The Micro-foundations of Micro-politics:
An Example of Research for the next 50 Years

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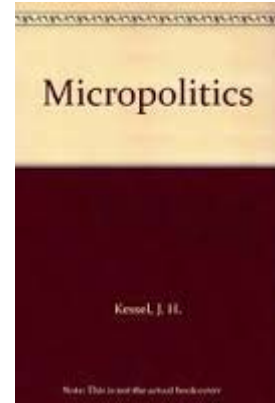
Pragmatic and Principled Policies

"Tax rates go up and down, regulations come and go, but

every abortion is a unique human life snuffed out forever."

Ross Douthat, "In Defense of the Religious Right," (NYT,

Oct. 16, 2016, SR 11).

The Micro-foundations
of Micro-politics

- Basic argument:
- There are two kinds of issues commonly encountered in elections.
- These two kinds are rooted in differences, perhaps, in the brain, and certainly in understanding differences of:
  - moral/principled, "easy," identity/race(?), perhaps partisan polarized politics,
  - pragmatic, "hard," economic, perhaps partisan in less polarized eras.
- These types have different implications for
  - Spatial models
  - Risk taking propensities
  - Turnout due to alienation, and maybe political effects of alienation generally.
  - Trading off, or not, between issues – compromise versus principle (Freedom Caucus, Boehner/Ryan difficulties in House GOP?)
  - Perhaps Trump supporters and other "populist" appeals?

Where it Starts: Shepsle (1970; 1972); Risk Acceptant – Risk Averse

THEOREM 3: If a *majority* of voters is risk acceptant in some interval $I \subseteq [A, B]$, containing x_{med}, then any $p(x)$ defined on I with expectation at x_{med} defeats the median most-preferred point.

Conclusions

Second, it was shown in Theorem 3 that, *for a different electoral profile*, ambiguity and equivocation may be positively rewarding. The effect of this theorem is a limitation of the scope for which Downs's premises are valid. Specifically, if a majority of voters is risk-acceptant (and, by interpretation, possesses intense preferences, thus rendering the issue "critical"), then parties may be "encouraged to be as equivocal as possible about their stands . . . "

Easy – Hard Issues

- Easy - Hard – Carmines-Stimson (1980)

  – Hard: Downsian "sophisticated decision calculus"

  – Easy:
    - 1. The easy issue would be **symbolic** rather than technical;
    - 2. It would more likely deal with **policy ends** than means;
    - 3. It would be an issue **long on the political agenda**.

  – Application: **Race** in the 1960s, micro-foundation of their theory of issue evolution.

Principled - Pragmatic,

– [Moral or] Principled – Pragmatic – Tavits (2007)

- Principled: "Ideological bias;" (Tavits)

- Pragmatic: "Welfare-Maximizing."

- Or Principled = Morally right/wrong (a la Haidt);

- Pragmatic = Smooth, continuous utility differentials, such as in linear, quadratic.

– Use:

- Pragmatic

  – changes in policy seen to be a measure of government responsiveness to its citizens;

- Principled

  – changes are see as being inconsistency with citizens' core values and, well, simply unprincipled.

- Tested cross-nationally (23 countries) with numerous issues.

Formalization: McKelvey (1975)

ASSUMPTION 4.1 (Quadratic Based Loss): *There is a positive definite, $n \times n$ matrix A, and a monotone decreasing function $\phi : R \to R$ such that, for each $\alpha \in \Omega$, there is an $x_\alpha \in R^n$ satisfying $U_\alpha(x) = \phi(\|x - x_\alpha\|_A)$.*

Hinich and Ordeshook identify three types of quadratic based loss which are distinguished by the form of ϕ:

DEFINITION 4.1: If $C_2(\xi, \{V_\alpha\})$ is a two-candidate contest satisfying Assumption 4.1, then we have
  (i) *Strict Quadratic Utility* (U1) $\leftrightarrow \phi(t) = -t^2$ for all $t \in R$.
  (ii) *Concave Quadratic Utility* (U2) $\leftrightarrow \phi(t)$ is a concave function of t.
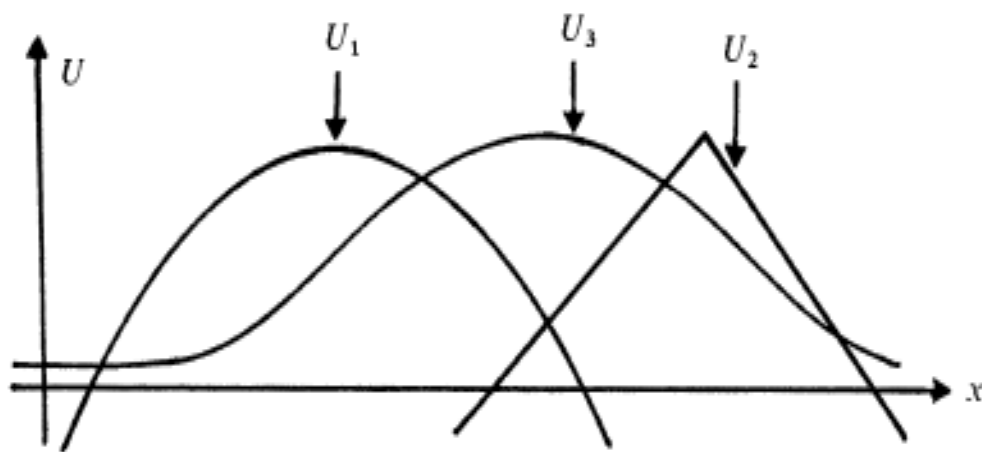 (iii) *Unimodal Quadratic Utility* (U3) $\leftrightarrow \phi(t)$ is any monotone decreasing function.

FIGURE 10.

# "Pragmatic" and "Principled" Issues: Definitions

1. Assumptions about preferences:

    a. Ordinal utility: Preferences over outcomes are complete, reflexive and transitive;

    b. Cardinality: In addition, outcomes are transformed into an interval "scale," with cardinal properties, usually via Von Neumann – Morgenstern assumptions (2007 [1944])

    c. Choice: Assume expected utility maximization.

2. Spatial assumption: $R^N \to U$, s.t.: $U = f(R^1)$.
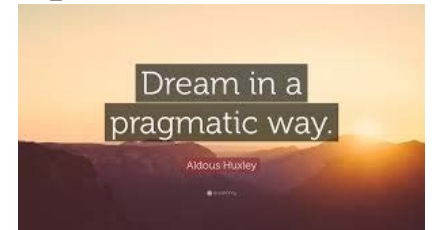
3. An issue is **pragmatic** if it is consistent with McKelvey assumptions U1 or U2 (inter alia)

4. An issue is **principled** if it is consistent with an instance of McKelvey assumption U3

    $U_i(x) = g\|x - x_i\|$, such that if $g\|x - x_i\| < c$, $x e R$, and $U_i(x) = r$, and

    if $g\|x - x_i\| \geq c$, $x e W$, and $U_i(x) = w$,

    with $r > w$ (and usually $r >> w$).

# Principle to Policy Transformation

Gilligan and Krehbiel (1990) Policy transformation (of principled issue):

Accordingly, the first assumption of the model distinguishes between policies (bills, legislation), which are the objects of choice by legislators, and outcomes (consequences), which are the end results of implementing policies. Uncertainty in legislative choice is characterized by assuming that the relationship between policies and outcomes is subject to random variation. Formally,
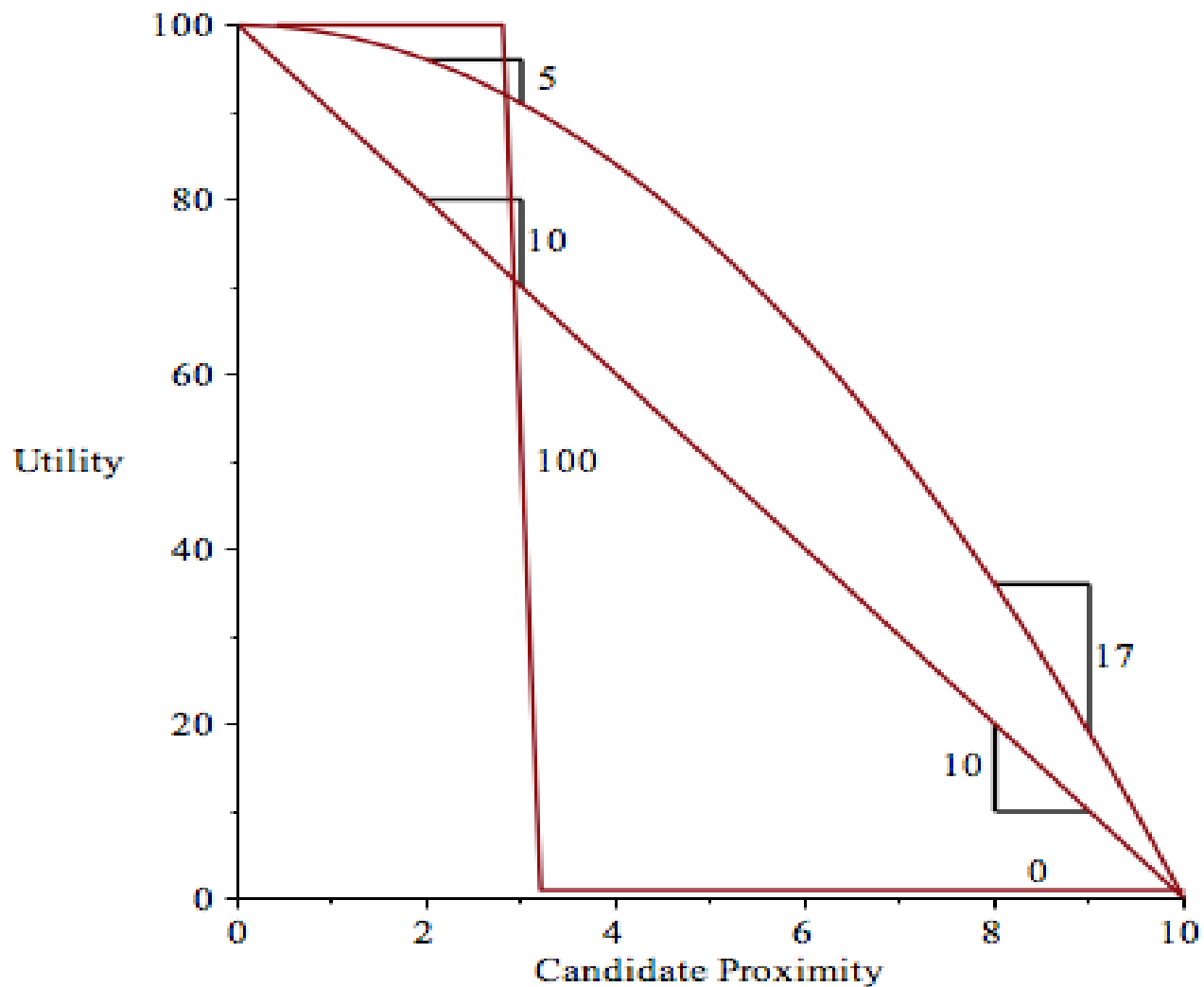
x = p + *w*,

where x is an outcome, p is a policy, and *w* (omega) is a random variable.

Principled Issue with Policy Uncertainty:
McKelvey U3 with Gilligan-Krehbiel Policy Transformation yields Shepsle Risk Acceptance
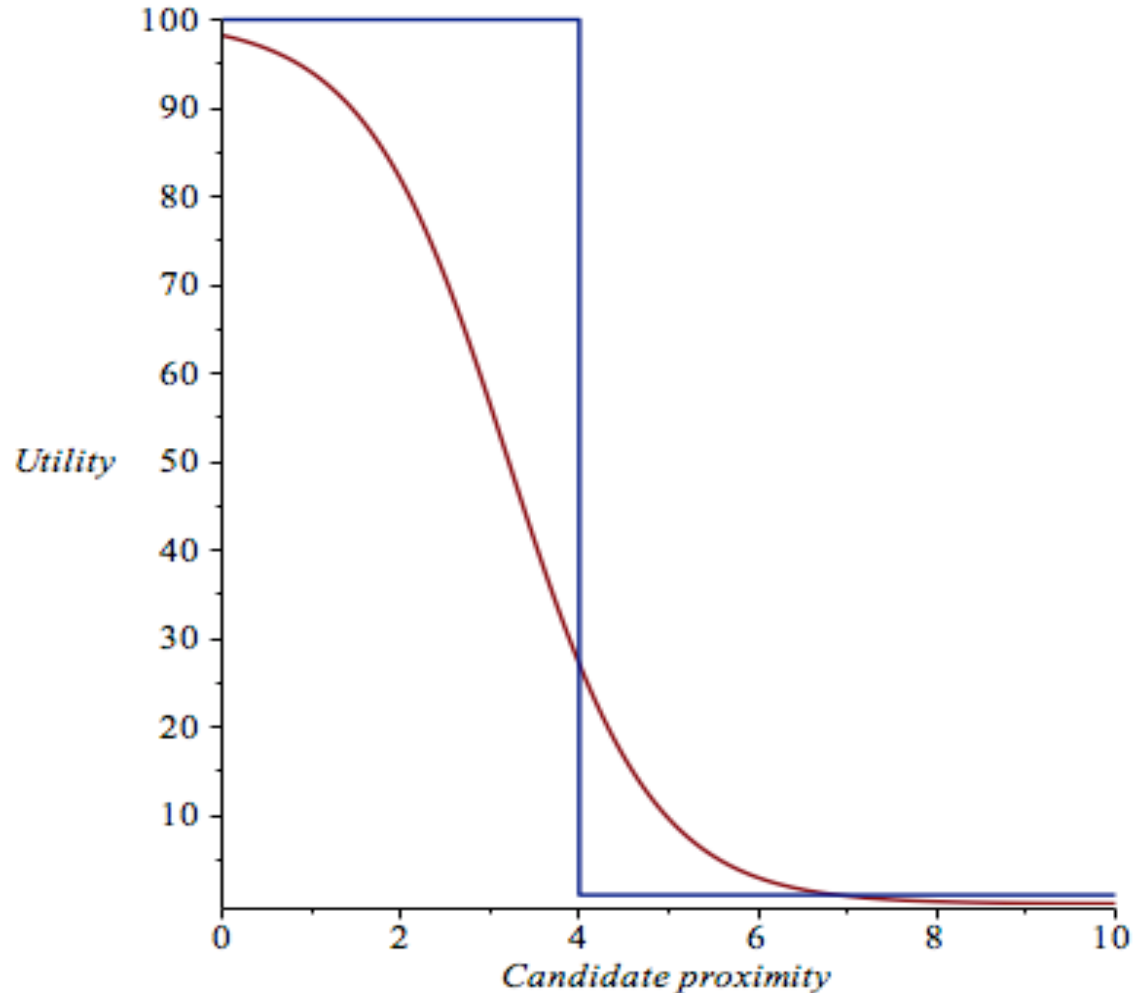
Pragmatic Issues: McKelvey U1 and U2, Shepsle Risk Neutral and Risk Averse

Example: Mosteller and Nogee (1951):
Two estimates of poker: Principled-like preferences

It is easy to lie with statistics; it is easier to lie without them.

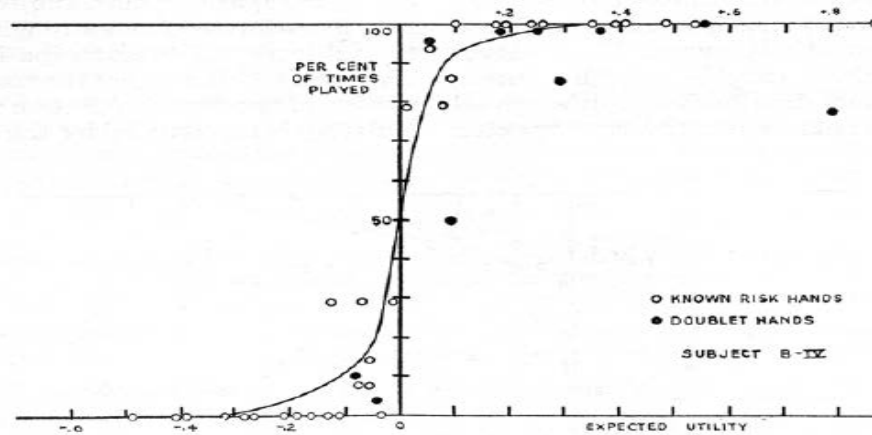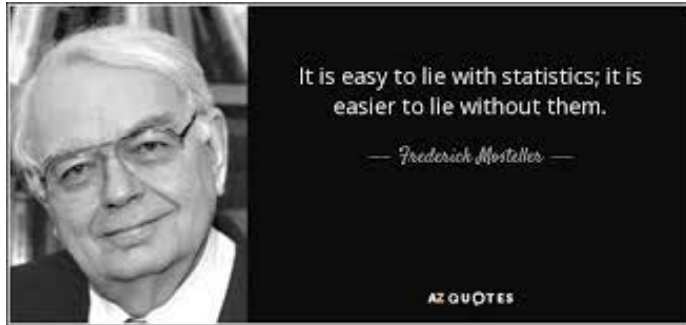— Frederick Mosteller —

AZ QUOTES

FIG. 4b—Percentage times played plotted against expected utility for subject B-IV. Curve is freehand fit to Known-risk points. The fit of this curve to the Doublet points shows roughly how good predictions of subsequent behavior are.
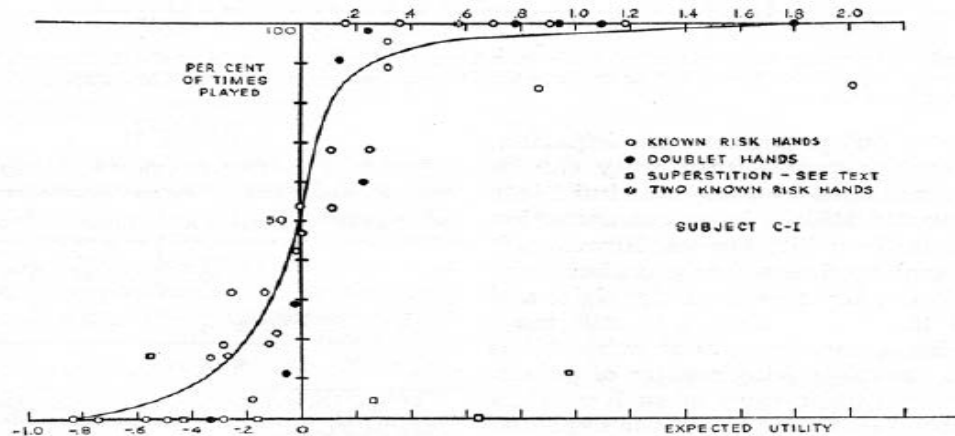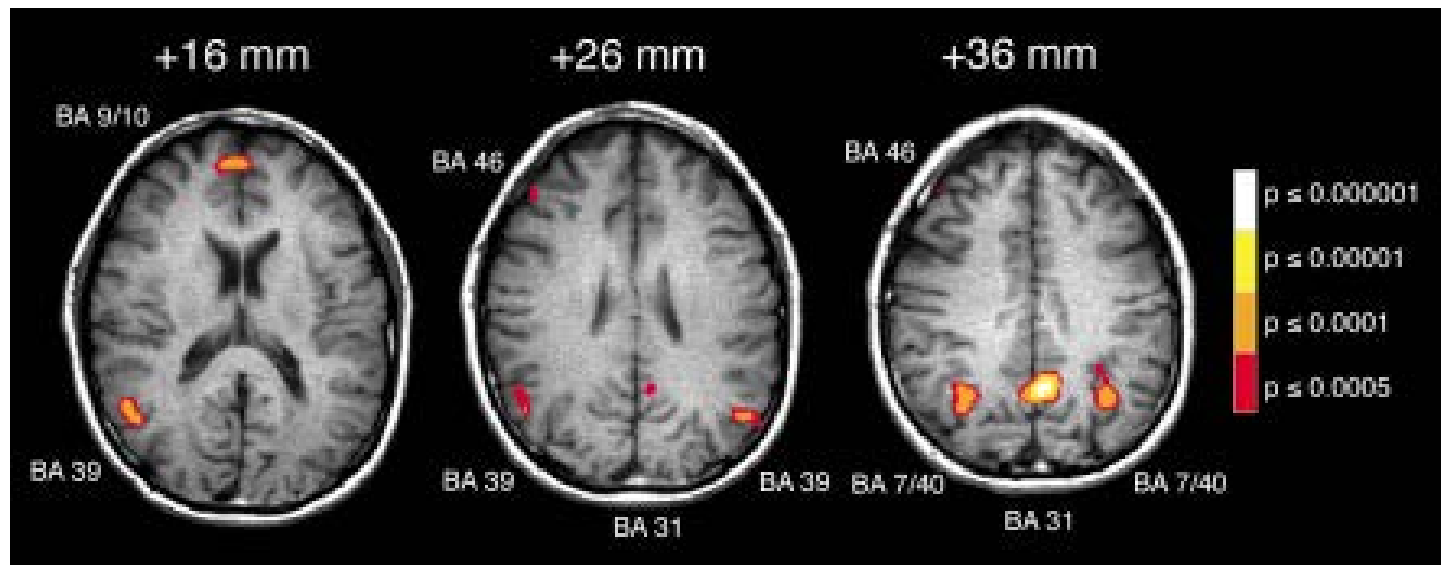

FIG. 4c—Percentage times played plotted against expected utility for subject C-I. Curve is freehand fit to Known-risk points. The fit of this curve to the Doublet points shows roughly how good predictions of subsequent behavior are.

The fMRI "foundation" of moral preferences

Neuroimaging studies of moral judgment in normal adults, as well as studies of individuals exhibiting aberrant moral behavior, all point to the conclusion, embraced by the social intuitionist model [7], that emotion is a significant driving force in moral judgment. The work of Greene *et al.* [32], however, suggests that reasoning can play an important role in the production of impersonal moral judgments and in personal moral judgments in which reasoned considerations and emotional intuitions conflict.

Greene, Joshua, and Jonathan Haidt. "How (and where) does moral judgment work?." *Trends in cognitive sciences* 6, no. 12 (2002): 517-523.

Risk Acceptant – Risk Averse; Shepsle (1972)
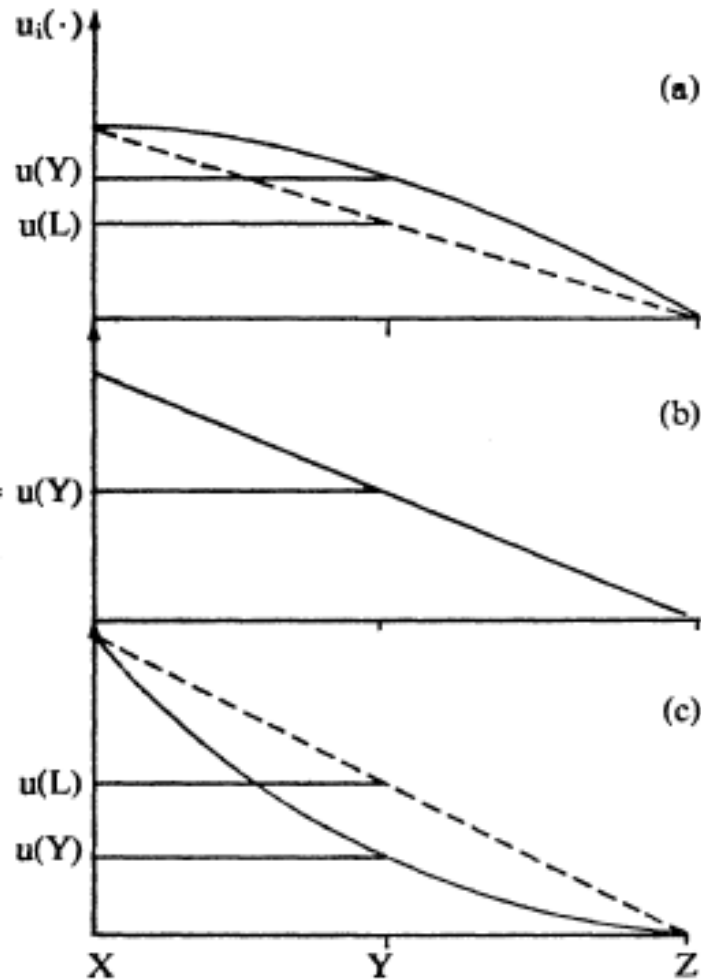
Figure 1. Voter utility functions.

$$\text{If} \qquad \text{then}$$

$$u''(x) < 0 \text{ (concavity)} \qquad u(\bar{p}) > \Sigma\, u(x)p(x)$$
$$\text{(risk-averse)}$$

$$u''(x) = 0 \text{ (linearity)} \qquad u(\bar{p}) = \Sigma\, u(x)p(x)$$
$$\text{(risk-neutral)}$$

$$u''(x) > 0 \text{ (convexity)} \qquad u(\bar{p}) < \Sigma\, u(x)p(x)$$
$$\text{(risk-acceptant)}$$

Kenneth A. Shepsle "The strategy of ambiguity: Uncertainty and electoral competition." *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 02 (1972): 555-568.
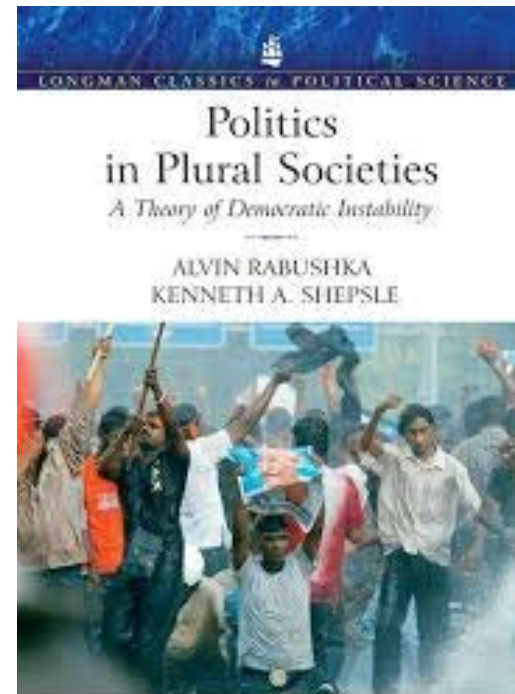
Empirical Example:
Concave Preferences in the Electorate: "Voter alienation as a function of indifference" by Jenke

Nonlinear predicted values

Linear and nonlinear regression predictions, abortion
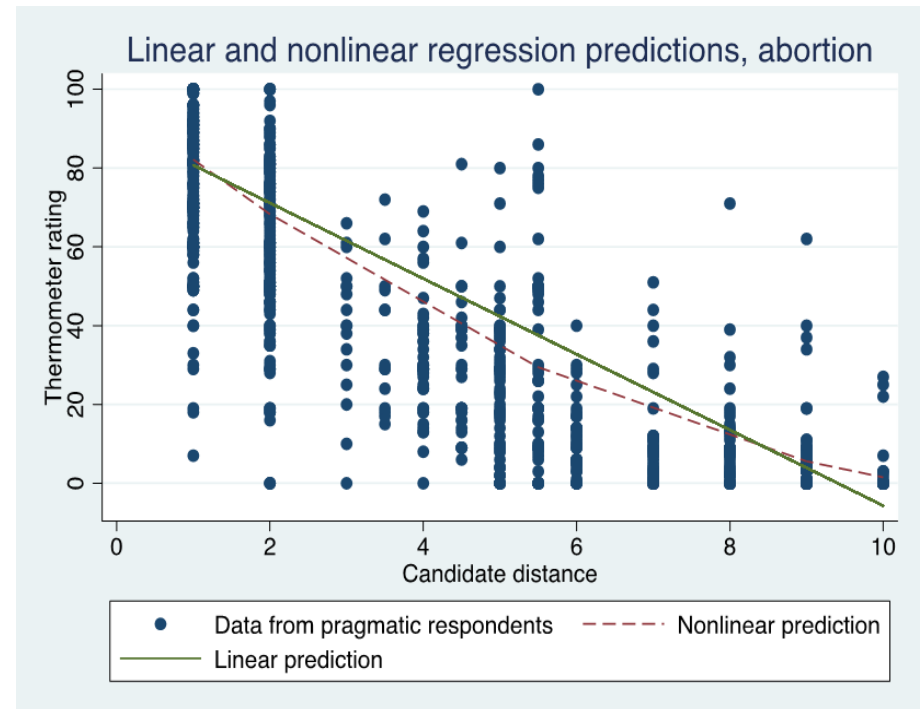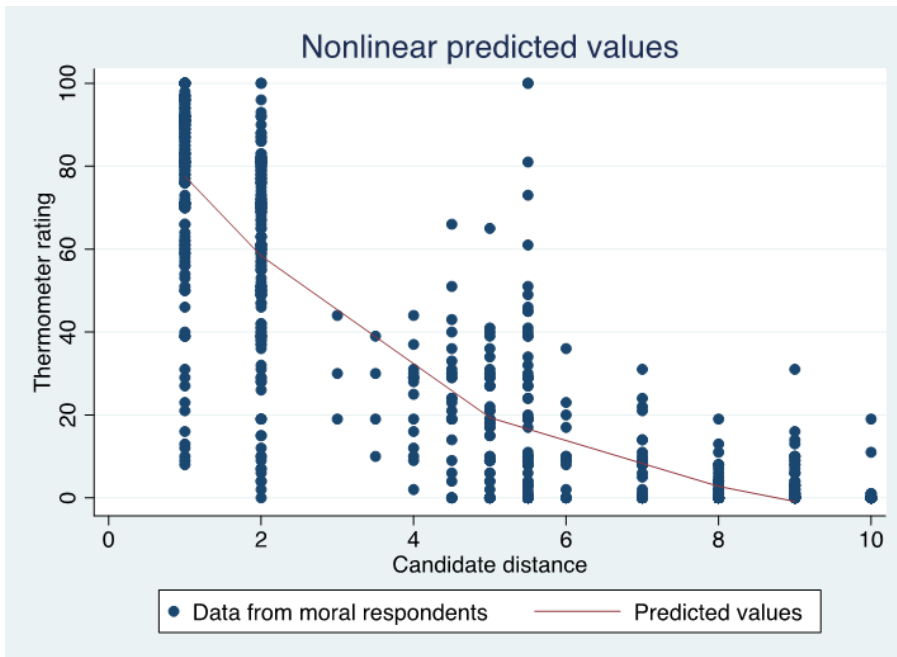
A Research Design: to be completed by 2066

Base:

Brain measures

Hypothesis: The cluster of brain areas activated for moral and pragmatic issues are different (but overlapping)

Brain to Observational data:

Public Opinion:

Moral Issues	Race/Ethnicity	Partisan identity (as "social id")?
(or morality invoked)	as "social identity"	(always?, polarized era only?)

Hypothesis: Experimental treatment, and by extension, politicians and/or media can invoke, withdraw moral component to many if not all issues. (some evidence)

Hypothesis: race/ethnicity identification makes racial issues akin to moral issues, harder to "dis-invoke" (lots of evidence)

Hypothesis: partisan identification – carries meaning when there is partisan polarization (hence polarization = Snyder, Ting, Grynaviski et al., party reputation?) and when there is reputation it can become a social identity, and hence politicians can manipulate the issue into (or potentially away from) being a moral instead of a pragmatic issue. (some evidence)

Thank you

Research Questions

Ia. Is there a principle-pragmatic distinction on commonly employed policies? (Yes)

Ib. Can we develop a high quality treatment paradigm (as Psychologists use the term) to move a typical subject/respondent between principle and pragmatic evaluations of policies? (TBA)

IIa. Assuming we can tap principle/pragmatic distinctions and have some experimental control over them, we would like to see if there is a foundational difference between the two. (Apparently)

IIb. Can we do some analogue to the experimental manipulation – that is can we show that we can make people use one or the other parts of the brain, due solely to something akin to our experimental treatment? I.e., is the difference in policy evaluation of U1, U3 types variable and subject to our control?

Research Questions, cont'd.

IIIa. If a policy invokes racial. ethnic identity, is it inherently "moral"? (So, take a pragmatic policy and somehow invoke racial identity, does it inherently become like a moral one?, and can we flip back easily?)

IIIb. If so, does invoking racial identity always make a policy principled?

IIIc. And if so, how far does identity reach – to partisanship, say? And if any "reaching" applies, is it easier or harder to change how policies are evaluated?

IIId. And is an identity U3 more or less resistant to campaign appeals than a moral one? Is an identity, moral combination immobile?