

The “Logic” of American Politics

- I. Who Will Win in 2012?
- II. The Logic of Political Science
- III. Rational Choice
- IV. Politics as Collective Action
- V. Problems of Collective Action
- VI. Government as Solution to Collective Action Problems



I. Who Will Win in 2012?

- *Q: Which candidate is more likely to win in 2012 and WHY?*



a. The Logic of Political Science

- Start from an important QUESTION
 - Who will win in 2012?
- Move to an HYPOTHESIS
 - Obama will win OR Romney will win *because...*
 - “It’s the economy, stupid”
- Develop an EXPLANATION, which includes a DESCRIPTION of the key variables in play
- Combine all into a PREDICTION of outcome
 - Model of electoral behavior (in this race)
- Political Science as ‘science’

I. Rational Choice

- Actors (preferences and choice)
- Institutions (context)
- Strategic Interaction
 - Maximizing Preferences
 - Interaction with other Actors
 - Influence of Institutional Contexts

II. Politics as Collective Action

- **Collective Action:** Actions taken by a group to deal with some common problem.
- **Politics:** is the process through which individuals and groups reach decisions on common (or collective) actions.
- **Constitutions:** the set of rules prescribing the political process that must followed to reach and enforce collective agreements. Constitutions establish the rules between government and governed, and between different parts of the government (i.e., federal and state).
- **Government:** institutions created by the constitution and charged with making and enforcing collective agreements.

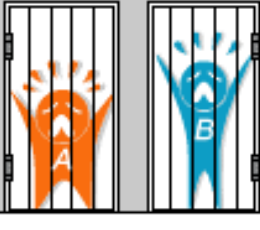


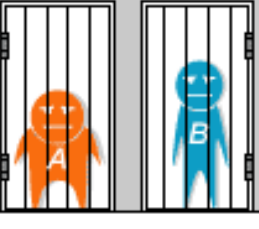
III. Problems of Collective Action

- Coordination Problems
- Prisoners' Dilemma
 - Lack of Trust
 - Individual Interest v. Collective Interest
- Free Rider Problem
- Tragedy of the Commons
- Costs of Collective Action (Conformity and Transaction Costs)

The Prisoners' Dilemma

- What is the best outcome for *both* players?
- What is the best outcome for each *individually*?
- What is the actual outcome of this game? Why?

Prisoners' dilemma

		prisoner B	
		confess	remain silent
prisoner A	confess	 5 years 5 years	 0 year 20 years
	remain silent	 20 years 0 year	 1 year 1 year

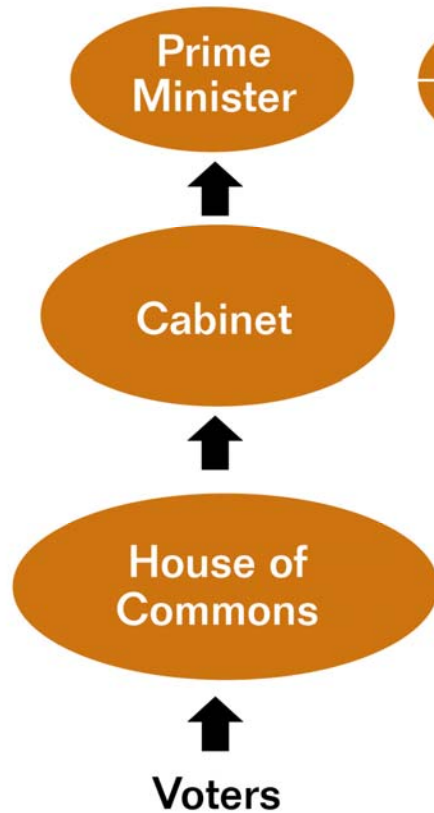
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IV. Government as a Means to Resolve Collective Action Problems

- **Democracy:** government by the people (*demos* = the people; *kratos* = authority or power)
 - Political Equality and Majority Rule (50% +1)
 - Plurality Rule (most votes, even if >50%)
- **Representative Democracy (or Republican Government)**
 - **Direct Democracy:** government in which citizens come together to discuss and pass laws and select rulers.
 - **Representative Democracy:** government that derives its power indirectly from the people, who elect (delegate) authority to those who govern; also called a *republic*
- **Presidential v. Parliamentary Government**

Figure 1-2 Comparing the American and British Constitutional Systems

British Parliamentary System



U.S. Presidential System

