The Art of Politics: Critical Analysis and Knowledge

Preface to the Case of GOP Strategy in the American Political Environment
How do We Know What We Know?

- When we try to understand our world, such as why the GOP faired well in the last election season, we fall back on different modes of knowing depending on our training, friends, family, experiences, etc.

- How do you know what you know, especially regarding what is happening in politics?
How do We Know What We Know?

- What should the world look like? Is there a current ideology or political party that may offer an answer?

- More importantly, how do you know that your normative vision of politics is better than alternatives?
Normative vs. Empirical

- **Normative questions** are based on values and relate to how the world should work, not necessarily how it is in reality.

- **Empirical** is based on the senses of what we can observe around us, related to facts.
How do We Know What We Know?

- Is it investment?
  - Do you know what you know because you have invested time or resources into believing something, or have bought into some logic of the existing status quo from which you do not wish to move?
  - For those that voted Republican in 2004, did they do this out of habit or similar investment?
A key problem with investment is that this type of knowing, and related behavior, may not be at all connected with the truth but more to what one wants to believe.

Individuals may not fully open their eyes to the objective world, to the extent and can be perceived.
How do We Know What We Know?

- Plato’s allegory of the cave: to perceive reality one needs to crawl out of the cave to see the sunlight, not to view the shadows on the cave walls as real.

- Gaining education and critical analysis is a means to see the shadows for what they are, but if all knows are the shadows then one will see them as real.
How do We Know What We Know?

- Another way of knowing is through authority, where someone tells you something you accept as true or factual.

- How often do you simply accept what the media or others tell you?

- How do you know they may be correct?
How do We Know What We Know?

- No matter your partisan or independent status, are you concerned that the government is paying members of the media to endorse government policies in their coverage of politics?

- Is not free information vital to the democratic process?
How do We Know What We Know?

- Something may also seem true because it is logical, even when backed up by mathematics.

- However, logic is usually simplified and based on a few assumptions, which means it may not match empirical facts.
How do We Know What We Know?

- Be careful of simple ideas and slogans, these are especially crafted to sound appealing. Politics more than ever is using the same tactics that are used to sell you a car, beer, insurance, or cereal. Legislative proposals are even named to mislead on some occasions.

- Most government polices contain numerous complexities that may make something that sounds logical misleading.
Slogans may also, besides being outright disinformation, be loaded with normative assumptions.

Example: Defense of Marriage Act: On one hand, preserves status quo conception of marriage but discourages more people from getting married in the aggregate.
How do We Know What We Know?

- Some may “Know” the world through “Faith”, which may not be based, by definition, on much empirical evidence.

- Knowing is outside of logic, experience, etc., and typical of religious views.
Science and Knowing?

- While not all issues can be studied scientifically, those that are observable, empirical, can be analyzed scientifically.

- Science is useful precisely since it is communitive, based on multiple observations from many people.
Science and Knowing?

- Science is not facts or knowledge but a method of identifying empirical facts and understanding.

- Science is self-correcting in that it is not permanent but open to scrutiny and revision over time to produce better theory and facts.
To Be Critical

- The point of going through these modes of knowing is to point out that one cannot really understand one’s world until one begins to ask, “how do I know what I supposedly know or believe.”

- To be critical is to begin this process, not just to criticize.
To Be Critical

It is important to be critical because:

- Evidence produced by science is tentative to some degree, even if evidence is highly supportive of conclusions.
- Values, Disinformation, or misinformation may masquerade as empirical facts.
- To rely on gaining knowledge through investment, logic, or authority, and faith on empirical matters, may lead to a short-circuiting of rational decision-making.
What’s the Matter With Kansas?

- What question does Thomas Frank seek to answer, other than that he thinks something is apparently wrong with Kansas?

- What is his research question?
What’s the Matter With Kansas?

- Why do people apparently under great economic stress allegedly vote for the GOP, the very party where their economic interests do not lie?

- This is his primary question, but is related to why the GOP has been successful.
What's the Matter With Kansas?

- What values would Frank hold based on the Introduction to his book?

- What logic would Frank see as important that many in Kansas apparently do not?

- Hence, Frank presents us with a puzzle, and not just a polemic, considering the values and logic of some do not seem to hold in Kansas.