Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 1

- Goals of the Class
    - Overview of the political system in the United States
    - Introduction to institutions and behaviors studied by political scientists
    - How social science answers questions

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- The government is an insurance company with an army, funded mainly by taxes
- Americans have some sense of what the top 3 expenditures are, but overestimate how much is spent on other programs like education, foreign aid, etc.
- The two major political parties (Democrats and Republicans) hold different positions on difficult issues (abortion, budget, energy, health care, etc.)
    - Republicans want fewer government programs, less redistribution
    - Democrats want more government programs, more redistribution

- Why is it hard to get things done? The Constitution! (How does the Constitution constrain and structure the function of American government?)

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 2

- Why is it hard to get things done? The Constitution! (How does the Constitution constrain and structure the function of American government?)
- Articles of Confederation: weak federal government; states handled most things (veto rights over policy $\rightarrow$ status quo bias)
- Constitution: solved some of the problems (e.g. collective action) from the Articles—more power in the national government, but not too much
    - "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition" (*Federalist* 51)
    - Separation of powers (see enumerated powers), checks and balances
    - Unitary executive (President)
    - Bicameral legislature (House, Senate)
    - Senate and electoral college
    - Independent judiciary (Supreme Court)
    - Federal supremacy, but state discretion
- It's hard to get things done, but that's the point!

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 3

- What led to the constitutional design we have?
- Britain's error: Provided military security to the Colonies and decided Americans should have to pay for those costs (taxes) → public unrest
- Continental Congresses—national government, independence, state governments, Articles of Confederation
- Articles: National authority was so limited, delegates saw no need for executive or judiciary (had no way of funding the war!)
- Constitutional Convention:
  - Virginia Plan: bicameral legislature, population based representation
  - New Jersey Plan: unicameral legislature, equal representation of states
  - Compromise: legislative branch is both population-based (House) and equal—2 per state (Senate) representation, etc.
- Ratification
  - Federalists feared tyranny of the majority, thought elites were best to govern, strong central power, favored ratification
  - Anti-Federalists feared tyranny of aristocracy/monarch, wanted govt closer to the people, retention of power by states, preferred modification to Articles instead of Constitution

- How do we create new policy with checks and balances and power shared across multiple institutions? What can motivated groups do to overcome status quo bias of the Constitution?
- Political Parties
    - Facilitate legislative activity
    - Provide a framework for electoral competition
- Constitution had little guidance on the legislative process—didn't resolve who should take charge. First Congress had no political parties, but "factions" of common interests started coordinating right away. (Parties step in!)
- Political parties have two goals, which may be in conflict:
    - Gain control of government
    - Implement preferred policies
- Modern parties organize Congress and elections, recruit candidates, negotiate party goals/policies, manage "party brand"
- Parties solve problems of coordination in legislature, across branches, and in the electorate—perhaps not inevitable, but ...

- Definitions of Public Opinion:
    - Citizen responses to survey questions — the opinions of the public
    - The attitudes and beliefs relevant to public policy or elections
- A representative democracy should reflect the public interest—PO helps us measure the will of the people
- Key question: Does the public know enough to keep its representatives accountable?
    - Individual knowledge of government function seems low (opinions determined by party ID)
    - But, aggregate opinion is relatively stable, responds to national events and economic changes
- Do opinions translate to policy? Gilens suggests that policy is most responsive to those at the top of the income distribution

- How do elections map the public interest into the behavior of their representatives? How do opinions of citizens translate into their vote choice?
  - Delegation of authority raises the possibility of agency loss—elections can help by providing an incentive (job security) to do what the electorate wants and providing opposing candidates incentives to criticize the current government
- How does the structure of elections affect the positions that candidates take?
  - The candidate with the plurality (most) votes wins
  - People vote for the candidate who takes the policy position they most prefer
  - Median Voter Theorem: a majority rule voting system selects the outcome most preferred by the median voter (not the same as middle of policy space)
  - Valence—traits like experience, likability affect voters' attitudes toward candidates, beyond policy, so candidates with the median voter's policy preference might not always win
- Voter turnout is higher in presidential elections than midterm elections

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 7

- How do people decide for whom to vote?
    - Voters use cues and heuristics as cognitive shortcuts like incumbent performance, single issues, opinion leaders, candidate traits, and party labels
    - Retrospective voting rule: vote for incumbents who have performed well in the past term in office (economic performance is influential here!)
    - Prospective voting rule: (ex) party labels predictive of candidate issue positions
- Which factors lead to divergence from the median voter theorem? (Valence, turnout)
- Voting is hard! We don't know what politicians are going to do, but we can use heuristics to make better decisions
- Voting is hardest for indifferent individuals, yet they often determine election outcomes
- Campaigns mobilize supporters and persuade undecided voters

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 8

- Polarization: collapse of ideological diversity within each of the two party coalitions
- Democrats and Republicans are distinct, more than before in Congress
- We can measure polarization using NOMINATE scores, which look at roll call votes to measure similar and different members of Congress
- McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal show that income inequality and immigrant population correlate with polarization
- Polarization is largely an elite phenomenon—the public is not polarized on policies (Fiorina, Culture War)
- Polarization impacts Congress's ability to govern, importance of judiciary, etc.

- Federalism: different elected bodies share responsibilities and powers with overlapping jurisdictions (national, state, local govts)
- States and Federal government have different functions:
  - States: run welfare/Medicaid programs, with local govt., run K-12 schools, higher education, prisons, must balance budget
  - Federal: National defense, universal pension and health care systems, money to states for transportation, support for the poor, doesn't have to balance budget
- Huge variation in states (size, geography, resources, population, laws)
- Laboratories of Democracy: states can try policies that might not be politically feasible at the federal level or in other states

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 10

- Who decides how powers are divided and when laws overstep their bounds?
- Judicial authority comes form the Constitution
- Courts arbitrate violations of civil or criminal codes
    - Criminal: offenses against society as a whole (shoplifting, vandalism, homicide)
    - Civil: violations of obligations and contracts between individuals and groups (failing to pay rent, negligent behavior)
- Justices and judges appointed by the president, confirmed by the Senate, life appointments
- Judicial Review: comes from *Marbury vs. Madison*—power of the courts to declare laws of Congress or state legislatures null and void
- Different theories of how to determine when a law is unconstitutional (plain meaning of the text, original intent, living constitution)
- Though technically nonpartisan, justices still vote in blocs