

## Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

### Participation

- Which political acts are the most and least unequal? Why?
- If you were an interest group official who wanted to influence policy, which acts would you urge your membership to take part in?
- What are the differences between the socioeconomic (SES) model of participation and the Civic Voluntarism (CVM) model?
- How important are various factors in the CVM model for different participatory acts?
- How much do the factors vary across individuals?
- Where do these factors come from?
- What is the relevance of education for participation? What are the differences between absolute and relative levels of education?
- What is the relevance of income for participation? Of free time?
- What is the relevance of skills, and where can they be gained?
- What are the sources of political interest, information, and efficacy?
- Compare churches and unions as mobilizing entities
- How does the CVM model explain the low participation rates of the young? The high participation rates of the old?
- What kinds of reforms aimed at increasing participation does this model suggest?
- Would full participation matter for policy outcomes? How and why?
- What are some of the measurement issues associated with the CVM model?
- What factors aren't discussed in Verba, Scholzman, and Brady? (network effects; context effects; role of public policy in influencing CVM factors; overtime analysis and trends in participation, inequality)

### Voter Turnout

- What is the relevance of individual, elite, and institutional factors in voter turnout?
- What is the role of education in turnout? What are the causal mechanisms?
- What are institutional factors and barriers to turnout? What is the effect of voter registration on turnout, and how does this vary across demographic groups? What does the effect of the Motor Voter bill tell us about the impact of registration and about the likely effects of different kinds of reforms?
- What is the role of mobilization by parties, interest groups and social movements in voter turnout? How can we explain changes in turnout over time?
- How can we explain differences in turnout between the U.S. and other democratic nations?
- Contrast Plutzer's developmental model of voting over a lifetime with the more institutional-based perspectives of the other authors
- What are the advantages and limitations of rational choice perspectives on turnout?
- Which types of reforms aimed at increasing turnout are likely to be successful or unsuccessful according to these different views of turnout?

## Participation-Policy Linkages

- What effects do public policies have on the participatory factors – resources, engagement, and mobilization – that determine levels of political participation?
- What is the inherent criticism of the participation literature that this week’s readings offer? (that the literature has failed to incorporate the effects of public policy designs themselves on the likelihood of mass participation; and that participation differences matter for policy outcomes)
- How has Social Security affected the participation rates of senior citizens over time? What are the mechanisms?
- How have these program effects varied across senior subgroups?
- Seniors participate in politics at higher rates than younger people – does it matter? How would we know?
- How did the GI Bill affect the political participation of veterans who received its educational benefits? How were these effects different than or similar to those of Social Security? What is the reciprocity effect that Mettler speaks of?
- What is the effect of receiving welfare (social assistance) on client participation? Why do these effects differ from those of Social Security and the GI Bill? What are the differences between AFDC and Social Security Disability, and between AFDC and Head Start, in their effects on client political participation?
- Can we make more general statements about the specific characteristics of public program designs that create these different kinds of effects?
- Methodological issues: what is the best way to study these program design effects? How can we know the effects are due to program design and not simply to the preexisting characteristics of the clients?

## Party Identification

- Describe and contrast the *American Voter* (Michigan school) “standing decision” vs. Fiorina/Downs “running tally” paradigms of party identification. How is party identification formed under these alternative views, and does it change? What are the roles of factors like presidential approval or the state of the economy in each model?
- Why does party identification matter?
- How does party identification differ from vote choice, or does it?
- What is macropartisanship? What is the relationship between changes in macropartisanship and the kind of individual-level models of party identification discussed above?
- What are the Green/Palmquist/Schickler critiques of macropartisanship?
- How would each of the theories of party identification or macropartisanship explain the following empirical phenomena: (1) the fact that party identification tends to strength over a lifetime (2) the fact that realignments of party identification periodically take place

## Vote Choice

- Compare and contrast the different models of vote choice:
  - Columbia school: sociological model, vote choice based in social groups
  - Michigan school: psychological model where party identification is a ready guide for making political judgments

- Economic models, beginning with Downs: vote for party providing greater utility, try to reduce information costs by voting on performance or on broad symbols like party identification
- How do these perspectives vary as to how fixed or malleable the relevant factors are; how proximate they are to vote choice; how much they demand of voters; how well they explain cross-sectional and over-time variation in vote choice; how generalizable they are or how limited to the case study or time period examined?
- For Fiorina and Kinder/Adams/Gronke:
  - Does the public care more about means or ends, more about policy instruments or policy outcomes?
  - Are voters retrospective or prospective – do they look behind or ahead?
  - What kind of economic evaluations matter – national (sociotropic) or well-being of group or self (pocketbook)
  - How available are these pieces of information, and how does info vary across demographic subgroups?
- Petrocik:
  - What is the role of issues in vote choice?
  - By what mechanisms do issues matter?
  - What is issue ownership and how is it generated?
  - Does the role of issues vary across time and campaigns?
- Rahn/Aldrich/Borgida/Sullivan:
  - How do people form candidate evaluations? Is this an easy or hard task? Does the task vary by levels of political sophistication?
  - Is the role for campaigns the same or different compared to the Petrocik model?
  - What are the informational requirements for this model?
  - How proximate are voters' feelings/candidate affect to vote choice? Is this a concern in constructing an explanation of vote choice?
- How good are these models at explaining empirical phenomena such as (1) the Republican domination of the presidential vote vs. the Democratic domination of the normal vote; (2) or the increased Republican success in recent decades at all levels of government

### **Political Information**

- What is political information? Factual information? A skill set? Where is the line between information and heuristics? What is political sophistication? How do we measure these concepts?
- Is politics a unique arena (Luskin) or do people pick up politically relevant information in their everyday lives (Popkin)?
- What is low-information rationality?
- Do low- and high-information or sophistication groups make their political decisions in similar or different ways? Who uses heuristics?
- What happens when the information environment provides misinformation? Who reacts to changing information environments?
- How does the source of information matter?
- Do those who float between parties suffer from low information or do they respond to a changing reality?

## **Political Behavior Research Considerations**

- For each of these articles we ask:
  - What is the consequence of the methodological problem described?
  - What is the cure?
  - When do methodological fixes actually have substantive meaning?

## **Political Campaigns**

- Do campaigns matter? Do the day to day events of campaigns matter for the outcome, or can we simply predict outcomes based on preexisting factors?
- What is a campaign effect? Does it mean converting voters to a candidate that doesn't match their predispositions (a high bar), or simply bringing people around to vote in line with their predispositions?
- Who is available for a campaign to have an effect on?
- Should we worry about generalizing from one campaign to another? Do the authors' conclusions vary because of the particular campaigns they choose to study?
- What is the "minimal effects" model? Why was it reconsidered by researchers?
- As Gelman and King ask, why do polls vary so much but vote choice is ultimately so predictable? What theories fail to account for this phenomenon? What is the role of campaigns in their theory (bring people around to vote their fundamentals). What happens if campaigns are asymmetrical in resources or skill?
- If people vote their fundamentals, Gore should have won the presidency in 2000 – why didn't he, according to Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson? How generalizable was the 2000 experience? What mattered more – Gore's failure to prime the economic fundamental, or Bush's skill and advertising advantage?

## **Media Effects**

- What kinds of effects are the media believed to have? Does the media persuade people to new perspectives or beliefs, or have priming and framing effects? How have researchers' views of media effects changed over time, and why?
- How do we measure the effect of media on the public?
- How do media effects vary across individuals?
- What is the role of supply and demand in determining the content of media?
- What are the effects of changes in the media environment, such as the decline of network TV news and the rise of the internet?

## **Congressional Elections**

- What are the classic explanations for the incumbency advantage? What do we mean by incumbency advantage? Are these advantages due to personal or party characteristics?
- How has the nature of incumbency advantage changed over time?
- Why do challengers sometimes win? What are the characteristics of successful challengers?
- What is the role of money in congressional campaigns?
- What are the main differences between House and Senate campaigns? Why are Senators more likely to lose?

- How would you characterize turnout in congressional elections – level of turnout, who votes, how turnout affects outcomes?
- How explain the fact that the president’s party tends to lose seats in midterm elections? And how explain the exceptions to this regularity in 1998 and 2002?
- What are the factors in congressional voting? How important are party identification and defection, personal characteristics of the candidate and district service vs. party/ideology/policy. Does the weight of these factors change over time?
- How can economic or national conditions matter for congressional races? What is strategic politicians theory?
- Democrats held power in the House for 40 years. Why did they hold party control for so long, and how did the Republicans achieve party control in 1994? What are the prospects for Republicans having a long hold on power?

### **Sophisticated Voting/Minor Party Candidates**

- Why care about third parties? What is their normative function in the American political system?
- What the main barriers to third parties in the United States?
  - Structural barriers: single-member districts, ballot access rules, FEC rules, presidential debate rules, Electoral College
    - How do preferences get aggregated in the U.S.? Does the electoral system produce Condorcet winners?
  - Other handicaps: media emphasizing horse race coverage; can’t attract quality candidates; wasted vote logic; major parties co-opt issues and prevent third party candidates from appearing on ballot
- Why were there typically third parties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but third party candidates in the 20<sup>th</sup>?
- When do such parties/candidates emerge?
- Who votes for such parties/candidates?
- Does the presence of minor parties/candidates affect turnout?
- What is strategic voting, and who engages in it?

### **Partisan Realignment**

- These articles offer differing views as to when realignments occurred and whether they were sudden or gradual
- What are the characteristics of classic realignment theory (Burnham, Key, Sundquist)?
  - enduring change in party ID
  - caused by cataclysmic event (b/c otherwise PID stable)
    - war
    - Depression
    - Or new issue cleavage (slavery)
  - Foreshadowed often (1928 > 1932)
  - Can only know it happened after the effect
  - Critical elections in which change happens
    - Normal elections
    - Deviant elections
    - Might happen as old party system ages

- 1860, 1896, 1932 widely agreed upon
- Different types:
  - Replacement of one party by another (1860)
  - Absorption of one party into another (1896)
  - Shift of key groups from one party to other (1932)
- How happen:
  - Conversion of party loyalties in response to issue context or social/ec environment
  - Or mobilization of new or previously disenfranchised voters
- Voters don't change positions on issues; but cleavage dividing parties has changed, so might now ID with a different party than before
- How does "issue evolution" differ? (Carmines and Stimson)
  - not sudden earthquake, not single critical election
  - but gradual process – parties realign over issue, voters eventually follow and resort themselves
  - parties resort over race; Dems become party of racial liberalism
  - conservatives, esp in South, resort toward Rep party
  - 1964 has point when parties start issue change in earnest, but happening since 1948 (Truman integrating armed forces). Finally in 1992, Reps get PID advantage in South.
- Questions for the different theories:
  - have there been realignments since 1932?
  - What are their natures? Sudden, gradual? Issue based? Ideology based?
  - When did they occur?
  - How do you know – data?
  - Conversion or mobilization of new voters?
  - Is "realignment" the right term for changes that have happened since 1932 or 1964?
  - Always a top-down process? Parties change first and voters subsequently re-sort?
  - What is underlying theory of PID? Unchanging partisan loyalty that changes only b/c of big shock, or possibility for short-term forces to alter PID?