Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 20: Money in Politics

Asya Magazinnik (Professor)
Readings
Page and Gilens: Summary of the argument

1. “The policy preferences of the American public as a collective whole—unlike the opinions of many individuals—tend to be stable, coherent, consistent, and reflective of the best available information. They generally reflect people’s true values and interests. They are worth heeding.”

2. The problem is unrepresentativeness.

3. As a result, policy outcomes do not reflect the preferences of average voters:
   - Average citizens have almost no independent influence over policy outcomes.
   - Wealthy citizens have significant influence over policy outcomes.

4. Wealthy Americans want different things from government than average Americans → at best, democracy by coincidence

5. How do the wealthiest citizens exercise influence?
Causes of unrepresentativeness

1. The power of wealthy individuals
2. The power of corporations and organized interest groups
3. Extreme activists and polarized parties
4. Restricted choices
5. An unrepresentative electorate
6. Manipulated turnout
7. Misinformation
8. Unrepresentative institutions
9. Lobbying
10. Fragmented authority
11. Separation of powers/gridlock
Why people don’t vote

1. Barriers
   - Personal registration
   - Election Day is not a work holiday
   - Voter ID laws
   - Long lines and delays (particularly in urban areas)

2. Felon disenfranchisement

3. Nature of electoral choices
Average citizens have little to no influence
By contrast, wealthy citizens have a great deal of influence.
1. Giving money to parties and candidates

2. Access to officials

3. Shaping the climate of opinion
Wealthier Americans have different preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobs and incomes</th>
<th>Percent in favor</th>
<th>Multimillionaires</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government should see to food, clothing and shelter</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum wage should be above the poverty line</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase the earned income tax credit</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>-36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should see to it that every one can find a job</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government should provide jobs for the unemployed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-27</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retirement pensions</th>
<th>Percent in favor</th>
<th>Multimillionaires</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National health insurance financed by tax money</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to pay more taxes for health coverage for all</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-18</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Percent in favor</th>
<th>Multimillionaires</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expand Social Security</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security should ensure minimum standard of living</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise the cap on income subject to Social Security payroll tax</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| More government investment in worker retraining | 30 | -27 |
Detecting evidence of donor influence

Why do observational studies fail to detect an effect of donations?

1. Legislators prefer meeting with their allies

2. Interest groups give to legislators who are already ideologically aligned

3. Or, suppose interest groups only give to legislators whose support is not assured

To get around these problems, we need an experiment.

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17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process
Fall 2020

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