

The original democracy scale and its re-application

Measurement and Theory of Democratic Attitudes

Outline

Introduction

Democratic Values

The original study (1964)

Chong/McClosky/Zaller 1983

Summary

Recap: Lane

- ▶ New interpretation of ideology: system of everyday ideas about politics
- ▶ Research based on *systematic* in-depth study of ordinary people
- ▶ Relatively high levels of support for democratic ideology
- ▶ Based on highly selective sample
- ▶ *Democratic norms & values widely accepted*

Herbert McClosky

- ▶ 1916-2006
 - ▶ Working Class background, active in Democratic party
 - ▶ Graduate/Postdoc/Professor U of Minnesota from 1940
 - ▶ UC Berkely from 1960
- ▶ Psychology and Politics: values, attitudes, ideologies, political behaviour . . .
- ▶ Consensus and Ideology 13th-most-cited APSR article in a hundred years

What is it all about?

- ▶ Tocqueville (and many others): Democracy requires democratic consensus
- ▶ Dahl:
 - ▶ *Acceptance* is enough
 - ▶ Difference between politically active stratum ('elite') and citizens in general
- ▶ General confusion: what is consensus, and how much of it is needed?
- ▶ Empirical test/analysis of five questions/themes

Assumptions/hypotheses

1. American electorate divided, no general consensus on democratic ideology
2. Greater support for abstract, general statements than for their application
3. Greater, more meaningful support amongst 'articulate' segments of population
4. Even there, consensus not perfect
 - ▶ Greater agreement on political than on economic questions
 - ▶ ... on procedural questions than on policy questions
 - ▶ ... on freedom than on equality
5. Usual suspects (education, SES etc.) increase political awareness and support for democratic ideology/institutions

Elements of 'American Democratic Ideology'

- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Limited, constitutional government
- ▶ Representation
- ▶ Majority rule & minority protection
- ▶ Freedom of thought, speech, press, religion
- ▶ Equality of opportunity
- ▶ Rule of law & due process

Data

- ▶ 1950s: Surveys amongst political active and general population; several thousand respondents
- ▶ Long, complex instruments
 - ▶ 'Rules of the game'
 - ▶ General statements on free speech/opinion
 - ▶ Support for specific applications of free speech and procedural rules
 - ▶ Beliefs in equality
 - ▶ Cynicism towards politics/government
 - ▶ Political futility
- ▶ Examples: check your copies!

Findings

- ▶ Rules of the game widely accepted amongst ‘influentials’, no consensus (75%) amongst general public
- ▶ Overwhelming support for abstract principles in both samples
- ▶ Much lower levels of support for specific applications
- ▶ No consensus re empirical/normative notions of equality (table V)
- ▶ Relatively high levels of cynicism and (sense of) futility
- ▶ Influentials . . .
 - ▶ More willing and able to express opinions
 - ▶ More consistent/coherent in their opinions
- ▶ Does it matter? → class questions

The authors

John Zaller

- ▶ Political Communication/Public Opinion
- ▶ Best known for 'Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion'
- ▶ Former APSR editor

Dennis Chong

- ▶ Values, Norms, Political Action
- ▶ Information and framing
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Both former PhD students of McClosky

Core question(s)

- ▶ Do Americans support democracy and/or capitalism?
- ▶ Sub questions
 - ▶ Does political awareness make a difference
 - ▶ What roles do elites play?
 - ▶ Do personality traits (inflexibility) matter?

Core assumptions

- ▶ Political beliefs are 'learned' (through social exchange)
- ▶ Exposure to conflict and consensus amongst elites is crucial for learning experience
- ▶ Three-step process
 1. Exposure
 2. Comprehension
 3. Absorption/acceptance
- ▶ Four ideal types

Four ideal types

		low	Capitalist Values	high
Democratic Values	high	<i>20th century liberalism</i>		<i>19th century liberalism</i>
	low	<i>anti-regime</i>		<i>strong conservative</i>

Capitalism more controversial than democracy amongst opinion leaders

Data: Opinions and Values Study

- ▶ 1975-77
- ▶ General population
- ▶ two elite survey
 - ▶ High levels of political interest + ideological consistency
 - ▶ Non-partisan opinion leaders
- ▶ 1956/58 data for comparison
- ▶ Sentence completion with two alternatives
- ▶ Very large number of items on values/democracy
- ▶ Political 'awareness':
 - ▶ **Information test** (13 items)
 - ▶ Participation scale (9 items)
 - ▶ *Formal education* (six-level)

Findings: awareness + support

- ▶ Opinion leaders: 28% 20th century + 57% 19th century
- ▶ High awareness: mostly identical
- ▶ Low awareness: 56% anti-regime, 15% 20th century

Findings: other factors

- ▶ Rural people are parochial (anti-regime)
- ▶ 'Inflexibility hinders learning' (of norms) → personality
- ▶ Inflexibility + education → political information (interactive, p. 416)
- ▶ Low awareness + high inflexibility → high anti-regime
- ▶ Choice between three 'acceptable' options driven by liberal-conservative preferences

Conflict amongst elites

- ▶ Some norms widely accepted by elites, others contested
- ▶ Democracy
 - ▶ Freedom of speech for nutters
 - ▶ Affirmative action + gay marriage
- ▶ Capitalism
 - ▶ Private (land) property
 - ▶ Government regulation of businesses
- ▶ p. 421-423

Structure of belief systems

- ▶ Converse (1964):
 - ▶ Belief systems = organising principles that logically link attitudes ('constraints')
 - ▶ Most people live happily without them
 - ▶ (Most people have no proper attitudes)
- ▶ High inter-item correlations no necessarily proof for sophistication/structure
 - ▶ Could be result of personality traits
 - ▶ Or emotions

Impact of political awareness on sub-domains of democratic values

- ▶ Careful: correlations, not means
- ▶ Tolerance issues: consistency relatively high for low-awareness group
- ▶ Breaks down for other issues
- ▶ Psychological and logical factors in tandem for high-awareness group
- ▶ 'A striking aspect of the consistency of the unaware . . . is its anti-democratic bent'
- ▶ (Scales more reliable in high-awareness-groups)

Summary

- ▶ 2x2 table of democratic/capitalist values
- ▶ Political awareness, personality traits have reproducible effects
- ▶ Elite conflict/consensus matters systematically
- ▶ The unaware are anti-system, but does it matter?

Class questions

1. Summarise, in your own words, the summary from McClosky 1964. Do democratic attitudes matter at all?
2. Browse over the 44 items of the Democratic Value scale (Chang et al., p. 435-). Which of these items are
 - ▶ Simply outdated?
 - ▶ Not related to what you understand by democracy?
 - ▶ Still relevant?

What is missing?