

Political Science 10: Introduction to American Politics

Week 10

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Plan for the Day

- Go over learning outcomes
- Announcements
- Answer questions from lecture this week and/or the reading
- Course Review

By the end of section today, you should be able to:

- Explain the major themes of the course
- Identify what makes a good short answer response

- Extra office hours in advance of the final exam:
 - Monday, March 20th 8am-12pm
 - Always available over email!
- Pick up midterms, review your multiple choice responses, review section reading quizzes in office hours
- Please complete your evaluations for POLI 10! We sincerely value your feedback!
- **Reminder: The final exam will be in the Price Center East Ballroom!**

Questions??

What questions do you have from lecture this week?

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 1

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 - Overview of the political system in the United States
 - Introduction to institutions and behaviors studied by political scientists
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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

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 2

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- 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 → 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

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 4

- 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 ...

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 5

- 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

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 6

- 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.

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 9

- 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 from 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

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 11

- The public expects and demands more of the president than power is granted.
- President has authority through five functions: commander in chief, head of state, chief clerk, leader of a political party, legislator
- Three types of presidential power: expressed (Constitution), delegated (by Congress), inherent (asserted by the president)
- Executive powers, leading the political party, and legislative politics help the president deal with high expectations and limited authority
- Ambiguity of executive power leads to inherent power: presidents assert powers implied by executive power. Executive power enacted through executive orders, executive privilege, and signing statements (unitary executive). Many criticize these unilateral powers as insufficiently checked by Congress and the judiciary. Increasing use of executive action.

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 12

- Bureaucracy was created by Congress to achieve policy goals; agents of Congress and the President; “a hierarchical organization of officials with specialized tasks”
- Bureaucracies suffer from principal-agent problems; authority is delegated—individuals/groups with power (principal) authorize someone else (agent) to act on their behalf. Congress delegates to executive bureaucracy to implement its policies.
- Agency loss when agents don't do what the principal would want: 1) principal was unclear with instructions; 2) multiple principals competing instructions; 3) agents have divergent goals from principals
- Fire alarm vs. police patrol oversight
- Lobbying: activities aimed to influence directly the decisions made by public officials—give information, sit-ins, issue advocacy, campaign contributions; pros and cons of lobbying for representation

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 13

- Electoral Connection: how elections facilitate representation of citizen interests in Congress; Members of Congress behave like single-minded seekers of reelection
- Congress is supposed to represent the interests of the people
- Different types of representation: formalistic (process), symbolic (accepted), descriptive (traits), substantive (actions)
- Impediments to representation: indirect elections, staggered terms, different electoral bases, checks and balances, gerrymandering, nationalization of politics, pork barrel politics, incumbency advantage
- Incumbents rarely lose!
- Legislators advertise, credit claim, and take positions

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 14

- The policymaking process is long, slow, and complicated; Important to note that House and Senate have to pass the exact same bill and the president has to sign it
- Committees used to have the power, but now much work is done outside of committees
- Ability to control the schedule means you can keep bills you don't like, even if they would pass, from becoming law (Agenda control)
- Senate operates by unanimous consent—any Senator can speak or amend with no time limit. But, Senate has the filibuster: tactic to prevent action on legislation they oppose by holding the floor (requires 3/5ths of Senate to end filibuster—invoke cloture)
- Gatekeepers in the policymaking process: chamber leaders, committee chairs, majority of the House, 60 Senators, President
- Bills (big ones) rarely go through the standard process

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 15

- Agenda Setting: Ability to propose bills and amendments—very powerful tool! Non-median policies can survive
- We can apply the logic of the median voter theorem to voting in Congress, but the pivotal voter is not always the median voter
- The more veto pivots there are, the harder it is to change policy
 - House: speaker and median voter
 - Senate: filibuster pivot and median voter (and majority leader)
- The more extreme the status quo is, the more likely it is that a median policy (or any policy) can pass
- We can predict the range of policies that would defeat the status quo
- Policies inside the gridlock interval cannot be moved—one of the veto pivots always prefers this policy to an alternative proposal; policies outside the interval can be moved into it
- Gridlock interval can change when preferences of the veto pivots change, the location of the status quo changes, or the set of legislators change (elections)—changes identity of veto pivots

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 16

- Appropriate level of inequality is a central division in American politics—redistribution divides the parties and lessens income inequality at some cost to fairness and efficiency.
- Income inequality is the extent to which income is distributed unevenly in the population
- Liberal View: market income is not a fair distribution and the government can mitigate; government redistribution is good for economic growth by promoting opportunity
- Conservative View: market is the most fair way to distribute income; creates incentive to work hard and innovate; redistribution hurts economic growth—it's inefficient and unfair; lower taxes and smaller government increase growth by letting the market work
- Change in inequality mostly through gains at the very top
- “Unenlightened self-interest” —majorities don't know about a range of tax policies; opinions about tax policy shaped by broad political values such as partisanship and ideology
- Inequality is higher today than in the past—what to do?

Each Lecture in One Slide: Lecture 17

- Given status quo bias in American Constitution, what “works?” When does real policy change happen and how? (Action, process, result)
- Real policy change usually starts with events outside of Washington
- Lessons from Civil Rights Movement:
 - Way to a politician’s heart is through votes
 - Entrepreneurs identify new coalitions; demographic/economic changes
 - Beyond elections, public opinion and courts. Salient events, attention to inequities, moral leadership
 - Policies must get through checks and balances of Constitution
- Which avenues overcome status quo bias?
 - Public opinion (motivate members of Congress to respond)
 - Elections (most common source of change; change gridlock interval)
 - Parties (parties pursue own policies, not just median voter—policies change from within, so get issue on party platform)
 - Courts (litigation to force an issue)
 - Bureaucracy (targeted lobbying at right officials; get officials on board)
 - States and localities (laboratory of democracy to test new policy)
 - Constitutional amendments (Hardest threshold, but most permanent)