L2929 Week 07: The Role of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Opinions
Essential Readings Questions to Consider

Classes: Thursdays, 11:00 – 13:00, LT313

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Essential Reading Key Questions:

1. Banerjee et al. show that turnout increases in areas where information about candidates is provided to voters. This is especially so where incumbent candidate performed their duties poorly, and they gain less votes as a consequence. What does this tell us about who is voting when information is provided?
   a) What conclusions can we draw from their findings about the role of knowledge in political decisions? And in accountability?
   b) Banerjee et al. also argue that 'ethical voters wish to vote for the high quality candidate, and more precise signals aid this.' What do you think are the motives of an 'ethical voter,' and what other motives might voters have?
   c) Do you think that these findings would extend to other geographical and informational environments? And what role do you think trust might play in the impact of information in other environments?
   d) Banerjee et al. show that information about performance trumps information about qualifications. Do you think this is more about the utility of the information, how recently it was received, whether it is new, or something else?

2. What are the four models of political learning that Dinas presents, and what are the differences between them?
   a) What factors does Dinas identify as possible causes of changes in, or solidification of, political attitudes?
   b) What are Dinas' findings, and what do they tell us about the relationship between age, information, and attitudes?
   c) What are the implications, if any, of Dinas' findings for voting? And for other forms of political behaviour?

3. The analysis presented by Ezrow et al. 'reveals unambiguous linkages between the policy preferences of citizens and parties.' What do you think the mechanism linking public positions and party positions is?
   a) Given that mainstream parties are responsive to the average voter, and niche parties are responsive to their supporters, how would we expect people with positions that are distant from the average voter to behave? Are they well-represented in these political systems?
   b) Ezrow et al. also find that parties continue a shift in the same direction if they gained votes at the last election. Is this a sensible strategy for party leaders and organisations? Why?
   c) To what extent are these findings contingent on party dealignment? Would parties be as responsive to the median voter if they were still reliant on the votes of people with strong party identities or, for example, a particular class?

4. What are the reasons that Karpowitz et al. outline for inequality between men and women in deliberative participation?
    a) They find that women talk more as their numbers increase under majority rule but less as their numbers increase under unanimous rule. What are the implications of these findings for the evidence used to inform policy positions? Do you think these findings might extend to other group inequalities?
    b) Karpowitz et al. also note that '[p]articipants who held the floor for a greater percentage of the group's deliberation were more likely to be seen as influential by the other members of the group.' What are the implications of this finding for the stereotypes that people hold about other groups, and for future marginalisation of those groups?
    c) What other political contexts, if any, do you think these findings might extend to?
    d) What do these findings suggest should be done to ensure that a variety of opinions and beliefs inform political decision-making?

Essential Readings Further Questions:

5. What structure, if any, do you think exists between values, beliefs, and attitudes? Do some of these things shape others? Are the relationships two-way?
    a) Are some elements of human opinion easier to change than others?
    b) To what extent do you think that knowledge shapes human opinions?

Essential Readings for Next Week:

- Jonas Israel, Stefan Marschall and Martin Schulze (2017) 'Cognitive dissonance and the effects of Voting Advice Applications on voting behaviour: evidence from the European Elections 2014', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 56-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2016.1268142.

- Jennifer Oser, Marc Hooghe and Sofie Marien (2013), 'Is online participation distinct from offline participation? A latent class analysis of participation types and their stratification', *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 91–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912912436695.

- Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba and Henry E. Brady (2010), 'Weapon of the Strong? Participatory Inequality and the Internet', *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 487-509. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710001210.

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