

Political Science 146: Mass Media and Public Opinion

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Recent Washington Post Article

Income gap takes shape as central issue for both parties ahead of 2014 midterms



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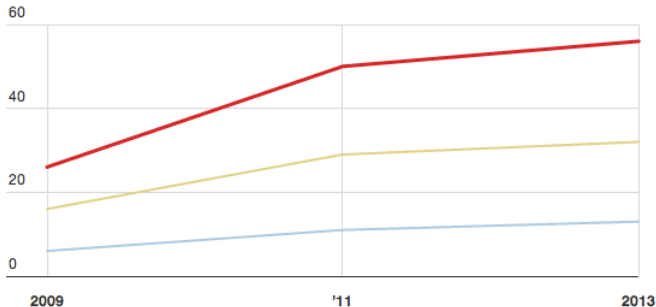
Next, Democrats plan to push to increase the federal minimum wage, part of an effort to make income inequality a core midterm campaign theme. Republicans are likely to resist an increase, but party leaders also face political pressure from vulnerable incumbents to demonstrate more compassion for the poor after back-to-back presidential election losses.

Reason Why Democrats Push Unemployment

Republican support for decreasing unemployment aid grows

% saying government should decrease spending on government assistance to the unemployed (full wording: Would you increase, decrease, or keep spending the same for government assistance for the unemployed? Pew Research Center February 2013.

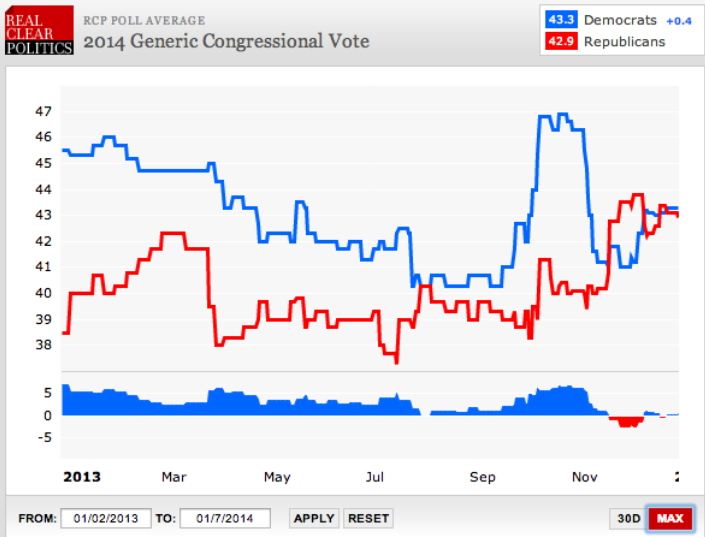
■ Republican ■ Independent ■ Democrat



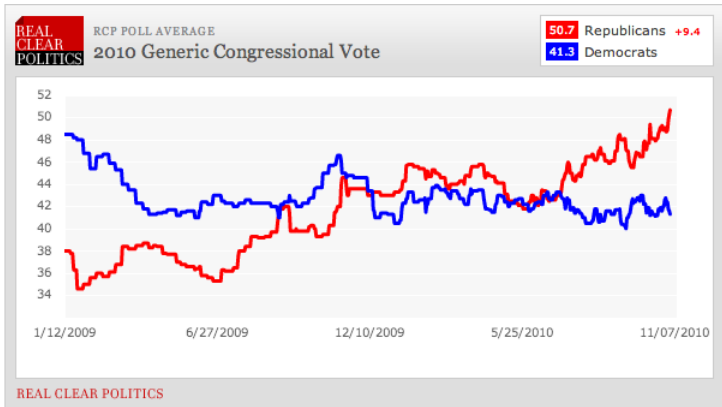
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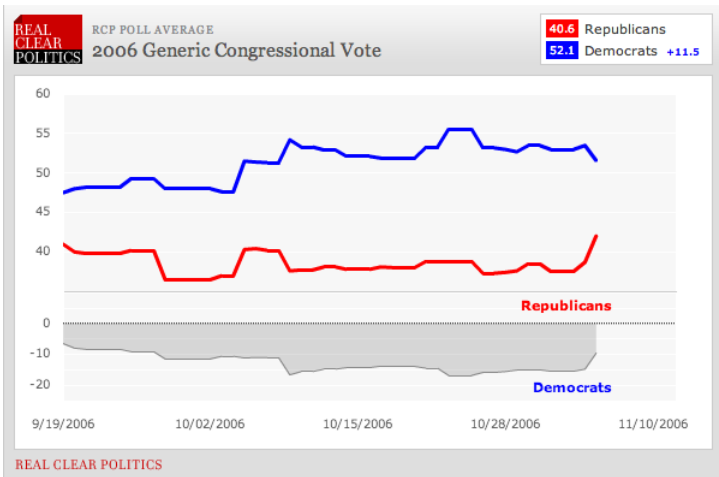
Generic Congressional



Generic Congressional 2010



Generic Congressional 2006



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- *But, how should the public function in a democracy?*

Theories of Democracy

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- Who should be allowed to vote? All adults? At what age are you an adult? Should there be educational requirements? Literacy requirements? Knowledge requirements?

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- Direct democracy: All citizens meet, discuss, and decide on content of the laws
- Later theorists have criticized classical democratic theory as unpractical and unworkable (i.e., women and slaves did not have voting/participatory rights, 40 debates a year!)

Greek Ways: Athenian Democracy



Figure : All non-slave men of Athenian descent participated in government. Every man had to be prepared to speak at an Assembly and persuade his comrades. One's stature was based in large part on one's rhetorical ability.

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- Critiques: Some groups possess more resources than others (i.e., business/trade groups); not all viewpoints are represented; less focus on citizen participation and benefits accrued from that

Democratic Elitism: Congress



Figure : Those elites think they're better than us don't they.

Democratic Elitism: Congress



Figure : Mark Takano, Riverside's representative to the U.S. House

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- Critique: Assumptions about citizens are unrealistic (e.g., Motor Voter)

Problems with Participatory Theory

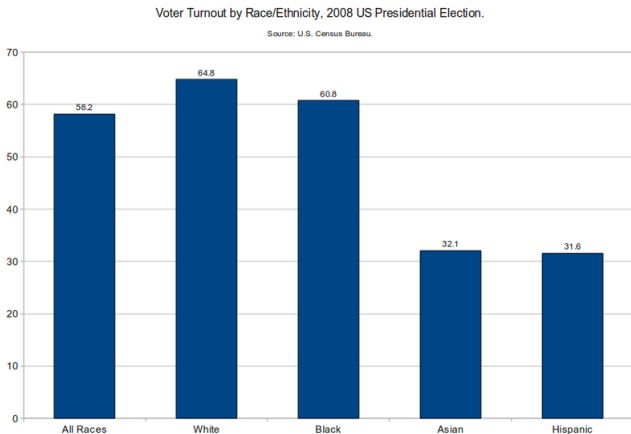


Figure : Blacks actually turned out at higher rates than Whites during 2012 election, but that was unusable. Turnout differences are even more pronounced in midterm elections.

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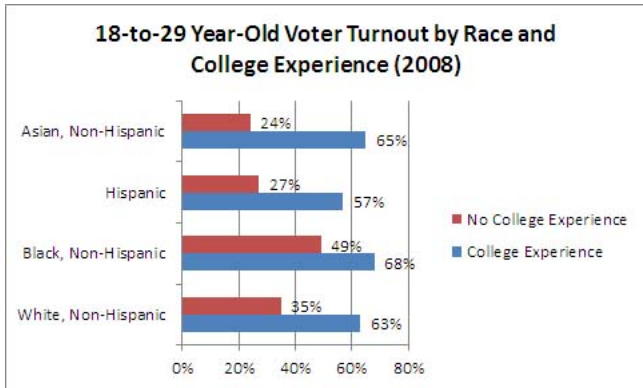


Figure : Among young voters, education clearly trumps race/ethnicity.

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- Simply the sum or aggregation of private opinions on any particular issue or set of issues
- Preferences of individuals, tallied such that each person's opinion counts equally

Polling & the Public

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- How can 1,000 people represent 40 million?

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- Private polling firms, poll on all issues, guide candidates and businesses

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- Can be good for democracy. Politicians don't have to guess what the public cares about, they can just do a poll and ask.
- A healthy skepticism of polls is fine, but understand why a poll is good or bad and you will be fine