


Sixth Edition

Political Behavior of the American Electorate

William H. 
Nancy H. Zingales

Political Behavior of the American Electorate

Sixth Edition



William H. Flanigan
University of Minnesota

Nancy H. Zingale
College of St. Thomas

wcb

Wm. C. Brown Publishers
Dubuque, Iowa

*To
Ruth M. and Edwin N. Flanigan
Amy K. Hill
and to the memory of
James S. Hill*

Copyright © 1988 by Wm. C. Brown Publishers. All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior
written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 86-10949

ISBN 0-697-06796-3

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Acknowledgments



The following analysis and description of the American electorate depends heavily on the work of others. Until 1960, extensive analysis of the research findings and data collected by social scientists was limited to an examination of published tables, but there have been significant changes since then. The major studies of American public opinion and voting behavior are now available to scholars throughout the world for further analysis and examination.

These developments in political analysis resulted from the cooperation of many individuals, but the efforts of two men associated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan deserve special mention. For a number of years the late Angus Campbell opened the archives of the Survey Research Center to outside scholars. This book has drawn on the work of many of the scholars who have benefited from this generosity. Warren Miller of the Center for Political Studies directed the organization and expansion of these archival activities through the creation of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. The Consortium, composed of Michigan's Center for Political Studies and about 200 departments of political science, has made available to a wide clientele not only the archives of the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies but other major data collections as well. Recognition of the

benefits that this work has provided for scholars in the field of political behavior has taken many forms. Most significantly, the National Science Foundation has begun continuous funding of the biennial election surveys.

This book is highly dependent on the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, both for large quantities of material collected by the Center for Political Studies and for election returns provided by the Historical Archive. We are pleased to acknowledge our great debt to the individuals in both organizations who have contributed to the establishment of these resources and services. We must hasten to add that neither the Center for Political Studies nor the Consortium bears any responsibility for the analysis and interpretations presented here. Indeed, the hazard of their efforts in providing open archives is the sort of reinterpretation and reanalysis that follows, and we can only hope that the weaknesses of this work will not reflect on the general worthiness and excellence of the Consortium and the Center.

We also wish to thank the many graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota who, over the years, have helped us with the analysis. Again, these acknowledgments do not diminish our responsibility for the errors that follow, but they qualify considerably the credit we are due.

W. H. F.
N. H. Z.

Introduction



The first edition of this book was written in 1967. The plan of the book then, as now, was to present basic analysis and generalizations about the political behavior of Americans, illustrating and documenting these generalizations with the best survey data available. What was unknowable at the time was that the American polity was beginning a decade of political trauma. Not only would some basic changes in political life take place, but these changes would call into question some of the things political scientists thought they knew about the way Americans behave politically. The 1980s are (so far) a quieter time, but the awareness of change remains. Indeed, many of the trends that began or were accelerated by the crises of the late 1960s and early 1970s are only now tapering off, and whether this deceleration is permanent or temporary is as yet uncertain.

In this edition, we continue to focus attention on the major concepts and characteristics that shape Americans' responses to politics: Who votes and why? How does partisanship affect one's political behavior? How do economic and social characteristics influence people's politics? How do party loyalties, candidates' personalities, and issues affect the political choices we make? How much influence do the mass media have on our choices among candidates? Are Americans committed to upholding basic democratic values?

We will try to place the answers to these and other questions in the context of the changes that have occurred in American political behavior over the past twenty years. Specifically, we are concerned with the declining trend in voter turnout, the decline in the attachment to political parties, and the loss of trust by citizens for their government. These trends have all been the subject of much discussion by political analysts and commentators as to their meaning for future prospects for American democracy. Wherever possible, we try to put these recent trends in the broader context of political change over the 200 years of the republic.

The remainder of this introduction is a brief bibliographic review of the major works in the areas of elections, voting, and public opinion.

Major Voting Studies

The first important study of voting behavior and political opinion that relied on survey research techniques was directed by Paul Lazarsfeld, who was interested in the impact of mass media on individual vote choice during a presidential campaign. Lazarsfeld selected a single community, Erie County in Ohio, for his study of the 1940 presidential campaign. The publication of his findings, *The People's Choice*,¹ marked a milestone in social analysis. In 1948, Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and William McPhee of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University conducted a second political study in Elmira, New York, and then published their findings in *Voting*.² Several major generalizations in political research emerged from these two studies: the cross-pressure hypothesis, opinion leadership, and selective perception. Up to this point the important public-opinion studies sampled single communities and were conducted entirely by sociologists.

In 1948, the newspaper polls predicted a Republican victory in the Dewey-Truman race for president, while a national survey conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan showed Truman winning, publicizing the more scientific sampling

¹Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944).

²Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

used in academic polling. This success promoted a national political survey during the 1952 presidential election, which was reported in *The Voter Decides*³ and which emphasized partisanship, issues, and candidate images. Every two years since 1952 a national election study has been conducted by the Survey Research Center or, more recently, by the Center for Political Studies, a parallel organization within the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. Based mainly on the 1952 and 1956 national surveys, the most impressive study, *The American Voter*,⁴ by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, continued to emphasize partisanship and political attitudes. Their study is required reading for anyone with a serious interest in American political behavior. Much of the following analysis depends heavily on *The American Voter*, both for substantive findings about the electorate and for analytic organization of the material. *Elections and the Political Order*,⁵ also by these authors, covers the 1960 election study as well and pursues the main themes of *The American Voter* in more complex analysis. Analyses of the elections of 1964,⁶ 1968,⁷ and 1972⁸ by the Survey Research Center/Center for Political Studies scholars have appeared in articles in major political science journals and are widely reprinted in collections of readings on political behavior.

The analysis in the following chapters of this book depends heavily on the data from these Survey Research Center and Center for Political Studies national election surveys up to and including the 1984 study. Indeed, a major portion of the research done by American scholars and students of political behavior over the last twenty years has been based upon these data made available through the Inter-

³Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1954).

⁴Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960).

⁵Angus Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966).

⁶Philip E. Converse, Aage R. Clausen, and Warren E. Miller, "Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election," *American Political Science Review* 59 (June 1965): 321-336.

⁷Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Jerrold G. Rusk, and Arthur C. Wolfe, "Continuity and Change in American Politics: Parties and Issues in the 1968 Election," *American Political Science Review* 63 (Dec. 1969): 1083-1105.

⁸Arthur H. Miller, Warren E. Miller, Alden S. Raine, and Thad A. Brown, "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election," *American Political Science Review* 70 (Sept. 1976): 753-778.

university Consortium for Political and Social Research. In 1980, the Center for Political Studies published a large set of data in table form covering the election studies from 1952 to 1978.⁹

Perhaps the great influence of the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies on the study of political behavior is best indicated by their present position as focal point of attack by scholars who argue, from a variety of viewpoints, for a reworking of many of the major conclusions in voting research. On the one hand, some suggest that the findings of *The American Voter* are "time-bound," that is, that they describe the political behavior of Americans only during the relatively placid 1950s and have been inappropriately generalized to other time periods. A more extreme argument suggests that the Survey Research Center analyses underestimated the actual extent of political activity and concern with policy questions among Americans in the 1950s as well as more recently.

An early example of the "revisionist" perspective on voting behavior is V.O. Key's *The Responsible Electorate*,¹⁰ which emphasizes the reasoned nature of attitudes and behavior in the American public. The most extensive study is *The Changing American Voter*¹¹ by Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, arguing that partisanship has declined and ideological orientation increased among the electorate since the 1950s. Gerald Pomper addresses a variety of similar topics in *Voters' Choice*¹² and Herbert Asher surveys the role of issues in presidential elections since 1952 in *Presidential Elections and American Politics*.¹³ A sound collection of readings covering these various views of political behavior is *Controversies in Voting Behavior*¹⁴ edited by Niemi and Weisberg. Another collection of original work, *The Electorate Recon-*

⁹Warren E. Miller, Arthur H. Miller, and Edward J. Schneider, *American National Election Studies Data Sourcebook 1952-1978* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹⁰V. O. Key, Jr., *The Responsible Electorate* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966).

¹¹Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).

¹²Gerald Pomper, *Voters' Choice: Varieties of American Electoral Behavior* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975).

¹³Herbert Asher, *Presidential Elections and American Politics: Voters, Candidates, and Campaigns since 1952*, 3rd ed. (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1984).

¹⁴Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg (eds.), *Controversies in Voting Behavior* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984).

sidered¹⁵ edited by John Pierce and John Sullivan, focuses in part on reanalysis of perspectives introduced in *The American Voter*. Several studies of the 1984 election have appeared with *Change and Continuity in the 1984 Elections* by Paul Abramson, John Aldrich and David Rohde being particularly sensitive to theoretical issues.¹⁶

Several studies of importance deal with selected topics. Paul Abramson in *Generational Change in American Politics*¹⁷ and Philip Converse in *The Dynamics of Party Support*¹⁸ use cohort analysis to examine partisan change over time and arrive at contrary views of the process. The varieties of political participation are examined extensively with a National Opinion Research Center survey by Verba and Nie in *Participation in America*.¹⁹ Two major works on socialization processes are Jennings and Niemi's *The Political Character of Adolescence* and *Generation and Politics*.²⁰

Among several formal theoretical works dealing with public opinion and voting, the most prominent is *An Economic Theory of Democracy*,²¹ by Anthony Downs; Riker and Ordeshook have surveyed and summarized this field in *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory*²² and Niemi and Weisberg have collected several of the best papers in this area in *Probability Models of Collective Decision Making*.²³ More and more analysts of electoral behavior have

¹⁵John C. Pierce and John L. Sullivan, *The Electorate Reconsidered* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980).

¹⁶Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1984 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1986).

¹⁷Paul R. Abramson, *Generational Change in American Politics* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Co., 1975).

¹⁸Philip E. Converse, *The Dynamics of Party Support: Cohort-Analyzing Party Identification* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1976).

¹⁹Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

²⁰M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (Princeton, N.J.: The Princeton University Press, 1974) and *Generation and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

²¹Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

²²William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook, *An Introduction to Positive Political Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

²³Richard G. Niemi and Herbert W. Weisberg (eds.), *Probability Models of Collective Decision Making* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1972).

worked within these theoretical frameworks, most notably Benjamin Page²⁴ and Morris Fiorina.²⁵

There are fewer studies of political opinion generally than of voting behavior, although recently John Pierce, Kathleen Beatty, and Paul Hagner have written *The Dynamics of American Public Opinion*, which stresses the role of ideology.²⁶ In 1978, the American Enterprise Institute began publishing *Public Opinion*, a journal that makes both commentary and data more readily available than heretofore.

Not all of the significant studies of American voting behavior have centered around attitudes or been based on survey data. Much of the work of the late V. O. Key demonstrated how the analysis of election returns could be used to describe and understand political behavior.²⁷ The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research now offers a practically complete collection of national election returns for major political offices recorded by counties. These data allow more elaborate historical election analysis than has been possible before, and the results of this research are beginning to appear in both history and political science. W. Dean Burnham's *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*²⁸ and James Sundquist's *Dynamics of the Party System*²⁹ are both concerned with the occurrence of major realignments in the voting patterns of the electorate, as is *Partisan Realignment* by Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale.³⁰ European scholars have done more with aggregate data. An excellent collection combining survey data with aggregate data

²⁴Benjamin Page, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

²⁵Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).

²⁶John C. Pierce, Kathleen M. Beatty, and Paul R. Hagner, *The Dynamics of American Public Opinion* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1982).

²⁷The following articles are good examples of Key's approach: V. O. Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics* 17 (1955): 3-18; and Key and Munger, "Social Determinism and Electoral Decision: The Case of Indiana," *American Voting Behavior*, ed. Eugene Burdick and A. J. Brodbeck (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), pp. 281-299.

²⁸Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970).

²⁹James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983).

³⁰Jerome M. Clubb, William H. Flanigan, and Nancy H. Zingale, *Partisan Realignment* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980).

and focusing on European electoral behavior appeared some years ago: Lipset and Rokkan's *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*.³¹ Two new cross-national collections based on survey data are: *Electoral Change in Western Democracies*,³² edited by Crewe and Denver, and *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*,³³ by Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck.

In the past few years many instructional materials in the area of political behavior have become available that allow students to use high-quality data in performing class exercises. The most extensive series of such materials is the SETUPS modules distributed cooperatively by the American Political Science Association and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Collectively, these modules cover a range of topics in American voting patterns, comparative electoral behavior, and socialization.

³¹Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross National Perspectives* (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

³²Ivor Crewe and David Denver (eds.), *Electoral Change in Western Democracies: Patterns and Sources of Electoral Volatility* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

³³Russell J. Dalton, Scott C. Flanagan, and Paul Allen Beck (eds.), *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Realignment or Dealignment?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Contents



Acknowledgments **vii**

Introduction **ix**

1 ☆ Suffrage and Turnout **1**

Extensions of Suffrage 2

Restrictions on Suffrage 4

The Eligible Electorate 6

Turnout in American Elections 8

“High Stimulus” and “Low Stimulus” Elections 13

Voters and Nonvoters 16

2 ☆ Partisanship **25**

Party Loyalty 25

Party Identification 28

Independents: Are They Apolitical? 42

3 ☆ Social Characteristics of Partisans and Independents 49

The Social Composition of Partisan Groups	52
Social Group Analysis	55
Social Cross-Pressures	65

4 ☆ Partisan Change 69

Expected Voting Patterns	70
Types of Electoral Change	70
Party Systems and Major Realignments in American History	74
Partisan Change	81

5 ☆ Public Opinion and Ideology 93

Public Opinion on Political Issues	94
Issue Positions and Partisanship	96
Domestic Economic Issues	99
Social and Racial Issues	102
Foreign Affairs	106
Political Ideology	110
Ideological Identification	115

6 ☆ Vote Choice and Electoral Decisions 121

Candidate Image	122
Selling Presidential Candidates	125
Party Images	128
Issue Impact	132
Determinants of Vote Choice	140
Meaning of an Election	144

7 ☆	Political Communication and Campaigns	147
	Functions of Opinions for Individuals	148
	Opinion Consistency and Dissonance	149
	Political Communication	150
	Political Campaigns	154
	Campaign Participation and Its Impact	154
	Mass Media and Election Campaigns	157
	Impact of Election Campaigns	165
	Campaign Strategy	168
8 ☆	Political Culture and Socialization	171
	Democratic Beliefs and Values	172
	Childhood Socialization	176
	Citizen Roles and System Support	179
	Protest and Violence	184
	Appendix A	
	Survey Research Methods	189
	Appendix B	
	Aggregate Election Statistics	199
	Index	205

1

Suffrage and Turnout



In 1960, slightly over 60 percent of the eligible electorate voted in the election for president. By 1984, the turnout of eligible voters had fallen to 53 percent. This rather sharp decline in the voting turnout rate has occasioned a great deal of commentary and more than a little concern about the future of American democracy. The decline in turnout is viewed as paradoxical because it has occurred at the same time that the legal impediments to voting have been eliminated or eased and while the education levels of American citizens are reaching all-time highs. Americans, with greater opportunities to vote, seem to be doing so less frequently.

In this chapter, we will put this recent drop in voter turnout into a broader historical context. We will also look at the factors that make some individuals more likely to vote than others, and examine how changes in the political environment can affect whether or not people vote. In doing so, we will come to some conclusions about what the decline in turnout does (and does not) mean about the current state of the democratic process.

Extensions of Suffrage

Suffrage, or the *franchise*, means the right to vote. Originally, the U.S. Constitution gave the determination of who should have the right to vote entirely to the states. Later, various amendments were added to the Constitution, restricting the states' abilities to deny the right to vote on the basis of such characteristics as race, sex, or age. However, the basic constitutional provision that gives states the right to set the qualifications for voting remains, and, over the years, states have used such things as the ownership of property, literacy, or length of residency as criteria for granting or withholding the right to vote.

During the colonial period and the early years of the Republic, suffrage was commonly restricted to white males with varying amounts of property; thus, only a small proportion of the adult population was eligible to vote. The severity of the impact of property requirements varied from state to state, and their enforcement varied perhaps even more. Gradually the amount of property held or the amount of taxes paid to obtain suffrage was reduced. Sometimes these changes were hard-won reforms enacted by state legislatures or by state constitutional changes, but in other circumstances practical considerations led to substantial reforms. For example, in the western frontier areas in the nineteenth century, delays in acquiring final title to land holdings made it inexpedient to establish property requirements. Often during the very early years of American history candidates in local elections would simply agree among themselves that all white males could vote rather than try to impose complicated restrictions on the electorate. Only in more settled communities could complex restrictions on suffrage be effectively enforced. On the other hand, in sections of the East, powerful landlords controlled the votes of tenants and often supported their enfranchisement.¹

After the gradual granting of suffrage to white males, the next major change was the enfranchisement of black males by constitutional amendment in 1870. Even though this change was part of a set of issues so divisive that it had led to civil war, the numerical impact of adding black males was actually rather slight in the nation as a whole. However, unlike other changes in suffrage, this one had a geographical bias: the impact of enfranchising black males was felt almost entirely in the South. (Their subsequent disfranchisement in the South is

¹Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy: 1760-1860* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), especially pp. 131-181.