

Introduction to American Politics

Week 6

Nazita Lajevardi

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:15am-12pm SSB 341
nlajevar@ucsd.edu
Department of Political Science

Thursday, February 12, 2015

Overview

- ▶ Review Chapter 10: Public Opinion
- ▶ Review Chapter 11: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections
- ▶ Review McDonald (2008): *The return of the voter*
- ▶ Review Keeter and Tyson (2008): *Young voters in the 2008 election*
- ▶ Review McDonald (2010): *Voter turnout in the 2010 midterm elections*

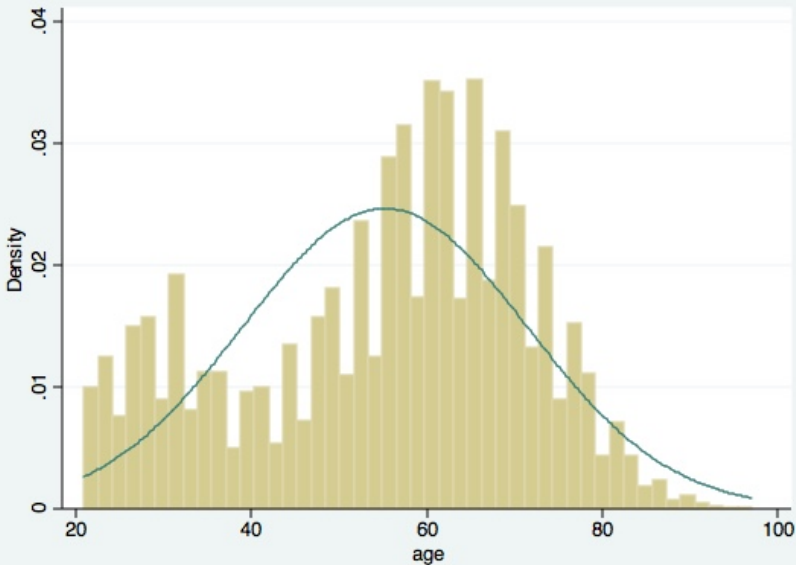
Introduction to public opinion

- ▶ We study public opinion to answer this very important question: **Is the government responsive?**
- ▶ Public opinion consists of those opinions held by private persons which governments find to be prudent to heed (Key Jr.)
 - ▶ Under this definition, each government has to pay attention to public opinion in some fashion.
- ▶ There are thus, many modern efforts to measure, shape, and exploit public opinion - and these efforts have led to two industries: (1) scientific polling (sounding out the public on an array of issues) and (2) public relations.

Measuring public Opinion

- ▶ Measurement of public opinion: (1) polls (ANES, CCES, Gallup, etc), (2) letters/e-mails/calls to representatives
 - ▶ **Case study: CCES 2012**
 - ▶ N: 54,535, nationally representative
 - ▶ Males: 25,275, Females: 28,259
 - ▶ No HS: 5,206, high school grad: 15,631, some college: 13,494, 2-year: 4,698, 4-year: 9,500, post-grad: 5,003
 - ▶ Vote 2008 = no: 12,841, usually vote but did not in 2008: 1,752, I am not sure: 812, yes I definitely voted: 38,993
 - ▶ Ideology: very liberal: 3,280, liberal: 6,742, somewhat liberal: 6,365, middle: 13,467, somewhat conservative: 6,288, conservative: 10,540, very conservative: 4,633.
- ▶ We measure public opinion in polls by selecting a random sample of the population of interest, ask them some appropriate questions about their views and count out the answers.
- ▶ Scientific polling today allows us to get a more *nationally* representative sample, whereas earlier efforts at polling targeted specific towns, cities, etc.

CCES 2012 age of respondents



Attitudes, ideologies, partisanship, opinions, information, and framing

- ▶ **Attitudes:** an organized and consistent manner of thinking feeling and reacting with regard to people groups social issues or any event.
 - ▶ Individuals differ widely in the attitudes they bring to bear on political choices. Most people have a loosely structures set of political attitudes.
- ▶ **Ideologies:** elaborately organized sets of political attitudes
 - ▶ Ideologies promote consistency among political attitudes by connecting them to something greater - a more general set of principles.
- ▶ **Partisanship:** attitudes that shapes a person's politics: disposition toward a party.
 - ▶ Identification with a party was thought to establish an enduring orientation toward the political world. A party may also be a short hand cue for some voters but as a source of identity for others.
- ▶ **Acquiring opinions:** attitudes acquired by families, schools, friends, opinion leaders, media
 - ▶ Political socialization: process of acquiring political attitudes, takes place during childhood and young adulthood - although new experiences can alter people later on.
- ▶ **Information:** many are ignorant of basic political facts and are in settings where they do not have incentives to develop sophisticated attitudes.
 - ▶ Yet ignorance doesn't prevent people from expressing opinions.
- ▶ **Framing:** explains how the media and campaigns can affect people's opinions.
 - ▶ All they have to do is frame the issue in a way that draws one response v. another.

The stability of public opinion

- ▶ Aggregate public opinion has been shown to be stable and coherent over time. Especially when there is no obvious reason to expect significant change, the distribution of opinions is highly stable.
- ▶ Aggregate opinion also varies in coherent ways over the shorter term
- ▶ Aggregate *partisanship* (the proportion of respondents who label themselves Republican or Democrats) shifts over time with (1) **presidential approval** and (2) **the economy**. Thus, popular presidents who preside over growing economies and successful foreign policies enhance their party's strength among voters.
- ▶ Thus, public opinion does not move erratically or unintelligibly.
- ▶ Moreover, public opinion is given rationality and coherence by opinion leaders who digest this information and spit it back to society in a way that is intelligible to the average person.
- ▶ The masses, in turn, are responsive to these leaders and use *cognitive shortcuts* to intake political information.

Public opinion on issues

- ▶ Just because we as a society agree on the tenets of a representative democracy, does not mean that we agree on every issue. The issues below have consistently generated wide divisions of opinion.
 - ▶ **Economic issues**
 - ▶ Today, government action to enhance economic welfare usually enjoys broad public support. At the same time, people are less enthusiastic about paying the costs of big government (through taxes and more regulation) and while the programs that serve the middle class enjoy wide support, programs that serve the poor are shakier.
 - ▶ **Social and moral issues**
 - ▶ Politics has also been largely about activism (not just the economy) - think back to abolishing slavery, achieving votes for women, ending segregation. But the debates we went over from *Griswold* to *Roe* to *Casey* exemplify how we as a society don't have a consensus on some moral issues.
 - ▶ **Foreign policy**
 - ▶ From the end of WWII to 1991 (end of the Soviet Union), the elites almost uniformly framed our thinking on foreign policy with respect to communism. But we as a society have often not agreed on whether the wars we engage in are kosher (think about Vietnam, the Korean war, the Iraq War).

Demographic characteristics that affect public opinion

▶ Race and ethnicity

- ▶ Many minority groups show distinctive patterns of issue opinion and voting behavior. I.e. Hispanics have lower incomes and favor more extensive services, Blacks have been captured by the Democrats and have a utility heuristic that binds them together (Frymer 2005, Dawson 1994).

▶ Gender

- ▶ On some issues, women and men do not agree. Women are less inclined than men to support the sue of violence in foreign and domestic policy.

▶ Income and education

- ▶ Surveys find that opinions differ abundantly among respondents based on income and education. People with low incomes tend to support government services, people with higher incomes do not want to be taxed a lot. However, on non-economic issues, higher-income groups are more socially liberal than lower income groups, who are more conservative..

▶ Religion

- ▶ Religious values have shaped political opinion (religion was a strong force behind prohibiting alcohol, abolishing slavery, extending civil rights to Blacks, banning abortions).

▶ Age

- ▶ Younger voters tend to be more liberal on social and economic issues (i.e. they are much more supportive of gay marriage).

Introduction to voting and elections

- ▶ Often, divisions in public opinion do not form consistent patterns - and so different groups must come together on different issues (and form various coalitions).
- ▶ Building coalitions (getting people to agree on an action in the absence of agreement on the purposes of the action) is what pluralist politics is all about.
- ▶ We have elections to *delegate* our authority (in this republic we all live in) to agents who represent us.
- ▶ Elections also give us the power to get rid of agents who do not do the job we wanted them to do when we delegated authority to them.

Who uses the right to vote?

- ▶ Despite wanting so bad to have a representative democracy, many people choose not to vote. Why is that?

Who uses the right to vote?

- ▶ Despite wanting so bad to have a representative democracy, many people choose not to vote. Why is that?
 - ▶ On the one hand, people insist on the right to vote because it gives leaders a reason to care about their interests and opinions.
 - ▶ On the other hand, it makes sense not to vote because the likelihood that any single vote will influence anyone or anything is minute. Individually, a vote counts for next to nothing.
- ▶ Turnout is influenced by a number of factors: including when the election is being held, age, and education.
 - ▶ For instance, other things equal, turnout in midterm elections is 27% higher for the most educated compared to the least educated. In presidential election years, turnout among the oldest citizens is 29% than it is among the youngest citizens.
- ▶ There are institutional facts that affect turnout as well:
 - ▶ Institutional factors we are talking about: variation in registration laws (polling distance, voter ID laws, etc) which affect turnout.
 - ▶ In the decades after the Civil War, southern states adopted devices such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and the requirement that voters reregister periodically to discourage Blacks from voting.

Alabama Literacy Test

- ▶ 1. A United States Senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date? **3 Jan**
- ▶ 2. A person appointed to the United States Supreme Court is appointed for a term of **good behavior**.
- ▶ 3. When the Constitution was approved by the original colonies, how many states had to ratify it for it to take effect? **9**
- ▶ 4. Does enumeration affect the income tax levied on citizens in various states? **No**
- ▶ 5. Person opposed to swearing in an oath may say instead: **I solemnly affirm.**
- ▶ 6. What words are required by law to be on all coins and paper currency of the United States? **United States of America; In God We Trust**
- ▶ 7. Appropriation of money for the armed services can be only for a period limited to **2 years**.
- ▶ 8. Who passes laws dealing with piracy? **The U.S Congress**
- ▶ 9. The Constitution protects an individual against punishments which are **cruel and unusual**.
- ▶ 10. For security, each state has a right to form a **militia**.
- ▶ 11. Of the original 13 states, the one with the largest representation in the first Congress was **Virginia** (10reps, 2sens)
- ▶ 12. Capital punishment is the giving of a death sentence. **True**
- ▶ 13. Involuntary servitude is permitted in the United States upon conviction of a crime. **True**
- ▶ 14. The only laws which can be passed to apply to an area in a federal arsenal are those passed by **Congress**, provided consent for the purchase of the land is given by state legislatures.
- ▶ 15. After the presidential electors have voted, to whom do they send the count of their votes? **President of the Senate**

How do voters decide?

- ▶ Voters use simple cues as cognitive shortcuts and rely heavily on the free information delivered by the news media, campaign advertising, opinion leaders, and their own experience to inform their predictions.
- ▶ Voters also rely on a representative's past performance and their incumbency status as a cue for their future performance.
- ▶ The news media and the campaigns supply plenty of free information about candidates' positions. However, voters cannot take all this information at face value so they rely on cues from their opinion leaders (Christian coalition, Pro-choice america).
- ▶ Voters also rely on the party label and engage in issue voting.

McDonald (2008)

- ▶ What is the main takeaway from this article?

McDonald (2008)

- ▶ What is the main takeaway from this article?
- ▶ **Turnout is no longer declining in presidential elections (if it ever even was), and it has reverted to the high levels experienced during the 1950s and 1960s.**

McDonald (2008)

- ▶ What is the main takeaway from this article? **Turnout is no longer declining in presidential was (if it ever even was), and it has reverted to the high levels experienced during the 1950s and 1960s.**

McDonald (2008): Argument and data

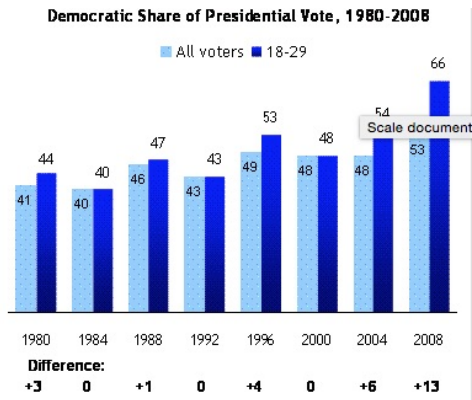
- ▶ In the 2008 presidential election, approximately 131.3 million persons cast a vote for president, which is 61.6% of those eligible to vote.¹ This represents a 1.5 percentage-point increase from the 60.1% turnout rate in 2004 and a nearly 10 percentage-point increase from the modern low of 51.7% in 1996.
- ▶ The 2008 presidential election poses a challenge to voting scholars. The myth of declining turnout rates has been laid to rest, and participation has been increasing for three consecutive presidential elections, contrary to a large number of theories advanced to explain the myth.
- ▶ What data does McDonald say about election reform efforts? I.e. about election day voter registration?

McDonald and reduced voting costs

- ▶ The 2008 presidential election saw states lowering these voting cost barriers through innovations in Election Day registration and early voting.
- ▶ **Election Day registration** is touted as increasing voter turnout by aligning registration with the act of voting, thereby reducing the burden of voter registration for first-time voters and recent movers. Scholars have found a positive relationship between Election Day registration and voter turnout
- ▶ **Early voting**: A more profound change in voting revealed itself in the unprecedented number of people who cast their ballot prior to Election Day. Preliminarily, about 40 million, or 30% of all votes, were cast prior to Election Day in the 2008 presidential election.

Keeter and Tyson Article (Pew)

- ▶ In the last three general elections (2004, 2006, and 2008) young voters have given the Democratic Party a majority of their votes, and for all three cycles they have been the party's most supportive age group.
- ▶ In 2008, 66% of those under age 30 voted for Barack Obama



Sources: National exit polls conducted by CBS/New York Times (1980-1988), Voter News Service (1992-2000) and National Election Pool (2004-2008).

Keeter and Tyson Article (Pew)

How They Voted

	<i>All Voters</i>		<i>Whites</i>	
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>McCain</i>	<i>Obama</i>	<i>McCain</i>
	%	%	%	%
Total	53	46	43	55
Age 18-29	66	31	54	44
Republicans	15	84	11	88
Democrats	95	4	92	7
Independents	66	27	62	32
Men	62	34	52	45
Women	69	29	56	42
College experience	65	32	55	42
No college	66	31	50	48
White	54	44		
Black	95	4		
Hispanic	76	19		
Age 30+	50	48	41	57
Republicans	8	90	7	91
Democrats	88	11	83	16
Independents	48	48	44	52
Men	47	51	39	59
Women	52	46	44	54
College experience	49	49	42	56
No college	50	48	38	60
White	41	57		
Black	96	4		
Hispanic	62	36		

Source: National exit poll conducted by NBC News.

Keeter and Tyson Article (Pew)

- ▶ In 2008, one of the most striking features of young voters is their racial and ethnic diversity.
 - ▶ Just 62% of voters age 18-29 identify as white, while 18% are black and 14% Hispanic.
 - ▶ In 2004, this age group was 68% white.
 - ▶ In 2000, nearly three-quarters (74%) of young voters were white.
- ▶ Women significantly outnumber men among younger voters, constituting 55% of those 18-29 and 30-44.
- ▶ The Democrats' overall advantage in party identification in the 2008 election was driven in large part by the strong Democratic leaning of young voters.

Keeter and Tyson Article (Pew)

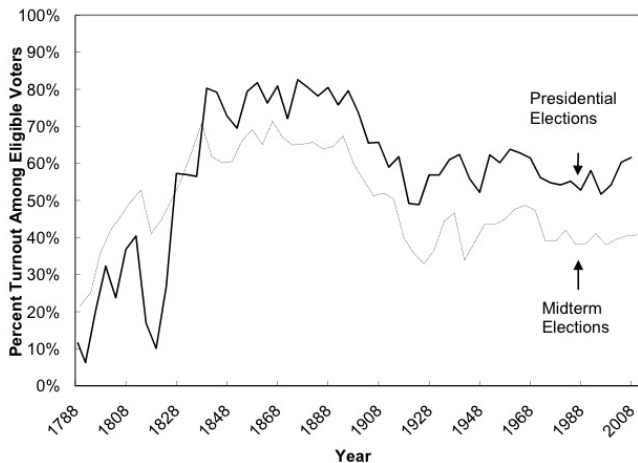
Age and the Issues

	Total	18-	30-	45-	65+
	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Scope of government</i>					
Govt. should do more to solve problems	50	69	48	46	41
Govt. does too much better left to business	43	27	44	49	50
Approve of Iraq war	36	22	37	41	36
Disapprove of Iraq war	63	77	62	58	61
<i>Offshore drilling</i>					
Favor	68	57	67	72	74
Oppose	28	39	29	25	22
Support Bailout	39	42	39	38	38
Oppose Bailout	56	52	59	58	55
<i>Most important problem</i>					
Economy	63	61	65	63	59
War in Iraq	10	12	9	9	10
Health care	9	9	9	9	9
Terrorism	9	5	8	10	11
Energy policy	7	10	7	7	6
Liberal	22	32	21	19	17
Moderate	44	42	46	45	43
Conservative	34	26	33	36	40

Source: National exit poll conducted by NBC News.

McDonald (2010)

- ▶ **Takeaway:** In midterm elections compared to presidential election, voter turnout is lower among all groups, but more so for young people.
- ▶ An estimated 88.7 million people cast ballots in the 2010 midterm election. The turnout rate was 40.7%.



McDonald (2010)

- ▶ The highest turnout rate in 2010 was Minnesota's 55.5%. The lowest turnout rate was Texas's 32.3%
- ▶ States above the median turnout rate tend to have better-educated populations.
- ▶ Numerous scholars find that persons of higher education are more likely to vote.
- ▶ The 2010 election poses something of a minor puzzle to the long-term trends in American voter turnout.
- ▶ Turnout in presidential and midterm elections tend to move together. While recent presidential turnout rates have reached comparable levels of participation as those experienced during the 1950s and 1960s, midterm elections have yet to break out to this upside with equal vigor.

Midterm Feedback

- ▶ 9 am section
 - ▶ 14 test takers
 - ▶ the average was 88%
 - ▶ The highest grade was 97.75 and the lowest was 74
 - ▶ 2 Cs
 - ▶ 5 Bs
 - ▶ 7 As

- ▶ 1. False: talks about the Constitution as originally written (staggering of terms was key)
- ▶ 2. False: talk about Virginia Plan and compromise to states' rights advocates: breakdown of Senate and House, SC has life time appointment.
- ▶ 3. Was supposed to be true (I understand if you wrote false and went into a discussion of the necessary and proper clause and the supremacy clause)
- ▶ 4. Was supposed to be False but I accepted both true and false answers (Engel/school prayer, Lemon test, wall of separation)
- ▶ 5. False: commerce clause standard

Essay

- ▶ Essay due NEXT WEEK on FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015.