Elections & Voting Choice

October 18, 2017

POL 001: Introduction to American Politics
Isaac Hale
Fall 2017
Outline

1. Election Basics
2. Voter Knowledge
3. Incumbency
4. Redistricting
5. Partisanship
6. Campaign Spending
7. Campaign Nationalization
Election Basics
Legislative Election Basics

• House of Representatives
  – Elected in single-seat districts of about 700,000 people each
  – Districts are redrawn every census (every decade)
  – Two year terms

• The Senate
  – Members elected statewide
  – Two members per state
  – Six year terms (staggered)

• We will discuss the electoral college and presidential elections later!
Legislative Electoral System

• Members of both chambers are elected using a system called *First Past the Post*

• Under this system, the candidate with the most votes wins the election
  – This could be well under 50% of the votes!
  – Note: some Southern states have runoff elections if no candidate receives 50% of the vote

• Primaries are used to determine the nominees of each party
  – Primary rules vary significantly from state to state
2010 US Senate Race in Alaska

Results by State House Seat

Murkowski 39.5% (Write-In)
Miller 35.5%
McAdams 23.5%
Legislative Primaries

- Most states have party primaries that are either
  - *Open*: any voter can vote
  - *Closed*: only voters registered with the party can vote

- Oregon, California, and Nebraska use *top-two* primaries
  - All candidates run on one ballot in the primary, with the two largest vote-getters advancing to the general election

- Louisiana uses a *jungle* primary
  - Louisiana has only a general election with all candidates running simultaneously
  - If no candidate gets over 50%, the top two advance to a runoff election
The 2012 Texas Senate Race: Primary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Senate Runoff Election, Texas Democratic Primary, 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Paul Sadler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grady Yarbrough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Votes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Senate Runoff Election, Texas Republican Primary, 2012</th>
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<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✔ Ted Cruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Dewhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Votes</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **David Dewhurst is gone, but not forgotten**

Image source: Ballotpedia
The 2012 Texas Senate Race: General

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Vote %</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🔴Republican</td>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>4,440,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🔵Democratic</td>
<td>Paul Sadler</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>3,194,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🟠 Libertarian</td>
<td>John Jay Myers</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>162,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🟢 Green</td>
<td>David B. Collins</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>67,404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Votes: 7,864,822

Image sources: Ballotpedia & Wikipedia
The 2016 California Senate Race: Primary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANDIDATES</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>VOTE</th>
<th>PCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamala Harris</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>2,051,048</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loretta Sanchez</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>943,002</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duf Sundheim</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>406,964</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Wyman</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>246,623</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Del Beccar</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>213,946</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Conlon</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>160,164</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Stokes</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>105,568</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Yang</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>77,826</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Roseberry</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>74,845</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Palzer</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>65,522</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail Lightfoot</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
<td>65,203</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Unz</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>64,698</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image source: The New York Times
The 2016 California Senate Race: General

U.S. Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANDIDATE</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>VOTES</th>
<th>PCT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kamala Harris</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>7,542,753</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loretta Sanchez</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>4,701,417</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

100% reporting (24,849 of 24,849 precincts)

U.S. Senate Map »

Image source: The New York Times
## Models of Electoral Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heuristic</th>
<th>Model of Vote Choice</th>
<th>Effect on Politicians’ Behavior</th>
<th>What Does the Model Explain?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party Identification</td>
<td>Michigan Model</td>
<td>Respond to base voters in their party</td>
<td>Vote choice, partisan bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Spatial model/proximity voting</td>
<td>Respond to the median voter</td>
<td>Candidate ideology, ideological representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Retrospective model</td>
<td>Motivated to provide goods, appear competent and moral</td>
<td>Vote choice, presidential elections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voter Knowledge
Voter Knowledge Matters

- Recall, there are *information costs* to voters acquiring information about candidates and elections.

- What do Stone and Buttice find in today’s assigned article regarding voter knowledge?

- A voter’s level of knowledge, along with the extremism of the candidates, is a good predictor of whether the voter perceives there being a choice in the election.
A. Ideology, perception of choice, and vote choice.

Image source: Stone & Buttice (2010)
C. Ideology, candidate polarization, and vote choice.
Incumbency
Decline in Senate Race Competition

Incumbent reelection rates over time

Source: Demos and U.S. PIRG Education Fund analysis of FEC and Center for Responsive Politics data.
Decline in House Race Competition

Source: https://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/27/as-swing-districts-dwindle-can-a-divided-house-stand/?_r=1
Puzzle: Congressional Job Approval is Low

Congressional Job Approval Ratings Trend (1974-Present)

% Approve

Source: Gallup
Incumbency

- Despite disapproving of Congress, Americans tend to like their own representatives

- Incumbency confers benefits to the incumbent:
  - Name recognition
  - Ability to scare off high quality opponents
  - Can deliver pork or other indirect benefits to constituents

- Why do you think congressional races are so uncompetitive?
The Incumbency Advantage is Declining

Incumbency Advantage in the United States House
As measured by a Representative's over/underperformance of district partisanship

Incumbency advantage is the coefficient from estimating district result with weighted average of relative democratic vote margin in the past two elections + incumbency variable

Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara

Source: http://www.thecrossttab.com/2017/07/08/congress-nationalized/
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Source: http://www.thecrosstab.com/2017/07/08/congress-nationalized/
Redistricting
Gerrymandering
Gerrymandering, explained

Three different ways to divide 50 people into five districts

1. Perfect representation
   - 3 blue districts, 2 red districts
   - 5 blue districts, 0 red districts
   - BLUE WINS
   - BLUE WINS

2. Compact, but unfair

3. Neither compact nor fair
   - 2 blue districts, 3 red districts
   - RED WINS

Source: The Washington Post
These three maps show just how effectively gerrymandering can swing election outcomes.

**Republican Congressional Map Used in 2012 and 2014**

**Hypothetical Democratic Congressional Map**

**Hypothetical Nonpartisan Congressional Map**

Source: https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2016/10/27/1579905/-These-three-maps-show-just-how-effectively-gerrymandering-can-swing-election-outcomes
Gerrymandering

• What effects does redistricting actually have?

• It definitely gives more seats to the party that successfully wields it

• But nationally there is little evidence that redistricting makes House races less competitive

• Incumbency is on the rise in the Senate – a venue with no gerrymandering is possible

• What other explanation is there? Partisanship!
Decline in Senate Race Competition

Incumbent reelection rates over time

Data source: Demos-
Partisanship
Split-Ticket Voting Is Disappearing

Split Senate votes since 1990

When Senate votes matched the most recent presidential election. Data from U.S. Election Atlas.

Split-Ticket Voting Is Disappearing

Partisanship

• What are the implications of the rise of partisanship on voting behavior?

• How might it affect incumbency rates?

• The party of the candidate matters much more than it did previously
  – Cannot be easily overcome by higher valence
  – Provides a challenge to the median voter theorem
Recall: Partisanship Is a Very Strong Force

Data source: 2010-2014 CCES
Campaign Spending
Consider the Following Prisoner’s Dilemma

A Political Campaign Prisoner’s Dilemma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate A</th>
<th>Candidate B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No TV ads</td>
<td>No TV ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheap toss-up</td>
<td>Cheap toss-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheap win</td>
<td>Expensive win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive win</td>
<td>Expensive win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive toss-up</td>
<td>Expensive toss-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Image source: Kollman textbook
Campaign Spending Cancels Out

- Expand this dilemma to *all* campaign spending

- Both sides spend heavily in competitive elections

- Campaigns are becoming increasingly expensive, but little evidence of an effect on who wins

- Spending is important for voter mobilization, but perhaps has less ability to win over voters, given the effects of partisanship and ideology
Nationalization of Elections
Elections are Increasingly Nationalized

• Local factors matter less in congressional elections, whereas national politics matter more

• Partisanship is a much stronger predictor of congressional voting than it used to be

• BUT: the president’s party still usually suffers in midterm elections. Why?

• Voters from the party out of power are more likely to vote, are motivated by dislike for the president, and dislike of policies pushed by the president
The President's Approval Rating Roughly Predicts Their Party's Midterm Performance

White House Party's Performance (%)

President's Approval Rating (%)

*Note: Presidential results are 538's "benchmark," a weighted average of the Democrat's relative presidential election margin in each district/state for the past two elections.

Data: Gary Jacobson, Geoffrey Skelley, Carlos Algara

Source: http://www.thecrosstab.com/2017/07/08/congress-nationalized/
In Summary

• Congressional races are becoming less competitive

• Partisanship is a very strong predictor of congressional election outcomes, and it is still increasing

• Incumbency still matters, but partisanship is making it matter less

• Redistricting (gerrymandering) has little effect on the competitiveness of congressional elections
In Summary

• The president’s party tends to suffer in midterm elections

• Campaign spending cancels out, leaving little effect on election results

• Would Madison be bothered by the role of these various effects in election outcomes?
  – Why are elections important in the Madisonian framework?
Q&A