Developing Political Preferences: Citizen Self-Interest

Carlos Algara
calgara@ucdavis.edu

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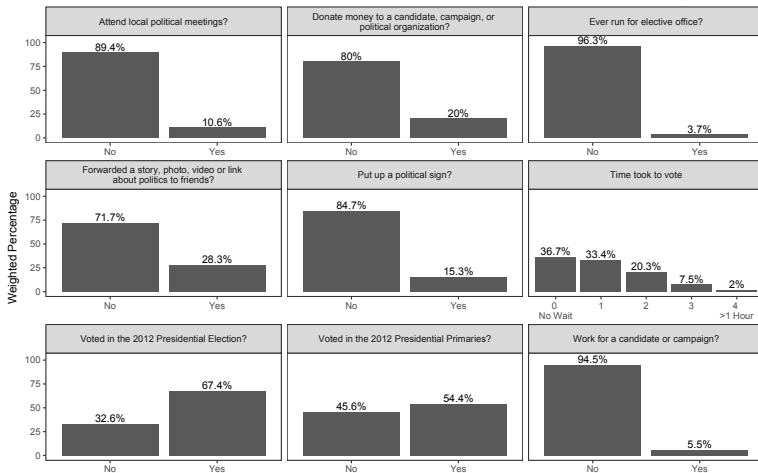
Agenda

1. Revising the "Paradox"

2. Abstention Incentive: Opinion Instability

3. Heuristics as Short-Cuts: Economic Valence Voting

Revisiting Variation in Political Participation



Variation in Different Activities of Political Participation, 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

▶ Opening question: What do you think are the biggest predictors of political knowledge (i.e. sophistication)?

Variation in Political Knowledge: *Education*

Effect of Education on Citizen Political Knowledge,
2016 American National Election Study

Variation in Political Knowledge: *Income*

Effect of Income on Citizen Political Knowledge,
2016 American National Election Study

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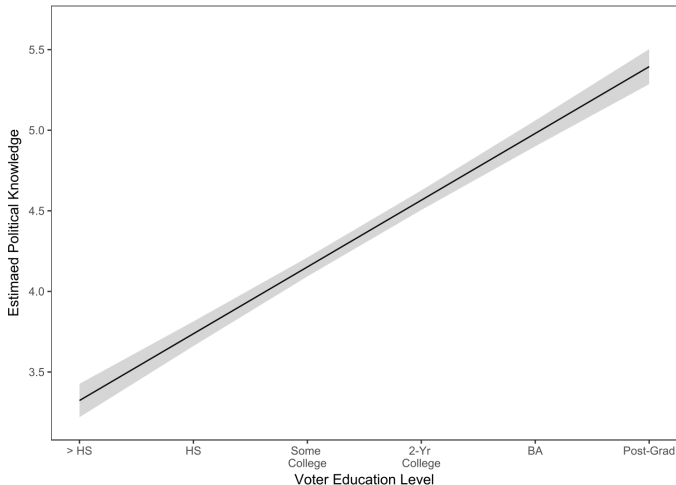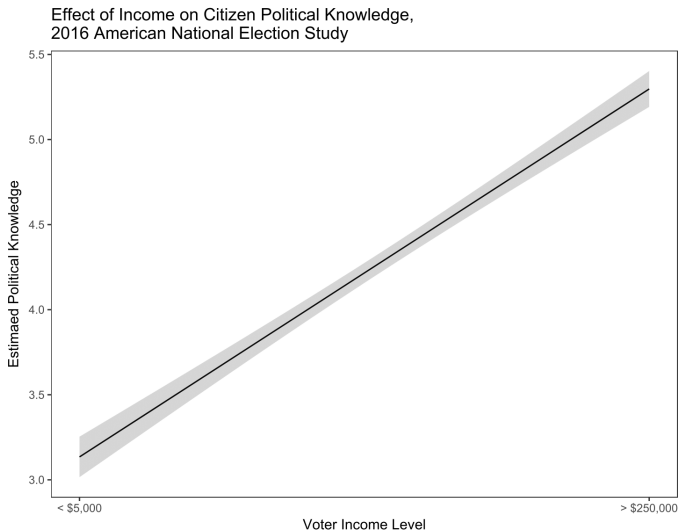
Paradox of Voting & Rational Abstention

Revisiting Riker & Ordeshok's (1968) Calculus of Voting Theory:

$$R = P(B) - C$$

- ▶ What do the variables in the equation (R, P, B, & C) operationalize?
- ▶ Under what conditions do citizens vote or participate in politics?
  - ▶ When the utility provided by voting is greater than 0 (i.e. $R > 0$)
  - ▶ For $R > 0$, inherently the benefit derived from their preferred electoral outcome B must be greater than the cost of voting C
  - ▶ P will inherently be a very small number, given the **very** low probability of a citizen's vote being pivotal
- ▶ Recall C captures both intrinsic & information costs to voting

Why do people participate? A *Revised Theory*

- ▶ Why would the *Calculus of Voting* need to be respecified?
- ▶ If not respecified, model would predict that no one participates in voting or politics, which is not an empirical reality
- ▶ Riker & Ordeshok rework the theory in the following way:

$$R = P(B) - C - [D + M + b]$$

- ▶ Where: R is the utlity of voting, P is the probability of pivotal vote, B is the benefit from preferred electoral outcome, C is the cost of voting
    - ▶ D is the sense of civic duty (i.e. "good feeling") provided by voting
    - ▶ M is the material benefit of voting (i.e. "I voted sticker")
    - ▶ b is the social benefit yielded from being mobilized to participate

# A Causal Model of Political Participation
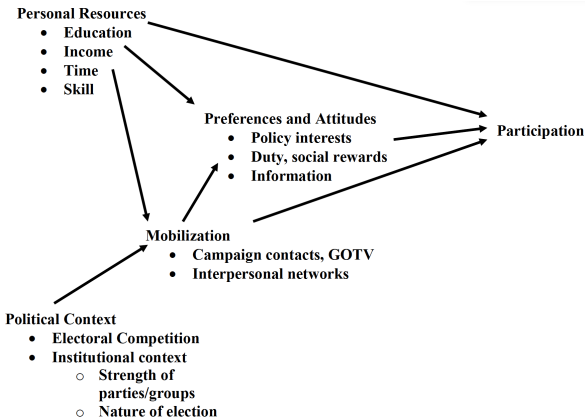
"*Strategic mobilization without individual motivation is impossible, and individual motivation without strategic mobilization is illogical.*" - Rosenstone & Hansen (1992)

Descriptive Evidence of Causal Model: *2016 Donors*

Variation in the Incentive for Political Donors to Donate to Campaigns, 2016 CCES

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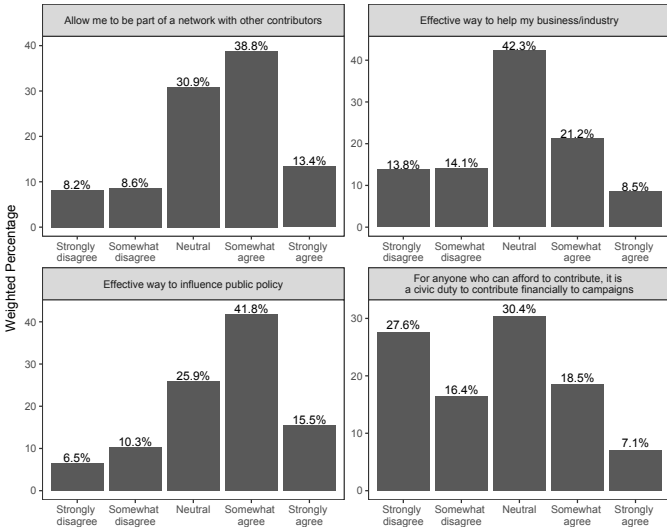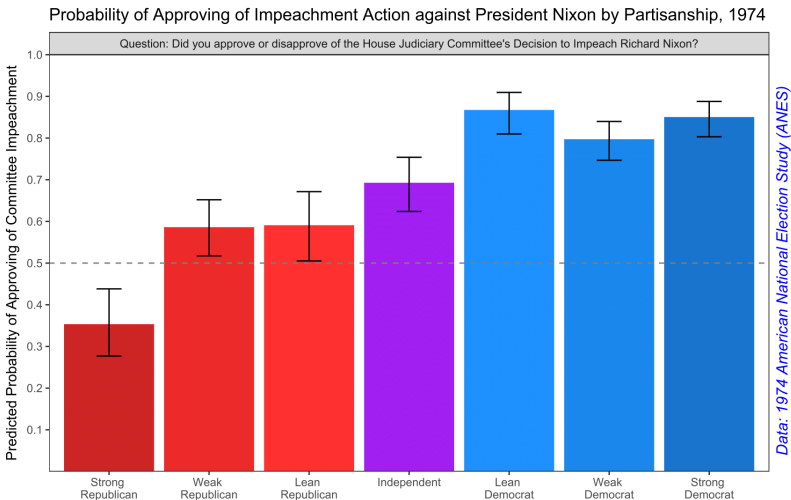
Zaller's "Top of the Head" Model
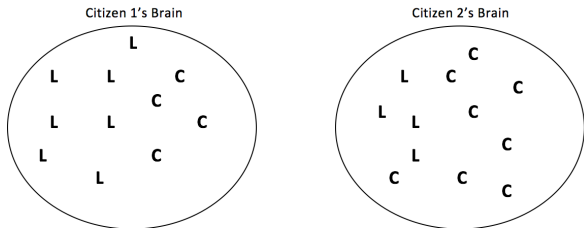
- ▶ Voters are bombarded with political *considerations* in everyday life
- ▶ *Consideration* is anything such as a belief, attitude, or fact that might support an opinion
- ▶ Where L = liberal considerations & C = conservative considerations
- ▶ Can you think of a *consideration* & predict how both citizens would respond to an opinion question based on the subject of your consideration?

Axioms of Zaller's Model

1. **Ambivalence:** Citizens are generally susceptible to conflicting considerations
   1. **Reception:** Citizens with *higher levels* of political interest & awareness are more likely to receive political information
   2. **Resistance:** Citizens *resist* political information that are contrary to their predispositions (especially partisan & ideological preferences)

2. **Accessibility:** Considerations that are more recent to a citizen are more accessible when responding to surveys or forming attitudes

3. **Response:** Probability of a liberal or conservative survey response (or preference) given considerations present at the "top of the head". For example: Citizen 1 (2) has a 64% probability a liberal (conservative) response (7/11).

Evidence of the *Resistance Axiom*: Nixon Impeachment

Probability of Approving of Impeachment Action against President Nixon by Partisanship, 1974

Probabilities estimated from bivariate logistic regression model. Confidence intervals estimated with Huber-White Robust standard errors.

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Implications of the "Top of the Head" Model

- ▶ Variation in citizen capacity to develop political preferences & participate in politics
- ▶ Citizens have *rational* incentives to abstain from politics & act on limited information as possible
- ▶ How does cost of participation & Zaller's Model fit with Madison's Theory of the Republic where:
    - ▶ Human Nature $\rightarrow_1$ Factions $\leftrightarrow_2$ Representation
    - ▶ Where: $\rightarrow_1$ = Self-interest & $\leftrightarrow_2$ = Elections
    - ▶ Election & re-election ($\leftrightarrow_2$) critical to theory: protects against agency loss by faction (voters)
- ▶ The implications of theory on Madison is the *democratic dilemma*, expectation that citizens must be fully informed to engage in politics even though they have a rational incentive not to be
- ▶ *Heuristics* help citizens *act* as if they are fully informed, providing *short-cut* to make *correct* decisions

Models of *Electoral Control*

Models of Electoral Control

Heuristic	Vote-Choice Model	Implications for Representatives	Analytical Purposes
Ideology	Spatial/Proximity Voting	Responsive to Median Voter	Representation & Candidate Positioning
Partisanship	Michigan Model	Responsive to Partisan Base	Explaining vote choice/partisan bias
Valence	Retrospective Model/Valence Rule	Develop reputation, (honesty/integrity), monitor economy	Explaining electoral outcomes, pres. forecasting

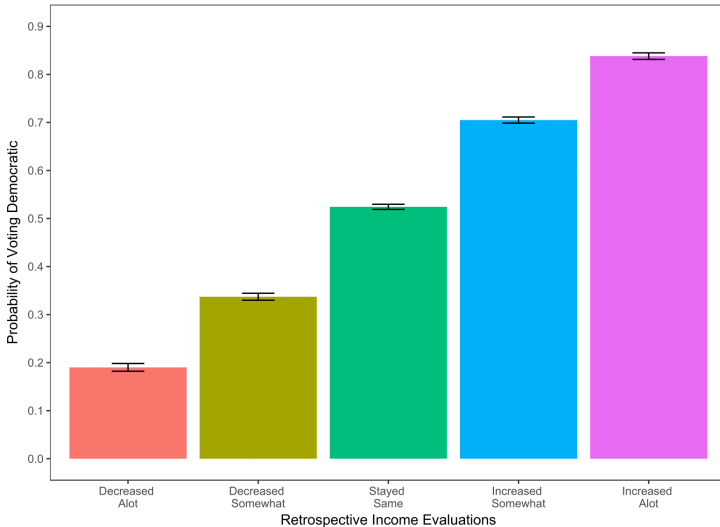*Note: Partisanship & ideology are generally prospective models.*

Overcoming the Cost C to Participate

Retrospective & "Pocket Book" Voting

▶ What's the argument presented in the political science literature as told in the review by Linn et al.?

▶ Voters behave *prospectively* (i.e. bankers) and/or *retrospectively* (i.e. peasants)and punish *incumbents* if they perceive the economy will lagged and/or will not get better

▶ What does that substantively mean?

▶ What does *incumbent* mean? Where would voters be able to use economic evaluations to hold agents (politicians) accountable?

▶ The *collective* nature of the presidency & his party

▶ How would you critically test this?

▶ Key IVs: Prospective & Retrospective Economic Indicators

▶ Dependent Variable: Incumbent Party vote-share

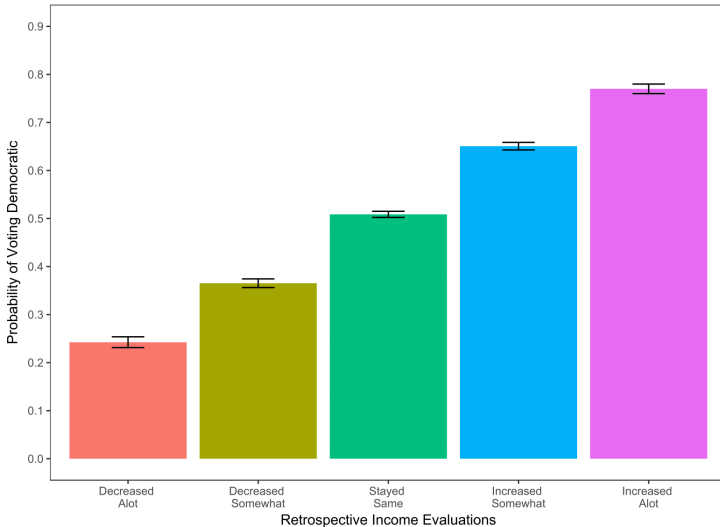▶ *Logic:* Economic perceptions a short-cut in democratic accountability

Role of *Retrospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

Probability of Voting Democratic by Retrospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 Presidential Election, Cooperative Congressional Election Study
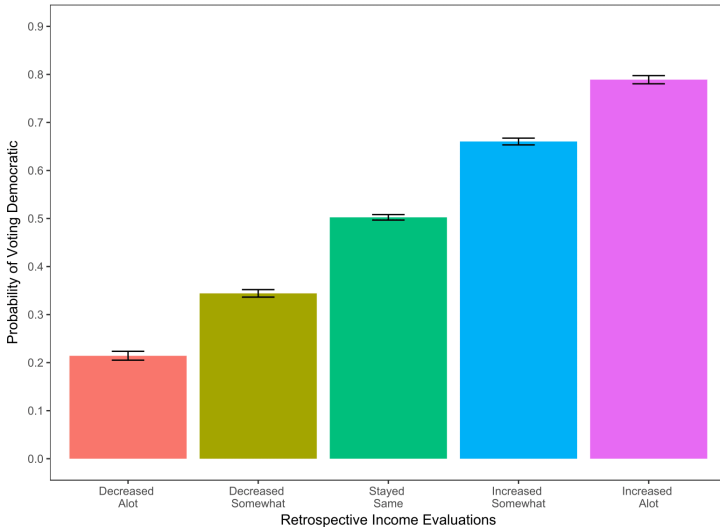
Role of *Retrospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

Probability of Voting Democratic by Retrospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 Senate Elections, Cooperative Congressional Election Study
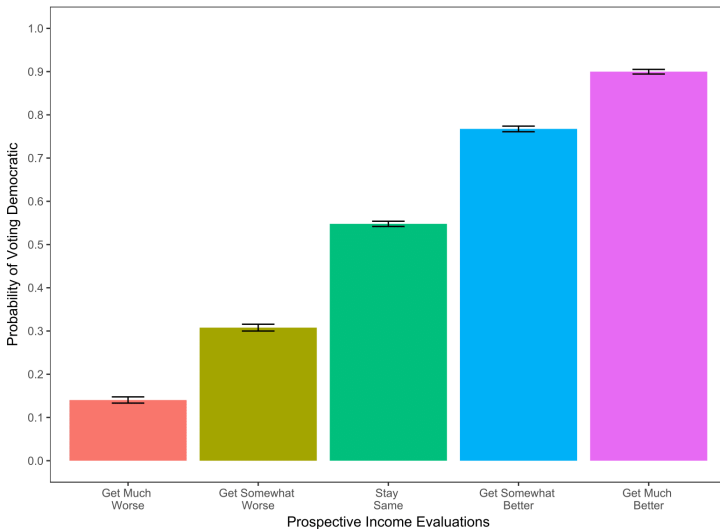
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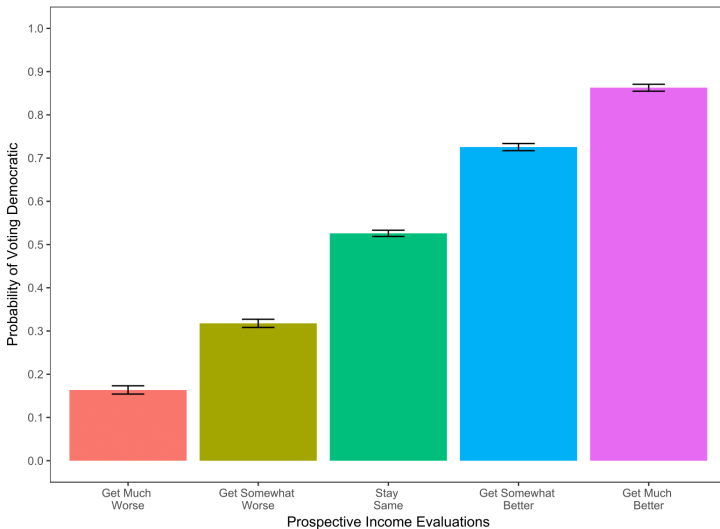
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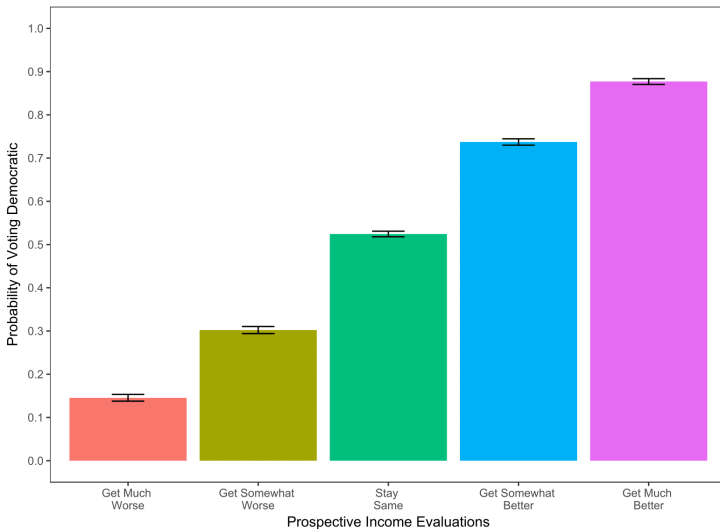
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Reactive & Proactive Voters

▶ What does the results of the prospective & retrospective model of economic voting say with respect to voters, are they proactive or reactive?

▶ Voters are reactive to *valence* considerations, such as bad economic conditions (*cheap cost for assessment*)

▶ Example of *collective accountability*, president not only rewarded or punished based on economic perceptions, but also his party

▶ Politics ultimately *abstract* to citizens, economy/valence considerations easier concept for citizens to grasp; *caution for heuristic?*

▶ Citizens ultimately have incentive to act based on the *minimal amount* of information they encounter

▶ This leads to the *democratic dilemma*, where we expect voters to be fully informed with respect to their self-interest (preference) but they are not

Key Points:

- ▶ Cost of political participation provides incentive for citizens to rationally abstain & free-ride off of others
- ▶ Education & Income key indicators of political knowledge
- ▶ Citizens largely motivated by sense of civic duty & social benefits to participate politically (D term)
- ▶ However, key is to reduce the cost (C) in order to stimulate participation/voting in politics
- ▶ Citizens bombarded with political considerations, which leads to resistance to new information (bias) & unstable political opinions
- ▶ However, citizens fundamentally fall short of Madison's ideal given *democratic dilemma*
- ▶ Heuristics needed to overcome *rational ignorance* and get voters to act *as if* fully informed
- ▶ *Economic* voting helps as a "valence-shortcut" & for collective accountability