

# 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



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- ▶ Participation Question: What do you think political science entails & how does it differ from civics?



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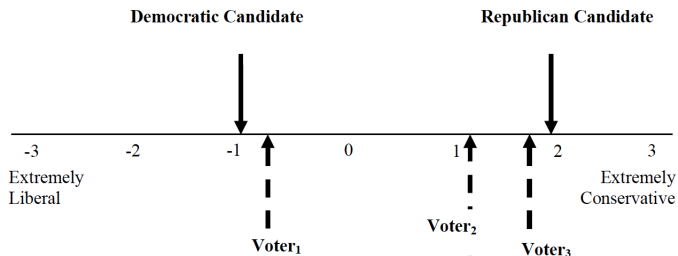
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# What is Political Science?

- ▶ 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?

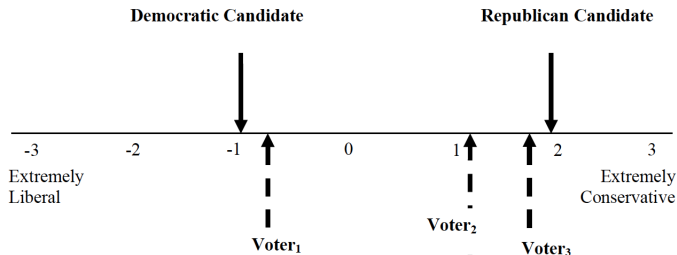
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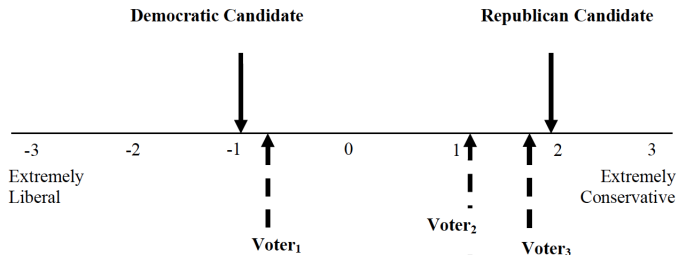
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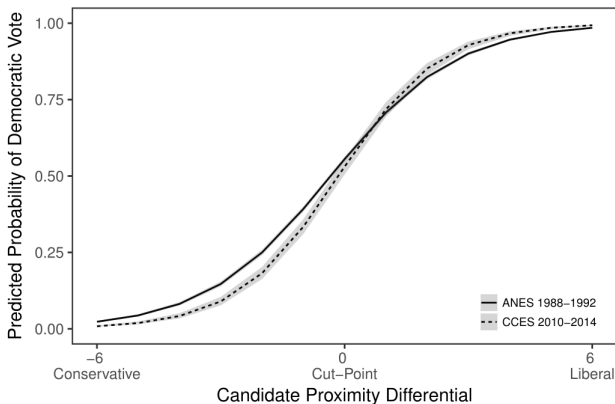
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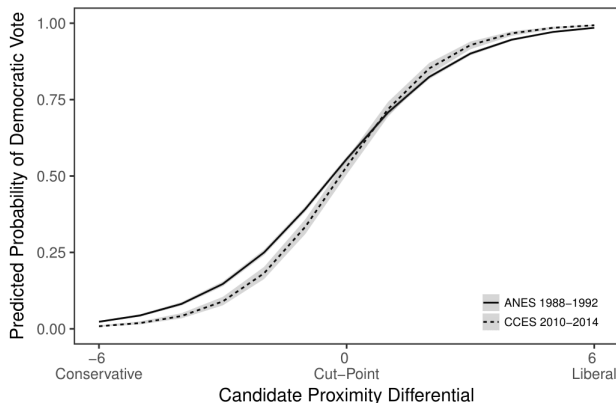
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## Proximity Voting in U.S. Senate Elections, 1988-1992 & 2010-2014



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

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**TPM LIVEWIRE**

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

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AP Photo / David Goldman

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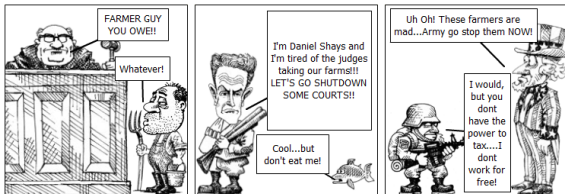
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**Shays's Rebellion** by Coach Rodriguez



## 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