

# Political Science 17.20

## Introduction to American Politics

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### **Political Choice**

Lecture 15 (April 4, 2013)

1 Models of Political Choice

2 Vote Choice

3 Partisanship

**1** Models of Political Choice

2 Vote Choice

3 Partisanship

# Three Perspective on Political Choice

- 1 Rational
- 2 Cognitive
- 3 Motivational

- Well-defined preferences (utility) over outcomes
- Rational accounting of uncertainty/ignorance
  - expected utility (outcome  $\times$  probability)
- Risk aversion

- Cognitive limitations → systematic deviations from rationality (prospect theory)
- Biases:
  - Status quo → loss aversion, risk seeking in the domain of losses
  - Framing effects
  - Heuristics

# Motivational

- Motivated reasoning
- Affective dissonance
- Perceptual bias

# Common Elements

Humans are:

- 1 Intentional
- 2 Limited

# Outline

1 Models of Political Choice

**2** Vote Choice

3 Partisanship

# Voting: A Choice Citizens Can Make

- Voting is by far the most common formal political decision faced by ordinary citizens.
- Reduction of choices to Yes/No or Democrat/Republican makes citizen participation feasible, but it also creates opportunities for the exercise of the second dimension of power (agenda control).

# The Three Major Factors Affecting Vote Choice

In reverse order of importance:

- 1 Candidate traits (valence)
- 2 Policy issues (spatial)
- 3 Party

# Outline

1 Models of Political Choice

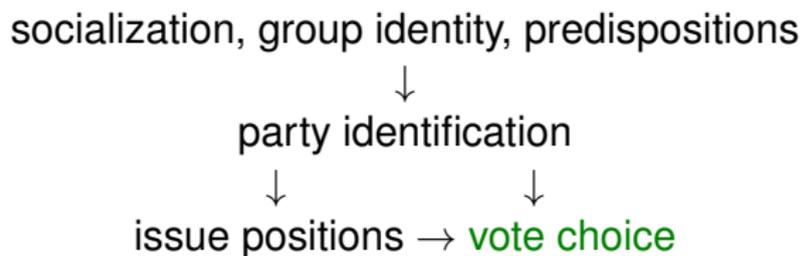
2 Vote Choice

**3** Partisanship

# The Primacy of Party ID

- Party identification (PID) is a psychological act of attachment or self-categorization with one of the parties.
- PID fundamentally structures citizens engagement with the political world
- Direct as well as indirect effects
- Few true independents, at least among the politically active

# From Partisanship to Choice



# Trends in Partisanship

- **Realignment:** durable shift in parties' group bases of support
- **Dealignment:** decline of partisanship (1960s–70s)
- **Revival of partisanship**
  - Growing connection between partisanship and vote choice
  - Partisan polarization/sorting (elite → mass)

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