

Power and Politics in America
Recitation 1: Why Government
February 5, 2013
LGAS (ch.1), RAP (sect. 1.2)

Tragedy of the Commons:

When do societies face a tragedy of the commons?

How can we tackle the tragedy of the commons?

What kind of legal problem does Hardin see with the way in which we try to avoid the tragedy of the commons?

Did you ever witness a situation which could be described as a tragedy of the commons?

Can you think of situations in which common access was transferred to proprietary access to avoid the tragedy of the commons?

Analytical tools:

Models: Stylizations that approximate a real situation

Equilibrium: Situation in which none of the actors involved is able to gain anything by changing her action unilaterally.

Collective Action problems arise b/c individuals have incentive to deviate from a plan of action actually benefitting the group as a whole

Excercise: For lack of a better solution to disposing of their industrial waste, the only two companies in a small town have been dumping that waste in a local pond. Suddenly, the fish in the pond have three eyes. The companies are concerned about the public relations nightmare that three-eyed fish will cause them. Each values a clean pond (and two-eyed fish) at 20 dollars. The total cost of cleaning the pond is 30 dollars. If they both work together to clean the pond, they will split the cost equally between them. If only one of them cleans, that company will bear all of the cost, but the pond will get cleaned and both companies will avoid the public relations nightmare. You should be able to set up the payoff matrix for the game and predict the outcome given each company's decision to clean the pond.

Now,

Describe actors, actions, and payoffs.

How is this form of collective action problem usually called?

What is the equilibrium of this game?

What could the role of government be to avoid the problem characterized in this exercise?

Power and Politics in America

Recitation 2: Constitution

February 12, 2013

LGAS (ch.2 and 3), RAP (sect. 2.1, 2.2), PPAP 3-3)

Terms [Put on board (not definition/explanation in parentheses), ask if clear to everyone, 10 min]:

Factions - Tyranny, cross-cutting cleavages

Separation of powers - Legislature, executive, judiciary

Checks and balances - Legislative supremacy, veto power, divided government, agenda setting powers, constitutional review

Bicameralism

Federalism

Federation vs. confederation

Expressed powers (only those powers named in the text are granted to the federal government)

Necessary and proper clause - or elastic clause (congress has the authority to make all laws “necessary and proper” to carry them out)

Supremacy clause: national laws and treaties “supreme Law of the Land”.

Reserved powers (police power)

Dual federalism

Cooperative federalism (grants-in-aid, categorical grants-in-aid, project grants, formula grants)

Regulated federalism (national standards and social regulation (civil rights, poverty programs, environment protection ↔ Unfunded mandates)

New Federalism. Devolution.

Review U.S. Constitution [15 min]:

- Q: What are some of the parts of the US Constitution that makes it unique? A: It is incredible short and its main body was never changed. Changes (amendments) even correct and sometimes contradict main part. It is the oldest democratic constitution.
- Q: Is a written constitution needed? Desired? A: UK has no written constitution but very old documents protecting basic rights (Magna Carta) and system still works fine. Weimar Germany had what Historians called the most democratic and representative constitution including all human and civil rights you can imagine but opened the door for Hitler.

- Q: Is the vagueness in the U.S. Constitution an asset or liability? A: Ask for examples that leave room for interpretation. On the other side, vagueness has allowed institutions established under the Constitution (especially, the judiciary, the executive, and federal power in general) to evolve overtime to meet the needs of the day.
- Q: Is the difficulty to amend it (Article 5) an asset or a liability? (which can be tied back to the vagueness discussion)
- Q: Is the Constitution too undemocratic? A: Here can talk about the need for super majorities, the Senate, the electoral college, judicial review (although not in the Constitution per se), etc. And again, can talk about protection of the status quo when clear majorities in electorate want change.

Federalism [35 min]:

- Q: What are some examples of expressed powers (that the Constitution grants to the federal government)? A: Collect taxes, regulate interstate commerce, coin money, regulate currency, set standards of weights and measures, declare war, raise and maintain an army and navy.
- Q: What are some examples of fundamental powers retained by the states? fundamental rights of the states? A: Coercion - power to develop and enforce criminal codes, administer health and safety rules, regulated businesses, develop family law, define private property ⇒ police power
- Discussion: Second Amendment. Yet lots of cities have gun control laws.

Federalism exercise

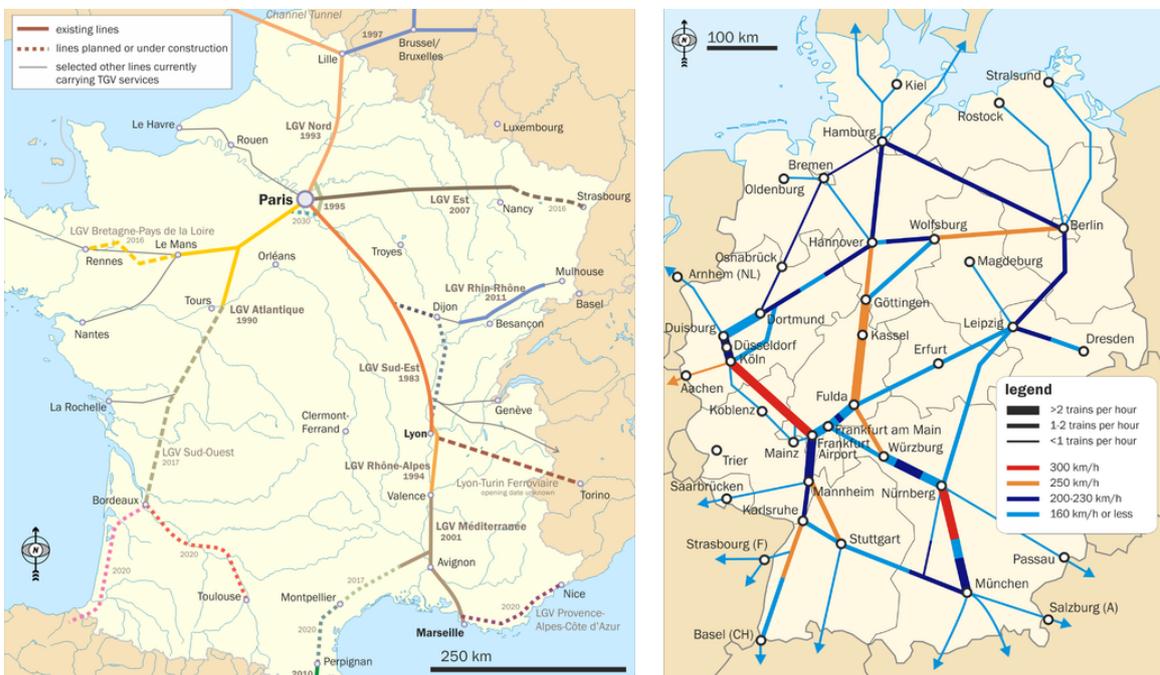
- Divide students into four groups. Assign a type of federalism to each group: (1) dual, (2) cooperative, (3) regulated, (4) new federalism.
- They have 10 minutes to prepare a 3 minute presentation of the main attributes of each type of system and its advantages and disadvantages.
- Write down the characteristics and pros and cons on the board.
- Q: Take the issue of air pollution. How would it be handled under each type of system? What type of system offers the best solution to this problem, and why? [you can mention the “Clean air battlefield” article and talk about the problems identified there]

Federalist papers [15 min]:

- How does Madison define “faction” and why is their existence problematic?
- Q: What are the two possible solutions that he analyzes? A: removal of causes (destroy liberty or give everyone the same interests and opinions) which is impossible, and control of the effects (a federal system in a large, diverse society).

- Q: Do you agree that the United States are diverse enough to avert the dangers of factionalism? A: Can you think of other countries and societies that can be used as an example either for or against Madison's claim?
- Q: Why are checks and balances needed?
- Q: What main attributes should each of the three government branches have to ensure the existence of checks and balances, according to Federalist no. 51? Should they be elected or nominated? Why is the status of the judiciary special? A: each a will of its own and as little agency as possible in the appointment of the others. Ideally, they would all be elected. However, the judiciary has a special status (qualification, independence).

Figure 1: High-speed rail network in France and Germany



Power and Politics in America
Recitation 3: Public opinion
Tuesday 19th February, 2013
LGAS (ch.10), Pollock (ch. 2)

Terms [Put on board (not definition/explanation in parentheses), ask if clear to everyone, 15 min]:

Federalism: Necessary and proper clause - or elastic clause, Supremacy clause

Public opinion:

Socialization: political socialization, agents of socialization

Gender gap

Conservative, liberal

Agenda-setting effects, priming, framing, saliency, latency

Statistics:

Sampling, selection bias, sampling error

Variable

Level of measurement: nominal, ordinal, interval

Central tendency: mode, median, mean

Dispersion

Index variables

Measuring and describing data [15 min]: Take the data attached (raw table and different forms of display (summary stats table, histogram)) to illustrate the following concepts

Level of measurement: **nominal** (variable: *race*), **ordinal** (*class*), **interval** (*age*).

Central tendency: **mode**, **median**, **mean**

Dispersion: comparison **mean** and **median** (look at *age*, do we have more weight in the distribution above or below the **mean**? If the **median** is above the **mean**, we have more old than young folks \Rightarrow **positive skew** (see summary statistics table and histogram of age))

The data is taken from the ANES 2008. The variables are: Race (6 categories: White, Black, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, Other), Class (self-assigned social class), Feeling Thermometer (feeling towards Bush Junior!), and Age.

The frequency plots also contain the mean of that variable (red line) and the median of that variable (blue line); might be helpful when talking about skewness. To further illustrate positive and negative skewness, put a plot on the board with long tails (e.g. participation in protest has a long tail, many protest once or never, a few protest a lot, driving up the mean but the median is low \Rightarrow positively skewed).

Figure 1: Raw data

race	class	therm	age	id
Native American	Average middle	85	35	1
White	Average working	60	58	2
White	Average middle	85	39	3
White	Average working	50	50	4
White	Average middle	70	72	5
White	Average middle	70	71	6
White	Average middle	85	66	7
White	DK/NA	70	56	8
White	Upper working	85	40	9
Black	Average middle	0	55	10
White	Average middle	60	84	11
White	Upper middle	85	55	12
White	Average working	70	30	13
White	Middle class--NA average or upper	97	79	14
White	Average middle	70	78	15
White	Upper middle	70	72	16
Black	Average working	15	21	17
White	Average working	15	27	18
White	Average middle	30	61	19
White	Average middle	85	51	20
White	Average middle	40	32	21
White	Average middle	30	87	22

Table 1: Summary statistics

Variable	# of Obs.	Mean	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
Race	2307	2.149	1	1	1	5
Class	2182	2.629	3	1	0	7
Feeling Thermometer	2309	37.480	40	0	0	97
Age	2277	47.369	47	46/53	18	93

Figure 2: Frequency distribution of Race (excluding Others, DK, and NA)

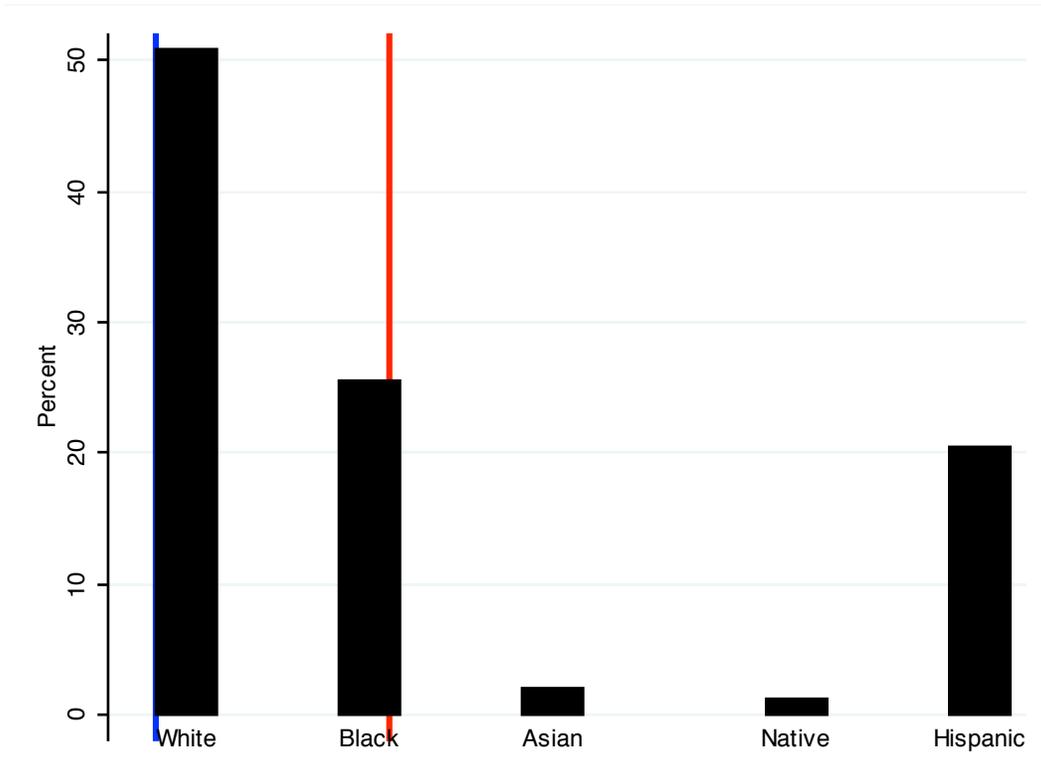


Figure 3: Frequency distribution of Class (excluding DK and NA); Values: 0 = Lower class, 1 = Average working, 2 = Working (NA average or upper), 3 = Upper working, 4 = Average middle, 5 = Middle class (NA average or upper), 6 = Upper middle, 7 = Upper class

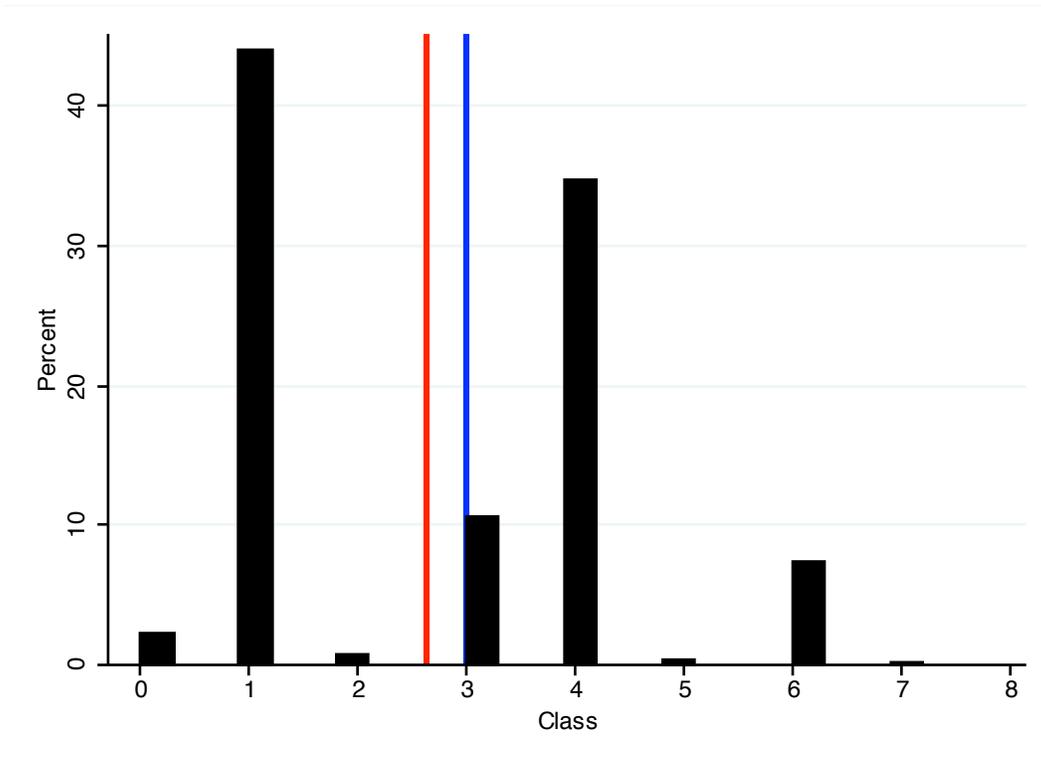


Figure 4: ANES Feeling Thermometer question

ANES - Feeling Thermometers

I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.



Figure 5: Frequency distribution of Feeling Thermometer (excluding DK and NA)

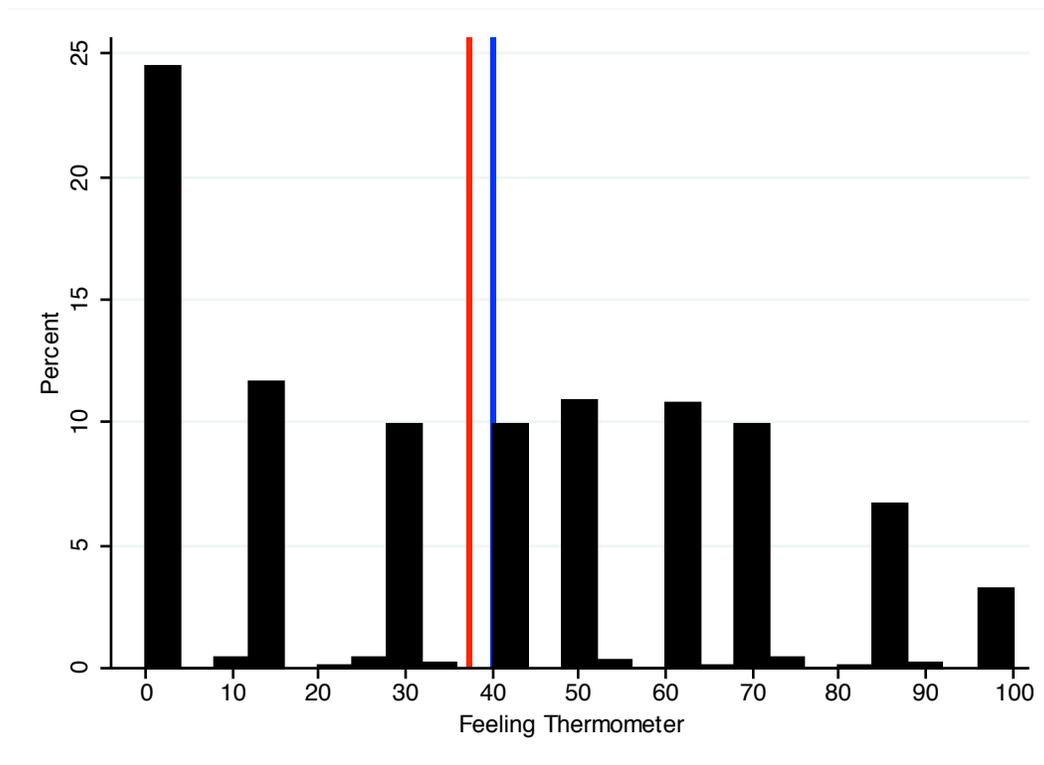
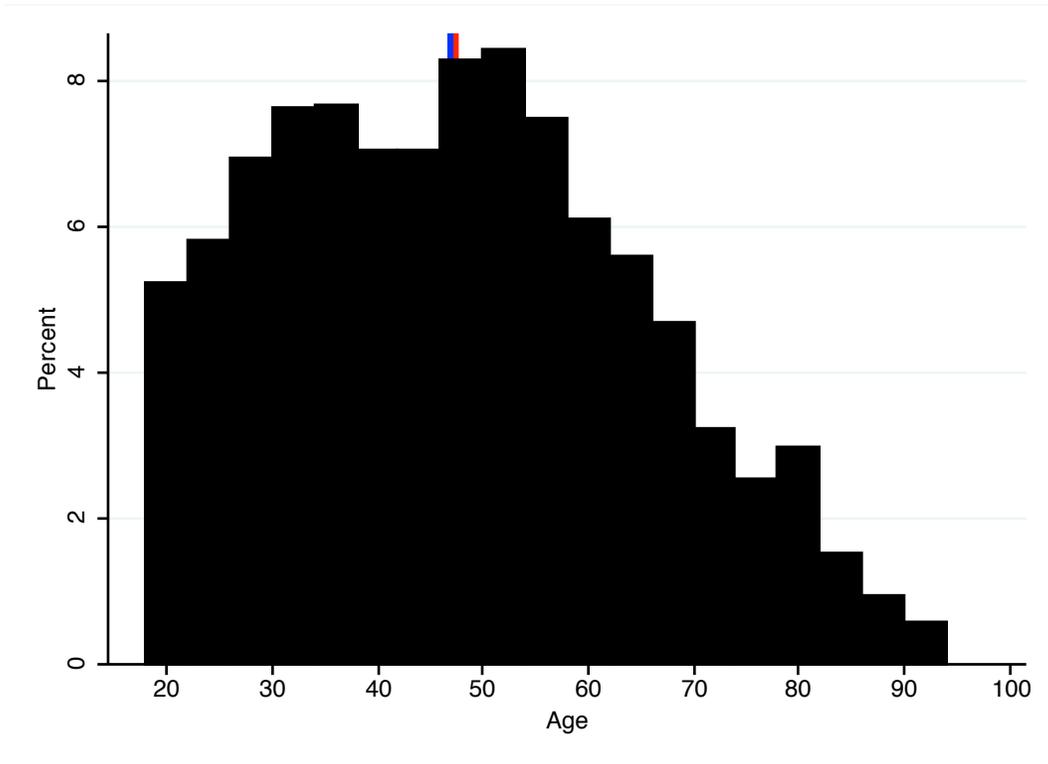


Figure 6: Frequency distribution of Age (excluding DK and NA)



Survey design [30 min]: We give the students the following concepts:

Eye color

Gender

Income

Ideology

There task is to design a questionnaire which gives us the best possible measure of those social characteristics; for now we ignore sampling issues! The focus of this task lies with the precision of measurement.

The students are put into groups for discussion and given the following questions to answer:

What is a definition of the concept?

What is the best question to ask to measure each concept?

What are potential problems? In answering this question you might want to make use of the following terms: unit of analysis, level of measurement, additive index, likert-scale, wording, self-assignment question.

How to lie with statistics [20 min]:

Show students a range of figures collected from media outlets and ask the following questions:

What do we learn from this figure

What does the media outlet claim that we learn from this figure?

How is this claim by the media outlet a misrepresentation of survey answers?

Figures: How to lie with statistics

Figure 7: The Atlantic: Tax the rich to pay for health care (Conor Clarke, 2009)

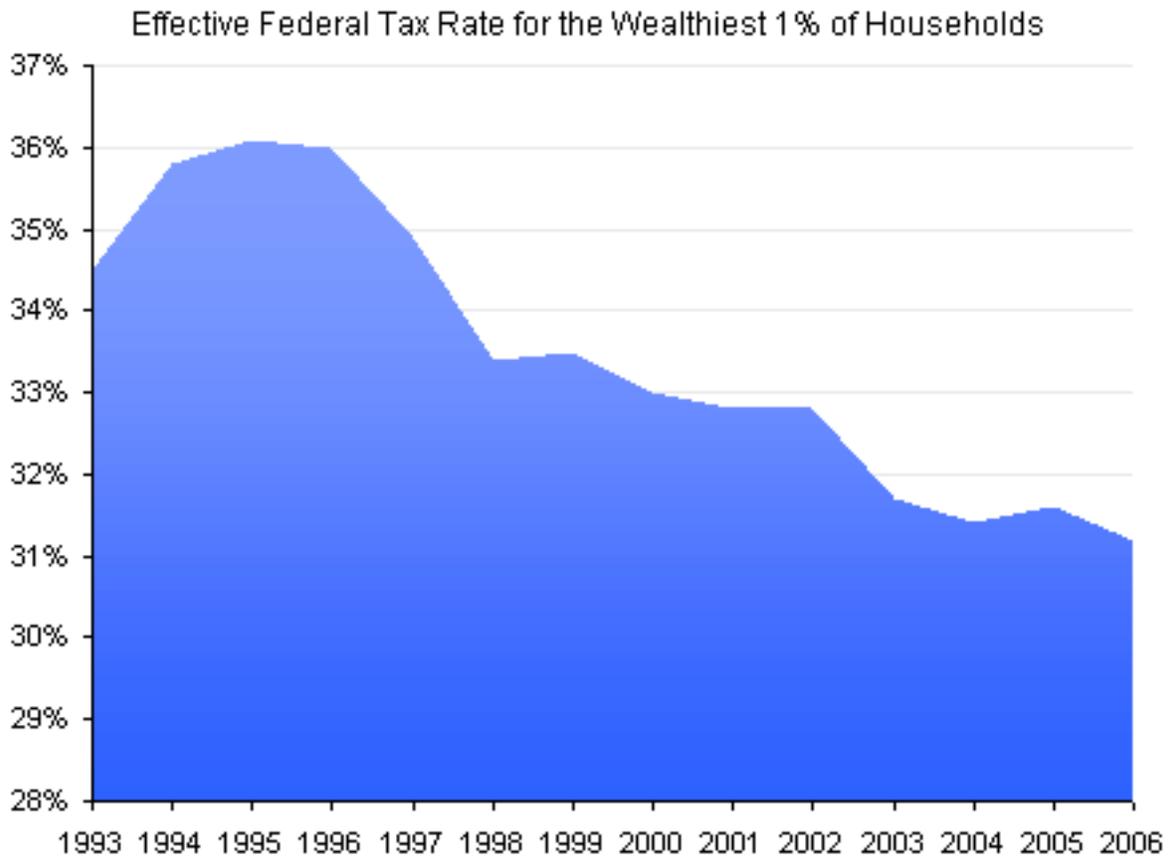


Figure 8: The Atlantic: Tax the rich to pay for health care (Conor Clarke, 2009) – now, with the correct axis scaling

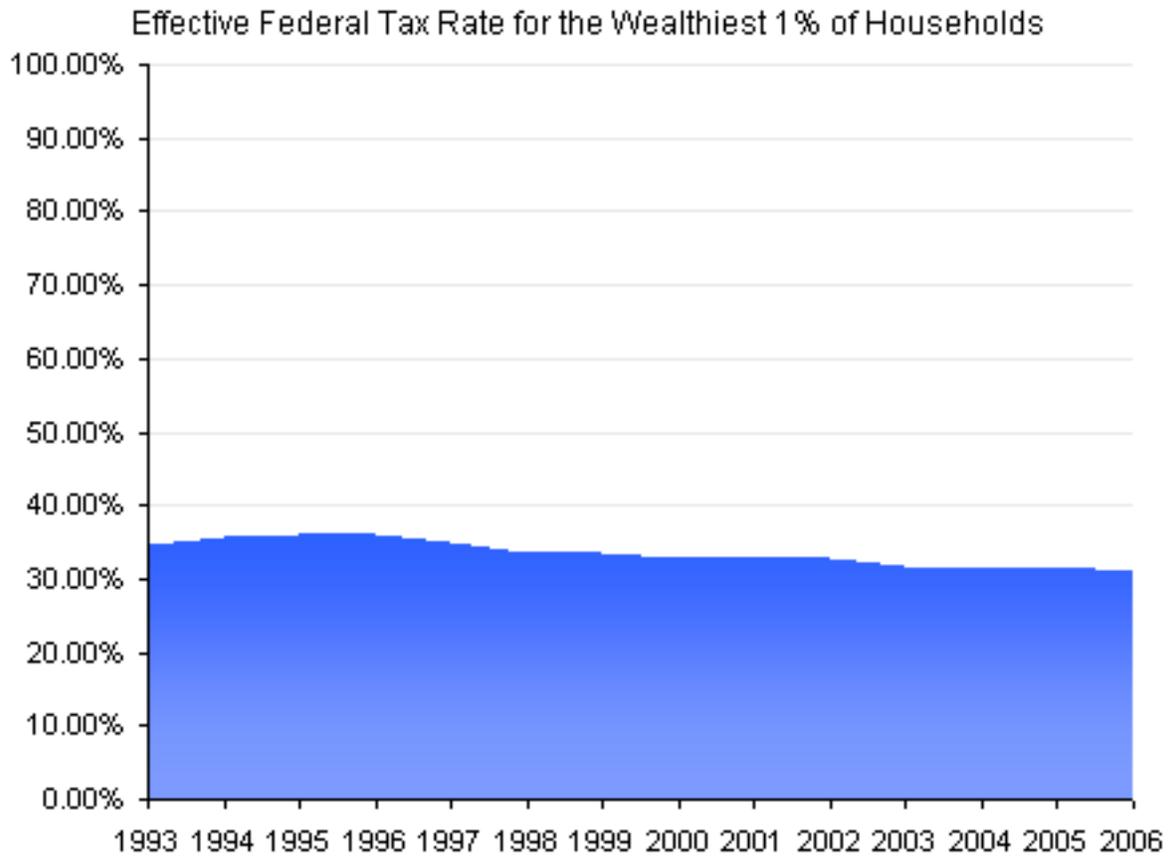


Figure 9: CNN: Democrats far outnumber Republicans and Independents in thinking the Florida state court was right to order Terri Schiavos feeding tube removed (2005)

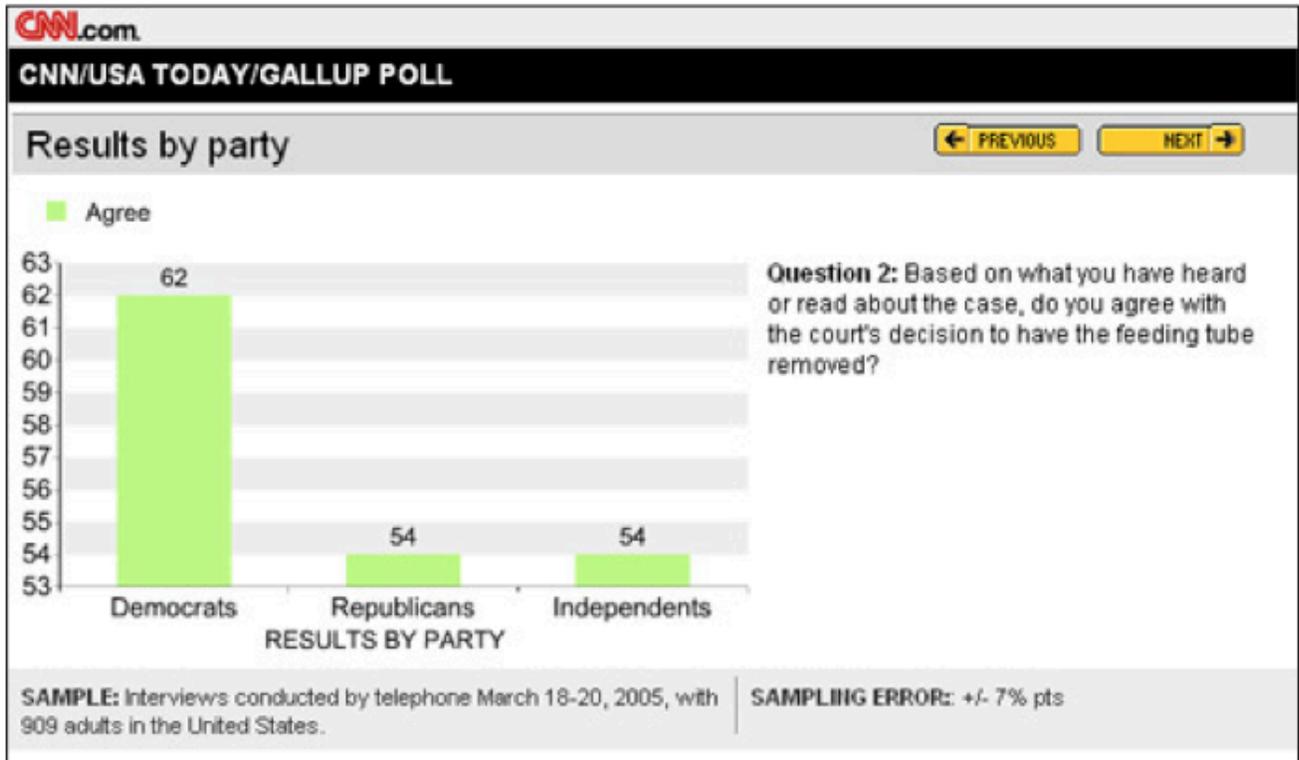


Figure 10: CNN: Democrats far outnumber Republicans and Independents in thinking the Florida state court was right to order Terri Schiavos feeding tube removed (2005) – now, again, with correct axis scaling // Also, think about sampling error ($\pm 7\%$)

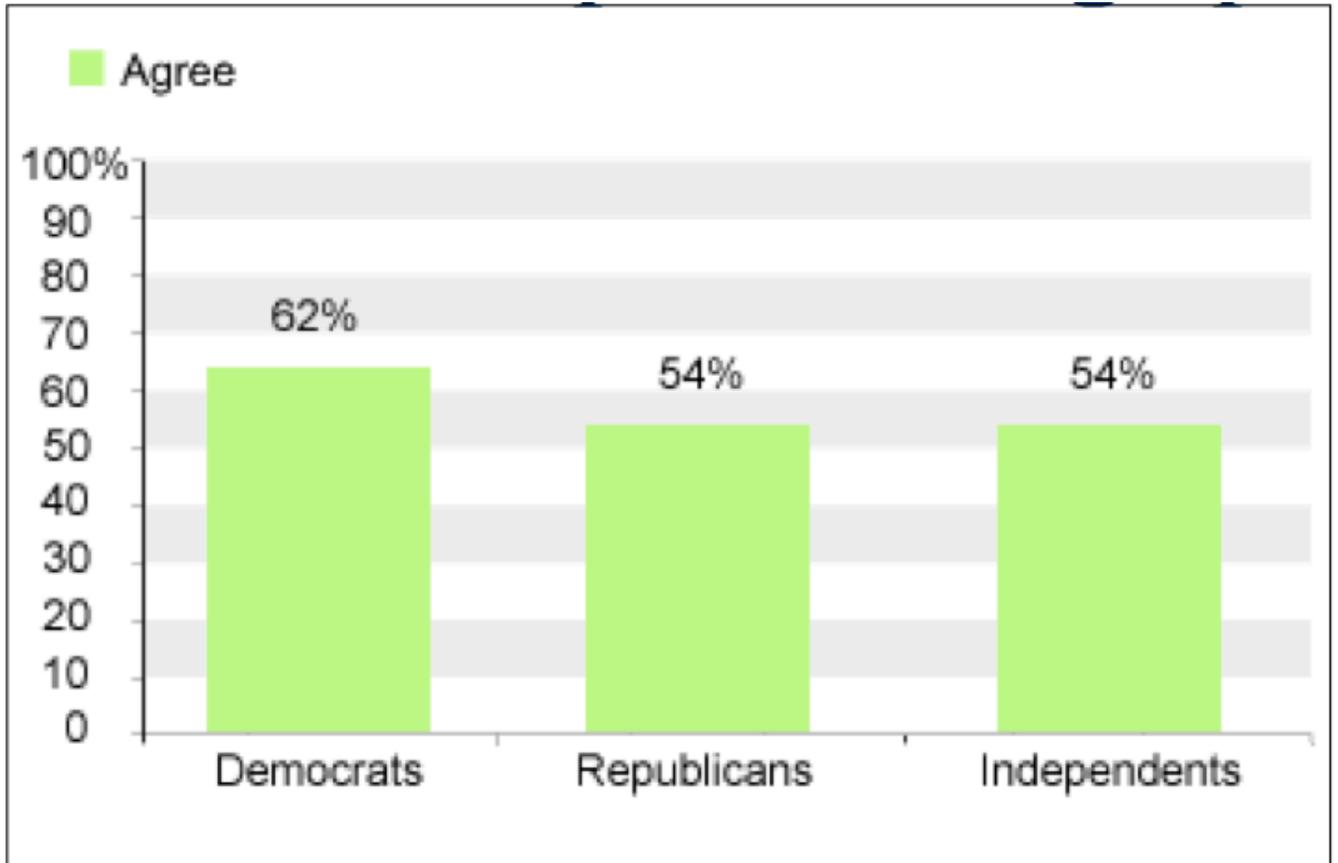


Figure 11: Number of hurricanes per year increases (no source)

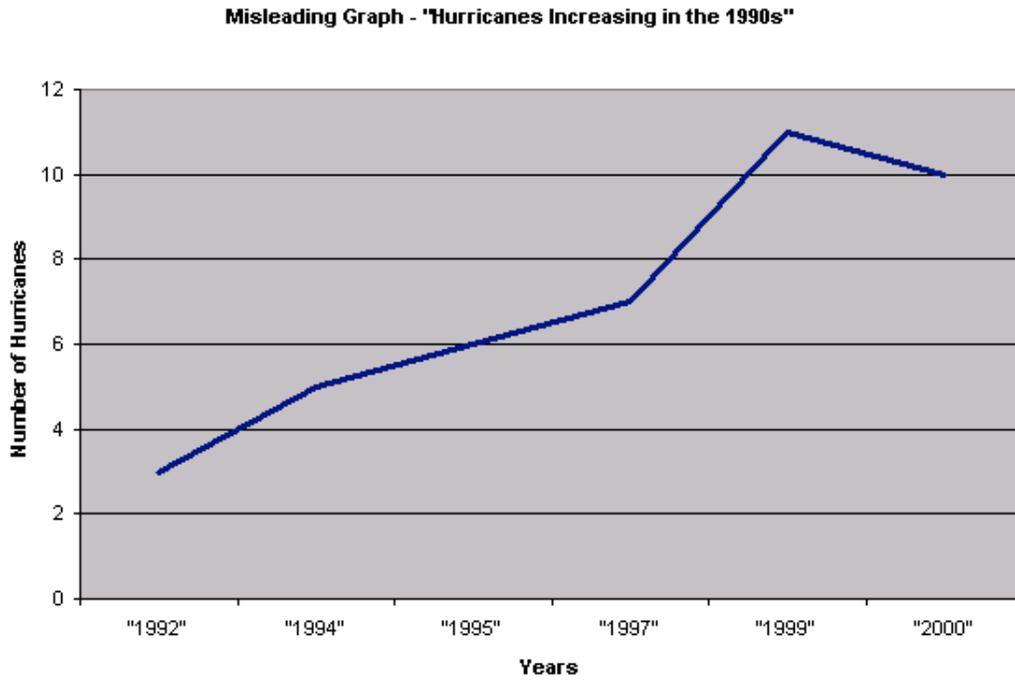


Figure 12: Number of hurricanes per year increases (no sources) – now, with all years

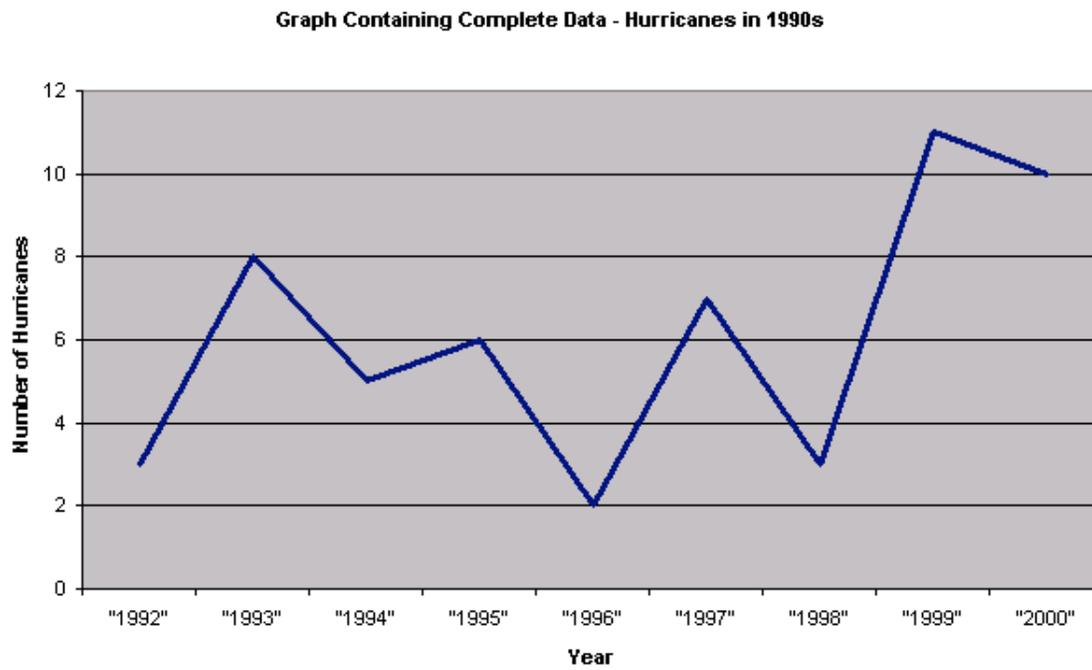
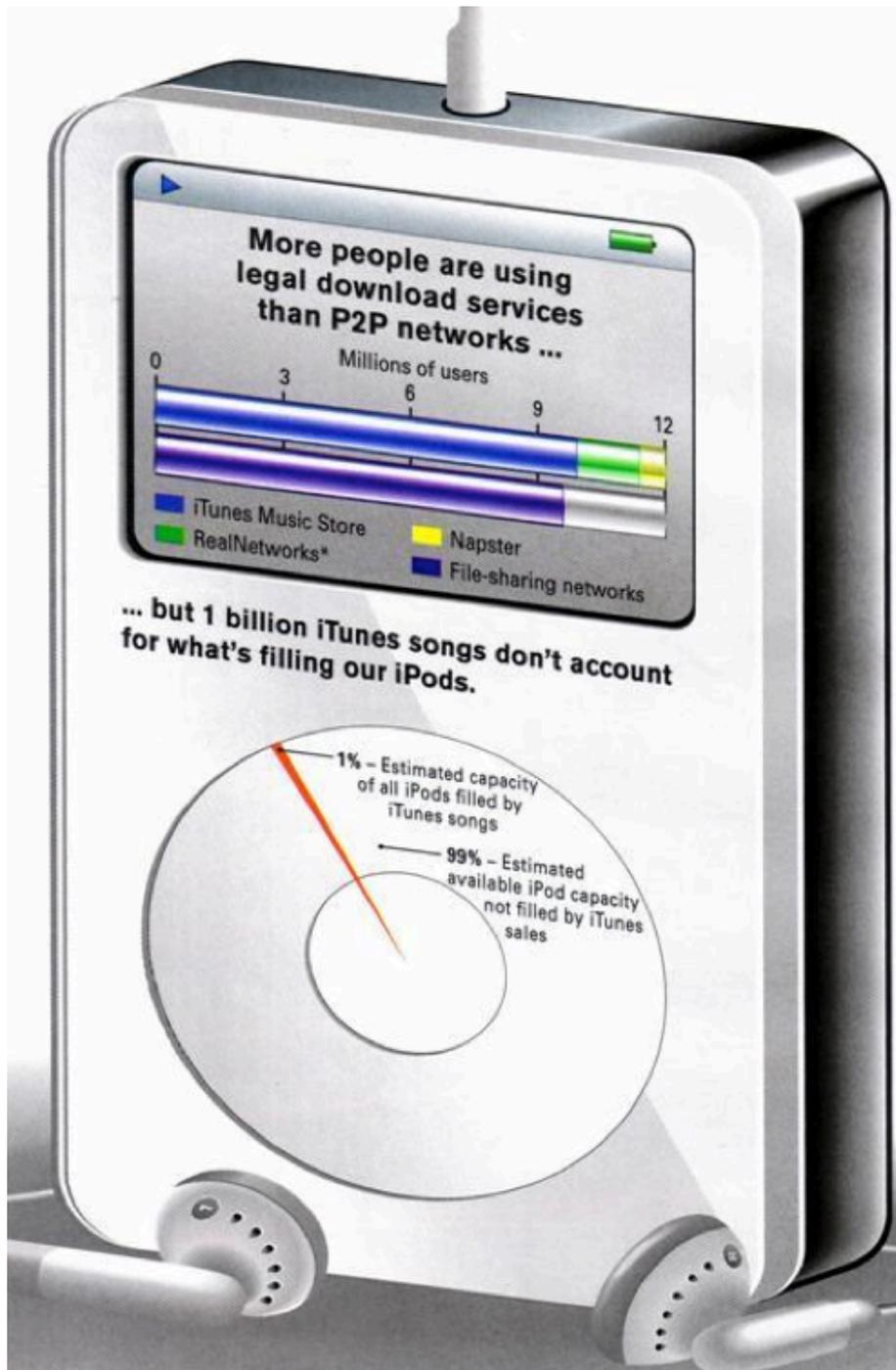


Figure 13: Where are all the downloads coming from? (no source) – think about the reference point!



Power and Politics in America

Recitation 6: a. Voting and issue voting. b. Interest groups.

March 26, 2013

LGAS (ch.13), Change and Continuity (ch. 6)

**Terms. Put these up on the board. Ask students if they have questions.
15 minutes**

Voting paradox - Majority rule cycle

Collective preferences cyclic even though individuals have ordered preferences.

Condorcet winner

- would be the winner in a two-candidate election against each of the others.

Agenda-setter

Strategic voting

Issue voting

Retrospective voting

- How well has the incumbent done on policy?

- How likely is it that the challenger will do better?

Personal traits of the candidates

Prospective voting *Voters compare candidates' policy platforms with own preferences.*

Interest group

Pluralism

Informational benefits - *newsletters, conferences, training*

Material benefits - *goods, services or money*

Solidary benefits - *friendship, networking*

Purposive benefits - *advocacy, emphasize the purpose of the group*

Political entrepreneurs

Lobbying

Going public - *mobilize public opinion to put pressure on politicians*

Political Action Committees (PACs)

Initiative

Section 1. Campaign issues

20 minutes

a. Discussion question: Why does the importance that voters assign to different issues fluctuate over time? How much can candidates influence public opinion with respect to which issues are most important in an election?

b. Exercise: The following are campaign messages used by presidential candidates. Read each of them and ask students to answer the following questions:

- Does the message come from an incumbent or a challenger?
- A republican or a democrat?
- Do you know who the candidate is?
- What do you think was the context and what were the main issues in the campaign?

(a) Are you better off today than you were 4 years ago?

1980 slogan of republican challenger Reagan. Attacking Carter for not being able to deal with inflation and increase America's influence in the world.

(b) Read my lips. No new taxes.

1988 slogan of republican George H. W. Bush. Building upon the economic success of the Reagan administration.

(c) Putting people first. (and) It's the economy, stupid!

1992 slogans of democratic challenger Bill Clinton. Bush focused on foreign policy, Clinton preferred to talk about the economy and reforming the health care system.

(d) Peace and prosperity.

1956 slogan of republican incumbent Eisenhower. Context: Cold War, the end of the Korean War in 1953. Did not repeal New deal and continued most of the federal programs.

(e) A safer world and a more hopeful America.

2004 slogan of republican George W. Bush. Context: war in Afghanistan, Iraq, war against terrorism.

Section 2. Issue Voting

25 minutes

a. Question: What is strategic voting? Give an example from recent elections. How can we find evidence of strategic voting? Why do some voters vote strategically? Why don't all voters vote strategically?

b. Discussion question: In 2008, McCain was closer to the average voter on most issues and over all the combined issues. What would we expect the result of the election to be, and why?

How can we then explain that McCain has lost the elections? Is this evidence that voters don't vote based on issues? What other factors could have affected the results?

You can discuss:

Voting is an individual action, choice made by each individual by somehow combining all the issues.

Issue salience. Obama was closer to the median on health care and defense spending.

Issue voting criteria:

- *be able to place themselves on an issue*
- *be able to place the candidates on the issue*
- *perceive a difference in candidate positions. We DO find evidence of issue voting for those voters that meet all three of these criteria.*

Projection: voters can inaccurately perceive the candidate that they already favor closer to their own position.

Retrospective voting. But how?

Section 3. Interest groups

15 minutes

a. Question: What is the difference between interest group, Political Action Committee and political party?

b. Question: Group membership has an upper-class bias. What does this mean and what are the implications of this for political representation?

Parties can mobilize the lower social strata. The relative importance of interest groups and political parties.

c. Question: What strategies can interest groups use to influence policy, and what are the challenges that they have to face?

Direct lobbying: members of Congress, the President, the Administration. Using the courts. Going public. Using PACs.

Power and Politics in America

Recitation 7: Congress

LGSA, Chapter 6; Krehbiel: Pivotal Politics; recitation hand-out

April 1, 2013

1. Terms [10min]

Representation – constituency, delegates, trustees

Bicameral legislature – House of Representatives, Senate

Electoral rules – FPTP, patronage, pork-barrel legislation, gerrymandering

Agenda control, agenda setter – Speaker of the House, majority leader

Status quo, median

Partisanship

Committee – gatekeeping authority, proposal power, oversight, seniority, agency

Incumbent

Bill, Law – closed/open rule, cloture, logrolling

Pivots, presidential veto, pocket veto, filibuster, supermajority

Gridlock – *Absence of policy change in equilibrium in spite of the existence of a legislative majority that favors change*

Impeachment

2. Congress [10 min]:

- How does a bill become a law?
- What is the role of committees? Are they agenda setter?
- Why is partisanship/polarization a problem? What's a veto, what's a filibuster?

3. Pivotal politics model [35min]

Model Set-Up:

- Uni-dimensional policy space, status quo policy q , president, n legislators, preferences are symmetric and single-peaked (explain on board, draw)
- Supermajorities required to enact laws: veto- and filibuster procedures (let a student draw the policy space with pivotal legislators for a conservative president)
- Sequence of play: Congress adopts bill, Filibuster or not, President signs or vetoes, Congress overrides or sustains; let a student replicate figure 2.3 (p.24 in Krehbiel) and indicate where gridlock can occur.
- What is gridlock? See definition in terms. In the model gridlock is any outcome where the pivotal player chooses the status quo over the proposed policy. Why might that be a disappointment for the public, perceived as injustice? Except when $q=m$, there will be a majority favoring p but is stuck with q .
- Who is the pivot? Go through 2-3 cases mentioned in the book starting p. 28.
- Make students put up the generalization of gridlock cases on the board (figure 2.7, p.35). What are the lessons? Gridlock occurs often but not always. Winning coalitions are usually large and bipartisan.

Exercise:

Consider a pivotal politics model similar to the one discussed in class. All actors have single peaked, symmetric preferences, and bargaining occurs on one dimension (with higher values being associated as more liberal). The sequence of moves is the following: The legislature (represented by the median) proposes a bill. If the filibuster pivot allows the bill to be voted on, it passes, and then goes to the president. The president then can sign the bill (and the bill becomes a law), or vetoes it, and the status quo (q) remains.

- (a) Imagine a situation where the president's ideal point (p) is at 8, the ideal point of the legislative median (m) is at 13, and the ideal point of the filibuster pivot (f) is at 15. For what range of q are the outcomes different from q ?
- (b) An economic recession happens, and a new president is elected who is more liberal than his predecessor. Specifically, the new president's ideal point is at 19. How does your answer from a change?

4. Polarization in Congress [Divide in two groups, 20 min]:

First of all, how do we know that there is polarization in Congress? Look at Roll-call voting behavior (filibuster and cloture votes, unanimous party votes). Let one group make a case why polarization and decision-making centralization is ok, let one group make a case why it is bad.

Arguments why polarization is bad

- Gridlock: No reform.
- Abuse of congressional procedures by majority (see reconciliation) and minority party (see filibuster, blockage of administrative nominees); speakers in both chambers make policy and do not preside sessions (is that really bad?)
- Flow of power from Congress to the president
- Negative public view of Congress, low turnout?

Arguments why polarization is good

- Gridlock: No tyranny.
- Congress is responding/reflecting to polarization in public (normative argument, responsiveness is good)
- More coherent parties means easier identifiable ideological labels; more information provided to public/voters
- System becomes more accountable and transparent (normative argument) since responsibilities are more clearly assigned and misbehavior/scandals more often made public by the opposition