

# RECITATION 5

## MEDIAN VOTER THEOREM FRAMEWORK

- Ingredients and output of the MVT?
  - Mapping between my ideal point and my choice
  - Mapping between a distribution of preferences over different political programs and who gets elected
- Implicit assumption?  
Everyone participates in the elections

## MODEL THAT WE SAW YESTERDAY IN CLASS

- Context = understanding vote-buying
- Idea: the reason why I vote and choose candidate A over B is NOT (or not only) that I believe it is going to affect the final outcome of the election
- Then, why do some voters participate, and others don't?

# WHY DO SOME VOTERS PARTICIPATE AND OTHERS DON'T?

- Instrumental benefits (voting as a means towards an end)  
I hope to affect the result of the elections / vote buying  
Higher for close election / in a Swing state
- Expressive benefits  
I vote for a party with similar political views as mine

# HOW DO THESE 3 TYPES OF BENEFITS FIT WITH THE MODEL SEEN IN CLASS LAST TIME?

- The model:

$$U_i = m + \left( \frac{1}{2} - |p_j - b_i| \right) - c_i$$

where  $m$  is the money received for my vote (can be 0)  
 $b_i$  is my political preference (for instance taxation rate)  
 $p_j$  are the propositions of the different candidates  
 $c_i$  is my cost of voting

- Instrumental benefits?

I vote to get payment  $m$

- Expressive benefits?

$$\frac{1}{2} - |p_j - b_i|$$

- What we want to predict
  - which candidate I vote for BUT ALSO
  - whether I vote or not

WHAT AFFECTS  $c_i$  (AND, THUS,  
PARTICIPATION)?

Consider  $c_i$  as a net cost: gross cost of voting - intrinsic utility derived from voting

- What affects the Gross cost of voting?
  - ① Going to the polling station
  - ② But one first needs to be registered!
  - ③ Feeling incompetent
  
- What affects the intrinsic utility derived from voting?
  - ① Complying with a norm of good citizenship
  - ② Being seen by *others* as a good citizen
  - ③ Fulfill a commitment towards a canvasser

# WHAT CAN AFFECT $c_i$ (AND, THUS, PARTICIPATION)?

Consider  $c_i$  as a net cost: gross cost of voting - intrinsic utility derived from voting

- What affects the Gross cost of voting?
  - ① **Going to the polling station**
  - ② But one first needs to be registered!
  - ③ Feeling incompetent
- What affects the Intrinsic utility derived from voting?
  - ① Complying with the norm and image of the good citizen
  - ② Being seen by *others* as a good citizen
  - ③ Fulfill a commitment towards a canvasser

## GOING TO THE POLLING STATION

Details matter: “le diable est dans les détails!”

- When is Election Day? Sunday as in France / weekday?
- How far do I have to go to vote?  
France, 1848, 1st elections with universal suffrage in the country
- Information: Where should I vote? What time is the polling station open?

# WHAT CAN AFFECT $c_i$ (AND, THUS, PARTICIPATION)?

Consider  $c_i$  as a net cost: gross cost of voting - intrinsic utility derived from voting

- What affects the Gross cost of voting?
  - ① Going to the polling station
  - ② But one first needs to be registered!
  - ③ **Feeling incompetent**
- What affects the Intrinsic utility derived from voting?
  - ① Complying with the norm and image of the good citizen
  - ② Being seen by *others* as a good citizen
  - ③ Fulfill a commitment towards a canvasser

# FEELING INCOMPETENT: DANIEL GAXIE, THE HIDDEN POLL TAX

- Short story of poll taxes
  - prevalent in Southern states, cf. censal suffrage
  - outlawed by the 24th Amendment, ratified in 1964
  - literacy tests eliminated by the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Daniel Gaxie: there is still a hidden poll tax
  - we usually make the assumption that everyone is equally competent about political subjects
  - cf. polls: what do you think of the North American Free Trade Agreement?
  - but actually, many people don't even know how to locate themselves on a left-right (or democrat-republican) axis
  - political competence, measured by the fraction of answers increases with education, age, social-demographic category, and higher for men

# WHAT CAN AFFECT $c_i$ (AND, THUS, PARTICIPATION)?

Consider  $c_i$  as a net cost: gross cost of voting - intrinsic utility derived from voting

- What affects the Gross cost of voting?
  - ① Going to the polling station
  - ② But one first needs to be registered!
  - ③ Feeling incompetent
  
- What affects the Intrinsic utility derived from voting?
  - ① Complying with the norm and image of the good citizen
  - ② Being seen by *others* as a good citizen
  - ③ **Fulfill a commitment towards a canvasser**

## GET-OUT-THE-VOTE CAMPAIGNS

- Who were the people asking questions at the last Obama / Romney debate?
- Which voters do the 2 candidates actually target?
  - Undecided voters (cf. MVT - preferences framework)
  - Their own base (cf. participation framework)
- Gerber, Alan S. and Donald P. Green (2000). The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment. *The American Political Science Review* 94:653-663.
  - their question: why declining turnout since the 70s?
  - hypothesis: because declining *personal* contacts between parties and voters
  - test: GOTV randomized experiment
  - results: door-to-door canvassing more effective than telephone calls and direct mail
  - has shaped campaigns since 2004

## GET-OUT-THE-VOTE CAMPAIGNS

- Channels through which GOTV operates?
  - increased information
  - increased competency
  - commitment
  
- Potential issues?

We might end with many uninformed voters, adding noise and voting for “wrong” reasons
  
- But maybe we should not consider the degree of political interest as something fixed

If you convince me to vote, I will take time to get informed, talk with friends, and decide which candidate I prefer

# WHAT CAN AFFECT $c_i$ (AND, THUS, PARTICIPATION)?

Consider  $c_i$  as a net cost: gross cost of voting - intrinsic utility derived from voting

- What affects the Gross cost of voting?
  - ① Going to the polling station
  - ② **But one first needs to be registered!**
  - ③ Feeling incompetent
- What affects the Intrinsic utility derived from voting?
  - ① Complying with the norm and image of the good citizen
  - ② Being seen by *others* as a good citizen
  - ③ Fulfill a commitment towards a canvasser

- In France and US, registration is not automatic →
  - unregistered citizens
  - misregistered citizens
- In this class, how many students are registered to vote in Cambridge?
- My research in France: voters' registration experiment
  - door-to-door canvassing visits
  - home registration visits
- Results
  - high impact on registration
  - high impact on turnout

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

## 14.75 Political Economy and Economic Development

Fall 2012

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.