

Abramson, et al., Ch. 6: Candidates, Issues, and the Vote

(John H. Aldrich, Duke Univ.)

I. Introduction

- A. Shared political interests and attitudes are a major reason why members of social groups often vote the same
- B. The major types of political attitudes relevant to vote choice are attitudes about:
 - 1. Candidates
 - a. *Personal qualities* (Reagan and Carter were very high on some elements of this dimension but low on the next dimension)
 - b. *Professional competence* (Nixon and Clinton were very high on some elements of this dimension but low on the previous dimension)
 - 2. Issues
 - 3. Parties

- C. *Strategic voting* among supporters of 3rd-party or independent candidates (like Nader and Buchanan in 2000 and Nader in 2004):
 - 1. (Aldrich's definition): not 'wasting' their vote on their 1st-choice, but instead voting for their 2nd-choice (major-party) candidate, who has a better chance of defeating the major-party candidate they like the least
 - 2. (Nader's definition): not 'wasting' their vote on a major-party candidate, but instead voting for the 3rd-party or independent candidate, who is their 1st choice (even though that candidate doesn't have a chance of winning) in order to
 - a. "Send a message" to both major parties that there are voters looking for an alternative,
 - b. "Punish" the candidate and party closest to the issue positions of the favored candidate for failing to adopt the full agenda of the latter, and
 - c. Win eligibility for federal funding in the next election by securing at least 5% of the popular vote

II. Attitudes toward the candidates

- A. Overall ratings of the candidates Figure 6-1, p. 123

- B. Were supporters of 'protest candidates' "sophisticated"? Table 6-1, pp. 125-26
 - 1. 1968, '80, '92, and '96: more so in Nader's than Aldrich's definition:
 - a. 84% of Wallace supporters voted for Wallace
 - b. 57% of Anderson supporters voted for Anderson
 - c. 77% of Perot supporters voted for Perot in '92
 - d. 61% of Perot supporters voted for Perot in '96
 - 2. 2000: more so in Aldrich's than Nader's definition: Nader held only 1 in 5 of those who preferred him in pre-election surveys
 - 3. 2004: Nader was lower in both pre-election surveys and Election-Day votes

- C. In a multi-candidate race, can a candidate who is *opposed* by a majority of the voters still win?
 - 1. Yes: the least-liked candidate (in two-candidate pairings) can nonetheless win the presidency two ways –
 - a. (As Aldrich points out) if the majority of popular votes is split evenly between the two most-popular candidates, then the least-liked candidate (in two-candidate pairings) *might* win a plurality vote share large enough in the right combination of states to produce an electoral-college majority (Riker argues that 1912 is a likely example, with TR splitting the Republican vote with Taft and thereby allowing the 3rd choice [Wilson] of most Republican voters to win);
 - b. (As Aldrich fails to point out) if the least-liked candidate (in two-candidate pairings):
 - (1) Wins enough electoral votes to deny all other candidates an electoral-vote majority,
 - (2) Then, the least-liked candidate *might* win the runoff vote in the U.S. House among the top three electoral-vote recipients (1824 is *not* a possible example, because J.Q. Adams and Henry Clay were both probably preferred over Jackson by a majority of voters)
 - 2. Other examples of multi-candidate races when the least-liked candidate *did not* win the presidency
 - a. 1968: Wallace did not win
 - b. 1980: Anderson did not win
 - c. 1992 & '96: Perot did not win
 - d. 2000 (it was a 4-candidate race) but neither Nader nor Buchanan won
 - e. 2004: Nader did not win

- III. Retrospective and prospective evaluations
- A. Definitions:
1. *Retrospective* voting: when the voter decides based on an evaluation of the incumbent party's performance in office (will be analyzed in chapter 7)
 2. *Prospective* voting: when the voter decides based on which candidate's policy promises come closest to the policy positions of the voter
- B. Findings: **in the past 8 elections, most voters were centrist, placing themselves in between the Republican candidates' more conservative positions and the Democratic candidates' more liberal positions**
- IV. The concerns of the electorate Table 6-3, p. 131
- A. Findings:
1. In the past 4 elections, most voters were far more concerned about domestic (economic & social) issues than about foreign and military policy issues
 2. The particular mix of economic and social issues has varied greatly from election to election
- B. Explanation:
1. End of Cold War
 2. Absence of troubling international 'hot spots'
- V. Issue positions and perceptions Figure 6-2, p. 133; Figure 6-3, p. 134
- A. Findings: in 2000, most of the voters were centrists (in between the perceived positions of the Bush and Gore) on policy issues – with 2 exceptions
1. More conservative than Bush on *aid to blacks*
 2. More liberal than Gore on *women's rights*
- VI. [*Prospective*] issue-voting criteria
- A. The problem: in order to prospectively 'issue vote,' the voter must –
1. Have a policy preference on an issue that is salient to the voter
 2. Accurately perceive the relative positions of the candidates or parties on that issue (column IV in Table 6-4)
- B. The data Table 6-4, p. 137
1. 80-90% had issue preferences
 2. But, only 30-50% accurately perceived the positions of Bush and Gore (41% average over 7 issues)
- C. Comparisons with 1972-96 data
1. Somewhat lower prospective issue-voting in 2000 than in the Reagan-Mondale ('84), Clinton-Bush ('92), and Clinton-Dole ('96) contests
 2. About the same as the Nixon-McGovern ('72), Reagan-Carter ('80), and Bush-Dukakis ('88) contests
 3. Somewhat higher in 2000 than in the Carter-Ford ('76) contest
- D. Conclusion:
1. Variation in prospective issue-voting across elections is due
 - a. More to changes in the clarity of choices offered by the candidates
 - b. Than to changes in the ability of the electorate to perceive these choices
 2. Aldrich credits this finding to Morris Fiorina; however, V.O. Key, Jr. made exactly the same argument years before in his 1966 book, *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960*
- VII. Apparent issue voting in 2000
- A. Issue criteria and voting on each issue Table 6-5, p. 140; Table 6-6, p. 141
1. Finding for 2000:
 - a. There is a clear relationship between the voter-candidate issue proximity and vote choice on six of the seven issues
 - b. All but the women's rights issue
 - c. Across all 7 issues, roughly 7 out of 10 voters voted for the closer candidate in 2000
 2. Comparison to 1972-96: roughly the same in other 7 elections (1972 the highest at 76%)
- B. The balance of issues measure Table 6-7, p. 143 tilted slightly Republican in 2000
- C. The issues of abortion and gun control Table 6-8, p. 146; Table 6-9, p. 147 tilted slightly Democratic in 2000
1. The electorate's responses were clearly more pro-choice than anti-abortion overall
 2. Roughly 60% favored making gun purchases harder
- D. Overall: prospective issue voting favored neither party in 2000
- VIII. Conclusion: prospective issue voting was common in 2000, but not decisive in determining the outcome because it was so evenly balanced **[You should heed a warning that Aldrich does not give: while this conclusion may be true nationwide, the results may vary from state to state and voting bloc to voting bloc]**