Developing Political Preferences: Citizen Self-Interest

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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

- **Attend local political meetings?**
  - Yes: 89.4%
  - No: 10.6%

- **Donate money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization?**
  - Yes: 80%
  - No: 20%

- **Ever run for elective office?**
  - Yes: 96.3%
  - No: 3.7%

- **Forwarded a story, photo, video or link about politics to friends?**
  - Yes: 71.7%
  - No: 28.3%

- **Put up a political sign?**
  - Yes: 84.7%
  - No: 15.3%

- **Time took to vote**
  - 0: 36.7%
  - 1: 33.4%
  - 2: 20.3%
  - 3: 7.5%
  - >1 Hour: 2%

- **Voted in the 2012 Presidential Election?**
  - Yes: 67.4%
  - No: 32.6%

- **Voted in the 2012 Presidential Primaries?**
  - Yes: 54.4%
  - No: 45.6%

- **Work for a candidate or campaign?**
  - Yes: 94.5%
  - No: 5.5%

**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**

The graph illustrates the trend of estimated political knowledge across different education levels. It shows a positive correlation, indicating that higher education levels are associated with greater political knowledge.
Variation in Political Knowledge: *Income*

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

- **Estimated Political Knowledge**
  - Range: 3.0 to 5.5

- **Voter Income Level**
  - Categories: < $5,000 and > $250,000

The graph shows a positive correlation between income level and estimated political knowledge, with higher income levels associated with greater political knowledge.
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 utility 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
“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

- Allow me to be part of a network with other contributors:
  - Strongly disagree: 8.2%
  - Somewhat disagree: 8.6%
  - Neutral: 30.9%
  - Somewhat agree: 38.8%
  - Strongly agree: 13.4%

- Effective way to help my business/industry:
  - Strongly disagree: 13.8%
  - Somewhat disagree: 14.1%
  - Neutral: 21.2%
  - Somewhat agree: 42.3%
  - Strongly agree: 8.5%

- Effective way to influence public policy:
  - Strongly disagree: 6.5%
  - Somewhat disagree: 10.3%
  - Neutral: 25.9%
  - Somewhat agree: 41.8%
  - Strongly agree: 15.5%

- For anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to campaigns:
  - Strongly disagree: 27.6%
  - Somewhat disagree: 16.4%
  - Neutral: 18.5%
  - Somewhat agree: 30.4%
  - Strongly agree: 7.1%
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
   - **Reception**: Citizens with *higher levels* of political interest & awareness are more likely to receive political information
   - **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**

**Question:** Did you approve or disapprove of the House Judiciary Committee's Decision to Impeach Richard Nixon?

Probabilities estimated from bivariate logistic regression model. Confidence intervals estimated with Huber-White Robust standard errors.
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-cuts to make correct decisions
# Models of Electoral Control

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<th>Heuristic</th>
<th>Vote-Choice Model</th>
<th>Implications for Representatives</th>
<th>Analytical Purposes</th>
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<td>Ideology</td>
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<td>Responsive to Median Voter</td>
<td>Representation &amp; Candidate Positioning</td>
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<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>Michigan Model</td>
<td>Responsive to Partisan Base</td>
<td>Explaining vote choice/partisan bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Retrospective Model/Valence Rule</td>
<td>Develop reputation, (honesty/integrity), monitor economy</td>
<td>Explaining electoral outcomes, pres. forecasting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*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

- Decreased A lot
- Decreased Somewhat
- Stayed Same
- Increased Somewhat
- Increased A lot
Role of *Retrospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

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

![Graph showing probability of voting democratic by retrospective income evaluations](image-url)
Role of *Retrospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

Probability of Voting Democratic by Retrospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 House Elections, Cooperative Congressional Election Study

![Graph showing the probability of voting for the Democratic party based on retrospective income evaluations. The x-axis represents different levels of retrospective income evaluations: Decreased A lot, Decreased Somewhat, Stayed Same, Increased Somewhat, and Increased A lot. The y-axis represents the probability of voting Democratic, ranging from 0.0 to 0.9. The graph illustrates that the probability of voting Democratic is highest for those who report an increase in income by a lot, followed by those who report an increase in income by a somewhat, and so on, with the lowest probability for those who report a decrease in income by a lot.]
Role of Prospective Economic Evaluations & Voting

Probability of Voting Democratic by Prospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 Presidential Election, Cooperative Congressional Election Study

- Get Much Worse
- Get Somewhat Worse
- Stay Same
- Get Somewhat Better
- Get Much Better

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Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 5
Role of *Prospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

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Probability of Voting Democratic by Prospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 House Elections, Cooperative Congressional Election Study

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Prospective Income Evaluations</th>
<th>Probability of Voting Democratic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Get Much Worse</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Somewhat Worse</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay Same</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Somewhat Better</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Much Better</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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Revising the “Paradox” Abstention Incentive: Opinion Instability Heuristics as Short-Cuts: Economic Valence Voting

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