Are Nonvoters Fence-sitters?

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2021/1/6

Roadmap of Presentation

Introduction

- Politics is known to influence almost every aspect of our life.
- A vast literature studies voters' behaviors and attitudes.
  - the determinants of voting participation and voting choice (e.g., Zuckerman et al., 2007)
  - the evolution of party identification throughout life cycle (e.g., Gerber et al., 2003; Coppock & Green, 2015)
  - the interaction of voting behavior and attitudes (e.g., Mullainathan & Washington, 2009)
- Less attention paid to nonvoters
  - potential voters
  - more weak-willed

Research Questions

- In the context of U.S. presidential elections,
  - are nonvoters more likely to affiliate to the same party as president than voters after the presidential election?
  - If so, why?

Literature Review: the Endogeneity of Voting

- The behavior of voting is endogenous
  - demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, income and so on
  - past voting experience (Meredith 2009; Kadt,2017)
  - ...
- Previous studies provide various ways to address the endogeneity problem
  - IV (e.g.,Hansford & Gomez,2010; Dinas, 2014)
  - DID (e.g., Hodler et al., 2015; Gentzkow et al., 2011; Falck et al., 2014)
  - RCT (e.g., Gerber et al., 2008; León, 2015)
- This paper exploits the voting eligibility age threshold to constructed an IV.
  - compares 18- and 19-year-olds to 20- and 21-year-olds, two years after the presidential election

Literature Review: Cognitive Dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957)
  - any discrepancy between cognitions may be psychologically disturbing
  - people have a strong incentive to reduce such dissonance
- For voters
  - choice bring loyalty (Dinas, 2013)
  - voting causes greater polarization in attitudes toward the president (Mullainathan & Washington, 2009)
- For nonvoters
  - if their potential choices are inconsistent with the outcome (most people favor), what will happen?

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Data

- Main data: **General Social Survey(GSS)**
  - 12 nonpresidential(interim) election years: 1974(4)2018
  - all respondents are at least 18 year old.
- Supplementary data: **National Election Study (NES)**
  - NES collected respondent's vote choice after each presidential election
  - 12 presidential election years

Variable Definition

- Dependent variable: same party as president
  - party identification (0-7):
    - ✓ democrat: 0(strong democrat); 1(not very strong democrat); 2(independent, close to democrat)
    - ✓ republican: 4(independent, close to republican); 5(not very strong republican); 6(strong republican)
    - ✓ 3(independent); 7(other)
  - a dummy variable

- Endogenous variable: whether the respondent voted in the previous election two years ago
  - a dummy variable

- Demographic controls
  - the logarithm of family income and dummies for gender, race, being employed, having graduated from high school, living in an urban area.

Instrumented Variable

- The endogeneity of self-reported turnout
  - reverse causality
  - omitted variables
  - measurement error

- IV: Whether the respondent was eligible to vote (18 years old or older on election day)
  - the minimum voting age in the United States was 18 years old.
  - eligible group:
    ✓ ages 20-21 two years after presidential election (N=535)
  - comparable ineligible group:
    ✓ages 18-19 two years after presidential election (N=265)

- Compare the age on interview day to the age on election day
  - interview date V.S. election date
  - birth month V.S. election month

Identification Strategy

- 1^{st} stage:

$$Voted_{i,t-2} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Eligible_{i,t-2} + X_{it}\Gamma + \delta_t + \phi_r + \epsilon_{it}$$

- 2^{nd} stage:

$$Same_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \widehat{Voted_{i,t-2}} + X_{it}\Gamma + \delta_t + \phi_r + \epsilon_{it}$$

  - X_{it}: demographic characteristics
  - δ_t: year fixed effect
  - r_s: region fixed effect

Balance Test

- Observable demographic characteristics

	Ages 18-19			Ages 20-21			Difference	p-value
Variable	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	in means	
Male	0.506	0.501	265	0.479	0.500	535	-0.027	0.470
Race:								
White	0.694	0.462	265	0.710	0.454	535	0.016	0.644
Black	0.215	0.412	265	0.181	0.386	535	-0.034	0.265
Other	0.091	0.288	265	0.108	0.311	535	0.018	0.422
Partyid:								
democrat	0.460	0.499	265	0.471	0.500	535	0.011	0.777
Independent	0.155	0.362	265	0.187	0.390	535	0.032	0.249
Republican	0.362	0.482	265	0.316	0.465	535	-0.046	0.195
Other	0.023	0.149	265	0.026	0.160	535	0.004	0.758
High school	0.536	0.500	265	0.843	0.364	535	0.307	0.000
Paeduc	12.33	3.677	189	12.24	3.717	390	-0.095	0.771
Maeduc	12.36	2.993	237	12.40	3.059	491	0.044	0.852
Employed	0.400	0.491	265	0.607	0.489	535	0.207	0.000
City	0.121	0.326	265	0.148	0.355	535	0.027	0.287
Log(inc_per)	8.511	1.373	265	8.460	1.213	535	-0.051	0.610
Voted	0.011	0.106	265	0.363	0.481	535	0.351	0.000
Same	0.381	0.487	265	0.364	0.482	535	-0.017	0.648

Balance Test

- Unobservable ability
  - three proxy variables
    - ✓ respondent's understanding of the questions
    - ✓ respondent's attitude toward the interview
    - ✓ vocabulary test
- Placebo tests
  - exclude age effects

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Voting and Party Affiliation

	(1) **OLS**	(2) **First-stage**	(3) **2SLS**
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Voted in the previous election two years ago	Same party as president
Voted	0.005		-0.235**
	(0.040)		(0.119)
Eligible		0.321***	
		(0.024)	
Kleibergen-Paap *F*-statistic		175.458	
Demographics	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region fixed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	800	800	800

Placebo Tests

- three placebo tests

Time period relative to presidential election	Base regression two years post presidential election	Placebo regressions		
		Two years post presidential election	Two years post Presidential election	Presidential election year (NBS)
Ages compared	20,21vs. 18,19	22,23vs. 20,21	24,25vs. 22,23	20,21vs.18,19
Eligible	-0.076*	0.047	0.001	0.006
	(0.039)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Observations	800	1,262	1,609	1,356

Mechanism: Cognitive Dissonance

- Voters
  - casting a ballot makes a commitment
  - voters prefer the party they choose(Beasley & Joslyn, 2001; Dinas, 2013)
- Nonvoters
  - affiliate to winners (most people support)
    - ✓ fence-sitters!

Mechanism: Cognitive Dissonance

- Predict the potential vote preference year by year
  - Prediction I:
    - ✓ Form a linear fit using ***ages 18-21*** from NES data in each presidential year
    - ✓ predict party of vote choice using contemporary demographic characteristics in the subsequent non presidential year
  - Prediction II:
    - ✓ Form a linear fit using ***all sample*** from $\cdots$
    - ✓ predict party of vote choice $\cdots$

	Prediction I		**Prediction II**	
	Vote for winners	Vote for losers	Vote for winners	Vote for losers
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president
voted	-0.206	-0.347**	-0.239	-0.319*
	(0.208)	(0.148)	(0.160)	(0.169)
Kleibergen-Paap F-statistic:				
	73.985	90.721	99.440	68.139
Observations	363	437	429	371

Robustness Checks

	(1) Control region-year fixed effect	(2) Control month and week fixed effect	(3) Narrow window Age 19 vs. Age 20	(4) Logit model
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president
Voted	-0.259**	-0.223*	-0.228	
	(0.118)	(0.128)	(0.196)	
Eligible				-0.075**
				(0.038)
Observations	800	725	422	800

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Term Limit

	(1) President is in her/his first term	(2) President is in her/his second term	(3) Difference
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president
Voted	-0.422***	-0.033	-0.389*
	(0.160)	(0.173)	(0.236)
Kleibergen-Paap *F*-statistic:			
	94.809	76.381	
N	465	335	800

Government Trust

- Government trust index:
  - "how much does r trust federal government?"
  - calculate average trust index by year

	(1)	(2)
	Years with high trust in gov.	Years with low trust in gov.
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Same party as president
voted	-0.456**	-0.082
	(0.026)	(0.588)
Kleibergen-Paap *F*-statistic：		
	69.380	99.404
Observation	384	416

Gender Difference

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
			Predict to vote losers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Dependent variable:	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president	Same party as president
voted	-0.349**	-0.140	-0.425*	-0.168
	(0.167)	(0.169)	(0.235)	(0.232)
Kleibergen-Paap F-statistic:				
	83.995	82.340	33.782	26.872
Observations	390	410	180	191

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Conclusion

- This paper empirically estimate the impact of voting on party affiliation.
- We find that nonvoters are 23.5 percent more likely to affiliate to the same party with president than voters after the presidential election.
- Cognitive dissonance plays a vital role
  - voters prefer the party they choose (keep attitude consistent with behavior)
  - nonvoters,especially for those who would cast a vote for losers if they were eligible, tend to change their attitude after election to go along with most people.

Implications

- Another source of incumbency advantage
  - spontaneous
  - zero-cost
- Future plan
  - an temporary or long-lasting change in political attitude
  - will a change in party affiliation turn into a vote in future?

Thank you!

All comments are welcome!

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