

**The American Electorate Reconsidered:
A Review Article**

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Abstract

Three decades ago there surfaced a revolution in the study of the American electorate. This behavioral approach and/or revolution is based on the systematic or scientific analysis of public opinion and political behavior. However, in recent years, there has been considerable debate over the nature of the electorate.

The traditional view emphasizes that the American public has been politically unsophisticated. The average citizen views politics only in concrete, operational terms rather than in ideological terms. The American voter arrives at stated opinions almost randomly rather than through thought and reflection, thus precluding predictability across issues as well as stability of attitudes over time. Therefore, the voter engages in sporadic voting behavior based almost exclusively on partisan attachments, which are learned at a very early age within the family with the result of supporting the status quo.

The revisionist view emphasizes that the American public has recently become reasonably sophisticated. It sees the current electorate as reasonably capable of viewing politics ideologically and having true opinions on the issues of the day, which are both constrained and reasonably stable over time. The American voter engages in political behavior based increasingly on opinions of important issues and less on partisan attachments, and reasonably critical both of the regime and of unworthy incumbents once they prove their unworthiness.

Some revisionists believe the current electorate is different from the electorate in 1950s and that both caricatures have been true only at different times. Others believe that the traditional view of the electorate was based on faulty research.

Some of the methodological objections of the latter scholars include misguided conceptualizations of research concepts such as ideological constraint, the failure to deal with problems of measurement error, and problem of indicator invalidity, particularly temporal invalidity.

As described in the article, the debate can not be resolved definitively since, unfortunately, the “changed politics” and the “changed interview format” occurred simultaneously. However, the above debate over the nature of the American electorate will facilitate the sophistication and progress in the study of American electoral behavior.