

# Preface

This book studies how the voting choices of individuals are shaped by the interactions between two considerations: their sentiments, which may be practical or moral or both; and the tangible problems of their state of residence. Practical voters make reasonable, deliberative decisions: they consider which candidates can best solve the social and economic problems of their state and nation. Moral voters make their decisions according to their own strongly held cultural values, beliefs, as well as their moral commitments: they make morally rational, intuitive, and emotional decisions. In making their choices voters express a mixture of practical and moral considerations, with the weighting of each factor varying with individual and circumstance.

This book seeks to answer a general question: Are voting decisions more decisively determined by moral considerations indicated by moral conservatism and moral liberalism or by the practical considerations reflecting economic self-interest and the tangible problems of their state and nation? In this connection, it further asks how do practical voters make up their mind to vote for a candidate; how do a state's tangible social and economic problems inform practical decision making; and how do a state's characteristics combine with its voters' political ideologies and moral sentiments to limit practical voting? To answer these questions, this book links survey data on the 2008 presidential election to information about the tangible problems of each state.

Accordingly, Part I of this book, focusing on practical voting, asks: How do social attributes, political ideology, and social contexts influence the practical voting decisions of individuals? Part II, asks: What are the tangible social and economic problems of four states and do these problems influence practical voting? And Part III, on moral voting, asks: How does moral conservatism—sentiments about abortion, same-sex marriage, and guns—affect the voters' political variables and contribute to disconnections between the developmental needs of the states and the political responses of the voters?

The numerous studies of voting have provided me with a theoretical and substantive understanding of which variables are important, how they may differ in priority (e.g., time order), how the variables form a system of relationships, and the variables' effects. In this study I form theoretical concepts at the middle-range level of abstraction; I then combine deductive and inductive approaches to test hypotheses and uncover new findings. Most often the findings I uncover pose new research questions, which I then address: the new research questions may in turn lead to additional research questions and findings. For example, I find that party affiliation and political ideology do not vary much across the four types of states; but indicators of moral conservatism do vary, with the South and Heartland more conservative than the other types of states. This finding led me to explore in Part III the determinants and consequences of moral conservatism. To depict the results I use graphical models that synthesize many of the specific findings and open up new avenues of inquiry.

Above all, this book shows that moral considerations often trump the practical; political ideologies shape party affiliation more than does party affiliation shape political ideologies; the income inequality characterizing a state affects its risks to human development, but inequality had no discernible effect on the voters in the 2008 election; the historical classification of states as red, purple, or blue has very little direct influence on why people choose a particular candidate; a typology that groups states as South, Heartland, postindustrial, or balanced predicts the political color of the states and organizes a vast range of macrolevel indicators of tangible problems but has little effect on the voters' political sentiments; moral conservatism leads to favorable sentiments about the economy and disregard for crucial economic problems—inequality, wage stagnation, insecure pensions, and risks of unemployment. Moral conservatism versus moral liberalism—cultural sentiments—is an important cleavage that more than most other variables shape political ideology, party affiliation, and the voting choice, and limit practical voting. This research suggests how high-quality education can ease these limits.

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