

# **17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process**

Recitation: Research Paper Workshop

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## **Condense Several Citations into One or a Few Paragraphs**

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## Condense Several Citations into One or a Few Paragraphs

- Common problem: over-summarizing
  - Okay if you are writing an analytical paper
  - But will make your research paper lose focus...
- Boil down multiple articles to a single sentence or paragraph (multiple citations in parentheses).
- Example: Prior studies have shown that American voters were not competent in assessing the performance of incumbent politicians (Huber, Hill, and Lenz 2012; Achen and Bartels 2017; Matthew et al. 2020)

### The Priming Hypothesis

Until the 1980s, research had generally failed to produce much evidence of campaign or media effects on vote choice and presidential approval (Graber 1993; Patterson and McClure 1976). This began to change with findings from lab-based experiments on agenda setting and priming (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar et al. 1984). The authors of these studies hypothesized that, by calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news alters the issues on which the public judges presidents and candidates for public office. To test this “priming” hypothesis, these studies manipulated the extent to which subjects viewed television news stories on an issue and found that greater exposure led viewers to give greater weight to that issue when evaluating politicians. For instance, when shown television news stories about the economy, subjects were more likely to evaluate the president based on their perceptions of the president’s handling of the economy.

Political scientists have shown great interest in the influence of agenda setting and priming (Riker 1986; Schattschneider 1960), referring to them also as “framing,” “manipulating the dimensions underlying vote

choice,” and “heresthetics.” In part, priming is of such interest because it provides an intriguing account of how campaigns and the media influence elections. In Schattschneider’s words, “He who determines what politics is about runs the country, because the definition of the alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice of conflicts allocates power” (1960, 66). Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954) provide the quintessential example in their analysis of the 1948 U.S. presidential campaign. They argue that Truman won the election, to the surprise of many, because his campaign shifted the nation’s focus from international issues back to New Deal issues, where he and the Democratic Party had an advantage. Priming also interests scholars because, some have argued, it constitutes evidence of a dangerous bias in citizens’ decision making. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) find priming effects so large as to imply that voters are overweighting some issues while underweighting others. These results may indicate that campaigns and the media have the power to manipulate voters through priming, a finding that has ominous implications for democracy. In this vein, Krosnick and Kinder characterize people who manifest priming as being “swept away by [an] avalanche of stories and pictures”

## Example: Mason 2015

Political scientists tend to agree that partisan-ideological sorting has occurred in the American electorate during recent decades (Abramowitz 2010; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009; Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Jacobson 2007; Levendusky 2009). Specifically, people have sorted into the “correct” combination of party and ideology—Democrats are now more liberal and Republicans are more conservative than they were 50 years ago. Some view this phenomenon as simply a reorganization of political tendencies, with little effect on behavior or mass polarization (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Levendusky 2009), whereas others suggest that this sorting is a reflection of a deep polarization emerging in the electorate (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Bafumi and Shapiro 2009). The effects of this sorting, however, remain relatively unexplored. I argue that sorting itself has been responsible for increased levels of partisanship and polarized behavior, including partisan bias, activism, and anger. This is due to the powerful effects of the politi-

cal identities involved. The partisan-ideological sorting that has occurred during the last 50 years has not been a consequence-free realignment of static identities. Sorting, by virtue of its basis in social identities, has acted to increase the strength of political identities and has polarized mass political behavior.

While sorting has brought partisan and ideological identities into alignment, levels of partisan bias, activism, and anger have increased (Abramowitz 2006, 2007, 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 2005, 2008; Abramowitz and Stone 2006; Brewer 2005; Hetherington 2001; Jacobson 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; Levendusky 2009; Mason 2013). In comparison, issue positions in the mass public have experienced relatively smaller increases in polarization in the same period (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005, 2008; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Levendusky 2009; Mason 2013; Wolfe 1998). Unfortunately, the difference between the social elements of polarization and the polarization of issue positions has not been clearly elaborated and has thus

Mason, Lilliana. “I Disrespectfully Agree: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization.” *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (2015): 128–45. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association (United States). All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

## Example: Mason 2015 Cont.

led to a vigorous debate among political scientists over the nature and even existence of political polarization. At a time when many Americans consider polarization to be a real and apparent problem in American politics, political scientists cannot agree on whether it exists (see Abramowitz 2006, 2007, 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 2005, 2008; Abramowitz and Stone 2006; Brewer 2005; Hetherington 2001; Jacobson 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007; *versus* Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005, 2008; Fiorina and Levendusky 2006; Levendusky 2009; Wolfe 1998). The theory presented here helps to clarify the terms of this debate by demonstrating how partisan-ideological sorting has increased social polarization to a greater extent than it has increased the extremity of held issue positions in the American electorate. The result is an electorate that may agree on many things, but nonetheless cannot get along.

## Bartels 1996 (If you prefer old-fashioned clarity and concision)

The political ignorance of the American voter is one of the best-documented features of contemporary politics, but the political significance of this political ignorance is far from clear. Observers as diverse as Bryce (1893), Lippmann (1922), Schumpeter (1942, chap. XXI), and Dahl (1989, 332–41) have seemed to take it as a natural and unavoidable feature of democratic politics. Others have seemed to assume as a matter of course “that a well-informed electorate is necessary for a democracy to function well . . . feeling neither the logical obligation of proof nor the empirical obligation of evidence” (Kinder and Palfrey 1993). Still others have theo-

Bartels, Larry M. “Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections.” *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 1 (1996): 194–230. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association (United States). All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.



# Bartels 1996 (If you prefer old-fashioned clarity and concision)

## Cont.

rized that low average levels of political information may in fact be inconsequential, either because poorly informed voters make efficient use of relevant cues in the social and political environment (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; McKelvey and Ordeshook 1985; Neuman 1986; Page and Shapiro 1992), or because individual errors tend to cancel out in a large electorate (Miller 1986; Wittman 1989; Converse 1990; Page and Shapiro 1992; all following Condorcet 1785).

What is striking is that political scientists have done so little to investigate empirically the electoral consequences of voter ignorance. If those who have viewed a well-informed electorate as crucial to the functioning of democracy have been too little burdened by the scientific demand for supporting evidence, the same could be said of those who have viewed the political ignorance of the average voter as largely or wholly irrelevant. They have preferred either to limit their analyses to individual information stores and information processing, or to extrapolate from individuals to collective outcomes on the basis of assumptions rather than evidence.

Here I attempt to measure more directly the impact of information, and hence of its absence, on voting behavior in each of the last six United States presidential elections. My aim is to use the observed relationship between information and voting behavior in recent elections to simulate the behavior of a hypothetical "fully informed" electorate, and to compare actual voting behavior at both the individual and aggregate levels to this hypothetical baseline. The empirical analysis indicates that the behavior both of individual voters and of the electorate as a whole deviates in significant and politically consequential ways from the projected behavior of a "fully informed" electorate.

## **Summarize Academic Debate and then Choose a Side**

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## Example:Hetherington 2009

At the elite level, many studies show that Congress is increasingly polarized, with party members clustering towards the ideological poles and the middle a vast wasteland.<sup>5</sup> Evidence that ordinary citizens are polarized, however, is less clear. Morris Fiorina, in his compelling book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, argues that voters *appear* polarized because the political arena offers mainly polarized choices. He argues that voter preferences remain moderate, have generally not moved farther apart over time even on hot button social issues, and are increasingly tolerant of difference.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Gary Jacobson sees polarization in the unprecedented partisan differences in evaluations of George W. Bush, a larger partisan split on the war in Iraq than any previous war, and the mental gymnastics that mass partisans apparently engage in now to buttress their opinions even when they are demonstrably false.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Abramowitz and Saunders see polarization in the increased consistency in liberal and conservative views in the mass public.<sup>8</sup> In any case, while many of Fiorina's recent critics present compelling evidence in support of their understanding of polarization, they most often fail to engage Fiorina's.

# Political Science Research 101

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# Academic Sources

- You are encouraged to cite credible academic/scholarly sources
  - Scholarly articles are often published in political science academic journals or monographs
  - Journal articles are quite different from research-oriented outlets.
- Why scholarly works?
- When navigating the journal articles, focus on main thesis and arguments of the authors. You may skip the formal model or data analysis section.

# A Work Flow Might Save You Tons of Time!

- Topic → Articles and Book Chapters in Syllabus → Look at the References Section → Articles XYZ Look Relevant → Read Those Articles and Repeat Step 2

# List of Top Political Science Journal

- You are by no means required to cite articles from these journals!
- Flagship
  - *American Political Science Review*
  - *American Journal of Political Science*
  - *Journal of Politics*
  - *British Journal of Political Science*
  - *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*
- Institution
  - *Legislative Studies Quarterly*
  - *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*
  - *Presidential Studies Quarterly*
- Behavior
  - *Political Psychology*
  - *Political Behavior*
  - *Political Communication*
  - *Public Opinion Quarterly*

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17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process  
Fall 2020

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