Course Overview & “First Attempts” at American Democracy

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June 26, 2017
Agenda

1. Course Overview
2. What is Political Science?
3. Solving Collective Action?
Syllabus & Course Materials

Course Logistics & Structure

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What is Political Science?

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- 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

- Democratic Candidate
- Republican Candidate

- Extremely Liberal
- Voter₁
- Voter₂
- Voter₃
- Extremely Conservative

What do we observe?
Ex: What explains how people vote in American elections?

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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?

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Will touch on other models of vote-choice later in the course...think like political scientists!
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Despite Opposing Sandy Relief, Cruz Calls For Federal Aid For Texas Flood

AP Photo / David Goldman
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Solving Collective Action? Articles of Confederation

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Shays’s Rebellion by Coach Rodriguez

FARMER GUY YOU OWE ME!

I'm Daniel Shays and I'm tired of the judges taking our farms!! LET'S GO SHUTDOWN SOME COURTS!!

Cool...but don't eat me!

Uh Oh! These farmers are mad...Army go stop them NOW!

I would, but you don't have the power to tax...I don't work for free!
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.