

Midterm Review

There were six broad topics covered in the readings, which are listed below. The main points covered in each set of readings is also included. You will not be responsible for the following readings: Frank, Lijphart, Judis and Teixeira, and Jacoby. Those readings are omitted from the list below.

The Spatial Model of Elections.

Readings:

- Downs, Anthony, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Chapter 3.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A., and Mark S. Bonchek. *Analyzing Politics*, pp. 104-115.

Major Points Covered:

- We began by introducing a normative theory of democracy we termed the “civics textbook” view of democracy. Citizens are fully informed and aware, candidates are responsible.
- Understand the concept of “rationality” in decision making.
- Downs’s theory of “rational retrospective voting.” Expected party differential and current party differential.
- Understand the basic logic of the spatial model of voting.
- Realize there are possible problems even in this idealized world (vote cycles, etc.).
- Have at least a passing familiarity with the evidence in favor of the spatial model of elections we discussed (survey evidence — people tend to vote for candidates closer to the on 7-pt issue scales, etc.) Also have at least some idea of what some problems with this evidence are (projection of candidate positions, etc.).

Participation in Politics.

Readings:

- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, Chapter 2.
- Putnam, Robert D. “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America.”

Major Points Covered:

- Understand the argument that holds that voting is irrational. $E(V) = P*B - C$.
- Have a passing familiarity with how socio-economic and demographic traits are related to voter turnout. (i.e., higher levels of education lead people to be more likely to vote).
- Rosenstone and Hansen’s “selective benefits” argument as an explanation for voter turnout. People are rewarded or punished for voting/not voting by their social group.
- Putnam’s theory of declining social capital as an explanation for declining voter turnout over time. Television is the culprit.

Social-Psychological Models of Voting.

Readings:

- Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, Chapter 6.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. *The American Voter*, Chapters 6 and 7.

Major Points Covered:

- The “Columbia School” refers to the studies from Columbia University, such as *Voting*.
- The “Michigan School” refers to the studies from the University of Michigan, such as *The American Voter*.
- Columbia School findings: (1) The “minimal effects” finding: political campaigns don’t seem to change people’s minds. (2) Instead, people seem to be “socialized” to vote a particular way. The “Index of Political Predisposition.” One-sided political environments.
- Michigan School findings: (1) People develop a psychological attachment to political parties early in life. (2) This is “partisan identification.” (3) Alternative views of the nature of party ID are Key’s “standing decision” and Fiorina’s “running tally.”
- Party ID can change over time. “Partisan realignments” are times when many people change their party ID. This is usually in response to a “cross-cutting cleavage”: a major issue arises, the party an individual identifies with takes a stand on the issue the individual doesn’t like, and thus the individual breaks with their previous identification and changes parties. Some evidence that some people change in response to short-term forces (recessions, etc.) — party ID must be weaker for these people. Although you are not required to know it, the Judis and

Attitude Coherence and Stability.

Readings:

- Converse, Philip E. “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” (abridged version).
- Zaller, John. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Chapter 2.

Major Points Covered:

- Converse revealed that many people have little understanding of issues. Often take contradictory issue positions (i.e., cut taxes but increase government spending), have no concept of “ideology” or coherent world view, positions on specific issues not even stable across time.
- Zaller argued that individual opinions do have some basis in information. Information comes from elite level discourse, and individual attention to this discourse varies. Those that pay no attention never form opinions, that that pay a little attention have opinions that vary over time, and those that pay a lot of attention have stable opinions. (Of course, most people pay no or little attention to elite level discourse). Political predispositions or “core values” act as constraints on opinions — people just won’t adopt some opinions.

Limited Information and Voting.

Readings:

- Popkin, Samuel L. “Information Shortcuts and the Reasoning Voter.”
- Lau, Richard R., and David P. Redlawsk. “Voting Correctly.”
- Bartels, Larry M. “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind.”

Major Points Covered:

- “Low-information rationality”: information can be costly, but people can pick up valuable political information for free in daily life and use it to help them make an informed vote.
- “Information shortcuts.” Ways to learn about candidates with little effort. Endorsements, campaign events, etc.
- Lau and Redlawsk: Most people (about 70%) cast the same votes they would with full information.

- Information shortcuts don't always work, especially on complicated issues — many people were unable to link recent tax cuts to cuts in services and fee increases.

Retrospective Voting

Readings:

- Fiorina, Morris P. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, Chapters 1 and 10.
- Lewis-Beck, Michael S. *Economics and Elections*, Chapters 1 and 3.
- Achen, Chris, and Larry M. Bartels. “Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to Drought, Flu, and Shark Attacks.”

Major Points Covered:

- Trying to predict the future or judge candidate policy promises is uncertain and difficult. It is better to use information about current events — less costly and more certain.
- Two major theories of retrospective voting: Key and Downs.
- Key argues retrospective voting is “reward-punishment.” If the voter is happy with current events, reward the incumbent with a vote. If unhappy, punish the incumbent by voting for the challenger. Voters are retrospective (care about the past rather than the future) and outcome rather than policy oriented.
- Downs argues that people engage in “rational retrospective voting.” (this is exactly the theory discussed in the Downs reading above). People use past information to get an idea of what candidates will do in the future. Voters are prospective (care about the future rather than the past) and policy rather than outcome oriented. Note this theory assumes candidates and parties pursue consistent policies over time.
- Fiorina argues for a synthesis of these two theories: voters are prospective and outcome oriented.
- Empirical evidence shows that the state of the economy is related to vote choice — voters do seem to pay attention to the state of the world, at least a little. People appear to have at least some minimal awareness that elections are meant to shape the future, and they appear to be “sociotropic” (voting based on the state of the national economy) rather than “pocketbook” (voting based on their personal finances). voters.
- There are examples where retrospective voting appears to go wrong (such as shark attacks leading people to vote against the incumbent).