Course Overview & “First Attempts” at American Democracy

Carlos Algara
calgara@ucdavis.edu

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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: $IV \rightarrow DV$
  - 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?
Support for model?
Will touch on other models of vote-choice later in the course...think like political scientists!
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
Despite Opposing Sandy Relief, Cruz Calls For Federal Aid For Texas Flood
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?
**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.