

L2929 Week 01: What is Political Behaviour?

Essential Readings Questions to Consider

Class: Friday, 14:00 – 16:00, LT211

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Office Hour: Friday, 12:00 – 13:00, MC431

Essential Reading Key Questions:

1. Dalton and Klingemann note that '[c]itizens must have a sufficient knowledge of the workings of the political system if they intend to influence and control the actions of their representatives.' Do you agree with this assessment? Why?
 - a) If you agree, what should be the minimum level of knowledge, and how should it be assessed?
 - b) Further, does this imply that there should be qualifications required for people to participate in politics?
 - c) How optimistic or pessimistic are you about current levels of public ability and knowledge regarding politics?
 - d) Should the public be concerned with politics? Why?
2. Dalton and Klingemann also note that '[i]n nearly all the advanced industrial democracies for which long-term survey data are now available, partisan ties have weakened over the past generation.' In light of this, how can we explain the recent rise of affective polarisation?
 - a) Could it be the case that people's identities have become more complex over time? If so, what might this imply for their role in voting?
 - b) Do you think that candidate image and issue voting hold the same significance now as they did when Dalton and Klingemann were writing? Why?
 - c) Do you think that the drivers of vote choice change over time?
 - d) What do you think are currently the main drivers of vote choice? Are these the same drivers as those for other forms of participation?
3. Dalton and Klingemann argue that the ultimate question in the study of public opinion within democracies is '[t]o what extent do the views of policy makers and the outputs of government policy reflect the preferences that the public itself prefers?' Do you agree with their characterisation?
 - a) They also argue that parties still have the capacity to represent and mobilise citizens around left-right orientations. Do you agree? Why?
 - b) Further, they argue that 'never before in history has the interaction between elites and people been shifted so much to the side of the people.' Do you think this is still true?
4. Van Deth notes that observing changes in political participation depends on one's definition. Do you think that political participation is increasing or decreasing?
 - a) How does your position relate to your definition of political participation?

5. What does van Deth identify as the four uncontroversial elements of a minimalist definition of political participation?
 - a) If the minimalist definition identifies type I participation, what are the bases for identifying types II, III, and IV?
 - b) Can you identify your own examples of each of the types of political participations outlined by van Deth?
 - c) How useful do you find van Deth's decision-tree approach to identifying political participation?
 - d) Are there any problems that we might encounter when applying van Deth's approach to defining political participation?

Essential Readings Further Questions:

6. Dalton and Klingemann identify a decline in traditional civic engagement and a rise in new forms of political action. What are some examples of traditional and new forms political participation?
 - a) Does it matter how people express their political views? If so, how does matter?
 - b) Is the shift from traditional to new forms of political participation a good or bad thing? Why?
7. Dalton and Klingemann note that 'a major question is whether new democracies will develop a system of liberal-democratic responsible party government and electoral choice, and what are the consequences if they do not.' With the benefit of hindsight, how do you think the wave of democratisation in the nineties fared in this regard?
 - a) How would you characterise current global trends in democratisation?
 - b) What do you think are the drivers of the current global trends in democratisation?
 - c) How would you characterise the current condition of established democracies?
 - d) Do you think there has ever been an era of political stability?
8. Do you think that political culture stems from institutions, or vice versa?
 - a) What do you think is the causal relationship, if any, between economic, cultural, and political change?
9. How do we strike a balance between accommodating the complexity of the world and seeking parsimony in our models of political behaviour?

Essential Readings for Next Week:

- John H. Aldrich (1993), 'Rational Choice and Turnout', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 246-278. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111531>.
- William H. Riker and Peter C. Ordeshook (1968), 'A Theory of the Calculus of Voting', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 25-42. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953324>.
- Donald E. Stokes (1963), 'Spatial Models of Party Competition', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 368-377. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1952828>.

Note: the essential readings are all available via the L2929 page on Myplace.