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

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Agenda

1. Revisiting the Paradox

2. Low Information Voters

3. Heuristics as Short-Cuts
Revisiting the Paradox of Voting

- Why would the *Calculus of Voting* need to be respecified?
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Revisiting the Paradox Low Information Voters Heuristics as Short-Cuts

Zaller’s “Top of the Head” Model

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- 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

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5. **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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisanship</th>
<th>Predicted Probability of Approving of Committee Impeachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Republican</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Republican</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean Republican</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean Democrat</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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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.
Variation in citizen capacity to develop political preferences & participate in politics
Implications of the “Top of the Head” Model

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- *Heuristics* help citizens *act* as if they are fully informed, providing *short-cuts* to make *correct* decisions
# Models of Electoral Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heuristic</th>
<th>Vote-Choice Model</th>
<th>Implications for Representatives</th>
<th>Analytical Purposes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Spatial/Proximity</td>
<td>Responsive to Median Voter</td>
<td>Representation &amp; Candidate Positioning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Voting</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>
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Note: Partisanship & ideology are generally prospective models.
Using Ideological Self-Interest (Preferences) as a Short-Cut

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- “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

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- Evidence of convergence towards the median voter?
Distribution of Ideological Preference in the Electorate, 2016 ANES Pilot Study

Democracy
Independents
Republicans

Political Ideology
Density

Carlos Algara
Introduction to American Politics: Meeting 6
Revisiting the Paradox: Low Information Voters Heuristics as Short-Cuts

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
Partisan Voting in the 2016 Presidential Election

Probability of Voting Democratic by Partisanship Group,
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- Strong Republican
- Lean Republican
- Weak Republican
- Independent
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- Lean Democrat
- Strong Democrat
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- 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 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 elections

DV: Vote for the Democratic House 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
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Evidence of Valence Effect in U.S. House Elections, 2010

Robust standard errors clustered by 404 districts. DV: Democratic vote, N = 32,243
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.