Overcoming Limited Information: How Citizens use Short-Cuts to Act

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October 17, 2017
Agenda

1. Revisiting the Paradox & Possible Solution
2. Spatial Model
3. Partisan (Michigan) Model
4. Candidate Valence Model
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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*Note: Partisanship & ideology are generally prospective models.*
Using Ideological Self-Interest (Preferences) as a Short-Cut

- Ideology = coherent & consistent belief system around a set of policy issues
- Traditional view is that ideology limited to elites rather than mass public, costly to develop consistent issue beliefs
- Heuristic where voters are able to place themselves & candidates on the same scale, with voters choosing candidates that are closer to them in ideological proximity
- Model assumes voter capacity to place themselves & candidate
- “Correct” vote is voting for the candidate closest to voter in ideological proximity
The Spatial Model of Voters & Candidate

Assume that the three voters are able to place themselves on the unidimensional liberal-conservative space & the positions of the two candidates are known

How will each voter vote according to the spatial model of “proximity voting?” Why?

What would be a spatially incorrect vote for each voter?

Which candidate is more “moderate” on the scale?
Evidence of Spatial Voting in 2016 Presidential Election

Probability of Voting Democratic by Ideological Proximity & Correct Ideological Placement of Candidates, 2016 Presidential Election (CCES)
Evidence of Spatial Voting in 2016 Senate Elections

Probability of Voting Democratic by Ideological Proximity & Correct Ideological Placement of Candidates, 2016 Senate Elections (CCES)
Evidence of Spatial Voting in 2016 House Elections

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Limitation of the Heuristic? Presidential Election

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Probability of Voting Democratic by Ideological Proximity & Correct Ideological Placement of Candidates, 2016 House Elections (CCES)
Assessing the Spatial Model

- Does the spatial model help explain vote-choice?
- What are the fundamental assumptions of the spatial model & how citizens form political opinions?
- Why would you think there is variation in the effect of ideology on voting different among voters that are able to place candidates “correctly” than those that can’t?
- Under this model, what should candidates in a two-candidate do?
- Evidence of convergence towards the median voter?
- If true, what are the implications for congressional representation?
Distribution of Ideological Preference in the Electorate, 2016 ANES Pilot Study
Distribution of Ideological Preference in the Electorate, 2016 ANES Pilot Study

- Democrats
- Independents
- Republicans

Political Ideology

Liberal 1 0 1 2

Density

0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00 1.25
The Partisan Model of Voting

“The first & perhaps most important political heuristic is relying on a candidate’s party affiliation.” (Lau & Redlawsk)

- Partisanship influenced by socialization, resources, & ideology
- Important heuristic for voting, valence evaluations (economy, candidates) & issue opinions
Evidence of Michigan Model?: Determinants of PID

Probability of Identifying as a Democrat by Income, 2016 ANES

- Voter Income
- Probability of Identifying as a Democrat

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Evidence of Michigan Model?: Determinants of PID

Probability of Identifying as a Democrat by Racial Group, 2016 ANES
Evidence of Michigan Model?: Determinants of PID

Probability of Identifying as a Democrat by Perceived Ideology, 2016 ANES

- Extremely Conservative
- Conservative
- Slightly Conservative
- Moderate
- Slightly Liberal
- Liberal
- Extremely Liberal

Predicted Probability of Identifying as a Democrat
Partisan Voting in the 2016 Presidential Election

Probability of Voting Democratic by Partisanship Group,
2016 Presidential Election (CCES)

Predicted Probability of Democratic Vote

- Strong Republican
- Lean Republican
- Weak Republican
- Independent
- Weak Democrat
- Lean Democrat
- Strong Democrat
Partisan Voting in the 2016 Senate Elections

Probability of Voting Democratic by Partisanship Group,
2016 Senate Elections (CCES)
Partisan Voting in the 2016 House Elections

Probability of Voting Democratic by Partisanship Group, 2016 House Elections (CCES)
Partisan Effect on Policy Preferences

Predicted Probability of Favoring Various Policies by Partisanship, 2016 ANES

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Assessing the *Partisan Model*

- Does this model help explain vote-choice in the 2016 presidential elections?
- Partisanship is a “sticky” form of identification, voters are “resistant” to changing their partisanship (Michigan Model)
- What are some of the potential pitfalls of the partisan model of voting?
- No mention of ideology on policy issues of candidates & parties
- Can distort spatial voting, especially in *depolarized* races and lead to incorrect inferences about candidate positions (conservative Democrats & Liberal Republicans)
- Can distort *objective* valence assessments: such as state of economy.
Valence as a Heuristic

- What are valence considerations?
- Non-policy conditions valued by the electorate as a whole
  - “Good” & robust economy (see Meeting 5)
  - Trustworthy & competent (ability to solve problems) politicians
  - Politicians with integrity & grasp of important issues
- By definition, valence does not have a policy component to it
- Requires voters to form opinions about valence considerations
- Testing the effect of valence in U.S. House & Pres elections
  - DV: Vote for the Democratic candidate
  - IV: Difference in valence between the Democratic and Republican candidate
  - Valence = competency, integrity, trustworthiness, problem solver, issue grasp, qualified for office, public servant
  - Data: 2010 UC Davis Election Study & 2016 ANES
Evidence of Valence Effect in U.S. House Elections, 2010

Robust standard errors clustered by 404 districts. DV: Democratic vote, N = 32,243
Evidence of Valence Effect in 2016 Presidential Election

Model controls for voter partisanship.
Evidence of Valence Effect in 2016 Presidential Election

Model controls for voter partisanship. Valence differential = difference in mean candidate valence evaluation (honesty, caring, knowledgeable, strong leader)
Potential Pitfall: **Partisan Bias in Valence**

Linear Prediction of Positive Feelings Toward Clinton by Partisanship, 2016 ANES
Potential Pitfall: \textit{Partisan Bias in Valence}

Linear Prediction of Positive Feelings Toward Trump by Partisanship, 2016 ANES

- Strong Republican
- Weak Republican
- Lean Republican
- Independent
- Lean Democrat
- Weak Democrat
- Strong Democrat

Predicted Positive Feelings Toward Donald Trump
Potential Pitfall: **Partisan Bias in Valence**

Linear Prediction of Valence Perceptions of Clinton by Partisan Group, 2016 ANES

- **Candidate is Honest**
- **Candidate is Knowledgable about Issues**
- **Candidate is Strong Leader**
- **Candidate is Trustworthy**

Predicted Perceptions Towards Clinton (Low-High)
Potential Pitfall: *Partisan Bias in Valence*

Linear Prediction of Valence Perceptions of Trump by Partisan Group, 2016 ANES

- Candidate is Honest
- Candidate is Knowledgeable about Issues
- Candidate is Strong Leader
- Candidate is Trustworthy

Predicted Perceptions Towards Trump (Low-High)
Solving the *Democratic Dilemma?* Key Points:

- Madison’s theory requires that citizens act on their “self-interest” when selecting their representatives (incentives)
- However, voters have a strong incentive to abstain from politics or act on as little information as possible (*democratic dilemma*)
- Heuristics help voters act rationally (“correctly”) *as if they are fully informed*
- Support for spatial model, but requires voter ability to 1) have ideological preferences and 2) to place candidates on the left-right scale
- Support for partisan model but no mention of candidate positions, potential distortion & partisanship “sticky” identification
- Support for valence model but assessments abstract & open to partisan bias