

# Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 17-18: Retrospective Voting and Partisanship

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# Some Views on Partisanship

1. **Fiorina:** a “running tally”
2. **Campbell et al.:** a stable, organizing political force
  - Formed at a young age and stable over lifetime
  - Partisanship → policy/attitudes, not policy/attitudes → partisanship
3. **Green, Palmquist, and Schickler:** a social identity
  - Not unlike gender or race; best comparison is religion
  - Stable throughout life; rare changes come from marriage or move
  - **Not** driven by different conceptions of reality; **not** inconsistent with coherent aggregate preferences
  - **Not** social validation: “They’re jerks, but they’re our jerks.”
4. **Mason:** your team

# Mason, “Uncivil Agreement”

Partisanship as team membership:

- Partisans view the other party as more extreme than their own, while their own party as not extreme
- Partisans have “extremely unfavorable” views of the other party and prefer to live in neighborhoods without them
- Partisans want to win, not compromise; view of politics as zero-sum game
- Partisan sorting: partisans are less cross-pressured and increasingly isolated from each other
- Tajfel: groups are how people naturally see the world and they want their group to win

**Discussion:** Do you agree with Mason’s view that American politics has come down to a competition between two teams? What about the role of issues, e.g. race, coronavirus, the economy?

# Achen and Bartels, “Democracy for Realists”

Retrospective voting as a mechanism for good leadership selection:

- Voters choose on **valence** issues, not **position** issues
- A simple model:
  - Politicians come in two types: lazy and hard-working
  - Hard-working politicians are **more likely** to produce good outcomes than lazy ones, but the world is complicated and there's no guarantee
  - All voters want a good type in office
  - Voters can't observe politician's true type; they have to judge based on a noisy signal of performance in office
- Question: when do we **select** good types for office?
- Harder question: when do we **incentivize** politicians to work hard?

# Achen and Bartels, “Democracy for Realists”

All this rests on voters rewarding type or performance → link from elected office to outcomes.

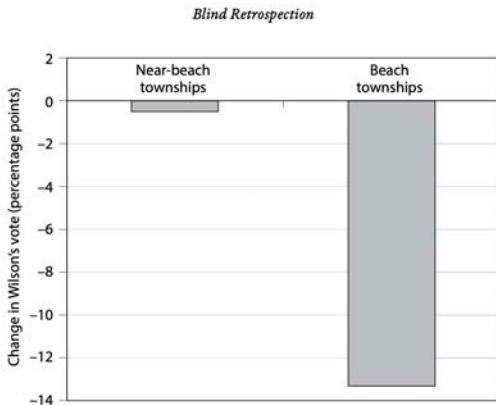
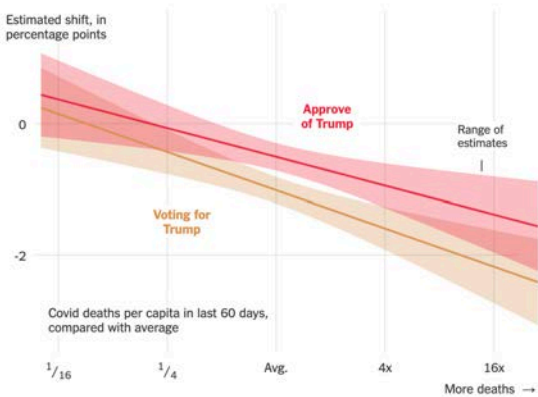


Figure 5.3. Change in Woodrow Wilson's Vote Share (1912–1916) in Ocean County Townships

# Blind Retrospection? (Vavreck and Warshaw 2020)

## A Link Between Deaths and Loss of Support

Counties with higher rates of virus-related deaths per capita have moved more against President Trump.



Source: Author's estimates based on Nationscape surveys

**Discussion:** Do you buy Achen and Bartels's argument that even a minimal retrospective voting theory of democracy is impossible? What role do you think retrospective voting has played in the 2020 election?



# Mendelberg, “The Race Card”

Two fundamental features of American society:

1. **Explicit** commitment to norm of equality
2. Continuing prevalence of **implicit** racism
  - Whites’ negative attitudes toward Black Americans (ethnocentrism)
  - Perception of economic competition, e.g. redistribution and affirmative action

Mendelberg, Tali. “A Theory of Racial Appeals.” Chapter 1 in *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equity*. Princeton University Press, 2001. © Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

# Mendelberg, “The Race Card”

Mendelberg’s theory of racial appeals:

1. Politicians can use implicit appeals based on racial stereotypes:
  - Criminality
  - Laziness
  - “Inner city”
2. The effectiveness of such appeals is defused when their racism is made explicit

Mendelberg, Tali. “A Theory of Racial Appeals.” Chapter 1 in *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equity*. Princeton University Press, 2001. © Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

# Mendelberg, “The Race Card”

## [Willie Horton campaign ad](#)

**Lee Atwater:** “By the time we’re finished, they’re going to wonder whether Willie Horton is Dukakis’s running-mate.”

**Jesse Jackson:** Bush campaign was deliberately “sending out race-conscious signals”; ads “designed to create the most horrible psychosexual fears”; “A rather sinister campaign has been run by the Bush-Quayle forces, rather blatantly anti-liberties, civil liberties..”

# Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, “How Trump Lost and Won”

Two facts to explain about the 2016 election:

1. Clinton won the popular vote
2. Trump won the Presidency

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, et al. “The 2016 Election: How Trump Lost and Won.” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 2 (2017): 34–44. © Johns Hopkins University Press for the National Endowment for Democracy. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

## 1. Predictors of the popular vote for the incumbent party

- Presidential approval (high)
- Economic performance (solid)
- Incorporate a small penalty for the incumbent party

→ Clinton performed right around predictions (or even slightly overperformed)

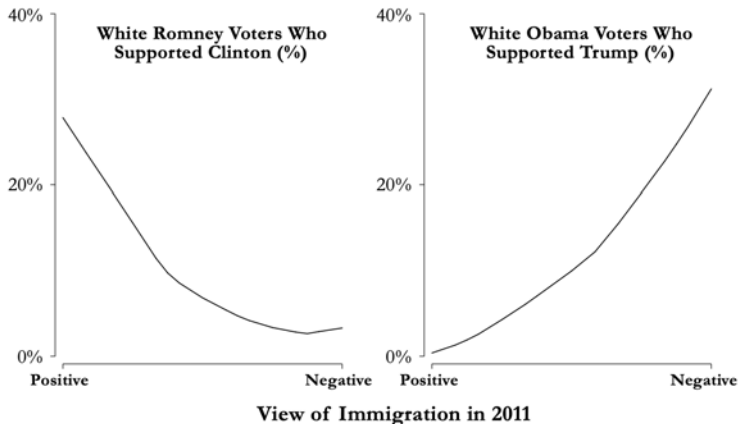
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# Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck, “How Trump Lost and Won”

## 2. Race and ethnicity played a heightened role in the Trump-Clinton matchup

- Attitudes toward African Americans, immigrants, and Muslims were more strongly related to support for Trump in the 2016 primary race than they had been to support for John McCain and Mitt Romney, the eventual victors in the 2008 and 2012 Republican races
- During the Republican primary, whites’ support for Trump was related to the importance they placed on whiteness as a part of their identity, as well as to how much they believed that whites suffered from discrimination
- Both white ethnocentrism and whites’ attitudes toward African Americans were more strongly related to voter preferences in the Clinton-Trump race than they were to preferences in matchups between Clinton and Marco Rubio or Ted Cruz, two of Trump’s leading Republican competitors

**FIGURE 2—VIEWS OF IMMIGRATION AND CHANGES IN THE VOTES OF WHITES, 2012–2016**



Sides, John, Michael Tesler, et al. "The 2016 Election: How Trump Lost and Won." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 2 (2017): 34–44. © Johns Hopkins University Press for the National Endowment for Democracy. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

*How does Mendelberg's theory of racial appeals hold up in 2016?  
What might she have overlooked or what may have changed?*



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