

# Government 30

## Lecture 9

### Public Opinion and Political Behavior

March 6, 2006

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## Public Opinion and Democracy

### I. Democracy: The Rule of the Ruled.

Framers: "due dependence upon the people"

### II. Hamilton: safety in executive requires "due dependence" of President upon popular will.

dependence requires accountability to public interest (Lincoln).

### III. Political Science Q: Why do People Behave, and Think, As They Do?

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## Substance (or Lack Thereof) of U.S. Public Opinion

What does America think? Not much.

### Do Americans Know Anything?

#### Percentage Unable to ID

<input type="checkbox"/> Party with Senate majority	38%
<input type="checkbox"/> Name of Vice President of US	40%
<input type="checkbox"/> Name of Speaker of the House	47%
<input type="checkbox"/> Both Senators from their State	54%
<input type="checkbox"/> Chief Justice of Supreme Court	97%

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## Where You Stand Depends upon Where You Sit: The Gender Gap

Issue	Women	Men
Poverty and homelessness should be gov't priority	44%	29%
Favor ↑ child-care funding so welfare parents can work, attend school	91%	91%
Death penalty for murderers	46%	54%
Should criminal justice system be tougher on drunk drivers?	76%	58%
Want stricter gun control	70%	50%
Would not vote for a candidate who is gay	43%	30%

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## Ignorance and Information: Who Benefits Politically?

1. The Fishkin Deliberative Poll: Conservatives Benefit on Economic Issues, perhaps Lose on Defense Issues

- Wages 
- Source of Problems 
- Foreign Policy 

2. Bartels: Dems Benefit

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## Wage Fairness Before and After the NIC

Statement: the average worker does not receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

	<u>Before the NIC</u>	<u>After the NIC</u>
Strongly Agree	26.6%	40.4%
Agree Somewhat	32.8%	34.6%
Disagree Somewhat	29.6%	18.9%
Disagree Strongly	6.7%	4.2%
Don't Know	4.4%	1.8%




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## Source of Problems Before and After the NIC

Q: Some people think that the biggest problems for the American family are economic problems. Others think that it is the breakdown of the traditional family values. Which is closer to your view?

	<u>Before the NIC</u>	<u>After the NIC</u>
Economic Problems	35.5%	50.7%
Breakdown in Values	57.6%	47.7%
Don't Know	6.9%	1.6%




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## Cooperation/Isolation Before and After the NIC

Statement: the U.S. should continue to engage in military cooperation with other nations, not to add trouble spots in the world.

	<u>Before the NIC</u>	<u>After the NIC</u>
Strongly Agree	20.8%	37.7%
Agree Somewhat	50.8%	44.1%
Disagree Somewhat	17.4%	12.6%
Disagree Strongly	7.8%	3.9%
Don't Know	3.2%	1.8%

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## III. Measurement: Method is Everything

### A. Random Sampling.

1. 1948 Election ("Dewey Defeats Truman").

Problem: non-random sample that correlated w/ income

2. 1996 Election (Bob Smith of New Hampshire) -- Problem: naturally occurring statistical sampling error

3. 2000 Election (Gore, then Bush, then nobody in Florida) -  
- Problem: early call based upon bad data

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## Method is Everything

### B. The Phrasing of the Question

Statement: The country isn't spending enough \$ on assistance to the poor. **Agreement: 63%**

Statement (same survey sample): The country isn't spending enough \$ on welfare. **Agreement: 19%**.

Example: Balanced Budget Amendment. With or without Social Security effects?

Example: Stricter pollution control to clean the nation's rivers? Are job effects included in the question?

See Asher (K & S) for numerous examples.

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## Political Participation

Why IMP?

(1) general idea of democracy -- "due dependence upon the people"

(2) the DeTocqueville-Putnam argument: like Campbell's soup, politics is good food. Aristotelian view of politics as soul work.

BUT,...

A. The Paradox of Voting: Why Would Rational People Vote at All?

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## The Paradox of Voting

**Why Vote?** The more people I expect to show, the less likely my vote will make a difference.

"Marginal value" of vote is negligible. So if I care about eventual outcome, I have no incentive to vote.

**Result:** Can't predict "positive turnout" based on rationality alone. And it happens... 

**BUT,...** If I expect no one to show, then I am dictator. 

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## The Problem of Turnout: An Extreme Example

WESTMORELAND, Kansas (CNN) (March 1997) -- When officials in a remote Kansas county prepared to tally results from a local election, there was nothing to count.

Nobody, not even the lone candidate, showed up to vote in the Rock Creek School Board election Tuesday in Pottawatomie County. The district has 327 eligible voters.

The board is now short a member. "I can't explain it," County Clerk Susan Figge said Wednesday. "I don't understand it, I really don't."

Some voters were not aware of the election -- and those who were may have been confused by the relocation of the polling place.

Figge said the seat will be filled by a vote of the board -- if board members show up.




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## The Problem of Turnout

### A. The problem:

- ♣ 1860-1900: at least 70% of eligible population voted
- ♦ Since 1900, never greater than 70%, and in recent years less than 50%.
- ♣ Also a decline since 1960 (Teixeira)

Puzzle: Why? We've got the "crime," now who are the culprits?

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Presidential Turnout by Race




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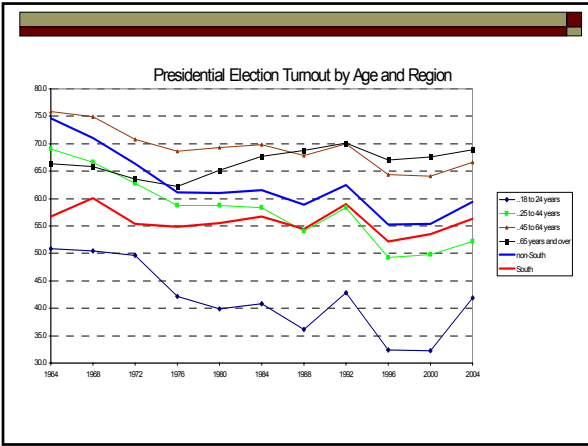
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### Why Did Turnout Decline? And why has it risen very recently?

(1) INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE? HAS THE COST OF VOTING INCREASED?

(2) Changes in Voters?

- (a) CYNICISM?
- (b) SES – socio-economic status?
- (c) social connectedness & NETWORKS (Putnam)
- (d) “political efficacy” -- People have less of a say in what goes on, or at least think they have less of a say

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### Why Has Turnout Declined? Some Other Factors

(1) Competition has declined

If we suspect incumbents are going to win anyway, why turn out to vote for them or against them?

(2) Expansion of electorate

More diverse interests, and more diverse people, are involved.

(3) Decline of PARTIES...next time.

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