ***IV*** → ***DV***
 - ▶ Gathering *empirical & measurable data* to address hypothesis
 - ▶ Testing hypothesis & revisiting model (alternative explanations?)

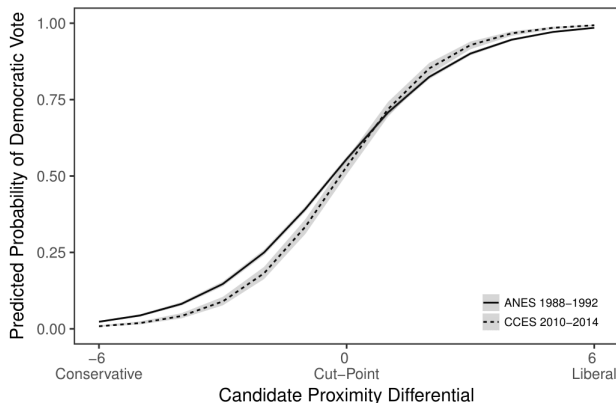
Ex: What explains how people vote in American elections?

Spatial Model of Voters & Candidates



- ▶ What do we observe?
- ▶ What's the independent and dependent variable in the model?
- ▶ How would we test the hypothesis derived from model?

Proximity Voting in U.S. Senate Elections, 1988-1992 & 2010-2014



- ▶ Support for model?
- ▶ Will touch on other models of vote-choice later in the course...think like political scientists!

Understanding the American Political System

Fighting the Collective Dilemma:

- ▶ What do we mean by the collective dilemma?
- ▶ How does this relate to government & public goods?
- ▶ Citizens have an incentive to *free-ride*, both in politics & life
- ▶ How does this relate to the prisoner's dilemma?
- ▶ Coordination problems part of the American political life?
- ▶ Possible solution in *delegation*?

Understanding the American Political System

Principal-Agent Model & Delegation Problems:

- ▶ What are principal & agents? Conditions for identification?
- ▶ Key to relationship: ability to *sanction* agent
- ▶ How does agency loss happen?
- ▶ Premium on screening agents & monitoring their behavior
- ▶ Role of institutions & setting the “rules of the game”
- ▶ Institutions constrain how agents behave and serve principals
- ▶ Institutional choices shaped by trade-offs: **transaction costs** vs. **conformity costs**
 - ▶ Example: *Electoral Connection* between voters (principals) & their members of Congress

TPM LIVEWIRE

Despite Opposing Sandy Relief, Cruz Calls For Federal Aid For Texas Flood

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AP Photo / David Goldman

Solving Collective Action? Articles of Confederation

Constitutional Design of Articles of Confederation:

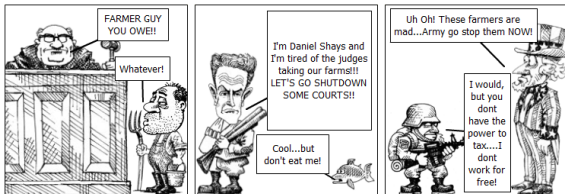
- ▶ Principal-Agent Dynamic: *States* → *Central Government* ?
- ▶ Loose confederation of states: unitary government with single legislature
- ▶ Each state one vote: constitutional change required *unanimity* in legislature & changing policy required 9/12 states
- ▶ Legislature lacked power to tax, regulate trade, and raise army (states can refuse to send militias)
- ▶ No executive to enforce & implement “congressional” acts
- ▶ No Supreme Court to resolve disputes between states

Solving Collective Action? Articles of Confederation

Why was this *constitutional design* a disaster?

- ▶ What's the collective dilemma in the Articles of Confederation?
- ▶ Do states have an incentive to free-ride?
- ▶ What's the coordination problem here?
- ▶ How does a strong(er) federal government overcome clear collective action problem?

Shays's Rebellion by Coach Rodriguez



Key Points:

- ▶ Collective action problems shapes all political behavior, both in individuals and collective institutions.
- ▶ Collective action problems provide framework for our *understanding* of political behavior
- ▶ Allows us to make assumptions of rational political behavior by units of interest
- ▶ Institutions help mitigate collective action problems! But design critical to avoid principal-agent problems
- ▶ Institutions help shape *incentives* for responsive agents
- ▶ Institutional choice requires trade-offs between transaction costs & conformity costs