17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process

Recitation: Collective Action and Interest Groups; Electoral Geography and Voting Rights
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1. Announcements

2. Logic of Collective Action

3. Issue Salience

4. Cameron, Epstein, and O’Halloran, 1996
Announcements
Announcements and Logistics

- We will distribute the paper prompt this week
- Argument/Analytical Paper: No outside research is needed
- Response paper grading and feedbacks
- Commented copy
- Tips for response paper
Logic of Collective Action
Main Argument

- Large groups have problems coordinating collective actions
- Diverse interests?
- Members have incentive to free-ride
- Individual members are rational actors
Logic of Collective Action: Case Study

- Say we are planning a protest demanding transparency
- Let’s assume:
  - Everyone’s goals are exactly the same
  - Two actors are rational actors who maximize their own utility (happiness)
  - Organizing a protest can be time-consuming and risky.
  - Base utility for each actor = 2; Benefit of organizing the protest = 4; Cost if one person do everything = 6; Cost if both actors participate = 2
**Logic of Collective Action: Payoff Matrix**

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• A payoff 4 is better than 2 anyway. Why not protest?
• Each individual was responding to other’s strategy
• Choosing “shirk” will always be a better option given other’s strategy
• This is called the “dominant strategy”
Selective Benefits/Incentive

- One way to solve the collective action problem is to reward workers and/or punish shirkers:
- Can be positive or negative
- Let’s create an rule such that shirkers will clean workers’ room throughout the rest of the year. The cost of room cleaning and the benefit of having a clean dorm are the same: 5
Logic of Collective Action: Payoff Matrix with Selective Incentives

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<td>Shirk</td>
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Selective Benefits/Incentive

- One way to solve the collective action problem is to reward workers and/or punish shirkers:
- Can be positive or negative
- Let’s create an rule such that shirkers will clean worker’s room for the rest of the semester. The cost of room cleaning and the benefit of having a clean dorm are the same: 5
- In practice, designing and implementing selective benefits can be difficult for large groups.
- It might also create some serious problems in the long run...
Issue Salience
How Political Scientists Think about Issue Salience?

- Definition: the relative importance people attach to policy issues
To measure Salience, we conducted a Proquest search of New York Times articles counting how often the policy was mentioned in some form (details available by Lax and Philips, 2012)

Selective Benefits/Incentive

- Measuring Issue Salience
- Does media coverage really capture issue salience among general public?
- Do politicians really care about the voice from the other side?
Measuring Issue Salience

- Survey Question

What do you think are the most important problems facing this country? (IF MORE THAN ONE PROBLEM:) Of all you've told me (1996-LATER: Of those you've mentioned), what would you say is the single most important problem the country faces?

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Measuring Issue Salience

- Survey Question

01. AGRICULTURAL
02. ECONOMICS; BUSINESS; CONSUMER ISSUES
   (includes foreign investment, tariffs/protection of U.S. industries, international trade deficit/balance of payments, immigration, interstate commerce/transportation; does not include unemployment [09], defense spending [03], foreign [03] or government spending on domestic social welfare [09])
03. FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL DEFENSE
   (includes: foreign aid, defense spending, the space program; does not include: international trade deficit [02])
04. GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONING
   (not 'the economy' [02])
05. LABOR ISSUES
   (not unemployment [09])
06. NATURAL RESOURCES
07. PUBLIC ORDER
   (includes: crime, drugs, civil liberties and non racial civil rights, women's rights, abortion rights, gun control, family/social/religious/moral 'decay,' church and state, etc.)
08. RACIAL PROBLEMS
   (note: this primarily includes civil rights issues and racial equality; monetary assistance to minorities is primarily found in code 9, however there is a slight overlap: see Note 7 for specific codes; note especially 1988 code 300 and 1966-1972 codes 61-63)
09. SOCIAL WELFARE
   (includes: population, child care, aid to education, the elderly, health care, housing, poverty, unemployment, 'welfare' etc.)
97. Other problems (incl. specific campaign issues)
Measuring Issue Salience

- Survey Question

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Measuring Issue Salience

- Survey methods are not without limitations:
  - Question wordings and survey formats vary among different pollsters
  - Issue pool changes over time, reflecting current events
Cameron, Epstein, and O’Halloran, 1996
Descriptive Representation vs. Substantive Representation

- **Argument:** promoting descriptive representation does not always lead to greater substantive representation
- **Implication:** creating more majority-minority districts may not promote minority interests
- **Conditions:**
  - African American voters can form a coalition with liberal white voters
  - and/or Liberal white candidates that promote African American interest
Descriptive Representation vs. Substantive Representation: Case A

- 9 legislative districts in state A. Each district elects one state legislator.
- Statewide population: 900 black voters, 990 liberal white voters, and 1,800 conservative white voters (3,690 in total)
- Each district features two candidates: a black candidate and a white conservative candidate
- The newly elected legislators will vote on an Affirmative Action bill
# Case A: Voters are Evenly Distributed

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Case A: Voters are Evenly Distributed

- Affirmative Action Bill got passed.

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Case A: Creating 3 Majority-Minority Districts

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Case A: Creating 3 Majority-Minority Districts

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- Affirmative Action Bill failed.
Descriptive Representation vs. Substantive Representation: Case B

- 9 legislative districts in state A. Each district elects one state legislator.
- Statewide population: 900 black voters, 990 liberal white voters, and 900 conservative white voters (2,790 in total)
- Each district features three candidates: a black liberal, a white liberal candidate and a white conservative candidate
- The newly elected legislators will vote on an Affirmative Action bill
Case B: Voters are Evenly Distributed

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Case B: Voters are Evenly Distributed

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- Affirmative Action Bill got passed.
## Case B: Creating 3 Majority-Minority Districts

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**Case B: Creating 3 Majority-Minority Districts**

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- Affirmative Action Bill failed.
• Say you were a campaign consultant working for Republicans
• Your state is turning purple: new immigrants, people are getting more educated, and big tech companies are setting offices here...
• Bad news for Presidential elections
• Creating more majority-minority districts in urban areas?