UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN VOTER

Dr. Rob Demski

OLLI Course – June 2024
UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN VOTER

Presentation Outline

• I. The Voting Context: -------------------------------------- Macro View
• II. Sources of Voter Information ------------------------ I
• III. Understanding Voter Information ------------------ I
• IV. Responses to the Vote ----------------------------- I
• V. Voter Taxonomies ---------------------------------- I
• VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter --------------------- I
• VII. Voter Decision-Making ----------------------------- Micro View
• VIII. Political Functions of Voting
• IX. Connecting the Dots
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

Manufacturing

Manufacturing as a Percentage of All U.S. Employment
(1940 - 2019)

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities
   Income Disparities

Mapping Average Income of the Top 1%

Source: http://www.howmuch.net/articles/average-income-of-top-1-per-cent
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities
Compensation Lags Productivity

1948–1973:
Productivity: **Up 96.7%**
Hourly compensation: **Up 91.3%**

1973–2013:
Productivity: **Up 74.4%**
Hourly compensation: **Up 9.2%**

2013: 243.1%
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

The Losing Bottom 50%

Income trend for the top 1% diverges from most Americans after 1980

The share of U.S. pretax income accruing to the bottom 50 percent and top 1 percent of income earners, 1962-2014

I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

The Favored 10%

The majority of all wealth in the U.S. is controlled by the top 10%

Percent of U.S. wealth earned by each wealth group, 1989-2018

I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

Inequality Higher in U.S.

Inequality has increased more rapidly in the U.S. than Europe
Share of national income earned by the top 10% of earners, 1980-2016

Source: WID.world [2017]

Equitable Growth
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

Inflation Declines from 2022 Peak
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities
Federal Spending Outpaces Revenues

The federal government spent 28.7% more than it collected in FY 2022, resulting in a $1.45T deficit.
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

Tax Burden Reduction
I. Voting Context: Economic Realities

Summary

• 1. Decline of manufacturing jobs
• 2. Rising concentration of wealth
• 3. Hourly compensation not keeping up with productivity
• 4. Income inequality higher in US compared to Europe
• 5. CPI reaches high July 2022, then slowly declines
• 6. Federal expenditures outpace revenues
• 7. 2019 tax cuts expect trickle-down effects
• Do perceptions match reality?
• https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/22/poll-economy-recession-biden
I. Voting Context: Social Realities

Gender Issues

Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage over Time

Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into same-sex marriages? (If “FAVOR” OR “OPPOSE,” ASK:) Would you say that you strongly favor/oppose, or just somewhat favor/oppose?

- Favor allowing same-sex marriages
- Oppose allowing same-sex marriages

Views of laws and policies related to transgender issues differ widely by party

% saying they would strongly favor or favor each of the following laws or policies that are either in place or being considered in the U.S.

- Protect transgender people from discrimination in jobs, housing and public spaces
- Require that trans athletes compete on teams that match the sex they were assigned at birth
- Make it illegal for health care professionals to help someone <18 with medical care for gender transition
- Require trans individuals to use public bathrooms that match the sex they were assigned at birth
- Make it illegal for public school districts to teach about gender identity in elementary schools
- Investigate parents for child abuse if they help someone <18 get medical care for gender transition
- Require health insurance companies to cover medical care for gender transitions

Note: Other responses included “strongly oppose,” “oppose” and “neither favor nor oppose.” The wording of some items was shortened for space. See topline for full question wording.
“Americans’ Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues”
I. Voting Context: Social Realities

Ethnic Relations

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Support for the Black Lives Matter movement varies by race, ethnicity, age and partisanship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% saying they _____ the Black Lives Matter movement</th>
<th>Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly support</td>
<td>Somewhat support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All adults</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian*</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-29</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimates for Asian adults are representative of English speakers only.

Note: White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.
Response options also included “Somewhat oppose” and “Strongly oppose.” Question wording included “From what you’ve read and heard, how do you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?”

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Since 2021, immigration concerns have surged among Republicans while holding steady among Democrats

% who say _____ should be a top priority for the president and Congress to address this year

Defending the country from future terrorist attacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'21</th>
<th>'22</th>
<th>'23</th>
<th>'24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dealing with immigration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'21</th>
<th>'22</th>
<th>'23</th>
<th>'24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reducing crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'21</th>
<th>'22</th>
<th>'23</th>
<th>'24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

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## I. Voting Context: Social Realities

### Religion

### About 7 In 10 White evangelical Protestants say Trump stands up for people with their religious beliefs at least to ‘some’ extent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who say each presidential candidate stands up for people with their religious beliefs</th>
<th>Joe Biden</th>
<th>Donald Trump</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. adults</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET A great deal/Quite a bit</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little/Not at all</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Many Americans think conservative Christians, secular liberals have gone too far in trying to control religion in government and public schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who say…</th>
<th>CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS have gone too far in trying to push their religious views in the government and public schools</th>
<th>LIBERALS WHO ARE NOT RELIGIOUS have gone too far in trying to keep religious values out of the government and public schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. adults</strong></td>
<td>48% Don’t think so</td>
<td>50% Don’t think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET A great deal/Quite a bit</td>
<td>49% Don’t think so</td>
<td>47% Don’t think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>23% Don’t think so</td>
<td>75% Don’t think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little/Not at all</td>
<td>61% Don’t think so</td>
<td>22% Don’t think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>35% Don’t think so</td>
<td>27% Don’t think so</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Note

- Figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding. Those who did not answer are not shown. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic.
- Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 13-29, 2024
- "If it is 10 Americans Say Religion Is Losing Influence in Public Life”

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**Pew Research Center**
I. Voting Context: Social Realities
Abortion

Pew Research Center: May 13, 2024

I. Voting Context: Social Realities
Segregated Media Ecosystem  (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018)
I. Voting Context: Social Realities

Political Use of Social media

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### Most Americans who use social media to engage in politics fall at the ends of the ideological spectrum

% of **social media users** who ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post about political or social issues</th>
<th>Do not post about political or social issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Conserv Rep**
- **Mod/Lib Rep**
- **Conserv/Mod Dem**
- **Liberal Dem**

|                  | 26 | 17 | 20 | 29 |

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Note: Question only asked of people who report using social media.

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I. Voting Context: Social Realities
Summary: Clashing Moral Sensibilities

Cosmopolitanism

Neo-Victorianism
I. Voting Context: Political Realities
Partisan Polarization to the Right

Democrats

Republicans

Note: Data excludes nonvoting delegates, as well as lawmakers who officially served but (due to illness, resignation or other factors) didn't have a scorable voting record for a given Congress. Party categories include independents who caucus(ed) with that party. Members who changed parties (or became independents) during a Congress were classified according to the status they held the longest during that Congress. For most of the 116th Congress, Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan was either an independent or a Libertarian, and didn't caucus with either major party.


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The 2021 political typology
% of ____ who are ...

General public
- Faith and Flag Conservatives: 10%
- Committed Conservatives: 7%
- Populist Right: 11%
- Ambivalent Right: 12%
- Stressed Sideliners: 15%
- Outsider Left: 10%
- Democratic Mainstays: 16%
- Establishment Liberals: 13%
- Progressive Left: 6%

Rep/Lean Rep
- 23%

Dem/Lean Dem
- 6%
- 13%
- 16%
- 28%
- 23%
- 12%

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I. Voting Context: Political Realities

Policy Polarization

![FIGURE 4. Critical Issues, by Party Affiliation](image)

I. Voting Context: Political Realities
Rise of Populism

THREE FEATURES

1. People centrism
2. Anti-elitism
3. Manicheanism
I. Voting Context: Political Realities

Populist Examples

• **EXAMPLES**

  • **Ross Perot** [1990’s]: snappy down-home style, ran for president 1992 & 1996 as 3rd party candidate, was against NAFTA, contempt of politics as practiced

  • **The Tea Party** [2000’s]: floated Obama conspiracy theories, portrayed itself as grass roots & spontaneous, wanted small govt, lower taxes, reduced deficits

  • **Occupy Wall Street** [2011]: leaderless groups arose after 2011 financial crisis, set up urban encampments, against big banks & corporations, the 1%

  • **Bernie Sanders & Donald Trump** [2016]: Sanders tackled economic inequality, ran against Hillary Clinton; Trump slogan “Make America Great Again” anti elite, etc
I. Voting Context: Political Realities

Populist Outcome: Two Routes  (Levitsky & Way, 2002)

Democratic Rejuvenation?
- Democracy makes a self-correction
- Government gets strong leaders to make things right
- New social & economic policies restabilize the country
- Traditional political & economic elites are trusted
- The majority of “the people” dominate over monied interests

Competitive Authoritarianism?
- **Definition**: democratic institutions used as means of obtaining & exercising political authority, incumbents violate rules so often & to such an extent, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy.
- Elections are seriously contested with attempts at manipulation
- Governments attempt to subordinate the judiciary, sometimes through co-optation
- The media frequently threatened, periodically attacked, may emerge as opposition figures
I. Voting Context: Political Realities

Authoritarian Supporters?

Figure 2: Support for Authoritarianism in Response to Direction of the Country, by Party and Religious Affiliation

Percent who agree that “Because things have gotten so far off track in this country, we need a leader who is willing to break some rules if that’s what it takes to set things right.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Catholic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiously unaffiliated</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White mainline/non-evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian religion</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Catholic</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 3: Support for Political Violence in Response to Direction of the Country, by Party and Religious Affiliation

Percent who agree that “Because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Americans</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Catholic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiously unaffiliated</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White mainline/non-evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious unaffiliated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian religion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PRRI surveys 2021-2023.
I. Voting Context: Political Realities
Realities of the 2024 Election
II. Sources of Voter Information

Overview

• Family & Friends
• Social Media
• News Media
• Political ads
• Debates & Speeches
• Political Polls
• Party & Candidate Websites
II. Sources of Voter Information

Internet Sources Dominate

*About one-in-five U.S. adults say they get their political news primarily through social media*

% of U.S. adults who say the most common way they get political and election news is ...

- No answer: 1%
- Social media: 18%
- News website or app: 25%
- Cable TV: 16%
- Local TV: 16%
- Network TV: 13%
- Radio: 8%
- Print: 3%


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## II. Sources of Voter Information

Age influences info source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>News Website or App</th>
<th>Cable TV</th>
<th>Local TV</th>
<th>Network TV</th>
<th>Radio</th>
<th>Print</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-29</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


“Americans Who Mainly Get Their News on Social Media Are Less Engaged, Less Knowledgeable”

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II. Sources of Voter Information

Social media users less knowledgeable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>High political knowledge</th>
<th>Middle political knowledge</th>
<th>Low political knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News website or app</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable TV</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network TV</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local TV</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Knowledge index created from nine political knowledge questions. High political knowledge includes those who answered eight or nine questions correctly, middle knowledge includes those who answered six or seven questions correctly, and low knowledge includes those who answered five or fewer questions correctly.

Answers correct as of November 2019
"Americans Who Mainly Get Their News on Social Media Are Less Engaged, Less Knowledgeable"

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II. Sources of Voter Information

Ads are a mixed bag

- Ads have little effect on changing preferences
- Positive ads work no better than attack ads
- Swing-state ads are not more effective
- Ads do help name recognition
- In extremely tight races ads may affect outcomes
- Ads may keep the base energized
II. Sources of Voter Information

Democrats favor ads more on social media

**54% of Americans think social media companies should not allow any political ads on their platforms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Allow all</th>
<th>Only allow some</th>
<th>Not allow any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. adults</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mod/Lib</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cons/Mod</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
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II. Sources of Voter Information

Too little attention is paid to issues & policy
II. Sources of Voter Information
Debates have little effect

- Most people have already made their choice
- Debates didn’t help undecided voters
- Debates didn’t change voters’ preference
- Debates effects are small & tend to fade
- Viewers’ biases filter what they see

Nuwer (Oct 20, 2020). *Scientific American*
II. Sources of Voter information

Speeches have effects!

- What matters is not what the speaker has in mind but what the audience perceives
- But, language is highly metaphorical in ways we don’t realize [“Be there, be wild.”]
- Political speech reflects value stances, policy positions, persuasive strategies
- Speeches can activate fear, anger, grief

Pazzanese (Oct 23, 2023) The Harvard Gazette
II. Sources of Voter Information

Political Polls: The good, the bad, the ugly

- The effect on voters
- The uses by politicians
- The problems
II. Sources of Voter information

Party & Candidate Websites

**Parties**
- Democratic: [https://democrats.org/](https://democrats.org/)
- Project 2025: [https://www.project2025.org/](https://www.project2025.org/)
- Green Party: [https://www.gp.org/platform](https://www.gp.org/platform)
- Libertarian Party: [https://www.lp.org/platform/](https://www.lp.org/platform/)

**Candidates**
- Trump: [https://www.donaldjtrump.com](https://www.donaldjtrump.com)
- Biden: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-biden/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president-biden/)
- C. West: [https://www.cornelwest2024.com/](https://www.cornelwest2024.com/)
III. Understanding Voter information

- Media agenda setting
- Conceptual framing & priming
- Effects of vivid images
- Key words & verbal tricks
- Conspiratorial language
- Fake news
- Political memes
III. Understanding Voter Information
How to think about what’s important

- Agenda setting
- Framing
- Priming
III. Understanding Voter Information
The power of vivid images
III. Understanding Voter Information
The power & danger of words

POWER WORDS
• Freedom
• Big government
• Immigration
• Abortion
• Liberal
• 2nd amendment
• Terrorist
• Taxes

VERBAL TRICKS
1. Red Herring - misdirection
2. Strawman – intentional misrepresentation
3. Slippery Slope – thin edge of the wedge
4. Begging the Question – circular reasoning
5. Post Hoc – false cause
Understanding Voter Information
Conspiratorial language

• Uses bare assertion & innuendo

• Lacks arguments & evidence

• Uses sheer repetition

• Subverts the idea of legitimate opposition

• Disdain for experts & authorities

Muirhead & Rosenblum (2019). *A lot of people are saying.*
A majority of Americans who have heard of the QAnon conspiracy theories say QAnon is bad for the country.

Among U.S. adults who have heard or read about QAnon, % who think it’s a ___ thing for the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very bad</th>
<th>Somewhat bad</th>
<th>Somewhat good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>NET Good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All U.S. adults</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep/Lean Rep</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem/Lean Dem</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents who didn’t give an answer are not shown. They amount to 6% of U.S. adults, 9% of Rep/Lean Rep and 4% of Dem/Lean Dem.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER
III. Understanding Voter Information
Fake news: the loss of the center

- Produced to generate profit by mimicking real news
- Info rooted in unreality meant to hinder fact-based understanding of the world
- Meant to influence political beliefs while eroding trust in journalism
- Examples: conspiracies, junk science, misleading gossip

Zimdars & McLeod (2020). *Fake News*

https://apnews.com/hub/not-real-news
III. Understanding Voter Information

Political memes

BIDEN: "ANTIFA IS AN IDEA NOT A HATE GROUP"

IN OTHER NEWS: IDEAS BURNED DOWN HALF OF MINNEAPOLIS

HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN TRUMP IS LYING?

HIS MOUTH IS STILL MOVING.
III. Understanding Voter Information

AI-generated messaging: Synthetic Politics

• What is AI?
• Uses
• Misuses
• Examples
• Challenges
IV. Responses to the Vote
Summary

• History: Who can vote?
• Types of voters
• History: Voter turnout
• U.S. voter rates compared
IV. Responses to the Vote
U.S. History

1776
America declares independence. “Free holding” men are eligible to vote.

1789
The Constitution grants states the power to set voting requirements. The Naturalization Act of 1790 becomes law.

1870
The 15th Amendment becomes law, prohibiting the government from denying the right to vote on the basis of race, color, or previous servitude.

1920
The 19th Amendment becomes law, prohibiting the government from denying the right to vote on the basis of sex.

1924
All Native Americans are granted citizenship and the right to vote through the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act.

1943
Chinese immigrants are given the right to vote by the passage of the Magnuson Act.

1965
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 becomes law.
IV. Responses to the Vote

Non-voters

Those who almost always vote and those who sometimes vote aren’t that different

Demographic information of survey respondents, by voting history

We used a voter file combined with survey responses to classify voters. ● Rarely or never vote: voted in no more than one election ● Sometimes vote: voted in at least two elections, but not all (or all but one) ● Almost always vote: voted in all (or all but one) election.

Sources: Fivethirtyeight / Ipsos, Aristotle
IV. Responses to the Vote

Partisan voters: 2020 election
IV. Responses to the Vote
Independent voters
IV. Response to the Vote

Undecided voters are largely moderate

% of undecided voters who described their political views in the following ways

- 2% Very liberal
- 8% Liberal
- 32% Moderate
- 11% Conservative
- 3% Very conservative
- 19% Unsure

Question: How would you describe your political views? Source: GlobalWebIndex Q2 2020
Base: 2,281 U.S. internet users aged 18+ who said they don’t know who they intend to vote for in the next election
IV. Response to the Vote
The low information voter
### IV. Response to the Vote

**Swing Voters**

#### Figure 6

**Demographic Differences Among Swing Voters And Decided Voters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percent of Swing Voters</th>
<th>Percent of Decided Voters</th>
<th>Total Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29 years old</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49 years old</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64 years old</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Percent of Swing Voters</th>
<th>Percent of Decided Voters</th>
<th>Total Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Affiliation</th>
<th>Percent of Swing Voters</th>
<th>Percent of Decided Voters</th>
<th>Total Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dem and Dem-leaning</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure independent</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep and Rep-leaning</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: KFF Healt Tracking Polls (conducted May 30-June 4, July 18-23, 2019) See topline for full question wording and response options.*
IV. Response to the Vote
Single-issue voters

- Abortion: protections vs. restrictions
- Immigration: border management vs. sweep crackdown
- Health Care: extend ACA/Medicare vs. ACA criticism & cut spending
- Taxes: raising taxes for above $400K vs. extend 2017 Trump tax cuts
- Judges/Supreme Ct. liberals & diversity vs. young conservatives
- Trade: favors investment / opposes tariffs vs. across-the-board tariffs
- Foreign Policy/NATO: supports Ukraine/NATO vs. increasing isolationism

Sahil Kapur, 4/17/24, NBC News
IV. Response to the Vote

Presidential Turnout by Election

- How Groups Voted in 2020 Election
- https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-2020
IV. Response to the Vote
How the U.S. Compares

How U.S. Voter Turnout Measures Up
Share of voting age population that voted in the most recent national election

- Sweden 2018: 82.1%
- Belgium 2019*: 77.9%
- Israel 2020: 77.9%
- Germany 2017: 69.1%
- South Korea 2020: 66.5%
- Canada 2019: 65.1%
- Spain 2019: 65.1%
- United Kingdom 2019: 62.0%
- United States 2016: 55.7%
- France 2017: 44.4%

* National law makes voting compulsory though not necessarily enforced.
Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
V. Voter Taxonomies
4 Approaches

• Michigan School: The political science view (1960’s).
  [Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1964]

• Maximalist School: The cognitive psychology view (1980’s).
  [Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986]

• Nation as Family: The moral-linguistic view (2000’s).
  [Lakoff, 2002]

• Narrative Model: The connection of the personal & national (2020’s).
  [Packer, 2021]
V. Voter Taxonomies
The Michigan School

Based on Degree of:

• 1. political sophistication
• 2. political partisanship
• 3. Self-interested rational choice.
• 4. Five voter categories
V. Voter Taxonomies
Maximalist Model

1. based on amount & complexity of info
2. Info is multidimensional, emotion-laden
3. choices based on organized networks of beliefs, higher order values
4. networks of beliefs positively or negatively related to other networks
5. Associative web-like networks, logically consistent structures
V. Voter Taxonomies
The Nation as Family: Overview

1. Uses “the family” as unconscious political metaphor

2. Nation = Family, Govt = Parent, Citizen = Child

3. Models are abstract ideal types, can be mixed

4. Basis for social & political reasoning strategies

5. Results in different issues emphasized

6. Connected moral systems supply ideological coherence
V. Voter Taxonomies
The Strict Father

Life as struggle & competition with others
Life requires self-discipline, strength
Need order, authority, obedience
Focus on good vs. evil
Interference with self-interest is immoral
Wealth reflects moral & character strength
Favors retribution over restitution
Parental authority provides nurturance,
V. Voter Taxonomies
The Nurturant Family

Focus on care, support, empathy
Focus on cooperation, protection
Parents nurture self-discipline, self-reliance
Parent foster exploration of ideas, values, options, self-questioning
Authority and respect are earned
Develop social conscience, responsibility
Relations governed by bonds of affection, respect, cooperation
V. Voter Taxonomies

Issue comparisons: Strict father vs nurturant family

Different views on:
- Health care
- Gun access & safety
- Racial inequality
- Climate change
- What kids learn in school
- Economic inequality

Similar views on:
- Inflation
- Artificial intelligence
- Jobs & employment
- Human trafficking
- Terrorism
V. Voter Taxonomies
Narrative Approach: Overview

1. Melding of personal & national narratives, reflect moral identity, personal & local needs and desires

2. Emerged from declining middle class, less political cooperation, all have value & shortcomings

3. Reflect shift from traditional party positions to Republican rural populist insurgents Democratic urban affluence & minority concerns
V. Voter Taxonomies
Free America

1. most politically powerful,
2. libertarian ideas,
3. personal freedom,
4. reaction against modern secularism,
5. against collectivism and social welfare,
6. only purpose of govt is to secure individual rights,
7. anti-governing elites
8. Self-made man
V. Voter Taxonomies
Smart America

1. Mostly associated with the Democratic party

2. Welcome novelty and diversity,

3. Value credentials and expertise,

4. Little local identity, embrace

5. Embrace capitalism, meritocracy,

6. Value affirmative action, social safety net, global economy;
V. Voter Taxonomies
Real America

1. small towns, are hard working and patriotic,

2. white identity politics, anti-intellectual bias,

3. the best politicians come from ordinary people,

4. evangelical and fundamentalist, white Christian nationalism

5. systems are rigged for insiders,
V. Voter Taxonomies

Just America

1. Experience poor schools, crowded prisons, declining neighborhoods, police killings

2. Don’t believe the bland promises of middle-aged liberals,

3. America is a fixed hierarchy, a caste system,

4. Demands redress of group disparities,

5. Young, well-educated, overeducated, metro underemployed

6. Ideal of equality is a betrayal
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter

Key components

- Beliefs
- Values
- Attitudes
- Emotions
- Identity
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter

Functions of Beliefs

• Are models of reality
• Are clustered into systems
• Are acquired
• Filter reality
• Support each other
• Support party preferences
• Support moral emotional reactions
• Create partisan divides
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter
Values: Six Foundations [Haidt, 2012]

- Care vs harm
- Fairness vs. cheating
- Loyalty vs. betrayal
- Authority vs subversion
- Sanctity vs degradation
- Liberty vs oppression
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter
The Use & Misuse of Values: Unrestricted Right to Bare Arms

• Policy Position = restrictions are needed
  • Supporting Value = freedom from . . .
  • Selected Facts = guns kill the innocent,
    used in domestic violence
    used in suicide

• Policy Position = restrictions not needed
  • Supporting Value = freedom to . . .
  • Selected Facts = source of self-defense
    can protect others
    is a rewarding hobby
### VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter

Values can affect behavioral attributions

- **Event**: people crossing the US southern border

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value pref.</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Attrib.</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conser:</td>
<td>harm</td>
<td>invader</td>
<td>take over [disp]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal:</td>
<td>liberty</td>
<td>asylum seeker</td>
<td>flee harm [situat]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter
Political Power of Emotions
VI. Cognitive Aspects of the Voter
Politics as Identity Performance?
VII. Voter Decision-Making
Cognitive Heuristics

• Affect referral heuristic
• Endorsement heuristic
• Habit heuristic
• Viability heuristic
VII. Voter Decision-Making
Common Decision Strategies

- Rational choice
- Confirmatory
- Fast and frugal
- Semiautomatic intuitive
- Retrospective
- Prospective
VIII. Political Functions of Voting