

Introduction to American Politics

Week 1

Nazita Lajevardi

Office Hours: Thursdays 10am-12pm SSB 341
nlajevar@ucsd.edu
Department of Political Science

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Hello, Introductions, and Names

- ▶ Name
- ▶ Year in school
- ▶ Major
- ▶ Favorite food
- ▶ Where you want to be in 5 years

Section Expectations and Goals

- ▶ Section attendance and participation is **10%** of your total grade.
- ▶ Discussion questions.
- ▶ Review key concepts from class.
- ▶ Answer lingering questions.

Key dates

- ▶ **MIDTERM:** Week 5 IN SECTION (Thursday, February 5th)
- ▶ **ESSAY:** Wednesday, February 18th (Turnitin)
- ▶ **FINAL:** Friday, March 20 (11:30-2:30)

Chapter 1: Power and representative governments

- ▶ All organizations are governed by rules and procedures for making and enforcing decisions.
 - ▶ The **constitution** of a nation establishes its government institutions and the set of rules and procedures these institutions must and must not follow to reach and enforce collective agreements.
- ▶ **Power** refers to an officeholder's actual influence with other officeholders, and as a consequence, over the government's actions.
- ▶ Modern democracies often proclaim to have **representative governments**.

Chapter 1: Agenda control/Setting the agenda

- ▶ The framers of the constitution relied on several design principles to mediate different relationships. Agenda control is one of these tools.
- ▶ **Agenda control** is the authority to place proposals before others for their decision, as well as preventing proposals from being considered.
 - ▶ Ex: Congress presents a passed bill to the president; congressional committees recommend legislation to the full chamber.
- ▶ Agenda control is the right of one actor to set choices for other actors (can be legislation, proposed regulations, etc).
- ▶ Agenda control is key in settings where some members of the group exercise proposal power and others do not
 - ▶ Ex. Constitution requires that tax bills originate in the House – so the House sets the Senate's agenda on this important topic)

Arrow's paradox and the law of cyclical majorities

- ▶ **Takeaway:** collective preferences can be cyclic (i.e., not transitive), even if the preferences of individual voters are not. This is paradoxical, because it means that majority wishes can be in conflict with each other.

Voter	Preference 1	Preference 2	Preference 3
Voter 1	A	B	C
Voter 2	B	C	A
Voter 3	C	A	B

- ▶ If C is chosen as the winner, arguably then B should win instead, since two voters (1 and 2) prefer B to C and only one voter (3) prefers C to B. However, by the same argument A is preferred to B, and C is preferred to A, by a margin of two to one on each occasion. The requirement of majority rule then provides no clear winner.

Takeaway from Arrow's Paradox: So what?

- ▶ Recall the importance of agenda setting, i.e., not only deciding which questions are asked, but their order? Well, given the same democratic process and rules (everyone has one vote at each stage), by changing the ordering of the pairings, we can come up with three different outcomes?all supported by 2/3rds!
- ▶ 1. He/she who sets the agenda usually has more power than others.
- ▶ 2. Democratic processes dont guarantee stable and predictable outcomes.
- ▶ 3. You can fool some of the people at least some of the time (but now you know better).

Chapter 15: The prospects for institutional reform

- ▶ The Framers of the constitution were worried that those people who were unhappy with the new government would want constitutional reform. Thus, they placed very high transaction costs - the investment of time, effort, and resources needed to reach collective decisions - on attempts to change the American political system.
- ▶ **Discussion Question 1:** Americans admire the Constitution but often try to amend it. We salute the flag but debate whether we should require everyone to pledge allegiance to it. Did we have have a perfect union or is all of this change our attempts to get there?

Chapter 1 & 15: The prisoner's dilemma

- ▶ To solve coordination problems, political parties have employed various methods (i.e. direct primaries) to focus support on a single candidate. But when voters want me turnover among politicians, they deal with their prisoner's dilemma by supporting term limits.
- ▶ **Prisoner's Dilemma:** The prisoner's dilemma occurs whenever individuals who ultimately would benefit from cooperating with each other, also have powerful and irresistible incentives to break the agreement and exploit the other side.

The Prisoners' Dilemma

		Prisoner A Choices	
		<i>Stay Silent</i>	<i>Confess and Betray</i>
Prisoner B Choices	<i>Stay Silent</i>	Each serves one month in jail	Prisoner A goes free Prisoner B serves full year in jail
	<i>Confess and Betray</i>	Prisoner A serves full year in jail Prisoner B goes free	Each serves three months in jail

Chapter 15: Term limits as a solution to the prisoner's dilemma

- ▶ Term limits mandate turnover in a legislature, preventing representatives from running for reelection, after they've held office for a certain period of time.
- ▶ For voters who wish to be represented by a series new legislators who bring fresh perspectives, term limits provide a way out of the prisoner's dilemma.
- ▶ Often, voters feel trapped by their incumbents - they like that their legislators have seniority, but they want new blood (challenger) - but are afraid that if they have an incumbent and their neighbor keeps the senior legislator), their legislator will have less power.
 - ▶ This is the crux of the prisoner's dilemma: neither voter can risk choosing his most preferred option because he will suffer when the other voter reaps the rewards of deviating from this strategy.
- ▶ Thus, term limits bind all voters together in regularly dumping their incumbents, to ensure that no district can defect to build up its legislator's seniority and influence.