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Understanding Presidential Voting Motivation by Factors of Agency

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The President of the United States sets the tone for policy and has significant power in adopting and implementing policy. Despite this acknowledged power, prior studies, have not examined whether or not agency theory is predictive of voting in U.S. presidential elections. Agency theory is important in the scope of voting behavior as it identifies the relationships which support significance in practicing the activity. This correlational study examined the statistical impact of personal agency, social agency, and sociocultural agency on predictive voting behavior. This study used secondary data originally collected between 1956 and 2008 by the American National Election Study through a multistage probability design that yielded a survey of 28,000 individuals. A single, combined model was created from variables measuring personal, social, and sociocultural agency on the dependent variable of voting to test which type of agency had the highest predictive power on voting. The outcome of a logistic regression analysis demonstrated that sociocultural and personal agency, but not social agency, were statistically powerful predictors of voting ($p < .05$). These findings suggest that an individual's personal perceptions and cultural status influence their likelihood to vote, but that their social units do not. These findings suggest that efforts to increase turnout by members of sociocultural groups that are less likely to vote should focus on increasing personal agency. This study promotes positive social change by empowering the design of more effective get-out-the-vote campaigns to increase voter participation, especially among the underrepresented.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father for always having encouraged me to learn. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for being my biggest supporters in life and academics!

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I would like to acknowledge Professor Karen Shafer for having provided extremely helpful and supportive commentary throughout the dissertation process. Without Dr. Shafer's detailed suggestions, I could never have executed the logistic regression model at the heart of the study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

The selection of executive leadership at the highest level of government that accurately reflects the values and traditions of the people the government represents requires that the represented populace go to the polls and cast a vote. Voting has traditionally been considered an act of agency: an exercise of volitional behavior (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Newman, 2008). Voting agency theory offers are three broad answers to the question of who (or what) exactly exercises volition. Personal agency theory suggests that the individual makes unmediated voting decisions that are influenced, but not determined, by other people or environmental circumstances in the voter's life. Social agency theory suggests that the individual's choice is largely determined by the people they have intimate relationships with (family, friends, neighbors, influencers etc.). Finally, sociocultural agency suggests that it is neither the unmediated individual nor a small social grouping of like-minded others that is responsible for exercising voting choice. According to this body of theory, voting choices emerge from the actions of entire social classes.

These three research traditions in voting agency theory have historically been largely distinct from each other. Sociocultural theorists, starting with Marx (1972) and more recently including scholars such as Thomas Frank (2004) and Elizabeth Beaumont (2011) have tended to perform qualitative work focusing on the influence exercised by large groups of people (such as the working class) on individuals' political behavior; such work has extrapolated from the behavior of smaller groups to larger groups. Personal

agency theorists often work in the neoclassical and individualist tradition of Adam Smith (1801); this tradition is conceptually, theoretically, and methodologically irreconcilable with many of the assumptions of sociocultural theorists. Social agency theorists, such as Robert Putnam (2001a, 2001b), have a distinct research program influenced by sociocultural theory and personal agency theory but that has developed its own vocabulary and concerns.

Recent empirical research on the topic of agency theory in the scope of political science has tended to be limited to either sociocultural agency, personal agency, or social agency. For example, Lin (2010) focused on voters' personal attitudes to aspects of governance, Poundstone (2008) examined the role of families and other social units as determinants of individual voting preferences, and Campbell (2006) examined the predictive power of voting. The applicability of these study findings, however, is generally limited by a low coefficient of determination. Scholars have tended to conduct empirical research bounded by specific agency theories, instead of taking a broader approach that encompasses multiple agency theories. As a result, their regression models lack explanatory power (Aggarwal, Meschke & Wang, 2012; Gonzalez-Ocantos, De Jonge, Melendez, Osorio & Nickerson, 2012; Kasfir, 2014).

This study was designed to address these limitations by incorporating multiple forms of agency into its empirical model. Kiewiet and Lewis-Beck (2011) suggested that voting is an extraordinarily complex act and is likely influenced by a multitude of personal and social factors. In order to test the importance of these factors, and to determine which kinds of agency might be more influential in predicting voting, it is

necessary to conduct a form of regression in which the independent variables include several kinds of agency variables. The remainder of the chapter consists of the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Problem Statement

Voter turnout in the United States remains lower than in many nations (Simon, Egidi, & Viale, 2008). This low turnout erodes the quality of democracy as only sections of the population are significantly represented (Postman, 2006). In order to raise voter turnout, it is necessary to learn more about why people vote, so that policy actions can be better targeted to improving participatory behavior (Putnam, 2001a, 2001b). Although scholars have enumerated the general reasons that people vote, these reasons have not been weighed against each other (Benney, Gray & Pear, 2013; van der Straeten, Laslier & Blais, 2013). An example of this is the proposition by Sexton (2011) that for people to vote the benefits need to outweigh the cost. The determinants of voting behavior are difficult to compare precisely because of the radical subjectivity of voters' cost-benefit analyses (Sosnaud, Brady & Frenk, 2013; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2013).

There is no preexisting quantitative framework through which scholars can understand the relative contributions of personal, social, and sociocultural agency to voting behavior. Although there is a scholarly consensus that there are many independent variables that predict voting (Sexton, 2011), there is a fecund amount of study which has sought to examine this problem through the utilization of statistical models. Academic

study is therefore needed in order to inform policymakers and scholars who the people are that will participate in voting as indicated by the significance of the strength of agency factors as influencers of the behavior of voting.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the sociotropics of voting behavior. This exploration is performed through determining how voting emerge from a combination of personal, social, and sociocultural agency (Kiewiet & Lewis-Beck, 2011). The statistical model of this study measures personal agency through subject perceptions of four variables: (a) how much people think that they can affect government, (b) the importance that respondents attach to people doing what authorities tell them, (c) whether or not respondents are optimistic or pessimistic about their nation's future, and (d) respondents' interest in information about government and politics. Social agency is measured through the degree of respondent's family's interest in politics. Socoiocultural agency is measured through the following variables: (a) household income, (b) home ownership, and (c) education. The goal of the related statistical analysis was to quantify the predictive power of each of these independent variables on the dependent variable of election vote, and in doing so to arrive at a conclusion about which of the three varieties of agency theory is more predictive of voting.

Research Question and Hypotheses

The study was examined American voting by analyzing data collected from the American National Election Studies (ANES) series of surveys. These surveys were

administered to American voters in every presidential election year since 1948.The primary research question for this study was:

- RQ: How did the factors of personal, social, and sociocultural agency influence American voters' stated voting actions in U.S. Presidential elections from 1952 to 2008?

The null hypothesis for the primary research question was that neither personal, social, or sociocultural agency factors had any predictive power in determining whether a representative sample of American voters intended to vote in U.S. Presidential elections. The alternative hypothesis was that at least one factor was a significant predictor of American voting in U.S. Presidential elections. Twenty specific subhypotheses were developed to test specific factors:

H_10: There is no significant relationship between age and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_1A: There is a significant relationship between age and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_20: There is no significant relationship between gender and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_2A: There is a significant relationship between gender and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_30: There is no significant relationship between race and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_3A: There is a significant relationship between race and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_40: There is no significant relationship between education and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_4A: There is a significant relationship between education and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_50: There is no significant relationship between family income and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_5A: There is a significant relationship between family income and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_60: There is no significant relationship between religion and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_6A: There is a significant relationship between religion and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_70: There is no significant relationship between home ownership and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_7A: There is a significant relationship between home ownership and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_80: There is no significant relationship between interest in the elections and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_8A: There is a significant relationship between interest in the elections and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_90: There is no significant relationship between interest in public affairs and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_9A: There is a significant relationship between interest in public affairs and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_{10}0$: There is no significant relationship between a belief that one has any say in what government does and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_{10}A$: There is a significant relationship between a belief that one has any say in what government does and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The research question was designed to be addressed through the use of logistic regression, in which the null hypothesis is accepted if the *p* value of each individual agency factor's contribution to voting is $\geq .05$, and the null hypothesis is rejected if $p < .05$ for any of the agency variables. The inclusion of demographic as well as agency variables allows the answer to the research question to reflect variation due to different facets of respondents' circumstances and identities. The ANES dataset from which the personal, social, and sociocultural agency variables were taken, and the nature of these variables themselves, is discussed further in chapter three.

Theoretical Base

One way of organizing a discussion of the theoretical base is through the notion of agency. Agency theory has three main divisions: (a) personal agency, in which theorists assume that humans are want-maximizing, purposive decision-makers who consciously seek to achieve goals that gratify themselves; (b) social agency, in which theorists assume that social units (such as families and neighborhoods) help to determine individual

decisions, based on their influence of the individual; and (c) sociocultural agency, in which theorists assume that individual decisions are the products of membership in large groups (for example, the working class or the Republican Party).

There is incidental amounts of overlap between the various kinds of agency theory. For this reason, agency theory is better described as being a spectrum than a dichotomy (Cote & Levine, 2014).For example, personal agency theorists acknowledge that decisions do not take place at a perfect Archimedean remove from the structural and infrastructural facts of an agent's life, many of which are predetermined before the agent's birth (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). Yet, like classical liberals, personal agency theorists emphasize that voter behavior is essentially want-maximizing behavior in response to felt needs and based on an ultimately rational appraisal of their situations (O'Sullivan, 2009). Sociocultural theorists (e.g., Thoms, 2006) acknowledge some modicum of personal choice and want maximization. However, they also focus more acutely on the background context of this behavior than social theorists of agency, showing it as either wholly (e.g., Marx, 1972) or partly determined by variables that have little, if anything, to do with individual choice.

There is a degree of theoretical complexity which exists in the current study as there are social and cultural factors under examination. While social and cultural complexities exist, quantitative study can still have implications for theory if the limitations present are acknowledged. As an example, if quantitative identifies that making over $175,000 a year is the surest predictor of voting, then rationale becomes evident that there is a need for further investigation of a general sociocultural theory of

voting built around income. These results cannot be presented as either simple or causal, but must be taken as planks in an ongoing debate about voter motivations that neither this study nor any other is likely to conclusively resolve.

Nature of the Study

This quantitative study used logistic regression as its main statistical technique for data analysis. The study's dependent variable was voting in U.S. Presidential elections. Its independent variables of the study were:

1. potential voters' perceptions of how much people can affect government;
2. potential voters' perceptions of how important it is to do what authorities tell them;
3. potential voters' optimism or pessimism about the nation's future;
4. potential voters' interest in information about government and politics;
5. potential voters' families' interest in politics;
6. potential voters' household income;
7. potential voters' home ownership status; and
8. potential voters' education.

The intermediate variables of the study were race, gender, major party affiliation, religion, ethnicity, and age. The data pertaining to these variables was collected from the published ANES dataset pertaining to U.S. Presidential elections. This dataset contains contains responses from hundreds of thousands of potential voters who were statistically representative of the American electorate in various election years.

Definition of Terms

Agent. An individual in his or her capacity as a decision-maker, especially when such decisions take place in relative conditions of autonomy (Krugman & Wells, 2009).

Agentic. Behavior that reflects the relative autonomy of an agent (Krugman & Wells, 2009).

Mobilization. Pro-voting messages (such as through the use of advertising, both public and private) that reach the voter and influence his or her behavior (Putnam 2001a, 2001b).

Personal agency theory. Theory rooted in the belief that humans are want-maximizing, purpose actors who seek to achieve certain ends for their own individual reasons (Smith, 1801).

Self-interest. A state of being in which an agent attempts to reach his or her goals, regardless of the implications of this want-maximizing behavior for others (Poundstone, 2008).

Social agency theory. A theory stating that smaller social units (such as families, neighborhoods, business cultures, etc.) function as determinants of individual political behavior (Poundstone, 2008).

Sociocultural agency theory. As articulated by theorists including Frank (2004) and Marx (1974), a theory claiming that larger social and economic units such as economic classes and political parties) play the primary role in determining individuals' economic behavior.

Sociotropic. A voting behavior that is understood to reflect some combination of personal, social, and sociocultural agency (Kiewiet & Lewis-Beck, 2011).

Uses and gratifications theory. A personal agency theory committed to the position that voters vote in order to satisfy personal gratifications, such as the need to participate in a democracy (Rubin, 1983).

Assumptions

The assumptions of the study are the same as the ANES assumptions, which center around the truthful answering of questions by participants, particularly regarding voting. There have been some well-documented examples of social desirability bias in political surveys; for example, the Bradley Effect is the name given to the phenomenon of white voters overestimating their actual likelihood of voting for a black candidate (Rogers, 1992). It is possible that some kind of social desirability bias infected ANES, for example by leading participants to overstate their voting.

Limitations

The limitations of the study are also the limitations of ANES. One important limitation is that ANES did not survey cell-phone only households (ANES, 2011)..

Delimitations

The study is delimited to the ANES data about the U.S. Presidential elections of 1952 to 2008. In addition, the ANES sample was delimited to only those respondents who gave substantive answers to the questions; respondents who opted out of answering the main question, of whether or not they intended to vote, were not included in the final sample.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it is the first study to apply the full spectrum of agency theory (including personal agency, social agency, and sociocultural agency) to the empirical study of voting behavior. Agency theorists tend to work within their own field of interest; as a result, there is a dearth of literature that employs each of the three components of agency theory as a frame through which to examine political behavior. The methodological significance of the study lies in the use of a quantitative model, defined and defended at length in chapter three, which can test and weight the roles of each kind of agency in the prediction of voting behavior.

The study will be of value to a number of audiences. Political scientists, public policy theorists, political operatives, citizen activists, and even marketers and psychologists will benefit from an increased quantitative understanding of the antecedents to voting.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The study will promote positive social change by identifying potential weak spots in electoral participation, providing a basis for public policy changes that could increase incentives to vote. The connection to public issues is as follows: Currently, public resources are applied to get-out-the-vote efforts on both a federal and state-level basis, but, in the absence of supporting data, it is difficult to know whether public resources are being efficiently spent. Identifying the roles of three kinds of agency in impacting the decision to vote makes it possible to create data-driven get-out-the-vote strategies, which in turn have a higher likelihood of persuading people to vote and thus promoting positive

political change—on the assumption that exercising the franchise is a measure of the quality of a democracy. A higher rate of political participation is directly connected to social change, because people who are more active in voting tend to feel connected to society in ways that make them better parents, neighbors, friends, and workers (Putnam, 2001a, 2001b).

Summary and Transition

This chapter has discussed and provisionally justified a new approach to answering the question of why people vote, grounded in the ANES data from U.S. Presidential elections. This approach is based on the use of three kinds of agency theory—personal agency, social agency, and sociocultural agency—as part of a single theoretical frame through which to examine voting behavior. The statistical methods of linear and logistic regression can be used to determine the relative importance of each type of agency theory as a prediction of voting behavior, thus generating insights that can help policymakers to target get-out-the-vote resources in a more rational and efficient way. Moreover, the use of the three kinds of agency theory is also a means of generating a richer explanatory model and uniting insights from theorists who are often not divided by methodological and conceptual boundaries. Thus, this study can play an important role in mobilizing agency theory for a more thorough explanation of voting behavior, assisted by the extensive data in ANES (2011) and the use of regression analysis.

Chapter two offers an overview of the theories used to inform the study design and that constitute the context of voting behavior. Chapter three will demonstrate how certain theoretical predictions about why people vote can be empirically tested by means

of a regression analysis of the ANES data. Chapter four will consist of a presentation and discussion of the resulting findings. Chapter five will summarize the main findings, discuss the implications of the findings for past and future researcher, and conclude with a reflection on the importance of electoral participation in democratic societies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The scope of the literature review was broad, as theories of political participation date from the work of Aristotle to contemporary times. There was a cutoff date of 2010 used for supporting research in academic articles, however this cutoff was not used for texts which support the investigation of agency theory in the scope of voting as knowledge from seminal work on the topic was determined to be useful in arguing the delineation of the elements of agency theory which were studied. Review of literature did not uncover thesis or dissertation work that would be useful in giving a background on the topics studied. Publications related to political science and sociology were therefore utilized in order to utilize supporting literature to undergird the performance of the current study. Studies performed before 2010 were largely excluded from the review of literature, however this exclusion was not applied to books on the topic which give support and seminal explanations of the constructs examined. The literature review strategy involved entering the following search terms into the Political Science Complete, Political Science, Expanded Academic ASAP, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central databases:

- “individual agency” and “voting”
- “social network” and “voting”
- “class struggle” and “voting”
- “motivations for voting”
- “voting motivations”

These search strings uncovered several hundred articles, many of which were read and annotated preparatory to writing the literature review. The second component of the literature search strategy used the snowball method suggested by Creswell (2009), in which both the texts and the bibliographies of chosen articles were consulted in order to identify seminal works and expand the circle of reading. This process identified several seminal works (e.g., Aristotle's *Politics*) cited in many different empirical studies. When such works were identified, they were procured, read, and annotated to add context to the literature review.

This literature review incorporates information from 23 peer-reviewed journal articles in addition to book-length monographs. The search focused primarily on books because many political scientists have expanded their empirical work on voting to book length. In addition, the topics of individual, social, and historical agency have received more theoretical attention and empirical analysis in book publications than in journal articles. One of the rationales for this study was to close a gap in the empirical literature on multiple factors of agency as predictors of voting.

There is broad consensus in the literature that voting is the result of choice. While voting is described as an act of choice, the controversy emerges when trying to decide exactly who is doing the choosing (Kang, 2010). Personal agency theorists argue that the ultimate decision-maker in voting is the individual; while this individual might be somewhat influenced by their social group, this perspective argues, a vote ultimately transcends social influence and represents an individual's desire to exercise agency in the world of politics (Hersh, 2012). Sociocultural agency theorists instead argue that the role

of the individual is overshadowed by the role of the social network that they are embedded in, and that it is ultimately the social network rather than the individual that chooses (Bergh & Bjorklund, 2011). Finally, historical agency theorists suggest that both the individual and the social network are acted upon by the forces of history, especially economics and class struggle, and that it is the historical moment (rather than individual or social agency) that determines how and why people vote (Marx, 1972). Many empirical studies have been written on individual and social agency; historical agency has not similarly been subjected to empirical analysis, with its theorists primarily writing highly conceptual arguments.

Previous Approaches to the Problem

The question of why people are motivated to vote has often been answered through qualitative methodologies. These methodologies have offered rich insight into the participatory behavior of citizens in democratic countries, but are structurally unable to answer and resolve certain questions and disputes. Although several qualitative theories of voting behavior have been developed, however, scholars have been unable to weigh these theories against each other to see how they operated together in such a way that they could both support the performance of voting. Over the past two decades alone, there have been several qualitative studies emphasizing multiple aspects of voting behavior:

- Partisanship (including ideology and formal and informal identification with parties) (Payne, Krosnick, Pasek, Lelkes, Akhtar, & Tompson, 2010; Poundstone, 2008);

- mobilization (meaning the influencing of the electorate by outside messages) (Postman, 2006);
- the overall fabric of civic participation representing the quality and kind of political participation at the family, friend, and neighborhood level (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Putnam 2001a, 2001b);
- religious identity (Frank, 2004);
- socioeconomic status (Marx, 1972);
- personal psychology, including attitudes to information, authority, and race (Simon et al., 2008); and
- demographic facts such as age and gender (Scheff, 1994).

This confluence of findings from qualitative study has led to the creation of what Geertz (2008) termed a thick description (p. 5) of voting and pre-voting behavior, in which each of the major theories has some a priori merit and stands in need of weighing against the others. It is highly unlikely that any person decides to vote because of a single pathway of motivation (Geertz, 2008). Now that evidence from other behavioral research programs has accumulated, the more appropriate conclusion is that human beings make any purposive and important decision on the basis of a gestalt of other considerations, conscious and unconscious (Zhang & Margolis, 2006). There is also evidence of noise in human decision-making, indicating that some of the variability in decisions cannot be explained at all, at least by variables that are known to researchers (Westen, 2008). Statistical analysis such as linear and logistic regression can quantify how decisions are made, however; the R^2 measurement and individual Beta values for independent variables

(IVs) can both be used to quantify the relationship between any IV (such as mobilization) and the DV of voting behavior. In theory, quantitative analysis can offer more precise descriptions of voting behavior than qualitative research.

Each of the variables tracked in this study have been used in prior research on this topic, but not in the agency-comparative manner utilized in this study. These variables are: (a) potential voters' perceptions of how much people can affect government; (b) potential voters' perceptions of how important it is to do what authorities tell them; (c) potential voters' optimism or pessimism about the nation's future; (d) potential voters' interest in information about government and politics; (e) potential voters' families' interest in politics; (f) potential voters' household income; (g) potential voters' home ownership status; and (h) potential voters' education—can be justified because they. Poundstone (2008) drew upon the variables of potential voters' families' interest in politics and potential voters' education. Lin's (2010) analysis touched on potential voters' perceptions of how much people can affect government, potential voters' perceptions of how important it is to do what authorities tell them, potential voters' optimism or pessimism about the nation's future, and potential voters' interest in information about government and politics. Finally, Campbell (2006) examined potential voters' household income and potential voters' home ownership status. These findings are all evidence that voting is likely an activity that is influenced by a number of different social and sociocultural factors.

Numerous empirical studies have examined individual, social, and historical agency. This literature review did not, however, identify any studies that have attempted

to detect the operation of each kind of agency in a quantitative manner. Indeed, many scholars who approached the problem from a wide variety of perspectives have noted the insufficiency of existing methodologies as predictors of observed voting (Abrams, Iversen, & Soskice, 2010; Alvarez, Levin, & Sinclair, 2012; Aragones, Giboa, & Weiss, 2011; Bergh & Bjorklund, 2011; Grafstein, 2009; Hersh, 2012; Kang, 2010; Oswald & Poedthavee, 2010; Panagopoulos, 2010; Urbatsch, 2012). It is therefore legitimate to suggest a new approach to the problem of predicting voting, especially an approach rooted in quantitative methodology and attentive to all three forms of agency mentioned in the previous literature.

Overview of Theories of Agency

Personal agency represents a form of methodological individualism rooted in the neoclassical framework of Adam Smith (1801) whereas sociocultural agency has historically been represented by Marx (1972). Smith represented the trend in modern political thought that privileges the individual as the source of goal-driven, purposive, and free voting behavior. Marx stood for the proposition that voting was the outcome of sociocultural forces that directed the decisions and consciousness of the voter. For Smith, it was the individual who acts and thereby dictates the nature of society. For Marx, it was society—actually, history, because history dictates the evolution of society—that acts and thereby dictates the nature of the individual. In-between these poles are social agency theorists who accept Smith's idea that voting behavior is goal-driven, purposeful, and freely-chosen, but reject Smith's idea that it is the individual making the choices. For social agency theorists, the unit of decision is not the individual but, rather, some

collective: For example, households, neighborhoods, language groups, religious groups, etc. For Marx, the unit of decision is history itself. Marx did not believe, as social agency theorists do, that political decisions in democratic countries reflect the communal choices of groups of people, for two reasons. First, Marx argued that there were only two groups struggling throughout history, workers and bosses, and that other groups were irrelevant. Second, Marx believed that history itself was guiding both the workers and the bosses towards their interests and positions. Thus, Marx subscribed to a kind of historical determinism that rejected both the individual and the collective as potential sources of free, goal-driven decisions.

Following the conceptual divisions of agency advanced by scholars, the literature review is divided into four larger sections. The first section contains a discussion of the evolution of voting. The second section touches on the frame of individualism. The third section employs the frame of social agency, which is halfway between Smith's (1801) pure individualism and Marx's (1972) pure social determinism. The fourth section employs the frame of determinism, and examines sociocultural theories of voting. Because of the possibility of confusion that can arise when trying to explain the inter-relationships between the frames and the theories, some visual support would be helpful. Accordingly, Figure 1 lists the three theoretical frames in the study (individual agency, sociocultural agency, and historical agency) and demonstrates where four bodies of theory (uses and gratifications, mobilization, civic agency, and sociocultural agency) fit on the spectrum:

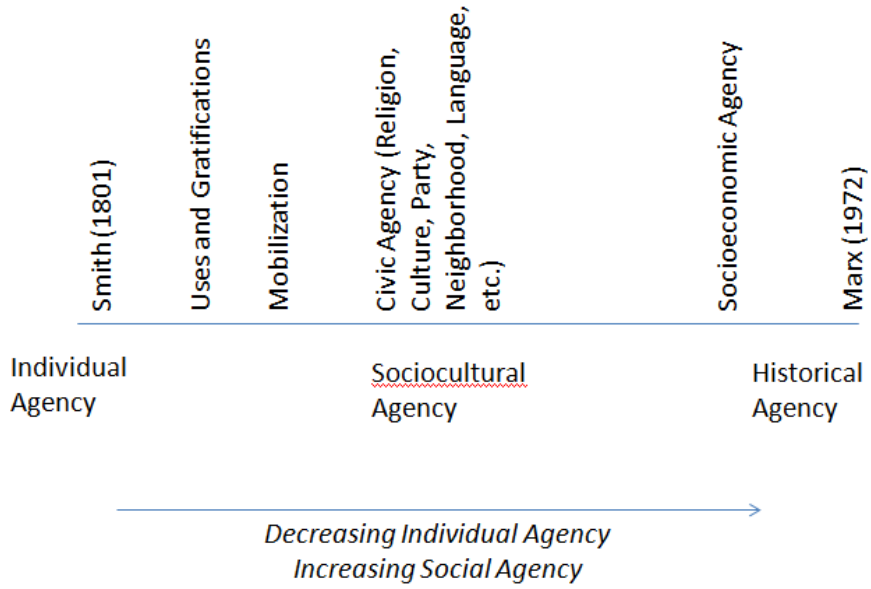

Figure 1. A diagram showing the study's theoretical framework and the relative positions of specific theories.

Individual agency is anchored by Smith (1801) and historical agency by Marx (1972). There is a bias in modern political thought towards the acceptance of either individual agency or sociocultural agency as frames for examining voting behavior; accordingly, as clear from Figure 1, most of the chosen theories also fit on this side of the spectrum. However, for reasons of theoretical and historical completeness, it is necessary to acknowledge Marx, even though Marx's work is not central to the theoretical model of this study.

The topic of voter decision-making and psychology is vast, but the use of the frames in Figure 1 resulted in the narrowing of literature to examples of seminal work from, for example, uses and gratifications theory and mobilization theory. The second research strategy was to discover appropriate scholarly resources by employing the

Science Direct, EBSCO Host, and JSTOR databases. The following search strings were employed in these databases: Voter theory; voting theory; voting in America; psychology of voting; and motivations for voting.

Before examining theories through the three frames in Figure 1, it would be helpful to offer an introduction to voting behavior. The purpose of this general overview is to trace the historical appreciation of voting behavior and to illustrate the emergence of individual-centered and socially centered explanations of voting through the history of political thought.

The Evolution of Voting

The Oxford English Dictionary (2011) defined a *vote* as follows: "An indication, by some approved method, of one's opinion or choice on a matter under discussion; an intimation that one approves or disapproves, accepts or rejects, a proposal, motion, candidate for office, or the like" (para. 7). The word appears to have entered the English language in the late 15th century from the Latin word *votum* (vow, wish) and its past participle, *vovere* (to vow, desire).

In Western political philosophy, beginning with the history of ancient Greece, there is every indication that voting was understood more as a civic obligation rather than a discretionary right of the citizen (Evans, 2010). In Athens, for example, voting (which was limited to free men) was not obligatory, but it was a social taboo not to vote. In fact, since Athenian voting took place publicly and ballots were not secret (Pels, Briquet, & Bertrand, 2006), strong social and political pressure could be exerted on non-participants in their process (Cartledge, 2009). Because ancient Athenian society was small enough

for many Athenians to know each other personally, social pressures to vote were particularly intense (Cartledge, 2009). Voting had a strong significance in Athens for two reasons. The first reason was a material one. Since Athens only went to war on the basis of direct voting, and many elections centered on the elevation of officers to generals, there was a strong incentive for the electorate to make its wishes felt (Pritchard, 2010). Failure to vote in Athens likely meant that the non-voter exercised no impact on one of the most important decisions Athenians could face, that of warfare (Lape, 2010). The second reason for the importance of voting in Athens was symbolic and philosophical. Missiou (2011) is one scholar who made an explicit connection between the philosophy of practice of democracy in Athens. In Greek mythology, the city of Athens itself was named after the results of a vote. Both Poseidon and Athena wished to have the city named after themselves, and all the gods—except for Zeus, who remained neutral—voted on behalf of the two divine claimants to Athens' naming rights. Zeus's abstention resulted in a win for Athena (Pritchard, 2010).

This story is important in its own right, because it suggests that the independent and relatively egalitarian city-states of Greece, which later exerted such great influence on the entire history of Western political organization, prized the ideas of fairness, consensus, and consultation, even where gods were concerned (Osborne, 2010). To be sure, neither the rhetoric nor the reality of voting-based democracy has been ideal; throughout history, even democratic states have excluded some segments of their populations from voting.

In American political history, voting—like the study of voting behavior—has gone through several phases. In the years leading up to the Declaration of Independence, a number of seminal figures in American politics wrote of voting as a system of basic self-preservation and self-interest. In 1766, writing to William Shirley, Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, on the occasion of British imposition of direct taxes on the American colonies, Benjamin Franklin (1825) stated that:

> …the frontiers of an empire are properly defended at the joint experience of the body of the people in such empire;--it would now be thought hard by act of parliament to oblige the Cinque ports or sea costs of Britain, to maintain the whole navy, because they are more immediately defended by it, not allowing them at the same time a vote in choosing members of the parliament…(p. 35).

Franklin thus believed that, at least for the American colonists of the late eighteenth century, voting was a means of defending themselves from onerous taxation that threatened to destroy the viability of several colonies, especially after the major economic crisis brought about by the Bank of England's decision to forbid the colonies from minting their own money. The cry of 'taxation without representation,' inspired by Arthur Lee's (1775) eloquent *A Speech, Intended to Have Been Delivered in the House of Commons, in Support of the Petition from the General Congress at Philadelphia*, became the popular rally for the incipient American Revolution, and it was premised on the necessity of voting.

Voting lost its urgency after the success of the revolution. In the 1760s and 1770s, voting had taken on vast rhetorical importance precisely because it was denied to the

American colonists by the British Empire. After 1776, when America entered the global community of nations, the issue of voting diminished in importance and was less frequently evoked as a form of political salvation (McCaffrey, 2004). In fact, from the period from 1776 to 1789, much of the public discussion of voting in America focused on state-level voting rather than individual voting, as the nation moved to amalgamate its colonies into a single federal apparatus at the Constitutional Convention. Many states sent just a handful of representatives, or sometimes only one representative, to the Convention, meaning that direct voting was not a factor in the proceedings; the representatives did not arrive with a mandate to vote in one way or another based on the vote of their respective states' citizens (McCaffrey, 2004). Rather, political elites took on magnified importance at this time, with defenders of federalism engaging in back-room bargaining for representatives' votes.

The contemporary American voter arose as a result of the reforms of the Progressive Era, including the innovations represented by the secret ballot and the 17th Amendment. Carson and Jenkins (2011) argued that the debt of the secret ballot in the late 19th century rendered voter intimidation less likely. At about the same, the 17th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States established the direct vote for Senatorial elections and thus further empowered the individual voter (Gailmard & Jenkins, 2009). It is within this general historical framework that it is possible to speak of American voting as both a meaningful and a common political decision for individuals.

Individual Agency

Several kinds of individual agency have been identified in the literature. This overview will delve into neoclassical decision theory by way of uses and gratification theory as well as mobilization theory. As Adam Smith (1801) is the great ancestor of agency theory as it is applied in modern Western economic and political though, his work will loom large in the discussion.

Uses and gratifications theory first emerged in the context of communications, with the scholars Lazarsfeld (1940) and Herzog (1940) using the theory to explain why certain members of radio audiences chose particular shows over others. However, in order to understand the true roots of uses and gratifications theory, it is necessary to discuss neoclassical decision theory. Neoclassical theory originates with Adam Smith (1801), who is credited with introducing and popularizing the use of methodological individualism as a science of decisions.

Before Smith (1801), scholars who studied human decisions had two general approaches to the topic: Great man theory and divine providence theory, both of which have their roots in ancient Greek political theory and were adopted by Christian theorists during the Middle Ages. Divine providence theory, as championed by Aquinas (1916), implied that the decisions of individuals carried less weight than divine providence. Thus, Aquinas (1916) and other Scholastics argued that the political order was decreed by God. Great man theory, which may have its roots in Plato's (1908) *Republic*, assumed that the decisions of certain important personages, particularly kings, carried disproportionate weight in deciding the state of affairs in war, culture, politics, and economics.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, the Scottish humanist and economist Adam Smith (1801) introduced a new idea: That the decisions of individual humans collectively dictated the reality of the market (and, by extension, of politics and other aspects of the collective human condition). Smith was one of the very few figures in Western intellectual history who made the ordinary individual the centerpiece of a theory of decision-making. Of course, in the years since Smith, there has been empirical confirmation of his methodological individualism in economics (Yonay, 1998). The history of economics after Smith is, in some ways, a history of the failure of every theory other than methodological individualism (Ingham, 2008). Centralized economic systems have failed with predictable regularity and the market has proven immune to manipulation by any actor, or set of actors, over the long term (Spiegel, 1991). In the wake of Smith, it is possible to conclude that the building blocks of economic reality are individual men and women whose decisions, often made in isolation from each other and in the absence of a guiding hand, collectively determine the status quo. Given that there is a rich body of literature treating political decisions as a subset of economic decisions (see Downs, 1957), Smith's economic thoughts are highly relevant to electoral politics. However, even if Smith's specific ideas about economic decision-making are discarded, his formulation of methodological individualism must be acknowledged as the starting point for modern discussions of voting behavior.

Methodological individualism was not, for Smith (1801), a generic decision theory, but rather a way of approaching what he called *homo economicus*. For Smith's account of the invisible hand to be theoretically coherent, it required some form of

methodological individualism as an anchor. However, in the years after Smith, neoclassical economists and scholars in other fields influenced by the neoclassical turn began to turn Smith's limited concept of methodological individualism into a generic form of decision theory based on the interrelated concepts of want maximization, risk reduction, and bounded rationality (Blais, 2000). These concepts are the direct precursors of both uses and gratifications theory and of other forms of individual agency that inform voting behavior, so they deserve closer attention.

Bounded rationality is a theoretical lens in decision theory and economics assuming that people are rational (that is, want-maximizing, self-interested beings) but also limited in their rationality, for example by not knowing everything that needs to be known to make a fully rational decision (Simon et al.,2008). In neoclassical theory, the ultimate arbiter of rationality is the market itself (Altman, 2006); for example, if a company stock traded is priced at $100 a share on the open market, this price is in theory fully rational in that it reflects the sum total of individual valuations of the stock. However, the individuals making the decisions to buy the stock are limited in their knowledge of what might make the stock go up and down. Thus, in bounded rationality theory, humans are basically rational but limited by their inability (Wittman, 2008) to discern, process, and act upon the sum of knowledge relating to complex decisions (such as buying a stock or voting for a political candidate).

The bedrock of bounded rationality theory, as of methodological individualism in general, is a commitment to the idea of a free individual (Udehn, 2001). It is for this reason that methodological individualism is so closely tied to the philosophy of

democracy. Bounded rationality posits a world of free agents picking and choosing between information in order to take voluntary want-maximizing actions. While the agent's free will is not the only aspect of the decision space—which can also include constraints on the agent's free will, such as law and social custom—it is, to bounded rationality theorists, the most explanatorily powerful aspect of all decisions, including decisions relating to political behavior.

Despite the fact the bounded rationality was in the intellectual marketplace of ideas after Smith's (1801) original 1776 publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, it took well over another century and a half for theorists to rigorously categorize the elements of rationality. An early and influential attempt at such a categorization was made by Abraham Maslow (1945), who is associated with his concept of the hierarchy of needs. Maslow accepted the central thesis of bounded rationality theory, that people act in order to maximize their wants based on the information and resources available to them, but he rejected the idea that all wants were equal to each other in explanatory strength. Maslow argued that the wants most capable of fulfilling a human being, and therefore the wants that were most intensely pursued by the mass of humanity, were higher-order emotional needs. This argument was a radical one when Maslow made it, because there was a common assumption that the most human needs had to do with food, shelter, and other physical necessities. It took the work of Herzberg (1966) to reconcile Maslow's insights with previous theorists' prioritization of physical needs. Herzberg argued that physical necessities were not in themselves capable of leading to profound satisfaction; however, when these necessities were absent, people felt dissatisfaction. Herzberg's decoupling of

the concepts of satisfaction and dissatisfaction was known as Two-Factor Theory, and has been empirically verified in both experiments and pseudo-experiments many times.

In this sense, the work of Maslow (1945) and Herzog (1966) is at the foundation of uses and gratifications theory, which, starting in the 1940s, posited that people consume cultural artifacts (such as radio shows or political messages) because such consumption resulted in higher-order emotional and cognitive gratifications. In of uses and gratifications theory, the methodological individualism introduced by Smith (1801) and the high importance placed on primarily emotional needs by Maslow came together to provide a foundation for explaining why people took purposive action.

In its early manifestation, uses and gratifications theory was used to analyze consumption of entertainment. However, in the 1960s, numerous scholars recognized the potential of uses and gratifications theory to predict and describe political behavior (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). These developments were related to Downs's (1957) seminal work, which suggested that the kind of agent-driven decisions reflected in uses and gratifications theory applied equally well to economic analyses of political decision-making. For example, both the decision framework discussed by Downs and uses and gratifications theory could explain why people preferred to consume certain political messages rather than others. In uses and gratifications theory, the idea was that politics was, like entertainment, capable of generating emotions in the electorate that could only be fulfilled by taking some form of political action, such as casting a vote or becoming a party activist. Indeed, as the body of uses and gratification theory grew in the 1980s, scholars discerned that the gap between politics and entertainment was closing, at least in

America (Postman, 2006). Since the 1980s, studies have repeatedly shown that people who are most active in political life are also driven more by emotion than cognition (Munson 1993), which was also the case with the radio listeners studied by Lazarsfeld (1940) and Herzog (1940) in their pioneering application of uses and gratifications theory to communications.

Applied to voting, uses and gratifications theory assumes a framework of voter hegemony; in other words, voters act consciously to cast their ballots because of largely emotional (but also cognitive) satisfactions they associate with this kind of political behavior. The theory has little room for determinism (whether social, psychological, biological, or otherwise), and relies on Smith's (1801) model of the empowered individual, forging ahead with want maximization on a voluntary basis.

Mobilization Theory: A More Complex Kind of Agency Emerges

Mobilization theory is a catch-all name for a number of theories, with various degrees of similarity to each other, that promote what might be called a marketing- or influence-oriented approach to political behavior. Mobilization involves the marshaling of remote forms of influence, such as advertising and marketing. Prandstraller (2010) defined mobilization as "market offers aimed at gaining mass approval. Marketing strategies try to make the product 'seductive' so that large numbers of people will buy it" (p. 30). Marketing is a complex form of agency because, while acting upon people's existing inclinations to act in certain ways, it adds influence and behavioral modification that muddy the question of whether it is the individual or the marketing message, or the combination thereof, that is doing the 'acting.'

In American elections, billions of dollars are spent to reach the entire electorate with sophisticated, unremitting, and intense political messages. In addition to formal campaign spending on advertising, both formal and informal canvassing (of the kind that occurs when a celebrity endorses a candidate) are also part of the apparatus of mobilization (Prandstraller, 2010).

In some instances however, these theories overlap. Someone who has been convinced to vote Democratic by a series of advertisements may voluntarily leave his or her Republican neighborhood to be among politically like-minded people, in which case there would be an overlap between mobilization, uses and gratifications, and civic participations theories. One way of focusing the discussion is to take up Rogers' (1995) model of information dissemination, which establishes a natural boundary for the role of mobilization theory. Rogers, who is the theorist most closely associated with what is known as diffusion of innovations theory, argued that ideas are adopted in five sequential stages: (1) Knowledge, (2) persuasion, (3) decision, (4) implementation, and (5) conformation. Mobilization theory fits neatly into the second category, that of persuasion. It is certainly intended to induce decisions, implementation, and confirmation, but at those stages mobilization theory gives way to other theories that are superior at explaining what people do when they have made up their minds. Mobilization theory focuses on how outside agents try to make up people's minds in the first place. A seminal work on this topic is Rosenstone and Hansen's (2002) *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*, which is based on a version of bounded rationality that is indebted to Smith's (1801) methodological individualism. Rosenstone and Hansen argued

that the best metaphor to explain voting was that of stimulation by elites (p. 8). True, it is the individual who votes, but only as the end result of a dance with various interests (including media and political interests) that prime the pump for participation. It is for this reason that mobilization theory represents an approach that is further to the right, in Figure 1, of uses and gratifications theory. While uses and gratifications theory accords more power of choice to the individual, mobilization theory as articulated by Rosenstone and Hansen (2002) wish to portray individual choice as emerging from a web of influence.

Mobilization theorists tend to focus on the impact of media messages on consumer psychology (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2007). Because mobilization theorists' interests and theoretical frames overlap so closely with theorists who emphasize individual psychology as a predictor of voting, discussing them together is appropriate. In this category of theory, some scholars argue that the influence is equally divided; in other words, that individuals (voters) and message generators (television stations, advertising agencies, etc.) exercise mutual influence over each other (Hutchings, 2003) to create a single and communally accountable system. Others, while accepting the general existence of such a reciprocal system, argue that the media has more power to generate opinion and behavior than the individual has power to shape the direction of the media (Hill, 2003). Neuman (2007) took an opposite tack, arguing that political emotion was more in the control of the recipient of the message, but that how such emotion could be translated into action was vulnerable to manipulation.

Sharan (2002) argued that one of the core components of mobilization theory is the concept of conditioning. The use of certain stimuli, which can be administered by the kinds of elites discussed by Rosenstone and Hansen (2002), is intended to bring about positive responses in the agent. For example, an individual watching so-called attack ads on television might see a political in a split-frame with Osama bin Laden, with the hope of the advertiser being to get the viewer to associate disgust with Osama bin Laden with disgust for the politician portrayed next to him. However, mobilization theory also has a cognitive component (Southakker, 1961). In the cognitive version of this theory, the agent is rationally appealed to by messages. Sharan and other scholars have documented a split between these two approaches, with political mobilization in particularly leaning away from cognitive appeals and more towards the sensationalistic, stimulus-response pattern of advertising.

There are now more inclusive and sophisticated ways of thinking about consumer behavior and mobilization. For example, Foxall's (1999) behavioral perspective model was an attempt to capture the insights of both doctrinaire behaviorism and doctrinaire cognitivism. Foxall (1999) did not part ways with behaviorism and in fact called his theory the behavioral perspective model (BPM). However, BPM acknowledged that behavior itself has a rational and voluntary component in addition to the effects of classic conditioning. Foxall, Maddock, and Leek (2000) preferred to describe decisional behavior in terms of a larger context that included emotions, cognitions, and responses to stimuli.

Some theorists have resisted this line of thinking. Morrison, Rimmington, and Williams (1998) argued that "Post-modernist consumers will often have multiple, even contradictory, projects to which they are marginally and momentarily connected" (p. 174). Kotler (1999), while not embracing this radical claim, still wrote that while core values are not easily changed, secondary values can be. The implication is that mobilization is the key variable to consider when trying to model the behavior of the individual voter. What different forms of mobilization theory share in common is a vision of an individual agency that is complicated by outside influence. From this theoretical ground, it is a short jump to social or civic agency, which consists of theories that place the collective, rather than the individual, at the conceptual heart of the decision-making process.

Civic Agency Theory

Although there are many variations of civic agency theory, there is not necessarily enough of a theory gap between them to justify separating sections to discuss separate theories. The main difference between such theories lies not in their theoretical apparatus, but rather in their subjects of inquiry. For example, some theories focus on the determinative and agentic role of physical neighborhoods, whereas other theories focus on more abstract collectives, such as religious groups. Variations on these theories will be considered in this section.

In some ways, civic agency theory overlaps with purely sociocultural explanations of voting behavior. Both of these bodies of theory appeal to what some theorists call demotic explanations. The *deme* is, in ancient Greek, a word root that refers

to a class of people. For years, evolutionary biologists and other life scientists have argued that much human behavior thought to be individualistic is actually demotic (Dunbar, Barrett, & Lycett, 2005). For example, an extremely altruistic person might consider himself or herself to be acting out of purely individual principles of charity, but such actions also have a demotic value in that they increase the group fitness of the charity-giver's deme. There is therefore a dual significance to human action, an individual and a demotic significance (Okasha, 2009).

Civic agency theory, broadly construed, holds that political behavior is demotic. However, the difference between civic participation theory and the kinds of sociocultural theory examined earlier involves the extent to which the deme chooses. Sociocultural theorists broadly influenced by Marxism, as well as sociobiologists and other determinists, do believe that political behavior takes place in groups, but do not vest these groups with much power of choice. Classic civic participation theorists, such as Putnam (2001a), are still methodological individualists and non-determinists in the neoclassical mold, but they recognize a transfer of agency from the individual to the deme. Putnam (2001b), for example, suggested that civic groupings—which could be as simple as a two-person household or as complex as millions of co-inhabitants of a city—seem to exhibit a kind of agency that is distinct from, even though it is built out of, individual agency.

In democratic societies, civic participation is held to be voluntary, whereas in authoritarian societies—following the model in Plato's (1908) *Republic*—the root of civic participation is non-voluntary assignment to certain spheres of communal life. In

recent years, the debut of the Internet has shifted the terms of this debate, as political scientists have acknowledged the Internet's ability to span previously daunting distances between people. To some extent, the Internet has served as a flattener of civic differences, allowing people to voluntarily band together in virtual communities for purposes of political behavior (Gainous & Wager, 2011). This kind of use of the Internet was prominently on display in the run-up to the 2008 election, during which Barack Obama's campaign employed the Internet as a so-called 'netroots' of activists and well-wishers (Liu, 2010).

The phenomenon of civic democratic participation clearly exists. However, what is less clear is how to model the behavior of civic groupings. Recent work suggests that a civic grouping builds opinion consensus as a means of giving group members incentives to behave in a particular way. For example, Golub and Jackson (2010) argued that, in a generic decision-making model, "agents…naively update beliefs by repeatedly taking weighted averages of their neighbors' opinions" (p. 112). The individual embedded in a civic context is constantly interacting with that group. As Golub and Jackson (2010) suggested, the individual takes the group's opinion temperature, and then becomes more likely to conform to the group on the basis of social cognition and social desirability.

Social cognition is a powerful theory, and one that has often been employed to understand voting behavior. At its heart, social cognition theory is simply the claim that people learn by watching others (Bandura, 1997). Both simple and complex forms of behavior emerge and are reinforced through example. Thus, people are more likely to take on the beliefs and behaviors of those they have grown up around, in particular family

and friends. In political terms, there is a well-documented trend of families voting for a single ticket, and sociologists have also revealed that religious preference and many other forms of behavior track closely with group affiliation (Bandura, 1986). Social cognition is the theory that explains this observed phenomenon.

Social cognition explains some of the agentic aspects of civic participation, as the theory provides a model of how people learn political behavior in groups, and then how people keep their political behavior updated by taking continuous stock of the group, as Golub and Jackson (2010) argued. However, social cognition does not explain why people would want to immerse themselves in the group in the first place. Social desirability theory is a sociological theory that fills this explanatory gap. Social desirability holds (Giddens, 1987) that people obtain significant pleasure from, and save themselves from distress by, conforming to their immediate group (such family, neighborhood, workplace, and place of worship). Thus, the overlap between civic participation theory and uses and gratifications theory becomes clearer. Individuals obtain gratifications from the group, which serves as reciprocal reinforcement for group behavior, and in this sense there is a constant and mutual process of conforming adjustment between the individual and the group (Scheff, 1994). The group, meanwhile, becomes a self-sustaining institution that offers rewards for entry and disincentives for dissent, further cementing the loyalty of individual adherents.

The theory of partisanship, in the American context, is at heart the claim that dominant parties create an electorate that is both polarized and ‘big tent’ in nature (Bogaards & Boucek, 2010; Caplan, 2007; Fiorina, 1999). Since there are two major

parties of roughly equal strength, there are also two polarized electorates, each of which has begun to code the other as deviant (Andersen & Taylor, 2005). In this process, partisanship has to some extent succeeded in turning political opponents into what Cohen (2002) called folk devils. Scholars have empirically tracked increasing polarization beginning in the early 1990s (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996; Evans, 2003).

Moreover, since there are only two viable party choices, each party has to accommodate fellow travelers who might not be in the same party if not for the perceived necessity to aggregate their votes and achieve political efficacy. In this way, as Munger (2010) argued, American electoral democracy harbors a tension between the expression of ideology in the form of party membership and the suppression of ideology demanded by joining a party alongside people of essentially different leanings, such as a genuine socialist alongside a centrist in the Democratic Party. Outside the American context, partisanship may retain a sense of group survival (Gust, 2008), whereas in America the fate of no social group is directly tied to party supremacy.

Religious identity has been held to be a determinant of voting in recent decades in particular, given the association of the Republican Party with conservative Christian values (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). Borgida, Federico, and Sullivan (2009) argued that religious identity is part of the individual's political psychology and cannot be excluded from analysis in any study of the motivation of voting. Brennan and Lomasky (2008) also argued that religious emotions, cognitions, and heuristics informed political behavior, especially when one party's politicians were more able to co-opt religious identity into part of an alluring form of self-presentation (King & Leigh, 2009).

Some theorists believe that patterns in American voting can be understood as part of a global shift in voting dynamics away from what class-based to culture-based values. For example, a study conducted by Achterberg and Houtman (2006) revealed that, in the Netherlands, voting is not determined more by cultural values than by class interests, so that cultural conservatism and cultural liberalism are the surest predictors of voting. Achterberg and Houtman conducted a meta-review of literature revealing that the same pattern obtains in many other Western democracies, including the United States, and concluded that the data point to a "cultural explanation" (p. 75) for voting. Such a cultural explanation would subsume religious values and social values into a single construct.

There may be some overlap between Achterberg and Houtman's (2006) cultural explanation of voting and Darmofal's (2010) self-efficacy theory . Damofal (2010) conducted a study revealing that people who feel their vote is more decisive are more likely to vote; it is also the case, as Achterberg and Houtman (2006) discovered, that self-efficacious voters are often the ones with the most cultural investment in the outcome of a decision. In other words, the people who overestimate the prospects that an election will determine the cultural tone of their society are also the most likely to vote. While these new theories of voting have evidence to support them, they do not in themselves resolve the question of whether the decision to vote is based on individual and agency versus determination.

The common factor in various forms of civic theory is the insistence on the concept of free and goal-driven decision-making, but the transference of the center of

decision-making power from the individual to the deme. Whether the deme is represented by the neighborhood, family, or religion, it—rather than the individual—becomes what social agency theory considers the prime mover in decision-making.

Historical Bodies of Theory

Historically-oriented theories of voting behavior have been, since Marx (1972), radical theories that do not accept voting as the product of actual and legitimate want-maximization, but rather as the dependent variable of some pre-existing fact of economic or social organization. The classical formulation of this theory lies in Marx's concept of false consciousness, which after Marx's death became one of the pillars of Marxist theories of political behavior and participation in democracies.

The theory of false consciousness suggests that, when anyone but a bourgeois or someone else with an innate interest in the continuity of a capitalist state votes, they are under an illusion that they are acting in their own interest. According to Marx (1972), the interest of the vast majority of society lay in abolishing the existing capitalist order, and, for workers, peasants, and other socially and economically disenfranchised people, participation in this order was contrary to their true wants and needs. In this way, Marxism—and subsequent theories that have prioritized the importance of sociocultural factors as determining voting behavior—clashes directly with what Lukes (1974) called liberalism (best typified by the methodological individualism of Smith, 1801) and reformism.

Abrams (2010) argued that Marx's (1972) concept of false consciousness was the wrong way in which to approach voting behavior in capitalist democracies. While

Abrams adopted the same general theoretical frame, the argument was that income position is too limited a lens through which to examine voting behavior. Abrams suggested that a theory of voter turnout rooted in the voter's overall position in society was a better predictor of voting, but did not ground this claim in quantitative analysis. Other theorists embedded in the sociocultural tradition argue that voting itself is a sham. Saiegh (2011) argued that genuine rule is achieved by statue and influence-peddling, a claim that has also been made by Poundstone (2008). Some theorists point to low American election turnout (Hill, 2006; Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2012) as evidence that many citizens have reached the same conclusion.

A group of theorists in the sociocultural school de-emphasizes group economic interests, which were of such concern to Marx (1972), in favor of more cultural explanations. Dalton and Anderson (2011) argued that electoral choices are expressions of historical forces as they act upon the individual. Some theorists in sympathy with Marxist explanations have pointed out that false consciousness can exist in the field of cultural as well as economic and political behavior (Frank, 2004). In the cultural explanations school, Putnam (2001a, 2001b) and Campbell (2006) have been influential in arguing that, rather than determined per se, voter behavior is merely shaped by culture and community, a softer claim that is difficult to reject and that separates some of Marx's (1972) explanatory power from its ideological trappings.

Summary of Theories

Attempting to answer the question of why people vote is fraught with immense difficulties, because possible answers to this question invoke decision theory, rationality,

free will, determinism, emotions, cognitions, the environment, and social and economic facts. In the welter of all of these variables, it is just as unlikely that a final theory of voting will emerge as a final theory of human behavior will emerge. At best, scholars can illuminate different components of the question, and empirical models can be created to explain some of the variance in a statistical model with voting as the dependent variable. The preceding sections of the literature review surveyed various scholarly approaches that can point the way to a better, but not final or complete, theory of voting behavior that is tested by the methods utilized in chapter three.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relative contributions made to voting in U.S. Presidential elections by personal, social, and sociocultural agency. The contributions of these factors were specifically explored using information available through the publicly available American National Election Study (ANES) dataset. A quantitative, correlative research design drawing on panel data was chosen to determine the magnitude of these contributions. A quantitative methodology was appropriate for the research questions of the study because it sought to measure the contributions of specific independent variables pertaining to agency to the dependent variable of voting.

The hallmark of the quantitative methodology is a focus on measuring the impact of one or more independent variables on one or more dependent variables (Creswell, 2009). Correlative research is research conducted based on existing data. Sincet would be impractical to scale voting decisions or agency in laboratory conditions, the correlative approach is the proper means of collecting data to analyze the research questions of the study. Thus, only quantitative and correlative methods can effectively support the analysis of data from the thousands of subjects who need to be sampled in any statistically representative analysis of the U.S. electorate. The remainder of the chapter discusses and defends the specific components of research design associated with this approach.

Research Design and Approach

Regression analysis was applied to ANES presidential election voting data in order to examine the research question. Regression is a statistical procedure that can measure the relative contribution of different independent variables to a particular dependent variable. The independent variables in this study were personal, social, and sociocultural agency, and the dependent variable was respondents' voting. Logistic regression was an appropriate statistical approach because it is designed to deal with dependent variables that are dichotomous (Creswell, 2009). Since the dependent variable in this study has only two possible values (voting or not voting), logistic regression was applied as the main statistical technique.

Setting and Sample

This study exclusively used secondary ANES data. This panel dataset was chosen for this analysis because it is the largest dataset on American voters' behaviors and preferences. ANES is an ongoing panel study that began in 1948 for the purpose of tracking American voters' opinions and characteristics. In 2008, ANES collected two sets of data: A September 2 to November 3 pre-election window, and a November 5 to December 30 post-election window (ANES, 2008). The data in this study were drawn from the ANES pre-election window for 2008.

Instrumentation and Materials

The purpose of the study was to examine the relative contribution of the independent variables of personal, social, and sociocultural agency to the dependent variable of voting. The survey instrument used in this study, the ANES questionnaire,

includes a variety of questions designed to measure the variables needed to answer the research question. The dependent variable was measured by a single question that asked ANES respondents if they intended to vote in the upcoming election. For purposes of this study, only those respondents who answered yes or no to this question were included in the sample; those who indicated that they did not know or who did not answer the question were excluded.

Three classes of independent variables were used in this study: Personal, social, and sociocultural agency. Personal agency was measured using variables: (a) How much people can affect government, (b) how important respondent thinks that people do what authorities tell them, (c) is respondent optimistic or pessimistic about nation future, and (d) respondent interest in information about government and politics. These four variables were chosen because they express generic, non-partisan individual attitudes about governance that can be used as proxies for the individual's sense of political engagement. Social agency was measured using the degree of respondent's family's interest in politics. This variable was the only identified ANES variable that asked respondents to evaluate the strength of their social circle's commitment to political life, and was therefore the only appropriate variable for capturing social agency in this data set. Socoiocultural agency was measured through the following variables: (a) household income, (b) home ownership, and (c) education. Each of these variables has been shown to motivate the decision to vote (Caplan, 2007).

Table 1

ANES Study Variables

Variable	Type	Question Topic
Personal Agency	Independent	Belief that individuals have a day in government Degree of interest in the elections Degree of interest in public affairs
Social Agency	Independent	Mother's party Father's party
Sociocultural Agency	Independent	Respondent income Respondent home ownership Respondent education
Demographics	Intermediate	Race, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, major party affiliation
Voting	Dependent	Voting in Presidential election

The personal agency variables, social agency variables, and voting variable were all scored on a Likert scale measuring subjects' attitudes. For purposes of analysis, only substantive responses to these questions were considered; 'don't know' or blank responses were not considered. This exclusion is supported by DeBell (2013) in his paper on the decoding of the ANES. The sociocultural agency variables were measured continuously (for income) and categorically (for home ownership and education). The demographic variables contained categories from census data; the only special consideration is that major party affiliation includes people who reported being Democratic or Republican, while not being registered as such. For purposes of the analysis, all those who lean toward a party were counted as belonging to that party.

Data Collection and Analysis

ANES work is performed by researchers at Stanford University and the University of Michigan who were working with a National Science Foundation (NSF)

grant. The inclusion criteria for the 2008 ANES data collection were being a U.S. citizen born on or before November 4, 1990, having a landline telephone, and living in a U.S. household (ANES, 2008). The ramifications of this exclusion is that people who fit the demographic of not having a landline are not represented in the study. The method of sampling was stratified list-assisted random-digit-dialing (RDD) of landline telephones. The ANES researchers began by using automated telephone lists to isolate 51,386 randomly-chosen residential telephone numbers, although it was not reported by the performers of the ANES survey whether the randomness was achieved through computer algorithm or manual procedures (ANES, 2008).

The number of usable cases from the ANES dataset that were used in this study was over 28,000. Usable cases were those where there was not a "don't know or "blank space and where all items were responded to by respondents. This sample was chosen because it consists of all the respondents to the 1952-2008 versions of ANES who reported a voting outcome. A power analysis was performed and the results are given in chapter four, for the purposes of quantifying the generalizability of the sample. ANES's stratification methods and the size of its sample yielded a high level of generalizability.

To address the research question of this study, several variables were chosen from the ANES dataset. The data were analyzed by means of logistic regression of the dichotomous variable of voting, with logistic regression providing an odds ratio as the measure of an IV's predictive power over voting. The research question of the study was as follows: How do the factors of personal, social, and sociocultural agency influence American voters' stated voting in U.S. Presidential elections?

$H_1$0: There is no significant relationship between age and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_1A: There is a significant relationship between age and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_2$0: There is no significant relationship between gender and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_2A: There is a significant relationship between gender and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_3$0: There is no significant relationship between race and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_3A: There is a significant relationship between race and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_4$0: There is no significant relationship between education and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_4A: There is a significant relationship between education and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_5$0: There is no significant relationship between family income and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_5A: There is a significant relationship between family income and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_6$0: There is no significant relationship between religion and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_6A: There is a significant relationship between religion and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_70: There is no significant relationship between home ownership and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_7A: There is a significant relationship between home ownership and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_80: There is no significant relationship between interest in the elections and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_8A: There is a significant relationship between interest in the elections and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_90: There is no significant relationship between interest in public affairs and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

H_9A: There is a significant relationship between interest in public affairs and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_{10}0$: There is no significant relationship between a belief that one has any say in what government does and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

$H_{10}A$: There is a significant relationship between a belief that one has any say in what government does and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

For purposes of hypothesis testing, the independent variables were measured in ANES as follows. The personal agency variables of (a) How much people can affect government; (b) how important respondent thinks that people do what authorities tell them; (c) is respondent optimistic or pessimistic about nation future; and (d) respondent

interest in information about government and politics were all measured through a 3-point Likert scale, as was the variable of respondent's family's interest in politics. Household income was measured through a 6-point Likert scale corresponding to income levels. Home ownership was a yes/no dichotomous variable, and education was a categorical variable reflecting respondents' degree of schooling. Since all of these variables were quantified in the ANES dataset, they were all incorporated into a logistic regression model conducted in SPSS ™. The results of this regression can further be personalized into different demographic categories, which in this study were (a) people of different ethnicities (with the major categories being African-American, White, Hispanic, and Asian); (b) men versus women; (c) Democrats versus Republicans; (d) Christians versus non-Christians, (e) people of different sociocultural categories, and (e) the 35-or-older population (as of the survey administration date) versus the under-35 population, which were included in order to determine how common markers of individual and group identity (Kiewiet & Lewis-Beck, 2011) might mitigate the relationship between agency and voting. The results of the logistic regression (to be considered significant at a level of $p < .05$) will be disclosed and discussed in the next chapter of this study.

There are many ways to operationalize the concepts of personal, social, and sociocultural agency. This study operationalized each of these concepts in the manner summarized in Table 1 above. Of particular interest was the role of these variables in predicting voter turnout. The study hypothesized that personal, social, and sociocultural variables—into which the variables listed in Table 1 can be sorted—will indeed serve as

predictors of voter turnout, although it not clear which form of agency will be more predictive than any other.

Threats to Validity

After more closely analyzing the tens of thousands of phone numbers randomly selected in the initial samples, non-working, business, and fax numbers were screened out, and only numbers with a matching listed residential address were retained by ANES researchers (ANES, 2008). These households were then sent a letter, with $2 included, explaining the study and requesting the recruited participants to consent to an initial interview on the telephone and follow-up monthly surveys (ANES, 2008). Another potential threat was raised by the procedure of only sampling homes with landlines, given that many younger people and technology aficionados no longer have landlines, preferring cell phone and Internet telephony. ANES acknowledged this possible threat to validity and took one measure against it by treating voice-over Internet protocol (VOIP) numbers as landlines.

Ethical Procedures

The study was conducted based on publicly available data for which the original data collectors had IRB approval from their affiliated universities, as well as from the government of the United States (ANES, 2008). As such, no ethical procedures or concerns were associated with the data, other than the general ethical directives of analyzing data honestly and disseminating results. Both of these directives were followed in this study; all data were double-checked for accuracy and otherwise handled in accordance with Walden University IRB # 04-05-13-0101627.

Summary and Transition

A quantitative, correlative approach based in logistic regression was used to determine the extent to which factors of personal, social, and sociocultural agency influenced American voters' stated voting in U.S. Presidential elections. All data were drawn from the ANES (2008) dataset, whose high number (> 28,000) of subjects, statistically-representative sampling, and robust study design made it an appropriate source for information about both agency variables and voting in U.S. Presidential elections. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed in chapter four.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore how voting emerges from a combination of personal, social, and sociocultural agency as measured in the ANES dataset of the American electorate. The research question was: How do the factors of personal, social, and sociocultural agency influence American voters' stated voting in U.S. Presidential elections? Twelve null hypotheses were associated with this research question, with each null hypothesis utilizing the dependent variable of voting in U.S. national Presidential elections and separately tracking one of the independent variables: age, gender, race, education, family income, religion, home ownership, father's party, mother's party, interest in the elections, interest in public affairs, and believing that one had any say in what the government does.

Data Collection

Data were collected consistent with Walden IRB # 04-05-13-0101627. The ANES dataset was accessed online from October 11, 2013 to February 1, 2014 in order to obtain the data for analysis. During the process of data collection and analysis, the researcher discovered that data for some of the variables existed only in certain years of the ANES survey. The implications of this were that it was not possible to test all variables in both models In order to fully test the hypotheses, the ANES Time Series Cumulative Data File was accessed. The ANES Time Series Cumulative Data File contained data from 1948 to 2008 in a single SPSS file. These data were used to create two models, one from 1952 to 1988 and another from 1952 to 2008, in order to ensure that the appropriate

variables were represented. These procedures, while deviating from the initially outlined research plan, did not threaten the quality of the analysis, for reasons that will be discussed at greater length below.

I originally selected the 2008 ANES dataset on the assumptions that (a) all of the variables of interest were present in the 2008 data and (b) previous years of the ANES dataset did not employ the same variables. I subsequently discovered that two of the variables in my initial study design were not present in the 2008 data, but that each of the other variables required by this design existed in the ANES dataset going back to 1952, I decided to split the analysis into two models, one from which 2008 was excluded because of the absence of mother and father party identification variables. I further decided to take advantage of the cross-variable comparability in the extended data set by adding several more ANES years to the study.

Descriptive Statistics

The ANES dataset used for analysis included roughly 28,000 individual records of electorally eligible Americans surveyed from 1952 to 2008. Table 2 summarizes the independent, dependent and covariates under investigation in this study. None of the variables in the study were continuous (a variable, such as weight, that can be in theory be assigned any value between its minimum and maximum value [Nikoletseas, 2010]). Each variable was either categorical and could be sorted into categories that are not susceptible to any form of ordering or other form of numeric relationship with each other, or ordinal and had a clear order (Nikoletseas, 2010)). For this reason, standard descriptions of central tendency (such as mean and standard deviation) could not be

validly calculated for the demographic variables. For purposes of the inferential statistics utilized in this study, the inability to calculate measures of central tendency for demographic variables has no practical implication, as the statistics were chosen on the basis of the types of data available.

Table 2

Values and Categories of Variables

Variable	Categories
Age	1 = 17-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 45-54, 5 = 55-64, 6 = 65-74, 7 = 75+
Gender	0 = Male, 1 = Female
Race	0 = White, 1 = Non-White
Education	1 = Grade school or less, 2 = High school, 3 = Some college, 4 = College or postgraduate
Family income	1 = 0^{th} to 16^{th} percentile, 2 = 17^{th} to 33^{rd} percentile; 3 = 34^{th} to 67^{th} percentile, 4 = 68^{th} to 95^{th} percentile, 5 = 96^{th} to 100^{th} percentile
Religion	1 = Protestant, 2 = Catholic, 3 = Jewish, 4 = Other and non
Home ownership	0 = Does not own, 1 = Owns
Father's party	0 = Major party, 1 = Independent
Mother's party	0 = Major party, 1 = Independent
Interest in the elections	1 = Not much interested, 2 = Somewhat interested, 3 = Very much interested
Interest in public affairs	1 = Hardly at all, 2 = Only now and then, 3 = Some of the time, 4 = Most of the time
Belief about say in government	0 = Disagree, 1 = Agree
Voting	0 = Did not vote, 1 = Voted

Tables 3 and 4 report the percentage-based respective sizes of the measured categories from all of the measures in the two models described below.

Table 3

Frequency Table of Variables Used in Analysis Model 1 (1952-1988)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Age	1 = 17-24,	10.16%
	2 = 25-34,	22.69%
	3 = 35-44,	20.39%
	4 = 45-54,	16.36%
	5 = 55-64,	14.06%
	6 = 65-74,	10.52%
	7 = 75+	5.82%
Gender	0 = Male,	43.77%
	1 = Female	56.23%
Race	0 = White,	85.53%
	1 = Non-White	14.47%
Education	1 = Grade school or less,	21.13%
	2 = High school,	49.16%
	3 = Some college,	16.46%
	4 = College or postgraduate	13.26%
Family Income	1 = 0^{th} to 16^{th} percentile,	17.15%
	2 = 17^{th} to 33^{rd} percentile;	16.87%
	3 = 34^{th} to 67^{th} percentile,	31.90%
	4 = 68^{th} to 95^{th} percentile,	28.82%
	5 = 96^{th} to 100^{th} percentile	5.26%
Religion	1 = Protestant	68.01%
	2 = Catholic	23.15%
	3 = Jewish,	2.63%
	4 = Other and non	6.20%

Table 4

Frequency Table of Variables Used in Analysis Model 2 (1952-2008)

Variable	Category	Frequency
Age	1 = 17-24	9.69%
	2 = 25-34	21.63%
	3 = 35-44	20.64%
	4 = 45-54	16.90%
	5 = 55-64	14.05%
	6 = 65-74	10.51%
	7 = 75+	6.59%
Gender	0 = Male,	44.14%
	1 = Female	55.86%
Race	0 = White	79.98%
	1 = Non-White	20.02%
Education	1 = Grade school or less	15.68%
	2 = High school	46.35%
	3 = Some college	20.45%
	4 = College or postgraduate	17.52%
Family Income	1 = 0^{th} to 16^{th} percentile	17.04%
	2 = 17^{th} to 33^{rd} percentile	17.73%
	3 = 34^{th} to 67^{th} percentile	32.36%
	4 = 68^{th} to 95^{th} percentile	27.44%
	5 = 96^{th} to 100^{th} percentile	5.43%
Religion	1 = Protestant	64.60%
	2 = Catholic	23.50%
	3 = Jewish	2.38%
	4 = Other and none	9.52%

The majority (53%) of participants were between 18 and 44. The respondents were also primarily (55.7%) male. For the purposes of this study, the ANES participants were segmented into two racial categories, white (79.3% of participants) and non-white (19.9% of participants), with the remaining 0.8% of participants not having indicated their race. In terms of religion, the sample included 63.8% Protestants, 23.2% Catholics, 2.4% Jews, and 9.4% who indicated none or other. In terms of education, 15.5% of

respondents had an education of grade school or less, 45.9% had a high school diploma, 20.2% had some college without a degree, and 17.3% had a college degree or postgraduate degree. Income was measured in percentiles; 29.8% of the sample was included in the 34th to 67th income percentile, with another 25.3% in the 68th to 95th percentile.

The frequencies are very similar in Model 4 as well although there are a few areas where large differences emerge. One is in race. There are about 5% more non-White voters in Table 4 than in Table 3. This may reflect the fact that there were socio-cultural reasons for non-White people to not vote until the late 1950's-early 1960 with the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 when there were stronger laws put in place to protect non-White voters (Doar, 1997). Education could be reflected upon by there being greater availability for loans for education, something gained from policy designed in the 1960s (Hansen, 1983). The role of these demographic factors in predicting likelihood of voting is discussed later in this chapter.

Creation of Models

Since the independent variables of mother and party identification were not collected after the 1988 election, two separate models have been created: (1) a model in which every independent variable found in the hypotheses has been included and the years under consideration are 1952 to 1988 and (2) a model from which the independent variables of mother and father party identification have been excluded and the years under consideration are 1952 to 2008. Because there are two models, special note will be made of whether the null hypotheses in the study can fail to be rejected relative to each of

the models. In addition, statistical assumptions will be tested separately for each of the models.

Statistical Assumptions

One of the main assumptions of logistic regression is that the chosen predictors are meaningful, with meaningfulness measured by the cumulative *p* value of the independent variables (McPherson, 2001). In this study, both model 1 and model 2 had *p* values < .001, satisfying the criterion of meaningful predictors. Another important assumption of logistic regression is that there is goodness of fit, as measured by R^2 or pseudo-R^2, in the model (McPherson, 2001). In both models 1 and 2, the pseudo R^2 was over .12, which indicates that neither model had a high level of goodness of fit. However, because the focus of the study was on comparing the predictive power of chosen agency-based independent variables to each other rather than building a voting prediction model with high goodness of fit, the relatively low goodness of fit did not compromise the quality of the study.

Another important logistic regression assumption is that there is no multicollinearity, that is, that two or more independent variables in the model are not predicted by some combination of other independent variables (McPherson, 2001). In this study, the results of multicollinearity testing are presented in Table 5 below. In general, multicollinearity appears when two or more independent variables are highly correlated; including multicollinear variables results in redundancy and a loss of model quality (McPherson, 2011). Multicollinearity is typically tested through variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance. VIF measures the extent to which the variance of regression

coefficients increase as a result of multicollinearity. Tolerance is calculated as the reciprocal of VIF.

SPSS has been designed to test multicollinearity only in linear regression; however, the SPSS help file indicates that this kind of multicollinearity testing applies to logistic regression as well. Multicollinearity was tested through both tolerance and VIF statistics. In keeping with general recommendations about multicollinearity testing, VIF figures above 10 were held to indicate multicollinearity (McPherson, 2001), while tolerance figures under .100 were also held to indicate multicollinearity (McPherson, 2001). By these commonly defined standards, none of the variables in either model 1 or model were multicollinear. None of the observed VIF values in either model rose above 2, while none of the tolerance values in either model were below .5. Thus, based on the existing criteria (McPherson, 2001), none of the variables in the study were multicollinear. The tolerance and VIF figures presented in Table 5 below indicate that both models passed the general assumptions of multicollinearity in logistic regression.

Table 5

Multicollinearity Diagnostics, Models 1 and 2

Variable	Model 1 Tolerance	Model 1 VIF	Model 2 Tolerance	Model 2 VIF
Age	.809	1.236	.812	1.231
Gender	.946	1.057	.945	1.058
Race	.941	1.063	.939	1.065
Education	.740	1.352	.755	1.324
Family income	.700	1.429	.693	1.444
Religion	.954	1.048	.963	1.039
Home ownership	.823	1.216	.810	1.235
Father's party	.540	1.852	OMITTED	OMITTED
Mother's party	.544	1.837	OMITTED	OMITTED
Interest in the elections	.750	1.333	.738	1.355
Interest in public affairs	.712	1.405	.700	1.429
Belief about say in government	.901	1.110	.912	1.096

Results

The results were obtained by performing logistic regression, which SPSS refers to as binary logistic regression. Logistic regression was used because the outcome variable had only two conceptually independent states (voted versus did not vote) that could easily be represented as odds of voting. Diagnostics and assumption testing for logistic regression have already been presented. The summarized results appear in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Summary of Models

Variable	Model 1 (1952-1988)	Model 2 (1952-2008)
Age group	.181*** (.018)	.220*** (.013)
Gender	.051 (.055)	.088** (.040)
Race	-.032 (.079)	-.008 (.050)
Education	.327*** (.035)	.487*** (.025)
Family income	.205*** (.028)	.213*** (.020)
Religion	.024 (.034)	.016 (.021)
Home ownership	.389*** (.062)	.471*** (.044)
Father's party	-.016 (.102)	Omitted
Mother's party	-.027 (.096)	Omitted
Interest in the elections	.496*** (.041)	.553*** (.030)
Interest in public affairs	.143*** (.056)	.199*** (.022)
Belief about say in government	.359*** (.163)	.355*** (.040)

Note. Beta coefficient values of binary logistic regression, standard error in parentheses. *** = significant at < .001; ** = significant at .05.

Hypothesis Testing

H_10: There is no significant relationship between age and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The first null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model. In model 1, each unit change in age category was associated with an 18.1% greater likelihood of voting ($p < .001$); in model 2, each unit change in age category was associated with a 22% greater likelihood of voting ($p < .001$). As predicted by Putnam (2001a, 2001b) increasing age is associated with increasing participation in political and civic institutions. That finding was borne out in both models of this study.

H_20: There is no significant relationship between gender and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The second null hypothesis could not be rejected in model 1 and could not be accepted in model 2. In model 2, women were 8.8% more likely to vote ($p < .05$). The divergence in findings between models can be attributed to the fact that model 2 encompasses data from later years, in which women were more likely to vote. Welch (1977) pointed out that female American voters voted more frequently than men beginning in the 1970s, reversing the pre-1970s trend of lower female exercise of the franchise. From the 1970s to 2012, women have been observed to participate in American elections at approximately the same rate as men (Emmenegger & Manow, 2014). These existing empirical findings were borne out in model 2.

The implications of this point will be revisited in chapter five's recommendations for practice section. There is, however, literature suggesting that women are, and have been, more likely to vote than men. Because women had to fight for enfranchisement, they were historically more eager to exercise the right to vote (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002). Even after women were no longer influenced by the historical memory of enfranchisement, women's deep commitment to civic institutions and communal stability have been cited as reasons for women's superior participation at the ballot booth (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002).

H_30: There is no significant relationship between race and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The third null hypothesis could not be rejected in either model 1 or model 2, because the *p* value associated with the variable of race in both of these models was above .05. Previous analyses of voting patterns have not disclosed a significant

relationship between race and likelihood of voting (Simon et al., 2008). Simon et al. (2008) noted that, after the fall of Jim Crow and even in the face of contemporary efforts to make voting more difficult, African-Americans and other racial minorities have been adamant about exercising their franchise.

$H_4$0: There is no significant relationship between education and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The fourth null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, each unit change in education category was associated with a 32.7% greater likelihood of voting ($p < .001$). In model 2, each unit change in education category was associated with a 48.7% greater likelihood of voting ($p < .001$). As predicted in the literature (Poundstone, 2008; Scheff, 1994), more educated people were more likely to vote in either model. Poundstone found that Americans in the top 20% of income were nearly three times as likely to vote as Americans in the bottom 20% of income. This general trend of increasing voting frequency with increased education was affirmed in both model 1 and model 2.

$H_5$0: There is no significant relationship between family income and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The fifth null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, each unit change in family income percentile category was associated with a 20.5% greater likelihood of voting ($p < .001$). In model 2, each unit change in family income percentile category was associated with a 21.3% greater likelihood of voting ($p <$

.001). As predicted in the literature (Scheff, 1994), wealthier people were more likely to vote in either model.

H_60: There is no significant relationship between religion and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The sixth null hypothesis could not be rejected in either model 1 or model 2. Previous analyses of voting patterns have not disclosed a significant relationship between religion and likelihood of voting (Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

H_70: There is no significant relationship between home ownership and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The seventh null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, owning a home was associated with a 38.9% greater likelihood of voting ($p <$ .001). In model 2, owning a home was associated with a 47.1% greater likelihood of voting ($p <$ .001). As predicted in the literature (O'Sullivan, 2009), home-owners were more likely to vote in either model.

H_80: There is no significant relationship between father party identification and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The eighth null hypothesis was tested only in model 1, as the variables were not available after 1988. The null hypothesis could not be rejected in model 1. This variable, as well as the variable of mother's party identification, does not appear to have been included in previous studies of voting likelihood, so no meaningful links can be drawn between this finding and the work of previous scholars. However, there has been general support (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Putnam 2001a, 2001b) for the conclusion that

socialization, of which mother's and father's voting identification are proxy variables, conditions individual voting predilections and habits.

H_90: There is no significant relationship between mother party identification and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The ninth null hypothesis was tested only in model 1. The null hypothesis could not be rejected in model 1.

$H_{10}0$: There is no significant relationship between interest in the elections and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The tenth null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, every unit change in degree of interest in the elections was associated with a 49.6% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). In model 2, every unit change in degree of interest in the elections was associated with a 55.3% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). Hersh (2012) suggested that personal interest is the strongest predictor of voting, but did not quantify this claim.

$H_{11}0$: There is no significant relationship between interest in public affairs and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The eleventh null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, every unit change in degree of interest in public affairs was associated with a 14.3% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). In model 2, every unit change in degree of interest in public affairs was associated with a 19.9% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). Interest in public affairs, or civic-mindedness, has often been described as a determinant of political behavior such as voting (Putnam 2001a, 2001b), but the relationship between

such interest and voting behavior does not appear to have been quantified in previous studies.

$H_{12}0$: There is no significant relationship between a belief that one has any say in what government does and voting in U.S. Presidential elections.

The twelfth null hypothesis could not be accepted in either model 1 or model 2. In model 1, every unit change in belief about people's say in government was associated with a 35.9% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). In model 2, every unit change in degree of belief about people's say in government was associated with a 35.5% greater chance of voting ($p < .001$). There is a large body of literature suggesting that individual voters' belief in the inefficacy of their votes discourages voting (Hersh, 2012; Kiewiet & Lewis-Beck, 2011; Munger, 2010; Panagopoulos, 2010; Westen, 2008), but belief in voting efficacy does not appear to have been as widely studied, especially as a precursor of voting behavior.

Summary of Results

The purpose of the study was to study the factors of agency as predictors of likelihood of voting. Three main kinds of agency were considered as predictors: Personal agency, social agency, and sociocultural agency. Personal agency was measured through subject perceptions of the following variables: (a) Degree of interest in elections; (b) degree of interest in public affairs; and (c) belief in individual say over government. Social agency was measured through mother's and father's party identification. Socoiocultural agency was measured through the following variables: (a) household income, (b) home ownership, and (c) education. Based on the empirical results, all of the

components of sociocultural agency (as measured through education, income, and home ownership) and all of the components of personal agency (degree of interest in elections, degree of interest in public affairs, and belief that individuals have a say in government) were significant in both models. Neither of the social agency variables was significant in model 1, and social agency was omitted from model 2. When all three types of agencies are considered in one model of voting, only personal and sociocultural agency predict if someone is going to vote and measures of social agency were not significant.. The implications of the results of the study will be considered more carefully in chapter five.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore how voting emerges from a combination of personal, social, and sociocultural agency as measured in the ANES dataset of the American electorate. Regression analysis demonstrated that the variables associated with sociocultural agency and personal agency, but not social agency, were statistically powerful predictors of the likelihood of voting in presidential elections. This chapter relates the findings to past theories and empirical findings, discusses the limitations of the study, makes evidence-supported recommendations, and discusses the study's implications for positive social change.

In Model 1 the analysis of data was performed to 1988, however in Model 2 the analysis was performed to 2008. There is stronger significance in Model 2 than in Model 1. This finding indicates that in the 20 years between 1988 and 2008 that sociocultural and personal agency has gained in strength in order to influence a growth in the effect size. What this means is that there is an increasing amount of variance that sociocultural and personal agency are able to explain. This supports the idea that the voting population is becoming increasingly dependent on the sociocultural and personal agency factors.

Interpretation of the Findings

The theoretical debate over the nature of agency in voting behavior has continued for a long time. Although there is a consensus that there are many independent variables that predict voting (Sexton, 2011), existing quantifications of various types of agency in the same model are fragmented, with scholars studying one or a few variables rather than

variables that span all three categories of agency. However, not until relatively recently have the empirical means of testing these various theoretical positions have become available. In the United States, the ANES dataset represents a vast repository of voter data extending back to 1948 and encompassing hundreds of individual details about the voter.

The idea of voting as an expression of individual agency has been championed in the neoclassical approach to agency articulated by Smith (1801). Neoclassical theory suggests that the collective institution of democracy arises out of the voluntary and purposeful participation of millions of individual voters, just as the collective institution of the market arises out of the otherwise disconnected and small-scale buying and selling activities of innumerable individuals. There are other approaches to the role of agency in voting. Marx (1972) is closely associated with the idea that voting is not an expression of agency, but rather the function of structural forces—in particular, class struggle—that compel individuals to take certain kinds of actions. The Marxist theory of voting describes American and other forms of Western democracy as deluding voters into believing that they are making a free choice. Other political theorists (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Putnam 2001a, 2001b) have rejected the Marxist view of agency and also rejected the neoclassical / liberal version of personal agency, holding instead that voting is closer to an extension of collective (e.g., familial, communal, etc.) agency than to personal agency. Widespread support for the existence of personal agency was found in the models, even after controlling for gender, income, educational, religious, and racial distinctions. Personal agency has a significant impact on voting behavior. At the

foundation of this work, these personal agency findings were conceptually related to Smith's (1801) idea of individual agency as the driver of collective (i.e., economic, political, and social) behavior.

This study adds to the understanding of voting practices of individuals by looking at the voting behaviors of a larger group of voters in each election and measuring their voting practices in each period. Several previous studies have found that people who are interested in elections are more than twice as likely to vote than people who are not interested (Sanney, 2008; Westen, 2008). People who believe in the efficaciousness of their individual vote are also at least twice as likely to vote as people who do not believe in the efficaciousness of their vote (Hutchings, 2003; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2002). The applicability of these previous findings was, however, limited by a combination of small sample sizes, delimitation to one election, and use of dichotomous (e.g., interested / not interest) measures rather than ordinal or scale measures such as those used by ANES. By using the ANES dataset, this study was able to address many of the limitations of the previous studies. The models designed in this study measured how the factors measured have influenced voting over the past 50 years among a number of demographic areas.

This study produced several significant findings related to sociocultural agency. It found that, within the ANES population, a greater proportion of non-Whites voted in the time period between 1956 and 2008 than 1956 and 1988. This suggests that the voters' rights laws have had an effective influence on voting habits of individuals. It also found that voter education increased over time. This is something that could be tied to the government increasing the level of funding for education and supporting loans for

students in legislation passed in the 1960s. These results suggest that public policy may have been the main contributing factor to the growth of these demographic areas, as variables such as income and gender remained largely flat during the study period, with little change in proportions. This suggests that sociocultural agency relies on policy driving the changes needed for the voting bloc to grow.

These sociocultural agency findings align with numerous previous empirical findings. These earlier findings were generated using a theoretical foundation suggesting that individuals' emplacement within social categories helps to form their opinions and attitudes, forming voting behaviors (Borgida et al., 2009; Cwalina et al., 2008; Putnam, 2001a, 2001b). Poundstone (2008) calculated that Americans in the top 20% of income were nearly three times as likely to vote as Americans in the bottom 20% of income. Simon (2008) indicates that Whites and Non-Whites have exercised the franchise in a statistically identical manner from the 1970s onwards. Emmenegger and Manow (2014) noted that women vote more frequently than men because of a greater sense of social responsibility and emplacement. Putnam (2001a, 2001b) found that older Americans voted more frequently, typically because they are more concerned about protecting their spectrum of interests at the ballot box. Each of these earlier findings was affirmed by this dissertation study. These study results also confirm prior research on voting behavior using different statistical procedures and data models that takes into account a robust amount of demographic information.

The model tested in this study for 1956-2008 and 1956-1988 does not indicate that social agency will predict turnout, contrary to the propositions and findings of prior

research such as Putnam (2001a; 2001b). This suggests that other variables that can be implemented into the understanding of voter turnout. The use of other variables associated with society and social class could be used to understand voter turnout in future studies, however the contributions of Putnam (2001a) that suggest agency being present do not seem to be valid in this study.

Cumulatively, the results supported the interpretation that both personal agency and sociocultural agency are significant predictors of voting. This supports various theories and empirical findings of agency theory and furnishes useful guidance for policymakers insofar as an understanding of the factors that motivate voting decisions. These results also suggest that the American electorate genuinely believes that they are exercising agency and that their agency matters. While personal agency will influence a belief that they are voting based on their own beliefs, sociocultural agency also influences voting. In turn, this finding suggests that the neoclassical and liberal frames for understanding political behavior, combined with a healthy respect for the importance of sociocultural standing, remain highly relevant to American political life.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the study was that only a few questions in the ANES dataset were used to measure the concepts of personal agency, social agency, and sociocultural agency. ANES contains hundreds of individual questions. Other questions could have been included under the rubric of personal, social, and sociocultural agency, but were screened out because of the goal of only including the most relevant ANES questions. This also prevented the use of the disproportionately high number of highly

specific political questions in the overall ANES data set that only pertain to specific elections. The questions that were chosen for inclusion in the study did in fact represent valid types of agency. Another limitation of the study is the use of self-reported data and the lack of verification measures to determine whether or not participants' self-reported voting did not reflect their actual voting behavior.

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the main findings of the current study is that men and women differ significantly in terms of what motivates them to vote. Women's desire to vote is partially associated with social agency (in particular, degree of family interest in politics) whereas men have no social agency component in their voting. In addition, women were highly motivated to vote to the extent that believed in the possibility of change and also held a personal interest in politics, while men who believed that it was important to do what authorities told them to do were more likely to vote.

There are basic differences in how the genders exercise agency. In the current study, the observed difference between the kinds of personal agency predictors associated with male likelihood of voting and the kinds of personal agency predictors associated with female likelihood of voting held even when income, education, race, party affiliation, and religion were introduced as moderating variables. Thus, the difference between male and female voting cannot be explained away through a third variable; there seems to be some aspect of gender itself that is associated with difference in agency. Some existing research suggests that, in the United States, women are more socially connected (Frank, 2004), have a greater belief in their ability to impact public life

(Gerber & Rogers, 2009), and a greater desire to influence positive political change (Putnam, 2001a, 2001b; Scheff, 1994). These findings could help to provide a theoretical basis for the gender differences observed in this study.

One possible project of interest to future researchers could be the use of principal components analysis (PCA) to more precisely identify differences between male and female voters whose data is in ANES. The purpose of such a project would not be to explain the origin or the characteristics of male-female differences in the exercise of agency—a topic that is more suited to sociology, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and related subjects than to political science or public policy—but rather to keep analyzing the ANES dataset in order to determine whether there are other indicators of male-female difference that cast additional light on gender difference in voting preferences. PCA could be run on the entire set of ANES questions (treated as dependent variables) with the independent variable being gender. Such an approach could facilitate the identification of not merely isolated differences between male and female voters (such as the female preference for engagement and the male preference for response to authority) but rather the existence of larger conceptual categories of difference emerging from varimax rotation (Creswell, 2009).

Recommendations for Practice

An important aspect of public policy at the federal, state, and local levels is the development and support of get-out-the-vote programs. In the first chapter of the study, it was suggested that such programs can only be efficacious if they act on and engage personal agency. In other words, if voting is an act that is both personal and voluntary,

then appealing directly to voters' agency—as so many get-out-the-vote messages do—is bound to get more results than if voting is the end result of a class struggle or some manifestation of social agency. The results of the statistical analysis in chapter four demonstrate that the American electorate is characterized by a strong sense of personal agency. Therefore, the current approach to get-out-the-vote messaging appears to be the correct one. Such messages tend to consist of direct appeals to voters, both invoking and relying upon personal feelings such as pride of participation, the desire to make a difference, and interest in shaping the country.

Based on the findings of the study, this trend in get-out-the-vote messaging ought to continue. However, it is possible to further target get-out-the-vote messages by gender. As the statistical analysis in chapter four disclosed, women appear to be socially engaged (in terms of having their voting being more susceptible to family interest in politics) and more driven by considerations of personal interest than by men, who are disproportionately influenced to vote by their belief that it is important to do as authorities ask. Accordingly, it is possible to craft gender-specific get-out-the-vote messages that suggest that voting is a duty (to men) and that voting is personally fulfilling (to women). Segmenting get-out-the-vote messages in this way might lead to improved voter recruitment and participation, given what was learned about some of the differences between male and female motivations to vote. However more research on male-female voting differences is necessary before firm recommendations about get-out-the-vote messages can be made. Even if such segmentation policies are not adopted,

public policy officials considering get-out-the-vote messaging would be well advised to appeal to voters' and potential voters' social agency.

Positive Social Change

On the assumption that exercise of enfranchisement is a cornerstone of democratic societies, many public policy initiatives focus on convincing more people to vote. The premise behind such initiatives is that voting is a voluntary behavior that can be encouraged; in other words, that voting is the result of personal agency. From this perspective, the main positive social change implication of the study was the support found for the relationship between personal agency and voting. Because personal agency is a significant predictor of voting, get-out-the-vote efforts that focus on building personal interest in, and commitment to, the political process are likely to be effective in raising the voting rate, which in turn would represent positive social change, especially in the context of low voter participation in the United States (Alvarez et al., 2012).

Conclusion

Raising voter participation in democratic societies levels is a means of improving the quality of democracy (Alvarez et al., 2012; Aragones et al., 2011; Newman, 2007; Saiegh, 2009). In order to raise voter participation, public policymakers can rely on a number of methods. One common approach is to appeal to the individual voter's sense of interest, empowerment, and engagement (Cwalina et al., 2008). The main conclusion of this study is that such appeals are likely to work, because factors of agency are statistically significant and strong predictors of voting likelihood in U.S. Presidential elections. In particular, building prospective voters' interest in elections, interest in public

affairs, and belief that they can have a say in government are all strategies that are likely to increase the likelihood of voting.

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