POLI 100M: Political Psychology

Lecture 3: Political Participation and Voting
Taylor N. Carlson
tfeenstr@ucsd.edu
Announcements

• Grade contracts due today!
• Short Assignment 1 is due next time – any questions about this?
• Remember that you must complete 1 reading commentary per week, submitted to TritonEd.
• Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30 in SSB 341, or by appointment
Last Time

• Personality
  – Big Five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism/emotional stability
  – Connections to political behavior, especially extraversion (engagement) and openness (engagement and attitudes)

• Genetics
  – Some political attitudes and behaviors are heritable!
  – Nature AND Nurture

• Psychophysiology
  – Mind-body connection; not so missing link between genetics and political behavior
  – Can explain certain political attitudes (ideology, immigration) and engagement in some activities (political discussion)
What questions do you have?
Today: Driving Questions

• What are the psychological motivations behind why people vote and participate in politics?

• What are the psychological motivations behind how individuals choose which candidates to support?
Today: Learning Outcomes

1. Identify common forms of political participation
2. Explain the resource model of political participation
3. Explain the psychological correlates of political participation
4. Describe the most common ways in which individuals choose candidates to support
5. Evaluate whether these psychological factors that motivate voting behavior are more or less influential than other factors, such as resources
Political Participation
How do we participate in politics?

• Which of these activities do you think are the most common?
• How many of these activities have you done?
• Which of these activities do you think are the most important?
Political Participation in the US
Turnout by Age

Source: US Election Project electproject.org
Citizen Voting-Age Population Turnout Rates by Education

Source: US Election Project electproject.org
Figure 1. Proportion of Eligible Adult Population Who Reported Voting

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University
Why do people participate in politics?

• Brady, Verba, & Schlozman (1995) would ask instead: Why don’t people take part in politics?
  – Because they can’t
  – Because they don’t want to
  – Because nobody asked
Why do(n’t) people participate in politics?

• Brady, Verba, & Schlozman (1995): Participation for different activities is motivated by different things
  • Voting:
    – Driven by interest, civic skills matter
    – Income and time are less important
  • Donating money:
    – Driven by income
    – Time and civic skills don’t matter
  • Volunteering and other political activities:
    – Driven by interest, civic skills matter the most, time also matters
    – Income doesn’t matter
A Resource Model of Political Participation

• Those who have resources participate!
• Initially focused on resources like money
  – Focused on why low-SES individuals participated less
• Newer Version: Resources include
  – Time
  – Money
  – Civic skills
Think back to the reasons why people don’t participate...

• Because they can’t
• Because they don’t want to
• Because nobody asked
Personality and Participation

• **Contacting Elected Officials**
  – More extraverted more, likely to contact
  – More open to experience, more likely to contact
  – More conscientious, less likely to contact
  – More emotionally stable, less likely to contact
Personality and Participation

• Participating in Campaigns
  – Social Activities
    • Examples:
      – Try to convince someone to vote for/against a candidate
      – Work for a candidate or party
      – Attend campaign meetings or rallies
    • More extraverted, more likely to attend rallies
    • More open, more likely to convince others to vote for a candidate
    • More open, more likely to work for a party/candidate
Personality and Participation

– Individualistic Activities
  • Examples:
    – Put up a yard sign/bumper sticker/campaign button
    – Contributed to a party or candidate
    – Give money to a political group
  • More open, more likely to contribute money
  • More open, more likely to put up a yard sign/bumper sticker/campaign button
  • No effects for extraversion or other Big 5 traits
Personality and Participation

• Mondak (2010) finds no relationship between the Big 5 traits and voting
• No relationship between Conflict Orientation and voting
• Other personality traits matter!
  – Social Anxiety: those who are socially anxious are less likely to vote
Personality and Participation: Summary

• Extraversion affects the social forms of participation, but not the individualistic forms.

• Openness affects nearly all forms of participation except voting.

• Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability/Neuroticism have inconsistent effects on participation.

• Voting seems less strongly influenced by personality.
Genetics and Participation

- Fowler & Dawes (2008) show that there is a genetic component to voting
- Loewen & Dawes (2012) show that considering voting a duty is heritable, which could be the mechanism that explains the heritability of voting
- Remember that it’s Genes AND Environment, though!
Stress and Participation

- Cortisol is released in response to stress
- Cortisol levels are higher on election days than on non-election days (Waismel-Manor et al. 2011)
- Cortisol levels in supporters of losing candidates are elevated compared to cortisol levels of supporters of winning candidates (Stanton et al. 2010)
- Those with higher baseline cortisol levels are less likely to vote (French et al. 2014)
Stress and Participation

- Hassell & Settle (2017) find that when triggered to consider life stressors unrelated to politics, individuals without a history of past participation are less likely to vote.
Emotions and Participation

• Recall that politics is emotional!
• Anger is politically mobilizing
  – Weber (2013) finds that political messages that evoke anger increase intentions to participate
• Fear leads to greater attention to political information (Brader 2005)
• Enthusiasm leads to a larger reliance on habit (Brader 2005)
Psychology and Political Participation: Summary

• Political participation is more than just resources!

• Individual differences impact political participation
  – Personality: mostly extraversion and openness
  – Genetic predispositions toward voting and correlates of voting
  – Stress depresses turnout
  – Some emotions (anger, fear) are mobilizing, while others are not (sadness, sometimes enthusiasm)
5 minute break
Vote Choice
Choosing a Candidate

• Why do individuals choose to vote for certain candidates?
• What are the psychological explanations for how individuals choose which candidate to support?
Classic Explanations of Vote Choice

• Retrospective Voting: vote for incumbents who have performed well in the past term in office
  – Are you better off now than you were 4 years ago?
• Prospective Voting: vote for candidates who you think will best represent your interests in the future
  – Example: Single issues—vote for the candidate whose position is closest to yours on an issue you care about
• Information Shortcuts (Heuristics):
  – Opinion Leaders—other people give you voting advice
  – Candidate Traits—gender, race, personality, trustworthiness
  – Party Identification—the ultimate cue of policy positions
Influence of Party ID

- Party Identification is the best single predictor of vote choice in federal elections
- From 1952-2016, about \( \frac{3}{4} \) of presidential voters were self-identified partisans supporting their party’s candidates
What is Party Identification?

• An information shortcut
  – Reflects someone’s level of policy agreement with the two parties
  – “Running tally” of performance evaluations of the parties in office

• A strong psychological attachment

• A social identity
Party Identification as a Social Identity

• Social identification involves comparing a judgment about yourself with your perception of a social group.

• What kinds of social groups come to mind as I think about Democrats? Republicans? Independents?

• What social groups do I identify with?
# Party Identification as a Social Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Group Descriptions of Republicans</strong></th>
<th><strong>Group Descriptions of Democrats</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republican Respondents</strong></td>
<td>Big Business, Forward thinking, Able leadership</td>
<td>Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrat Respondents</strong></td>
<td>Big Business</td>
<td>Minorities, Forward thinking, Able leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why is party ID so influential?

- Powerful information shortcut (more on this next time)
- Operates as a “perceptual screen”
  - Ignore or reinterpret information that goes against their party (more on this next time)
  - Motivated reasoning (more on this next time)
- Individuals are psychologically motivated to be consistent
  - Stability of party identification; desire to vote along party lines
- Social pressure stemming from others in your social network (more on this later)
Vote Choice: Summary

• Classic theories of vote choice:
  – Retrospective voting
  – Prospective voting
  – Information shortcuts (opinion leaders, candidate traits, party identification)

• Choosing a candidate can be cognitively taxing, so sometimes we use information shortcuts to choose a candidate

• Party ID is the most influential predictor of vote choice in federal elections

• Debate over what party ID is, maybe a social identity

• Many reasons why party ID is influential over the vote
5 minute break
Bringing it all together

• Get into groups of 3-4 people
• I will assign you a question and a position
• Your job is to come up with the best argument you can defending your assigned position
• One person from your group should write down your argument and turn it in