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Voter Rationality in the US

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Chapter I: Introduction

American leadership, in government, is contingent upon the electorates' vote. Legislatures implement laws to run society, executives enforce the laws passed by the legislature, and the judiciary branch, which is appointed by the executives, ensures each law is constitutional. All power of the government derives from the voting public, as they elect all major officials in some regard. Many in 2020 ask whether the elected are fit to elect the officials who the country, but this begs a more interesting question: are those voting fit to elect their own leaders? Therefore, the main question of this research is: is the citizens of the United States, the electorate, voting in their own rational self-interest?

If voters are unable to vote in rationally and in their self-interest, what does this mean in terms of policy outcomes and officials elected to office? Will such officials not represent what is truly best for the public, and does this lead to drift between elite and public sentiments on policy outcomes? Does such a drift between the ideology of elites and the broader public degrade the core of democracy, and the bonds that hold a society together? A government should implement policies that reflect the needs of the people, if a government does not do so, then is a democracy truly a democracy? If a voter votes against their own needs due to incompetence, then should it not be the representative's responsibility to pass policy in the interest of the public, and not in the interests of their own agenda and ideology? Rational decision making of representatives, if unaligned with the people's interests, will result in massive ineffectiveness of the government as they will not address needed issues. But what of when the people's interest is unaligned with what is rationally good for them? Also are voters able to hold elected officials accountable.

Returning from this series of consequences of political drift to ponder to the main research question, is the electorate voting against their own rational self-interests, begins a series of many smaller questions needed to answer the main research question. What are a voter's self-interests and how does one determine if such self-interests are rational? When a citizenry is constantly voting against their own needs serious harm is brought to themselves and their communities. Ultimately the nation is harmed as the needs of the people are not met or suppressed. Also, what is the general sophistication of the electorate regarding the recognition of their own self-interest? This is a pertinent idea to study, regarding today's modern political landscape, that is filled with inconsistent information, misinformation, and a gridlocked government which often is unable to perform its duties. An analysis of the research question could lead to a realization of the predicament American democracy is in today. And such a realization leads to acceptance of the problems inherent in U.S. democracy, which in turn can lead towards reflection and growth within American political society. This thesis will attempt to answer the main research question by providing Review of Literature Chapters to better understand the question. This research will also provide a Methodology Chapter to measure the research question using the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES 2012) and analyze these results. Ultimately, a conclusion will be drawn on the results and findings of the research to best assess the state of American Democracy today.

Chapter II:

Review of Literature Part I: Theories of Voting

Introduction

Chapter II, the first part of the Review of Literature, investigates various theories of voting. These theories span three major subjects, those being emotional affirmation of resentment voting, the values voter, and the rational choice of voters. Each section will delve into these theories and how they relate to the main research question: Are voters voting in their own rational self-interest.

Section A: Strangers in Our Own Land-The Politics of Resentment

Before delving into the theoretical merits of the main research question, a look into a personal example of a voter's rational self-interest and their misaligned policy preference is necessary for analysis. Without an actual problem of irrationality there is no need for further development of the research. Think of the conservative factory worker, born and raised in Louisiana, living by a strict set of policy opinions against government control, regulation of business activity, and expansion of government policies. This worker enjoys the outdoors, fishing for crawfish, exploring the natural expanse of Louisiana and the healthy community that raised him. The worker's employer pollutes the environment that he so loves, brings diseases and illness to his family and fellow community members, and poisons the crawfish once pulled out in mass by families and fishermen alike. Nearly everything important to this man, the land he loves, his community, and the health of his family, has been rotted away by his employer. The employer focused solely on profit and held little regard for the safety of the community and its members.

It is clear to see that there is some form of disconnect between the life this man is living, the life he wishes to live, and his views on government which would greatly affect his standard of living. This man has a name, Mike. Mike lives with the “Great Pollution” created by the petroleum industry he worked for, blaming the inaction of an incompetent, ineffective federal government and harbors “great resistance to [the] regulat[ion] [of] the polluters” all the while the true cause of his misfortune derives from companies in the same position as his employers and a lack of regulation (Hochschild 26).

Another example, a woman, born into a broken household, abused, and battered by the world is a born-again Christian. Her harsh way of life and lack of familial support led her to the American South to live with her sister for a time, until she found meaning in prayer. This woman's name is Jackie. Jackie has become an obedient homemaker, who follows the will of her husband and believes sacrifice is the only way to achieve happiness, a byproduct of her harsh upbringing in a broken home. She listens to her husband and lives in the polluted environment of Louisiana believing that “pollution is the sacrifice [she] make[s] for capitalism and” a good life (Hochschild 130). Lastly there is a woman who above all else values her team loyalty. She puts the Republican party and a good work ethic above all things and “credits her team-her party and the industry she feels it represents-with all her good fortune in life” (Hochschild 22). This woman's name is Janice.

Looking back onto the main question, are these voters rationally making decisions in their best interests? Mike, Jackie, and Janice love the outdoors and what it means for their families growing up and today. Rationally, environmental policy regulations holding companies accountable to protect the environment would be a large policy issue, but for numerous reasons, these individuals are against such policy and incorrectly attribute government ineffectiveness as

the cause for their woes and praise the corporations who have poisoned their land. One such reason may be citizen distrust of an increase in the role of government, created by generations of rural community-based life away from the reach of government programs and regulation. These policies increase quality of life today by combatting large and harmful corporations. Another possible explanation for this phenomenon could be reliance on the very companies harming their lives and fear of loss of the economic opportunities that are provided by their work in the immediate. In this case, companies act as a double-edged sword both protecting the lives of people monetarily in the form of steady, good paying jobs and harming their lives through pollution which causes disease and environmental degradation which erodes their way of life. In summary, cases like Mike, Janice, and Jackie resent others who live better lives without pollution and incorrectly blame government for unfair treatment. This is the politics of resentment.

Section B: What's the Matter with Kansas-The Values Voter

In Thomas Frank's, *What's the Matter with Kansas*, The Republican Parties exploitation of Kansas voters' culturally conservative values is explored. For decades, the Democratic Party was "the party of 'workers, the poor, and the victimized'" (Young 864). But this began to change in Kansas. The once Democratic rural voter began reacting "negatively to what they s[aw] as an expanding welfare state, the rise of a secular cultural elite and the legalization of what was once considered immoral" (Young 864). Republicans took advantage of "Democratic leaders...eager[ness] to win over suburban professional," who had lost touch with blue collar America" (Bartels 2012). Republicans then gained the conflicted rural voter's support because the Democratic Party no longer represented the social views of rural voters, instead representing the views of the suburban class. This led to a wave of Republican control across the once

Democratic South and other previously Democratic rural areas of the United States, showing in a complete realignment of voter constituencies. The Democratic Party's departure from rural America marked a turning point as elites began to polarize in both their economic policy as well as their cultural standing on issues. Over the years the "working-class [began a] movement [for the Republican party] that has done incalculable, historic harm to working class people" by enticing them to vote on the basis of "cultural wedge issues like guns, abortion, and the rest" (Bartels 202). Issues of culture like these became more important than economic issues for many of these rural voters due to their conservative views of the world. Simply, economic issues were suppressed by cultural values.

Cultural issues like these were abandoned by the Democratic Party, issues that were highly salient to many voters, allowing the Republicans to take complete control over this new constituency in Kansas. These issues acted as the catalyst to put the economic and moral wellbeing of culturally conservative but economically liberal voters at odds with one another. In the end, allowing the more salient cultural issues to take hold, Republicans took control of states and regions like Kansas, which were once blue strongholds.

Since the inception of the United States of America, there have been numerous cultural conflicts in the country. However, in recent decades, the main cultural issue driving voter preferences has been the war between traditional values, which founded the nation, and liberal values found in modern liberalism. Traditional values were created and are currently propagated by religious institutions that many early Americans worshipped and where many still pray today. Throughout the past few decades American society has seen school prayer banned and abortion accepted which acted as a catalyst for many Americans who ascribe to traditional religious values to mobilize for Republicans. This has resulted in a furthering partisan divide between the

two parties in the American political process, Republicans and Democrats. The Republican elite and masses both have increasingly supported these traditional ideals which has caused mass mobilization of evangelical Christians in support of the more traditional party, while those who are secular or those who are moderate Christians have aligned and mobilize with and for the Democratic Party that supports modern cultural policies.

Evangelical religious organizations often increase their ideologically traditional views within members, as the large amount of time, investment, and participation aligning with such religious institutions will give rise to a religious identity group. These groups act as influencers on members' views on certain issues and make cultural values more important in contrast to other issues. Religiosity can be seen as increasing the salience of traditional issues like abortion and school prayer. In the case of Jackie, it is seen that her moral obligation to the church and its traditional values often outweigh pursuing other policies that may benefit her in life, like regulating companies polluting her community and the waters her children play and fish in. Jackie was affected by her social identity as an evangelical Christian and was mobilized by highly salient traditional values to vote for and support traditional issues, aligning with the Republican Party. Jackie does not value the importance of regulations or increased government social policy that may positively affect her life.

America is not divided between the lines of simply economic policy, but instead is divided along the lines of value based cultural conflict amongst many other issues. Religion has played a major role in the mass mobilization of individuals wishing to preserve their view on traditional culture, which has been heavily affected by religious institutions in America. These institutions increase the salience of traditional moral conflict and have brought the Republican Party to focus heavily on such issues to mobilize a significant portion of the US electorate.

Section C: An Economic Theory of Democracy-Rational Voter model

Anthony Downs' *An Economic Theory of Democracy* aims to analyze the calculus used by voters when deciding whether to participate in government. The work introduces an important idea called the Paradox of Voting, a concept in which the benefits of voting will typically outweigh the costs of such action. The literature relies on an assumption that individuals are rational, and it provides an economic definition for the term. Such an "Economic definition [of rationality] refers solely to a man who moves towards his goals, in a way in which, to the best of his knowledge, uses the least possible input of scarce resources per unit of valued output" (Downs 5). And as follows, voters implement a calculus to devise how to best invest their vote for the highest rate of return.

Such a calculus considers several important variables to analyze and predict the decision-making process for rational voters in this theory. These variables are as follows: the voters real or hypothetical utility in a period of time ($U;t$), the incumbent party (A), the opposition party (B), and expected value (E). The calculus to discern what party deserves a rational voter's support is called the expected party differential: $E(U^A_{t+1}) - E(U^B_{t+1})$. Simplified, this is the expected future utility of the incumbent party, minus the expected future utility of the opposition party and the value. If the quantity is positive then a rational voter will vote for the incumbent as they will provide greater utility. If the value of this calculation is negative, greater utility will be derived from the opposition and so a rational voter should vote for the opposition party. If the value is zero, then the rational voter should vote for neither, as they are unable to discern who is the better candidate and therefore would invest resources towards and outcome with unknown benefits. It is important to note that it is highly difficult for most voters to estimate future utility, and many simply use their current utility in deciding how to vote, which is represented by this

equation: $(U^A_t) - E(U^B_t)$, known as the current party differential. The justification behind such calculation “implies that each citizen casts his vote for the party he believes will provide him with more benefits than any other” (Downs 36). Rationality can be viewed in many lights. Fundamentally is this a process of thought and reason with no prior knowledge needed or does it require a minimal level of base knowledge to accomplish any logical decision making regarding the voting process? So, what is the main reason why one would forgo the act of voting and refrain from participation in government?

The answer is short and simple, it is uncertainty. Quite usually “[i]n the real world, uncertainty and lack of information prevent even the most intelligent and well-informed voter from behaving” rationally (Downs 46). Individuals lack all the knowledge to make informed and rational choices about voting, which by the Rational Theory of Voting would mean they are unable to make meaningful and calculated decisions and would therefore refrain from voting. But looking back towards the main research question, would all voters refrain from voting, even if they were ill-informed and improperly educated on an issue? The answer, many scholars believe, is no. It is also noted that, in a large democracy like the US, one vote is minimized and almost worthless amongst a sea of endless other votes.

Several ideas are explored in this literature, the most important ideas being rationality, the party differential, and the utility. In the prior parts of this section, each of these ideas were looked at through the calculative lens of economics. However, these ideas are to be analyzed in the political lens through voting behaviors. Politics is not simply a measure of economic utility, there are other forms of non-material benefits that voters are able to gain. So, rationality this research needs a slightly different definition in answering the main research question. Rationality for the American voter weighs the importance of different aspects of life. One of these important

aspects is the material world, how many items can one buy, how is employment, is income rising or falling. But other aspects of life like living in a clean, equitable, and safe environment. Other important issues like: the general culture of life in the U.S., class and race relations at a given point of time, whether members of society able to gain access to jobs, healthcare, and whether others can procure resources to ensure the entire American society is provided for are important. These are just some of the many, non-material issues that voters may be concerned about and are important to measure in life.

Issue salience is a related effect that could better explain voter behavior in this situation. When looking at how voters rationalize policy issues, the aspect of issue salience, or how important a specific policy is regarding other policies, comes into play. For most voters, certain policies will hold differing levels of importance. An example of this can be viewed through the lives of Mike, Jill, and Janice. Mike views economic issues far more importantly than the preservation of the environment in the beginning of his life. A conclusion can be drawn that for Mike, ensuring his community has access to decent jobs outweighs whether his community lives in a polluted and toxic environment, leading him to starkly support the Republican Party and vote against any government intervention that Democrats would support. Cultural issues, such as abortion, gun rights, religious liberties, and many others may impact an individual's perceptions of which party to support, as each of these are viewed as highly important to those whom value such things in contrast to supporting an agenda that may benefit their lives by preserving the environment and ensuring companies are unable to abuse the workers and communities that support them.

From Down's work, there are three ideas that need proper definition for the main research question of this paper: the rational and irrational voter; the self-interested voter; and

utility income. In the scope of this paper rationality can be viewed in two ways, the first being that rationality is simply calculating economic gain a policy may provide and the second being a decision-making process that weighs an individual's goals in life, including social, economic, and cultural desires. In the scope of this paper, the latter definition will be used as the world of politics is not strictly how material gain should be pursued but is defined by the role of government in affecting one's life and community. A self-interested voter is defined as an individual which pursues policy goals for all aspects of their life, weighing the importance of these preferences against one another to decide what policy is most important to pursue. Americans are, for the most part, wealthy in the sense that most of society's material needs have been met. This allows the average voter to value non-economic policy and include these issues in their rationalization process for determining how they wish to vote. Lastly, utility can be defined by the perceived benefits policies will bring to the life of an individual and the effects they will hold within their community and daily life. As voting pursues benefits that are not insured, due to the nature of representative government, there is no direct measure of what utility is, but solely the perceived benefits utility may bring to an individual.

With this usage of rationality, there are a shortcoming, in that how can an individual determine meaning and worth from policy beliefs which contrast perceived economic, social, or cultural gains and how do they weigh against each other. To an individual making the average income, a perceived loss of a marginal amount of income is less than dealing with the consequences of toxic pollution which can take decades off a human life. Cultural values must also be calculated in their value in contrast to how they will affect the life of an individual and how such a belief may affect income, culture, and community. It is because beliefs are so complex that a groups overall beliefs must be quantified in terms of what a group thinks overall

to establish their overall view of an issue. Secondly, that view must be analyzed as to how it may affect the group to determine if such a view is positive and therefore rational. This research aims to do such.

A deeper analysis of the nuances of what rationality is may also prove helpful in understanding whether voters make decisions that are in their own best interests, specifically in relation to the examples of Mike, Janice, and Jackie. A more in-depth calculative understanding of why voters turn out in support of their policy orientations progresses the analysis of the main research question. It does so regarding explaining which individuals will vote and a possible explanation of why voters may vote against their own rational self-interest. The basic model of rationality can be seen in Figure A below which is the work of John Aldrich. He shows the calculus of utility cost when voting.

[Figure A: Rational Choice and Turnout]

	Winning by More than One Vote	Winning by One Vote	Tie	Losing by One Vote	Losing by More than One Vote
Vote for Preferred Candidate	$1-C^a$	$1-C$	$1-C$	$\frac{1}{2}-C$	$0-C$
Vote for Other Candidate	$1-C$	$\frac{1}{2}-C$	$0-C$	$0-C$	$0-C$
Abstained Vote	1	1	$\frac{1}{2}$	0	0

[Aldrich 249]

The model assumes that the basic utility gained and whether one should vote from the outcome of an election is dependent upon several variables. The first of which is dependent on three possible actions: vote for one candidate, vote for the other candidate, or to abstain from the

voting process. The utility received by the outcome of the election process is the next component of this rational choice equation. If the preferred candidate wins, preferences are determined by voters' wants and desires, a utility value of one is achieved. If the other candidate wins, then a utility of zero is achieved. Lastly, if there is a tie, a utility of zero. In this basic model, votes act as a series of investments, and with any investment there is usually a cost. Those costs can come in the form of investments of knowledge or ability to vote. A specific utility can be derived on the combination of whether one votes for the preferred, the other, or abstains and whether both parties tie, one party wins by one vote, or by more than one vote. And the utility gained by an individual in each situation differs based on the differing costs voters must pay to submit their vote, as seen in the model. And this model implies that a rational voter will: "[n]ever vote for the less preferred candidate; [i]f costs of voting are high (.5 or greater), always abstain; [i]f costs of voting are zero (or even negative-i.e., you get more value from voting, per se, than it costs to vote), then vote for A because voting for A dominates abstaining; and, [i]f $0 < C < .5$, the basic model is silent. Note that it is silent because of the middle columns. Thus, rational choice models of turnout differ over ways to handle these middle cases" (Aldrich 251). Aldrich's work assumes that there is a calculative process voters' rationalize in order to spend utility and vote. Therefore, voters must be able to identify correctly with policy makers to then calculate their utility cost and possible risks when voting. If voters are irrational, then they are wasting valuable resources on partaking in a political process they do not understand.

Another addition, slightly more controversial, to this model was the creation of a new variable, the continuation of democracy. Voters will also vote by calculating their impact on the continuation of a democratic government by completing their civic duty as a voter. This model goes as follows: $R = PB - C + D$. R is the reward for voting, where P is the perceived closeness of

the election, B is the benefit of the preferred candidate over the other, C is the cost of voting and D is the duty to vote in a democratic society. It goes to say that the higher the value of P, the closer the election, and the more civic duty one holds, the higher the reward one will receive for voting and the more the cost of voting is diminished regarding the total gained benefit from the whole process. This model is predicated on the belief that individuals can make assessments on their utility.

A competing model, the Min-Max Regression model does not believe so, as it states individuals are unable to make the difficult realizations on what their true utility will be. In this model specifically, the regret of abstaining is analyzed regarding voting or not, and what the consequences are for choosing to not vote. There is a large amount of advanced calculus involved in this calculation, but the general idea is that in the right circumstances, individuals will be prompted to vote, and therefore does a better job at predicting turnout.

With these theories in mind, which have delved deeper into the rational process of determining utility and likelihood of voting, what does this mean for the main research question, do individuals vote in their own self-interests. Rational choice theory explains in what situation an individual will vote and how their vote will attempt to rationalize their self-interests. Returning to the idea of issue salience, if one perceives a specific issue is of more importance, this is factored into the individual's calculation of self-interest, leading many to the conclusion of who they will vote for. Regarding Mike, Jill, and Janice, figures like Rush Limbaugh and Donald Trump provide emotional satisfaction and affirmation of their incorrect opinions and conclusions. This affirmation process strengthens resolve of individuals who harbor resentment through demagogue figures and usurp the salience of economic self-interests leading individuals like Mike, Janice, and Jackie against their own rational self-interests.

Aldrich and Downs offer two similar explanations of how voters rationalize and process the voting process. Both are similar regarding the rationalization process of voting, however there are a few key differences between the two theories which can offer reflection towards the main research question. Both scholars agree on the specific calculations that voters assume when rationalizing voter preferences, using utility income to decide on how to vote and what politicians to support through their actions in the political process. However, Aldrich also denotes the circumstances where an individual is likely to vote and when an individual may abstain from voting. The other key difference in Aldrich's thought behind voter rationalization is that a vote is an investment in democratic society, which may help to explain why some conflicted voters torn on key issues may choose to vote despite having conflicted desires in the political process that would otherwise force an individual to abstain from the political process.

Section D: Summary

Analysis of the Chapter II on the theories of voting conclude that a mixture of rational choice voting, and emotional affirmation may heavily impact the rationality of a voter by defining key terms in answering the main research question and by highlighting the complexities of what determines self-interest. The research explores three models which explain voter choice. These models on voter decisions are based on resentment towards other advancing out-groups predicated on a feeling of in-group decline, forgotten and necessary cultural values, and rational processes which explain the likelihood and candidate choice in voting.

Chapter III:

Review of Literature Part II: The Unsophisticated and or Conflicted Voter

Introduction

The third chapter in this research investigates ways that the voter may be unsophisticated and unable to discern what is rational or attribute proper causation in politics. This chapter considers ways in which the average voter does not meet the expectations of a rational voter. Specifically, voters who lack sophistication when determining the correct official to support or policy position to align with and how conflicting issues make it difficult for voters to align with their most rational choice in politics.

Section A: The Unsophisticated Voter

To best understand the rationale behind how voters chose their representative and policy positions, is to understand literature on voter choice. The lens to look through when analyzing voting behavior is the Folk Lore Theory of Democracy, forwarded by Christopher A. The Folk Theory of Democracy offers a justification to salvage the integrity of the American electorate, explaining how their seemingly uneducated decisions can still result in positive political outcomes. Should this theory be found true and beneficial, then the electorate would be in effect a body, not rational, but still able to come to rational outcomes despite their lack of political knowledge, answering the main question of this research.

The Folk Theory of Democracy is “a set of accessible, appealing ideas assuring people that they live under an ethically defensible form of government that has their interests at heart” (Achen 1). This theory makes several assumptions on a citizenry within democracy, ascertaining that “[the democratic citizen] is supposed to know what the issues are, what the history is, what

the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, [and] what the likely consequences are” (Achen 23). This theory of voting behavior assumes that the populace can adequately vote in representatives that will act with their best interest in mind. It is important to note that the behavior expected by such a theory is in direct contrast to the life experiences of many voters like Mike, Jackie, and Janice. The Folk Theory of Democracy predicts that elections will produce governments that are effective and efficient. So how does such a theory function, and could it explain the predicament many Americans face, in terms of their poor voting choices.

This relates to one of the largest problems within the Folk Theory of Democracy, that being it is a highly “‘narrow framework’ in assessing what society wants or should get” (Achen 27). The Folk Theory simply does not account for the many poor decisions that the voting body makes, and therefore is unable to function properly when predicting the votes of individuals in what is best for society. There is also the idea that the will of the people create and subjugate government, known as political sovereignty. This idea, which is pertinent to the Folk Theory of Democracy is “‘greatly circumscribed if voter[s] merely ‘ratify’ the choices made by party elite” (Achen 65). Not only are voters wills susceptible to elite influence, but who is to say that voters are even able to identify the elites representing them. In “‘2008, in the earliest stages of a three-way race for the Democratic nomination, ‘barely 30% of Democratic voters managed to select the candidate who...best represented their own interests’” (Achen 67). Aside from this incompetence and the overall gullible nature of the American electorate, there are more issues dissuading this research from using the Folk Theory of Democracy as a justification for voter rationality.

Retrospective voting is another major problem for the Folk Theory. Achen and Bartels argue retrospective voting is inadequate. Proponents of this retrospection offer it as a solution to

the lack of sophistication in American voters. Therefore, the retrospective voter phenomenon arises as an explanation to save the unsophisticated voter. The past experiences of the voter lead to reflection on the status of events, in turn leading to a rationalization of whether there should be change or if things are to remain the same politically. There are several shortcomings however, as retrospection is imperfect and can assign faulty blame. In simpler terms, due to retrospective voting, “the electorate...hold[s] rulers responsible for calamities and disasters that are clearly beyond their control” (Achen 118). This idea goes as far back to divine rulers in antiquated systems of governments like pharaohs and emperors, as they were held responsible for plague or poor harvest by the citizenry and this societal behavior has carried over to modern democratic regimes.

Looking another example, after a string of “shark attacks in New Jersey” in 1917, the people of New Jersey held Woodrow Wilson accountable for these attacks (Achen 118). They held their vote, which caused him to lose the state in the upcoming presidential election. They did so despite his inability to control or mitigate this tragedy that scared an entire community and ruined a booming tourism industry off the coast of the state. In this specific case, voters were unable to discern that President Wilson had little to do with the shark attacks and thus showing their poor knowledge when voting. This has a greater level of merit when looking into the cases of Jackie, Mike and Janice, and their inability to hold the correct bodies accountable for their misfortune. Some of these cases were unable to discern that it was the chemical plants that caused their suffering, not the government. Retrospective voting asserts that low information citizens can behave as if they have levels of knowledge. While Bartels and Achen argue that retrospective models fall short because the sometimes inappropriately assign blame.

Going back to the main research question, the Folk Theory of Democracies shortcomings do show several lessons that explain why voters may act irrationally with policy preferences and their own voting behavior. These shortcomings within this theory do not in any way disprove the irrationality behind many voters' choices and thusly does not abdicate the electorate from their perceived irrationality.

Section B: The Conflicted Voter

The United States government is comprised of two parties in which many voters identify with either the predominantly conservative or the predominantly liberal party, those being the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Many American voters do vote primarily on party lines, however there is a fairly large segment in which “about half of the citizens declare themselves to be moderates or are unable to place themselves on an ideological scale” which aligns with one party or another (Gironde). This begs the question, as to how these unaligned voters deal with the conflicting views of their own political preferences in determining which candidate gains their vote. In such an instance the “conflicted voter's curse emerges: If there is no position that reconciles the ideological views of both parties, it is always rational for conflicted voters to abstain even if they are, as a group, a majority” (Gironde). The conflicted voter curse is rationalized as that there is some level of psychological cost non-partisan voters bear as they rationalize their conflicting ideology. Simply, a conflicted voter will abstain as the costs of weighing preferred contrasting policy beliefs exerts strain and make it more difficult to rationalize choice in a preferred candidate and to politically participate. It is also more difficult for moderates to make these calculations as parties increase the distance between their political beliefs, as political polarization increases.

The differences in party identification in a polarized environment forces many non-partisans to compromise on their views, to align with the party which currently represents their views the best. And in many cases, “most citizens [and] groups attach different levels of concern to distinct issues” (Gironde). Independents are often forced into a calculus to decide how to invest their vote. Independents are not the only group of conflicted voters.

Partisans also represent many in this category. All voters will vote based on two separate spectrums, those being economic and moral issues. Typically, partisans align with the economic and moral issues of a singular party platform, but in the recent decades, United States politics has become increasingly more complex. Mainly, many voters do not completely identify with every issue a party offers, creating a conflicted voter. This started “when parties began differentiating on their positions on abortion or gun control,” while “voters caught at the intersection of conflicting economic interests and moral preferences were left without a natural partisan home” (Stan 53). Voters are put in between a rock and a hard place, when discerning which issues, they should favor with the support of their own vote. For example, a professional college educated Christian, who identifies with liberal policy and has consistently voted for liberal candidates is faced with new legislation that is contrary to his moral beliefs predicated in Christianity. This person must now calculate how he or she will vote moving forward, and what politicians best align with their own opposing moral and economic views.

These views on the economy and of the moral character of the nation are two of the most important aspects of what motivates voter preferences in policy. And “[g]iven the predominance of moral and economic issues in political discourse, it is difficult for those who are pushed in different ideological directions by their religiosity or economic status to find a comfortable position along the liberal-conservative continuum” (Stan 78). On the individual level, voters’

“solution has been to adopt a political worldview that harmonizes their seemingly opposing political interests” to the best of their ability (Stan 78). An important factor to account for in this situation is the role of polarizing elites, who in turn have made it difficult for the average moderate partisan to align consistently on all moral and economic issues. Elites within the Republican Party have focused on the cultural issues to mobilize rural, more conservative populations. Republican officials have capitalized on the beliefs of rural voters to force these constituencies to vote for their cultural values. It is not in a sense that voters are unable to rationally discern their interest and decide their best policy outcomes, but that an increasingly polarized elite have backed rural voters into a corner. In this corner, voters must choose to pursue their economic goals and align with the Democratic Party or pursue their moral and cultural goals with Republicans. The conflicted voter was caused by polarizing elites, and because of this confliction and the political environment they live in, they are forced to act irrationally.

Section C: Summary

As can be seen from the third chapter of the research, the voter may seem to be very irrational and even irredeemable from a logical standpoint when solely looking at the lack of voter sophistication. Retrospective voting does not work, among many other issues that voters tend to showcase coming from a lack of knowledge. But issue salience and the confliction within a voter brings some hope to the light of rationality. If there is confliction, some issues may and do rise above the importance of others, creating a balancing scale that determines the interest of an individual in the political field.

Chapter IV: Methodology

Section A: Rationalization for Union Political Choice

This research examines whether voters vote in their rational self-interest. To do this, a dive into the workings of a singular and specific group is needed to measure what is in that groups self-interest and whether they vote in such a manner. The group that this research will use to measure the main question is the working-class voter. This group is a measurable class of individuals that are present in the US, who have similar social policies that would benefit their group due to their unique economic situation. This first section within the Methods Chapter will explore what policies would best benefit working-class voters and explore what party best represents their policy needs, as well as other important factors. Subsequent sections within the Methods Chapter will investigate the descriptive statistics of working-class voters to better understand their demographic and political characteristics. The last section uses logistical regression to estimate the likelihood blue collar voter supports the democratic candidate for president in 2012. Data from the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey is used in this study. The 2012 CCES is used for a few main reasons. It is a large sample size of about 50,000 n. With this large sample, meaningful conclusions can be drawn from the relationships within the model for the working class and non-working-class subgroups. With a larger n, comes a more robust analysis of working class in this research.

Working class individuals will be defined as those who are currently or have at one point held union membership. Union membership is an acceptable way to measure whether an individual is a part of the working-class. This is because, a vast majority of working-class individuals tend to be a part of unions. Non-working-class individuals do not take part in union membership generally. Union jobs have been for a large part of U.S. history linked exclusively

with working class jobs, ranging from coal miners' unions, steel unions, and automobile manufacturers' unions, among many other working-class fields. Though non-working-class jobs in professional fields like many doctors, lawyers, and bankers have never had unions to participate in. Service jobs are also void of unions. Further, the union vote has been a traditional Democratic bloc of supporters because the party represents their interests. Therefore, analyzing what factors encourage a union member to defect to the Republican Party is a "best-case" method for studying the main research question.

The union vote has many interests in certain policies, and often have various legislation they support. This research argues it is more rational to support Democratic candidates than Republican candidates for those who are apart of unions. This is for a variety of reasons. Mainly, when analyzing the unique set of economic issues that face many Americans, union members will more greatly benefit from many of the social policies that the Democratic Party advocates. But politics and policies supported by groups are often not a black or white issue. There are many cases that may affect the working-class vote that are not strictly economic but based on moral sentiments towards cultural issues which are dominant in the U.S. These cultural issues may reduce support for the Democratic Party. But first, an analysis of the pertinent economic issues must be analyzed to explain why union voters should rationally support the Democratic Party.

Analysis of pertinent economic issues is important because to determine whether voters are acting rationally in their self-interest, it must be known what truly benefits the working class. Before such analysis can occur however, a definition of rationality is needed to truly understand how to measure whether the working class is acting in their self-interest. When reflecting on much of the literature review, a singular definition of rationality is difficult, due to the complex

nature of human behavior in the realm of voting. A rational human will tend to make choices that are beneficial to themselves, as individuals in society and will look for their own self benefit, as discussed in much of Anthony Down's work. So, a rational individual ought to take actions and hold beliefs that will directly advantage themselves and other individuals in their group to procure resources and benefits. This is because, as an animal looks for food to survive in the wild, an individual in democracy will look for resources to better their lives in a civilized society. A deep look into specific policy issues is the next step towards uncovering what the working-class voter ought to support, to compare with how they vote in a presidential election and determine their rationality.

The first major issue that the Democratic Party has historically supported is the protection of workers' rights against the large corporations which have employed them. The Democratic party has a long history of supporting and advancing worker protections. This can be easily seen through the myriad of support from numerous unions that have often led union members to support blue candidates. Though the success of these candidates in supporting workers' rights may be argued, there is a clear distinction between Democrats and their Republican counterparts. Republicans plainly have supported business owners by implementing more lax laws on paid time off, workers compensations, and health care mandates that have been designed to protect workers from employers and have actively hindered union organizing in the United States. These actions have made a clear distinction for many workers in the past as to which party to support with their vote. Any rational and educated worker would choose to protect their income should they be injured, have a child, and need to or want to care for the child in their first few months of life, and ensure adequate access to healthcare that ought to be provided by employers. These all provide valuable resources to the worker and are policies that many Democratic politicians have

supported for decades. This makes it easy in determining that the rational economic choice for workers, especially in a physically demanding environment where most union workers are employed, that the Democratic Party is the rational choice to support when looking through the lens of workers' rights.

The next major point of policy is taxation. Republicans favor tax cuts, while Democrats for decades have favored increased taxes on those in the highest tax brackets. The US uses a graduated income tax system, where taxes are applied differently to different set levels of income. An example, not the actual tax system, is the first thirty thousand dollars made, is taxed at ten percent, then thirty to sixty thousand is taxed at twenty percent, and all income above sixty thousand is taxed at twenty-two percent. Democrats favor an increase to the higher levels of income, for the ultra-wealthy, with the justification being that those who are multi-millionaires and billionaires are wealthy due to the sacrifices of employees, and ought to give back to society by paying more in taxes. Republicans believe that this will stifle the creation of wealth and hinder the whole of society. The increased redistribution of wealth to provide a better life for Americans in the general society would most probably provide for programs that would benefit those who are not excessively wealthy, but instead live normal lives often paycheck to paycheck like many working-class individuals. While there may be some credit to the Republican view, this is not definite and there is no direct incentive for working-class individuals to support such a belief. Democrats offer direct reward through the procure of resources through redistribution, as well as through distribution of wealth. This makes again, the rational choice for working-class union individuals to support the Democratic as they receive something, though this is undetermined.

This begs the question of what union members will be receiving through their support of the Democratic Party. Redistributive policy and distributive policy would be the two ways many working-class individuals would receive resources from the government that would be redistributed from the ultra-wealthy. Democrats have a long history of supporting these types of policies which are favored by union voters. Union and Democratic goals align towards the reduction of inequality, procurement of healthcare, and for job protections. This aligns union voters with the Democratic Party.

The economics of the working class are more in line with progressive Democrats, but what of their cultural views. The working class is often seen as far more conservative from a cultural perspective than their economic views. When reflecting upon much of the literature review, when advocating for social policy, their beliefs will favor Republican perspectives. This would be seen that when looking towards issues like abortion, immigration, and religion among many others, the working class will support conservative views. This puts many working-class individuals into an interesting situation where they must make a choice between supporting Democratic politicians based on economic policy forgoing much of their social needs or supporting the Republican Party while forgoing much of their economic needs. This returns to the idea of issue salience from the Literature Review Chapter. Will economic needs trump social needs or vice versa? Later in this chapter, this question will be expanded upon when looking into logistic regression on this very topic.

Besides policy alignment and benefit the working class should experience, there is also the context of the 2012 US presidential election. It is to be noted, that the 2016 US Presidential election is not used because then presidential nominee Donald Trump ran on a very different policy scheme than previous Republicans. Donald Trump ran on both cultural backlash and a

return to economic prosperity that greatly concerned the working class, ranging in issues from immigration to Made in America. This was mainly done on a reliance of promises on ensuring factories and jobs would stay in the US. These issues were popular within large portions of the working-class. Therefore, 2012 is selected as a more appropriate election year featuring a conventional Republican candidate in Mitt Romney and incumbent President Barack Obama.

2012 was four years out of the 2008 financial crisis. The two candidates running were Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. President Obama was a highly charismatic leader who saw large amounts of support and popularity in the past 2008 Election cycle. Obama grew up in a life that was not a multi-millionaire venture capitalist like his opponent Mitt Romney. Romney in this regard was far less relatable to the average American than Obama. It was more difficult for Americans to relate to Mitt than Barack. The response to the financial crisis was headed by Barack Obama, the big tech boom that occurred in the US which propelled companies and the economy to new heights was again sustained under Obama. The institution of the Affordable Care Act was a result of initiatives taken by Obama. There were many events that had occurred during the first four years of the Obama administration that made many believe he would be the correct, charismatic, and relatable choice in 2012, which was made true in November of 2012. Many of the issues in this race characterized long standing stable beliefs in politics on various issues about topics ranging from the economy, to immigration, to other social issues. For these reasons, the 2012 CCES is the best survey to determine whether the working class votes rationally.

Section B: The Union Voter Defined

This section of the methods chapter looks in greater detail towards the union voter, and various factors that are present in union households and may affect voting behavior differently

than nonunion households, represented by the working class and non-working class groups in Tables I through VII found in the Appendix. The characteristics this research explores are age, educational level, income, ideology, religiosity, and tolerance towards immigrants. In each of these relations, this section of the research will explore how each of these defining factors affect union membership. Lastly this section will explore how union membership affected the 2012 US presidential vote for working class and non-working class voters. The cross tabulations used to analyze the working class and non-working class are derived from the 2012 CCES survey.

Age is a characteristic that highlight valuable demographic trends for different populations. As seen in Table I, in the appendix, working class voters are older than their non-working class counterparts. There are far fewer younger working class voters, than their counterparts. This trend could be attributed towards the major shift in the US economy in the past few decades, where jobs in industry have become fewer in number, to to increased globalization. The educational level of working class and non-working class groups differs greatly. Union members in the working class account for far larger portions of highschool graduates and of individuals with some college experience or of having two year college degrees. While in contrast non-union voters were found to represent the majority of individuals with four year degrees. Higher levels of education has often been viewed as a defining characteristic in affecting voter knowledge, which plays a direct role in creating a rational voter. Without adequate voting efficacy, one will have a lower level of rationality. These educational trends can be seen in Table II within the Appendix.

Looking to Table III in the Appendix, family income varies for working class and non-working class voters. Working class voters are seen to have a far more homogenous and concentrated level of income, representing a majority of those earning the middle two income

brackets. While in contrast voters who are non-working class occupy the extremes of the income distribution. This may be because non-working class jobs are more varied in their level of income while having many in low paying roles but also having many individuals who make large amounts of wealth every year. There is far more inequity in income for the non-working class population which concentrates wealth and resources at the top of the earned-income spectrum while union jobs pay better but do not allow for large wealth concentration.

Table IV, found in the Appendix, demonstrates the biases in ideology of working class and non-working class groups. The working class population is far more liberal than non working class individuals. Working class individuals are more liberal and are more heavily represented on the liberal end of the political spectrum. Non-working class individuals are more conservative. These trends may be explained by the living conditions of individuals respective groups. Union voters will favor liberal ideology due to liberal historical ties and support for the working class, while trends for non-working class tend towards conservatism because of historical support for elites by Republicans. Table V, also found in the Appendix, tabulates religiosity and union status. Religious importance is more important for non-working class individuals in the extreme. But, both groups showcase that religion is equally important when looking towards moderate views on religion. This trend could be explained by many non-working class individuals who may be apart of evangelical groups which value religion extremely, trending religiosity towards a higher than expected value for many non-working class individuals.

Table VI, found in the Appendix, looks toward groups tolerance of immigrants. The more ideologically conservative non-working class groups harbors more intolerance directed at immigrants. While the more liberal working class tends to be more accepting of immigrant populations. This is to be expected, as more liberal ideology will tend to support immigrants

more so, as conservatives often fear the perceived societal change immigrants may bring to the US. The final table, Table VII found in the Appendix, showcases that working class voters voted for Barack Obama in 2012 far more than the non-working class. Which reflects much of the ideological biases of both groups.

Summary

The working class vote is defined as a group with a moderate income level, education level, and religiosity. Regarding working class religiosity, this score may be lowered in relation to other economic groups due to evangelical voters in the non-working class who overrepresent high levels of religiosity for the non-working class. Union voters are ideologically more inclined to be liberal, possibly due to their historical ties to the democratic party, which may affect their views and tolerance towards immigrants and their presidential vote in 2012.

Section C: Logistic Models

Below, in Table VIII, are three separate models of logistic regression. Each model is a progression of the previous, with the first direct influence of the classic variables that influence the presidential vote. This Simple Model, Model I, can be represented by this equation:

$$\text{Presidential Vote} = a + B_1(\text{Income}) + B_2(\text{Education}) + B_3(\text{Age}) + B_4(\text{Union}$$

Membership) + B_5(Religiosity) + B_6(Immigrant Tolerance). The research adds upon the simple model by introducing two new interactive variables in a new logistical regression.

This new complex model is Model II. The new terms in this model are interactions between religiosity and union membership and next an interaction between environmental importance and union membership. Model II is represented by: Presidential

$$\text{Vote} = a + B_1(\text{Income}) + B_2(\text{Education}) + B_3(\text{Age}) + B_4(\text{Union}$$

Membership)+B₅(Religiosity)+B₆(Immigrant Tolerance)+ B₇(Religious Interaction)+B₈(Environmental Interaction). The final model follows and adds a final new interactive term.

This third model adds an interaction between economic perception and union membership to Model II, creating the new regression model: Presidential Vote=a+B₁(Income)+B₂(Education)+ B₃(Age)+ B₄(Union Membership)+ B₅(Religiosity)+ B₆(Immigrant Tolerance)+ B₇(Religious Interaction)+ B₈(Environmental Interaction)+B₉(Economic Interaction). Please see all models below in Table VIII.

Table VIII: Logistical Regression Models for 2012 U.S. Presidential Vote

Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III
Income	-0.074***	-0.074***	-0.086***
Education	0.139***	0.116*	0.120**
Age	-0.007	-0.006	-0.007
Union Member	0.562***	4.063***	9.463***
Religiosity	0.544***	0.573***	0.577***
Immigration	2.372***	2.277***	2.266***
Interaction I (union*religiosity)		-0.292*	-0.433**
Interaction II (union*environmental)		-0.965***	-0.540***
Interaction III (union*economic)			-2.055***

CCES 2012

In the figure above, there are several variables used and each having a unique purpose. The first variable chosen, income, is a very basic predictive factor in determining the likelihood or probability of voting Democratic based upon household income. The next variable chosen is the educational level of the respondent. Education is a typical indicator of voting behavior. Turnout typically increases at higher levels of education, all other factors being equal.

The next included variable in Model I is age. Age can show important demographic trends in a relationship. Different age groups may behave differently which can lead to various conclusions regarding voting behavior and age groups. As people age their likelihood of voting increases and they become more conservative. The fourth variable in the model is union membership, measured as a one-zero variable. Union membership is used to define a test to determine whether working class voters vote with Democrats in their rational self-interest, and thus must be included in the model. Religiosity can help determine how individuals who are religious vote. Religion is an important factor linking individuals to more conservative social values. Last, tolerance towards immigrants tests another merit of social and cultural beliefs that the working class may hold.

Each model uses logistic regressions to determine the probability that various factors have of affecting the likelihood individuals will vote for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2012. The logistic regression of Model I estimates the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate with each of the previous variables mentioned. The logistic regressions in Model II and Model III introduce interactive variables. The interactive variables test whether they reduce the likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate. The variables introduced in Model II are the interactions between union membership and religious importance and union membership and views towards environmental protection. Environmental protection is used to determine the

effect post-modern values have on the voting outcome for union workers. Post-modern values represent the valuation of non-income, as much of the United States is wealthy and able to survive. Union workers may value a clean environment over marginal gain in income which provides little utility in life. The final model introduces a new interactive variable between union membership and views on the economy. The economic interactive variable is used measure the effect retrospection may have on the voting process, which if influencing the vote away from the Democratic platform, would showcase irrationality. These interactive variables will be used to test whether the probabilities of voting for Obama in 2012 change compared to the results in Model I. This is a test of alternative influences on the rational economic vote by union members.

If union voters respond to religious values, then the interaction term between union membership and religiosity will be significant and reduce the likelihood of voting for President Obama. Similarly, if cultural backlash interacts with the union vote then the interactive term with immigration will reduce the probability of supporting Obama. These predictions were formed on much of the knowledge gained from the literature review chapter. Much of the literature review separate key cultural issues into a highly influential factor that can sway the vote of individuals away from their rational economic self-interest. Variables like religiosity, immigration, and the first and second interactive variable all represent these cultural values, which can be used to determine how values may sway the union vote but can also explain why this change may be rational from the perspective of cultural views.

When reflecting off much of the literature review chapter, there are key trends that should be reflected regarding the strength and direction of the coefficients if working class voters be rational. If working class voters are rational, they would be seen to support the Democratic Party and most policies they often fight for, as discussed in the first section of the methodology

chapter. Age is the first variable measured regarding its effect on presidential vote but can be discarded as it is by no means a significant relationship. The next variable is family income. Family income has a weaker coefficient of -0.074 and $p < 0.001$. This means that as family income increases, the probability of voting for the Democratic party decreases. This illustrates that as income increases, individuals favor the Republican Party to protect their wealth, a rational decision when economic self-interest is valued. Does this make sense and is this relationship rational for the working class? The simple answer is yes. The poorer one is, the more likely they are to rationally favor a Democratic candidate who supports more redistributive policy who also happens to heavily contrast with an ultra-wealthy venture capitalist like Mitt Romney.

The next variable to look at is educational level. For Model I as educational level increases, the probability of voting for Obama increased by 0.139 with a $p < 0.001$. Education is known to significantly increase support for the Democratic Party, as when educational levels generally increase, one often prioritizes a different mindset and focus. This life is generally focused on better and more effective ways to run a society, as more education will equip individuals with far more tools and knowledge to properly address the problems faced in the rational decision-making process that is voting and political participation. Individuals who are educated will favor Democratic policy as it is often a better way to establish quality living and long-term growth and stability in many different issues ranging from health care solutions to simple tax and spending policies. Individuals with education will rationally favor Democratic policy as they value long terms societal growth and equality.

Union membership strongly increases with a coefficient of 0.562 and $p > 0.001$. If one is in a union, they will be far more probable to vote blue than red. Knowing the needs of the working class in much of the United States, it is an expected outcome to see union membership

increase the likelihood of voting Democratic and illustrates their rationality as defined in this research. The next variable to investigate is tolerance towards immigrants. Tolerance strongly increases by a coefficient of 2.372 and a $p < 0.001$. This makes sense due to much of the logical standing behind Democratic ideology being more supportive of immigrants, showcasing rationality that voters align with the beliefs of the party they support. The final variable to look at in the simple model, is religiosity. Religiosity's strong coefficient of 0.544 and $p < 0.001$ denotes that as religious importance decreases, the likelihood of voting for Obama increases this much per unit of change. This relationship is statistically significant and makes logical sense, as discussed in much of the literature review, religion has a powerful effect on mobilizing conservative forces and forcing issues of culture towards political self-reflection.

The overall trend in this simple model speaks much towards the rationality of voters in general, as those who support certain issues often support the candidates who identify with those interests. What is interesting is that the union vote heavily favors the Democratic Party along with those who have high levels of tolerance towards immigrants. In short, Model I reflects the typical predictors of the Democratic vote.

The next step is to test for the effects of the interaction terms. Model II uses two interactive variables, both of which are interactions with union membership. These two other parts of the new interactive variables are religious importance and environmental importance. The model stays much the same for the significance, direction, and strength of the relations between the variables from the first model, excluding union membership. Union membership becomes a far stronger variable when regressing the model with the two new interactive variables. The strength of the union variable increases in the probability of voting for Barack Obama in 2012. The interactive variables tell an interesting tale. The religious interactive

variable is significant with a $p < 0.01$ and it has a strong coefficient of -0.292 . This decreases the probability of voting for the Democratic Party as religious importance increases among union members. This decrease relates heavily to Thomas Franks ideas on religiosity in *What's the Matter with Kansas*. Religion is a powerful tool in forcing union members to choose between their economic interests and their cultural interests. When the religiosity of union members is increased, they become less likely to vote in their rational economic interest and instead may vote within their culturally conservative interest and vote for the Republican ticket. This is another example which proves the calculated decisions many voters take to determine how to spend their vote.

The last variable added to Model II is the interactive variable between union membership and environmental concern. This interaction has a strong coefficient of -0.965 and a $p < 0.001$. What this means is that the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate decrease for union members who increasingly value employment over the environment. Union members who happen to value employment over the protection of the environment recalls an individual, Mike. And there are many other working-class individuals who favor employment over pollution regulations, who also happens to vote red as Republicans often favor employment free of most restrictions like environmental protections. This showcases that some union members do not have post-modern values. Individuals like Mike do not realize that the marginal increase in income will bring less utility to their life than some environmental protection which have health benefits. Those without post-modern views on the environment showcase irrationality because they cannot properly assign value to a livable environment. Model II showcases the same trends as Model I, while exploring two new facets of voter rationality when looking specifically towards the interactive variables constructed for this model. The interactive variables isolate

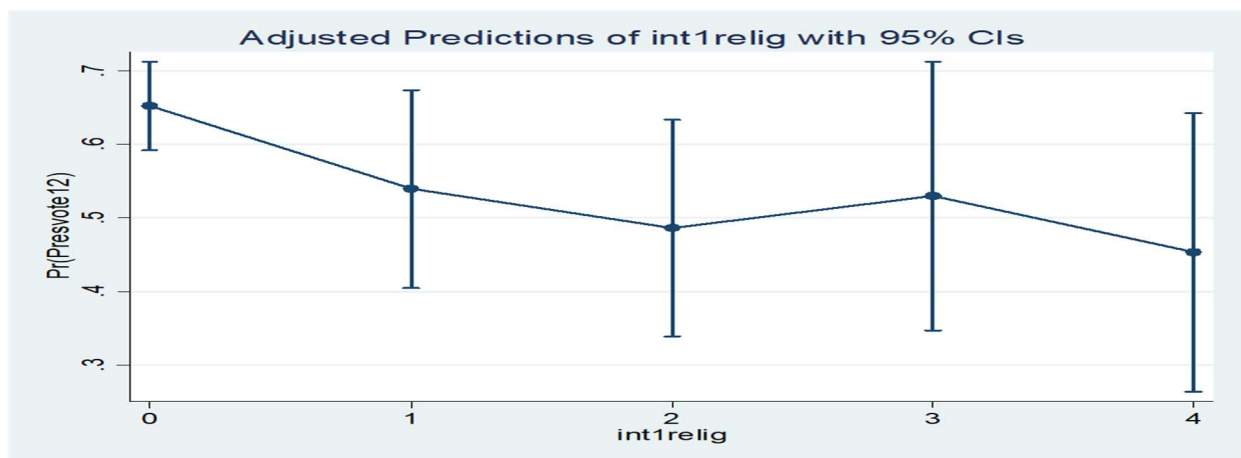
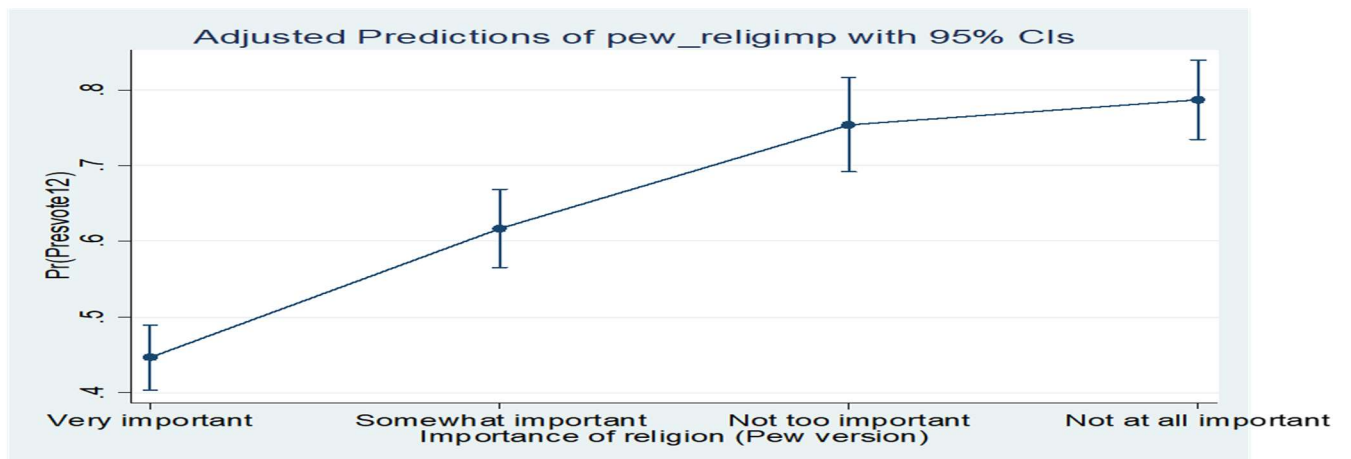
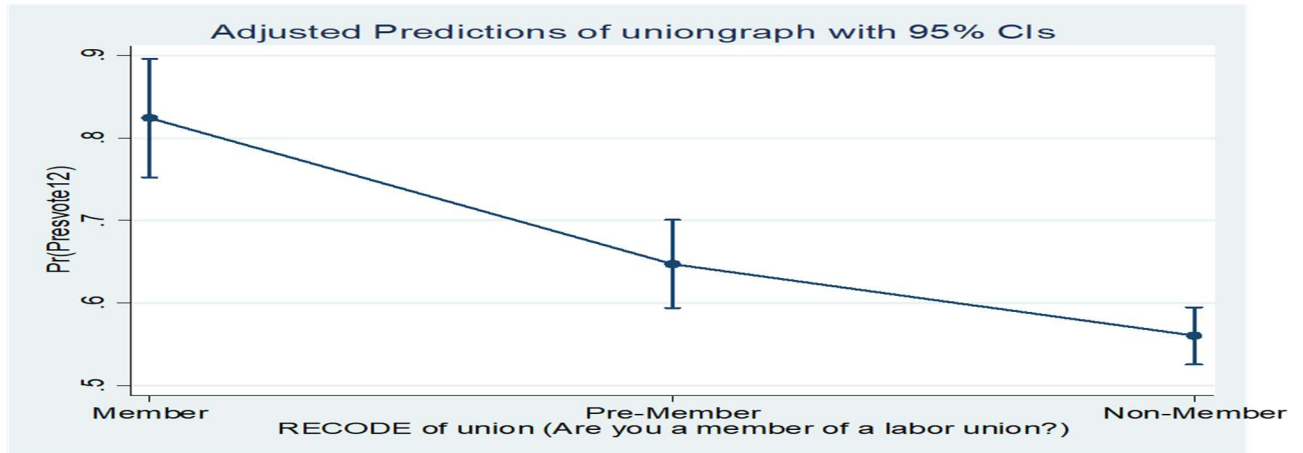
unique aspects of the union community and tell a story about what can affect the union vote in a negative manner. The rational value of union decisions are decreased because of cultural values and a lack of post-modern reflection that conflict with the rational choices union members should make in their self-interest.

The third and final model of the methods shows much of the same. Again, all the variables show the same trends, with the same or more amount of significance, with very similar coefficients. What is interesting about the model is the final interactive variable that was added, int3econ . This last interactive variable measures the effect one's opinion on the economy has on the probability that a union member will vote for the Democratic candidate in the 2012 US presidential election. The coefficient of this new variable is -2.055 and indicates that as union voters' perception of the economy worsens they are less likely to vote for President Obama. If voters were not happy with how the economy functioned under Obama, and his economic policies, they would most likely turn towards a different set of economic policies proposed by Romney. Though this assumes that the president was to blame for the state of the economy, which may or may not be true. The rationale behind this seems to support the retrospective theory of voting, which is an irrational way to determine self-interest because events are often wrongly attributed. In turn, this thought process leads to poor voter decision. This variable, above all the others may cast some level of doubt towards the rationality of voters, but it cannot be determined if voters who are unhappy with the state of the economy rightly punish Obama by voting against him because there are many complex issues voters may correctly or incorrectly take issue with.

The Logistical Regression Models have offered a large amount of insight into the rationality of the working-class, union voter. But graphics are often used to best expand and

visualize concepts. Though much of the main research question has been answered, graphics of more logistical regressions will help to better answer the question of whether voters are able to rationally satisfy their self-interests and vote for the correct candidate. Please see Panel A below, which looks at how union membership, religiosity, and the interaction between union membership and religiosity each affect the likelihood of voting for Barack Obama in 2012.

Panel A [CCES 2012]



The first graphic in Panel A shows the probability of voting for a Democrat in the 2012 presidential election regarding union membership. There is a massive difference between those who are union members and who are non-union members in likelihood of voting for Obama. As can be seen, union members are extremely probable to vote for a Democratic candidate. The first graphic demonstrates that the simple probability that a union is approximately 0.82, in contrast to non-members who are approximately at 0.57. This connects heavily to the Theory of Rational Voting as well as retrospective voting. When analyzing the economic benefits for union members in a presidency controlled by Democratic politicians, workers' rights are supported and better protections for wages, hours, and benefits are pursued. A rational voter who is in a union will have a higher probability of voting for the Democratic Party because of these conditions, while those who are nonunion members have less economic benefit from supporting Democrats, and therefore have a far lower probability of supporting a democrat. The next graphic is Graphic B, which showcases the effect of religious importance on the probability of voting for the Democratic ticket in 2012.

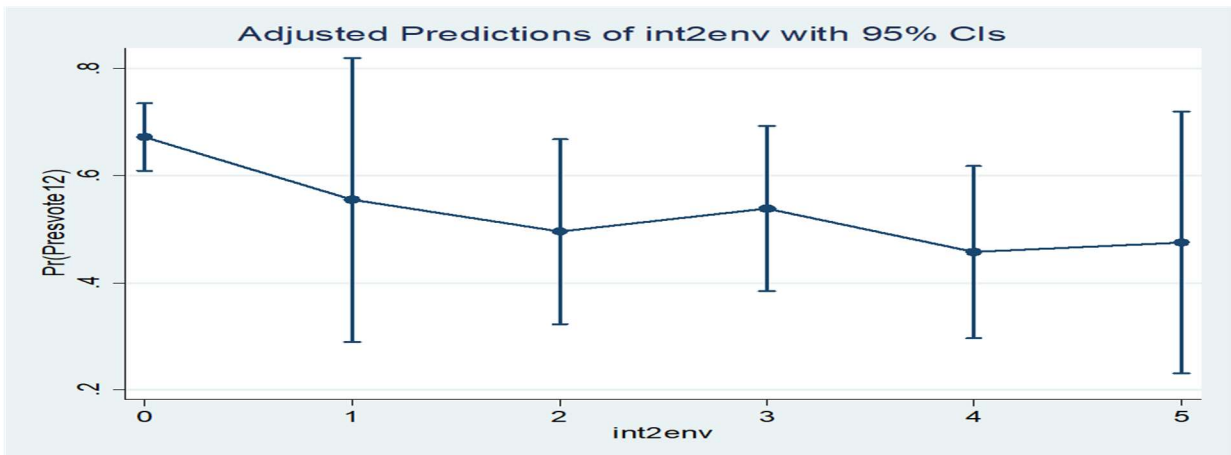
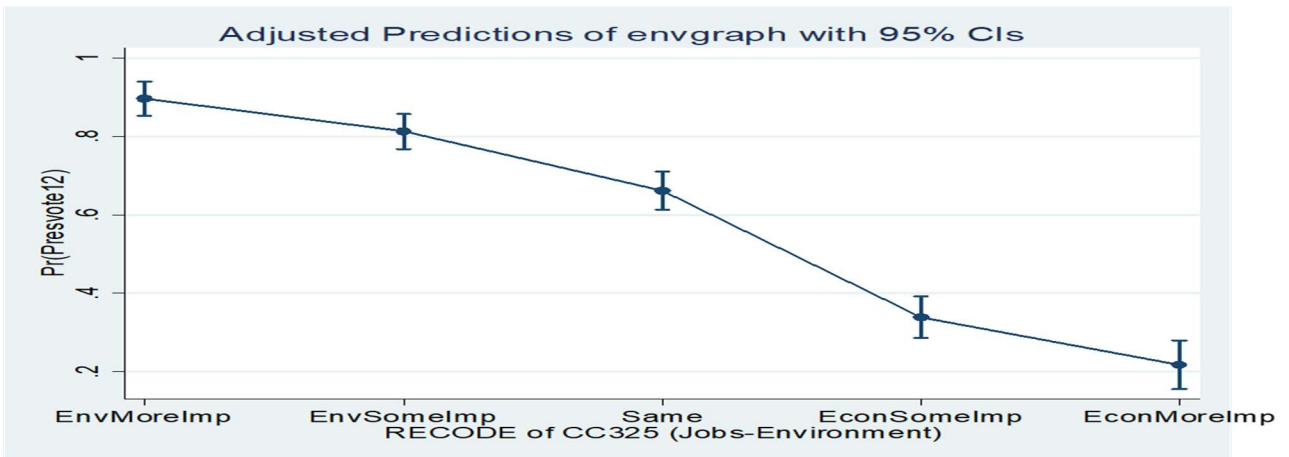
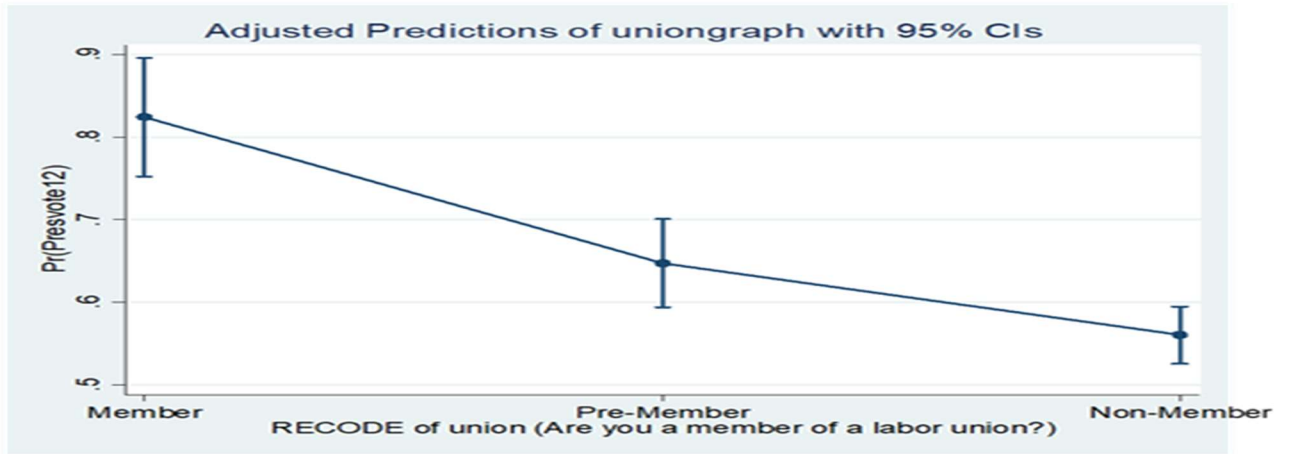
The second graphic in Panel A shows the effect religious importance has on the probability of voting for Barack Obama in 2012. The simple for this graphic is that as religious importance decreases, the probability of voting for Barack Obama increases in 2012. This shows the influence of religion on the vote for individuals in the 2012 presidential election. Religion is tied to highly conservative social values, which in turn are supported by Republican tickets, so it is rational to see an increase in support for the Democratic ticket as religious importance decreases as well.

The third graphic in Panel A illustrates the influence of a union household and religiosity. Being highly religious reduces the probability that a union member votes Democratic from 0.82

(as seen in the first graphic) to 0.65 (as seen in the last graphic), or a reduction of about 0.15. The trend shows that as religious importance increases while being a union member, so too does the probability of voting for the Democratic candidate. Therefore, religiosity decreases the union vote for Democratic candidates suggesting that cultural values can reduce the influence of economic rationality.

This is the expected outcome when rationalizing religious values that are present when an individual holds more conservative religious belief. Because one is more conservative, on account of religious views, they are rationally less likely to support a Democratic candidate because they value more than just simple economic rational self-interest. Their support of religious views on various cultural issues from school prayer to abortion makes them more probable to support Republican candidate and less likely to support Democratic ones. The effect that religiosity has on the union vote is as expected and hypothesized. Religion is a powerful and effective cultural motivator that heavily impacts voting and the rational process behind voting. Religion forces union members to evaluate their own cultural beliefs and minimizes the effect that economic needs have on the vote and reduce support for the Democratic ticket when high religiosity and union membership interact. Please see Panel B below, which looks at how union membership, environmental valuation, and the interaction between union membership and environmental valuation each affect the likelihood of voting for Barack Obama in 2012.

Panel B [CCES 2012]

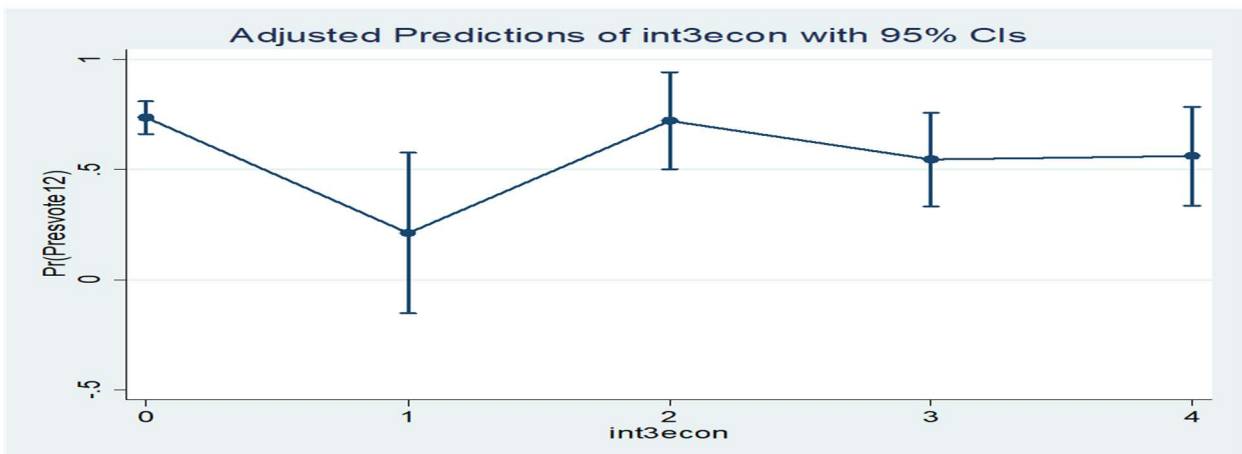
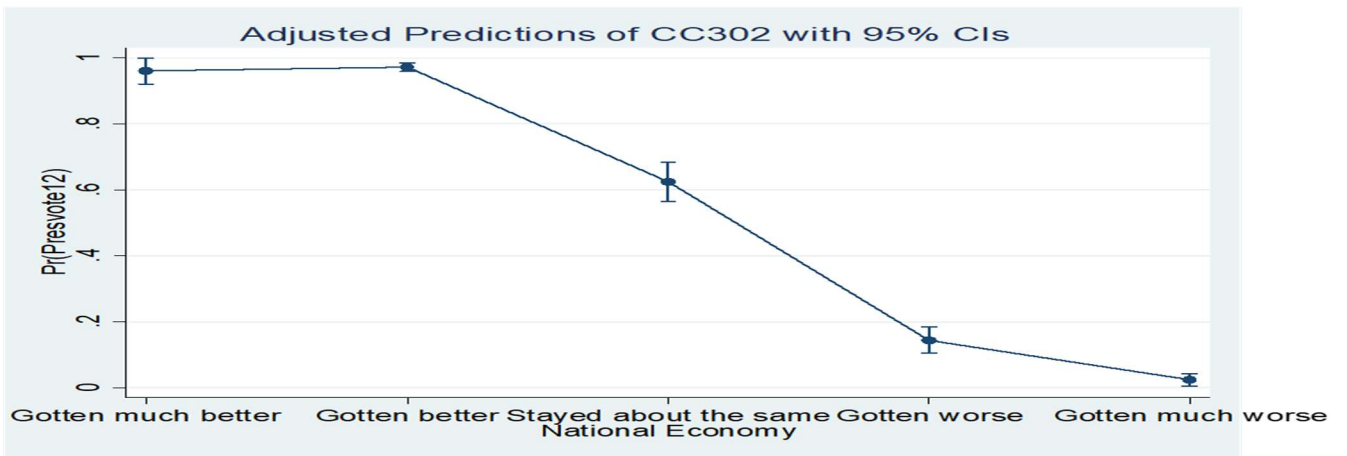
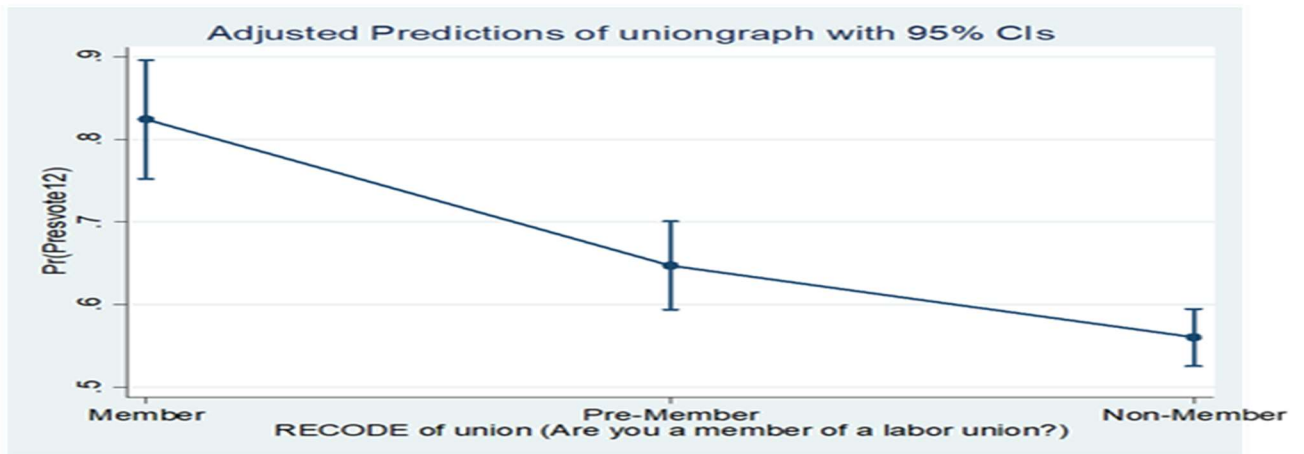


The first graphic is union memberships effect on the probability of voting for Barack Obama in 2012, the same from Panel A. The second Graphic in Panel B, seen above, is the effect that environmental valuation has on the 2012 US presidential vote. As one values the environment more, they tend to vote for the Democratic candidate. If an individual values the environment, they have a coefficient of 0.90, or a strong probability that they will vote for Obama, while those who do not value the environment have a weak 0.20, meaning they are unlikely to vote for Obama. This aligns with many of the expressed points found in *Strangers in Our Own Land*, where those who often value less business regulations will favor Republican tickets out of fear from lost employment opportunity. These individuals sacrifice a clean and healthy unpolluted living environment for both economic opportunities and dislike of government intervention in the form of pollutant regulations on businesses. The trends seen in this graphic, are in line with the expected values when reflecting upon the literature review chapter. Voters who fear government expansion for environmental regulations or fear lost job opportunities will rationally vote against environmental protection, as they believe they must provide for themselves and their families by sacrificing a healthy and clean environment, leading to less regulation and lower support of the Democratic platform, which favors environmental protections and regulations to protect people from business pollutants and externalities. Please see the third graphic which looks at the interactive relationship between union membership and environmental valuation.

The interactive variable represents how the union vote is affected when environmental importance is present. When the economy is extremely important to union members, there is a huge decline in the probability of voting for Obama in 2012. This can be seen when comparing Graphic A's approximate eighty-two percent probability of supporting the democratic ticket to,

as seen in Graphic E, an approximate forty-seven percent probability of supporting Obama in 2012. This is a huge decline in probability, an approximate thirty-five percent drop for democratic support. But what does this mean substantively. This drop may be explained by union voters who view government regulation as wrong and fear of job loss. The union segment which values small government and fears the economic repercussions of regulation on businesses rationally votes in favor of a party which does not impose regulations or restrictions on industry as much in contrast to their Democratic counterparts. The union vote when preferring the economy over the environment thinks of short-term benefit and prioritizes a marginally higher income over a healthy living environment. Therefore, increasing pro-economic views decreases support for Democratic candidates suggesting that pro-economy beliefs sway union voters to adverse policy choices which pollute living environments. Please see Panel C below, which looks at how union membership, economic perception, and the interaction between union membership and economic perception each affect the likelihood of voting for Barack Obama in 2012.

Panel C: Economic Retrospection and Presidential Vote [CCES 2012]



The first graphic in Panel C again shows the simple probability a union voter has of voting for Obama in 2012. The second graphic demonstrates the effect that economic perception has on the probability of voting for the Democratic ticket in 2012. What is seen above, is that those who favor the economy support the incumbent Democratic President Barack Obama, as they believe that he has done well. Those who believe that the economy maintained its strength have a probability of voting for the incumbent ticket of above 0.60, meaning they have a slightly higher probability of supporting Obama, and those who did not favor the economy are very unlikely to support Obama. Individuals judge the President based on how they believe the economy is, if they believe it is poor, then they do not reward the president with a vote. This is the definition of retrospective voting, and is believed to be an irrational process, at least in the review of literature.

The third graphic represents how the union vote is affected by economic perceptions. There is a large discrepancy between those at the extremes of retrospective perspectives on the economy. Those in unions who heavily thought the economy was doing well, had an approximate 0.25 drop in probability of voting for Obama in 2012. While union members who thought the economy was doing very poorly, had an increase of nearly fifty percent probability of voting for Obama in 2012. What do these trends mean, in the context of 2012 for union voters and are they rational?

Union members are predisposed to support Democratic candidates based on economics, due to their unique working needs that have been supported by Democrats in the past. The decline in support for Democratic candidates when economic conditions are viewed poorly is softened when an individual is a union member because of historical ties to the Democratic Party. Union individuals do not support Republicans in times of economic hardship, as they

perceive their economic benefits will be undermined and therefore have a higher probability of voting for Democrats. This showcases a high level of economic rationalization in union members long term self-interest. On the flip side, union voters who believe that economic conditions are positive decrease their probability of voting for Obama greatly. This is because good economic conditions increase the importance of other issues, like cultural values which tend to favor Republican candidates. So, in harsh economic times, union voters value their economic self-interest greatly do not decline much support for Democrats. While in good times the salience of cultural issues increase as economic needs are met, swaying voters away from Democrats and towards Republicans. Therefore, as economic times are good, Democratic support is dwindled due to the increased salience of non-economic issues, suggesting that current economic conditions can improperly affect economic rationality.

Ch V: Conclusion

The main question of this research is a complex one, is the American electorate acting in their own rational self-interest. The research has explored differing theories of voting, as well as numerous shortcomings voters have in making their electoral decision. This research explored working class voters and their various economic needs as a group of people. The methods continued with by exploring the probability of various factors, including union membership, to measure their effects on the presidential vote in 2012. Creating two more complex models, interactive variables were used to determine that in fact, the union vote seems to be mostly rational. They generally voted Democratic. However, religiosity decreases their likelihood of support for Democratic candidates when. If one values religions and is a member of a union, they will be less likely to support Democrats as they are conflicted with whom to support. Therefore, there is some level of irrationality within the union vote.

These same relationship with the subsequent interactive variables further proves the rationality of union voters, as their vote probabilities are altered in expected directions towards whatever interaction is present in the interactive variable. This, proves, that despite union members being predisposed to vote for the democratic candidate, as they are the established rational choice for union voters, they will be swayed toward lesser probabilities if they have conflicting views on wedge issues. A process of rational decision making occurs and alters voting probabilities. This behavior assumes that voters can successfully recognize what politicians are in their own self-interest to support and that individuals can reason as to what and when issues are more or less important.

The research confirms that union voters should vote for the Democratic Party, and this is found to be true. The simple model, Model I, establishes a model which is in line with most other

research on voting behavior. Models II and III then come to establish interactive variables which prove rational processes are ongoing in determining what is ones' self-interests based on individual views and opinions. For example, if one views that immigrants are bad, they will have lower tolerance of immigrants and their probability for support of Democrats will lessen because of this view. This is because issues are salient, and individuals waver against and balance their complex views on a myriad of political and cultural issues. The results of the methods, regarding the interactive variables connects much of the second chapter of this research, as individuals go through a process to determine what to vote based on issue salience and balance the economics aspects of utility gained in the eyes of Downs not just in solely economic terms, but in terms wellbeing.

What may be interesting to continue researching, from this point on, is if other groups of individuals showcase the same trends with interactive variables, to prove that not solely working-class individuals act rationally regarding the changes in voting probabilities when interactive variables are present. This would increase the validity of the research by proving it was not coincidental and other groups behave similarly to working class voters in election. Factors such as religiosity decrease rationality in determining utility and overall wellbeing in life.

What this means for America can be good or bad. Voters act in their self-interest and align and organize in groups, but because voters have differing opinions within a group and different levels of belonging to other organizations, they will have differing probabilities for voting for various candidates. Union members will have differing likelihoods of voting for Barack Obama because some may be religious, have different levels of education, and live different lives. People are not the same, and because of this their different cultures, views, and backgrounds affect their decision-making process, which can negatively impact determining

what is the best way to spend time and energy in voting to maximize the best return for their entire life. American's live in a divided time where much of society is focused upon the individual. People have different views of what is best based upon their unique life. What is good for one may not be good for another or for society. Individuals who pursue self-rational benefit, may not always consider the total effect policy beliefs have on their lives and may act in a way that is disadvantageous to democracy and society. A realistic conversation on how Americans lives can be bettered may help to resolve the problem of voter rationality, as they will more correctly value what positively impacts their lives.

Asa Marvel

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Appendix

Table I: Union Membership and Age

Age	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
18-28	6,365 16.43%	561 3.61%	6,926 12.67%
29-38	4,469 11.54%	812 5.22%	5,281 9.73%
39-48	5,122 13.22%	1,569 10.09%	6,691 12.33%
49-58	8,911 23.00%	4,151 26.70%	13,062 24.06%
59-68	8,533 22.03%	5,619 36.15%	14,152 26.07%
69-78	4,425 11.42%	2,431 15.64%	6,856 12.63%
79-88	860 2.22%	390 2.51%	1,250 2.30%
89-94	51 0.13%	12 0.08%	63 0.12%
18-94	38,736 100.00%	15,545 100.00%	54,281 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table II: Union Membership and Education

Education	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
No High School	1,243 3.21%	299 1.92%	1,542 2.84%
High School	9,909 25.58%	3,806 24.48%	13,715 25.27%
Some College	10,511 27.13%	4,053 26.07%	14,564 26.83%
2-Yr	3,722 9.61%	1,651 10.62%	5,373 9.90%
4-Yr	8,747 22.58%	3,268 10.62%	12,015 22.13%
Post-Grad	4,604 11.89%	2,468 15.88%	7,072 13.03%
All Levels	38,736 100.00%	15,545 100.00%	54,281 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table III: Union Membership and Income

Income (Thousands USD)	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
0-49	17,181 50.64%	5,829 42.34%	23,010 48.24%
50-99	11,112 32.75%	5,373 39.03%	16,485 34.56%
100-199	4,706 13.87%	2,263 16.44%	6,969 14.61%
200-499	809 2.38%	284 2.06%	1,093 2.29%
500+	104 0.31%	14 0.10%	118 0.25%
0-500+	33,931 100.00%	13,768 100.00%	47,699 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table IV: Union Membership and Ideology

Ideology	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
Very Liberal	3,018 8.51%	1,534 10.32%	4,552 9.04%
Liberal	6,572 18.52%	2,985 20.08%	9,557 18.98%
Moderate	11,581 32.64%	4,698 31.60%	16,279 32.34%
Conservative	9,292 26.19%	3,764 25.32%	13,056 25.93%
Very Conservative	5,014 14.13%	1,884 12.67%	6,898 13.70%
All Ideologies	35,477% 100.00%	14,865 100.00%	50,342 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table V: Union Membership and Religiosity

Religiosity	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
Very Important	17,112 44.22%	6,571 42.29%	23,683 43.67%
Somewhat Important	10,245 26.48%	4,182 26.91%	14,427 26.60%
Not too Important	5,373 13.89%	2,257 14.52%	7,630 14.07%
Not at all Important	5,965 15.42%	2,529 16.28%	8,494 15.66%
Total	38,695 100.00%	15,529 100.00%	54,234 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table VI: Union Membership and Immigrant Tolerance

Immigrant Tolerance	Non-Working Class	Working Class	Total
Intolerant	13,823 35.69%	6,163 39.65%	19,986 36.82%
Tolerant	24,913 64.31%	9,382 60.35%	34,295 63.18%
Total	38,736 100.00%	15,545 100.00%	54,281 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table VII: Presidential Vote and Union Membership

Class Status	Vote for Romney	Vote for Obama	Total
Non-Working Class	643 72.57%	756 64.78%	1,399 68.14%
Working Class	243 27.43%	411 35.22%	654 31.86%
Total	886 100.00%	1,167 100.00%	2,053 100.00%

[CCES 2012]

Table VIII: Logistical Regression Models for 2012 U.S. Presidential Vote

Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III
Income	-0.074***	-0.074***	-0.086***
Education	0.139***	0.116*	0.120**
Age	-0.007	-0.006	-0.007
Union Member	0.562***	4.063***	9.463***
Religiosity	0.544***	0.573***	0.577***
Immigration	2.372***	2.277***	2.266***
Interaction I (union*religiosity)		-0.292*	-0.433**
Interaction II (union*environmental)		-0.965***	-0.540***
Interaction III (union*economic)			-2.055***

[CCES 2012]