POLITICAL PARTIES & ELECTIONS, FALL 2012

**PARTISANSHIP/PARTY IDENTIFICATION and PARTY SYSTEMS**

Wayne chapter 3; Hershey chapter 6

Monday, September 24

**Hershey ch. 6 terms**: measurement of party identification; factors influencing party identification; New Deal coalition; straight-ticket voting, split-ticket voting; party voting, trends over time; short term forces; retrospective evaluations; myth of the independent. attitudinal and behavioral independents

**Wayne ch. 3 terms**: problems with measuring voter turnout; 23rd Amendment, 24th Amendment, 26th Amendment; Voting Rights Act; legal constraints on turnout, motor-voter law; psychological barriers to voting; education and voter turnout; competitiveness and voter turnout; results of Republican efforts to boost voter turnout in recent elections; key explanatory factors in The American Voter model of voting behavior; importance of partisanship/party identification (these terms are interchangeable), candidate views and issue positions; how V.O. Key refines theories of voting behavior; Fiorina, retrospective evaluations; why partisanship weakens from late 1960s to mid 1980s; why partisanship strengthens again from mid 1980s to today; Fiorina school versus Polarization School; social influences on voting behavior, role of intermediaries and personal contacts; New Deal Realignment and structure of the Democratic Party coalition; party coalition changes since the 1950s, particularly changes/realignments from 1980 to today

**Material about recent trends/changes in voter behavior will be covered Wednesday along with Hershey ch. 7!**

0. Chris’s introductory comments will cover the major models of U.S. voting behavior (covered in Wayne pp. 88-95 and again Wednesday in Hershey 7). [Click here](http://homepages.gac.edu/~cgilbert/p215/votechart.pdf) or go to page 3 of this handout for a chart that puts the major models together.

1. What are the general trends in US party identification AND party voting over the last 50 years? What factors help to explain these trends?

2. What are the most important factors that influence whether voters do or do not exercise their right to vote? Try to rank the factors you come up with in terms of their impact on voter turnout (from most important to least important).

3. How do voters develop party identification?

4. Describe the political beliefs of independents – what motivates them, what explains their vote choices, why do they matter in U.S. elections, what myths exist about independents?

5. Review the statements on the next page (page 2) of today’s handout. Based on what you have read for today, are voters fools? Does the American voting public show evidence that it knows enough about candidates and issues to cast informed votes?

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE AMERICAN VOTER**

**Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922)**

The trials and tribulations of daily life are compelling in a way that politics could never be. We should not expect ordinary people to be absorbed in the affairs of state, except when they affect people directly.

**Nie, Verba & Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (1976)**

Public opinion studies generally tell us the following about the American public:

* Americans are indifferent to much that takes place in politics
* Americans don't know many (or much about) the major players in government
* they are lackadaisical regarding debates that preoccupy Washington
* they are ignorant of basic facts that the well-informed take for granted
* they are unsure about the policies advanced by presidents and presidential candidates, even after an entire campaign

**V.O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate* (1964)**

". . . voters are not fools. To be sure, many individual voters act in odd ways indeed; yet in the large the electorate behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect, given the clarity of the alternatives presented to it and the character of the information available to it. In American presidential campaigns of recent decades the portrait of the American electorate that develops from the data is not one of an electorate straitjacketed by social determinants or moved by subconscious urges triggered by devilishly skillful propagandists. It is rather of an electorate moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public policy, of governmental performance, and of executive personality.” (pp. 7-8)