Developing Political Preferences: Citizen Self-Interest

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Agenda

1. Revising the “Paradox”

2. How to Measure Preference & Public Opinion
Revisiting Variation in Political Participation

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

- Attend local political meetings?
- Donate money to a candidate, campaign, or political organization?
- Ever run for elective office?
- Forwarded a story, photo, video or link about politics to friends?
- Put up a political sign?
- Time took to vote
- Voted in the 2012 Presidential Election?
- Voted in the 2012 Presidential Primaries?
- Work for a candidate or campaign?

Opening question: Why do you think people participate in politics when it’s rational to abstain?
Revisiting Riker & Ordeshok’s (1968) Calculus of Voting Theory:
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- What do the variables in the equation \((R, P, B, \text{&} C)\) 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
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Why do people participate? A Revised Theory

Why would the *Calculus of Voting* need to be respecified?

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.
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

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

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Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 5
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"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 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

- Allow me to be part of a network with other contributors
- Effective way to help my business/industry
- Effective way to influence public policy
- For anyone who can afford to contribute, it is a civic duty to contribute financially to campaigns

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Overcoming the Cost $C$ to Participate

Retrospective & “Pocket Book” Voting
Overcoming the Cost $C$ to Participate

*Retrospective & “Pocket Book” Voting*

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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

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Role of **Retrospective** Economic Evaluations & Voting

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

- **Decreased A lot**
- **Decreased Somewhat**
- **Stayed Same**
- **Increased Somewhat**
- **Increased A lot**

![Bar Chart]
Role of *Retrospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

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

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

Probability of Voting Democratic by Prospective Income Evaluations in the 2016 Senate Elections, Cooperative Congressional Election Study
Role of *Prospective* Economic Evaluations & Voting

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

- Get Much Worse
- Get Somewhat Worse
- Stay Same
- Get Somewhat Better
- Get Much Better
Revising the “Paradox”

How to Measure Preference & Public Opinion

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.

▶ 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.

▶ 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.
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Variation in Political Knowledge

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

Estimated Political Knowledge

Voter Education Level

> HS  HS  Some College  2-Yr College  BA  Post-Grad
Variation in Political Knowledge

Effect of Income on Citizen Political Knowledge, 2016 American National Election Study
Voters are bombarded with political *considerations* in everyday life
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
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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
**Axioms of Zaller’s Model**

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2. **Reception**: Citizens with *higher levels* of political interest & awareness are more likely to receive political information
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How to Measure Preference & Public Opinion

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)
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Axioms of Zaller’s Model

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2 **Reception**: Citizens with *higher levels* of political interest & awareness are more likely to receive political information

3 **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.*
Key Points:

- Cost of political participation provides incentive for citizens to rationally abstain & free-ride off of others.
- Citizens largely motivated by sense of civic duty & social benefits to participate politically.
- However, key is to reduce the cost ($C$) in order to stimulate participation/voting in politics.
- *Economic* voting helps as a “valence-shortcut” & for collective accountability.
- However, citizens fundamentally fall short of Madison’s ideal given *democratic dilemma*.
- Citizens bombarded with political considerations, which leads to resistance to new information (bias) & unstable political opinions.