

## Political parties & voting behavior: Weakening linkages?

API-414 – class 10

## Structure

- I. General feedback on project plans
- II. The function of parties and their decline?
- III. Parties in the mass public
- IV. Parties as organizations
- V. Parties in government
- VI. Conclusions:
  - ✦ Strength in government and yet dealignment among leaders, members and citizens

## General feedback on project plans

- ✦ Topics: X to Y
- ✦ Theoretical framework
  - Alternative explanations of the dependent variable
  - Theoretical debate, literature search
  - Policy-relevance
- ✦ Theoretical propositions
  - Coherent theory
  - Alternative plausible testable explanations

## II: Parties in decline?

- ✦ Dalton *Citizen Politics* Ch 9
- ✦ Also
  - Norris *Electoral Engineering* 2004 ch 6
  - Russell Dalton and Marty Wattenberg "*Parties without Partisans*" OUP 2000.
  - Paul Webb, David Farrell and Ian Holliday. "*Political Parties in advanced industrial democracies.*" OUP 2002.

## Functions of parties

- ✦ V.O. Key (1964)
  - **Parties-in-the-electorate**
    - Simplifying electoral choices for voters
    - Educating citizens
    - Generating symbolic loyalties
    - Mobilizing citizens to participate
  - **Parties-as-organizations**
    - Recruiting leaders for elected/appointed office
    - Training elites
    - Articulating interests
    - Aggregating interests
  - **Parties-in-government**
    - Creating government majorities
    - Organizing government and the legislature
    - Implementing policy objectives
    - Organizing dissent
    - Ensuring responsibility for government actions
    - Fostering stability

## II. Parties in the mass public

- ✦ Function of partisan identification
  - Cognitive short-cut or cue for evaluating new issues, policies, candidates, and leaders
- ✦ Affective orientation measured by *direction* and *strength*
  - "*People associate themselves psychologically with one or other of the parties, and this identification has predictable relationships with their perceptions, evaluations and actions.*"
  - Campbell et al 1954.

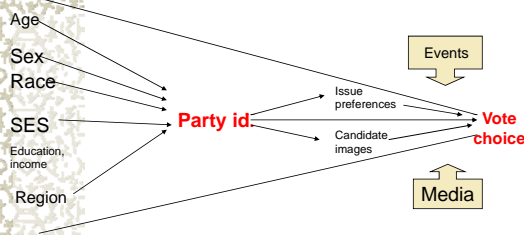
## Classical literature

- ✦ First campaign surveys by the Columbia school in Erie county in 1940s – Paul Lazarsfeld et al.
- ✦ 1948 first U.S. national election surveys (NES) ; The Michigan school
- ✦ Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes *The American Voter* (1960)
- ✦ Philip Converse 1964 'The nature of beliefs systems'.

## The American voter

- ✦ " *The electorate is almost completely unable to judge the rationality of government actions; knowing little of the particular politics and what has led to them, the mass electorate is not able to appraise its goals or the appropriateness of the means chosen to secure these goals.*"  
Campbell et al. p543.

## Funnel of causality



Ref: Campbell et al *The American Voter* 1954

## Evidence?

- ✦ [Party identification] "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (A3004)
- ✦ [Direction] If 'yes', "Which party is that?" [A3005\_1]
- ✦ [Strength] "Do you feel very close to this [party/party block], somewhat close, or not very close?" (A3012)

## The America Voter: Conclusions

- ✦ Low levels of cognitive knowledge and civic engagement in American electorate
  - Most Americans unable to name their elected member of Congress
  - Most unfamiliar with government institutions
  - Most do not understand the policy process
  - Irrational voter
- ✦ Yet Americans cast a ballot due to the cognitive shortcut of *affective* party identification

## Does party id anchor voters elsewhere?

- ✦ Britain – Butler and Stokes –(1972)
  - Many 'non-attitudes' with unstable opinions over time and little consistency among issues
- ✦ France – Converse and Dupeaux (1963)
  - less interest than the US
- ✦ Almond and Verba (1963)–
  - 5 nation study - few discussed politics frequently or read about government
- ✦ Stouffer (1955)
  - Support for democracy as an ideal but not in practice eg social tolerance, freedom

## Dealignment

- ✦ Widespread evidence of weakening partisan identification since 1950s & 1960s.
- ✦ Why?
- ✦ Russ Dalton: Due to societal modernization
  - Improved educational levels
  - Growth of mass media
  - Fragmentation of interest groups
  - Long-term and steady process
  - Lead to new forms of democratic politics such as expansion of direct democracy, expanding use of the courts, greater public consultation

## Alternative explanations

- ✦ Or due to 'top down' shifts in party strategies
  - Schmidt and Holmberg - *Citizens & the State*
  - Cross-national variations in dealignment
  - 'Catch-all' (Kirchheimer) or 'bridging' parties
    - Party strategies generate weaker party links to capture broad coalition of floating voters
    - Esp. true in majoritarian electoral systems

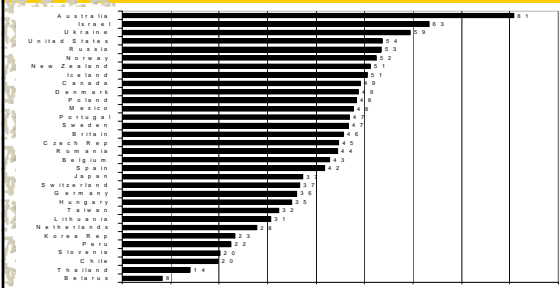
## Trends

- ✦ Russell Dalton and Marty Wattenberg
- ✦ *Parties without partisans* (OUP 2000)
- ✦ Regress year on party id in 19 OECD nations
  - Partisan attachment weakened in 17
  - Sig. fall (.10 level) in 13
  - Weaker by *age* and *education* (political sophistication)
  - Not concentrated among those dissatisfied with government performance

## Consequences

1. Greater electoral volatility
2. Growth in party fragmentation (ENPP)
3. Growth in split-ticket voting
4. Later timing in voting decisions
5. Move towards candidate-centered politics (leader v. party)
6. Decline in party-based campaign participation

## % with a party ID by nation



Note: Q: "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (%'Yes').  
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Module 1 1996-2002.

## % Party id by type of society

