

**17.20: Introduction to American Politics**  
**Short Paper #3: Comparative Analysis**  
**DUE: April 12 at noon**

In paper #2, you analyzed the behavior of the president and members of Congress using Krehbiel's pivotal politics model, which treats actors' preferences as exogenously determined. In this paper, you will focus on where the preferences of different political actors originate in the first place. Specifically, you will analyze how government officials and ordinary citizens thought about and behaved with respect to a complex political issue: the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), also known as "Obamacare."

Choose ONE of the following two types of government officials:

1. A *career civil servant* (not a political appointee) in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services who is responsible for specifying and implementing certain regulations mandated by the PPACA.
2. A *U.S. Supreme Court justice* faced with a case challenging the constitutionality of the PPACA.

Your task is to contrast your government official with a *typical American citizen* who votes regularly but is not a political activist or campaign donor. In order to account for the differences between the actors, you will need to consider the different incentives, opportunities, and constraints that each actor faces. Your argument should explain how each actor's attitudes and behavior regarding the PPACA were influenced by the following factors:

- A. *Motivations*: What are the goals and motivations most relevant to the actor's attitudes and behavior regarding the PPACA? For example, Krehbiel's pivotal politics model assumes that actors vote on bill based only on its policy consequences. Mayhew's electoral connection is premised on the idea that members of Congress care first and foremost about getting reelected, and only secondarily about other goals like achieving good public policy. What analogous simplifying assumptions would you find most plausible for understanding the motivations of the actor in question here?
- B. *Decisions*: What kinds of political decisions (e.g., vote choice in a general election) does the actor have the opportunity or obligation to make with respect to the PPACA? What alternatives can the actor choose between? How much and what kind of influence do the actor's choices have over the law's implementation?
- C. *Information*: How much does the actor know about the PPACA? What kinds of information are least/most important or relevant to the actor? How do the actor's motivations and decision opportunities affect how much and what kind of information they gather on the PPACA?

**Writing Tips:**

- Your argument should be cast in general terms. You are not being asked to explain the attitudes and behavior of particular people (e.g., your mom and Chief Justice John Roberts). Rather, you should present a general framework for understanding the attitudes and behavior of each type of actor. Each type of actor may be internally diverse in certain respects (e.g., ideologically), and your framework should take account of such potential diversity as well as the likely similarities among actors of the same type. For example, just as Krehbiel and Mayhew are agnostic as to MCs' policy preferences or the political conditions in their districts, so too should your argument apply generally to each type of actor.
- By the same token, you do not need have or demonstrate more than Wikipedia-level knowledge of the PPACA. For our purposes, the most important characteristics of the Act are that it was complex and politically divisive; its constitutionality was contested; and it delegated important policy-making details to the bureaucracy. Your argument should be generalizable to any law or issue that shares these features.
- A good comparative analysis does more than simply describe key differences and similarities between two subjects. Your aim is to take synthesize the various aspects of the comparison into a single coherent argument.
- In your introduction, you will need to establish your frame of reference (in this case, the PPACA and the two types of actors) and your grounds for comparison (the factors one which you will compare them), and also state a clear thesis that summarizes how your two subjects relate to each other (sometimes it helps to begin your thesis with a word like “whereas”).
- It is fine to structure your argument by addressing each of the three factors in turn. Use the key questions that follow the “factors” (above) to help you analyze evidence for each of your points.

**Sources:**

Your comparison of the different types of actors should be rooted predominantly in the readings and lectures from this course. The lectures most relevant to this paper are 9, 10, and 12–15. It would be advisable to review the lecture slides for these weeks as well as the readings. The ideas and models that might be most useful to you include:

- the bureaucracy pieces by Moe and Lewis, which cover such topics as agency models and bureaucratic professionalization
- the legal, attitudinal, and strategic models of judicial decision-making covered explicitly in lecture 10 and indirectly in that lecture's readings
- Zaller's and Berinsky's theories of survey responses and media effects

- the ignorance, inconsistency, and instability of ordinary citizens' opinions and the prospects for low-information rationality (see the Bartels and Schudson readings and lectures 12 and 13).
- the perceptual effects of partisanship (lecture 14)
- rational-choice (e.g., Downs) and psychological (e.g., Quattrone & Tversky) models of political choice (lecture 15)

Citations to these sources will be very helpful for establishing the plausibility of the premises of your argument. If you need to cite a detail about the PPACA that is not common knowledge, you may cite its Wikipedia article:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patient\\_Protection\\_and\\_Affordable\\_Care\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patient_Protection_and_Affordable_Care_Act)

**Paper Requirements:**

- Your paper must be uploaded in PDF format by noon on April 12.
- Your paper must be double-spaced and between 1,000 and 1,250 words in length (around 4 pages).
- Assignments submitted after the noon deadline will be immediately penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g., A to A-), and each 8 hours the penalty increases by 1/3 of a grade.
- Use parenthetical citations with a references list at the end of your essay. (The reference list will not count toward your word limit.) For a good resource, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style*. When citing a specific quotation or part of a work, provide the page number.

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