Political Science 17.20
Introduction to American Politics

Professor Devin Caughey

MIT Department of Political Science

Political Choice
Lecture 15 (April 4, 2013)
Outline

1. Models of Political Choice
2. Vote Choice
3. Partisanship
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3. Partisanship
Three Perspective on Political Choice

1. Rational
2. Cognitive
3. Motivational
Rational

- Well-defined preferences (utility) over outcomes
- Rational accounting of uncertainty/ignorance
  → expected utility (outcome $\times$ probability)
- Risk aversion
Cognitive limitations → systematic deviations from rationality (prospect theory)

Biases:
- Status quo → loss aversion, risk seeking in the domain of losses
- Framing effects
- Heuristics
Motivational

- Motivated reasoning
- Affective dissonance
- Perceptual bias
Common Elements

Humans are:
1. Intentional
2. Limited
Outline

1 Models of Political Choice

2 Vote Choice

3 Partisanship
Voting is by far the most common formal political decision faced by ordinary citizens.

Reduction of choices to Yes/No or Democrat/Republican makes citizen participation feasible, but it also creates opportunities for the exercise of the second dimension of power (agenda control).
The Three Major Factors Affecting Vote Choice

In reverse order of importance:

1. Candidate traits (valence)
2. Policy issues (spatial)
3. Party
1. Models of Political Choice
2. Vote Choice
3. Partisanship
The Primacy of Party ID

- Party identification (PID) is a psychological act of attachment or self-categorization with one of the parties.
- PID fundamentally structures citizens engagement with the political world
- Direct as well as indirect effects
- Few true independents, at least among the politically active
From Partisanship to Choice

socialization, group identity, predispositions
↓
party identification
↓
issue positions → vote choice
Trends in Partisanship

- **Realignment**: durable shift in parties’ group bases of support
- **Dealignment**: decline of partisanship (1960s–70s)
- **Revival of partisanship**
  - Growing connection between partisanship and vote choice
  - Partisan polarization/sorting (elite → mass)
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