

# Turnout: Effect of Laws and Party Positions



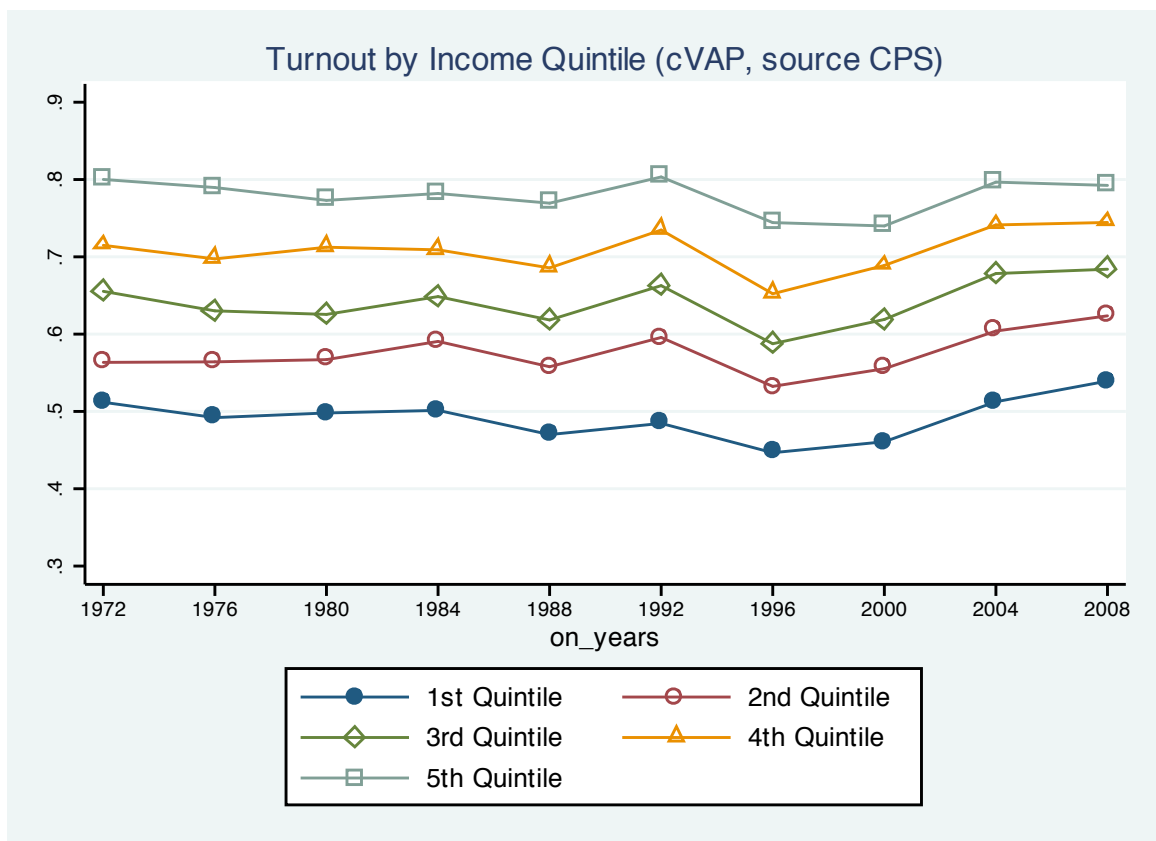
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## What to Believe?

- Observational Data
  - Over Time
  - Cross-sectional
- Field Experiments
- Confusing Mode Change for Additional Votes
- Implementation Variation in Reforms

Figure 2.2, Turnout by Income, 1972-2008



Source: Leighley and Nagler, *Who Votes Now*, Princeton University Press, 2014.

## Legal Rules and Voting Procedures

- US is unique in putting burden on individuals to register to vote.
- Would easing those burdens increase turnout?
  - If so, turnout of (rich?, poor?, young?, old?)

## Research Design

- We looked at turnout from 1972-2008
- Created a dataset of laws in effect in each state, (support from Pew!) measuring availability of:
  - Election Day Registration
  - Short or Long Closing Period for Registration
  - No-Fault Absentee Voting
  - Early Voting

## Findings

- Election Day Registration:
  - Worth about 3 percentage points in turnout.
  - Net effect probably smallest for low income group.
  - Net effect probably largest for young people.
  - Watch at-risk effect
    - a large fraction of non-voters from upper income groups are converted to voters.
- No-Fault Absentee Voting:
  - Worth about 3 percentage points.

## Findings

- Registration Closing Period:
  - 10 days is worth about 1 percentage point.
- Early Voting:
  - Hard to tell if it matters.
  - Might depend on length of early voting period.

## Chapter 6: Preferences of Voters vs Non-Voters

- Conventional Wisdom:
  - Voters and non-voters hold similar policy positions (Wolfinger and Rosenstone).



## Evidence of Policy Differences

- American National Election Study data from 1972-2008.
- Seven-point issue scales, partisanship, ideology (high is conservative).

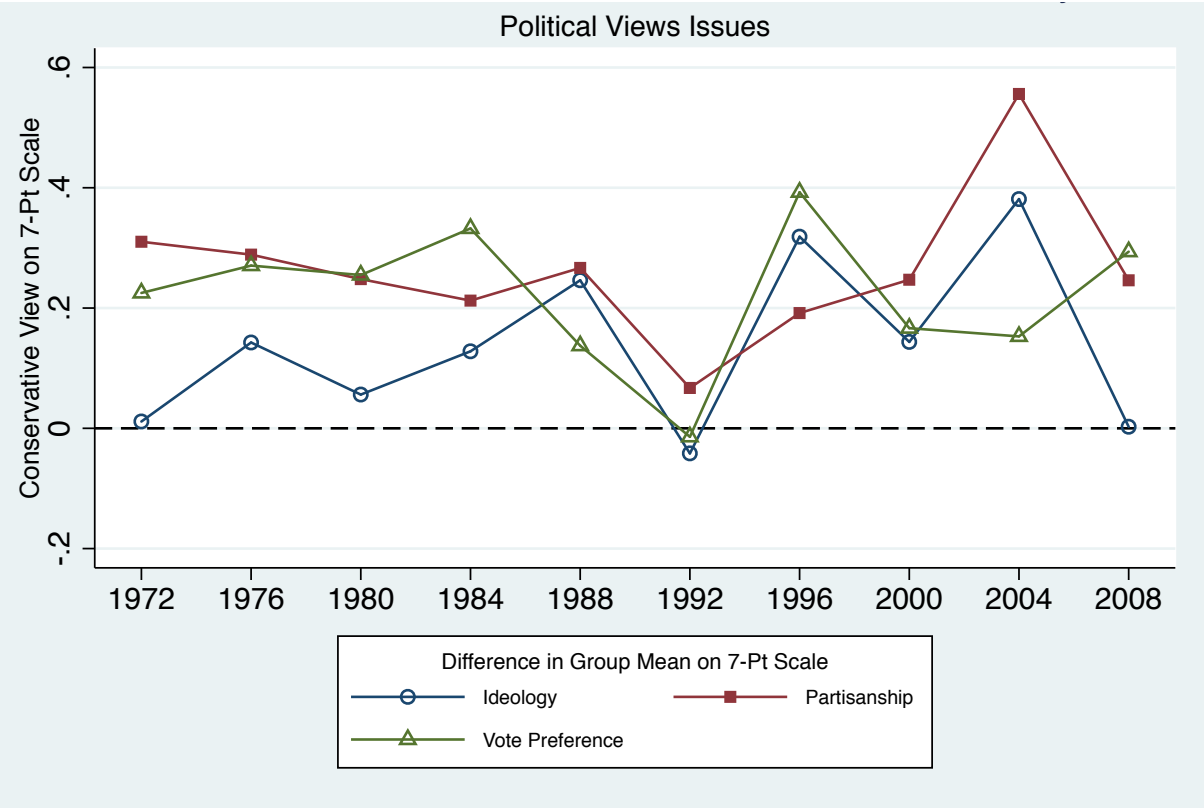
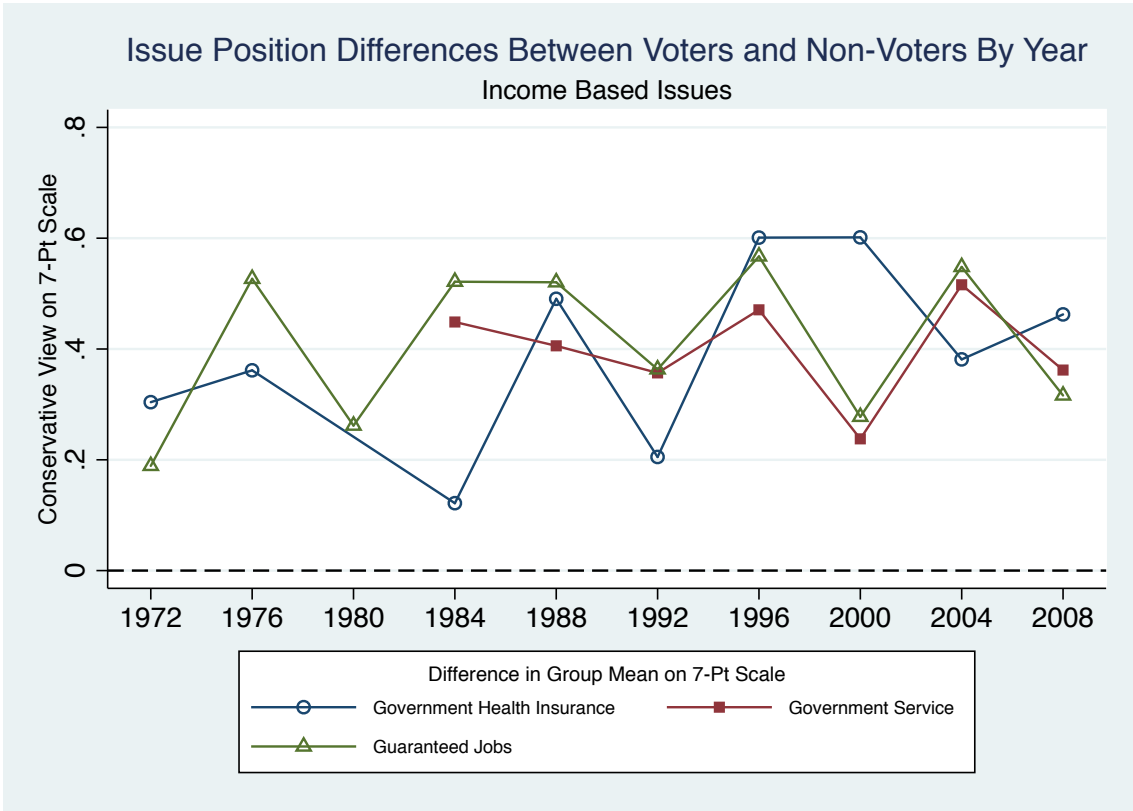


Fig 6.2, Who Votes Now



**Fig 6.1, Who Votes Now**

## Providing Incentives to Vote

- We focus on the choices offered by the candidates.
- Specifically, the issue positions the candidates represent.
- The potential voters are faced with policy choices

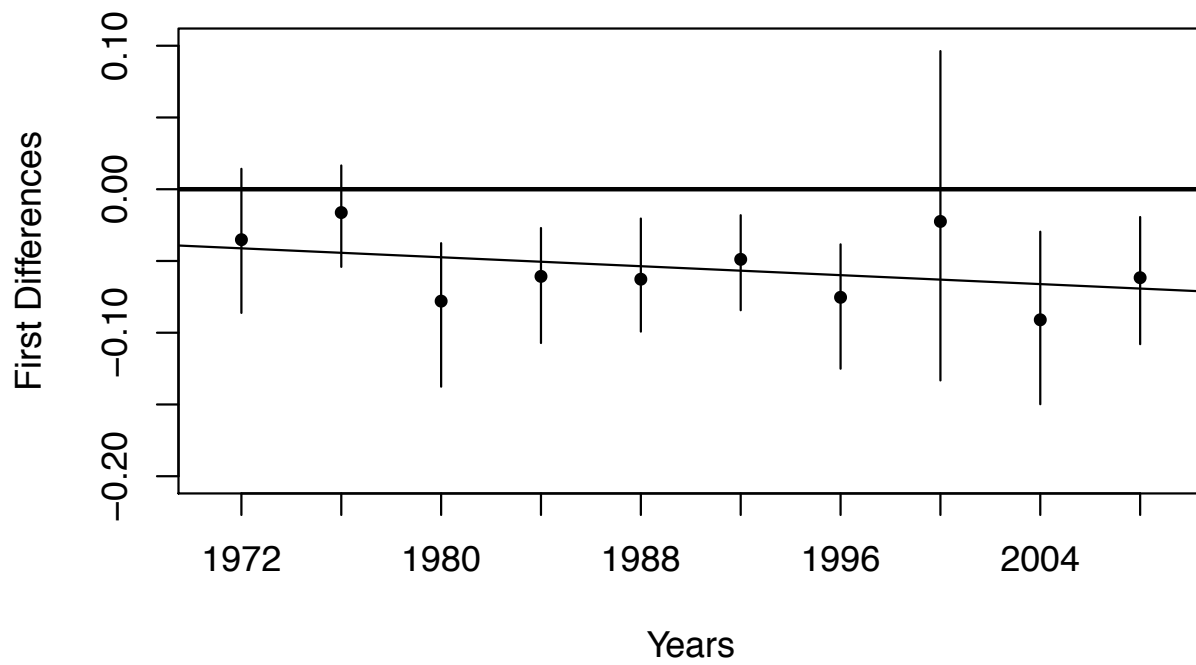
We show that:

- Individuals are more likely to vote when candidates take more distinctive policy positions...
  - provided the individual prefers one set of policy positions to the other.
- AND - poorer people are less likely than richer people to know that Democrats and Republicans have different policy positions.
- THUS - poorer people are less likely to be motivated to vote by the policy differences between the candidates.

How large is the effect of perceiving a difference between candidates?

- If a voter perceives a reasonable difference between the two candidates on liberal-conservative ideology, and just one issue they are as much as 10 percentage points more likely to vote.

### Marginal Effect of 1 Std Dev Change in Indifference on Ideology and Govt-Jobs on Turnout



- Would other differences between candidates make people more inclined to vote?



# Mentions of Clinton and Sanders in Tweets about #DemDebate 2 (Nov 14, 2015) - By Gender

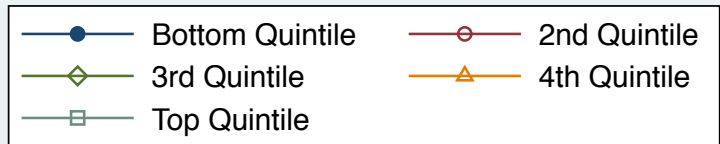
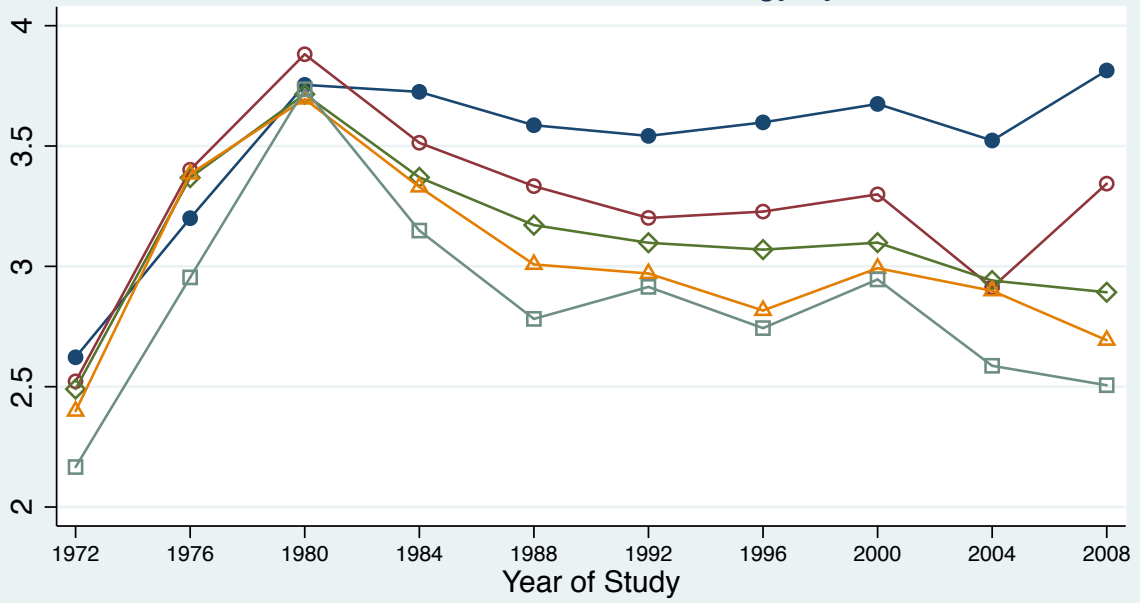
	Women	Men
Percentage of Tweets Mentioning Clinton	28.4	27.3
Percentage of Tweets Mentioning Sanders	31.8	29.4

Data collected by NYU Social Media and Political Participation Lab

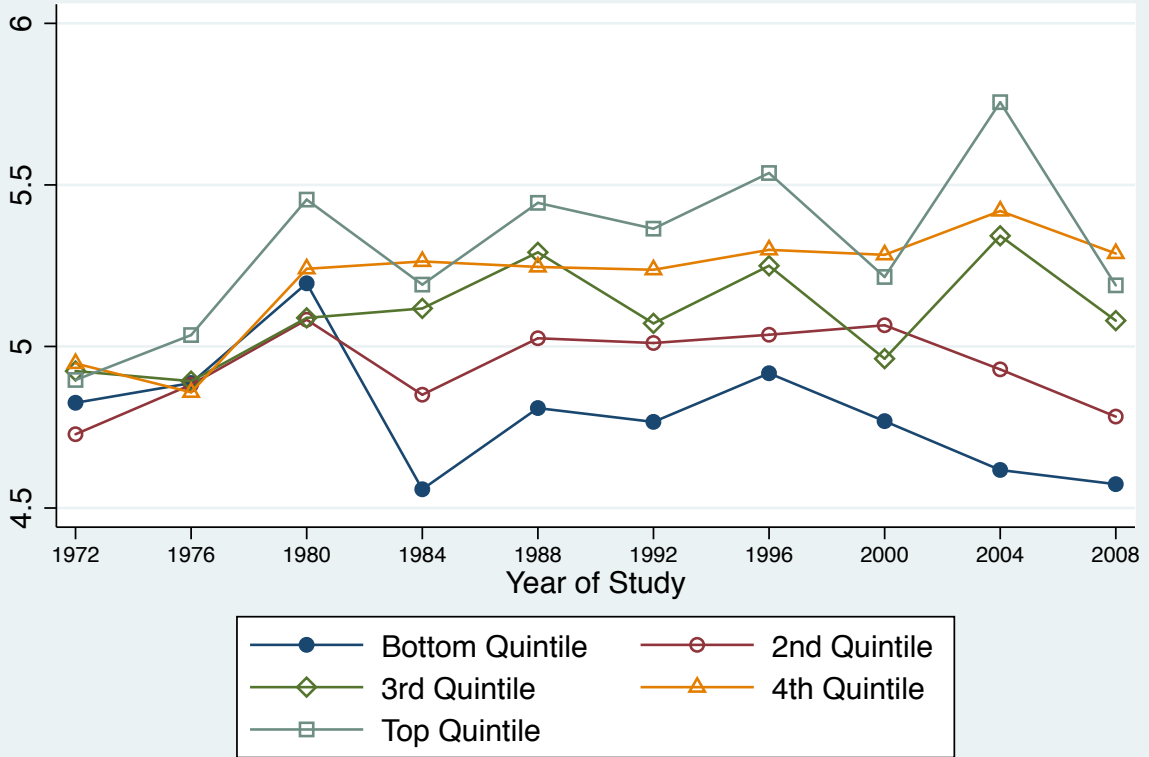
## Providing Incentives to Vote

- We presents evidence that suggests that lower-status citizens have dropped out of the electorate, in part, because they are increasingly indifferent between the choices offered by parties.

Democratic Candidate Placement on Ideology by Income Quintile



Republican Candidate Placement on Ideology by Income Quintile



## Conclusions

- We can increase turnout by changing laws to:
  - Make it easier to register
  - Make it easier to vote
- If parties and/or candidates give people real choices, and people know they have real choices, more people will vote.

## Challenges

- Better documenting of changes in laws governing voting and registration, and implementation.
- Who takes advantage of making it easier to register and vote?
- Finding what drives individuals to vote in some elections, but not others.
  - How do we keep voters from dropping out during non-presidential elections?
- Finding the impact of educating voters about their choices.
- Examining the impact of Motor Voter *implementation*, and Automatic Registration