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Econ 854

Week 6: Voter Motivation, III: Miscellaneous

I. Religion, Party, and Ideology
   A. Many observers of modern American politics think that the divide between secular and religious voters matters. Does it?
   B. The General Social Survey has measures of religious belief (especially Biblical literalism) and religious practice (especially church attendance). N≈26,000. Bible goes from 1-4, 1 being most literalist; ATTEND goes from 1-7, 7 being most frequent.
   C. First, let's add these measures to the initial linear probability models from Week 4. (Tables 8a&8b)
   D. Results: Both measures have substantial but not overwhelming predictive power, especially for Republicans.
   E. What about religion and ideology? Table 9 shows that our two religious measures are by far the strongest predictors of ideology. If the liberal-conservative divide is "really" something else, it's a secular-religious divide.
   F. Note, however, that the magnitudes are still not huge. The ideology variable goes from -3 to +3, but moving from the minimum to the maximum on the religious variables only makes you 1.32 units more conservative.
   G. What if we race ideology against religion as a determinant of party identification? Ideology still crushes religion, especially for P(Dem). (Tables 10a and 10b)

II. Personality and Ideology
   A. The Five Factor Model now reigns supreme in personality psychology. Acronym: OCEAN. (Myers-Briggs analogs in parenthesis).
      1. Openness to Experience (Intuitive vs. Sensing)
      2. Conscientiousness (Judging vs. Perceiving)
      3. Extraversion (Extraverted vs. Introverted)
      4. Agreeableness (Feeling vs. Thinking)
      5. Neuroticism (No MB analog, but the negative of Neuroticism is Stability)
   B. Despite economists' incredulity, personality measures are predictively useful. Ex: Occupational choice.
   C. Especially given the low MC of voting one way or another, it seems plausible that personality would have large effects on political views. Do they?
   D. Data sets with personality and political info are scarce, but some serious results are now in. Gerber et al summarize past findings, and present some new ones.

E. Robust past findings: Conservatives are lower in Openness and higher in Conscientiousness. Lower Openness and Higher Conscientiousness predict higher conservatism for almost all measures; higher Stability predicts higher conservatism for most but not all measures. (Table 4)
F. Magnitudes in Gerber et al's data: Personality variables go from 0-1, ideology goes from 1-5. So going from the minimum to the maximum level of Openness makes people about a point less conservative, and going from the minimum to the maximum level of Conscientiousness makes people about half a point more conservative.
G. Gerber et al distinguish economic and social ideology (scaled to have mean=0 and SD=1) and find additional patterns, even controlling for education and church attendance. (Table 6 and Figure 1)
H. The robust predictors of social conservatism, like overall conservatism, are Openness (-), and Conscientiousness (+).
I. The robust predictors of economic conservatism are: Extraversion (+), Agreeableness (-), Conscientiousness (+), Stability (+), and Openness (-). Free-marketeers are closed, conscientious, disagreeable, emotionally stable extraverts.
J. Interpretation? Two they consider, and one they don't:
    1. Some personalities are less self-interested than others.
    2. Some personalities have *different* interests than others.
    3. Some personalities see the world more clearly than others.
K. Compared to other predictors of ideology, these are strong. But in absolute terms, ideology remains hard to predict.

III. Genes and Political Behavior
A. Political attitudes and behavior often seem to run in families. Why is this?
B. People usually assume it's nurture, but in most families, there is a confounding variable: genes.
C. How can we distinguish the effects of nature and nurture? There are two standard "behavioral genetic" approaches:
    1. Twin studies
    2. Adoption studies
D. Adoption studies are still fairly unexplored for political attitudes and behavior, but quite a few twin studies exist.
E. Main findings: Nurture matters a lot for party identification.
F. However, genes account for most or all of the family resemblance in:
    1. Whether you vote
    2. Whether you always vote for one party
    3. Issue positions (and a wide range have been studied!)
    4. Left-right ideology
G. There are strong parallels between the behavior genetic results for religion and politics. Religious *affiliation* is strongly influenced by parents, but by mid-adulthood, genes explain most or all familiar resemblance in:
    1. Church attendance
    2. Religious intensity (how religious you feel, how interested you are)
    3. Doctrinal views

IV. Mainstream and Polarization Effects

A. There are interesting empirical connections between political awareness and opinion. Political scientists call these the "mainstream" and "polarization" effects. (Zaller 1992)

B. The "mainstream" effect: When elite opinion is united, agreement with elite opinion is an increasing function of political awareness.

C. Interpretation: For non-partisan issues, the more aware you are, the more likely you are to know what everyone is "supposed to believe."

D. The "polarization" effect: When elite opinion is divided along ideological lines, agreement with "your" ideological leaders is an increasing function of political awareness.

E. Interpretation: For partisan issues, the more aware you are, the more likely you are to know what people on your side of the fence are "supposed to believe."

1. Ex: Nixon on price controls.

F. Contrast: The Vietnam War in 1964 versus 1970.

G. Limits of the mainstream effect: at least under censorship, susceptibility to propaganda peaks at around the 67th percentile of awareness, then declines. It takes some sophistication even to be brain-washed!

H. Note: We could also think of the mainstream and polarization effects as "leadership" effects.

VI. Does Policy Match Public Opinion? What Are the Unpopular Policies?

A. Now that we have a better grip on voter motivation, let us return to the earlier question: Is the median voter model correct?

B. It is hard to do formal empirical tests on the federal government (without internationally comparable data, N=1). But there is a lot of informal evidence that the median voter gets what he wants.

C. What does the federal government do? Is this what the median voter wants?

1. Spending (2015)

Source	**Share**
Social Security	23.9%
Defense	15.8%
Domestic Discretionary	15.8%
Medicare	17.2%
Net Interest	6.1%
Income Security	8.2%
Medicaid	9.5%
Other Retirement/Disability	4.4%
Other	6.1%
Offsetting receipts	-7.0%

2. Taxes (2015)

Source	**Share**
Individual Income Taxes	47.4%
Payroll Taxes	32.8%

Corporate Income Taxes	10.6%
Excise Taxes/Customs	4.1%
Other	5.1%

3. A lot of regulation: Environmental, worker safety, drug safety, anti-competitive behavior, labor...

D. Starting with the budget: Social Security and Medicare remain extremely popular programs; the military is also usually well-regarded. The remaining items are more contentious.

E. Broadly defining "welfare" as Medicaid and Income Security, we get 17.7% of the budget. But:
   1. Few people want to actually abolish these programs
   2. Medicaid also pays for middle-class nursing home residents who have depleted their personal savings.

F. The national debt is unpopular, but repudiating it would be even less popular. So "net interest" ultimately has voter support.

G. That leaves 22% of the budget for "domestic discretionary" and "other" spending. Some of this spending is "waste." Waste is unpopular. But outside of isolated examples of $500 toilet seats, what spending do a majority of Americans agree is wasteful?

H. Turning to spending: It is surprising that income and SS taxes are such a large percentage of the budget. But insofar as business "passes on" corporate and other taxes, do a majority of Americans really want significant changes here?

I. Regulation is more complicated. Are there majorities in favor of weaker (or stronger) environmental regulation? Worker safety? Drugs?

J. Challenge: What policies exist that a majority of American voters oppose? Consider all the clichés of politics. Do any hold water?
   1. Relatively weak gun control?
   2. Foreign aid?
   3. NAFTA?

VII. Application: State-Level Policy

A. There have been a number of empirical studies of state-level policy.

B. Main findings: Variations in degree of liberalism are strong predictors of variation in state policy. When public opinion is liberal (as in NY), policy is liberal; when public opinion is conservative (as in Colorado), so is policy.

C. It is hard to convincingly show that public opinion and policy match each other 1:1, but the evidence is suggestive.

VIII. Bartels' Case that Government Is Too Small

A. In the GSS, the *median* voter wants to spend more in most areas. The only area where the median voter consistently favors cuts is foreign aid.

B. Larry Bartels generalizes this finding to all 23 of the countries he looked at: "Citizens in every country in every year wanted additional government spending on health, education, old age pensions, the environment, and law enforcement."

C. Both the GSS and Bartels' data also show, however, that voters around the world want less spending *overall*! "The distribution of responses to

this question is, if anything, even more skewed than for the questions in the battery on spending for specific government programs. Averaging across countries and years, about two-thirds of the respondents said they favored cuts in government spending, many ‘strongly’; only 10% were opposed.”

D. It is well-known that adding a warning about the connection between higher spending and higher taxes depresses support for spending.

E. GSS spending preference data doesn’t have such a warning. Bartels’ data does, but it’s weird: “Remember that if you say "much more," it might require a tax increase to pay for it.” Problems:
   1. It suggests that moderate spending increases *don't* require higher taxes.
   2. It fails to mention that spending cuts would *reduce* taxes.

F. When the GSS gives a binary choice between higher spending on “social programs like health care, social security, and unemployment benefits” or lower taxes, 60% want higher spending. But adding a status quo category would almost certainly show that the median person favors the status quo over change in either direction.

G. Overall: Since voters’ stated budgetary preferences are contradictory, it is hard to tell if they are “getting what they want.” But the contradictions are weaker for better questions, which generally show that the median voter favors the status quo.

Table 8a: Conditional Probability of Being a Democrat, with Literalism and Attendance

Regression Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0	
	B	SE(B)	Beta	SE(Beta)	T-statistic	Probability
LREALINC	-.005	.003	-.010	.007	-1.487	.138
EDUC	.000	.001	.002	.007	.252	.801
BLACK	.378	.010	.259	.007	39.670	.000
OTHRACE	.142	.012	.076	.006	11.801	.000
SEX	.074	.006	.077	.006	12.100	.000
AGE	.003	.000	.111	.007	17.018	.000
YEARA	-3.065	.389	-.051	.006	-7.878	.000
ATTEND	-.006	.001	-.035	.007	-5.096	.000
BIBLE	.007	.005	.011	.007	1.496	.135
Constant	6.212	.776			8.008	.000

Table 8b: Conditional Probability of Being a Republican, with Literalism and Attendance

Regression Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0	
	B	SE(B)	Beta	SE(Beta)	T-statistic	Probability
LREALINC	.039	.003	.089	.007	12.817	.000
EDUC	.009	.001	.057	.007	7.922	.000
BLACK	-.272	.009	-.197	.007	-30.139	.000
OTHRACE	-.172	.011	-.098	.006	-15.090	.000
SEX	-.043	.006	-.048	.006	-7.511	.000
AGE	.000	.000	-.002	.007	-.266	.791
YEARA	-.407	.369	-.007	.006	-1.103	.270
ATTEND	.020	.001	.120	.007	17.328	.000
BIBLE	-.056	.004	-.089	.007	-12.597	.000
Constant	.730	.735			.992	.321

Table 9: Determinants of Ideology, with Literalism and Attendance

Regression Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0	
	B	SE(B)	Beta	SE(Beta)	T-statistic	Probability
LREALINC	.094	.010	.068	.007	9.781	.000
EDUC	-.019	.003	-.041	.007	-5.619	.000
BLACK	-.408	.028	-.095	.007	-14.368	.000
OTHRACE	-.252	.036	-.046	.007	-7.004	.000
SEX	-.207	.018	-.074	.006	-11.469	.000
AGE	.005	.001	.054	.007	8.147	.000
YEARA	4.492	1.151	.025	.007	3.903	.000
ATTEND	.083	.004	.161	.007	22.797	.000
BIBLE	-.292	.014	-.151	.007	-21.016	.000
Constant	-9.117	2.295			-3.973	.000

Table 10a: Conditional Probability of Being a Democrat, with Ideology and Religion

Regression Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0	
	B	SE(B)	Beta	SE(Beta)	T-statistic	Probability
LREALINC	.002	.003	.005	.007	.742	.458
EDUC	-.002	.001	-.010	.007	-1.485	.138
BLACK	.349	.009	.237	.006	36.839	.000
OTHRACE	.128	.012	.068	.006	10.730	.000
SEX	.057	.006	.060	.006	9.549	.000
AGE	.004	.000	.122	.006	19.098	.000
YEARA	-2.634	.382	-.044	.006	-6.899	.000
ATTEND	.001	.001	.004	.007	.633	.527
BIBLE	-.017	.005	-.025	.007	-3.538	.000
POLVIEWSA	-.088	.002	-.255	.006	-39.495	.000
Constant	5.353	.761			7.030	.000

Table 10b: Conditional Probability of Being a Republican, with Ideology and Religion

Regression Coefficients					Test That Each Coefficient = 0	
	B	SE(B)	Beta	SE(Beta)	T-statistic	Probability
LREALINC	.030	.003	.067	.007	9.951	.000
EDUC	.010	.001	.064	.007	9.359	.000
BLACK	-.238	.009	-.170	.006	-26.770	.000
OTHRACE	-.148	.011	-.082	.006	-13.121	.000
SEX	-.023	.006	-.025	.006	-4.065	.000
AGE	-.001	.000	-.019	.006	-3.044	.002
YEARA	-.755	.359	-.013	.006	-2.100	.036
ATTEND	.012	.001	.074	.007	10.810	.000
BIBLE	-.029	.004	-.045	.007	-6.551	.000
POLVIEWSA	.097	.002	.298	.006	46.703	.000
Constant	1.453	.716			2.028	.043