

## L707: Analysis of 2012 Election

### Session 7: Psychology of Voter Behavior

#### **Introduction:**

In my introduction to this course and in my overview of session 1, *Political Ideologies as Perceptual Filters*, I addressed the need for rational decision-making in voting behavior if democracy is to work. In that essay, I wrote: *The current election may determine to a large extent whether the (political) system is beyond repair. Will the voters be able to rationally choose what kind of nation they want? And, will the new administration be able to claim the legitimacy needed to govern?*

In these earlier postings on the OLLI website, I reviewed the literature that clearly shows that each of us filters the world through our belief-systems, or ideologies (secular and religious). These filters largely determine how we process information. People vary in their ability to revise their ideology when presented with empirical data that contradicts their beliefs. The article I distributed, *Made-up Minds*, describes the people who refuse to budge when faced with empirical evidence that challenges their beliefs; rather, there is a tendency to harden their beliefs. I am sure you see this in the debates during this election. I recommend you go back and read the OLLI postings for the course introduction and session one. If you do not have these in your electronic file, go to the OLLI website, [www.oli.gmu.edu](http://www.oli.gmu.edu) and click on Doc. Store (Left column) and locate L707.

In our session on 29 October, I want to zero in on some specific factors that determine voter behavior. I will begin with some of the survey data that summarize specific issues that influence voting choices. These are what may be called manifestations of beliefs. But the main purpose of this lesson is to delve into the underlying psychological factors that are at work. The first factor I want to focus on is subliminal influences that guide our voting preferences. This will elucidate the effect of non-verbal behavior in debates. I will distribute an article in the October 2012 edition of *Scientific American*, (p.92), *Politically Irrational*. This article summarizes what the literature has long shown: voices, looks, and mannerisms may trump content.

#### **Survey Data.**

Let me begin with some general propositions about voter behavior that we can glean from the efforts of pollsters and political pundits. While the validity of these measures depend heavily on statistical analysis, polls and demographic data can provide a rough picture of why people vote the way they do.

Individual economic welfare. The most obvious factor in voting is that people are motivated by their economic welfare—it's the economy stupid! When the economy is lagging, the public wants to "throw the bums out." Reagan lost 26 House seats in 1982 and his approval rating was lower than Obama's is at the same point of their presidency. But Reagan's tax cuts were extremely popular even though they contributed to huge deficits. Voters also vote against taxes—of any kind. GHW Bush promised, "Read my lips, no new taxes." After taking office, he raised taxes and was denied a second term, arguably because of that act. In his first budget, Clinton raised taxes—without one single Republican vote, and lost both the House and Senate in 1994. The current railing against deficits was set aside when the Bush Tax cuts were extended two years. Will they ever be allowed to expire?

Short-term goals. Voters are motivated by short-term rather than long-term, strategic goals; this is an inherent weakness in the democratic form of government. A classic example is the problem of global warming. In the political arena, efforts to deal with the problem are confronted with the tradeoff between the immediate impact of costs and jobs versus the long-term consequences of doing nothing. (I will discuss the issue of scientific evidence later in this essay). As Gregory Burns, director of the Center for Neuropolicy at Emory University told Al Gore “—the standard approach to goad the public action on climate change—which is to warn, warn, warn of the dire damage that a warming planet could cause to future generations and to life as we know it—would ‘never work’ because human beings are ‘completely present-tense oriented’ as a function of their brain wiring. The long-term future, it seems, just doesn’t matter all that much to us.” (“The Politics of the Brain”, *Atlantic Journal*, July 2010, p. 16).

Simple answers. Most of the problems facing the nation are complex; voters want simple answers that serve their immediate needs. The causes of the current economic recession are complex and will take time to correct. Voters demand immediate relief, as witnessed last November. Macro economics is beyond the scope of understanding for most voters; they only know what the impact is on their personal lives. How many voters know the difference between neo classical economic theory and Keynesian economics?

Single issues. Some issues are so important to some voters that they will vote on that single issue, e.g. abortion, same-sex marriage, gun control, religion, regardless of other issues. As I will argue below, the single-issue voter is not usually faced with an either/or choice; candidates often offer a package of issues that appeal to a general ideology.

Candidate Persona. This is the focus of the Scientific American article cited above. In the age of mass media, particularly television, voters are heavily influenced by the physical appearance and manner of speaking of candidates. Advisors carefully craft behavior and messages that respond to “market research.” One constant in the message is the claim that the candidate does not respond to polls. In the midst of the presidential primary several years ago, former Senator Bob Kerry called a press conference to announce that he was quitting the race, explaining that the contest was not about issues, but a choreographed theater. Successful candidates usually spend years developing their “message” based on market research.

Emotional factors. Voting behavior is determined to a large extent on feelings rather than a rational analysis of the issues. Candidates use hot-button slogans to appeal to these emotions and emphasize glittering generalities, both pro and con. Unfortunately, too much of this rhetoric is in the form of negative attacks, both on individuals and institutions. This can be dangerous to individuals and national solidarity. Constant degradation of the “government” has seriously undermined trust and confidence in our governmental institutions at all levels. This has impeded rational discourse on issues.

Race. No Democratic presidential candidate has won a majority of White votes since the Civil Rights legislation in the LBJ era. Obama got 10% of the White vote in Alabama.

### **Dominant Values in American Society**

Let me summarize what I see as some of the dominant values in American society that impact on voting behavior. Research indicates that while people espouse these values in theory, they value specific programs that conflict with theory.

- A. **Rugged individualism.** The country was born in an environment—physical and culturally—that emphasized self-reliance and individual initiative. Missing was the

- role of government in assisting in distributive justice. In a sense, everyone was on her/his own. While circumstances have changed considerably as the society has become more interdependent, the culture, at least in theory, has endured. A survey in the sixties of fifty countries measured the individualistic-communitarian continuum. At the head of the list of individualism was the United States, with England second. Large urban areas, where life is more interdependent, reflects a more communitarian culture, while rural areas and sparsely populated areas, remain highly individualistic. It should not come as a surprise that “Red” and “Blue” states reflect these differences.
- B. Belief in American Exceptionalism.** The belief that America is an exceptional country that is destined to lead the world in the march toward enlightened political, economic, and human justice is deeply engrained in our psyche. Any suggestion that our foreign policy is flawed is quickly denounced as a “blame America first” attitude bordering on treason. Some argue that this leads us to pursue a “Pax Americana” foreign policy that attempts to make the world over in our image. In a recent op-ed piece, Henry Kissinger argued that the belief in “American exceptionalism” is an obstacle to world peace. In his book, *Washington Rules*, Andrew Bacevich argues that this attitude condemns us to endless wars such as Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This demands increasingly large military forces and spending. Economic and political correlates are discussed below.
- C. Small Government.** Another feature of our early history and a rugged individualism was the innate fear of a powerful government. Settlers had lived under oppressive governments in Europe and were distrustful of any attempt to create similar institutions here. The “Bill of Rights” was designed to ensure individual freedom and privacy. Conservatives argue for a narrow interpretation of the tenth amendment. The demand for “States’ Rights” is a manifestation of the disdain for the national government. This battle still rages. Governor Rick Perry is perhaps the most vocal Republican leader on this issue. “Small government” is especially aimed at the national government.
- D. Distrust of government.** Consider the current polls regarding trust and confidence in our government institutions. If we have no trust in our government, can we endure? If we do not trust the judgment of our elected officials, where do we turn for guidance? “Throwing the bums out” every two or four years doesn’t seem to solve the problem. More on this below.
- E. Free markets.** “Free enterprise” is next to godliness in our society. Although we have not had laissez-faire capitalism for nearly a century, the concept still has political appeal. This element of conservative ideology carries over into our foreign policy, which leads to our goal of forcing it on the rest of the world.
- F. Democracy.** Our political form of government, along with free markets, is undoubtedly the “end of history” as far as debate about ideology goes—according to some neo-conservatives.
- G. Authoritarian.** In spite of our claim to be a culture that encourages individuals to “think for themselves,” we derive most of our opinions from opinion formers who may or may not be either informed or honest.
- H. Religion.** While fundamentalists more often vote on single issues, the mainstream religions promote diversity of thought. Catholics are generally conservative on social issues, but liberal on economic matters. Protestant Fundamentalists tend to be

conservative on both social and economic issues and represent a powerful voting bloc for Republicans.

- I. **Guns.** I simply don't know how to discuss this issue.
- J. **Low taxes.** Raising taxes is the third rail of politics; candidates recommend tax increases at their peril. The average European country levies taxes to provide their governments (All levels) the ability to provide 49% of the GDP. We have provided revenues to all levels (County, State, and Federal) for 35-38% of our GDP. For the last three decades, we have allowed the Federal government to spend about 20.7% of GDP; but revenues have been limited to about 18%. The gap has been through deficit spending and accumulated debt. Dealing with this gap is at the heart of the political debate. Republicans argue that the solution lies in reducing spending (to 18% of GDP), not raising taxes, while Democrats argue for raising taxes rather than cutting spending. As I see it, Democrats believe in "Tax and Spend" and Republicans "Borrow and Spend."
- K. **Rational Man.** It seems to me that much of our belief on rugged individualism, democracy, and free markets is based on the assumption that people are rational beings and that they will make rational choices regarding their welfare. This leads to the belief that if given the choice, they will plan for their old age, health care, etc. In fact, this concept is the basic principle of classical economics. It is closely related to the concept of "free will," which I will discuss below. The belief in rugged individualism and free will were at the heart of Ayn Rand's economic philosophy. I point this out because among her followers are Alan Greenspan and many of the Republican congressional leaders, e.g., Ryan and Boehner. The following section elaborates on this factor.

### **Free Will, Psychic Determinism, or...?**

The July 2010 edition of the National Journal suggested a possible theory to explain the basis of a tough-minded (conservative) or a tender-minded (liberal) approach to human behavior. The cover story, "The Politics of the Brain" suggests that cutting-edge neuroscience could fling a political wrecking ball at liberal and conservative dogma on many public policy issues. The notion of personal responsibility lies at the heart of the theory, as explained in this passage:

**"Consider conservatives' enshrinement of the notion of personal responsibility—a totemic object of worship in their ideological constellation, from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush, in modern political times. Sorry, but neuroscience is finding that personal responsibility may not be the lodestar that conservatives think it is.**

**The scientific chain of logic goes like this: Personal responsibility hinges on the assumption that people have free will, defined as the ability to make considered choices about their conduct. This is a bedrock concept in Judeo-Christian theology, which couches free will as the freedom to choose between good and evil, between doing the right thing and acting sinfully."**

There is probably no scientific concept more controversial than "free will." Not only does it conflict with "common sense," it encounters emotional religious beliefs, as cited by the Journal

article. Nonetheless, let me address conventional wisdom and make a logical case for what is often called “psychic determinism.” In essence, this concept rests on the assumption that the basic scientific laws of cause and effect that govern the physical world applies to human behavior. Follow my argument carefully and be prepared to rebut it during our discussion.

Common sense, and scientific research, tells us that the way people think and behave is shaped by forces that begin at conception, forces largely beyond the control of the individual. Each person inherits a set of genes that determine both intellectual and emotional traits that set them apart (other than identical twins) and these traits circumscribe personality development. Hereditary qualities are similar to the hard wiring of computers. While we may like the term “all men (and women) are created equal,” this is demonstrably untrue. We start out life with biological (physical and mental) hereditary advantages and disadvantages. Moreover, these hereditary biological attributes are shaped from the beginning by environmental factors largely beyond the individual’s control. The fetus is impacted by a multitude of stimuli that determine how the hereditary predispositions will develop. The mother’s dietary habits, smoking and drinking habits, exercise—even the playing of music while pregnant—have been shown to affect the personality of the individual.

Newborns are thrust into environments that differ drastically. Some parents are warm and caring; others are cold and uncaring. How much this affects future development is immeasurable. As a child grows, it is exposed to both intellectual and emotional experiences that shape its reaction to the cultural world. Beliefs about what is right or wrong in terms of religion, political ideology, justice, personal responsibility, etc. are systematically formed. I believe we can all agree that these environmental factors are largely beyond the control of the individual. Some people are fortunate to have a rich culture that prepares them to succeed in life; others suffer from a poverty of culture that limits their development.

One may argue that people are not passive objects to environmental forces; rather, they can “choose” how to react. Those who make this argument often cite the case of an individual who rises above deplorable surroundings and reaches great heights of achievement. Generalizing from a small sample of anecdotes is logically dishonest. Not all environmental factors are detectable; moreover, individuals differ in intellectual and emotional traits that they have inherited and that have been shaped by events preceding the moment when they first “choose” to react to a given situation. How much “freedom” a person has is open to philosophical speculation. Many reputable scientists reject the notion of “free will;” rather, they accept the notion that mental behavior follows the same principles of cause and effect that govern the physical world—“psychic determinism.” (This not the same as “predestination,” which is a religious concept implying a transcendental force).

I believe we can agree that humans are born with varying degrees of intellectual and emotional qualities that are determined by parental genes. The individual has no responsibility for his (I will use the masculine form for simplicities sake) hereditary package. I also believe we can all agree that the combination of physical and mental qualities determine how the individual will response to the real-world sensory inputs that come early in life (as mentioned above, research indicates that fetuses react in different ways while still in uterus). If we can agree that after birth the initial responses to sensory input are determined by heredity, let us explore the question of when an individual exercises “free will” in “choosing” to react one way or another in a given situation.

At whatever age or circumstance in one’s life—point X—we decide to hold an individual “responsible” for his first “free” decision, logically we need to identify input other than heredity

or past experience through the five senses that influences the decision. What logical sense does it make to establish an “age of reason” that can be used to establish moral accountability when the first choice (point X) by definition has been determined by inputs beyond the control of the individual? Is there some transcendental force that provides the input? If so, how is the individual responsible? If there is no third force, does it make logical sense to posit some internal process that is independent of heredity and past inputs?

Acceptance of complete psychic determinism (or lack of free will) is unacceptable to many people, even if it is supported by logic. It undermines the basic premise of most religions and raises questions about accountability in everyday behavior. For the sake of argument let us reject the absolute version of determinism and address the question of “partial determinism.” Given the variations of genetic makeup and life circumstances, can we say that there are degrees of freedom? Everyday observation tells us that the game of life is not a level playing field. People are born with different levels of intelligence, physical attribute, and into different environmental conditions. Assume individual “A” is born with an innate level of intellectual capacity that will measure an IQ of 70 on a standardized test. His parents have little formal education; there is no intellectual stimulation in the home; the parents instill no strong moral values; he has no access to pre-school; he struggles in school and drops out; and he finds it hard to get employment. Compare that to individual “B” born with an IQ of 160; of educated parents who provide intellectual stimulation; instill strong moral values and a work ethic; pre-school education is provided; he excels in school and easily finds employment. It is clearly not a level playing field. The role of government in ameliorating the injustice is another matter; what is that role? Conservatives and liberals differ on the answer.

Add to the variables identified above: race; sex; religion; and ethnicity. Any objective analysis would find it difficult to conclude that the two individuals have the same degree of “free will” to make tough choices that involve good and bad outcomes as defined by society. Some will argue that yes, but life is not fair and individuals must play the hand they are dealt. A book by a sociologist (Herbert Spencer) in the 19th Century argued for a public policy of “Social Darwinism,” that is, survival of the fittest. He suggested that it is beneficial to weed out the weak in order that the human species could evolve into a hardier species (The Supreme Court, in *Lochner v. New York*, 1905, cited that book as justification for the decision denying the State of New York the right to regulate working conditions). Ayn Rand advocated the same philosophy. As I cited in an earlier essay:

*Rand saw people as “makers” vs. “takers and “creators” vs. “parasites.” In our society, everyone has an equal opportunity to choose which they will be. Regardless of intelligence level or life circumstances, each individual comes to a decision point with the “free will” to make the right choice. The government has no right to bail out those who make the wrong choice.*

Does this language remind you of recent comments?

Since we are concerned here with current public policy, let us see how such an analytical framework can be applied in a practical manner in such areas as criminal behavior, economic activities, and the role of government in establishing “distributive justice.” For purposes of this

essay, my hypothesis is that conservatives are less likely to consider life circumstances as mitigating factors in public policy.

In regard to criminal justice, we have long recognized the differences in life circumstances by considering “mitigating circumstances.” In general conservatives want to hold people accountable regardless of backgrounds. The recent execution of a woman for murder in Virginia is a case in point; she fits the “A” personality fairly well, with an IQ of 70, which is borderline mentally incompetent. She was the first woman executed in Virginia in almost a century. She asked two men to kill her husband and stepson so she could collect insurance. The evidence indicated she was manipulated by one of the men, who was her lover. The killers got life imprisonment. Liberals decried the execution; conservatives generally applauded it. Recently, a man in Texas with an IQ of 61 was executed for murder; the Arizona killer that shot Gifford was ruled “insane” and not subject to the death penalty!

The death penalty is very controversial and in some ways the perfect issue to illustrate how conservatives and liberals look at “free will,” or shades thereof. The U.S. is one of the few democracies that allow the death penalty, with the decision left to the States. The States that allow it are overwhelmingly “Red” States i.e., conservative. What is the justification for the death penalty? Is it a deterrent, is it for retribution, is it for the cathartic effect, or some combination of the three?

Those who take mitigating circumstances into account when dispensing punishment are in effect accepting a lesser degree of individual responsibility than implied by 100% free will. This is frequently labeled as “soft on crime;” and can be a kiss of death politically. When presidential candidate Michael Dukakis expressed the view that he was against the death penalty even if someone murdered his wife, his poll numbers dropped precipitously. The voting public, especially conservatives, want leaders who are “tough on crime.”

Where does one draw the line in accepting mitigating circumstances without losing social control? Consider the sociological study some fifty years ago that identified ten factors that are correlated with teen-age crime (the figures I give are for illustration only because I have not dug up the study). Factors such as single parent, mother a prostitute, living in poverty, etc. each had a significant correlation. Using a statistical tool called factor analysis, the researchers were able to identify which permutations and combinations of these factors would lead to criminal behavior. For example, they found that if a teen had 7 of these in his life he would have a 60% probability of a criminal file by the time he was 15 years of age. If he had ten factors, there was a 95% probability. Also consider that today 59% of federal prisoners and 75% of State prisoners are high school dropouts. The chain of causal factors is clear. Since there are an infinite number of variables in one’s environment, it is impossible to account for all inputs to one’s behavior. For example, an individual that had ten factors and still was free of crime may have had a teacher become a significant person that countered the unfavorable factors.

In formulating policy to deal with undesirable behavior, whether it is crime, unemployment, drug abuse, welfare dependency, school dropouts, etc., what is the alternative to holding the social miscreants personally responsible for their conduct? Liberals tend to focus on environmental factors and argue for social programs such as better housing, pre-school opportunities, counseling, affirmative action, etc. In other words, let’s focus on the circumstances that “caused” the undesirable behavior. Many of these policies are labeled “welfare programs,” especially if the minority population has a higher percentage of recipients. Conservatives tend to focus on holding the individual responsible for his choice of behavior. This view has led the U.S. to have the largest prison population in the world. Unemployment

benefits are viewed as encouraging individuals to stay on welfare rather than find a job. The “Welfare State” breeds a culture of dependency that is passed from generation-to-generation. It is best to leave it to the “market place” to correct these kinds of problems, even if it is brutal in its outcomes.

One can make arguments for both approaches to public policy; it is not all black-and-white. Providing good housing and economic support does not translate easily to eradicating the “poverty of culture.” While basic needs are essential, they are not sufficient. Motivating individuals to pull themselves up by their bootstraps is an essential component of public policy. It is a matter of emphasis, and it seems to me that extreme conservatives often err in direction of leaving it all to the market place. In the case of civil rights legislation, some conservatives still believe the government should not force private hotels and restaurants to serve African Americans; rather, that should be left to the market place. Robert Bork was rejected for a seat on the Supreme Court for advocating that policy. Many Republicans and conservative Democrats from the South fought the 1960s Civil Rights Act using the same argument. Newly-elected Senator Rand Paul takes the Bork position.

Adam Smith is the original economic guru of conservatives who espouse the “magic of the market place.” His Wealth of Nations (1776) is their bible. Smith also wrote A Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), in which he said, “The disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful...[is] the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.” Perhaps conservatives should spend some time reading the earlier work. When I showed some unidentified excerpts from it to my students at the National Defense University in the 1980s, they attributed them to Karl Marx.

The degree to which one leaves it to the “market place” to correct social problems is critical in identifying where one falls on the conservative/ liberal continuum. The history of “progressive government” has been one of expanding the role of government in providing an economic “safety net” for the disadvantaged. Conservatives have argued for a “free market” as the best approach to ensure justice while liberals have argued for government intervention. Social Security, Medicare, Minimum Wage laws, workplace safety (OSHA), and the 2010 Health Reform Act are examples of such intervention. Most of these policies have been under Democratic Presidents (Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon—and to a lesser extent Eisenhower—were exceptions).

Politicians are sensitive to the danger of being labeled as callous toward the unfortunate; hence the claim to be a “compassionate conservative.” Likewise, one must not be labeled a “bleeding heart liberal,” as I cited in the case of Dukakis. Bill Clinton fought the label by declaring “the era of big government is over,” and later, “welfare as we know it is over.” In the 22 October 2010 edition of The Week, this was the Quote of the week:

**“In American politics, Republicans routinely speak in broad themes and tend to blur the details, while Democrats typically ignore broad themes and focus on details. Republicans, for example, speak constantly of ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ and couch practically all their initiatives—tax cuts, deregulation, and so forth—within these large categories. Democrats, on the other hand, talk more about specific programs and policies and steer clear of big themes. There is a reason for this: Republican themes, like ‘liberty, are popular, while Republican policies often are not; and Democratic themes (‘community,’ ‘compassion,’ ‘justice’) are less popular, while many specific Democratic**



**programs—Social Security, Medicare, even (in many polls) putting a price on carbon emissions—have majority support.”** Michael Tomasky in *The New York Review of Books*

These broad themes give the Republicans the advantage in theory. When specific programs such as Social Security and Medicare are the focus, Democrats win. Witness the recent “Ryan Budget” and the specific issue of Medicare. The Tea Party has capitalized on that knowledge; a survey by the Washington Post reported that the top five words used by Tea Party members to describe themselves were: patriotism, constitutionalism, freedom, liberty, and grass roots. (24 October 2010, p. A9). This reminds me of the advice given in a textbook I used in a 1948 class “Public Opinion and Propaganda,” to wit, “to win an election, wrap yourself in the American Flag, stand on the Constitution, and quote the Bible.” (Public Opinion and Propaganda, Leonard Doob, 1948).

### **Summary.**

There are clear substantive differences between the two major parties as I have tried to describe in this paper. It seems to me that the central issue facing us in the immediate future is what we want the government (particularly the Federal Government) role to be. As I have emphasized throughout this course, a yardstick we can use to estimate the answer is how much resources we allocate to the government. In regard to the Federal Government, should it be the 18%, 21%, or 23%? Even in terms of Washington budgets, a \$750B difference in the annual federal budget is real money. Simplistic slogans using glittering generalities cloud the issue. Do voters understand the consequences when they vote for these concepts of the government role in their lives? I don’t think so! Did the 2010 election signal a return to the pre-New Deal era of a Spartan government?

One of the most disturbing factors in the body politic today is the emotional rhetoric based on negativism in general and specifically the anger and hate targeting both individuals and institutions. You are not only wrong if you disagree with me—you are evil, unpatriotic, and unworthy of trust. Why do political candidates and elected officials use these techniques that are dysfunctional to an effective democratic process? The answer is simple: these techniques work to get one elected. There is a label for candidates who refuse to use negativity and vitriol: losers! Hundreds of millions will be spent in this election using emotional mud-slinging ads clouding the real issues. Is rational voting likely?

We are left with the only logical conclusion regarding blame for our dysfunctional system—it is “We the People.” The tragedy of an attempted assassination of a member of Congress in Arizona contains a lesson, but what is that lesson? It immediately provided material for partisan rhetoric. I suggest that the violence reflects a disdain for government in general. Our political system thrives on bashing “the government.” It is the bread and butter of such movements as the “Politics of Rage” practiced by George Wallace, to a lesser degree by Pat Buchanan, and by some political figures today. The leftists practiced it in the 60s, albeit without the umbrella of a political label. When public trust and confidence is lost, can we endure? As Sissela Bok put it:

**“...Trust is a social good to be protected just as much as the air we breathe or the water we drink. When it is damaged, the community as a whole suffers; and when it is destroyed, societies falter and collapse.**

**...Trust and integrity are precious resources, easily squandered, hard to regain...”**

Lying, 1978

If we are to return to a civil and rational political discourse that is essential for our form of government, we must develop a rational dialogue to educate voters to a degree that they know what they are voting for and the policy consequences of those choices. I have no magic solution for this problem. The formula that calls for extensive government services and low taxes is a recipe for gridlock. This dilemma may come to a head within the next few days, but certainly in the coming years. The voters will choose, but I’m not confident that, for reasons discussed in this paper, they will make a rational decision.

For those of you who wish to soar up the ladder of generality, I encourage you to follow the political turmoil that is taking place around the world. As I write this, there are articles about the turmoil in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria—and excerpts from an interview with the President of China, where he (Hu) explained why China will keep a tight control on political behavior while they modernize. Most articles focus on the U.S. emphasis on pluralistic democracy and free markets. President Hu rejects these as models for China. I suggest you follow these events with the question in mind—are our forms of pluralistic democracy and free markets appropriate to today’s challenges? Assume that we genuinely believe our economic and political systems are the best for everyone, does this justify a “Pax Americana” foreign policy that tries to enforce it on others?