

THE VOLATILE AMERICAN VOTER:
INCONSISTENT VOTING BEHAVIOR IN THE UNITED STATES, 1948-2004

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract**THE VOLATILE AMERICAN VOTER:
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Advisor: Prof. John H. Mollenkopf

This dissertation is a study of the political behavior, demographics, and attitudes of Americans who have been inconsistent in party choice, turnout, or both in presidential elections from 1948 to 2004. Most prior scholarship has indicated that these individuals, who play a pivotal role in electoral outcomes, have comprised a minority of the American electorate. The analyses presented here, however, reveal that these “volatile” voters have, from 1948 to 2004, comprised between 50.5 and 60.7 percent of the voting public. Volatile voters are, overall, less likely to be politically sophisticated than party-loyal voters. But the aggregation of all volatile voters into one group when assessing their levels of political aptitude and engagement obscures the fact that volatile sophisticates are plentiful in the United States, and have comprised between 18.1 and 27.0 percent of the electorate since the 1948 – a segment that is decisively large. The large distribution of volatile sophisticates, and volatile voters overall, provides support for the notion that voter engagement with political issues regularly overcomes the habitual party affinities of a substantial fraction of the American public, and that issues indeed matter to voters, most of whom engage them and act upon them in a reasoning manner. I additionally provide evidence, contrary to the findings in much voting and elections literature, that volatile voters can be reliably identified and quantified using sociological measures.

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Key Terminology Used in this Dissertation

Volatile Voter: any voter who does not consistently turn out and vote for the same party across three presidential elections; these include "peripheral voters" who might, for example, turn out twice and vote for the same party, but abstain in a third election, as well as "party switchers" who might vote Democratic in two elections and Republican or Independent in another – or any combination of these behaviors.

Standpatter: Any voter who consistently turns out and votes for the same party across three presidential elections.

Ideological Consistent: Any voter expressing three ideologically liberal or three ideologically conservative opinions about three major political issues surveyed.

Ideological Eclectic: Any voter who does not express a consistently liberal or conservative opinion across three major political issues surveyed.

Sophisticate: Any voter who provides two or more positive responses out of four on a composite scale of sophistication; each point on the scale reflects a dummy variable response indicating the presence of 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) correct knowledge of which party controls the House of Representatives, 3) a high expressed interest in politics, and 4) having contacted a public official (or a belief that citizens can influence government in ways other than voting).

Unsophisticate: Any voter who does not score two or more positive responses on the sophistication scale just described.

Volatile Sophisticates, Volatile Unsophisticates, Sophisticated Standpatters, Unsophisticated Standpatters, Volatile Ideological Eclectics and Volatile Ideological Consistents are voter types who simultaneously fit *two* of the of the six voter descriptions listed above.

Attitude Set: Simply a set of political attitudes that may be consistent or inconsistent.

Floating Voter Hypothesis: The theory that shifts in party support across the electorate are driven by the politically unsophisticated.

Converse's Paradox: The problem presented by the claim by Converse (1967a) that the least sophisticated voters, who are presumably those least engaged with political information, are also those most likely to be swayed in voting decisions by "short-term" stimuli in the media.

“I am not a Federalist, because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in any thing else where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all.”

– Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Francis Hopkinson, March 13, 1789

I. Introduction

1. Overview

When V.O. Key (1966, x) famously wrote in the early 1960s that “voters are not fools,” he challenged a key finding in two of the most formidable studies of voting behavior ever conducted – those published as *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. [1960] 1980) and *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968)¹. Both studies arrived at the same rather disappointing conclusion that American citizens are not, by and large, politically engaged or knowledgeable. An alarming number do not know basic facts about the government and current events, and most are only marginally interested in or engaged with politics. Furthermore, the measures employed by Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980)² for gauging political sophistication, which rely on levels of respondent “constraint” in thinking about about politics using abstract, ideological concepts, showed that most Americans form political opinions – when they do at all – on the basis of information that is fragmentary at best, and that they maintain political belief systems so incoherently organized, they might as well have been assembled at random. Citizens unconstrained in their political thinking by standards of “liberalism” or “conservatism” were shown to be less politically cognizant than those who used terms like “liberal” and “conservative” more frequently in open-ended questions. Another damning revelation in

¹ These bodies of research are often referred to, respectively, as the “Michigan studies” and “Columbia studies.”

² These measures were also later and more notably used by Campbell’s co-author Philip Converse (1964).

these studies was that voters who are not consistently party-loyal, or who abstain from voting at times, were the least politically sophisticated to be found in the electorate. Campbell's co-author, Philip Converse (1967a), later argued that shifts in party support that tip the balance of elections depend on mobilizing or persuading these politically unsophisticated citizens, who, paradoxically, were more likely than other voters to be swayed by "short-term" information input during campaigns. Paralleling and refining Converse's findings, Zaller (2004) reported that when there is a high level of issue salience in an election, "low-information" voters will tend to be driven to volatility in their party choices while "high information" voters will tend to be driven to greater party loyalty (2004, 195).

These are all disturbing findings for any proponent of "classic" democratic theory relying on the notion of an active, civically engaged citizenry.³ But what I have found equally disturbing about these findings is that voters who are categorized as "sophisticated" are shown to comprise a group that is predominantly driven to maintain habitual and strongly ideological preferences that are impervious to changing political conditions, candidates, platforms, and events. I find this a puzzling behavior pattern, and what I find puzzling about it proceeds from an admittedly normative but commonsense starting point: the notion that greater intake of political information should – at least in the abstract – create more opportunities for conflicting and incongruous understandings of politics to arise and thus more frequency of volatile voting behavior. As in most intellectual endeavors, the more knowledge one has, the less likely one will have a monolithic perspective on a given subject that is free of contradictions and conflicting

³ This notion of "classic" democratic theory is used in many studies as a straw man against which negative assessments of voter competence are made. I discuss this matter more fully in Chapter III.

theories. Yet a substantial body of long-standing scholarship tells us that American voters do not think in this manner at all, and that instead, increased political sophistication results in higher levels of political certitude and ideological coherence among voters. This dissertation research has therefore focused on the nature of individuals who are volatile in their voting behavior, and those who are not ideologically consistent with respect to political issues – and reports on a search for what Popkin (1991) calls “the reasoning voter,” who is not, in Key’s words, “straitjacketed by social determinants” (1966, 7) or blinkered by force of political habit. I have accordingly aimed to demonstrate that *issues matter* to voters, and drive their voting behavior, as do candidate issue positions, and candidate attitudes embodying issue positions. But as a necessary condition for this to be true, voters must be sophisticated enough about politics to understand the impact of policies offered in relation to issues, and motivated enough by what they understand to engage in the political act of voting – or abstaining. I have therefore not only endeavored to measure the number of volatile voters and ideological inconsistencies in the American electorate, but to measure the levels of political sophistication of both groups. By “volatile voters” I emphatically do not mean “Independents” which is a term that describes party identification and not voting behavior. The dependent variable I endeavor to explain in this dissertation is actual voting behavior, not a stated party identification or lack of party identification.

The question of how well “unstable,” “volatile,” or “inconsistent”⁴ voters comprehend and engage with political issues has been a source of controversy in political

⁴ The terms “inconsistent,” “inconstant,” “unstable,” and “volatile” are used synonymously throughout this dissertation in relation to voting behavior. But I generally refer to voting behavior that is not consistent as “volatile,” while attitudes, ideologies, and issue opinions that are not consistent are referred to as “inconsistent” and “eclectic.”

science for more than half a century. In this long-running debate, one perspective argues that shifts in party loyalty are driven by informed and reasoning “party switchers” (Hillygus & Shields 2008; Key 1966; Nie et al. [1976] 1999; Popkin 1991, 54) while the opposite perspective holds that such shifts in party support are driven by less politically sophisticated “floating voters” (Campbell et al. [1960] 1976; 1968; Converse 1967a, 137; Converse 1967b, 9-39; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Zaller 2004).⁵ The notion that unsophisticated voters disproportionately make up the volatile segment is often referred to in voting and elections literature as the “floating voter hypothesis.” These numerous floating voters, it is argued, drift aimlessly in their voting decisions, while other voters remain party loyal – or sometimes switch – on the basis of much more political aptitude and knowledge.

What I have found in the research presented in this dissertation is that ideologically and behaviorally inconsistent voters have been the norm in the American public as far back, at least, as the 1940s. The ideologically inconsistent have in fact comprised between 63.5 and 83.0 percent of the American electorate and those who are inconsistent in voting behavior have comprised between 50.5 and 60.7 percent of it when consistent nonvoters are excluded. Furthermore, by eschewing levels of ideological constraint as a gauge of sophistication – as have been used in many past studies – I have found that the *ideologically inconsistent* who are politically sophisticated in terms of education, and political knowledge, interest, and involvement outnumber the *ideologically consistent* who are sophisticated. I also find that individuals who are volatile in their voting behavior *and* politically sophisticated are rather numerous, and

⁵ H. Daudt (1961) made an extensive study of what he called “floating voters,” but finds that “the opinion that floaters are less intelligent than the rest of the voting age population” is “unfounded” (168). Daudt also offers some attempt to qualify floating voters demographically.

have comprised between 18.1 and 27.0 percent of the electorate between 1948 and 2004 (see Figure 1). I do find, however, that volatile voters and ideological inconsistencies are, probabilistically, somewhat less likely to be sophisticated as shown in Chapter VIII (Table 24). Additionally, *sophisticated ideological eclectic*s are significantly *less* likely to be volatile voters (Table 42) while *unsophisticated eclectic*s are significantly *more* likely to be volatile (Table 43). Both of these findings support the making of the conventional distinction between sophisticated “switchers” and unsophisticated “floaters.” In this respect, the analyses presented in this dissertation affirm what has long been asserted by the floating voter hypothesis in relation to volatile voters as a homogenous category, but with some important qualifications, in particular, evidence of the need to recast the manner in which volatile voters are described and accounted for.

First, the statistical support for the floating voter hypothesis is significant, but not dramatic when analyzed without the benefit of controls for issue opinions, ideological consistency, and standard demographic measures, and when using more direct measures of political sophistication such as education, and political interest, knowledge, and involvement. This support is contingent upon the use of volatile voters as a single, homogenous category in the dependent variable.

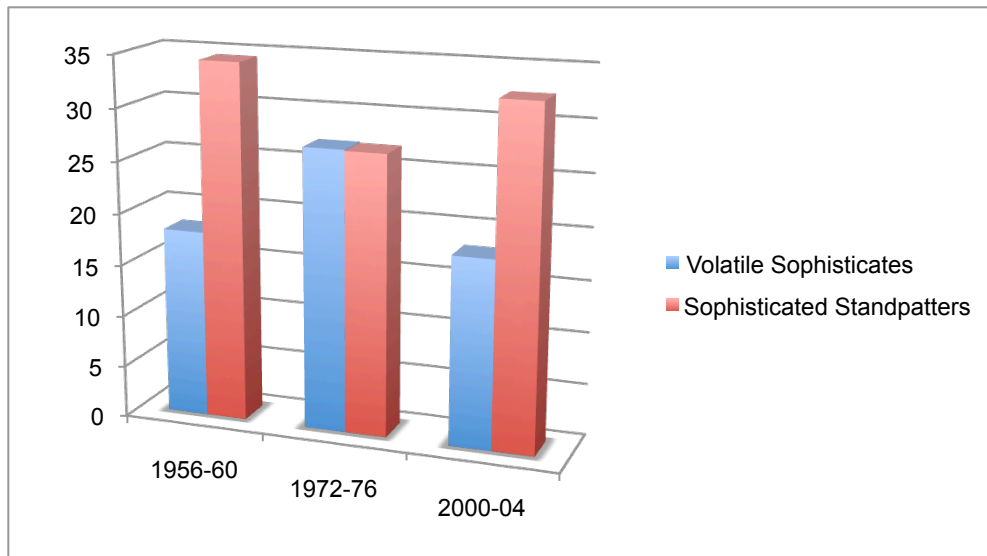
Second, but more significantly, I show that a large and substantial segment of the American public is, and has historically been, both politically sophisticated and volatile in voting behavior, and I argue that the reason for their volatility is their susceptibility to political persuasion due to the higher intake of political information by individuals making up this segment. The findings presented in this dissertation about volatile voter demographics, behavior, and attitudes serve to support the notion that a decisively large

portion of the American public does indeed “reason” about politics (Popkin 1991) and vote “responsibly” (Key 1966).

Third, previous studies arguing in favor of the floating voter hypothesis have not adequately distinguished and accounted for the subset of volatile voters who are politically sophisticated and who are strikingly different from volatile unsophisticates demographically and attitudinally. My analyses show that findings regarding the sophistication of volatile voters by Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004) must be more sharply qualified by the fact that there are *two* major subsets of volatile voters: those who are educated, and politically active, interested and knowledgeable, and those who are less so. The former group is substantial in size, and plays a decisive role in elections. As such, the precise qualification of this group presents a challenge to the portrayal of volatile voters as overwhelmingly unsophisticated in studies supporting the floating voter hypothesis.

Finally, my analyses reveal that both sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile voters hold strong issue opinions, and that these groups are marked by significant demographic patterns. Thus volatile voters are shown to be more politically engaged, multifarious, and multifaceted than they have been portrayed in past studies.

Figure 1.
Historical Summary: Volatile Sophisticates and Sophisticated Standpatters



	1956-60	1972-76	2000-04
Volatile Sophisticates	18.1	27.0	18.1
Sophisticated Standpatters	34.4	26.9	32.5

I take guidance from the arguments of V.O. Key in *The Responsible Electorate* ([1966] 1968), Nie et al. ([1976] 1999) in *The Changing American Voter*, and Popkin (1991) in *The Reasoning Voter* that political issues and information have a pivotal effect upon the preferences citizens, and significantly influence how they vote and *whether* they vote – enough so that a decisive number of them are driven to engage in “unstable” voting behavior such as crossing party lines, abstaining, and voting for third-party candidates – and in many cases breaking habits of partisanship that noted studies of party loyalty (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Campbell et al. [1960] 1976) argue are learned in childhood and remain fixed throughout adulthood. Like Key, I too argue that voters really *do* evaluate candidate and party issue positions and political attitudes in a “reasoning”

fashion (Key [1966] 1968, 7; Popkin 1991). Of course, not all voters reason about electoral decisions in a sophisticated manner, but I show that many more do than have been reported in past voting and elections and political behavior literature. I also show that they can be described more precisely and reliably than past literature suggests.

Why Study Volatile Voters and the Ideologically Inconsistent?

Political campaign strategists inevitably attempt to target those citizens they believe can be mobilized or won over using marketing communications, or, in some cases, demobilized when strategically advantageous (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997; Kahn and Kenney 1999). Although the voting behavior of these individuals is shown to drive electoral outcomes,⁶ the overwhelming consensus in voting and elections literature indicates that identifying the persuadable “swing voter” is a most elusive goal (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Pew Research Center 2004; Jones 2008; Mayer and Teixeira 2008; Kaufmann et al. 2008).

Today, electronically enhanced data from surveys, voter lists, the United States Census, commercial mailing lists, internet analytics, and numerous other databases in which information about consumers and citizens is increasingly gathered, offer campaigns the promise of targeting voters according to profiles constructed from precise demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral measures. These methods also offer the promise of quantifying the susceptibility to persuasion of specific voter types – a process often

⁶ I note James Campbell’s (2008) study examining swing voters, defined in this case as active voters – excluding occasional nonvoters – who have been queried in the ANES about the degree to which they have “settled” on a candidate or party before or during a presidential campaign. Campbell shows that for only one victorious presidential candidate since 1972 – Carter in 1976 – was the winning of the majority of these types of “swing voters” consequential. But by defining swing voters as he has, Campbell obscures longer-term volatility among American voters and presumes that the number of party-loyal voters in presidential elections in the United States since 1972 has ranged between 69.8 and 81.6 percent (2008, 126). The accounting of volatile voters provided in this dissertation indicates a far smaller prevalence of party-choice stability in that period – with a much more consequential range of 50.5 to 60.7 percent volatile as compared to the 19.4 to 30.2 percent range that Campbell provides.

referred to as “microtargeting.” Such efforts typically focus on segments of the electorate exhibiting a higher historical propensity to volatile voting behavior⁷ or persuadability on the basis of issues that relate to demographic or attitudinal voter categories (Kaufmann et al. 2008, 224; Malchow 2003, 21-36). Although the hunt for reliably targetable “swing voters” has not been particularly fruitful, researchers have nonetheless continued to try to explain what could be driving volatile-voting behavior and identify what forces could manage to surmount habitual affinities toward, or loyalties for, one political party or another.

Recent attitudinal and “lifestyle” targeting efforts have produced more promising results in the effort to mobilize and persuade voters where pure demographic targeting has not (Malchow 2003; Sosnik et al. 2006). Analyses provided in this dissertation, however, demonstrate several strong and statistically significant demographic patterns among those who exhibit volatile-voting behavior, and these findings offer challenges to the studies noted above arguing that virtually no sociological patterns in volatile voting are discernible. I have also found significant patterns in political opinions and attitudes among volatile voters, as is shown in Chapter IX.

Partisanship and Political Sophistication

If voting behavior across the electorate is predominantly inherited and stable, as many scholars have claimed (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Campbell et al. [1960] 1976; Campbell 1966, 42; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 427), we should have seen a fairly continuous string of Democratic party victories in presidential elections – at least in the popular vote – between 1948 and 2004 given that registered Democrats and Democratic-

⁷ Persuasive messaging is just one potential goal of targeting. Gathering market intelligence, relationship building, and increasing brand awareness among defined groups are other political marketing objectives that rely on targeting.

leaning Independents have outnumbered Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents substantially throughout that time period (Green et al. 2002; 41, Keith et al. 1992, 14). Why, then, have we instead witnessed nine Republican victories in the 15 presidential elections between 1948 and 2004 versus six Democratic victories? Fiorina's (1992) analyses suggest that American voters actually prefer divided government and vote accordingly, and American National Election Studies (ANES) data confirm that more than half of respondents in the 2000-04 period express this preference.⁸ In relation to this possible pattern of voter preferences, it is important to note, when examining volatility in voting behavior, that instability and defection that occur in presidential voting are not necessarily paralleled in electoral contests for lower offices as is shown in literature on ticket splitting (Campbell and Miller 1957; DeVries and Tarrance 1972; Roscoe 2003).⁹ Volatility levels due to ticket-splitting can vary dramatically from those limited to presidential voting, and vary from state to state.

One possible explanation for the surprising level of volatility in presidential elections that I describe may lie in the differing degrees of skill employed by campaigns throughout the years to mobilize their base supporters, provoke party switching in opposition regulars, or demobilize them. The more optimistic answer I propose, however, is that issues, candidate issue positions, and candidate attitudes embodying issue positions are of great importance to voters, whether or not they are volatile in voting behavior, and in particular, to a large segment of the electorate that is both volatile and sophisticated.

⁸ To the question "Do you think it is better when one party controls both the presidency and Congress, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn't it matter?" 52.2 percent of respondents in the 2000-02-04 ANES panel indicated that they thought it "better when control is split." 24.0 percent said they preferred it "when one party controls both, and 21.1 percent said "it doesn't matter." The ANES variable is P000397; N = 1187.

⁹ Also see Converse (1975, 146).

Political Sophistication as a Mediating Variable in Voting Behavior

If issues and candidate issue positions and attitudes *do* substantially affect voting choices, voter awareness of such issues and political attitudes, and their capacity to understand and be affected by them, are necessary conditions to any causal relationship between issues and voting decisions. In order to reveal whether such a mediating process takes place to a substantial degree, the political knowledge, awareness, engagement, and capacity for political understanding of voters – what I collectively refer to as sophistication – must be known. In order to gauge this mediating effect, I test the hypothesis that volatile voting behavior, the dependent variable, is positively associated with political sophistication among American voters. Multivariate analyses using standard measures of political sophistication that are presented in this dissertation, however (Chapter IX), somewhat disconfirm the notion that volatile voters are politically sophisticated when treated as a homogenous group. This hypothesis is disconfirmed in the 1996-2004 period at a statistically significant level, and disconfirmation is suggested in the 1968-1976 and 1948-1956 periods, but falls short of statistical significance. A variety of demographic and attitudinal controls are used in these analyses and are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

I also present analyses in Chapter IX that indicate a robust association between volatile voting behavior and strong opinions about important issues of the day, particularly among sophisticated volatile voters. And, I find that even though the modal volatile voter reports a low level of education, interest in politics, and political knowledge, such voters are nonetheless *aware enough* of important political matters to be able to vote in a manner that reflects engagement and interest in politics.

I reason, as do Hillygus and Shields (2008), that it is the *complexity* of politics and the awareness of that complexity on the part of the volatile voter that creates party choice instability. I have thus explored the proposition that a relatively high level of voter sophistication has a positive relationship to such volatility — with two important qualifications: 1) that more meaningful measures of political engagement and sophistication must be used than have been used in past studies, and that measures of ideological consistency – an exogenous and indirect gauge of voter attitude and knowledge – be excluded and 2) that such analyses take account of contextual factors by way of controlling for demographics and the effect of salient political issues.

The hypothesis explored in the present study holds much in common with Key's thesis, as well as studies by Burnham (1970, 124-7), Daudt (1961, 168), Dobson and St. Angelo (1975, 487-8), Hillygus and Shields (2008, 4, 64-8, 86-7), Macaluso (1977, 257), Pomper (1975, 31-35), and Shaw (2008), that show there is a high frequency of sophisticated voters who are inconsistent ideologically or in voting behavior, and a substantial frequency of those who are both, all of whom are and susceptible to cross-pressures produced by awareness of policy complexity and persuasive messages in the media. This hypothesis accordingly holds that the complexity of different issues that are salient and relevant to voters create the potential for volatility in voting, and that party loyalty can, in many cases, be conceived of as a *less* politically thoughtful form of behavior – a cost-saving measure, as some scholars argue (Downs 1957, 101-2; Niemi and Weisberg 2001; Popkin 1991; Shively 1979). Importantly, Kinder (2006, 205-6) calls attention to the notion that cognitive shortcuts can readily misinform and mislead the voter from his or her truly preferred choice. Higher levels of political sophistication

could, on the other hand, create *more* partisanship if parties are well aligned to belief systems maintained by voters. Even if party ideologies are not logically consistent in conventional ways, they may have been linked to voter preferences by force of habit, and can thus provide cues to voters that are low in information cost.

The hypothesis explored in this dissertation holds that sophisticated and engaged voters rely *less* on party labels and more on issue-related information, and can thus be cross-pressured when, for example, they may like the competence or personality of a candidate, but dislike his or her position on an important issue. But receptivity to, and intake of, cross-pressure-creating political information is a condition that must exist prior to such evaluations by voters, and accordingly, volatile voters must be sensitive to, and affected by, salient issues and information about candidates.¹⁰

Zaller (2004) and Converse (1967a) both provided important refinements to the floating voter hypothesis by showing that volatile voters are not deaf to politics, and are engaged enough to take the time to vote. These voters, they argue, are simply much more susceptible to short-term, sensationalistic information, such as, in the case of Zaller's (2004) study, economic data. The problem with this assessment is that it lumps together sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile voters who are in fact, strikingly different demographically, attitudinally, and in their use of media.¹¹ This distinction between volatile sophisticates and volatile unsophisticates reveals both 1) an engaged and politically knowledgeable segment of voters that is persuadable and that plays a decisive role in elections, and 2) a less politically sophisticated segment of the electorate that is

¹⁰ The matter of whether candidate quality and incumbency affect this relationship is addressed in Chapters IV and V.

¹¹ There is not, however, a sharp, bimodal distinction between sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile voters. The sophistication levels of these voters are more evenly spread out across a continuum, as shown in Chapter IX.

nonetheless engaged enough in politics to make the effort to vote, but on the basis of much smaller inputs of political information.

The Role of Media in Volatile Voting Behavior

I also explore the theory that the power of media that have sharply increased in presence and reach as of the 1950s, combined with contentious major political issues and the increased importance of candidate personalities, has driven greater awareness of and engagement with politics throughout the citizenry, and has in turn driven greater volatility in voting. Historical data show otherwise, however. Between the 1948-60 and 1968-76 periods, one could find substantial support for such a notion. But as the media have become more ubiquitous and more pervasive in daily life between 1976 and 1996, volatility has dropped back to the same level as the 1950s. Support could therefore be found for the claim that less costly information, and therefore more widely available and widely consumed information, has the effect of making voters more partisan, which would support the floating voter hypothesis. But increased political sophistication and information intake, as I show in Chapter IX, affects different voters in different ways. Some are driven to volatility and others to party loyalty. As noted earlier, Zaller (2004, 195) argues that short-term inputs of political information drive sophisticated voters to partisanship while unsophisticated voters are driven to volatility by such inputs. I show however, that there is a rather large number of sophisticated volatile voters, and an even larger number of unsophisticated volatile voters – and that both types of voters hold strong issue opinions. But my findings do tend to confirm the notion that more political sophistication produces greater voter clarity and decisiveness with regard to politics, and in turn, greater partisanship. Information and sophistication can therefore bring about

either confusing complexity or focus in the mind of the voter – or both. My findings tend to support the notion that higher levels of political knowledge and involvement do in fact tend to create more focus than confusion.

The “Randomness” Thesis of Ideological and Behavioral Inconsistency

I also argue, with Key ([1966] 1968), Nie et al. ([1976] 1999) and Popkin (1991, 54) that voters – at least volatile sophisticates, and arguably all volatile voters – make ballot choices substantially in response to salient *issues*, and that these voters do not act in either an arbitrary and haphazard manner, or in one that averages out to be essentially random as Caplan (2007, ch. 1) has asserted and that has been suggested by Converse (1964, 243-5). This “randomness” thesis is flawed in two key ways. First, Converse argues that because aggregated – and, importantly, not individual level – responses to political knowledge questions by voters are not well correlated, they must lack ideational structure and therefore be randomly generated. This correlative evidence, however, hardly means responses must be “random.” It simply means that they are inconsistent. By using aggregate data in this manner, Converse indulges in the ecological fallacy – inferring individual behavior from group behavior. Second, even if there *is* randomness of a kind in these responses, assuming a normal distribution of different *levels of randomness* in survey responses in the sample, only a small minority of individual preferences will be random. On one extreme side of the randomness continuum, some respondents’ preferences may be “perfectly” random in the statistical sense (zero

correlation), while on the other extreme, individual preferences will be perfectly correlated with each other. The rest will have varying degrees of randomness.¹²

The Prevalence of Volatile Voting

This dissertation research has also endeavored to demonstrate that volatile voting behavior in presidential elections since 1948 is more prevalent in the electorate than party-loyal voting when considered across *three* presidential elections. A key to my ability to produce data analyses that account for the demographics and attitudes of volatile voters with high levels of statistical significance and that reveal a high prevalence of “volatile sophisticates” in the electorate is that a larger sample size and longer time frame has been used than in other studies. This approach reveals more volatility across the electorate and more evenly distributed frequency of volatile voting behavior across all levels of political sophistication.¹³ A higher electorate-wide prevalence of political sophistication than is shown in many previous studies has also been revealed using these measures.

As a foundation for this research, the dependent variable, volatile voting behavior, has been operationalized using actual reports of voting and non-voting. No measurements of stated party *identification* are used in any analyses. The definition of volatile voting behavior used in this dissertation is much the same as the one used by Shaw (2008), with party-loyal voters defined as those who vote consistently for the same party in each of *three* successive elections, non-voters defined as those who abstain in all three elections, and all others categorized as volatile. The complete definition of such voters, and how

¹² For further discussion of the relationship of apparently random responses in aggregated data, see Page and Shapiro (1992, 14-15), and Stimson (2004, 19-20). Also see the discussion of Luskin’s (1987) analyses in Chapter III of this dissertation.

¹³ See Chapters VI and IX of this dissertation. Shaw (2008) is the only study using a three-presidential-election time frame but he arrives at a different accounting of volatile voting than I do. These differences are explained more fully in Chapter VI and notes thereto.

their behavior is accounted for, is provided in chapters V and VI along with a description of approaches to data analysis used in this dissertation which offer novel, and what I argue to be more valid, approaches to handling the data contained in ANES survey datasets than have been presented in previous studies. Indeed, a key outcome of this project is a precise and parsimonious definition of volatile-voting behavior as a dependent variable that can produce clear, straightforward and reliable behavioral and demographic descriptions of volatile voters.

A General Caveat

It may not be possible to significantly explain volatility in voting as primarily an outcome of political sophistication or engagement. Such behavior might instead be a function of weakness of indoctrination into party support, or some other inherent lack of partisanship. Indeed, voters may cross party lines or abstain for reasons having nothing to do with persuadability as a function of engagement with or ability to comprehend political issues, education, or political knowledge. Multivariate analysis can explain much of the change in a dependent variable of interest – assuming all relevant variables are included – but it cannot directly account for potential causal factors not measured in the surveys such as levels of politicization in the respondent’s family of origin, economic conditions in the respondent’s community prior to surveys, and other such causes that may have been manifested prior to the phenomenon being measured. This dissertation, however, employs what a large portion of more than sixty years worth of voting and elections scholarship suggests are the most the most promising causal (independent) variables with which to seek an explanation of volatile voting behavior: 1) measures of education and political knowledge, awareness and engagement, 2) measures of issue

awareness and direction of opinion, and 3) measures of ideological consistency employing respondent opinions regarding important political issues of the day.

2. Roadmap

In a project such as this one, a researcher is confronted with a vast number of tempting pathways for investigation ancillary to the main problem. In some cases, these pathways may be highly illuminating. Yet parsimony and practicality dictate a tighter focus. I have thus left aside potentially fruitful investigation into the nature of “ticket-splitting” behavior for purposes of brevity and focus, as well as investigation into congressional, state, and local elections. I also leave aside exploration of the differences between *intended* vote and *actual* vote by survey respondents as a measure of volatility, as well as the vicissitudes of “undecided” behavior in campaign cycles that are, again, potentially fruitful subjects for investigation. As noted above, I eschew measures of party identification and focus instead on actual voting and non-voting *behavior*. Finally, I leave aside the very interesting matter of searching for demographic, attitudinal, or behavioral patterns among declared Independents that could potentially shed much light on the matter of volatile voting behavior. I focus instead on the demographics, attitudes, and behavior of *voters who do not consistently vote for the same party across three presidential elections*. Other areas of potentially fruitful investigation have naturally emerged in the course of this research that could enhance this and other studies, and I have suggested, in the last chapter of this dissertation, some additional research topics to explore that are related to how voters use information, how political sophistication and ideological attitudes affect voting behavior, the potential role of the “reinforcement

effect” in producing party loyalty, and the potential role of social-network “influentials” and other “opinion leaders” in voting decisions and the formation of political attitudes.

Chapter II presents an examination of prior studies of electoral volatility, identifies key issues in understanding this phenomenon, examines controversies in the study of electoral volatility, and sets forth the key questions to be examined in order to understand what drives voters to cross party lines or abstain in presidential elections.

Chapter III defines political sophistication, explains its utility for understanding voting behavior, and presents a critique of conventional approaches to its measurement. The validity of the long-standing measure of ideological consistency as a positive indicator of political sophistication is investigated with attention to the potentially confounding normative underpinnings of this approach. In relation to this task, I examine the ideological eclecticism of the American citizenry as a distinctive feature of mass-level American political philosophy and whether measures of ideological constraint are useful in gauging the sophistication of American voters who maintain such a philosophy. I also evaluate a variety of more direct alternatives to measuring political sophistication both theoretically and by way of reviewing literature.

Chapter IV presents a theory of volatile voting that is based on measures of education, political knowledge, and engagement, as well as composite measures of political sophistication and ideological consistency. I describe a theory positing that a reasonable level of political sophistication is a necessary condition of volatility in voting behavior, and propose a means of testing the theory using alternatives to measures of the ideological consistency of survey responses or levels of respondent knowledge about abstract, non-issue-specific political phenomena.

Chapter V describes general research design considerations and several novel approaches to measuring voter volatility, sophistication and ideological consistency. This chapter also explains my approach to handling the ANES data used in my analyses.¹⁴ More specific descriptions of data handling and operationalizations for specific quantitative analyses are included in Chapters VI through IX in which results of these analyses are reported.

Chapters VI through IX provide quantitative analyses of volatile voting behavior based on my own accountings of the frequency of volatile voting, political sophistication, and ideological eclecticism in the electorate. I provide analyses of the relationship between these main variables of interest as well as their relationship to standard demographic variables, and in some analyses, respondent issue opinions. I interpret the results of these analyses in terms of historical trends, consistent sociological patterns and relationships, and in relation to historical events, as well as from the standpoint of political information processing.

Chapter VI provides an accounting of non-party-loyal voters and occasional abstainers in the electorate across three presidential elections using a novel approach to data handling that yields a distribution of far more volatile voters than has been shown in previous literature – and that provides the basis for what I argue is a more valid and accurate set of measurements relating to the sophistication, attitudes, and demography of volatile voters.

¹⁴Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the American National Election Studies (ANES) or the organizations providing funding to the ANES. The ANES is not responsible for any opinions, advice, statements or results derived by a third party from ANES data or from content or products disseminated on the ANES website.

Chapter VII provides an accounting of political sophistication in the electorate using both conventional, factual measures of respondent education, political knowledge, and self-reports of political interest and involvement, as well as a composite measure of sophistication developed in the course of this dissertation research.

Chapter VIII provides an accounting of ideological eclectics in the electorate using a novel composite measure, and describes trends related to the consistent increase in ideological consistency in the United States since the 1950s. The relationship of ideological consistency to various measures of political sophistication is shown along with a further discussion of ideological eclecticism as a feature of American political philosophy, and its prevalence in the American public.

Chapter IX provides analyses of volatility in voting behavior as it relates to political sophistication using both conventional measures and a composite measure of political sophistication. Demographic measures and respondent issue opinions as predictors of volatility are also presented in multivariate binary logistic regression models. Additionally, analyses are provided using ideological eclecticism as an independent variable in the effort to account for the role of cross-pressures in volatile voting.

Chapter X provides summary interpretations of the data analyses presented in previous chapters and an assessment of the theory of volatile voting and hypotheses given in Chapter IV in light of these analyses. I also explore the implications of these findings for a variety of questions related to voting behavior – and other political behavior – including the effect of issues upon vote choice, and our current understandings of

political knowledge and sophistication, dealignment, and polarization in the electorate. I additionally suggest areas for further research.

II. Elements of Volatile Voting Behavior

1. Background: Prior Studies of Volatile Voting Behavior

Voters who are variously described as “undecideds,” “Independents,” “defectors,” “floaters,” “changers,” “switchers,” and “ticket splitters” together play a consistently pivotal role in American elections. This multifarious group is also often imprecisely referred to as “swing voters.” What all of these kinds of voters have in common is that they have been consistently hard to identify and that their voting preferences have been found difficult to predict. Because these members of the electorate do not provide consistent support for one party or another at the polls, scholars have described their behavior as “unstable” or “volatile.” This type of voting behavior is naturally distinguished from that of “stable” or party-loyal voters who are seen to be acting upon conditioned habit formed in childhood, and who may also be acting upon habits reinforced by path dependence (Pierson 2000, 252-3) which discourages voters from forfeiting their long-term investment in a particular ideology or accumulation of political or philosophical ideas upon which other life decisions may have relied. Some scholars have also argued that party loyalty owes much to the information shortcuts provided by party labels that signal acceptable ideologies for voters (Dobson and St. Angelo 1975; Niemi and Weisberg 2001; 105-6; Shively 1979). Others have described stability of preference in party identification and voting due to reinforcement effects (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, 74-7; Converse 1975, 117-18; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller [1992] 2003, 421, 310) and the resistance of voters to admitting to error in their political opinions.

Another possible explanation for at least a substantial portion of apparent party choice stability on the part of voters is the fact that in southern states, from the late 1800s to the 1960s and even beyond, virtual one-party rule prevailed (Key [1949] 1984). Ideological and policy differences in the south were fought out within the Democratic party – thus more stability in voter behavior appeared in surveys than really existed. As of the late 1960s, a large percentage of nationwide volatility in voting could be traced to southern conservative voters shifting to the Republican party due to persuasion in accordance with the Republican “southern strategy” that appealed to conservative Democrats on the premise that they would, particularly with respect to their attitudes regarding African-American civil rights, and so-called “states’ rights,” be more at home with the Republicans than with the increasingly liberal Democrats aligned with “New Deal” economic policies and support of black civil rights (Ginsberg 1996, 9-11; Hillygus and Shields 2008, chapter 5). Awareness of party and policy changes is, I argue, a necessary condition to this type of party shift. But rather than break out southern voting patterns and attendant sophistication levels, I have treated this particular type of party shifting as simply one more form of “rational” volatility that could not occur without some reasonable amount of political awareness and engagement, or opinion leader influence causing voters to respond to changing political conditions. This aggregate shift did not happen suddenly, however, as many reports suggest it in fact began in the mid-1950s.¹⁵

¹⁵ Campbell and Miller (1957) note “only 21 per cent of the Eisenhower voters in [the South] in 1952 reported supporting Republican candidates for Congress; in 1956 46 per cent did so. Especially interesting is the fact that a third of the Southern Eisenhower voters reported voting a completely straight Republican ticket in 1956, double the number who so reported in our 1952 survey.”

Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968) and Campbell et al. ([1960] 1976) argued that ideological and party preferences in voting behavior are generally inherited and remain stable over time. But in addition, these classic studies indicated that there were few “Independents” and “switchers” in the American electorate and that persuasive advertising and other campaign appeals had little effect on the voting choices of individuals who were very much set in their ways in their political partisanship. Although the number of Independents has clearly increased – to more than 1/3 of voters – recent work by Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, esp. 424-28) affirms the findings of pervasive party loyalty provided by Campbell et al. Furthermore, Keith et al. (1992) show that two-thirds of Independents are reliable partisans despite the apparent anti-partisanship of these voters suggested by their avoidance of party identification. Many other studies, however, show a marked decline in partisanship – at least in terms of stated party identification (Crotty 1984; Pomper 1977; Wattenberg 1991).

The “Columbia Studies” produced by Lazarsfeld et al. in the early 1940s were arguably the first *panel surveys* of electoral behavior – repeated interviews with the same respondents across a specified time frame, in this case, seven months during the course of one election season in 1940 ([1944] 1968, 3-5). These studies revealed very little volatility in voting patterns. Lazarsfeld et al. found that “fully 77 percent” of respondents “said their parents and grandparents had voted consistently for one or the other of the major political parties, and [that] they maintained these family traditions.” This “stability,” these researchers argued, is “made possible by a sort of protective screen built around central attitudes,” and they note, importantly, that “Despite the flood of propaganda and counterpropaganda available to the prospective voter, he is reached by

very little of it” ([1944] 1968, xxxii). Campbell et al. (1960, 135) arrived at a similar conclusion in later studies, conducted in the 1950s, noting that “persons who identify with one of the [political] parties typically have held the same partisan tie for all or almost all of their adult lives.” The “protective screen” referred to by Lazarsfeld et al. sounds very much like the mechanism Zaller (2004) describes that provides for reinforcement of positions in which voters are already invested, commonly known as the “reinforcement effect” (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, 74-7; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Taber and Lodge 2006, 767; Zaller [1992] 2003).

In contrast to the Michigan and Columbia studies, later research, conducted in the 1960s by Nie et al. ([1976] 1999) reported that a great shift had taken place in voter psychology since the 1960 publication of *The American Voter* by Campbell et al. Nie and his colleagues found that just a few years later, in the mid-1960s, voters had become much more aware of, and influenced by, major political issues due to the widened reach of electronic media and the salience of such issues as the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Cold War, the civil rights movements, feminism, and the Sexual Revolution.¹⁶ By the 1970s, voters identifying themselves as Independents had come to account for some 31 to 38 percent of the electorate, versus 19 to 23 percent in the 1950s (Keith et al. 1992, 14),¹⁷ and voters who did not, at the polls, vote in a consistently partisan manner counted for more than *half* of the electorate according to self-reports in the ANES (Nie et al. [1976]

¹⁶ See Nie et al. ([1976] 1999), 2, 9, 194 and 347-353. The claim that issue voting supplanted party-loyal voting in the 1960s invited a fair amount of controversy. Challenges to this claim argue that a statistical illusion was created by changes in the wording of American National Election Studies (ANES) questions related to contemporaneous political issues and argue against findings that issue awareness *changed* between the 1950s and 1970s. Nie et al. address these challenges in pp. 367-70*n* of the “Enlarged Edition” of their book (1999).

¹⁷ Keith et al. (1992) show that between 1970 and 1980, the percentage of Independent Democrats, Pure Independents, and Independent Republicans combined was between 31 and 38 percent. The number of “Pure Independents” tallied in those years runs between 13 and 15 percent of voters surveyed in the ANES.

1999, 54-55).¹⁸ In the studies just mentioned, and many others, levels of political sophistication and ideological consistency are shown to be key mediators of volatility in voting. I turn to the study of these elements of volatility in the next section.

2. Issues, Political Information, Ideology, and Voter Sophistication as Determinants of Volatile Voting Behavior

The idea that voters make ballot choices on the basis of *issues* rather than habitual party preference inherited from families or impressed upon them by peer groups presupposes that voters are aware of and informed about politics to some reasonable degree. Accordingly, one might reasonably infer that the less stable a voter's choices are with regard to party, the *more* informed and issue-aware that voter is likely to be, assuming that parties and candidates do indeed differ with respect to evolving issues. On the other hand, if parties are aligned with issues in a clear and consistent way, issue-based voting could be directly reflected in party voting after all. But support for the argument that issue voting has *not* resulted in party loyalty is provided by the fact that as of 1990 well over 30 percent of voters identified as "Independent" (Keith et al. 1992, 14),¹⁹ by the fact that as of 1976, 32.6 percent of the electorate split their tickets in presidential election years (Maddox and Nimmo 1981, 401-8), and the fact that an average of between 3 to 14 percent of strong Democratic and Republican identifiers and an average of between 13 to 32 percent of weak Democratic and Republican identifiers between 1952 and 1980 defected from the parties with which they identified (Crotty 1984, 32).

¹⁸ Nie et al. (54-55) note that in 1952, "only one out of four party identifiers reported inconstancy in their vote." But they report that by 1972, "almost one out of two identifiers said that they did not always vote for the same party."

¹⁹ These figures were reported in 1990, and include "Independent Democrats," "Pure Independents," and "Independent Republicans." "Pure Independents," as of 1990, represent 11 percent of the electorate. Independent Democrats and Independent Republicans, unlike "Pure Independents," are known to vote, despite their declarations of independence, in a predictably partisan manner, favoring the party towards which they claim weak preference.

Additionally, and importantly, the analysis of Nie et al., noted above, shows that by the early 1970s “over half of voters ... reported that their presidential vote had not been constant in party terms” ([1976] (1999, 54). Finally, if issues mostly served to drive voters to greater party loyalty, one would simply not find that the majority of the electorate has consistently been volatile as I show in Chapter VI of this dissertation.

The role of parties in the electorate has changed, and dealignment has increased since 1948. These phenomena may either be a cause or an effect of increasing political awareness, engagement or receptivity, or unwillingness of voters to align with parties whose ideologies or issue positions might be considered imperfectly aligned with their own. But the meaning of parties to voters is not the main subject of interest here. It is, rather, a class of phenomena the present study could help to explain.

Party Identification, Independence, and Volatility

Party identification tells us how people identify themselves politically in a very general way. But it only reliably predicts what *some* voters actually do in specific political circumstances. This dissertation is therefore decidedly not focused on party identification as a dependent variable – or as an explanatory variable. Indicators of party independence, as noted above, are also not especially illuminating in the study of volatile voting behavior. Scholars have reported on the motivations, sophistication, and demographics of Independents (Burnham 1970; Keith et al. 1992; Schneider 1984; Shively 1979), a group that certainly comprises a major portion of volatile voters. But as note above, most Independents are in fact reliably partisan in their behavior. Only about one-third of Independents are “pure Independents” who do not admit to leaning toward

Democrat or Republican identification. These voters are, unlike Independent leaners, much more likely to be volatile in their voting behavior (Keith et al. 1992, 63).

Some studies aligned with Key's "responsible voter" thesis suggest that voters who are more issue-aware are just as likely to be *less* partisan as they are of being partisan. Pomper (1975) found that when "Independent" status is defined by actual voting behavior rather than by party identification, we will instead find that those who do not vote consistently for the same party – "behavioral Independents" – "are about as educated, concerned, and aware of policy questions, as those who stay with the same party." Pomper (1975, 33) however uses ANES data to show that Independents are indeed as knowledgeable as strong and weak partisans. Presumably these voters, stimulated by complex political information, would not consider a vote choice to be a simple matter of habit. According to Pomper, these more politically sophisticated Independents may constitute a new breed of voter that is "controlled by campaign manipulation rather than by habitual partisanship." On "five of six measures of more general involvement," Pomper shows that "the unaffiliated are more active, aware, or confident than the weak partisans" (1975, 31-32). Pomper also notes the fact that issues have become "more dramatically salient" in recent years, and argues that consequently, political awareness is "as likely among Independents as among partisans." Consequently, voters may now rely *less* on "party cues" as shortcuts to acquiring political information (1975, 31-32). Kaufmann et al. (2008, 29) similarly state that "We have known for a long time that Americans, especially the middle class and the better educated, are inclined to call themselves Independent and assert unbiased judgment of the candidates."

Keith et al. (1992) show that “partisan Independents” (leaning Democrats and leaning Republicans), the behavior of whom are revealed when the Independent category is split into three, “have always been relatively interested, informed, and active,” while Pure Independents “have been notably uninterested, ignorant and inactive” (1992, 41). Interestingly, Converse (1964, 227) also agrees with this proposition in a limited way, writing “among the most highly sophisticated, those who consider themselves ‘independents’ outnumber those who consider themselves ‘strong’ partisans.” But Converse notes that when the category of analysis is Independent voters rather than sophisticated voters, only a minority qualifies as “sophisticated.”

The Role of Sophistication in Volatile Voting Behavior

While Key (1966) and Popkin (1991) argued that those who vote without strict loyalty to party are indeed responsive to inputs of political information, Converse (1967a, 140-41),²⁰ and later, Zaller (2004) argued that the “floating” vote is “attributable disproportionately ... to shifts in short-term evaluations of less informed voters.” Indeed, a central claim made by Converse is

the probability that any given voter will be sufficiently deflected in his partisan momentum to cross party lines in a specified election varies directly as a function of the strength of short-term forces toward the opposing party and varies inversely as a function of the mass of stored information about politics. [emphasis in original].

Thus less informed voters, easily influenced by “short-term forces,” create what is commonly called “swing.” Being less informed, and, according to Converse, necessarily holding less developed and less consistent ideological attitudes, these voters presumably form a bloc in the electorate that can be swayed by sensationalistic political advertising, crafty public-relations efforts, and other salient forms of political communication.

²⁰ Also see Campbell (1966, 41).

Carrying a relatively light “mass of stored information,” these voters can more easily be swayed by the changing winds of campaign discourse. This argument by Converse is presented as “no more than a restatement of the floating voter hypothesis” (1967a, 141) which posits that the greatest susceptibility to vote shifting is to be found among the “less involved and less informed” members of the electorate” (1967a, 137).

Converse and Campbell do not describe or quantify “short-term forces.” They simply comprise, by implication, the increased “stimulus” found in presidential elections as opposed to off-year elections (Converse 1967a, 141-43). As noted above, these stimuli can include news, advertising, and debates appearing during the campaign season (1967a, 145-7). Converse uses “number of media attended” (145-6) as a measure of campaign information intake by respondents and refers indirectly to what Campbell refers to as a “high-stimulus” election and “short-term political stimulation” (Campbell 1966, 41). Describing what type of information makes up the content of this kind of stimuli, Stokes (1966, 127) refers to “war, a sharp recession, a rash of scandal.”

Building upon Converse’s analysis, Zaller (2004) argues that it is primarily the “poorly informed voters” who are “likely to shift back and forth during presidential campaigns,” and that such voters are substantially “more volatile” than others, but Zaller importantly also notes that they are “typically more responsive to the content of individual elections than their better informed counterparts.” These “low information voters” are seen as generally “more sensitive” to salient foreign policy and economic issues (2004, 166-82). But there is also a variety of scholars who argue various middle ground positions between those of Key and Converse, some offering qualifications of the floating voter hypothesis, and others more strongly arguing against it (Hillygus and

Shields 2008; Nie et al. [1976] 1999; Popkin 1991; Macaluso 1977). Another finding by Zaller (2004) is that informed voters are made more party-loyal by new political information, while less informed voters are made more volatile by the intake of new information. This analysis suggests that volatile voters may be processing new information while party-loyal voters may be using new information to rationalize the less uncertain status quo and reinforce political beliefs in which they have become invested.

Each election, of course, attracts a different mix of voters to the polls, or will alternatively give some voters cause to stay home. Differing issues, candidates, and candidate positions, and changing demographics and attitudes in the electorate, will drive changes in the prevalence of volatility as well as the prevalence of political engagement and sophistication. Most of the data in key past studies of voter volatility, however, have not been provided in likelihood models of voting behavior employing controls for age, race, gender, and issue preferences of respondents (Campbell et al. [1960] 1976; Converse 1964; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Zaller 2004). Analyses performed by Shaw (2008) and Hillygus and Shields (2008) are, however, notable exceptions.

3. Challenges to Prior Research Regarding Volatile Voting Behavior

A Challenge to the Floating Voter Hypothesis

Key importantly cautions “It would be an error to suppose that switchers are eternally volatile and the standpatters forever stable” (1966, 9-22), a perspective that is a foundation of my challenge to the “floating voter hypothesis” as articulated by Converse (1967a) and Boyd (1986, 231) and argued by Zaller (2004) and Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] (1968). I maintain instead that it is not necessary for a standard of “responsible” voting to depend on what have been established as high levels of scholastic forms of political

knowledge. It is also not necessary for this standard to depend on comprehension of ideologies – or on the ideological consistency of political opinions as is argued in prominent literature supporting the floating voter hypothesis.²¹

Some scholars argue that there has been a leveling of the distribution of political sophistication in the electorate due to the increased reach of the media and the increase in nationwide educational attainment. These trends could explain increases in political sophistication and issue voting where they are evident, and where volatile voting and sophistication are linked. Shively (1979) observed that a large increase in educational levels was realized in America from 1900 to 1970. He reports that in 1900, 70 percent of “new voters” did not have more than a grade-school education, whereas in 1930, 45 percent had grade-school education or less. By 1970, that figure had dropped to 7 percent. Thus, Shively argues, “one would guess that information costs have declined,” and, consequently, citizens would have less need for “guides such as party identification” to assist them in political opinion formation and voting decisions (Shively 1979, 1050).

²¹ I use Key’s term “responsible” rather than the term “rational” in order to differentiate voter reasoning about issues and candidates from Downsian “rationality” with regard to the costs and benefits of the act of voting (Downs 1957). Quite a lengthy discussion could be had attempting to define what constitutes a “rational” political act. In addition to Downs’s standard of political rationality, another benchmark that has been invoked in political behavior scholarship is that a voting decision is rational if it is the one that would have been made if the voter possessed perfect information (Shively 1979, 1042-2). By this standard, no vote could ever be rational, and according to the “logic of collective action” standard which gauges whether a voter is acting in accord with his or her utilitarian interests, Downs (1957) and Olson (1971) show in pure cost-benefit terms, that this is the case. Given how little anyone can know about the full range of policy matters at hand in an election – even politicians themselves make decisions on the basis of quite meager information (Davidson 2010, 293-95) – such notions reveal themselves to simply be impractical and only useful as abstract, baseline standards. But let it suffice to say at this point that rationality in voting need not conform to an absolute ideal. For one to be motivated to vote at all, one can reasonably infer that on the basis of at least one issue, or in accordance with at least one political or personal norm, some compelling bit of information must have been processed by the voter and driven that voter to act for some useful purpose. Hence a rational and responsible process has occurred, at least with regard to one matter of importance to voters. For the purposes of the present study, voting is assumed to be a rational act in a utilitarian sense, and at the very least, an emotionally comprehensible act (Downs 1957). The main focus, however, is what level of sophistication is needed for a *responsible* vote, as defined by Key (1966), or a “reasoning” vote such as is described by Popkin (1991) that has been influenced by an intake of political information and an evaluative process involving concerns that really do matter to voters.

Such increased availability of political information may not, nonetheless, be a driver of volatility as argued by supporters of the floating voter hypothesis.

In their 1944 *The People's Choice*, Lazarsfeld et al. wrote: “the notion that people who switch parties during the campaign are mainly the reasoned, thoughtful, conscientious people who were convinced by the issues of the election is just plain wrong. Actually, they were mainly just the opposite” (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968, 69).²² Jeffrey M. Jones, writing 64 years later, similarly found that those who have “given ‘a lot of thought’ to the election, were about half as likely to be swing voters – meaning in this case, those who switch preferences during the campaign – as those who had not thought as much about the election” (Jones 2008, 69). As mentioned earlier, Converse (1967a, 141-3) and Zaller (2004, 166, 182-5, 195-198) argue that it is the less informed voters who will be swayed by short-term media stimuli such as campaign advertising, major events such as political debates and sensationalistic news reports.²³

In political science literature, there are three types of challenges to findings that support the “floating voter hypothesis.” The first argues that volatile voters are in fact more politically knowledgeable than has been thought. The second argues that partisanship is an information shortcut and actually a sign of a *lack* of political sophistication, and the third argues that levels of sophistication commonly used to support the floating voter hypothesis are not valid standards for gauging responsible voting.

²² Note, however, that these authors qualify this statement by referring to “people who switch parties *during the campaign*” [emphasis added]. This assessment does not necessarily pertain to voters who switch parties in a less abrupt manner, or those who occasionally abstain from voting.

²³ Shaw’s study, referenced above, using less general and more context-specific qualifications of voters exhibiting non-party loyal behavior, shows five, and potentially more, categories of high-information swing voters including informed African-Americans, Jews, white southerners, union members, and seniors (2008, 95-6).

The first challenge holds that *cross-pressured* voters, who become so by having a high information intake and the intellectual capacity to process this information, are more likely to be volatile in their voting decisions (Hillygus & Shields 2008, 21, 92; Lazarsfeld, et al. [1944] 1968).

The second challenge is the notion that party labels function as information shortcuts for voters who are either distinguished by a relatively low interest in politics, and relatively low intake of political information, or, who are otherwise seeking to lower their information costs (Dobson and St. Angelo 1975; Downs 1957; Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 105-6; Popkin 1991, 51-52; Shaw 2008; Shively 1979). Thus partisanship may be a feature of low-information voters using party brands as a way of lowering information costs when making voting decisions. Shively notes the need of many voters to “make political decisions under confusing circumstances” and argues that if “perfect information were available” to voters, no party identification would be necessary (1979, 1040-2; also, see Downs 1957, ch. 7). Shively argues that the more intellectually equipped voters are, the less they should need party affinity as a cost-saving guide (1979, 1039-1054), and, according to Popkin, voter ideology is “not a mark of political sophistication and education” but is instead, an outcome of conditions of “uncertainty and lack of ability to connect policies with benefits” (1991, 51-52). If this cost-savings thesis is correct, however, why are the *least* politically aware – those who would presumably use party brands most as information shortcuts – found to be more volatile in so many renowned studies, and less guided by party affinity? Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004) argue that the relatively low mass of political interest and involvement of less sophisticated voters makes them more susceptible to fluctuations in the political environment and thus more

likely to be volatile. These voters, one may infer from the analyses of Converse and Zaller, do not know or care enough about politics to make adequate use of party labels.

Voters avail themselves of a variety of information conveniences that leverage the ideological positions with which they are already comfortable. Niemi and Weisberg (2001) state “there is no longer any real dispute with the proposition that citizens are, on average, not sophisticated political consumers,” and “have little political interest and information.” But these scholars find, as do Shively (1979), Pedersen (1978) and Downs (1957, 100-2; 113), that voters can nonetheless navigate political decisions involving complex information by using “shortcuts to overcome information deficits,” some of which include reliance on opinion leaders and experts and on “connectionism” – cues provided by the acceptability of a political candidate to a group or individual with which the voter holds an affinity (Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 105-9). One may of course argue that the ideology underlying a party label constitutes more than sufficient information for a voting decision. “Acquaintance with each party’s view of the good society,” Downs argues, is what helps each voter decide which candidate to vote for “without knowing about every policy specifically” (Downs 1957, 113). But the notion that party labels and partisanship may be conveniences employed by the *unsophisticated* remains a challenge to the floating voter hypothesis.

The third challenge to the floating-voter hypothesis is that measures of sophistication that have been used to support it are not valid. One aspect of this challenge is embodied in the distinction between “hard” and “easy” issue information (Carmines and Stimson 1980) that reaches voters in the form of campaign rhetoric. This theory holds that “unsophisticated” voters are able to navigate political issues and positions from

the standpoint of policy *goals* as opposed to institutional means and processes. A policy goal as distinguished in this scheme need not be “ideological,” however, although people’s differing visions of a “good society” (Downs 1957, 96-98) will surely be a key, if not controlling, element in developing opinions about policy goals. Accordingly, a voter who is not familiar with technical facts related to politics need not be thought of as uninformed and “irresponsible” in voting behavior in light of this theory.²⁴

Volatile voters may be clear about relatively simple and straightforward policy concerns and vote “responsibly” without being highly educated, politically involved, or politically knowledgeable. In effect, this challenge holds that sophistication, as commonly measured, is an unnecessary standard of voting responsibly. Carmines and Stimson (1980) tell us that “easy issue voters are no more informed, educated, or active in politics than those who are not influenced by issue considerations at all” (1980, 85). Yet these voters are distinct because even though they may not be sophisticated, they nonetheless care about political outcomes, particularly those related to issues long in the public’s consciousness, such as policies regarding race. Carmines and Stimson do not view “easy issue” voting as entailing “sophisticated political calculation.” Hard issue voters, however, are generally found to be sophisticated (1980, 85).

Another aspect of this third challenge is that the use of these types of general political knowledge and interest measures elides the relevance of specific issues to specific types of voters. Measures of sophistication used in many studies do not provide distinctions between “domain specific” information (Alvarez and Brehm 2002) having a

²⁴ It may be useful here to draw a distinction between a “policy goal” and an “ideology.” Carmines and Stimson (1980) do not define a policy goal per se, but they do offer desegregation in the 1960s as an example of a policy about which strong opinions have existed without deep citizen knowledge of technical aspects of governing. Such issues are held to be “symbolic” rather than technical (80). Converse refers to an ideology as a “belief system” (1964, 207), while Downs refers to a “view of the good society” (1957, 96-98). I therefore hold that a policy goal is a much narrower category than an ideology and need not be ideological.

direct impact on voters – economy, war and peace, civil rights – and more diffuse and abstract notions such as ideology, or more technical information, such as which party controls the House of Representatives or whether the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court is conservative or liberal.

While in the aggregate, voters may not be highly informed about, or interested in, politics, this observation should not preclude the notion that 1) there may be varying degrees of political awareness and interest to be found in the electorate and that these differences can be described and quantified; and 2) the high levels of political sophistication as conventionally defined may not be necessary to making “rational,” “responsible,” and indeed, reasonably informed voting decisions.²⁵ Such analyses must employ valid measures of voter sophistication, which, as I will argue below, have not been used in many important past studies of volatile voting behavior. Finally, a variety of analyses have been made attacking the use of ideological consistency as a measure of sophistication on the grounds of statistical methodology (Achen 1975, 1225; Marcus et al. 1974, 406; Smith 1980, 685; Wyckoff 1987, 164). I return to these criticisms in the next chapter.

Converse’s Paradox

Converse (1967a, 141-3) and Zaller (2004, 166, 182-5, 195-198) argue that *less informed* voters are swayed by short-term media stimuli that are more intense when they appear in what Campbell (1966) refers to as “high-stimulus” elections. Furthermore, Converse (1967a) found that these presumably uninvolved and unaware voters are

²⁵ As noted above, “rationality” in voting could mean many things. For Downs, a “rational action” is “efficiently designed to achieve the consciously political or economic ends of the actor” (1957, 20). Furthermore, Downs writes, “Any citizen is rational in regard to elections if his actions enable him to play his part in selecting a government efficiently” (1957, 24). These ends, however, vary with geographic location, socioeconomic status, age, profession, marital status, and numerous other factors. And, the term “efficiently” is left undefined. Could an “efficient” decision also be an incorrect one that has been made at a low cost?

persuaded to volatility by strong campaign stimuli. This finding is acknowledged by Converse to be a “paradox” (1967a, 144). Additionally, an aggregate-level paradox parallels this finding: if sophisticated voters tend to be more ideologically consistent than unsophisticates – according to Converse and Zaller (2004) – why has strength of party identification *decreased* over the past 60 years as the availability of political information in media and education levels has increased (Crotty 1984, 28-29; Keith et al.; Nie et al. [1976] 1999, 356, 152-5, 347-50 Pomper 1977, 36; Wattenberg 1991, 38)? Education and media consumption should *increase* sophistication across the electorate, and party loyalty with it according to the floating voter hypothesis. One important distinction that must be made here, however, is that while party *identification* has decreased since the 1940s, volatility in actual voting *behavior* has followed a different course, going from 52.7 percent of voters in the 1948-1956 period to 60.7 percent of voters in the 1968-1976 period, and back down to 50.5 percent of voters in the 1996-2004 period (excluding consistent non-voters). Sophistication has generally increased since the 1950s, going from 40.9 percent of the electorate to 50.5 percent of the electorate, as measured by the composite variable I describe in Chapter VI, but a notable spike appears in the early 1970s, paralleling the spike in volatility.

Converse and Zaller suggest that the effect of short-term stimuli is only a fleeting and meager form of political awareness or sophistication, and Converse (1967a, 140) contends that high information voters have an “inertial basis” for resisting the “information flow” of short-term stimuli and will remain party loyal as Zaller (2004) also found. This “inertia,” due to an accumulated load of political knowledge and belief, is again, reminiscent of the “protective screen built around central attitudes” described by

Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968, xxxii)²⁶ and the “reinforcement effect” referred to above which results in a strengthening, rather than a moderating, of preferences as a result of information input. This inertia, then, can be conceived of as a prejudice and a barrier to the intake of political information that may challenge and confound the voter’s beliefs with diverse and potentially disruptive political ideas. Such a theory suggests that high levels of information and engagement that these voters may display is only information consumed for the purpose of convenience, and the justification of path dependence (Pierson 2000, 252-3), and such a thought process does not sound intellectually rigorous or sophisticated. Yet there is a much higher likelihood that those who are stable in their political behavior and less susceptible to flows of new political information will be sophisticated according to conventional measures.

An alternative solution to Converse’s paradox is the notion that many voters may not be politically sophisticated according to more technical or more generalized standard measures, but when it comes to policies having a direct impact on them, they are sharply aware of issues and are therefore persuadable on the basis of such issues and more likely to be volatile. Or, they may be aware of the general political norms of candidates and parties and candidate qualifications, and persuadable on these bases, but not adept at more technical and scholarly types of political knowledge. But if this is so, one should nonetheless expect volatile voters to exhibit reasonably high levels of attention to news media and campaign messaging.²⁷ As I will show in Chapter IX, volatile sophisticates exhibit high levels of attention to political media while volatile unsophisticates do not.

²⁶ Also see Stokes (1966, 327).

²⁷ Alvarez and Brehm (2002, 33) qualify their argument by saying that “the ability of the citizen to bear information costs” is also a mediating factor in producing voting behavior that is driven by issues.

Converse's paradox, I argue, results from aggregating these two groups that have sharply different patterns of media usage.

Converse (1967a) argues that "other things being equal, both the individual rates of defection from one party and the amplitude of the vote oscillations will be limited if the flow of information is weak," and that "short term forces ... that either reinforce partisanship or deflect the voter from his normal partisan course obviously depend for their life on the flow of current information" (1967a, 143). What this implies, then, is that floating voters are indeed paying attention to politics, and that perhaps the short-term stimuli they receive are not so meager after all. Campaigns clearly offer much information to voters and quite a bit more than a broad-brush party label does. It is puzzling, then, that Converse would state that the public is "massively bombarded by information" (1967a, 143) about presidential candidates while downplaying the impact of such information on voters – presumably, an increase in volatility, and this is the "paradox" to which he refers. Converse and Zaller devalue these "short-term" forces, but these information inputs may in fact constitute more than enough knowledge for making "responsible" and "rational" voting decisions – decisions that are surely *more* responsible and rational than ones made on the bases of information "inertia" and the weight of long-reinforced partisan habit that filters out challenging information.

Higher issue awareness and higher educational levels have often been found to result in *less* loyalty to parties (Shively 1979, 1039-1054; Shaw 2008, 87-91; Dobson and St. Angelo 1975; Macaluso 1977, 255-60). At the same time, reliance on partisan labels and party cues may be of more importance to the *less* politically sophisticated due to the reduction of voting information costs (Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 105-6; Popkin 1991,

51-52; Shively 1979). Thus partisanship may not be strongly related to political sophistication. But many studies show the opposite: that strong party identification is *greater* among more sophisticated voters due to their greater clarity and consistency in thinking about political issues and that unstable voting is most prevalent among those exhibiting the *least* amount of political knowledge, engagement, and exposure to political information and discourse (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 172-3; Converse 1967a, Zaller 2004). One of Zaller's explanations for low sophistication levels among volatile voters is that they are "less strongly attached to, or socialized into, the dominant ideological and partisan structures of society and therefore more apt to abandon them when societal problems arise" (Zaller 2004, 182; 204). Kaufmann et al. (2008, 78, 86) similarly argue that "politically unengaged people" are most responsive to stimuli produced by the "varying agendas" and "candidate positions" that appear in presidential campaigns and are also distinguished by "their tendency to be less interested, less involved and less motivated" (2008, 78, 86).

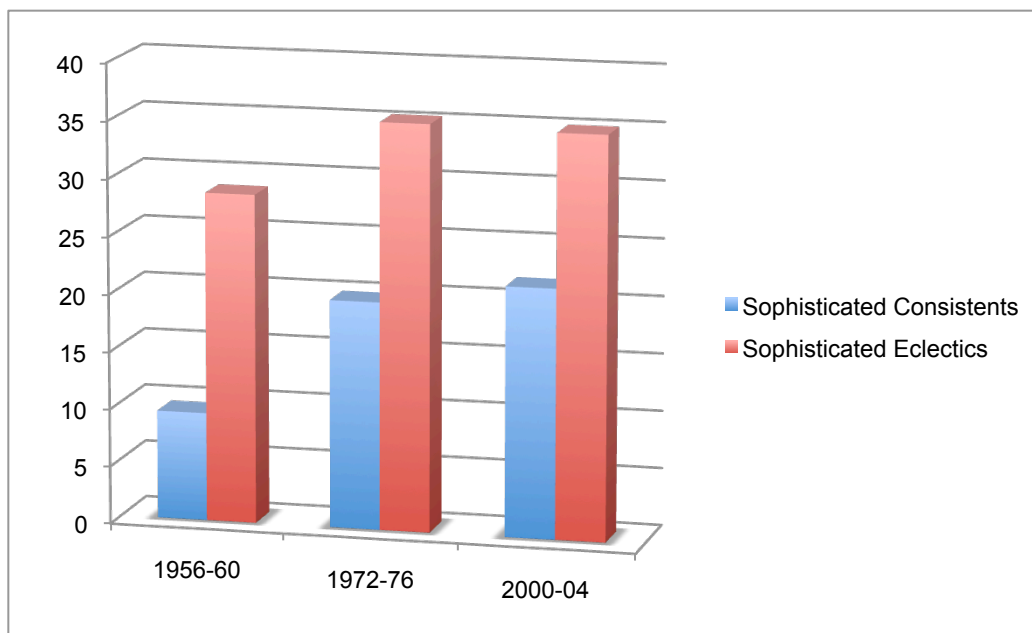
These arguments, however, suffer from internal contradiction aligned with Converse's paradox. If these voters are truly less aware and engaged with politics, why would "varying agendas" and "candidate positions" be consequential for them? One may wonder how salient "short-term" issues are even processed by voters who are as politically indifferent as proponents of the "floating voter hypothesis" contend. These scholars report that uninformed "floating" voters cannot accurately report on political facts such as the name of their U.S. representative, cannot understand which candidates or parties stand for what issue position, and cannot locate candidates or parties on an

ideological scale – but are nonetheless swayed by candidate stands on prominent issues. How can these two contradictory claims be reconciled?

The distinction made by Carmines and Stimson (1980) between “easy” and “hard” issues, noted above, may offer a partial solution to this problem. “Easy” issues tend to be “symbolic” and “readily communicated to mass publics” and “almost inevitably concern the ends of public policy rather than the means.” Hard issues, on the other hand, are “more technical” and are accessible only by “more interested, more informed and more involved citizens.” (78-91) If correct, this notion would help solve the puzzle encountered when we find less educated and politically knowledgeable volatile voters reporting a high level of media consumption and engagement in politics. Indeed, the findings of the present study show that even voters with poor comprehension of political technicalities are aware of broad issues like economic conditions, war, and civil rights, and have strong feelings about how they should be handled. Carmines and Stimson’s research suggests that regardless of a citizen’s level of technical sophistication about politics, issues do indeed matter to a substantially large segment of the American public – sophisticated and unsophisticated – and trump the habits of party affinity held to be so decisive in the Michigan and Columbia “psychological” models of voting behavior. What may be occurring, however, is that easy issues might matter disproportionately to the unsophisticated, and hard issues may have a greater effect upon the sophisticated as Zaller (2004) suggests. But a clear dividing line between these two group behaviors has not been shown to exist.

Ideological Consistency and Stability of Party Support

Key benchmarks of political sophistication in past research have included ideological consistency, the prevalence of ideological thinking, and cognitive “constraint” aligned with political belief systems (Campbell et al. 1969; Converse 1964; Zaller [1992] 2003). I provide a more detailed critique of these measures in Chapter III, arguing that they are highly normative and privilege overarching abstract concepts over more direct, context-specific opinions and attitudes on the part of citizens. I provide analyses of political sophistication and its relationship to volatile voting based on what I, and other scholars (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Fiske et al. 1990; Weisberg 2010; Zaller [1992] 2003), argue to be more value-neutral measures. But, as a potential indicator of cross-pressure that can lead to volatile voting, and as a test of the floating-voter hypothesis, I also provide analyses of what I have termed ideological “eclecticism” or ideological inconsistency in opinions regarding key political issues, and its relation to both volatile voting behavior and political sophistication. My findings show that ideological eclectics have made up between 63.5 to 83.0 percent of the electorate since 1948, and that the sophisticated portion of the ideologically eclectic segment, as shown in Figure 2, has ranged between 28.6 and 35.3 percent of the electorate in this time period. While logistic regression analyses show that ideological eclectics are more likely to be both volatile in voting behavior and politically unsophisticated, the raw frequency distributions provided nonetheless show that the sophisticated portion of the ideologically eclectic segment of the electorate comprises a formidably large segment of the voting public that can be expected to be “reasoning” in voting behavior and responsive to political issues and candidate quality.

Figure 2. Sophisticated Ideological Consistents and Eclectics

4. Identifying Volatile Voters

Another goal of the present study has been the demographic and psychographic identification of volatile voters. According to Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 227-28), the findings by Campbell et al. in *The American Voter* showed that a “pure sociological model fails in that people’s social demographics are stable and cannot explain variations in election outcomes, let alone why groups associate with one party or the other.” These studies, along with the overwhelming majority of voting scholarship, argue that only a very few, very weak demographic patterns are to be found among so-called swing voters.⁹

A survey by the Pew Research Center comparing the size and composition of the swing vote in the years 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 reports that swing voters “come from almost all demographic categories.” While Pew indicates a slightly higher incidence of

⁹ Also, see Daudt 1961, 122

Catholics and white evangelicals among swing voters, there is nonetheless reckoned to be little to distinguish them demographically from the electorate as a whole (Pew 2004). But Pew's own data show a somewhat greater incidence of volatile voting behavior among women under 50, respondents with some college education or more, and respondents under 30, as well as a higher level of swing voting among respondents who self-identify as Independents.¹⁰ Notably, however, Pew defines "swing" voters as those who were "uncommitted" or "undecided" during the campaign (2004, 1-2) rather than those who have exhibited behavioral volatility across several elections.

Similarly, Jones (2008, 57) argues, based on Gallup Poll data, that no demographic group consistently comprises a substantial proportion of swing voters, while Mayer and Teixeira (2008, 102-111; 133) argue that there is "strikingly little support" for claims that swing voters can be accounted for demographically, and suggest that there is little basis for "the media obsession with demographically defined swing voter groups" which has typically included such categories as "soccer moms" and "office park dads." On most demographic measures, they write, "differences between swing voters and the rest of the electorate are small and statistically insignificant" (2008, 139). Additionally, Mayer and Teixeira (2008, 133) find little evidence that swing voters have much in common with one another in the way of policy preferences. Moreover, where differences can indeed be found between swing voters and the rest of the electorate, these voters

vary from election to election: a group that is overrepresented among swing voters in one year will generally not be so positioned in subsequent years. In demographic terms, the most prominent characteristic of swing voters is their diversity (2003, 139).

¹⁰ These studies were conducted in 1992 and 1996, with sample sizes ranging from 928 to 1,509.

Mayer and Teixeira oddly ask “why do campaigns target swing voters?” (2008, 140). If they are not identifiable by demographics, or by some other reliable sociological measure, how can this targeting be done? Are campaigns simply targeting illusory descriptions of swing voters? Or, are they perhaps targeting only temporary and crude demographic qualifications of these voters?

Kaufmann, Petrocik, and Shaw (2008)²⁸ also argue that it is a myth that there are *demographic* patterns to swing voting. They find instead that “swing voting appears to be a psychological predisposition, one that is spread across a wide range of demographic and social groups” (2008, 15). Shaw (2008), however, argues the opposite elsewhere – that “Swing voters ... form a distinct group, whose membership is roughly consistent from election to election (2008, 91).” They “change their preferences during the campaign” and are “affected by short-term forces and elite cues conveyed by the news media” (2008, 86). In this definition of “swing voters,” Shaw includes “floaters” he defines as voters who “change their preferences during the campaign” (2008, 86) and whose preferences are driven by short-term forces and elite cues conveyed by the news media” as well as “switchers” who “cast votes out of line with their party identification” due to candidate positions on “some highly salient issue.” But according to Shaw, this “distinct group” is defined not by demographics, but by psychographics and “sociopolitical identities.” Presumably he means levels of engagement and political information as these are the only two non-demographic variables used in his models. Shaw’s data however show that “informed members of targeted groups” are often more likely to be swing voters. These data are fascinating in that they show that some groups, when “informed” about politics

²⁸ I have elsewhere referred to this source as Kaufmann et al. (2008), but in this paragraph I wish to highlight the fact that Shaw is one of the authors of this text, and that the data presented in this co-authored book comprises substantially the same data analyses that Shaw presented in his single-author 2008 study.

and issues, are more likely to swing, while others are much less likely to do so.

According to Shaw,

... informed suburbanites, informed members of middle-income households, informed younger voters, and informed college graduates are all more likely to be swing voters, whereas informed Latinos, informed waitress moms, informed office park dads, and informed soccer moms are less likely (2008, 95-96).

Shaw performs this analysis using logistic regression with volatile voting as the dependent variable, but notes that his “mixed results” are not supported by strong levels of statistical significance and should therefore be “interpreted with caution” (2008, 96). Shaw’s data, using ANES panel surveys capturing voting behavior in the 1968, 1972, and 1976 presidential elections, and the 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential elections, profile swing voters demographically, with an additional qualification as to whether the respondents can be deemed politically “informed” (2008, 86-94).¹³ Shaw’s data show that “informed” voters are less likely to be volatile in both the 1968-76 and 1996-04 periods.

In the models I present that relate political sophistication to volatile voting behavior, I have aimed for greater parsimony in the selection of independent variables than is provided in Shaw’s analyses. Shaw has attempted to reveal whether targeted groups and informed members of targeted groups are more likely to be volatile in voting behavior. Unfortunately, the datasets do not provide large enough samples of the targeted groups to provide inferential power. For example, of a total of 91 African-Americans in the valid sample of 996, 45 are “informed,” and out of a total of 141 respondents under

¹³ There is but one purely demographic swing-voter profile provided by Shaw, and it is a fairly weak one from the 1972-76 panel: Catholics are shown to be 4 percent more likely to be volatile than the swing voting average across all demographic groups. Furthermore, Shaw’s data show that historically, by the 2000-2004 period, the likelihood of swing voting among Catholics equals the swing voting average of all groups.

the age of 30, 69 are “informed.”²⁹ I too am interested in this kind of demographic breakdown, but I have limited my independent variables to less specific demographic measures because my primary focus is whether political sophistication more generally has a positive relationship to ideological eclecticism and volatility in voting behavior – and because these less specific variables provide greater inferential power.

²⁹ By “informed,” I mean they can identify which party controls the House of Representatives. Shaw does not indicate what measure is used to qualify a voter as informed.

III. The Measurement of Political Sophistication and Its Relation To Voting Behavior

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen, and philosophers and divines.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self Reliance” (1841)

“A realistic picture of political belief systems in the mass public ... is not one that omits issues and policy demands completely, nor one that presumes widespread ideological coherence; it is rather one that captures with some fidelity the fragmentation, narrowness, and diversity of these demands.”

– Philip E. Converse (1964, 247)

“The concepts and categories that make up our political understanding help us to draw connections between political phenomena; they impart some order to what might otherwise appear to be a hopeless chaos of activities.”

– Sheldon S. Wolin ([1960] 2004, 7)

1. What is Political Sophistication?

In the bulk of voting, public opinion, and political psychology literature, the term “political sophistication” is used to conveniently aggregate multiple concepts that capture a voter’s ability to understand politics and effectively engage in political decision-making in ways that can be considered rational, intelligent, or at least thoughtful. Political behavior studies have tended to subsume under this heading measures of “political concept formation” (Campbell et al. 1960, 250-1), “cognitive ability” and “political interest and involvement” (Zaller [1992] 2003, 166; 333-4), and political knowledge (Mondak 1999; Shaw 2008) as well as such variables as “interest,” “education,” and “media usage.” A basic understanding of the American system of government is assumed in all positive measurements of sophistication. Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994) refer to political sophistication as a “bundle” concept that

packs together related, if distinguishable, properties including a tendency to pay close attention to politics, to have ready at hand banks of information about it, to understand multiple arguments for an against issue positions, and to recognize interrelationships among those arguments. (21)

But these authors note that such a bundling process also yields the problem of establishing which of the bundled elements has the greatest effect, and after some analysis, they choose *education* as a proxy for sophistication “because it manifestly covaries with political awareness and information” ([1991] 1994, 21).³⁰ Specifically, Sniderman et al. relate education to “ideological affect” (156-9), “organization of policy reasoning” (170) and “crystallization” of respondent political beliefs (214-5). These authors also distinguish political *reasoning* from the process of political preference-forming that is “affect-driven,” meaning political opinions formed on the basis of “emotional responses to politics” (21). Contrasting the emotional to the rational, they argue that “the less sophisticated a person is, the more likely his or her reasoning about political choices is likely to be affect-driven” (22). These authors note, of course, that “sophisticated” citizens are not “free of affect,” but are distinguished by “the use they make of it” (22-23). These authors allow that “feelings” are an integral element of political reasoning” (24), but what is not addressed in this study are the levels of political interest and awareness required to actually form such an “affective” opinion of a candidate, party, movement, or issue opinion – surely a component of political sophistication.

³⁰ Much of this measure is certainly mediated by the types of courses people take in school, and all “years of education” indicators are surely not equal in terms of gauging education effectiveness. Unfortunately, not everyone gets a sufficient background in civics, and according to a report by members of The American Political Science Association’s Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, published as “Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation and What We Can Do About It,” “the number of civics courses taken in public schools has declined by two-thirds since 1960” (Macedo et al. 2005, 1). Years of education may not, therefore, be a strong indicator of political aptitude.

One standard of political sophistication that has been widely used – not without controversy – is ideological “constraint” as a positive indicator. This standard was formulated by Campbell et al. ([1960] 1976) and Converse (1964, 222), and in a later work, Converse (1975) refers to this measurement scheme as a “hierarchy of ‘levels of conceptualization’” (85) that takes account of “linking information” and “overarching perspectives” (88) in gauging the ability of voters to comprehend and process political information. In another work, Converse (1967a) refers to some voters as being more or less “involved,” and “informed” (137), and to their levels of “political information” (139). In this last measure, he uses knowledge of which party controlled in the House of Representatives in 1960. Finally, Converse uses measures of “opinion giving” by respondents and their media intake (146, 154). I examine all of these measures in further detail later in this chapter.

A very comprehensive definition of political sophistication is provided by Luskin (1990) in his construction of a composite “sophistication” variable that includes “the political *information* to which people are exposed, their *ability* to assimilate and organize such information, and their *motivation* to do so” (331). In Luskin’s definition:

... a person is politically sophisticated to the extent to which his or her political cognitions are numerous, cut a wide, substantive swath, and are highly organized or “constrained.” Some psychologists write in this vein of *cognitive complexity* ... meaning the extent to which a person’s cognitions of some stimulus domain are both highly differentiated, (roughly, numerous and wide-ranging) and highly *integrated* (organized or constrained). Others refer equivalently to *expertise* ... (332)

Citing a variety of literature, Luskin reports that common indicators of sophistication include being “more participatory in voting and other activities,” “better at spotting and pursuing their political interests,” “more easily persuaded by reasoned

argument and less easily by mere symbolic display,” and “more attentive to policy issues and less to the candidates’ personas in deciding how to vote” (333). Luskin (1990, 335-6) also argues that a sophistication measure should include “a certain quantity of political information,” and the ability to “retain and organize large portions of the information” one encounters, and specifically

1) interest in politics

2) education

3) exposure to political information in media

4) intelligence “defined as the central tendency of cognitive abilities,” which includes interviewer assessments of respondent intelligence³¹

5) occupation³²

Finally, Luskin includes measures of “integration” and “differentiation,” the latter of which is scaled by the number of political issues on which a respondent can dimensionally locate him or her self and parties. Ideologically, “integration” is simply a measure of a respondent’s ability to say which party is conservative or liberal and what they mean by those terms (340).³³

A somewhat different set of sophistication attributes is proposed by Fiske et al. (1990). Using data from laboratory experiments, these researchers examined various components of political “expertise” employed by respondents in “political information processing” (1990, 31) and report that “core measures of well-developed political expertise” found in scholarly literature include indicators of “accurate political

³¹ Luskin (1990, 341) provides an analysis showing that the validity of these kinds of assessments are well corroborated by other measures in other contexts.

³² Here Luskin (1990, 336) differentiates “politically impinged” occupations such as farming or accounting from other occupations.

³³ Notably, Luskin does not employ what Zaller calls “neutral, factual” information. The closest he comes to this is his use of education and political interest as sophistication measures.

knowledge, media exposure, political interest, political behavior, political self-concept, and education” (1990, 34). Using factor analysis, Fiske et al. tested general political knowledge, political activity, general interest in politics, as well as print media use and electronic media use as predictors of comprehension of political newspaper articles shown to respondents. These researchers found that political knowledge and print media usage were positively and significantly related to superior political information processing ability, but that political activity, general interest in politics, and electronic media use were not (1990, 45). Education was found to be a “redundant” measure, predicting all other factors well, and lending support to the claim of Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994, 21) that education is a good proxy for the overall set of political sophistication measures they examined. Data provided in the present study, however, argue against this finding, showing aggregate higher education attainment increasing historically, as shown in Figure 5 and Table 9, while no consonant increases in political interest, engagement and activity can be found. If education were a valid proxy for other components of political sophistication, why, as education levels have increased, have we not seen other measures of sophistication follow a parallel increase since 1948? As Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 116-17) show, political knowledge has remained relatively stable over the past 60 years. The measures used in this dissertation therefore do not rely on this one variable, education, as an indicator of sophistication.³⁴

Although Fiske et al. do not find political activity and general interest in politics to be robust predictors of effective *political information processing*, these measures do

³⁴ Also, see Luskin (1990, 349). This author’s models show that education is not a significant indicator of overall political sophistication when the latter benchmark is indicated by a composite measure gauging levels of “integration” and differentiation” of political information – an exogenous standard that Luskin states is similar to Converse’s “levels of conceptualization” (340).

tell us about voters' expressed levels of political motivation and engagement and aid in the understanding of voting behavior beyond what the relatively narrow standard of efficacy in information processing can.

Why is Political Sophistication an Important Measure?

It is clearly important for political campaign organizations to know what kind of communications strategies will be effective, and with which audiences, in order to assess the efficacy of their efforts. But a larger matter, for political scientists and the polity as a whole, is an understanding of how political rhetoric and ideas function in a practical setting, and indeed, whether issues and ideas matter to the people who make up the electorate, to what degree, and under what conditions. Such knowledge is essential to knowing to what extent our society is indeed democratic, and how effectively citizens, politicians and governments can in fact communicate and deliberate with each other. The measurement of political sophistication is also crucial to understanding citizen participation and the manner in which citizens think about issues, and the degree to which they are motivated by economic policies, social and institutional forces affecting civil liberties and civil rights, national security policies and other matters of state – as well as how politicians endeavor to handle them. What is needed therefore – and what scholars continue to struggle with – is a valid measurement of the citizens' levels of engagement with politics, their various capacities to engage in political activity, and a realistic understanding of how political sophistication mediates their political activity.

Luskin writes that “By anything approaching elite standards, the American public is extremely unsophisticated about politics and has become appreciably more so” (1990, 333) — a statement that immediately drives one to ask whether elite standards are really

relevant to the act of deciding between two candidates³⁵ vying to be the citizens' designated expert advocates in government, who prominently and intrusively advertise their different qualifications, attitudes, approaches to political problems, success rates, ethical credentials, and personal values – with staggeringly large media budgets. Importantly, standard political sophistication measures often gauge the knowledge and understanding of a variety of *technical* understandings of politics, a practice that raises both normative and practical questions. One might ask: Does a patient need to understand endocrinology, neurology, microbiology, and pharmacology to select a physician who provides attentive service, good bedside manner, and the ability to explain a condition and institute appropriate therapy – and who can readily offer evidence of professional qualifications, expertise, and track record? As Dewey ([1927] 1991, 207) and others before him argued, must the cobbler's *customer* be an expert shoemaker, or even a barely competent one, to know where the shoe pinches? And in keeping with Aristotle's statement in the *Politics* (Aristotle trans. 2004, Book III, 1281a1:12-24) that “the guest will judge better of a feast than the cook,” must the diner have been trained at the Le Cordon Bleu to judge the palatability of a dish? Conventional political sophistication measures, I argue in the next section of this chapter, rely excessively on technical and needlessly abstract, academic standards of comprehending politics. The use of such measures implies that technical political aptitude is necessary to a rational, reasonable, and responsible political decision-making process for selecting an administrative or legislative professional. My argument, and that of several other scholars noted below, is that these abstract and technical standards of sophistication are unnecessarily high and of dubious relevance to understanding how, and to what extent, political issues and

³⁵Also see Popkin (1976) and McKelvey and Ordeshook (1986) on this point.

candidate qualities influence voting choices. Furthermore, these standards may be of even less relevance as tools with which to gauge whether the functioning of the American polity is sufficiently “democratic” in terms of the ability of citizens to play a meaningfully engaged role in governance. I return to this matter in section 4 below.

While this chapter presents a critique of ideological consistency and “levels of constraint” as measures of political sophistication, the data presented later in this dissertation nonetheless confirm that ideological consistency is often a good general predictor of standard levels of sophistication and volatility. I do, however, show that this measure fails to account for the presence of many forms of sophistication among the ideologically inconsistent and those who are inconsistent in their political behavior. And, I also argue that ideological consistency is a standard of political sophistication that is superfluous and needlessly normative – relying excessively on *one* idealized arrangement of thought that is presumably applicable to all political subject matter. I argue instead for the use of more direct measures of political sophistication such as education, knowledge of political facts, active political participation, and expressed interest and opinion strength regarding political issues and policies.

2. Issues and Problems in the Measurement of Political Sophistication

Measures of political sophistication are, and have been, used widely in political-science literature to predict the likelihood of respondents to turn out to vote, cross party lines, or remain party loyal. Most sophistication measures used in these studies rely on a small number of data points such as the ability to name government officials, respondent educational levels, self-reported levels of attention to political campaigns and news media, and, importantly, *ideological consistency* (Campbell [1960] 1980; Converse 1964)

– the last being a measure that is highly normative and based on the assertion that consistency in political cognition actually indicates political sophistication and is not merely a comforting idealization.³⁶ The explanations given for this theoretical assumption are scant. Levels of consistency are measured by sorting attitudes according to researcher-constructed interval measures, and as such, are prone to producing data that are artifacts of the data gathering process. The ideological consistency standard is applied in two ways. The first is its use in gauging respondent ability to *comprehend* ideological notions such as conservatism and liberalism. The second is its use in gauging the consistency, or “constraint” in sets of political opinions the respondent holds. This latter standard was notably employed in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960, 249-52) and also by Converse (1964) where it is referred to as “levels of conceptualization” (1964, 224-5).

A criticism of this standard that has been made by Marcus et al. (1974) and Smith (1980, 685) is that Converse tests respondent use of labels and terminology, and not concepts. Measures of ideological consistency may not in fact gauge ideological “evaluation.” Rather, these measures may simply reflect the verbal ability of respondents rather than their political aptitude. Indeed, as Marcus et al. have stated, such measures may result in “biases against the less articulate” (1974, 406). Accordingly, the gauging of respondent use of terminology will confound analyses that compare respondent ability to conceptualize politics ideologically over time. Achen (1975, 1225) argues that “fuzziness” of survey questions used in Converse (1964) renders the latter’s ideological consistency measures invalid, and this criticism also suggests that a large component of

³⁶ Zaller (1992, 170-2) uses this standard in a more nuanced fashion and relates these measures of ideological consistency to levels of political awareness (1992, 43, 333-6).

what was being measured by Converse was a respondent's precision in the use and interpretation of political terminology rather political acumen.

Converse (1964, 223) acknowledges this problem and interestingly asks "why should one bother to say that a party is conservative if one can convey the same information by saying that it is against spending?" A great question, and Converse notes that when "connotations" for a concept like "liberal" are limited contextually to discussion of a specific subject such as government spending, even highly sophisticated respondents abandon these ideological labels for more practical ones. Converse (1964, 211-12) nonetheless considers these measures valid, and they are deemed so because a process of diffusion of political ideas is said to take place whereby elites hand down "packages" of political ideas to the average citizen in a predefined system of "what goes with what and why." In the end, Converse (1964, 228) denies that his analyses are confounded by the rhetorical and interpretive abilities of respondents, stating "it is organization [of thoughts] that matters, not the capacity for discourse in sophisticated language." Constraint of political thinking according to a belief-system occurs through "transmission of information" according to Converse as well as the transmission of a framework in which to organize political information (1964, 212-213). Thus political awareness should be a mediator of such constraint and proportional to it.

Converse holds that a respondent's relative difficulty navigating the liberal-conservative continuum may simply show that the less educated have difficulty articulating the "more abstract lines along which their specific beliefs are organized" (1964, 227-8). "Discourse in a sophisticated language" is not really what is being measured according to Converse. Instead, "constraint" and "organization" are said to be

the varying cognitive phenomena, gauged according to the consistency of respondent issue positions on such matters as “employment,” “isolationism,” “aid to education,” “federal housing,” and “keeping American soldiers abroad” (228). The standard of consistency is whether positions on these issues “go together” (30) under the headings of “liberalism” and “conservatism.”

Respondents, Converse claims, need not comprehend abstract principles to respond to individual, issue-specific questions, therefore the notion that these queries are measuring rhetorical skills only may be dispensed with. But how, then, are such concepts to be articulated if not verbally? Importantly, the use of ideological terms such as “liberal” and “conservative” and proficiency in the use of abstractions, are, explicitly, Converse’s key criteria for rating a respondent as ideologically constrained and thus politically sophisticated (1964, 215-16, 219). The problem therefore remains that the standard of “constraint” still depends on an exogenous scale of “liberalism-conservatism” according to which *issue positions consistent with this standard* are deemed to indicate constrained conceptions – with constraint being a positive indicator of sophistication. Thus, constraint must be of one kind only – consistency in accordance with a set of ideological categories devoid of context that have been imposed upon a more complex, subtle, and multifaceted collection of experiences, knowledge, and beliefs. Also, notably, Converse does not measure respondent ideology directly. Levels of ideological constraint are instead applied post-hoc to interview data.

Similarly, the use of political rhetoric by individuals changes over time both as they learn more, and as political discourse in the public sphere evolves. Smith (1980, 694) argues that studies using “levels of conceptualization” as a measurement standard

are actually using observations of evaluative terminology by respondents and gauging the rhetorical consistency of these responses, and Smith finds that in these studies terminology is not used in a consistent fashion by respondents (695). Over time, according to Smith's analyses, responses do not exhibit stability, with levels of so-called ideological thinking changing substantially (691). Another problem, described by Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994, 28-29) is that because political ideas are received by individuals in ideologically pre-packaged forms, measurement of attitude consistency may not account for an individual's ability to conceptually organize political ideas because such measures may only gauge a respondent's ability to play back what opinion leaders and politicians have handed down to them.

Converse (1975, 84) writes that in the 1956-1958-1960 ANES panel survey, respondent opinions expressed on major policy issues "showed remarkably low levels of cohesion, or internal integration." These opinions, according to Converse, lacked the kind of logical structure "one might expect if these several positions were being informed in common by more generalized liberal or conservative views." At the same time, Converse allows that what may be at work in these measures is the "shorthand convenience" of "common 'ideological' yardsticks" (1975, 84). But aside from this caveat, little analysis of this notion of "shorthand" economizing on information is made in Converse's formulation of the ideological consistency standard, and the ways in which the use of these shortcuts may distinguish different types of voters is not accounted for. Notably, however, Converse states, in a much later article (2006, 308) that "some critics" of the "levels of conceptualization" scheme

have pointed out that voters hardly need to know anything about the liberal-conservative continuum to vote intelligently. I cannot deny this in principle. On the other hand, familiarity with that continuum is an extremely useful heuristic.

In effect, Converse is stating that ideological labels function as shortcuts for “cognitive misers” (2008, 308) as opposed to conveniences for those who have invested a great deal of time and effort in acquiring and processing political information, and numerous scholars have argued that ideology and party labels often function as shortcuts taken in order to avoid the effort required to comprehend political phenomena (Downs 1957; Kinder 2006; Pomper 1975; Popkin 1991, 51-52; Shively 1979; Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994).

Ideological consistency is indeed a rare ideal, analogous to perfect party discipline in a legislative setting – which is much more to be expected in such an environment. Of course, such discipline would not be needed were all individual norms and interests neatly aligned and all relevant information known by all actors. Such a standard may be useful in identifying clusters of adherents to certain political philosophies, but politics is far too complex for this standard to be useful in accounting for a wide variety of combinations of various levels of political knowledge, engagement, and awareness. Accordingly, I hypothesize that such consistency is *not* the defining mark of the politically engaged and aware citizen. And, given that Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980), Converse (1964), and Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) find such consistency to be quite rare, it would seem that either the public is overwhelmingly obtuse, or that measures of ideological consistency cannot account for many multidimensional forms of political comprehension that allow for practical and relatively rational decision-making and opinion formation processes not constrained by a “coherent” ideology – one of

presumably external origin. It would seem, according to much scholarly analysis, that ideological eclecticism is not even the mark of the somewhat reasonably aware. For example, compare the percentage of the electorate that is deemed to be “ideological” by Converse (1964, 218), 11.5 percent,³⁷ and Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 279), 24.5 percent, with the percentage of people who, according to the ANES,³⁸ watched a presidential debate (71.8 percent), can identify the US Attorney General (58.6 percent), or who hold a strong opinion about national health care policy (42.1 percent). These latter numbers vastly exceed the number of people Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980), Converse (1964), and Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 279) find are able think ideologically.³⁹ Using largely the same methods as Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980) and Converse (1964), Field and Anderson (1969, 388) found a greater prevalence of “sophisticated” ideologues in the electorate – 21 percent in 1956, 27 percent in 1960, and 35 percent in 1964. Nie et al. ([1976] 1999, 115), accounting for a respondent’s “ideological evaluation of candidates and parties” found 19 percent of respondents to be ideologues in 1956, 28 percent in 1960, 46 percent in 1964, 48 percent in 1968, and 45 percent in 1972. The figures from these studies are well exceeded by most of the findings in this dissertation indicating, in the period extending from 1948 to 2004, basic political knowledge (knowledge of which party controls the House of Representatives) exhibited by 52.4 to 62.0 percent of voters, high

³⁷ Converse (1964, 218) indicates that 2.5 percent of the electorate are “ideologues,” and another 9.0 percent of the electorate are “near ideologues” based on his “levels of conceptualization” measure.

³⁸ 2000-2002-2004 American National Election Studies panel survey.

³⁹ 2000-2002-2004 ANES data indicate that the number of respondents who contacted a public official was 22.6 percent. This is almost twice as many as Converse (1964, 218) indicates can think ideologically. The number of voters Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 279) show are ideological, however, using 2000 NES data, is 24.5 percent.

interest in politics of 34.1 to 43.4 percent, and composite sophistication of 40.9 to 54.1 percent, as shown in Chapter VII (Tables 9 and 11).⁴⁰

Most citizens, however, may not be thinking according to the constraints of an external, abstract system – one that might have developed in order to serve the purposes of parties and candidates in marketing and brand differentiation efforts above all else or to serve the media-sensation goals of journalists and commentators. Voters may instead be thinking about specific, proximate, and topical issues and decisions that can affect them directly. While American citizens may lack academic knowledge of politics or high levels of political interest, possession of relevant factual political knowledge and strongly held opinions about important issues is not limited to an elite stratum (Alvarez and Brehm 2002, 7, 17; Carmines and Stimson 1980, 84), although some of these issues may not be highly technical in nature.⁴¹ Lacking overarching theories, then, voters may nonetheless have a wealth of issue-specific, candidate-specific, and policy-specific knowledge that is useful to forming opinions and making decisions about politics, and be politically engaged in ways not accounted for in many surveys. That type of information may be of decisive importance to voters who cross party lines or abstain.

At the same time, argues Downs (1957, 113), “maintenance of ideological purity” may *not* be helpful in achieving an electoral victory. In the Downsian world, it is more rational to want to win an electoral contest than to remain ideologically consistent. Fiorina (2006, 16) however argues that, rational or not, opinion leaders and candidates

⁴⁰ One difference, however, is that I exclude consistent nonvoters. The authors just mentioned do not. My accounting of consistent nonvoters indicates a range of between 2.6 percent and 8.7 percent of ANES respondents as shown in Chapter VI, Table 4. These voters are known to exhibit low levels of sophistication.

⁴¹ Carmines and Stimson (1980) differentiate “hard issues” involving knowledge of a policy process such as, in their article, the matter of the United States withdrawing from Vietnam, from “easy issues” that are more “symbolic” and have tended to be subsumed into mass consciousness over a long period of time. Their example of this type of issue is desegregation, which, they argue, is a much simpler matter to understand in all of its implications and potential consequences than a foreign affairs matter such as the Vietnam War.

are pressured to remain ideologically pure in their quest for clear differentiation of their brands, while citizens are free to be moderate or inconsistent.

As in most intellectual endeavors, an increase in knowledge produces an increase in opportunities for controversy, incongruity, and hard-to-reconcile puzzles in the mind of the citizen. Relationships among ideas become subtler and less sharply defined and beliefs and theories that are contradictory often emerge. Greater complexity of information will often, and perhaps most often, result in greater inconsistency of thought, and thus, ideological inconsistency may very well be a reflection of high levels of knowledge and deeper engagement with political ideas. Accordingly, I tend to share the opinion of F. Scott Fitzgerald that “the ability to hold two competing thoughts in one’s mind and still be able to function is the mark of a superior mind” (Fitzgerald 1936) and that of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his famous statement that “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds” (Emerson [1840] 2009, 473). Accordingly, I theorize that greater political knowledge and awareness should *not* result in greater ideological consistency as Converse argues, but in greater political ambivalence and indecisiveness, and less basis for conformance to universalizing concepts.⁴²

The three examples that follow are intended to illustrate why ideological labels, at least in theory, are not very useful in a voter’s decision-making process in assessing whether a political candidate’s abilities seem acceptable and whether a candidate’s opinions and priorities are aligned with the voter’s. First, it is conventionally understood that liberals favor government activism and spending as a means of enhancing the nation’s economic well being whereas conservatives argue that the removal of

⁴² As noted above, Converse does acknowledge that among the “highly sophisticated,” there are more self-identified Independents than strong partisans (1964, 227).

government regulations and tax burdens on businesses and property owners will enhance the economy. Thus these two policy preferences now may be given labels. But does this labeling process help the voter make candidate choices? And, is it more helpful to the voter to know whether the policies themselves make sense, or to know in which ideological category these positions belong? A second example of a label applied to an “ideology” is the matter of abortion. Is it more important for the voter, with respect to this issue, to know that it is “conservative” to restrict access to abortions, or is it of more consequence to simply have an opinion regarding the issue? And, third, is it more important to know whether publicly funded healthcare is a liberal or conservative idea, or whether such a program seems desirable to taxpayers?

Political *involvement* is the underlying desired good in idealized conceptions of democracy positing the need for political information and high cognitive ability. Presumably these things are needed to think through political and economic problems in a critical and rational manner, and for effective political decision-making. Yet the fact remains that Americans live under a *representative* and not a direct democracy that is mediated by elected experts, and because of this, many voters are likely to remain rationally ignorant about much having to do with government. Surely an expert level of political sophistication on the part of citizens is an excessive requirement for a functioning representative democracy – just as an expert level of culinary knowledge by patrons is an excessive requirement for a successful restaurant.

3. The Use of Ideological Consistency as a Measure of Political Sophistication

Ideological consistency is an abstract ideal that becomes less and less attainable as complex issues accumulate in the mind of the individual. In accordance with this

reasoning, Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994) offer a very important bit of simple mathematical logic that confounds the use of ideological consistency as a measure of political sophistication:

Minimizing complexity, by narrowing the focus to immediate relevant considerations, tends to maximize consistency between principle and policy; maximizing complexity, by enlarging the range of considerations, [tends] to minimize consistency between principle and policy (26).

Hence, the less complex the citizen's views of politics, the less opportunity there will be for ideological incongruity. Conversely, the more complex an individual's store of political information, the more opportunity there will be for ideological inconsistency.⁴³

Thus many of the ideologically *consistent* could very well be those who are not the most sophisticated, but may instead be those with a relatively small store of political information. Those who are ideologically inconsistent, then, may actually possess high levels of information and sophistication. *Ideological eclectics* in the aggregate, as shown in Chapter VIII, are, however, less likely to be politically sophisticated and probabilistically more likely to be volatile in voting behavior. There is, nonetheless, a rather large segment of the electorate that is both ideologically eclectic and politically sophisticated. And, with regard to volatile-voting behavior, when the overall bloc of ideologically eclectic voters is broken down into sophisticated and unsophisticated segments, what is revealed is that unsophisticated eclectics are much more likely to be

⁴³ Political decision-making can be, and often is, made on the basis of candidate likeability and emotional assessments. But it is beyond the scope of this project to tease these effects out from the complex set of rational and emotional factors involved in the process of vote-decision making. This dissertation is instead focused on the operationalization and measurement of the political sophistication of voters in terms of rational cognition and conscious respondent opinions about political issues. What should be noted here, however, with reference to research provided by Sniderman et al. is that the ability of citizens to make "correct" votes based on "rational," fact-based information is not in itself an indication of sophistication according to the standards set forth in this dissertation. One may be highly aware of politics and interested in political outcomes on a highly emotional level that need not be thought of as unintelligent or "irrational" with respect to the attainment of the kind of government a person wishes to see in place.

volatile than sophisticated eclectics. More information, and more complex information, tends to produce greater behavioral consistency for this latter group.

Citizens not constrained by ideology may in fact be showing *greater* sophistication than opinion leaders and political professionals who are compelled to package themselves ideologically in a consistent manner for reasons having more to do with purveying political norms that serve career and business goals than with practical political problem solving. Madison ([1788] 2000, 55) foresaw this effect, noting in *The Federalist* number 10 that one of the preeminent forces that has “divided mankind into parties,” and “inflamed them with mutual animosity,” is the “attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for prominence and power.” In contrast to the goals of such contenders for political might, the public in general may be far more pragmatic and moderate in how they navigate politics as argued by Fiorina et al. 2006.

Zaller ([1992] 2003) remarks, “an extensive research literature has documented that people who are liberal (or conservative) on one issue tend to be relatively liberal (or conservative) on a range of other issues.” But noting that his own analyses build upon Converse’s conceptions of ideological consistency in this vein, Zaller summarizes Converse’s argument as saying:

Only the politically aware pay enough attention to elite discourse to find out the ideological implications of different policies – in Converse’s terms, to learn ‘what goes with what.’ As a result, attitude constraint of the conventional liberal-conservative type develops only among the more politically aware strata (Zaller 2003, 113).⁴⁴

So it would seem, then, that in fact only a small fraction of American citizens are consistently liberal or conservative in their opinions, and this politically sophisticated –

⁴⁴ Zaller acknowledges that Converse’s “belief system” scheme might not account for “idiosyncratic ways in which individuals may structure their attitudes” and that it may “arbitrarily [equate] ideological consistency with sophistication” (Zaller [1992] 2003, n114).

and that this tendency is actually somewhat rare. As indicated above (Chapter II, Section 2), however, by more value-neutral measures, there is a much larger segment of the electorate displaying high levels of political interest and knowledge than Converse's measures do.

Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994) echo Converse's findings, stating that "knowledge of liberalism and conservatism as systems of ideas" is "out of the reach of all but a small fraction of the general public" (23). According to these ideology-based measures of political sophistication, only a few qualify as being sufficiently "constrained" to thinking in consistent ways and in being able to discern "liberal and conservative" policy positions. Yet, as argued above, the main value such a consistent alignment of issue opinions may provide to voters is as the basis of an ideological "brand" that functions as a cognitive shortcut. Such branding, however, may be of far more utility to candidates and parties wishing to differentiate themselves from competitors than it is to voters with diverse and multifarious personal interests, concerns, and circumstances.

The American Voter by Campbell et al. (1960, esp. chs. 9 and 10), and "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics" by Converse (1964) are the starting points for the use of measures of ideological consistency as indicators of political sophistication. Converse (1964) defines a political "belief system," a term he uses roughly synonymously with "ideology," as a "configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence" (207). Furthermore, a "constraint" is described as a measure of how well one could predict, knowing one attitude or opinion held by an individual, other attitudes or opinions (207). Importantly, Converse maintains, on the basis of "historical observations" (1964,

210), that political belief systems are not produced by the mass public, but by *elites*.⁴⁵ Here he is referring to opinion leaders, commentators in media, influencers in social networks, and in general what Dahl (1961) portrayed as a distinct political class – “a small stratum of individuals ... much more highly involved in political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population” (1961, 90). In agreement with Campbell et al. and Converse, Dahl writes, “In the political stratum, an individual’s beliefs tend to fall into patterns that have a relatively high degree of coherence and internal consistency [while] in the apolitical strata, political orientations are disorganized, disconnected, and unideological” (1961, 91).⁴⁶ Elites, according to Converse, develop “logically constrained clusters of ideas” (1964, 211), or shall we say, ideologically consistent ideas, that are handed down to the mass public. They are not, however, seen as handed down effectively or consistently (231-34). The process whereby elite ideological constraint is transmitted, however, is not accounted for. There is no explanation as to why or how elite constraint is passed on to the public and why it is maintained that so *little* of it is indeed ever passed on. The role of opinion leaders is discounted (1964, 233).⁴⁷ According to Converse, for these “clusters of ideas” to form, elites must simply have “experienced” these idea elements as being coordinated within an ideology (1964, 211). Converse offers no more specific explanation as to why these idea clusters form. Interestingly, Converse (1964, 210) writes, “It seems obvious that few belief systems of

⁴⁵ The same argument is made in Campbell et al. (1960, ch. 9), which was co-authored by Converse.

⁴⁶ Dahl (1961, 91) also argues that “In the political stratum, information about politics and issues of the day is extensive; the apolitical strata are poorly informed. Individuals in the political stratum tend to participate rather actively in politics; in the apolitical strata citizens rarely go beyond voting and many do not even vote” (91).

⁴⁷ Converse writes that with regard to the role of opinion leaders is, “it seems doubtful that [opinion leading] represents the dominant, effective phenomenon sometimes supposed,” given that the mass of voters display a lack of “comprehension of the political context” (1964, 233). Notably, Converse demonstrates the weakness of opinion leading by cross-referencing respondent levels of conceptualization with “class position” using a scale of “occupation status” (231-32). If opinion leading was a strong effect, Converse argues, constraint would be consistent across all social classes. His data show it is not.

any range at all depend for their constraint upon logic.” Ideologies may only be “apparently logical wholes” (1964, 211), and may only be assembled opportunistically or with regard to the mere appearance of consistency. Thus citizens are deemed unsophisticated primarily because they have not internalized an ideological system that is normatively assembled by elites and handed down to them in some unaccountable manner. But as Converse recognizes, belief systems may not follow schemes that are logical according to ordinary reason outside of the improvised, day-to-day practice of politics by office-seekers, activists, and opportunistic advocates.

Converse himself argues that notions of “what goes with what” in a political belief system develop because these cognitive associations tend to serve a preexisting, partisan bias on the part of the individual. In most cases, Converse found that party loyalties “seemed to antedate the emergence of particular issues involved” in taking a political stance (1975, 117) suggesting the workings of the reinforcement effect. It would seem, then, that in this scheme of behavior, attitude consistency evolves less out of an interest in building a logically coherent philosophy than it does as a result of path dependence and the apparent economies of information it provides — in short, to reduce the effort and aggravation involved in continually reconsidering and reformulating a personal political philosophy by maintaining a consistent ordering of ideas according to the individual’s “home team” party preference.

Scholarly findings support the notion that the media serve to reinforce existing citizen opinions rather than provoke new ones. Furthermore, these citizens are themselves not motivated to change their views when confronted with new information (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, 74-7; Converse 1975, 117-18; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944]

1968; Lodge and Taber 2006; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Zaller [1992] 2003, 421, 310). Yet both Zaller and Converse argue, as a starting point in their analyses of public opinion formation, that most citizens hold “nonattitudes.”⁴⁸ Survey research, these scholars hold, provoke spur-of-the-moment, “doorstep” formations of individual opinion where none had existed. So what, then, is the source of “existing opinion” that is said to be later reinforced by media? Neither Converse nor Zaller address this contradiction.

Without transmission of constrained idea elements from elites to the masses, Converse (1964, 211-12) argues, the development of a coherent political belief system is impossible. In any case, for Converse, what trickles down to the masses is minimal, and citizens employing ideological “constraints” or high “levels of conceptualization” comprise only about 11.5 percent of his survey sample (218). Friedman (2006) similarly notes the need for citizens to have an “organizing model” (xi) in order to gather knowledge but cautions that such a model will give way to what Lippmann ([1922] 1997) referred to as “stereotype” schemes that necessarily exclude information and close off the subject from increased knowledge. Such stereotypes, Friedman maintains, can in turn produce “spirals of conviction” as individuals select or reject information in order to protect a prior investment in a belief – what is commonly known as the “reinforcement effect.”

Lacking a “grand theory” then, even a logically inconsistent one, can the average citizen really think politically in a manner that can be considered “sophisticated?” For

⁴⁸Converse (2006, 300) writes “the worst common misinterpretation of the [1964] essay” is the notion that “citizens have only ‘nonattitudes’ on questions of public policy. Converse does note elsewhere (1975, 79) that “all sorts of vigorous and well-grounded opinions about political options can be formed without, for example, accurate recognition of the minority leader of the Senate.” But it is clear that Converse also argues that “very substantial portions of the public” fit into a category of individuals holding “nonattitudes” (243-5) who are so lacking in ideational organization of their political ideas that their opinion structures approximate randomness – and his analyses are nonetheless widely understood to say this.

Converse, it would appear not, as he asserts that citizens “lack the kind of linking information or overarching perspectives” that allow them to apply their knowledge to issues and political decision-making (1975, 88). “Less than one in twenty-five” he reports, could engage in “ideological thought” (1975, 86) and “more than a third of the electorate,” as of 1960, could not distinguish liberal or conservative ideologies or define them. Interestingly, politicians and political scientists themselves do not seem to have such terminology succinctly defined or understood as evidenced by the numerous, lengthy investigations into political concepts by such authors as Rawls ([1971] 2003) and Hartz ([1955] 1991) on liberalism, Goldwater ([1960] 2007) on conservatism, Dahl (2000) on democracy, Pocock ([1975] 2003) on republicanism, on and so forth.

Deficiencies in Measures of Ideological Constraint

The validity of measures of political sophistication based on ideological consistency are not well supported empirically when correlated to voter attitudes regarding actual issues or to more direct measures of sophistication. Wyckoff (1987) finds that attitudinal consistency correlates “poorly, if at all, with most standard indicators of political interest, participation, and information (164),⁴⁹ and strikingly, Converse, the originator of the ideological consistency measure, remarks that differences in “attitude stability by education” are “quite trifling” (1975, 104). This rather abstract measure of the ability to reference ideologies consistently – a standard that has been in exceptionally wide use for over 50 years – privileges needlessly universalized conceptions of politics over the possibility of more eclectic, pragmatic, and context-

⁴⁹ Wyckoff (1987, 157) also writes, “Consistency scores observed during one campaign are found to be poor predictors of future consistency.”

specific opinions and forms of political comprehension, and more subtle ways of differentiating issues.

The “levels of conceptualization” used by Converse, ranging from “no issue content” at the lowest level, to “nature of the times” to “group benefits” to “ideologue” at the top, and measures of attitudinal “constraint,” gauge the degree to which respondents use abstract structures in organizing political thoughts, and abstract concepts when expressing opinions. If such indicators are indeed valid, notes Wyckoff (1987), the association of measurements of levels of conceptualization with measurements of ideological consistency “should produce highly correlated scores.” His analysis, using 1972 and 1976 ANES data, shows that they do not (1987, 159-61).⁵⁰ Furthermore, Wyckoff tells us that attitudinal consistency along the liberal-conservative continuum correlates “poorly, if at all, with most standard indicators of political interest, participation, and information” (164), and notes that “attitudinal consistency” in studies of political sophistication rely on an “untested assumption” – “that ideological sophistication can be inferred from the presence or absence of recognizable patterns in voter policy preferences” (163-4).

Weisberg and Naware (2010) found that the relationship of education, political interest, and political knowledge to levels of conceptualization in the 2000 ANES were “modest” and that the levels “should not be considered a surrogate” for more direct sophistication measurements” (2010, 550-1) while Luskin (1987, 866) finds that the connection between measures of consistency and sophistication are weak because “too many things besides sophistication affect consistency.” The use of measures of attitude

⁵⁰ Wyckoff found that those at the highest level of conceptualization, ideologues, displayed only marginally greater attitude consistency than the least sophisticated respondents (1987, 164).

constraint by Converse (1964) in correlations between different policy attitudes also presents a serious statistical problem according to Luskin (1987, 865) because these figures derive from aggregate measures and gauge the sophistication of groups and not individuals. Because these measures cannot be related to non-responses, these analyses are biased by sampling only the responsive and most sophisticated members of the American public (1987, 865) and magnify the appearance of consistency among the most sophisticated. Luskin also shows that a measure of consistency using correlation indexes, such as those employed by Converse uses (1964, 228-9), can show consistency between opinions that they “cognize dimly” (Luskin 1987, 867) and others that are cognized more substantively. Thus the respondent may be consistent but certainly not sophisticated.⁵¹

Rather than observing what voters actually do with the political information they have in specific circumstances and assessing the effectiveness of the purposive information processing that actually takes place, the use of levels of conceptualization in gauging political sophistication posits an idealized and entirely abstract standard of political sophistication against which voters’ attitudes will be gauged. It is notable that venerable theories of learning put forth by Piaget ([1930] 1966, 8-10; 1976) and Dewey (1933, 228) have proposed that the processing of *abstract* relationships is necessary to advanced thinking. But this privileging of abstract thought can, in practice, cause conceptual schemes to obscure empirical truths rather than reveal them. Converse is unabashed in his opinion that this kind of conceptualization is critical to understanding politics, writing “Most of the stuff of politics ... is in the nature of things, remote and abstract (Converse 1964, 213).

⁵¹ Luskin finds Converse’s use of Goodman & Kruksal’s gamma (Converse 1964, 222) highly problematical, because gamma correlations are “notoriously inflated” (Luskin 1987, 866).

The use of ideological consistency as standard of political sophistication confounds a more direct understanding of the effects of political information and issues upon voting decisions. In addition to the more abstract reasons for caution in the use of such a normative measure – and perhaps outright rejection of its use – the design of this scheme of measurement, and its application, exhibits serious technical flaws that can have a great impact upon reliability and validity.

First, the benchmark Converse (1964, 227-31) uses for political sophistication is the ideological consistency of *congressional candidates* – individuals who are highly focused on enhancing the distinctiveness of their public images. Converse then compares this group to a sample of the “mass public.” But a reference group of congressional candidates can by no means be expected to be typical of the “sophisticated” stratum of the electorate as a whole. Such candidates, due to pressures exerted by parties, donors, and in general, the need for “brand differentiation” surely must be “constrained” ideologically in ways that substantially distort more common habits of political cognition. Thus a standard of sophistication is established that is relevant to ambitious political candidates, but of dubious relevance to the political decision-making processes of citizens and voters.

Converse (1964) draws no direct relationships between respondent levels of ideological consistency and measures of political knowledge although he does relate levels of conceptualization to years of education, respondent levels of “political activism,” and the frequency with which respondents recognize liberal-conservative labels (1964, 224-5). As noted above, Converse also states that the correlation of ideological consistency to education is “quite trifling” (1975, 104). But Zaller (1992,

169-72) does relate levels of political awareness using knowledge of “neutral factual information” (1992, 336) to measures of a respondent’s ideological consistency or inconsistency (1992, 170-1, 345), and here, responses to questions regarding political issues are linked to the “liberal-conservative orientation” of that respondent (1992, 170). Zaller shows that a respondent’s attitude consistency increases substantially as his or her political awareness increases⁵² with the respondent’s stated ideology serving as the benchmark for attitude consistency. These analyses are based, however, on a small sample size of $N = 153$.⁵³ Zaller does accept that the belief systems scheme “overlooks idiosyncratic ways in which individuals may structure their attitudes” and states that he does not “equate consistency with sophistication except in the possibly perverse sense that an ideologically ‘consistent’ individual has managed to absorb a particular set of conventions” (1992, n114). But importantly, Zaller argues that low awareness individuals will be exposed to too little information to form inconsistent opinions, while moderately aware persons will be exposed to enough information to be made inconsistent in their opinions, and highly aware persons will reject messages that do not conform to their presumably preexisting ideology (1992, 170).

One of Converse’s key measures of political sophistication is the correlation of measures of the ideological consistency of the mass public to measures of the ideological consistency of congressional candidates – an “elite sample” (1964, 227-29). Zaller’s (1992) data on the other hand positively correlate “neutral” measures of political awareness to ideological consistency, but are not provided with measures of statistical

⁵² Zaller measures awareness using a composite scale consisting of questions that count for one point out of 19 on the scale for each correct answer. See Zaller 1992, 333-345. Zaller handles item non-response using mean imputation, but cases missing more than 2/3 of responses are deleted listwise (1992, 339). This latter procedure can bias analyses to oversample the more politically aware and ideologically stable. See Beckman 2009 and references cited therein, as well as Chapter V, Section 5 of this dissertation.

⁵³ Zaller provides a range of P values that appear to indicate statistical significance.

significance. Considering the small sample sizes used in his analyses, such levels may not be high or even acceptable by common standards.⁵⁴

The Psychology of Consistency

In an art history class I had many years ago as an undergraduate, the professor wished to demonstrate something about the nature of human thought processes. He drew the following figure on the blackboard:



Figure 3. Dots in Rows on the Blackboard

The professor suggested that our minds would instinctively endeavor to connect the dots. Why? “Your minds are order-makers,” he explained.⁵⁵ Such a notion drives me to question the normative implication of criticizing consistency as a standard of how well developed one’s cognition may be. Perhaps consistency is in fact an essential form of order making that is fundamental to making sense of the world. On the other hand, perhaps it is not in all cases. Standards of consistency may be flawed, and should be interrogated. They may, for example, be based on the notion that certain ideas are

⁵⁴Typically < .05.

⁵⁵ That was Prof. Alan Klotz, who taught “History of Photography” at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1979.

congruent when they are not. Because consistency is not a “better” form of thought or behavior in every situation, it may of course be a problematical standard in a broader sense: it can certainly be a meaningful and useful standard in many contexts, but it can also be a confounding standard in others, and this distinction is not acknowledged in the construction of ideological consistency based standards of political sophistication.

Problems with Statistical Methods in Earlier Studies of Voter Sophistication

Nearly all of the data analyses in key past studies of voter volatility, have not been provided with likelihood models of voting behavior using multivariate controls for the age, race, gender, and issue preferences of respondents (Campbell et al. [1960] 1976; Converse 1964; Converse 1967a; Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968); Zaller 2004).⁵⁶ Neither have potential non-linear relationships been explored. These studies have instead primarily employed bivariate analyses. Data reported by Campbell et al. (1960, 250-2) correlating ideological constraint to educational levels are not provided with statistical significance levels or measures of association, and this kind of “raw numbers” reporting is fairly typical in these “classic” voting studies. While this body of past research did once comprise a great many breakthroughs in understanding voting and the electorate, many of them they are time-bound in a period when important statistical techniques had either not been fully developed, subject to extensive critical analysis and testing, or widely applied, and when computing technology was in its infancy and not yet in wide use by political scientists. The sample survey, as of the 1940s and 1950s was a relatively new method, and the first commercially available (non-military) computer, the UNIVAC, had only been delivered to the Department of the Census in March of 1951 and used

⁵⁶ Analyses performed by Shaw (2008) and Hillygus and Shields (2008) are, however, notable exceptions.

cardboard punch cards for data input and storage (U.S. Census 2011). The authors of *The American Voter* were able to compile survey response data on their early punch-card computer, but were not able to perform very much data analysis; regression analyses and factor analyses were particularly difficult (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 10-15) and were not often employed in the early Michigan studies.

Additionally, past studies of electoral volatility have employed datasets that are biased in a variety of ways, including oversampling of active and sophisticated voters, over-sampling of standpatters, and over-reporting of turnout. Missing data have also been handled in problematical ways, including the use of listwise deletion, which is an approach known to produce systematic biases, especially in the case of panel data, where respondent drop-out – generally due to non-random factors – is often prevalent⁵⁷ (Allison 2002; King, Honaker et al. 2001). I discuss these biases in greater detail in Chapter V.

4. Unnecessary Standards of Political Sophistication

In light of the poor assessment of citizen sophistication produced by so many studies (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Zaller [1992] 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990, 333), how is democracy even possible? As discussed below in this section, many scholars have grappled with this question, and often arrive at conclusions based on unrealistic expectations of citizens and even public officials. Converse does not deny that politics can be navigated without deep sophistication (1975, 79), noting that “all sorts of vigorous and well-grounded opinions

⁵⁷ A study by King, Honaker et al. (2001) reports that in approximately 94 percent of “recent literature” found in political science journals, missing data in survey research is handled using listwise deletion. Also see Allison (2002) on biases due to missing data and its handling.

about political options can be formed without, for example, accurate recognition of the minority leader of the Senate.” At the same time, Converse notes that “the same voters over a period of years ... had a surprising degree of instability in their policy positions” (84). But this could very likely indicate, as Converse (1967a) argues, that voters are affected by the power of increased “information flows” – and are thus politically aware, but only to a meager extent, and only as a result of sensationalistic, short-term stimuli. At the same time, Converse observes that “a substantial fraction of the electorate” displays highly developed and often vehement positions” and “suffers no gross deficiencies of information” (1975, 83). These statements flatly contradict Converse’s own assertion (1964, 245) that most individuals in the electorate hold “nonattitudes” toward politics. But as noted above in this chapter (Section 3), Converse denies this. Clearly the electorate is made up of people with differing interests, levels of interest in politics, degrees of political participation, and cognitive abilities – and levels of political sophistication. Therefore, to impose standards of political sophistication that assume an idealized scheme of political understanding and a fixed threshold of effective and worthy political knowledge denies that voters may be politically aware and engaged in political activity and reasoning in changing, diverse, and unique ways. This is a standard of political aptitude that flies in the face of a pluralistic and liberal conception of democracy.

Measures of ideological consistency used in political behavior literature are based upon the assumption that connections between political ideas must be similar for everyone in order to be logical. But different political issue positions may simply be independent of each other, and may not be compatible on the basis of an abstract

ideological standard (Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994, 3).⁵⁸ Given the availability of more direct measures of political sophistication, perhaps ideological consistency is an entirely unnecessary measure of political thoughtfulness – one that takes no account of context and the validity of understanding the actual substance of *one* particular political issue at a time without regard to how a voter’s position on a given issue must relate to other completely different issues. It might very well be a mark of political sophistication to deliberately keep such issues detached rather than insisting on making “apples and oranges” ideologically comparable for the sake of fitting knowledge and opinions into a convenient, preexisting, abstract scheme of categorization providing economical shortcuts for information processing, the utility of which is simply assumed. The observation of William of Ockham (2003, 488) that “no universal” can be found “outside the mind” is a reminder of how abstractions we impose upon phenomena we observe may eclipse more direct and practical forms of understanding.

Interestingly, Converse takes account of comments by Lane (1973) stating that focusing on “integration” and “constraint among political opinions” “fails to take into account the idiosyncratic political reasoning by which people link superficially discrepant attitudes into meaningful, if personalized, structures of thought” – a point Converse does not refute (Converse 1975, 88-99). Such personalized “structures of thought” need not be unsophisticated, and in light of the theorem offered by Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994, 26), mentioned above, showing how ideological consistency may be inversely proportional to information intake, greater complexity of political phenomena should

⁵⁸ Sniderman et al. also argue that the ability to consistently tie political ideas together based on an abstract notion varies with the amount of education each person has ([1991] 1994, 3). But ANES data, and scholars such as Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991), and Converse (1975), indicate that education doesn’t tell us much about this relationship. Also, see Figure 5 and Table 9 of this dissertation, which show a historical increase in education since 1948, but not in other indicators of political sophistication.

indeed create more opportunity for ideological inconsistency. Such eclecticism should be widespread in the electorate – even among the most sophisticated segments, and data provided in Chapter VIII of this dissertation demonstrate that this is in fact the case.

My data confirm that political sophistication is negatively associated with ideological eclecticism in an un-dramatic but statistically significant fashion in two of three historical periods analyzed (see Chapter VIII, Table 24). But I argue that this measure is nonetheless superfluous and potentially confounding because it needlessly inserts a normative scheme of political cognition into the measurement of voting and public opinion-related phenomena that may not always be strongly associated with other measures of sophistication. Ideological consistency is a remote measure, unlike more directly measured variables such as education, knowledge of political facts, interest in politics, and active political engagement. Forms of sophisticated cognitive organization other than ideological consistency could be proposed – for example, the use of economic rationality as an organizing principle. But such a principle may or may not enable a voter to behave responsibly or wisely. Furthermore, such ideological consistency cannot tell us whether the respondent is organizing his or her thoughts on the basis of ideology as a shorthand convenience, or on the basis of preset aggregations of issue positions handed down by elites, or whether political information is being organized according to a more intellectually active reasoning process. Importantly, I find that a lack of ideological consistency is not significantly associated with a lack of consistency in voting behavior as shown in Chapter IX, Table 28.

How Much Do Voters Need to Know to Be Rational?

A decision to be made among two major candidates, and perhaps in some cases, one or two minor, less viable candidates as well, requires far less knowledge and sophistication than conventional measures of these phenomena might imply. Rational and responsible voting decisions, I argue, can be made without political sophistication of the kind measured in studies of voter behavior⁵⁹ such as those conducted by Campbell et al. (1960), Converse (1964; 1967a), and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). Yet many standard measures of voting behavior employ, in some way, the notion of a “correct vote” (Lau and Redlawsk 2006) based on “classic models of rationality” (2006, 15) according to which voters acting correctly support the candidate “that he or she would have chosen in the ideal world of fully informed preferences” (16), or, with “perfect information” about issues and candidates.

At least in the abstract, there are excellent arguments why high levels of factual political knowledge are *not* essential to choosing an expert government official, and why high levels of ideological coherence are not necessary to the maintenance of a functioning democracy. Strong ideology might even be counterproductive to maintaining a diverse and pluralistic polity. E.E. Schattschneider ([1960] 1975) offers some perspective on necessary levels of citizen sophistication, writing that

... nobody knows enough to run the government. Presidents, senators, governors, judges, professors, doctors of philosophy, editors, and the like are only a little less ignorant than the rest of us. Even an expert is a person who chooses to be ignorant about many things so that he may know all about one.

A theory of democracy positing the need for high levels of political knowledge “is false,” writes Schattschneider. Such a theory

⁵⁹“Rational” voting need not, however, be the only standard of voting “correctly.” Perhaps voting in a way that is sufficient for that voter’s own political purposes and even emotional purposes is all one needs to “vote correctly.” Some measure of sufficient *deliberation* to produce a personally well-considered vote, whether “rational” or not may be a more realistic one.

proves not only that democracy is impossible; it proves equally that life itself is impossible. Everybody has to accommodate himself to the fact that he deals daily with an incredible number of matters about which he knows very little. This is true of all aspects of life, not merely of politics (134).

Lau and Redlawsk (2006) similarly observe that “If the same standards that classic democratic theory holds up for citizens were to be applied to any other area of human life, such as finding mates or buying cars or choosing colleges, people would be judged to be just as inept in those areas” (74).

According to Lau and Redlawsk, “classic democratic theory” posits that “citizens should be interested in, and actually participate in politics” (72-76). But voters can and do make rational and reasonable decisions about voting and many other things while economizing on both information and political engagement. Theories of rationality in voting (Downs 1957; Olson 1971; Riker and Ordeshook 1968) concede that even the most politically motivated and knowledgeable citizen cannot possibly devote sufficient time to political engagement to possess anything approaching perfect or even excellent information about politics. Therefore some information shortcuts – and deficits – are unavoidable. Interestingly, Converse and Zaller do not address the possibility that both sophisticated and unsophisticated voters may in fact use party labels as shortcuts (Pomper 1975, 8; Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 106; Shively 1979; Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

Given how little anyone can know about the full range of policy matters at hand in an election – even members of Congress make decisions on the basis of quite meager information (Davidson 2010, 293-95) – such standards reveal themselves to simply be impractical and only useful as abstract, baseline references. As noted by Althaus (2006, 83) a wide variety of comments upon citizen sophistication or political competence refer

to the notion of “classical democratic theory” without defining the concept or referring to the authors of such a theories. Such a concept, Althaus notes, can function as a straw man against which reports on the subject of voter sophistication can be leveraged. Aristotle, Dewey, and Rousseau are often mentioned as purveyors of “classic” democratic theories presuming that ordinary citizens must be “informed and interested in politics” (Althaus 2006, 78-84, 95). Others such as Herbert Croly ([1909] 1989), who advocated a polity in which citizens should be “prepared for a higher form of democracy” by becoming “prepared for a more coherent and intense national life” ([1909] 1989, 271), and Jürgen Habermas, who advocates what is implicitly a highly participatory “deliberative democracy” (Habermas 1998) have set such standards. Clearly a practical and realistic alternative to these idealistic and ill-defined standards of citizen competence is needed.

The ancient Greeks referred to a citizen who did not actively participate in government as an *idiotes*. Although this term is the etymological root for our word “idiot,” it meant “good for nothing” to the Greeks (Colaiaco 2001, 102; Stone 1989, 100). In effect, an *idiotes* was seen as a free-rider. While frequent reference is made to Greek democracy as the root of our own, it must be recognized that that only a small fraction of this ancient city state, generally property owners and citizen-soldiers, actually were citizens. Most inhabitants, including slaves, women, and *metics* – resident aliens who were often trades-people – were not citizens and had no vote. The members of the democracy of this state were, much like the enfranchised few at the founding of the American republic, its empowered and propertied members who thus had a proportionally larger stake in the outcome of government decisions. The Greek citizens’ participation in what by today’s standards would be a small-size American city could be

expected by virtue of their more magnified role in such a community. That standard of citizen competence, even in this idealized democracy, was the very subject of Plato's *Republic*. Plato's observation even in a direct democracy such as this one, in which military and jury service, and service in the assembly were compulsory, was that ordinary citizens lacked the competence to make political decisions. Specialists in governance, Plato argued, were needed just as specialists in other trades, from carpentry to weaving to poetry, were essential (Plato, trans. 1974; Sabine 1961, 48-54). This is not the place to examine Plato's theories in depth. But his works, and those of Aristotle as well, argue that a highly participatory model of democracy would not be nearly as practical as a scheme of governmental division of labor with an expert political class in charge. Ideals such as the highly participatory Greek citizenship model to which Plato's criticisms were directed may simply be asking too much from democracy. It is a form of government in which the people are sovereign and have a say in the destiny of their nation – whether that say is correct or wise or deluded or irrational. It requires only that citizens are provided with a share of sovereignty, and if it is to mean anything, it surely must mean that each citizen uses their share – their vote – in whatever matter they can or wish, whether in an impulsive or “affective” manner, or in a carefully reasoned and studied manner. Democratic ideals are, understandably, normative constructs, as are standards of citizen competence. The goal of this discussion is not to critique democratic ideals themselves, however. It is simply to remove them as benchmarks which can confound the measurement of the ways in which people actually relate to politics and how people actually form opinions and make voting and participation decisions with limited

information – a predicament even the highest public officials and the most respected political experts are in.

The Need for More Basic Measures of Political Sophistication

Rather than relying on the needlessly normative scheme of ideological consistency, I argue instead for the use of what Zaller ([1992] 2003, 335-6) called “neutral factual information” in measuring political sophistication. His examples of this type of information include knowledge of the number of allowable terms one may serve as president, names of Supreme Court justices, which party holds a majority in the House of Representatives, and the names of congressional candidates (1992, 340-345). Zaller reports that these measures generally outperformed education, media exposure, political participation, and political interest as standards of *political awareness*. But here, Zaller at least in part assesses the utility of factual political knowledge measures using the normative benchmark of ideological and attitudinal consistency (Zaller 1992, 113-14, 335).

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) similarly aim to remove idealized schemes of ideology from the study of political sophistication and focus on factual political knowledge, defining this measure as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory (10) distinguished as “logic, reasoning, discourse, [and] participation” (11). Such measures of political sophistication need not be calibrated according to consistency in organization of political knowledge. And it should be noted that the ideological norms of American politics, are, in fact, quite inconsistent. “Conservatives” in the United States favor regulation of personal life, including regulation of the use of birth control and abortion, homosexuality, marriage, euthanasia,

and “recreational” drug use while they also favor *removal* of regulation of, and burdens imposed upon business and property ownership, including the lowering of taxes, fewer environmental and labor regulations, and fewer compulsorily funded social welfare programs. “Liberals” hold views that are the mirror image of those held by “conservatives.” Compared to “libertarians” who prefer less regulation in *both* the personal and economic spheres, and “populists,” who favor more regulatory intervention in both spheres, the two more prevalent ideologies, liberal and conservative, are quite inconsistent, particularly with regard to the amount of government intrusion that should be allowed into the private sphere. Intelligent and informed citizens who may have “inconsistent” attitudes about different issues – and in fact, the bulk of citizens who fall into the prevailing “liberal” and “conservative” categories – can thus be relegated to a low level of sophistication when accounted for using strictly *logical* measures of ideological consistency as opposed to conventions opportunistically establishing “what goes with what.”

5. Some Guidelines for Measures of Political Sophistication

Having now reviewed both standard measures of political sophistication and critiques of these measures, it may now be possible to propose more valid and less normatively confounded means of gauging political sophistication. One thing that is evident, if Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994) and Lau and Redlawsk (2006) are correct, is that different types of voters take in and process political information differently. Does this view preclude the possibility of measuring voter sophistication using standards that can apply to all kinds of voters? No. Some information is useless if it is not gathered and interpreted in a context-dependent manner, while other information is only minimally

useful if it is not generalizable and comparable across entire populations. The formulations presented in Chapters V and VII are designed to provide a composite variable that can be used to gauge sophistication in terms of “neutral” political knowledge, levels of engagement with political processes and ideas, and education – in accordance with the premise that such neutral measures will be more valid than ideology and thus more validly generalizable.

As is shown in a wide variety of literature, political knowledge, expertise, and involvement can be accounted for in numerous ways that do not involve ideological categories or for that matter, any other grand narrative about political sophistication. Interest in politics, active political engagement, media consumption, education, knowledge of political facts, opinions about specific policies and sociopolitical conditions – as well as knowledge of candidate qualifications, personalities and positions – are all thoroughly measured in ANES and other studies, and such measures may be applied directly to studies of, for example, voter turnout, participation, and party loyalty without the unnecessary mediation of measures of ideological consistency.

V.O. Key ([1966] 1968) famously wrote, “The voice of the people is but an echo.” But Converse (1975, 124) argued that at the same time, “voters are told many conflicting things which they could not possibly ‘echo’ in any unitary way.” Thus thoughtful, engaged, and informed citizens can be expected to maintain political “belief systems” that lack a “unitary” quality. The data analyses presented in Chapter VIII show that this is the case.

IV. A Theory of Volatile Voting Behavior

“In a time of ignorance, one has no doubts even while doing the greatest evils; in an enlightened age, one trembles even while doing the greatest goods.”

– Montesquieu, Preface to *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748)

1. Overview

The theory of volatile voting behavior explored in this dissertation proceeds from an admittedly normative perspective – one aligned with the thought of John Dewey ([1927] 1991) and John Stuart Mill ([1859] 2002): given that increased knowledge in most human experiences more often than not results in greater complexity of understanding and more subtle distinctions, I would expect that greater political knowledge and awareness should not result in greater attitudinal *consistency* as Converse (1964) and Zaller (2004) argue, but in greater political ambivalence. This perspective is rooted in the tradition of scientific reasoning that Mill and Dewey articulated wherein sophisticated thought processes are open to, and considerate of, the pros and cons involved in decision-making, attentive to all relevant phenomena, and suspicious of universalizing, overly expansive explanations. Scientific principles hold that thoughtful people be receptive to arguments and evidence that may challenge and even falsify strongly held opinions they may have – evidence from which they can learn and potentially avoid embarrassing and even destructive errors. They will similarly not brusquely reject inconvenient facts and ideas for the sake of remaining true to an abstract doctrine, for temporary personal prestige, or an egotistical need to appear firmly in the right. Uncertainty is not feared by the honest inquirer, whereas certainty about an erroneously held belief, is. The more thoughtful person, according to these norms, will be

skeptical of arguments and belief systems that are too neat and too all-encompassing, and will therefore not be constrained by a need for consistency in political attitudes or idea formation. One may even argue that ignoring inconvenient facts will tend to work against one's material interests and is therefore irrational. This mode of thinking however, is not practiced by many highly partisan voters, many of whom may be using party labels and ideological categories as means of lowering information costs (Kinder 2006, 205-6; Niemi and Weisberg 2001; Pederson 1978; Popkin 1991; Shively 1979). As shown in Chapter VIII, between 28.6 and 35.3 percent of voters since 1956 (excluding consistent nonvoters) have exhibited both sophistication and ideological eclecticism, while between 9.4 and 21.7 percent of the electorate has consisted of those who are ideologically consistent and sophisticated (see Table 22). Interestingly, there are many more ideological eclectics than volatile voters, indicating that the ideologically inconsistent and cross-pressured are in fact often party loyal.⁶⁰

In accordance with the normative perspective just described, I endeavored to find out whether those who are volatile in their voting behavior, ideologically inconsistent with respect to issues, or both, could be more likely to be sophisticated than standpatters and the ideologically consistent, and this is the theory that is tested in this dissertation, with results reported in Chapters VIII and IX. While this is not the case, I have found that there are, nonetheless, on a straight percentage basis, more sophisticated ideological *eclectics* in the electorate than there are sophisticated ideological *consistents*, as noted above.

Both in the abstract and by way of data analysis, the theory of volatile voting that has been explored in this dissertation endeavors to challenge arguments holding that

⁶⁰ As shown in Chapters VI and VIII.

volatile voting behavior and ideological inconsistency are likely signs of political ignorance. This latter perspective has been argued repeatedly by scholars using measures of ideological consistency as the key benchmark of sophistication — and with little evidence that this is a valid measure save for assertions about the importance of knowing “what goes with what” and little empirical support or abstract rationale as to why ideological *consistency* must be a positive indicator of political knowledge, thoughtfulness, or engagement. Furthermore, such belief systems, in most cases, according to much public-opinion research (Converse 1964, 213, 231; Fiorina 2008, 16-20; Stimson 2004, 19-20), have been formulated and handed down by journalists and opinion-leaders in the press who are focused on creating saleable excitement, and by politicians and campaign operatives opportunistically formulating differentiating campaign and party platforms. The ways in which such ideological schemes develop are quite distinct from more practically and organically constructed belief systems assembled and maintained by voters.⁶¹

Ideological *inconsistency*, I argue, can very well stand as a mark of awareness of and receptivity to changing political phenomena – and while probabilistically, ideological inconsistency is less likely to indicate political sophistication, it quite frequently does. When the volatile voter segment is broken down into sophisticated and non-sophisticated categories, a large proportion of *volatile sophisticates* in the electorate is revealed. And, when the ideologically eclectic segment is broken down into sophisticated and non-sophisticated categories, a large proportion of *sophisticated eclectics* is revealed. But as I show in multivariate binary logistic regression models reported in Chapter VIII, Table 24,

⁶¹ It is quite possible, however, that sophisticated, ideologically consistent voters might be consistent precisely because they have internalized the unusually consistent belief systems promulgated in the political media that these voters use more regularly than other voters.

sophisticates are significantly less likely to be eclectics in 2000-04 and 1956-60, and as shown in logistic regression models Chapter IX (Table 28), sophisticates are significantly less likely to be volatile in all three historical periods.

I provide data showing that a rather substantial segment of the electorate since the late 1948 – between 18.1 and 27.2 percent, is both volatile in their voting behavior *and* politically sophisticated according to a composite measure capturing political participation, education, political knowledge, and political interest.⁶² These volatile sophisticates exhibit a strong likelihood of paying a high level of attention to political news in the media, and of holding strong opinions about issues of the day. Their high likelihood of political participation, interest, and aptitude, combined with engagement with political media is, compared to other voters (volatile *unsophisticates*, sophisticated standpatters, and unsophisticated standpatters), a sign that they are motivated to vote in a “reasoning” manner using inputs of political information they consume regularly.

I undertook to discover evidence of what Key called an “electorate moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public policy, of governmental performance, and executive personality” (Key 1966, 7-8) and with Hillygus and Shields (2008), proceeded from the argument that *complexity* encountered in understanding political phenomena results from political interest and information input that in turn produces more opportunity for ideological inconsistency, cross-pressure, and uncertainty in the mind of the voter. With Berelson et al. ([1954] 1968, ch. 7) I too note that cross-pressures due, for example, to incongruent norms associated with class and religion ([1954] 1968, 148), may be an important component of the propensity of a voter to be

⁶² Burnham (1970, 125) similarly reports a bimodal distribution among independent voters in 1964. Independents, while distinct from volatile voters, are known to have a high likelihood of volatility (Malchow 2003, 22-25; Shaw 2008, 96).

volatile in party choice and/or turnout.⁶³ Like Carmines and Stimson (1980) I also note that voters may know little about what politicians and scholars may consider to be essential knowledge but that they may be highly aware of issues and political processes relevant to their proximate concerns and that can be reckoned according to the voter's deeply held values and principles. Accordingly, I argue that a decisively large portion of the American electorate is indeed composed of people who vote responsibly with regard to salient policy matters.

The American public is, nonetheless, widely understood as a whole to be politically unsophisticated and unengaged (Campbell et al. [1960] 1976); Converse 1964; 1976; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 72; Luskin 1990). And, it has long been argued that volatile voters in particular exhibit substantially lower levels of political sophistication than the rest of the overall American electorate (Converse 1967a; Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968); Zaller [2003] 1992). But given that between 50.5 and 60.7 percent of the electorate (excluding consistent nonvoters) has been volatile in party vote choice, turnout, or both since 1948 according to my accounting (presented in chapter VI of this dissertation), and the analysis of ANES data provided by Nie et al. ([1976] 1999, 54-55), such a claim must be reevaluated because past studies of the sophistication of volatile voters, I argue, have not accounted for either political sophistication or volatility in voting behavior using valid measures.

That ideological inconsistency results from a higher intake of political information can be demonstrated by the simple fact that as the number of issues considered by a respondent increases, the number of opportunities for inconsistency will

⁶³ I provide data showing a mild higher likelihood of volatile voting by those who are ideologically eclectic with regard to salient political issues in the 1996-04 period at a $\leq .10$ level of statistical significance. There is no significant association between ideological eclecticism and volatility in the 1948-1956 and 1968-1976 periods.

increase. This is shown in the analyses presented in Chapter VIII of this dissertation.⁶⁴ Accordingly, I hypothesize that high levels of engagement and receptivity produce more complex understandings of politics, and that more information input creates more cross-pressure, more uncertainty, and more inconsistency.

I have tested the proposition that with the ever-increasing availability of political information and opinion since the 1940s, such inconsistency should increase over time. It did not, as shown in Figure 7. In order to be cross-pressured, logically, one must be reasonably *aware* of political issues and have a reasonable understanding of them. Yet with the greater accessibility of political media, and the increase in the number of people who have attained a college education, there has not been a parallel increase in the number of ideologically eclectic voters, as shown in Figure 7. Thus the finding in two well-known studies (Converse 1967a; Zaller 2004) that low-information voters are most likely to be swayed by high-intensity information flows is rightly called a “paradox,” by Converse (1967a, 144). Yet Converse and Zaller present extensive analyses showing that this is indeed an accurate description of the political habits of unsophisticated voters, and my analyses show that there is indeed a large segment of the electorate that is volatile in voting behavior and politically unsophisticated. There have been, however, quite substantial a number of *volatile sophisticates* in the electorate, and the proportion of them across time has in itself been volatile as shown in Chapter I, Figure 1. This fluctuation reflects variation across time in interest in politics and political engagement, as shown in the individual measures of political sophistication provided in Table 9 (see Chapter VII).

I explore the proposition that incongruence of political attitudes do in fact indicate high levels of political engagement and awareness, and provide analyses challenging the

⁶⁴ See in particular Tables 12-14.

floating voter hypothesis as well as the notion that ideological consistency is a valid measure of political sophistication. This methodological critique and a resulting reformulation of measures are key to producing a tabulation of dramatically different proportions of volatile sophisticates and sophisticated eclectics than have been previously been reported.

The Importance of Political Sophistication to the Study of Volatile Voting Behavior and to Electoral Politics in General

Why are political scientists interested in citizen sophistication, and how does such a measure relate to volatile voting behavior? Given the types of measurement employed, it is clear scholars wish to discover which segments of the electorate are engaged in political discourse, action, and interaction, and whether varying levels of sophistication affect the processing of political information, and voter responses to such information. But what is the end to which such knowledge has been gathered? For candidates and political campaigns, knowing whether political information really makes a difference, and to whom, is of the utmost importance. For the polity as a whole, it is important to know whether and how political discourse affects both public opinion and election outcomes and upon whom such discourse has an effect.

Several notable studies argue that 1) the least politically sophisticated are the most susceptible to short-term information flows (Campbell 1966; Converse 1967a; Zaller 2004) and are most likely to be volatile in voting behavior, and 2) that those marginally involved in politics, and who are among the least politically engaged, comprise the segment of the electorate that votes only occasionally. These marginal voters can more easily be demobilized by negative advertising (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997; Kahn and Kenney 1999) and by institutional constraints (Piven and Cloward 2000), or roused

from their apolitical slumber by last-minute get-out-the-vote drives (Kaufmann et al. 2008, 145-6, 171; Key 1966, 22; Malchow 2003). According to Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004), those who shift party choice are similarly low on the sophistication scale and lacking in a store of political information that will steady their preferences.

These voters are typified by, for example, the many former Republican supporters who crossed over to give Franklin Delano Roosevelt a landslide victory in 1932 as the Great Depression was at its nadir, the so-called “Reagan Democrats” who voted Republican in 1980 and 1984, the many Democrats who voted for Nixon in 1972, the many Republicans who voted for Perot in 1992, and, to a much lesser but notable extent in 2008, Republicans who voted for Obama or abstained. Prominent apostates like commentator Christopher Buckley (Stolberg 2008) and former Bush administration Secretary of State Colin Powell (Knowlton and Zeleny 2008) also fall into this category in the 2008 presidential election.⁶⁵ Clearly information about world and national events, government activity, candidates, and the political leadership that is required in order to produce policy to address current events, is driving decision-making by voters other than the ones said to be in the unsophisticated “floating” segment.

2. Statement of the Theory

The theory that has been tested in this dissertation research is that greater political knowledge and engagement results in more ideological incongruity and complexity of ideas that in turn results in volatile voting behavior. According to one stream of logic, as education, information intake, and political participation and knowledge increase, decision-making processes should become more complex as the voter’s store information

⁶⁵ Conservative commentator David Brooks and Republican Nebraska senator Chuck Hagel also voiced a surprising amount of support for Obama’s candidacy, although they did not explicitly endorse him.

becomes more complex. The likelihood of inconsistent ideology and, in turn, volatility in voting behavior should then increase. But conversely, a greater store of information might serve to reduce uncertainty in the voter's mind to the point at which decisions are rendered clearer. And, greater complexity of political information could also drive the cross-pressured voter to reduce uncertainty by sticking with tried and true options, or employing the information economy afforded by party "brands"

Since 1948 more than half of all voters have either crossed party lines or occasionally abstained from voting when voting behavior at the individual level is analyzed across *three* presidential elections as shown in Chapter VI of this dissertation.⁶⁶ A preponderance of scholarship on voting behavior, as indicated above, argues that voters who cross party lines are, for the most part, politically unsophisticated. Yet this body of scholarship also argues that these voters are in the *minority* in the electorate. A wide variety of scholarship also claims that volatile voters cannot be accounted for demographically. I demonstrate instead that more than half of all voters not only exhibit volatile voting behavior, but are often quite sophisticated in terms of overall political sophistication, and that there are indeed discernible demographic and attitudinal patterns in volatile voting behavior.

Some sophisticated voters are driven to volatility by political information input and others are driven to party loyalty. Because more sophisticates are driven to loyalty, one can argue that information inputs and sophistication reduce uncertainty more often than they produce volatility creating cross-pressure. But volatile sophisticates, who I show are highly attentive to political media, are surely influenced by political information

⁶⁶ "Voters" includes consistently active voters and occasional abstainers. Consistent nonvoters, a proportion of the ANES survey sample that has ranged from 2.6 percent to 8.7 percent since 1948 (see Chapter VI), are excluded from this accounting.

and driven to take action by such information. More broadly, I theorize that *issues matter* substantially to both volatile voters possessing a high level of political awareness and understanding, and many of those with lower levels of sophistication as well. I show that a substantial segment of the American public consists of voters who are capable of comprehending many technical aspects of politics, are engaged and interested in politics, and are educated. I also show that less sophisticated voters care about political issues as well. At the same time, I argue that the amount of information and sophistication needed to select a professional advocate in government in a “reasoning” or “responsible” manner is nowhere near as great as is suggested by standards of “classic democratic theory” noted in the previous chapter, or as great as is suggested by analyses providing evidence of the ignorance of the American electorate in terms of standards of ideological consistency also discussed in the previous chapter.

In the analyses of ANES data that follow, I test the hypothesis that volatile voters are less likely to be sophisticated than a random sample of respondents. Accordingly, the finding of a significant *negative* association between political sophistication and volatile voting behavior constitutes one of two *alternative* hypotheses (H_a) in the present study. The *null* hypothesis (H_o) is that there is *no* strong association between political sophistication and volatile voting. The second alternative hypothesis (H_{a2}) is that there is a statistically significant *positive* association between political sophistication and volatile voting – at least among certain definable groups.

According to H_{a2} , the more *informed about issues* a voter is, the *less* s/he should behave in accordance with, and act strictly on the basis of, an inherited, consistent partisan identity – and the more issues can be said to matter to such a voter. I thus reason

that inputs of political information drive volatility in voters, particularly sophisticated voters. Many sophisticated voters will, of course, be driven to greater party loyalty by their greater consumption of political information and their political interest and involvement. But with regard to those who switch parties or occasionally abstain, the alternative to the notion that political information inputs drive this volatile behavior would be to attribute these actions to motivations that are so haphazard as to approximate a random selection of preferences. I have, however, completely discounted the idea that any sane adult citizen would take the time to register to vote, find and travel to a polling place, locate the correct area in the polling place in which to vote, sign in, and possibly wait in line to cast a ballot in order to express a preference formed in a manner akin to picking a name out of a hat.

If voters are influenced by salient issues and not acting in a manner that is so unaccountable as to be virtually random – and if political conditions, parties, and candidates actually do change over time, there should be a greater likelihood of switching party votes from election to election (or abstaining) among the most informed voters who, if Shively (1979) and Popkin (1991) are correct, should be less reliant on information-cost saving party “cues.”⁶⁷ If, however, parties are aligned with issue positions in a clear, stable, and consistent way, issue voting could be directly reflected in party voting after all, and issue salience could have the effect of making informed voters *more* partisan. But as noted earlier, the overall decay in party loyalty in the electorate and the substantial increase in Independent party identification since the late 1940s (Burnham 1965, 120-1; Crotty 1984, 27-33; Pomper 1977, 36; Wattenberg 1991, 38) suggests that a

⁶⁷ Such as are referred to in Pomper (1975, 5-10), Pedersen 1978, 18-30; 28, and Niemi and Weisberg (2001, 105-9).

large number of voters, and perhaps a majority of them, do not perceive such consistency and stability on the part of candidates and parties, and do not see themselves as consistently aligned with a party brand.

Potentially Confounding Variables

The effect of candidate quality can of course seriously confound any neat understanding of voting behavior based solely on issues and the political sophistication of voters. Voters do take candidate competence into account in their voting decisions, as well as the likeability of individuals running for office. But the effect of candidate quality on voting decisions must surely be mediated by awareness of, and interest in, politics. Here, “affective” engagement with politics, which is distinguishable from more factual and rational judgment, may play a part (Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994, 22). But an intuitive and emotional understanding of candidate competence, trustworthiness, and political philosophy could very well be based on the rational and factual, producing a feeling built up from many minute perceptions based on practical knowledge and experience. In either case, a candidate’s personal qualities cannot have an effect on voters unless they are mediated by political awareness. The perception of candidate fitness for service in public office on the basis of personal style, people skills, and credibility – major components of what is essentially a hiring decision – is therefore a kind of issue voting on the basis of what may be the most compelling “issue” of all: a candidate’s personal attributes.

Another potential source of distortion in the measurement of the effect of issues upon voting behavior is the effect of incumbency. Incumbents have the advantage – or in some cases, the liability – of recognition and voter familiarity. But incumbency is of far

more consequence in local, state level, and congressional elections, and I do not consider it to be an important enough consideration in presidential elections to include it as a control in my explanation of volatile voting behavior. I discuss this effect in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter V, “Data and Method”) but to briefly summarize, out of the 15 presidential elections between 1948 and 2004, only five were elections in which there was a strong incumbent victory (1956, 1964, 1972, 1984, and 1996, the second of which involved an incumbent not elected to his first term). These elections occurred in periods of greatly varying volatility, and there does not seem to be evidence of a relationship of an “incumbent effect” to electoral volatility or stability. Perhaps the most important argument I can make against the inclusion of incumbency as an important control in analyses designed to explain volatility is the fact that presidential elections are of such high visibility that the challenger becomes nearly as well known as the sitting president. And, what may be considered a recognition advantage for a member of Congress can often be a great liability for a president – as Hamilton foresaw in the Federalist number 70 in his expectation that presidents would be “narrowly watched,” and as presidential approval ratings, and late-night comedy monologues tell us.

3. Causal Sequence

The causal chain producing volatile voting that is hypothesized in this dissertation is diagrammed in Figure 4. In this sequence of behavior, political sophistication and engagement yield ideological cross-pressure that in turn yields volatility in voting. Hillygus and Shields (2008) have suggested a causal sequence in volatile voting behavior much like what is shown in this diagram, although these authors focus on the behavior of “cross-pressured partisans” (2008, 18), and would place “party identification” in the box

that is in the top row, second from the left. I theorize that *volatile sophisticates* are cross-pressured due to the complexity of information they take in (Hillygus and Shields 2008; Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994, 26) although this cross-pressure may or may not produce volatility. Similarly, ideological consistency on the part of the voter need not preclude volatility. One may be ambivalent about vote choice and not one's own norms.

Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004) argue that information inputs create more *stability* in voting behavior among political sophisticates and more *volatility* in voting behavior among the unsophisticated. The theory offered in this dissertation, however, proposes that a substantial fraction of sophisticates are driven to volatility on the basis of ambivalence-producing political information and appeals. The causal sequence shown in Figure 4 is thus limited to *volatile sophisticates*, as indicated by the conditions in the box furthest to the left. Volatile unsophisticateds, according to this theory, will be less likely to have the understanding or interest in politics needed to activate potential cross-pressures or cause these voters seek out political information that would drive volatile voting behavior. They may, however, be driven by “short-term” information of the kind Converse and Zaller have described, and this model can also apply to these voters as well, with the exception of the conditions listed in the box furthest to the left.

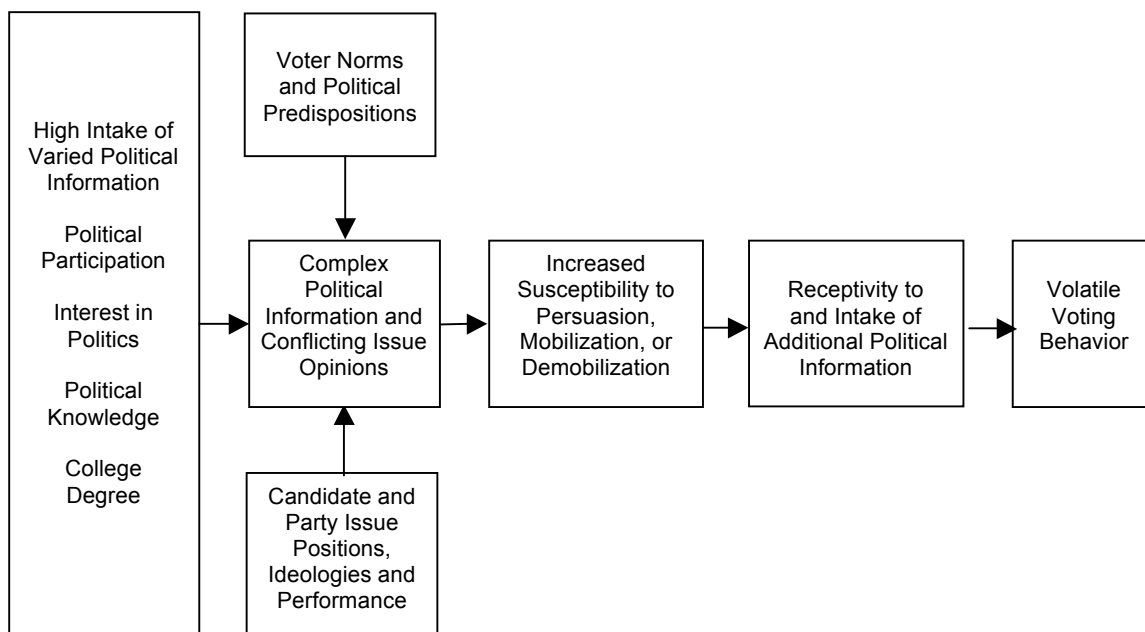


Figure 4. Causal Sequence of Volatile Voting Among Sophisticates

Hillygus and Shields argue that “persuadable voters have meaningful policy preferences, even if they do not add up to a coherent ideology” (2008, 43). I agree, but I argue for a causal sequence that differs in one important respect from Hillygus and Shields because I hypothesize that there are numerous social, political, and economic factors that create cross-pressures that exist independent of party identification. These can be evoked by the intake of issue-specific information as well as new political information that is consumed on an ongoing basis. Hillygus and Shields’s model rests on the notion that “persuadable voters” are made so by cross-pressures between their usual party *identification* and opinions on at least one key issue – a “wedge issue” – that fractures their party loyalty.⁶⁸ My understanding of volatility is different. First, I gauge volatility without dependence upon pre-existing party identification. Second, I reckon that within the segment of the public that is volatile in voting behavior there is a sub-segment of

⁶⁸ For the approach Hillygus and Shields take with Independents, see 2008, 25-26. Their focus is primarily on “persuadable partisans” whom they argue account for a much larger portion of the persuadable vote.

sophisticated voters, and a sub-segment of unsophisticated voters, and that these two groups of voters differ demographically and attitudinally. Additionally, there is a high likelihood that volatile voters are Independents (Malchow 2003, 22-25; Shaw 2008, 96), thus no cognitive dissonance takes place in the minds of these voters on the basis of issues and party identification. They are instead simply inconsistent in attitudes and voting behavior without respect to party. Volatile sophisticates also maintain strong issue opinions, as shown in Chapter IX of this dissertation. Interestingly, I also find, as shown again in Chapter IX, that those who are ideologically inconsistent but *sophisticated* are *less* likely to be volatile in voting behavior while those who are ideologically inconsistent and *unsophisticated* are *more* likely to be volatile.

When performing analyses that aggregate all volatile voters into one group, my results support the floating voter hypothesis: unsophisticated voters are indeed more likely to be volatile. Binary logistic regression analyses using the volatility and political sophistication variables constructed for the present study, shown in Table 28, describe these findings. But when the volatile segment of the electorate is broken down into sophisticated and unsophisticated components, as measured using the sophistication scale described below, a different picture of volatile voters emerges, and several other significant voter tendencies are revealed.⁶⁹ First, these analyses show that the volatile and sophisticated segment of the American public has, since the late 1960s, been increasingly and significantly more likely to be male and ideologically liberal with respect to certain political issues. Until the 1990s, these voters were also more likely to be under age 30. As

⁶⁹ Analyses using separate sophistication variables – education, and political knowledge, engagement, and interest – were performed and produced similar results, but the use of all four of these measures in a composite variable captures a variety of aspects of sophistication, and, using this latter standard, respondents must be sophisticated according to more than one measure comprising the scale. It is therefore a more stringent and conservative standard of political sophistication.

of the late 1990s, these voters are shown to be significantly less likely to be married. And, volatile sophisticates, as members of a group that is highly engaged in politics, have, since 1948, consistently exhibited a high likelihood of reading about political campaign news in the newspaper, as shown in Table 31, although this behavior has decreased over time, possibly because of the increased usage of television and the internet, and as of the 1990s, this relationship does not appear with statistical significance.

As is shown in Chapter IX, the proportion of volatile sophisticates in the electorate increased from 18.1 to 27.2 percent between the 1956-60 and 1972-76 ANES panels, providing a great deal of support for the claim by Nie et al. (1976) that issues such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, Watergate, and many other highly salient political events and controversies, along with the wide reach of electronic media, made political issues and widespread citizen awareness of politics powerful drivers of political behavior.

As will be demonstrated in Chapter VI, over half of the American electorate in the period spanning 1948 to 2004 (excluding consistent nonvoters) has been volatile in voting behavior. *The “swing vote” in the United States has thus comprised the majority of the electorate for this entire time period.* Furthermore, This more expansive accounting of volatility in the United States also reveals a larger number of volatile sophisticates, as shown in Chapter IX, with 18.1 percent of voters in the 2000-2004 and 1956-60 ANES panels and 27.2 percent of voters in the 1972-1976 panel falling into the volatile sophisticate category.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Meaning that these voters responded positively to at least two of four sophistication questions: attainment of a college bachelor’s degree, knowledge of which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in

The testing of the theory advanced in this chapter is designed to reveal what may be driving this highly prevalent volatile-voting behavior – assuming voters shift party support, or turn out or abstain for non-random reasons. The changing importance of political issues and party and candidate positions on issues is one possible explanation. Another is the varying likeability of candidates or their perceived trustworthiness or competence. The power of political advertising, get-out-the-vote efforts, and other campaign tactics is yet another possible cause. All of these variables are one form or another of political information, and if such information does indeed matter to the outcome of campaigns, voters must be aware of it to some reasonable degree, have the capacity to comprehend it, and understand how various candidate and party policy positions might affect political outcomes in matters such as the economy, war and peace, the environment, and civil rights. Furthermore, if voters are aware of issues and other political stimuli, there is the potential that, as they take in more political information, politics will become more complex in their minds, producing “cross-pressure” with regard to issues, ideologies, party platforms, and candidate qualifications and positions – as well as with the voters’ own issue interests and norms. This cross-pressure in turn opens the door to persuadability, and volatility in voting behavior.

The theory of volatile-voting behavior presented herein holds that it is primarily the effect of political issues and information that drives volatility, and that issues indeed matter to the American voter – both the sophisticated and unsophisticated, who take the time and make the effort to vote – and particularly to voters who historically exhibit the ability to cross party lines in presidential voting or who abstain. In referring to issues and

politics, and active political participation evidenced by contacting a public official, or belief that such participation can be politically effective.

political information, I also mean to include candidate and party attitudes and positions regarding political issues. This claim applies more readily to the subset of volatile voters who exhibit political sophistication. While issues and political information may also affect the less sophisticated portion of volatile voters, they are clearly of more consequence to those who are highly engaged in politics, educated, and politically knowledgeable. This group is also, unsurprisingly, more likely to regularly read about politics in a newspaper.

The Role of Volatile Sophisticates and Sophisticated Eclectics

As the data show in Chapter VIII, *sophisticated eclectics* are less likely to be volatile in voting behavior, and *unsophisticated eclectics* are more likely to be volatile. The volatile proportion of the sophisticated, ideologically eclectic segment made up 13.4 percent of the electorate in the 1948-1956 period, 17.1 percent in the 1968-1976 period, and 10.4 percent in the 1996-2004 period – paralleling the overall increase and decreases in volatility in the electorate since 1948 (Chapter IX, Tables 33-35). If it were to be assumed that unsophisticated eclectics or unsophisticated volatile voters shift party support in a fashion so disorganized as to approximate randomness (Converse 1964; 1970), the actions of *sophisticated* volatile voters, of whom there are numbers large enough to be of major consequence in driving electoral outcomes, would play a pivotal role as a result of the “miracle of aggregation” (Stimson 2004). Assuming sophistication is an indication that a voter is *not* acting randomly in his or her voting choices, the way this process works is, the voting decisions of the unsophisticated, whose decisions are presumably random and normally distributed, will all cancel out, leaving only the “non-random” non-normally distributed preferences to drive outcomes. How is this possible if

sophisticates are more likely to be consistent and standpatters? Because many sophisticates are also volatile and eclectic, and it is these voters who drive shifts in party support. All others would, in this scheme, either be stable in party preference, or normally distributed.

4. A Plan for Testing the Theory

In order to test the proposition that sophistication results in more ideological inconsistency, and in turn, more volatility in voting behavior, I first 1) distinguish volatile voters from standpatters, and then 2) construct a measure of political sophistication, as described in Chapter VII, that includes education, active political engagement, interest in politics, and factual political knowledge as components of an index of sophistication (0 to 4). I then reference the presence of volatility in voting behavior to a dichotomous measure of sophistication controlling for standard demographics (age, gender, race, and marital status) as well as media usage, and issue-related attitudes, including a measure of ideological inconsistency based on opinions about political issues. I also quantify the degree to which ideological inconsistency or “eclecticism,” acts as a mediator of volatility both among sophisticates and non-sophisticates. As noted in the previous chapter, studies supporting the floating voter hypothesis – those relating political sophistication to stability in party choice in voting (Campbell et al. [1960] 1980; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 288; Zaller 2004) – were not done using multivariate analysis controlling for the kinds demographic and sophistication-related variables provided in this dissertation.

5. Discussion

This chapter provides an abstract schematic of a theory of volatile voting behavior that gives priority to the effect of political knowledge, interest, and involvement, and education in driving volatility. It emphatically does not use measures of party identification as baselines, or measures of ideological constraint as indicators of political sophistication, although it does use a measure of ideological constraint as an indicator of cross-pressure. A formal statement of the theory has also been provided and illustrated as a causal sequence, as shown in Figure 4. Finally, the outline of a plan for testing the theory empirically has been presented. The next section, “Data and Method: General Considerations,” describes how variables have been selected and constructed to reflect both the causal elements and the result – volatile voting – for empirical testing of the theory, as well as other considerations in data handling and analysis.

V. Data and Method: General Considerations

1. Overview

This chapter discusses general considerations in the handling of data that have been analyzed in this dissertation, how they have been processed, and how variables were defined, distinguished and coded for processing in quantitative analyses. An examination of sources of bias and potential bias in the datasets is also provided, along with an explanation of how these distortions and potential distortions in the data have been managed. A discussion of statistical methods used in the data analyses is also provided. Data handling and approaches to measurement that are more specific to individual quantitative analyses are included in Chapters VI through IX wherein the data analyses are presented.

Much political science literature has been devoted to describing the erosion of party loyalty in terms of changes in *party identification* (ascertained through survey questions such as “are you a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?” in the ANES). But relatively few studies distinguish volatile voters demographically, behaviorally, or attitudinally according to *patterns of shifting behavior* in voting as opposed to self-reported party identification. This research plan deliberately ignores respondent reports of party identification and simply examines how voters *act* with regard to party choices in presidential elections. Indicators of party identification and aggregate trends in party identification – even as baselines – are not considered. I have limited the research to presidential elections in order to 1) keep the type of voter (or non-voter) consistent and 2) not introduce the bias caused by the fact that fewer and more politically engaged citizens will tend to vote in non-presidential election years.

2. Definition of Variables

Dependent Variable: Volatile-Voting Behavior

In order to identify volatile voters behaviorally, it is of course first necessary to define them. The definition used is, to a great extent, based on those provided by Key (1966), Shaw (2008), Daudt (1961) and Mayer (2008). Key's use of the terms "standpatters" and "switchers" to refer to party-loyal and volatile voters, respectively, is still somewhat apt, but my operationalization of volatile and standpatter voting behavior is different from the one Key used. Key defined standpatters as "voters who cast their ballots for candidates of the same political party at two successive elections" while Key's switchers "consist of two kinds of voters, one moving across party lines in one direction and the other shifting in the opposite direction" (1966, 16). The switchers described by Key are said to be highly aware of political phenomena while "floating voters" described by Converse (1967a) are far less politically informed. With regard to *voting behavior*, however, both voter types are largely the same. As Mayer notes, both the floating voter and the party switcher will "cross party lines from one election to the next" and exhibit a "disjunction in voting behavior across two successive elections;" they will "vote for a Republican in one presidential contest and a Democrat in the succeeding one or vice versa" (Mayer 2008, 12). Similarly, Daudt calls floating voters "those persons who do not make the same choice [in] two successive elections" (Daudt 1961, 7). More generally, *these voters do not vote consistently for any one political party*. The accounting of consistency and inconsistency in presidential voting that has been used in the studies just mentioned (with the exception of Shaw) all use voting behavior across *two* elections as standards. In this dissertation, however, the voter exhibiting "inconsistent," "unstable" or

“volatile” behavior is defined as one who has *shifted his or her party vote at least once, or abstained once or twice, in three successive presidential elections*. This is the same operational definition used by Shaw in his study presented in “Swing Voting and U.S. Presidential Elections” (Shaw 2008, 87-88). Such a definition need not involve any measure of party identification because the phenomenon to be studied is not stated party affinity, affiliation or party registration, but patterns, or lack thereof, in *voting behavior*. Those who have abstained in all three elections are categorized as consistent nonvoters and are dropped from the analyses.

Clearly the shorter the time frame used, the more voting behavior will appear consistent, and the longer the time frame used, the more opportunity there will be for behavioral inconsistency to appear. Thus, the use of shorter time frames in the preponderance of studies of volatile voting behavior obscures longer-term assessments of individual behavior in terms of consistency or inconsistency. The definition of volatile voting behavior that has been used in this dissertation is an attempt to bridge the already similar definitions provided by Daudt, Mayer, Shaw, and Key. To take full advantage of the time-frame breadth of the panel survey datasets used in the present study, I define a volatile voter as:

An individual of *any* expressed party affiliation or non-affiliation who has *not* voted consistently for a particular party over the course of *three* consecutive presidential elections covered by ANES panel surveys.⁷¹ Volatile voting behavior can include inconstant party choice, vote for an independent, or abstention in combination with any other voting behavior.

I include those respondents who are known to have voted in one or two elections in a three-election period covered by the panel surveys, but are known to have abstained in one or two other elections. As noted above, voters who are known to consistently abstain

⁷¹ These series of elections are: 2000-2004-2008, 1996-2000-2004, 1968-1972-1976, and 1948-1952-1956).

from all three elections are tabulated as non-voters.⁷² Once volatile voters have been distinguished by their reported voting behavior, they may then be further distinguished by levels of issue awareness, political knowledge, issue-related opinions, educational levels, and by other behavioral, attitudinal, and demographic measures.

There is also the matter of how strong a claim can be made for defining voting behavior as “volatile” based on available data. How many data points constitute a stable enough pattern to define behavior as stable or unstable? One election? Two? Three? Do state and local elections tell us as much about “unstable” status as presidential elections – and should they be included? The decision to define instability as I have is largely based upon the fact that I must employ what data are available and what can be employed consistently and parsimoniously. This seems to have been Shaw’s decision as well.

Importantly, following Shaw (2008) I have included in the volatile category what Key ([1966] 1968, 22) referred to as the “in-and-out” voter, also referred to by Campbell (1966) as the “peripheral” voter. I discuss this decision further in Chapter VI. Volatile voters therefore include those who are either peripheral voters, or those who have voted for different parties or third parties across three presidential elections.

Independent Variables

Independent variables include various measures of political sophistication, as well as measures ideological consistency, ideological orientation of issue opinions, perception of economic conditions, and political-media usage. The construction and employment of these variables are explained in more detail in chapters VI, VII, VIII, and IX wherein the

⁷² The ANES surveys provide responses to questions about whether or not respondents voted in the presidential elections, and these responses have been used to determine non-voting behavior in each election. Respondents who consistently abstain from voting are not considered volatile; they are considered nonvoters and have been dropped from the analyses.

data analyses are presented. Logistic regression models provided in chapters VIII and IX also include standard demographic measures such as age, gender, race, and marital status, and in some cases, whether or not a respondent attends religious services.

Individual measures of political sophistication such as educational level, ability to correctly identify which party controls the House of Representatives, expressed high interest in politics, and active political participation are cross-tabulated to dichotomous variables indicating 1) ideological inconsistency (Chapter VIII) and 2) volatile voting behavior (Chapter IX) in the effort to reveal statistically significant associations between indications of sophistication, and indications of volatile voting behavior and ideological inconsistency. A four-part, additive composite “sophistication” variable has also been constructed using the four separate measures of political sophistication just mentioned, and is used in cross-tabs and logistic regression models. Measures of ideological consistency and inconsistency are constructed using respondent opinions about key issues of the day. These opinions are coded as liberal or conservative, and those who display liberal or conservative opinions on all three issues are coded as ideologically consistent. All others are coded as ideologically eclectic.

All variables used in this dissertation have been dichotomized, including measures of volatility in voting behavior, political sophistication, ideological consistency, ideology with respect to political issues, and demographic measures such as gender, race, and marital status. Age is dichotomized using “under age 30” and “over age 30” because this is a fairly standard age cutoff in social science. The Pew Research Center has used this cutoff regularly for several decades (Keeter et al. 2008). I see this age break as one before which adult attitudes are still forming, but after which they have tended to gel.

Flanagan et al., in their study of civic engagement (2009) in young adults, similarly define young adulthood as being between the ages of 18 and 30.

3. Dataset, Measurement, and Analysis Considerations

Three datasets are used in the analyses provided throughout this dissertation. These are the American National Election Studies (ANES) panel surveys of 1956-60, 1972-76, and 2000-04 canvassing voting behavior across three consecutive presidential elections – 1948, 1952, and 1956; 1968, 1972, and 1976; and 1996, 2000, and 2004 – as well as attitudes, opinions, and demographics reported within the four year duration of the panels. The datasets were prepared with filtering variables provided by the ANES to assure that only panel participants were included in the samples analyzed.⁷³

Voters, Peripheral Voters, and Non-Voters

In the next chapter (Chapter VI), an enumeration of volatile voters in electorates across three historical periods is provided. I have analyzed the ANES datasets in several ways; some analyses account for the presence of consistent non-voters, and some exclude them. Elsewhere in this dissertation, I exclude consistent nonvoters from analyses as my focus is upon those who actually participate in the electoral process, even if that participation is only marginal. As is shown in Chapter VI, Table 4, consistent nonvoters are only shown to make up between 2.6 and 8.7 percent of the electorate. There are two explanations for why these numbers are so low in comparison to the portion of the electorate that is regularly reported to not turnout in any given presidential election – generally an amount over 40 percent since 1948. The first is that a substantial fraction of the electorate is made up of what Campbell (1966, 43) referred to as “peripheral” voters.

⁷³ The reason “filtered” data are needed is that some survey waves include both panel and non-panel respondents.

These are voters who do not consistently, or perhaps only occasionally, turn out to vote.⁷⁴

The second explanation for these low figures is that the ANES oversamples respondents who are politically active and engaged, and nonvoters will, unsurprisingly, also be more likely to be survey non-respondents as well as item non-respondents within surveys.⁷⁵

All of the analyses of voting volatility in this dissertation employ a dichotomous distinction between volatile voters, a group that also includes peripheral voters, and party-loyal voters who consistently turn out. Consistent non-voters, however, do not fit into either of these categories, and indeed, cannot be considered part of the electorate. I have therefore limited all analyses, including those that provide an accounting of political sophistication and ideological consistency, to voters and peripheral voters, and have dropped consistent nonvoters from all analyses because the population of interest in this dissertation decidedly consists of those who participate or occasionally participate in the electoral system rather than those who remain outside of the system.

Problems with Respondent Self-Assessments in Survey Questions

The types of questions asked in the ANES have been woefully inadequate to the task of assessing political knowledge and engagement. Many of these questions request self-assessment of political participation, knowledge, and awareness – measures for which respondents are likely to have limited external reference points against which to gauge such qualities. For example, the question posed for 1996-2000-2004 ANES panel variable P000863 is worded “Compared to the average person do you have fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, about the same number of opinions, or

⁷⁴ As noted in the next chapter, when voting behavior is analyzed across two elections rather than three, the number of nonvoters increases dramatically, indicating that a great number of voters are not consistent nonvoters but are instead *occasional* nonvoters, defined above for the purposes of this study as volatile.

⁷⁵ I discuss this matter in more detail in Section 5, below, in the subsection titled “Selection Bias in the ANES.”

more opinions? The response options are: 1. Fewer opinions 3. About the same number of opinions, or 5. More opinions. Who, one might ask, is the “average person” supposed to be? Surely each respondent has a substantially different conception of the “average person” and the best a respondent could do to respond to this question would be to crudely estimate their own level of “opinionatedness” against a limited and perhaps very homogenous circle of friends, acquaintances or family. Worse, the respondent may assess his or her opinionatedness in comparison to television pundits, talk radio hosts and callers, op-ed writers, bloggers, members of online discussion groups, or politicians. And despite the variety of potential meanings these responses may have, the most a response to such a question could tell us is a yes-or-no indication of whether a voter thinks of himself or herself as politically opinionated.

The 2000-2002-2004 ANES panel variable P001516 question states, “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.” Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?” Again this question seeks a self-assessment of political sophistication without a point of reference. Numerous ANES questions also attempt to tabulate the respondent’s *perception* of issues such as the nation’s economy and security, or whether there is enough equality in society. Again, common points of reference, such as definition of multidimensional terms such as “equality,” “economy,” or “security” are not provided, hence the question serves to measure how the respondent interprets the terminology used as much as it serves to measure respondent attitude regarding an issue.

I employ one type of measurement of media usage in this dissertation, and that is

the ascertainment in the ANES of whether a respondent reads campaign-related news. Other media usage measurements are avoided because 1) the types of media voters have used across the 56-year period examined in this dissertation vary dramatically – from newspaper to radio to television to the internet – not to mention the changes in the pacing, speed of delivery, and level of detail of media content over the years, 2) users may not focus on *political* news in the media they report using, and 3) respondents often misreport their media usage so their behavior is more acceptable. Zaller ([1992], 2003, 334) notes the importance of distinguishing between “low-brow” media such as talk radio and local weekly newspapers, and “high-brow” media such as National Public Radio, network television news, and *The Wall Street Journal* when using media consumption as a gauge of political awareness. One may, for example, read a newspaper every day – even a very “high-brow” one – but only take in the sports scores or movie reviews. Thus measures of the regularity of media consumption alone ignore the *type* of content be consumed and cannot be considered a valid measure of engagement with political news. Zaller also calls attention to the confounding effect of “social-desirability-induced exaggeration” when attention to media is self-reported, and notes, for example, that these reports indicate that 40 percent of Americans listen to NPR “several times a week,” whereas NPR’s own audience measurement data show that this figure is an exaggeration by a factor of 10. Macaluso (1977) makes a similar observation, arguing that measurement of voter sophistication via “number of media attended” can be misleading because it elides the level of sophistication of the content consumed: a respondent could be reading every word of the op-ed page of the *New York Times* each day, or s/he could be skimming the Yankees’ box scores on the sports page of the *New York Post* for two

minutes a day. These differences are not discerned by the ANES.

4. A Typology of Volatile Voter Definitions

This chapter section contains brief definitions of the terms “Independent,” “defector,” “swing voter,” “floating voter,” “switcher,” “changer,” “ticket splitter” and “undecided” in scholarly literature. “Volatile voter,” a term comprising the *behavior* of the floating voter, switcher, and “peripheral voter” that is operationalized in the present study, is also defined. As should be evident, a change in the definition of volatile voting behavior results in substantially different analytical outcomes. I have sought to provide a definition that is both valid and of practical use in understanding politics – one that defines actual voter behavior and is not confounded by a voter’s temporary intentions or abstract identity. I have also included the analysis of volatile voting terminology in this section in order to provide greater clarity and precision in referring to this type of voting behavior. The term “swing voter” is regularly seen in the media and scholarly literature, but it is maddeningly vague, and frequently employed with a great deal of imprecision. Independent party identification is also wrongly confuted with volatility. *The Swing Voter in American Politics* (Mayer 2008) includes essays by leading voting and elections scholars, and “swing voters” in this book include voters who might make an inconsistent voting decision once in six years as well as voters who shift within a month during a campaign. A very wide variety of voter types is included in this book, and while they all might “swing” elections, the term “swing voter” in this usage has the effect of homogenizing a variety of behavior that can, and should be, distinguished more precisely.

Also, not all volatile voters actually do swing elections as James Campbell (2008) shows.⁷⁶

Key's "Switchers" and "In and Out" Voters, and Campbell's "Peripheral" Voters

As mentioned above, Key calls "voters whose electoral affections remain the same from election to election" "standpatters." They are "voters who cast their ballots for candidates of the same political party at two successive elections." Although Key describes "switchers" as simply one of "two kinds of voters, one moving across party lines in one direction and the other shifting in the opposite direction," this is really one kind of voter – a party switcher. Key also notes the presence of another segment: "new voters," who cannot be said to be either stable or unstable, but who, according to Key's tabulation, outnumber switchers in many elections ([1966] 1968, 9-10, 16, 22). Finally, and importantly, Key defines a category of "in and out" voters ([1966] 1968, 22), mentioned above, who vote in some elections and abstain in others. Campbell (1966, 43) refers to these voters as "peripheral voters" and notes that variations in turnout largely depend on whether these voters can be stimulated to vote in a particular election.

"Changers" in Lazarsfeld et al.

Lazarfeld et al. ([1944] 1968) refer to three types of "changers" in the 1940 presidential election they study that are described differently than Key's "switchers." "Party changers" are "people who started out with a vote intention and later changed it to the other party, finally voting for it." They make up a mere 8 percent of the sample shown in this study. "Crystallizers" are "people who had no vote intention in May but

⁷⁶ As noted in Chapter I, Section 1, James Campbell's (2008) study defines swing voters as active voters – excluding occasional nonvoters – who have been queried in the ANES about the degree to which they have "settled" on a candidate or party before or during a presidential campaign.

later acquired one;” these voters shifted from ‘Don’t know’ to Republican (14 percent) or from ‘Don’t know’ to Democrat (14 percent). They make up 28 percent of the sample. “Waverers” are “people who started out with a vote intention, then fell away from it (either ‘don’t know’ or to the other party) and later returned to their original choice.” These authors note that 82 percent of these voters returned to their original choice ([1944] 1968, 65). Waverers make up 15 percent of the sample ([1944] 1968, 65-66). It should be noted, importantly, that in this study, “changers” make up the majority of voters – 57 percent of the sampled voters as a whole. “Constants” are seen to make up 43 percent of the sample ([1944] 1968, 65, 163).

“Floating Voters”

According to Daudt, “floating voters are those persons who do not make the same choice in two successive elections” (Daudt 1961, 7). Converse distinguishes the “floater” further: this type of voter is unstable in voting behavior because he or she tends to be one “whose information about politics is relatively impoverished.” Converse’s articulation of the “floating voter hypothesis” posits that “in any given shift between two elections,” it is the “less involved and less informed voters [who] are disproportionately represented” (Converse 1967a, 137). “Floaters,” according to Shaw “change their preferences during the campaign and are affected by short-term forces and elite cues conveyed by the news media.” Yet they are “neither especially interested nor involved in the politics of the day” (2008, 87-88). Shaw’s “switchers” differ from “floaters,” however, in that they are deemed by some to be more “rational” in their voting behavior. As defined by Shaw, switchers “cast votes out of line with their party identification and tend to do so because they either prefer another candidate’s credentials or positions or are responding to some

highly salient issues.” Shaw reckons that these voters have a “detailed and exceptional understanding of current political information” and cross party lines on the basis of such information (2008, 87-88). The distinction between “floaters” and “switchers” in many respects, parallels the categories of “volatile sophisticates” and “volatile unsophisticates” used in this dissertation in Chapter IX, and their characteristics.

“Swing Voters”

As noted above, I consider this term quite imprecise, and I include it here simply because it has been defined in scholarly literature. Mayer (2008) writes that “In simple terms, a swing voter is, as the name implies, a voter who could go either way: a voter who is not so solidly committed to one candidate or the other as to make all efforts as persuasion futile.” They are “voters whose final allegiance is in some doubt all the way up until Election Day.” They are, to use the terminology employed by Lazarsfeld et al., “cross-pressured.” Mayer, however, is writing of the status of such voters in any given election, and a “swing voter” in this context is defined as being one who is “not convinced that one candidate is clearly superior to the other.”

“Independents”

The category “Independent” is often confused with that of “swing voter” and “volatile voter.” While these concepts are not mutually exclusive, and while individuals often fit into both categories, they mean two very different things. The terms “volatile voting” or “swing voting” define behaviors and attitudes, while “Independent” is simply a category of party identification, which in this case is non-identification. Importantly, the “Independent” label only predicts voting behavior that is inconsistent in a minority of cases where this non-affiliation is expressed.

Keith et al. (1992) demonstrate that only a portion of declared Independents — around 11 percent of the electorate — can be categorized as “Pure Independents.” These authors argue that most people who call themselves Independent are actually hidden partisans who, when probed for a more specific preference, will admit to a party affinity and party loyalty in actual voting behavior. Studies by Jones (2008), Shaw (2008), and Malchow (2003) show that Independents do have a higher likelihood of volatility than party identifiers. But Keith et al. (1992) show that only about a third of Independents are volatile with respect to major parties. Neither Shaw nor Malchow discern what type of Independent is being discussed – pure Independents, or Independent “leaners” who reliably vote for one of the two major parties. This, as Keith et al. (1992) have shown, is a crucial distinction.

“Defectors”

Boyd (1969) defines defection as “the act of voting contrary to party identification.” Voting in accordance with such identification comprises the notion of a “normal vote” as articulated by Converse (1967b). According to Dobson and St. Angelo (1975), Converse’s “normal vote” is a “constant baseline around which vote defection can be measured,” but these authors point out that this approach is problematical because party identification itself is prone to regular fluctuation. Converse naturally conceives of defection as a form of volatility but is focused in this article on those who return to their “normal” party affiliation after casting a vote for a candidate whose party is not their own. Converse argues that “participants continue to think of themselves as adherents to the original party” (1967b, 14). These types of votes, writes Converse, do not involve “revision of party loyalty” (1967b, 15). But behaviorally speaking, in any case,

“defection” qualifies a voter as one who has demonstrated actual instability in voting behavior by virtue of having not remained a consistent party voter.

“Ticket Splitters”

Maddox and Nimmo (1981) in “In Search of the Ticket Splitter” base their definition of a ticket splitter on “responses to four items: reported votes for the major offices of president, governor, senator and representative.” Using these conditions, Maddox and Nimmo define a ticket splitter as “a person who casts at least one vote for each of two parties across the four offices in question.” Campbell and Miller (1957) in “The Motivational Basis of Straight and Split Ticket Voting” include votes for state and local officials as well. Their definition of ticket splitting includes any combination of votes that includes a choice of more than one party on a given ballot (1981, 401-8; 402). In both cases, these definitions refer to choices made in a single election. The present study does not examine ticket splitting, which is yet another form of volatility that, if combined with my accounting of volatility in presidential elections, would surely add to the prevalence of inconsistent voting behavior.

“Undecideds”

Shaw (2008) points out that “reporters and pundits believe that anyone who says she does not know for whom she is voting is a swing voter” but argues that in fact undecided voters are “not necessarily swing voters.” First, they may actually be “reliable partisans who are simply late coming home,” as with the “waverers” described by Lazarsfeld et al. who make up 15 percent of their sample. Second, they are “disproportionately likely to stay home on Election Day” with “almost one-fourth of undecided voters” ultimately not voting. Third, Shaw attributes much of the confusion in

the use of the term “undecided” to the manner in which interview questions about vote indecision are posed (2004, 77). Shaw views this as a “methodological artifact,” for example, whether the candidate’s party is mentioned, the point in the campaign during which the question is asked, or whether respondents are asked if they “lean” toward one candidate or another (2004, 78).

Jones (2008) defines “undecideds” as those “who have no candidate preference at all.” But in determining levels of voter undecidedness, Jones notes the importance of distinguishing among two kinds of Gallup Poll “Swing Voter Questions” used from 1944 to 2004. One is the “will you change your mind?” question form, as in “Do you think you may change your mind between now and the November election?” The other probes for “strength of support” for the respondent’s preferred candidate. The former tends to encourage respondents to express a more definitive overall preference, and Jones notes that the “will you change your mind” questions produce a much lower indication of swing voters presumably because weak supporters of a candidate may nonetheless be perfectly well decided upon whom they will vote for despite the encouragement to indicate ambivalence to the survey interviewer (2008, 36-44). “Strength of support” questions allowed weak, but nonetheless definitive supporters of a party of candidate to be qualified as a swing voter (42-44). Mayer (2008, 15) considers the matter of ascertaining a true measure of “undecided” voters problematical, noting “those who say they are undecided may actually have a preference that they are reluctant to reveal to the interviewer.”

A Final Note on Definitions

I have included this typology in order to clearly discern the type of volatile voter being examined in this dissertation from those types of voters who are not. These definitions are of course not mutually exclusive. The definition in use in this dissertation is only meant to reveal one type of volatility – one that nonetheless involves the biggest and most diverse segment of the American electorate and that includes not only party switching behavior but inconsistent turnout behavior. Both of these behaviors have been accounted for across a broader time span than has been used, with one notable exception (Shaw), in virtually all studies of party loyalty and volatility in voting and elections literature.

5. Caveats: Biases and Potential Biases in the Data

A variety of biases potentially affect the data used in a study of this type. These include distortions due to misreporting by respondents, recall error, panel effects, item non-response, and missing data resulting from panel drop-outs. Of particular note is the social-desirability influenced over-report of turnout by ANES respondents.⁷⁷ These types of biases have been examined extensively in political-science scholarship. Some of their effects are relatively small, but all, including effects that are larger, tend to bias the ANES panel data that have been used in this dissertation toward an oversampling of standpatter behavior. Weighting of data to correct for these distortions using auxiliary

⁷⁷ The ANES panels used in this dissertation indicate turnout ranging from 63.9 to 79.8 percent between 1948 and 2000 while Michael P. McDonald of the United States Election Project reports turnout levels of 52.1 to 63.6 percent of the voting eligible population in the same period based on United States Census-derived data (McDonald 2011). Given the selection bias in the ANES that over-represents the politically active, this is likely not as dramatic a misreport as it may seem at first. The ANES selection bias may in fact reflect the “selection bias” of the voting process itself. Additionally, as explained in this chapter section, there will be both an *over-sampling* of standpatters and an *under-sampling* of volatile voters in the survey. There will also be an over-sampling of sophisticated voters in both the volatile and standpatter groups, with a too-large proportion of sophisticates in the volatile voter sample. But since volatile voters are under-sampled in the overall survey, these two distortions in the volatile voter sample will, to a great extent, cancel out. On the other hand, because the survey over-samples both standpatters and sophisticates, the number of sophisticated standpatters will be inflated while the number of volatile sophisticates will remain relatively undistorted.

analyses would thus tend to either enlarge the distribution of volatile voters, or have very little effect on it. These biases also tend to result in an over-representation in this dissertation of the politically sophisticated.

Accordingly, the use of imputation techniques to correct for these effects, some of which can be quite complex and may produce other biases, has not been made. Instead, the face-value results of tabulating volatile voting behavior, levels of political sophistication, and the presence of ideological inconsistency are presented without adjusting for the potential biases described above – as has been done in virtually all previous studies of party loyalty in voting behavior. In not correcting for these biases, a more conservative accounting of the frequency of volatile voting in the electorate is provided. This assertion takes the following considerations into account:

- 1) Panel drop-outs are known to more likely be nonvoters or occasional nonvoters.

- 2) Virtually all of those who misreport turnout are nonvoters in a particular election, and can therefore be classified as either occasional nonvoters, and hence volatile, or as consistent nonvoters, thus more of the non-missing respondents in raw ANES data are volatile than are apparent.

- 3) Those who do not recall their votes correctly tend to recall voting for the winner or for their normally preferred party, and in such cases, those who misreport voting for a winning candidate could be claiming to vote either for a consistently preferred party or not. Thus it is likely much of this misreporting cancels out with regard to stability of voting. Given the relatively low frequency of this behavior (2 percent, as indicated below), the impact of this kind of misreporting, if any, should be quite small.

4) The ANES oversamples active voters and the politically active in general and this sample will necessarily exclude many occasional non-voters who are defined in this dissertation as volatile. Furthermore, as noted earlier, many studies show that voters exhibiting high levels of political engagement are more likely to be partisan and stable with regard to party choice.⁷⁸ Thus the ANES oversamples those more likely to be standpatters – and those more likely to be politically sophisticated. Accordingly, there should also be an over-representation of volatile voters who are sophisticates, but an under-representation of volatile voters in general. There will also be an over-representation of sophisticated standpatters. Since there are more volatile voters than standpatters in all periods, this bias will result in a larger proportion of standpatters being erroneously categorized as sophisticated relative to volatile voters, and a more conservative accounting of the sophistication of volatile voters relative to standpatters. No effort to correct these distortions has been made, however, for two reasons. First, attempting to correct for this kind of selection bias would involve formulating a model that would aid in categorizing certain cases, about which little is known, as unsophisticates, and such a process would introduce an additional set of biases inherent 1) in selecting predictor variables and 2) that are also present in the variables themselves. Second, the true distribution of unsophisticates in the *electorate* is not known, and it is quite possible that the selection bias of the ANES accurately reflects the “selection bias” of the electoral process itself. I have therefore chosen to use these datasets in the manner other key scholars mentioned in this dissertation have, without attempting to correct for this type of bias.

⁷⁸ Analyses in this dissertation, Chapter IX show this as well.

A full accounting of these biases, as well as a more detailed description of them is nonetheless in order, along with an explanation as to why correcting for such potential causes of bias as over-reporting, recall error, panel effects, item non-response, and panel drop-outs (as minimal as these effects may be in some cases) would produce evidence of even less individual-level party-choice stability in the American electorate than is reported below, and thus a more conservative description of voting volatility than might otherwise be produced.

Missing Data Issues in ANES Panel Data

Panel studies are often plagued by a large number of cases that are missing data of which four types are of concern in this study. The first is missing data caused by panel attrition – the reduction in the number of panel respondents across the duration of the survey, in this case, a period of four years per panel. The second type of missing data results from a lack of interviews at various points in the survey process due to reasons other than panel attrition. A third type of missing data is due to a “DK” (don’t know) or “RF” (refused) response that is not useful to the analysis, and the fourth type of missing data occurs in survey questions regarding vote choice where respondents have indicated in a previous question that they did not vote or were ineligible to vote. This last type of data, however, allows for the identification of 1) consistent nonvoters, and 2) occasional nonvoters who demonstrate volatility by abstaining in combination with a party vote at a different time.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ A pattern of two votes across three elections such as IR, ID, IN, II, DR, DN, NR can definitively indicate volatility, but a pattern of two consistent party votes out of three elections (RR, DD, NN) cannot indicate party loyalty.

A problematical solution to coping with missing data that has been used in a preponderance of studies of voting behavior is listwise deletion,⁸⁰ which simply means that all cases missing data for the variable of interest are dropped from analysis. King et al. (2001) as well as Allison (2002) show that listwise deletion will, in most cases, produce substantial biases. Portions of the missing data in the ANES panel datasets used in the present analyses have been extracted by tracing “INAP” responses to earlier “qualifying” questions that can reveal nonvoting behavior that can be a component of volatility. But sizable chunks of data are nonetheless missing from the surveys, particularly in the last waves. A potential solution to this type of problem is the use of multiple imputation (MI) for filling in missing data with values estimated using regression models containing a large number of survey variables. Such techniques have gained increasing acceptance in political science over the past decade and could conceivably be used here. Using MI in the present study would amount to creating a likelihood model for between 22.1 to 28.5 percent of the survey samples when analyses include voting behavior from three election periods, and exclude consistent nonvoters.⁸¹ MI models employ, as independent variables, a set of non-missing responses to predict values for missing dataset cells. These variables are inherently biased by selection, and by missingness in some cases. The MI process involves a great many judgment calls with regard to inclusion and exclusion of variables, cleaning data, coding of variables as qualitative or quantitative, and decisions about acceptable levels of missing data in predictor variables – all of which are themselves potential sources of additional bias.

⁸⁰ King et al. (2001) note that approximately 94 percent of “recent literature” in political science uses listwise deletion in analyses of survey research – studies in which virtually all datasets are missing data.

⁸¹ With consistent nonvoters included, a likelihood model would be needed for 14.7 to 24.7 percent of the survey samples.

Each application of MI demands extensive scrutiny of the construction of the imputation model, and such modeling and evaluation of the efficacy and validity of a data imputation approach is not the focus of this dissertation. Imputation of missing observations could provide a valuable perspective, but such efforts have been left aside for future exploration in order to focus on a more basic task: to examine volatility in voter decision making across the time frame of three, rather than two, presidential elections, bearing in mind that a rather substantial array of research, as indicated below, shows that missing cases are more likely to be volatile voters than standpatters. I have, nonetheless, produced logistic regression analyses using the presence or absence of item non-response as the dependent variable for the three ANES panel datasets used in this dissertation and they are included in the appendix to this chapter. This model is intended only to provide confirmation of the findings regarding missing data indicated below, and have not been used to augment the basic panel datasets.

Panel Attrition and Panel Effects

ANES researchers⁸² and studies in multiple scholarly fields report that panel attrition, overwhelmingly the source of missing observations in the ANES panel studies, does not significantly bias large-N panel data samples (Bartels 1999; Bennett and Bennett 1989; Clinton 2001; Falaris and Peters 1998; Fitzgerald et al. 1997; Price and Zaller 1993; Rahn et al. 1994; Sobol 1959; Traugott and Morchio 1990;⁸³ Zabel 1998; Zagorsky

⁸² See ANES Online Commons, “2008-2009 ANES Panel Study: Study Description” at <http://www.electionstudies.org/onlinecommons/paneldescription.htm> (accessed 3/3/10, 11:18 pm).

⁸³ Traugott and Morchio (1990) found very little distortion of turnout measures due to panel attrition in the first of two waves of a four-wave ANES panel study. The first two waves of this study were comprised of the 1988 ANES “pre-post” time series study. The second two waves of the panel comprised the 1989 ANES Pilot Study based on a subsample (N = 614) of the 1988 “pre-post” study. Traugott and Morchio found that in the first two waves, wherein panel attrition comprised 13 percent, only a 2 percent difference between the two waves in reported turnout was found (1990, 1, 9). In the last two waves of the panel, in which attrition reduced the sample size from 614 to 420 (a 31.6 percent attrition rate), the proportion of nonvoters was reduced from 26 percent to 22 percent.

and Rhoton 1999). Bartels also shows that panel effects – changes in respondent attitudes and opinions due to prior survey exposure – will not significantly bias data for most variables in a panel study. But Bartels argues that measurements of vote *intention* can indeed be substantially biased due to attrition and panel conditioning (1999, 15). Clinton (2001), on the other hand, finds that panel attrition does *not* bias measurements of respondent interest in politics or vote *intention* (2001, 29). The claims of Bartels and Clinton cannot both be true, and a variety of studies support Bartels's argument. The present study, however, does not use reports of vote intention but of votes already cast.

Respondents displaying a lower level of community involvement are less likely to agree to be re-interviewed in a survey (Groves et al. 2000), and respondents who drop out of panels unsurprisingly display less interest in survey subject matter than those who remain in the panel (Sobel 1959). Additionally, panel attritors are known to be disproportionately low in levels of political engagement, less educated, and less informed than the average respondent and therefore more likely to be nonvoters (Bennett and Bennett 1989, 346; Price and Zaller 1993, 139-40; Traugott and Morchio 1990; Traugott and Katosh 1979, 364, 371-2). Non-attritors, on the other hand, are also often found to become more politically active due to the stimulation of the interview process (Traugott and Katosh 1979, 375), further adding to the oversample of active voters in the non-missing portion of the ANES panel sample. Finally, and more generally, measures of turnout and political engagement are highly correlated to survey participation (Bolstein 1991; Burden 2000; Traugott and Katosh 1979, 364). These findings suggest claims that turnout and participation measures are only minimally biased by panel attrition cannot be correct. If the non-missing portion of panels *are* biased, however, they are clearly biased

in a manner that over-represents participators, political sophisticates, and those exhibiting more consistent voting behavior. Indeed, nonvoters are accounted for below in a manner that suggests that respondents who drop out of the panel are very likely to be either occasional nonvoters or consistent nonvoters – in agreement with the literature cited immediately above. Very few observations, it should be noted, are missing for the independent variables used in this dissertation, as is shown in subsequent chapters.

Recall Error and Over-Reporting for the Winner

“Recall data ... have their shortcomings, as will be shown, but they have the incontestable virtue of being available – and of being the only information covering so long a period of time.”

– V.O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate* ([1968] 1966, 12)

Weir (1975, 57) reported that between 7.3 percent and 16.5 percent of 1956-1958-1960 ANES panel respondents recalled their earlier presidential votes incorrectly, with a tendency to over-report voting for the winner. A substantial amount of apparent volatility could be explained by incorrect recall, but so could a substantial amount of apparent standpatter behavior, and Weir cautions that party effect – the tendency of strong party identifiers to report voting for a candidate of his or her normally preferred party – is a large component of misreporting. Thus this type of recall error should, if anything, produce an over-report of party-loyal behavior. Weir’s study should be regarded with caution, however, due to the somewhat small sample size of the analyses presented (N = 537), evidently caused by panel attrition – which in itself creates an oversampling of standpatters – and the fact that the baseline for respondent recall in this study is an earlier self-report of voting behavior.

Zaller (2004, 170-1) indicates that ANES data are distorted by over-reporting for the winner in what he presumably means are surveys of voting behavior in general presidential elections. This over-report, according to Zaller, averages “about 2 percent.” Wright (1993, 294-5) shows that average misreporting for the winner in 10 ANES national presidential elections surveys since 1952 is 1.5 percent. It is impossible, however, to directly determine which respondents a compensating factor should be applied to in order to correct for this bias, and randomly assigning a correction factor could conceivably create an even greater bias, thus no attempt has been made to adjust for this small distortion.

Over-Reporting of Turnout and Non-Voting

The accounting of voting behavior presented in the next chapter indicates a remarkably small number of consistent nonvoters across three presidential elections. For example, in the 1996-2000-2004 accounting of voting behavior, a mere 5.0 percent of the valid sample of panel respondents (N = 894) are tabulated as consistent nonvoters. These are respondents for whom a “didn’t vote” response has been recorded for all three elections. But many consistent nonvoters among the voting-eligible population (VEP) cannot be accounted for in this panel due to missing data within the surveys, and survey non-response. There is an additional 2.4 percent of the 1996-2000-2004 sample indicating abstention in one election, and for whom voting data are missing for the other two presidential elections, and another 6.1 percent of the sample, indicating abstention in two elections for whom voting data are missing for the other presidential election. Thus, in addition to the 5.0 percent for whom nonvoting behavior has been recorded for all three elections, a maximum of 8.5 percent of the entire panel sample *may* be consistent

nonvoters – but it cannot be assumed from these data that such respondents can be categorized this way across all three elections in a given panel. When voting behavior is analyzed across two elections rather than three, the number of non-voters increases dramatically, indicating that a great number of voters are not *consistent* nonvoters but are instead *occasional nonvoters*, defined above for the purposes of this study as volatile.

While my accounting of volatile voting does not adjust for over-reporting of turnout which has comprised anywhere from 7.0 to 31.4 percent of sample totals according to studies of the validity of ANES turnout (Anderson and Silver 1986, 772; Bernstein et al. 2001, 23; Burden 2000, 390;⁸⁴ Silver et al. 1986, 613; Traugott and Katosh 1979, 363), it is clear that the number of *consistent* nonvoters across three consecutive elections in a panel is substantially smaller than the number of nonvoters in *any given election* – and that many voters who do not turn out, and are accounted for in any one election as nonvoters, are in fact not *consistent* nonvoters. Just how small the number of consistent nonvoters actually is can only be revealed by knowing which individual respondents over-report turnout, and whether respondents for whom voting data are missing for one or two elections have indeed abstained in the election for which data are missing. Models can, of course, be created to predict the likelihood that unobserved respondent behavior is indeed abstention, but this cannot be directly observed in the ANES panel datasets.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Burden (2000, 3) reports that “researchers find a consistent bias of about 12 to 15 points” in overstating turnout.

⁸⁵ Interestingly, I found that only 2.6 percent of 1956-60 ANES panel respondents were consistent nonvoters, while Converse (1975, 131) found there were 4 percent consistent nonvoters in that panel. There is not enough background information provided in Converse’s tally to allow for an explanation of the 1.4 percent discrepancy, but one thing shown in both Converse’s accounting of this behavior, and the one I provide, is that *consistent* nonvoters make up quite a small part of the survey sample.

No over-reporters should be classifiable as standpatters. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) reported turnout of 56.7 percent in 2004 while the ANES reported 78.5 percent turnout, and analyzing this over-report, Ansolabehere and Hersh (2008, 2) unsurprisingly note “virtually no one who actually casts a ballot reports they did not vote” (3). Thus recall error, with regard to turnout, is biased in one direction only, and accordingly, many of the over-reporting “voters” accounted for in the ANES may in fact be consistent nonvoters or occasional nonvoters but surely not standpatters. Furthermore, those who claim they have voted when they did not tend to be better educated (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2008, 10; Silver et al. 1986) while at the same time those who are better educated are more likely to turnout (Brehm 1993; Keeter et al. 2000).⁸⁶ Given that these over-reporting respondents are likely to be more politically sophisticated and engaged, a substantial number of them could be expected to have turned out in other elections, which would make them classifiable as volatile. At the same time, those most likely to over-report are also more partisan (Bernstein et al. 2001, 41; Ansolabehere and Hersh 2008). Thus the non-missing sample of respondents in the ANES contains a disproportionate number of individuals claiming to be regular voters and standpatters but who are, in actuality, volatile due to their occasional abstention. The non-missing portion of the sample in ANES surveys therefore provides an excessive appearance of partisan stability.

Selection Bias in the ANES

Those who agree to participate in surveys are known to be more politically active (Bennett and Bennett 1989, 245; Burden 2000, 394; Traugott and Katosh 1979, 364,

⁸⁶ Wright (1993, 293) suggests, however, that misreporting occurs among the *least* sophisticated members of the electorate because of a propensity to “failed recall.”

371). Thus it is unsurprising that the ANES and other surveys also oversample active voters (Brehm 1987; Bolstein 1991; Burden 2000, 394). The over-reporting of turnout in the ANES may therefore not be as much of a distortion as is indicated by the gap reported by McDonald (2011) between actual VEP turnout and what ANES respondents report. This gap has ranged from 10.8 to 20.6 in presidential elections between 1948 and 2000. According to Burden (2000), those who are “least likely to participate” in political surveys such as the ANES “are also least likely to vote and report doing so” (395). Brehm (1993) concurs, stating “there is strong evidence to suggest that polls disproportionately sample from the most interested, most informed, and most participative people in society” (19). A conundrum with which we are confronted, according to Brehm, is that respondents must “perform the very act we wish to study in order to even be seen in our study” (19).⁸⁷ The sample of respondents, as opposed to non-respondents, will thus be biased to over-represent political participators. And, as noted above, those more highly engaged respondents will also tend to be more partisan and stable in party choice as reckoned by measures of political sophistication (Campbell et al. [1960] 1976; Converse 1964; Zaller 2004).⁸⁸ Thus, again, the ANES oversamples standpatters.

Campbell et al. ([1960] 1976, 94) recognized the survey selection bias problem during the infancy of the ANES. These authors noted a 12 percent over-report in 1952 and 1956, and while they acknowledged that misreporting was a component of this error, they attributed a larger source of error to be “disparity between the universe ... sampled

⁸⁷ Brehm (1993) defines survey non-response as comprising “respondents selected to the survey sample, but for various reasons, not interviewed” (18).

⁸⁸ The validity of measures of political sophistication used by Campbell et al. ([1960], 1976) and Converse (1964) has been questioned in a variety of literature (Hillygus and Shields 2008, ch. 1; Smith 1980; Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994, ch. 1; Wyckoff 1987, 159-164). This claim should therefore be considered with caution.

and the civilian population of the voting age.” This disparity is due to the fact that they did not sample “several groups that are almost wholly non-participants in the electoral process.” Campbell et al. write that “it is not unreasonable to attribute as much as half the difference” between the ANES sample and the recorded actual vote to this sampling bias in favor of active voters.

Given that panel attrition produces an over-representation of the politically active and engaged, producing an oversample of regular voters; that survey selection bias and over-reporting produce an oversample of active, engaged, and partisan respondents in the non-missing portion of ANES surveys; and that recall error tends to produce an over-report of party loyalty, the voting-behavior-related data presented in this dissertation are therefore argued to be conservative estimates of the distribution of volatile voters in the electorate as a whole. As noted, I also provide, in the appendix to Chapter VI, a binary logistic regression analysis using missingness of voting data as the dependent variable that provides data supporting this argument.

Sample Weights

ANES sample weights have not been used in these analyses. The Appendix to the ANES 2000-2002-2004 Panel states “The use of the respondent selection weight is strongly encouraged, despite past evaluations that have shown these weights to have little significant impact on the values of [A]NES estimates of descriptive statistics” (109). Given that the analyses of the prevalence of volatility in the American electorate reported on herein are limited to descriptive statistics – frequency distributions only – the use of sample weights would seem superfluous, particularly in light of much more significant

potential sources of sample bias, and the fact that the ANES sample weights are based on Current Population Survey (CPS) data, which also contains biases.

6. Potentially Confounding Variables and Effects

Period Effects and Changing Respondent Attitudes

Period effects can potentially confound analyses of attitudinal and behavioral data across the span of a four-year long panel study, such as are provided in this dissertation. Five types of period effects are of potential concern. The first is change in independent variable values across the time period of each panel. Variables such as race and gender, of course, do not change and are not subject to period effects. Other demographics such as education and marital status may change, however, as well as attitudinal metrics such as interest in politics and opinions about issues, and behavioral metrics such as political knowledge and participation. These independent variables, mostly related to political sophistication, have, except where noted, been measured at one point in time, plus or minus two years. Attitudinal and behavioral variables, which comprise the dependent variable in Chapters VII, concerning political sophistication, and Chapter VIII, concerning ideological consistency, include opinions about political issues measured in different panel waves, again, all within a four-year period. With regard to ideological consistency, I do not deem period effects confounding for this reason: if a respondent is ideologically *consistent*, for example, in 2000, but expresses an opinion that would result in ideological inconsistency two years later, I deem this to be an acceptable indicator that this respondent can be categorized overall as ideologically inconsistent. The fact that

someone's ideology may change over a relatively short period of time should be a reasonable indicator of lability in political attitude.⁸⁹

Another potentially confounding period effect is that of political events of the day. Economic conditions vary and affect different respondents differently; the country may or may not be at war, and may or may not be experiencing social upheavals regarding such matters as race relations and civil rights, or economic turmoil such as the financial crisis of 2008. As in other studies of volatility and sophistication (Converse 1967a; Key 1966 [1968]; Lewis-Beck 2008, 288-9; Shaw 2008), I have chosen not to attempt to control for these forces but have instead allowed for the vicissitudes of political events and their effects upon citizen attitudes to suggest ways in which changing events may be causing attitude change in a more general way. Controlling for the effect of specific types of current events or attitudes among different groups at different times could be illuminating but such controls have been left aside in the interest of parsimony.

Attitude changes among citizens can be accounted for quantitatively, while qualitatively relating those attitude changes to historical developments. Volatility in voting behavior and ideological inconsistency can likewise be related to political events and conditions. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, to assess how different types of issues may or may not have a stronger, weaker, null, or negative relationship to volatility, or to the aggregate volatility of a targeted social group.

The third period effect that should be considered is the changing party alignment of voters. For strategic reasons, in the 1948-1972 period, Republicans moved to appeal to conservative southerners whose historical Democratic alignment became less and less

⁸⁹ I also note the study by Highton (2009) arguing that determinants of sophistication are more permanent and largely in place in the high school years.

congruent with their political norms during a period when northern Democrats and the majority of the party overall had become more liberal. As the candidate and party-in-government alignments changed, so did the alignment of voters. This began with Strom Thurmond's candidacy for president on the States' Rights ticket offering Democrats of the "solid south" an alternative to the Democratic party and culminating in the use of the Republican "southern strategy" in 1964 and 1968 that appealed to conservative southerners whose political philosophy, particularly with regard to the civil rights of African-Americans, increasingly diverged from that of the majority of Democrats. I do not consider this realignment to be a phenomenon that would confound the analyses conducted in this dissertation, however, because I deem this development to be just one additional, albeit dramatic, example of an issue-like "current event" that voters may or may not be aware of, or engaged with, that can affect party loyalty.

Candidate Quality

Candidate quality in presidential elections is another potentially confounding effect. Some candidates are charismatic and exciting while others are less so. Can an unexciting candidate confound the effect of issues? Certainly. Can a candidate perceived as less competent confound one's usual loyalties on the basis of issues? Yes. Here again, I argue that these qualities are issue-like and can be thought of as political stimuli right along with issue positions, and have effect only insofar as citizens are engaged with politics and aware of the choices and issues candidates respond to.

Incumbency

Incumbency is another potentially confounding effect. Incumbents are known to enjoy a huge advantage in congressional elections and other lower-office elections due to

their name and face recognition, established networks of supporters, and track records. This cannot be said to be so in the case of presidents or vice presidents. Indeed, there is very little pattern to presidential incumbency, and this phenomenon offers no guidance in terms of the electoral advantage or disadvantage it may provide. Truman, unelected to the top of the ticket in 1944, only won narrowly in 1948. Two-term vice president Richard Nixon lost narrowly to the less-well-known Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960. Lyndon Johnson's 1964 reelection came on the heels of the horrifying assassination of JFK, and he was neither an elected nor long-standing incumbent. Neither was Gerald Ford. Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush were elected incumbents who were defeated, and Al Gore, despite an arguably tainted resolution of a statistical tie in the pivotal state of Florida, and other questionable polling occurrences in this election, lost despite his high level of recognition as vice president. Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush were incumbents who were reelected (the last somewhat narrowly) during periods of widely varying economic conditions and with widely varying social and geopolitical environments.

Between 1948 and 2004, there have been 15 presidential elections, and of those, ten had incumbents running. The six years in which an *elected* incumbent ran were 1956, 1972, 1984, 1992, 1996, and 2004. In two of these elections, the incumbent lost (Carter and G.H.W. Bush). If we accept that the presidents not elected to their first term were in fact "incumbents," then three lost (add Ford to the list), and two won narrowly (Truman and George W. Bush). Since only 10 of 15 elections had an incumbent running, and seven of the 10 running incumbents won (Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush) – but only five in a robust manner – there is not a strong

argument to be made that incumbency in presidential elections is a reliably important enough force to include in models of volatility. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any pattern to aggregate volatility in relation to incumbent victory or loss as elections in which there was a strong incumbent winner (1956, 1964, 1972, 1984, and 1996) all occurred in periods of greatly varying levels of volatility.

In the cases of reelected incumbents, in their first terms, Clinton and Reagan presided over relatively peaceful periods of relative economic soundness; Eisenhower presided over a period of war (Korea) and one of the more tense periods of the Cold War, along with a relatively stable economy save for a short recession at the end of his second term. Richard Nixon presided over a period of war (Vietnam) and another period of Cold War tension along with a faltering economy, and George W. Bush also presided over a period of war, and later, an economy that weakened to the point of disaster. I thus include these potentially confounding effects under the rubric of varying “political events of the day” that should not be included as causal variables. Presidential performance, I argue, is part of the political environment – stimuli that voters may or may not be affected by depending upon their own levels of political engagement, interest, and aptitude.

High-Stimulus Elections, Low-Stimulus Elections, and Incumbency

Disentangling the effect of changing historical issues upon the electoral fortunes of a wide variety of types of incumbents would be a dissertation-length project in itself – or more – and I have no theories to offer addressing the possibility that there are reliable patterns to such a relationship. Given the wide variety of outcomes in presidential elections, and the fact that really *all* presidential elections are high-stimulus elections, even if one were to say that there *were* in fact some “low-stimulus” elections – perhaps

1956, 1984, and 1996 (a very debatable proposition) – and one wished to argue that low-stimulus elections favor the incumbent, it is by no means clear that low-stimulus conditions must result in individual partisan stability, or that high-stimulus elections must result in volatility. High stimulus could drive voters to reduce uncertainty by standing pat as easily as it could drive change. Importantly, a problem with the overall concept of high versus low stimulus elections for present purposes is that *all* American presidential elections have been historically, the most “high-stimulus” political events of any kind, and the notion of a “low-stimulus” presidential election really is a contradiction in terms.

7. Controls and Independent-Variable Interactions

Statistical results are presented showing frequency distributions of volatile voters within demographic and behavioral categories, and the appropriate measures of significance and correlation. Additionally, binary logistic regression models are employed in order to show the relative power of different independent variables in explaining volatile voting behavior and ideological eclecticism.

Demographics such as age, gender, race, and marital status are frequently employed as controls in analyses of voting behavior and are included in the regression models provided in Chapters VIII and IX. These control variables also provide substantial explanatory power in showing demographic patterns in volatile voting.

Interactions between selected variables such as political sophistication and media usage, and ideological eclecticism and sophistication were tested but these interactions were not statistically significant and were dropped from the logistic regression models.

VI. An Enumeration of Volatile Voters

Overview

A broad array of scholarship appearing since the 1940s has shown that the number of citizens exhibiting volatile voting behavior in presidential elections is well exceeded by the number of voters who are reliably loyal to one party at the polls. Nearly all published studies, however, have been constrained by needlessly short time frames in which such behavior has been examined: *two* consecutive presidential elections. The present accounting of volatile voters, using ANES panel studies, expands this time frame to *three* consecutive presidential elections and reveals far more volatility in the electorate than has thus far been reported.

Analyses of individual-level data from the 1956-1958-1960, 1972-1974-1976 and 2000-2002-2004 ANES panel surveys⁹⁰ are provided showing that when tabulated across three consecutive presidential elections, and when accounting for voters who occasionally abstain, the frequency of volatile voting behavior substantially exceeds the levels obtainable in analyses across any two presidential elections within a panel study. This expansion of the analytical time frame reveals that volatile voters have represented between 50.5 and 60.7 of the electorate since 1948 (excluding consistent nonvoters), and that the modal American voter is volatile.

The classic studies of Campbell et al. ([1960] 1976),⁹¹ Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1948),⁹² and many others that would follow, reported that stable party preference was pervasive across the American electorate. But later research by Nie et al. (1976)

⁹⁰ The 1956-1958-1960, 1972-1974-1976 and 2000-2002-2004 ANES panel studies include voting-behavior data on the presidential election prior to each of these studies, respectively, those held in 1948, 1968 and 1996.

⁹¹ See tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.5 on pp. 125, 126 and 139 respectively in Campbell et al.

⁹² Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968, xxxii) write that “Fully 77 percent of the panel members said that their parents and grandparents had voted consistently for one or the other of the major political parties, and they maintained these family traditions in the 1940 election.”

challenged these findings, stating that the data reported by Campbell et al. were uniquely endemic to the 1950s, and that the subsequently high salience of issues such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War in the 1960s deeply affected voting behavior in ways that trumped inherited and habitual party preferences.⁹³ Nie et al. found that voters had become less loyal to parties, and wrote that by the early 1970s, “over half of voters ... reported that their presidential vote had not been constant in party terms” (1976, 54).⁹⁴ These data were derived from responses to the 1972 ANES question “Have you always voted for the same party or have you voted for different parties for president?” The same query in the 1976 ANES Time Series Study resulted in 54.0 percent of respondents saying they do not always vote for the same party for president,⁹⁵ and this query in the 1980 ANES major panel resulted in 57.9 percent saying that they were not party-loyal in presidential voting. The data presented herein affirm the findings of Nie et al. and the aforementioned 1980 survey results and extend these analyses using election-specific presidential vote-choice responses in the ANES panel surveys that include party-vote data for the 1948-1952-1956, 1968-1972-1976, and 1996-2000-2004 series of elections. Proportions of volatile voters in the electorate are reported in this chapter as approximating those indicated by the responses to the 1972, 1976, and 1980 ANES “party loyalty” questions regarding presidential voting mentioned above. These higher

⁹³ Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 14) argue in turn that data presented by Nie et al. are peculiar to the 1960s, and that perhaps “no period” can be considered “fully typical” when one is seeking out trends in voting behavior. But data showing that between 50.5 and 60.7 percent of voters (excluding consistent nonvoters) have not been party loyal in presidential elections since the 1960s, and the 1980 ANES party loyalty measures cited above, nonetheless remain compelling in support of Nie et al. Another factor to consider are shifts due to the realignment of southern Democrats to the Republican party which begins in the 1964-1968 period (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008, 155). These voters may not have been shifting ideologically, but were certainly shifting party identification, which in itself gives credence to the notion that these voters were paying attention to politics and acting in response to new political information.

⁹⁴ The data source for Nie et al. appears to be the 1972 ANES.

⁹⁵ ANES 1980 Major Panel; http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/1980_panelmajor/1980_panelmajor.htm (accessed 8.5.09). Unfortunately, the ANES discontinued this question after 1980.

levels of volatility serve to support arguments that political issues do indeed matter to voters, that political information and campaign communications drive voters to break their habits of voting behavior, and that the importance of the elusive “swing voter” to electoral outcomes is not a myth.

2. Data and Method

Statistical issues regarding over-reporting of turnout, over-reporting for the winner, recall error, panel attrition, and other forms of missing data, have been discussed in Chapter V of this dissertation, and apply to this chapter and all chapters reporting on survey data analyses. The data and method sections in this chapter primarily describe the coding of data, the operationalization of variables, and the decision-making process employed in these tasks.

Analyses of “swing” voting behavior across three presidential elections (using ANES panel studies) were previously performed by Shaw (2008, 88). In Shaw’s study

Anyone casting three consecutive votes for the same party is identified as a party voter, anyone abstaining in all three elections is a nonvoter, and everyone else is a swing voter. Thus voters who abstain or vote third party in one or two elections are swing voters, as are those who oscillate between the major party candidates across elections.

Importance of Peripheral Voters

Following Shaw (2008), I have included as volatile what Key ([1966] 1968, 22) referred to as an “in-and-out” voter. This type of voter, also referred to by Campbell (1966) as a “peripheral” voter, is one who may or may not be party loyal, but who abstains on occasion. Key suggested that these voters may be persons who were “prevented from voting ... by causes beyond their control.” One explanation is simple

practicality: “no legal residence;” “out of the country;” “they were ill.” But others, “doubtless far more numbers,” according to Key, include:

... persons with a low interest in politics, the apolitical, the apathetic, the indifferent, and those who vote only under the pressure of powerful stimuli or the exceptionally persuasive nudging of party workers.⁹⁶

I thus consider a volatile voter to be one who is either a peripheral voter, or one who has voted for different parties or third parties across three presidential elections.

The importance of these voters to election outcomes is crucial. Campbell (1966) described volatile voters as being those having lower levels of political interest, but “whose motivation to vote has been sufficiently increased by the stimulation of the election to carry them to the polls” (1966, 43). Turnout in any given election, according to Campbell, “is largely a question of how many of the less interested, less responsive people are sufficiently stimulated by the political circumstances of the moment to make the effort to vote” (1966, 43). Campbell also notes here that a “stirring issue” or an “attractive candidate” is what will drive these otherwise politically apathetic individuals to the polls “in large numbers.” Low-stimulus elections, however, “leave the electoral decision largely to the high-interest core voters” (1966, 43).

⁹⁶ The relatively low percentage of consistent nonvoters since 1948, between 2.6 and 8.7 percent, suggests that a rather large percentage of the electorate is comprised of these types of “in-and-outers.” Actual voting eligible population (VEP) turnout (derived from United States Census calculations) ranged from 51.7 and 63.8 percent between 1948 and 2000 (McDonald 2011; McDonald and Popkin 2001, 966), with a mean turnout rate in that period of 57.1 percent. The mean percentage of consistent nonvoters since 1948 has been, according to my accounting (using ANES data), 5.65 percent, and the mean turnout rate, combined with the mean consistent nonvoter rate equals 62.8 percent, suggesting that an average of 37.2 percent of the VEP has consisted of occasional nonvoters, and that well over 90 percent of Americans have been voters in some manner in presidential elections – even if they have not been consistent voters. What is not accounted for in these ANES data are “new voters.” The figures in the current study apply to already active voters, and voters making a standing nonvoter decision. The ANES undoubtedly under-samples consistent nonvoters and those reporting themselves to be consistent nonvoters, but there is no data available, to my knowledge, that can validate the number of consistent nonvoters across three elections. Even if the consistent nonvoter segment were three times as high as indicated in my ANES analyses, 26 percent of the electorate would still qualify as “in-and-outers” and 83.1 percent of the electorate would be either regular or occasional voters.

Given the importance of peripheral voters, the present analyses account for such respondents but produce different proportions of volatile voters than Shaw's analyses.⁹⁷ Some of these differences can be explained by the fact that the data provided herein account for 1) certain respondents who indicated in earlier "qualifying" interview questions that they did not vote in a specific election, thus their classification as volatile, and 2) respondents for whom data regarding presidential vote choice in one election are missing, but for whom volatility can be ascertained based on voting data in non-missing panel-waves.⁹⁸ Larger valid sample sizes than Shaw's were thus obtained by extracting usable data from cases that might otherwise have been deleted from analyses due to missing data in one or two panel waves. ANES filtering variables were applied to all datasets in order assure that only respondents selected for the four-year panels were included.⁹⁹

In the ANES panel covering the 1996-2000-2004 period, there are 113 respondents for whom data are missing in the 2004 wave but for whom volatility can be

⁹⁷ In the ANES panel covering the 1996-2000-2004 period, Shaw (2008) lists 190 respondents (23.0 percent) out of N = 826 as nonvoters (2008, 92). The accounting of the present study (N = 894) yields 45 consistent nonvoters across all three of these elections (5.0 percent). In the ANES panel covering the 1968-1972-1976 period, Shaw (2008, 92) tallies 108 nonvoters across all three of these elections (12 percent) out of N = 902, whereas the present accounting (N = 1126) yields 98 consistent nonvoters (8.7 percent). Part of this discrepancy appears to be due to the inclusion in the present analyses of respondents for whom an "INAP" response was recorded. INAP codes are often assigned in ANES party vote tallies when a respondent indicated not voting in an earlier qualifying question. Shaw appears to have coded respondents for whom an INAP response has been recorded as *nonvoters* when only some could be counted as such, and appears to have deleted respondents for whom usable data across two elections is present (where volatility across two elections is indicated), reducing the number of valid responses. In all analyses in the present study, ANES-provided filtering variables were used in order to exclude respondents who were not selected for the panel portion of the ANES surveys in order to maintain the ANES panel sampling scheme. Not using these filtering variables would inflate the number of missing observations due to the inclusion of non-panel respondents. It is not clear whether Shaw used such filtering procedures.

⁹⁸ These include respondents whose behavior fits the following patterns: INM, DNM, RNM, DRM, DIM, RIM, IMM, IIM where D = Democratic, R = Republican, I = third-party vote, N = abstention, and M = missing observation.

⁹⁹ ANES filtering variables used for the 1952-56-60 panel were VAR 600841, VAR 600842, and VAR 600843; for the 1972-74-76, panel, VAR 764002 was used, and for the 2000-02-04 panel, variable P021001 was used.

ascertained based on questions in the 2000 wave regarding presidential vote choice in 1996 and 2000. This represents 9.6 percent of the total (filtered) panel sample of 1187.

In the ANES panel covering the 1968-1972-1976 period, there are 94 respondents for whom data are missing in the 1976 wave but for whom volatility can be ascertained based on questions in the 1972 wave regarding presidential vote choice in 1968 and 1972. This represents 6.8 percent of the total (filtered) panel sample of 1320.

In the ANES panel covering the 1948-1952-1956 period, there are 42 respondents for whom data are missing in the 1956 wave but for whom volatility can be ascertained based on questions in the 1956 wave regarding 1952 and 1948 presidential vote choice. This represents 3.4 percent of the total (filtered) panel sample of 1239.

Volatile voters are coded as those reporting:

- Any combination of votes with votes for more than one party, including cases with missing data for one election and a combination of votes for more than one party in the other two elections
- Any combination of votes or abstentions that includes a third-party vote¹⁰⁰
- Missing data for one or two elections and any third-party vote
- Any combination of votes that includes an abstention and one or more party votes

Nonvoters are coded as those reporting:

- Three abstentions across three elections

Respondents exhibiting *consistent* voting or non-voting behavior across one or two elections but for whom data for a third election are missing have been deleted. The

¹⁰⁰ All third party voters are deemed “volatile” because in no case, according to the available data, could a respondent have voted for the same third party across three elections in a panel study period. Across *two* elections, the maximum number of voters who *could have* voted for the same third-party (the Green Party’s Nader, between 2000 and 2004) in the 1996-2000-2004 period is 4 (0.34 percent in a panel where the valid N = 667); in the 1968-1972-1976 period, the maximum number of voters who *could have* voted for the same third-party candidate (Wallace, between 1968 and 1972) is 8 (0.61 percent in a panel where the valid N = 1108).

reason for this decision is that voters who cross party lines within the span of two elections are clearly volatile in party choice, but it cannot be ascertained whether respondents are *stable* in party choice or consistent nonvoters in cases where information is available for only two of three elections. Respondents for whom data are missing for vote-choice questions, however, are known to exhibit a much higher likelihood of being nonvoters, occasional nonvoters, or volatile in party choice, as has been explained in Chapter V.¹⁰¹ Thus if a bias is created by the removal of these cases, it would cause over-representation of party-loyal voters, and an excessively low estimate of volatility in the American electorate. It will also produce an over-representation of “sophisticated” voters in both the volatile and standpatter categories.

In all analyses presented below, the frequency of volatile voting at the individual level across *three* consecutive presidential elections is compared with the frequency of volatile voting across *two* presidential elections in order to demonstrate how a greater incidence of volatile voting behavior is revealed by the use of a longer time frame. In analyses across two elections, nonvoters are coded as those respondents indicating two abstentions across two elections for which data are available.

Party-loyal voters – those who consistently vote for the same party – are coded as those reporting:

- Two votes for the same party across two elections in two-election analyses
- Three votes for the same party across three elections in three-election analyses

¹⁰¹ See the appendix to this chapter for a breakdown of voting patterns and frequency distributions for each pattern across the ANES panels. As noted above, a pattern of two votes across three elections such as IR, ID, IN, II, DR, DN, NR can definitively indicate volatility, but a pattern of two consistent party votes out of three elections (RR, DD, NN) cannot indicate party loyalty.

V.O. Key's term "standpatter" (1966, ch. 2) is used herein to describe party loyal voters, although it is employed differently. I use the term "volatile," also used by Key (1966, 18) and later by Zaller (2004, 178), to describe those who do not turn out and vote in a consistently party loyal manner. *Consistent nonvoters*, who are known to have not voted in *any* of the three elections covered in the panel studies, are distinguished from *occasional nonvoters*, the latter of which have voted in at least one election and abstained in one or two others. Importantly, definitions of standpat and volatile-voting behavior in the present study eschew any measure of respondent party identification because the phenomenon being studied is not stated party affinity, affiliation, or party registration, but patterns, or lack thereof, in actual voting behavior.

How volatile voting behavior is defined can produce a wide variety of research outcomes. Clearly the shorter the time frame used, the more behavior will appear consistent, and the longer the time frame used, the more opportunity there will be for behavioral inconsistency to appear. Thus, the use of shorter time frames in the preponderance of studies of volatile-voting behavior obscures longer-term individual voting inconsistencies, whereas when inconsistent behavior is assessed across a longer time span more volatility in the electorate overall is revealed.

Tables showing vote patterns across all three panels are provided in the Appendix to this chapter.

3. Distribution of Standpatters, Volatile Voters and Consistent Nonvoters

The analyses shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3 include regular voters as well as occasional nonvoters who move in and out of the electorate, and consistent nonvoters,

and provide comparisons between tabulations of voting behavior across two and three presidential elections.

1996-2000-2004

In the analysis of the 1996-2000-2004 period, reported on in Table 1, a striking difference in the proportion of volatile voters can be seen between the three-election tabulation and the two-election tabulations. Across three elections, 48.0 percent of the valid sample (N = 894) exhibits volatility as compared with 31.3 and 18.4 percent of the sample across two consecutive elections accounted for in the panel (1996-2000; 2000-2004). Note that even though there is a great deal of panel attrition as of the 2004 wave, volatility for many respondents has been ascertained on the basis of behavior across two elections, and by examining responses to earlier “qualifying” questions, thus increasing the valid sample size of the three-election analysis which would otherwise be only N = 590 if the analysis were limited those who responded to vote choice questions for all three elections. This procedure has been used in all three-panel datasets. Also note the much smaller sample size shown in the 2000, 2004 accounting. This difference of 227 cases is attributable to panel attrition, and the lack, in the 2000, 2004 accounting, of 1) cases for which both volatility can be ascertained based on two panel waves that include 1996 voting data (some of which may be missing 2004 data) and 2) cases for which volatility can only be distinguished using data for all three elections.¹⁰²

Cases in the 2000, 2004 accounting for which data are missing for 2004 – much of which is due to panel attrition – have been dropped from the analysis. Since this

¹⁰² Cases that were dropped from the three-election analysis were: two consistent party votes and one missing totaling 150 (13.4 percent); two abstentions and one missing totaling 72 (6.1 percent); one abstention and two missing totaling 37 (3.1). Included in the analysis were cases with two inconsistent votes and one missing totaling 113 (9.6 percent), and cases with one Independent vote and two missing observations totaling 2 (0.2 percent).

accounting does not include a tabulation of 1996 vote choice, only one vote choice across three elections can be known where 2004 wave data are missing.

Table 1.
1996-2000-2004: Distribution of Standpatters, Volatile Voters, and Consistent Nonvoters

Election Years	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Nonvoters (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)	Missing (% of survey N)
1996, 2000 %	596 (56.1)	332 (31.3)	134 (12.6)	1062 (89.5)	125 (10.5)
2000, 2004 %	542 (81.3)	123 (18.4)	2 (0.3)	667 (56.2)	520 (43.8)
1996, 2000, 2004 %	420 (47.0)	429 (48.0)	45 (5.0)	894 (75.3)	293 (24.7)

1968-1972-1976 Period

The analysis shown in Table 2 reveals a great difference in the proportion of volatile voters between the three-election tabulation and the two-election tabulations. Across three elections, 55.4 percent of the valid sample (N = 1126) exhibits volatility as compared with 34.2 and 35.8 percent across two consecutive elections accounted for in the panel (1968, 1972 and 1972, 1976 respectively).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Cases that were dropped from the three-election analysis were: Two consistent party votes and one missing totaling 126 (9.6 percent); two abstentions and one missing totaling 43 (3.3 percent); one abstention and two missing totaling 6 (0.5 percent). Included in the analysis were cases with two inconsistent votes and one missing totaling 98 (7.5 percent), and cases with one Independent vote and two missing observations totaling 3 (0.2 percent).

Table 2.
1968-1972-1976: Distribution of Standpatters, Volatile Voters, and Consistent Nonvoters

Election Years	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Nonvoters (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)	Missing (% of survey N)
1968, 1972 %	581 (52.4)	379 (34.2)	148 (13.4)	1108 (83.9)	212 (16.1)
1972, 1976 %	586 (50.0)	419 (35.8)	166 (14.2)	1171 (88.7)	149 (11.3)
1968, 1972, 1976 %	404 (35.9)	624 (55.4)	98 (8.7)	1126 (85.3)	194 (14.7)

1948-1952-1956 Period

The analysis shown in Table 3 also reveals a large difference in the proportion of volatile voters between the three-election tabulation and the two-election tabulations. Across three elections, 51.3 percent of the valid sample (N = 949) exhibits volatility as compared with 38.1 and 21.0 percent across two consecutive elections accounted for in the panel (1948, 1952 and 1952, 1956 respectively).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Cases that were dropped from the three-election analysis were: two consistent party votes and one missing totaling 73 (5.9 percent); two abstentions and one missing totaling 118 (19.5 percent); one abstention and two missing totaling 38 (3.1 percent). Included in analysis were cases with two inconsistent votes and one missing totaling 42 (3.4 percent). There were no cases of one Independent vote and two missing observations.

Table 3.
1948-1952-1956: Distribution of Standpatters, Volatile Voters, and Consistent Nonvoters

Election Years	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Nonvoters (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)	Missing (% of survey N)
1948, 1952 %	508 (56.1)	345 (38.1)	52 (5.7)	905 (73.0)	334 (27.0)
1952, 1956 %	712 (65.6)	228 (21.0)	145 (13.4)	1085 (87.6)	154 (12.4)
1948, 1952, 1956 %	437 (46.0)	487 (51.3)	25 (2.6)	949 (76.6)	290 (23.4)

Summary of Volatile Voting Across Three ANES Panels

Table 4 summarizes the distribution of standpatters, volatile voters, and consistent nonvoters in all three ANES panel studies. In all cases, there is a substantially larger number of volatile voters revealed when voting behavior is analyzed across three elections than are revealed when analyzed across two elections.

Table 4.
Summary of Standpatter, Volatile Voter, and Nonvoter Distribution Across Three Periods Covered by ANES Panels

Election Years	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Nonvoters (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)
1948, 1952, 1956 %	437 (46.0)	487 (51.3)	25 (2.6)	949
1968, 1972, 1976 %	404 (35.9)	624 (55.4)	98 (8.7)	1126
1996, 2000, 2004	420 (47.0)	429 (48.0)	45 (5.0)	894

When limited to consistently active voters, the number of party-loyal voters exceeds volatile voters. But such an accounting of voting behavior, shown in Table 5, excludes the tabulation of occasional abstention as a political act that can have decisive importance in elections. Note also that this tabulation contains a tremendously high proportion of missing data due to listwise deletion of nonvoters and occasional nonvoters.

When the accounting of volatile voters is limited to consistently active voters and occasional abstainers, but excludes consistent nonvoters, as shown in Table 6, the proportion of volatile voters increases, and consistently exceeds half the electorate across all three historical periods analyzed. This accounting of volatile voters and standpatters is the one that is used in all analyses of volatile voting behavior provided in Chapter IX.

Table 5.
Volatile Voters and Standpatters – Consistently Active Voters Only

Time Period	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)	Missing (% of survey N)
1948, 1952, 1956	437 (66.2)	223 (33.8)	660 (53.3)	579 (46.7)
1968, 1972, 1976	404 (58.1)	291 (41.9)	695 (52.7)	625 (47.3)
1996, 2000, 2004	420 (71.2)	170 (28.8)	590 (49.7)	597 (50.3)

Table 6.
Volatile Voters and Standpatters – Excluding Consistent Nonvoters

Time Period	Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile (% of valid N)	Valid N (% of survey N)	Missing (% of survey N)
1948, 1952, 1956	437 (47.3)	487 (52.7)	924 (74.6)	315 (25.4)
1968, 1972, 1976	404 (39.3)	624 (60.7)	1028 (77.9)	292 (22.1)
1996, 2000, 2004	420 (49.5)	429 (50.5)	849 (71.5)	338 (28.5)

4. Voting Across Three Elections Compared to Voting Across Two Elections in the Measurement of Voter Volatility

Rice and Hilton (1996) traced respondent partisanship across three waves of each of five ANES panels and showed that over 60 percent of the electorate was labile in party identification, in this case, along a seven-point scale of partisanship. These analyses were contrasted with analyses across two waves of the panels, demonstrating that the use of three waves instead of two produces “a much more dynamic portrait of partisanship” (1996, 192-3). Similarly, tracing the presidential vote of individuals across three elections reveals greater inconsistency in party support across the electorate as shown in tables 1, 2 and 3.

Note that there are seventeen possible combinations of inconsistent votes across *three* elections (RRI, RRD, IID, IIR, DDR, DDI, DIR, III, RRN, DDN, IIN, NIR, DIN, NDR, NND, NNR, NNI) but only seven possible combinations of inconsistent votes across *two* elections (ID, IR, DR, II, IN, DN, RN).¹⁰⁵ Additionally, there are only *three* possible combinations of standpatter votes across three elections: DDD, RRR, III, or in the case of two elections, and DD, RR and II in the case of two elections. Thus there is an

¹⁰⁵ D = Democratic vote, R = Republican vote, I = Independent or Third Party vote, N = Abstention in a particular election. These combinations are tabulated without regard to the order of the votes.

ever-increasing number of possibilities for inconsistent voting as the number of elections increases, whereas the number of possibilities of consistent voting remains fixed (for example, DD, RR, and II for two elections, DDD, RRR and III for three elections, DDDD, RRRR and IIII for four, and so on).

Accounting of Party Loyalty in Past Studies of Presidential Voting

Table 7 compares the results of a variety of studies reporting on the volatility of voters and the time frames used in these studies. The analyses referred to in these studies account for actual voting behavior and not change in party identification.

Table 7.
Studies Reporting on the Incidence of Standpatters in the Electorate

Study/Author	% Standpatters	Time Period	Time Frame	Data Source
Key 1966*	63~73	1940-1960	2 elections	ANES, NORC, AIPO (Gallup)
Janowitz and Marvick 1964 ^{*a}	48.6	1948-1952	2 elections	ANES
Converse 1967a*	53.1	1956-1960	2 elections	ANES
Dobson & St. Angelo 1975*	55.3	1956-1960	2 elections	ANES
Pomper 1977	72.7	1968-1972	2 elections	ANES
Pedersen 1978	77.4	1956-1960	2 elections	ANES
Keith et al. 1992	70~80	1972-1976	2 elections	ANES
Shaw 2008 ^{*†a,b}	45~53	1968-2004	3 elections	ANES
Lewis-Beck et al. 2008	NA	1996-2000	2 elections	ANES

*Nonvoters included in distribution. † Study uses panel data. ^a Study uses recall data pertaining to voting in earlier elections. ^b Listwise deletion appears to have been used for missing cases.

Responses to ANES Questions about Party-Loyalty in Voting Compared to Analyses of Voting Behavior

The analysis provided by Nie et al., noted above, showing that voters who did not cast ballots in a consistently partisan manner in presidential elections comprised more than *half* of the electorate ([1976] 1999, 54-55) is derived from responses to the ANES question “Have you always voted for the same party or have you voted for different parties for president?” These authors appear to have used data from the 1972 ANES. Not

included in the study by Nie et al. was the response to this question in the 1976 ANES and in the 1980 ANES “Major Panel,” but data from both surveys are provided herein in Table 8, along with responses to this question from selected ANES studies in which this query was made.¹⁰⁶ Beginning in 1952, a steady increase in reported volatile voting can be seen, with the frequency exceeding half by 1972.

Table 8.
ANES responses to the question “Have you always voted for the same party or have you voted for different parties for president?”

ANES Survey	Always Same	Different	N
1952	909	460	1369
%	66.4	33.6	
1956	798	590	1388
%	57.5	42.5	
1960	556	445	1001
%	55.6	44.5	
1968	708	610	1318
%	53.8	46.3	
1972	945	1128	2073
%	45.6	54.4	
1976	835	980	1815
%	46.0	54.0	
1980 Major Panel	269	370	639
%	42.1	57.9	

5. Discussion and Conclusions

When analyses of inconsistent voting are inclusive of nonvoters and occasional nonvoters, and include reporting of voting and abstention across *three* consecutive

¹⁰⁶ There have been a total of 12 ANES surveys in which this question has been asked: 1952, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1962, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974, 1976 and 1980. DK and nonvoter responses in these analyses have been excluded along with INAP responses that include respondents too young to vote in the previous election, those ineligible due to citizenship status, and residents of Washington, DC.

presidential elections, volatile-voting behavior appears substantially more common in the American electorate than has thus far been reported in political-science literature. A different picture emerges, however, when the responses pertaining to any one of the three presidential election years in these panels is omitted. For example, when 1996 vote-choice data are dropped from analyses of the 1996-2000-2004 period, the proportion of respondents exhibiting volatile voting behavior drops to 18.4 percent of the sample from 48.0 percent (when consistent nonvoters are included). As should be obvious, the number of opportunities for inconsistent voting by any individual will increase as the number of elections surveyed increases, thus claims that partisanship is a durable phenomenon in American politics must be qualified by the time frame of any particular analysis.

Responses to the question “Have you always voted for the same party or have you voted for different parties for president?” in the 1972 and 1980 ANES surveys produce additional evidence that since the early 1970s – and most likely, earlier, since these data comprise retrospective accounts of voting behavior – there have been more volatile voters in the electorate than standpatters. 54.0 percent of those who responded to this question in 1972, and 57.9 percent of those who responded to this question in 1980 indicate volatility while analyses in the present study reporting on actual voting across three elections indicate proportions of volatility in the electorate of 48.0 percent in the 1996-2000-2004 period, 55.4 percent volatility in the 1968-1972-1976 period, and 51.3 percent in the 1948-1952-1956 period. If the ANES party-loyalty question noted above does indeed produce an accurate measure of volatile voting, a truer accounting of inconsistency in actual election-specific voting behavior may therefore necessitate the use of broader time frames and the inclusion of occasional nonvoters in data analyses.

E.E. Schattschneider ([1942] 2004, 49) wrote “the movements of voters in and out of the reservoir of nonvoters [has] more influence on the outcome of election contests than the movement of voters from one party to the other.” In the spirit of this observation, occasional nonvoters have been included in the accounting of volatile voters to produce a reckoning of volatile-voting behavior in the electorate that does not ignore the importance of abstention as a political act, or of failure to vote by some citizens as a result of demobilizing persuasion, or other less political causes.

In *The Responsible Electorate* (1966, 18) V.O. Key, Jr. remarked, “It would be an error to suppose that switchers are eternally volatile and that standpatters are forever stable.” By broadening the time frame in which observations of voting behavior are made, such errors may be reduced. Evidence of greater volatility in the American electorate also provides support for arguments against the notion of partisan polarization in the United States and provides a new basis for analyses of demographic and attitudinal aspects of voting behavior. A wide variety of political-science literature argues that volatile voters are nearly impossible to account for demographically, and that these voters are, by and large, lacking in political sophistication. But with 48.0 to 55.4 percent of the American electorate shown to exhibit inconsistent voting behavior (50.5 to 60.7 percent when consistent nonvoters are excluded), there is great potential for demonstrating that volatile voters may be more identifiable than past research has shown – and that many more such voters are politically engaged and knowledgeable than has been reported in a wide variety of past scholarship.

VII. An Accounting of Political Sophistication in the Electorate

1. Overview of the Research Task

In order to test the hypothesis that volatile voters, or some important subset of them, may be politically sophisticated and motivated in their voting behavior by political issues and information, it is first necessary to define political sophistication and quantify the number of citizens possessing this attribute. And, in order to define political sophistication and construct meaningful measures of this variable, it is necessary to determine a *level* of sophistication that is necessary to accomplishing some specific political goal or purpose citizens presumably have. Elements of sophistication necessary to the goal may then be established, and it can then be known whether, when, or if, sophistication does indeed accomplish that goal.

I first examine what type of political sophistication is relevant to citizen decision-making in elections, and then present measures of these kinds of sophistication and a rationale for their use, along with approaches used in data handling. I then provide analyses showing the distribution of political sophistication across the electorate using separate and composite measures in each of three time periods. I also discuss the validity of these measures and their utility for understanding volatile voting and levels of ideological consistency.

The end for which political sophistication is presumed to be a means is often articulated in terms of voting “correctly,” “competently,” “rationally,” or “responsibly.” As noted earlier, Lau and Redlawsk (1997, 586) define “correct” voting as acting in accordance with what a particular voter would do if he or she had all of the information needed to vote in a way that serves “*the values and beliefs of the individual voter*”

[emphasis in original] as that voter would express those values and beliefs – as opposed to a presumed demographic interest. This standard assumes a fixed level of sophistication with regard to the voter’s own interests, and is of primary utility in assessing a voter’s information processing capacities in understanding political choices presented. McKelvey and Ordeshook (1986, 211), however, view correct voting as acting in the interest of one’s “individual welfare,” much in line with Downs’s notion of rational action being that which achieves the “economic ends of the actor” (1957, 20). Lupia (2006) similarly defines “competent” voting, but notes that such competence can be achieved, depending on the circumstances, with a relatively low level of sophistication. Page and Shapiro (1992) define “rational” opinions as those formed in a manner that is “meaningful” (xi) and logical as opposed to one that could be interpreted as random, while a “responsible” or “rational” voter for Key is “moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public policy,” of “governmental performance,” and the personality of a candidate (Key [1966] 1968 7-8).

Fiorina (1981) argues that for a citizen to engage effectively in “retrospective voting” – voting that is informed negatively or positively by the performance of an incumbent official or party – the voter must simply be able to “see or feel the *results*” [emph. in original] of recently established policies and the decisions of the officials currently in office. Citizens need not have a clear understanding of the policies themselves; they need only “calculate the changes in their own welfare” (1981, 5). Fiorina contrasts this level of knowledge to the necessities of “responsible,” “issue-based” voting set forth by Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980, 169-170) – that a citizen must “cognize” an issue enough to have a “minimal intensity of feeling” about it, and have a

perception that one party or candidate represents their own position on that issue better than another. The citizen must then be sufficiently compelled by this information to formulate a voting decision. Fiorina suggests that Campbell et al. set the bar too high for a standard for responsible voting (1981, 10) for reasons noted above, and because he argues that the voter simply needs to choose policy experts, not policy details. But neither of these standards suggests that a highly technical understanding of politics is required to vote responsibly. There are many other standards of political sophistication in the literature, and I have provided a review of them, and the assumptions underlying them, in Chapter III, including those offered by Converse (1964), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) Fiske et al. (1990), Luskin (1990), Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994), and Zaller ([1992] 2003).

I have proposed a standard of political sophistication based on different assumptions than those in the literature just cited. Candidates are not abstractions. They are professional experts hired to do specialized tasks in the interest of expressed constituent preferences (Pitkin [1967] 1972, 136-9, 211-12). Plato (trans. 1974) is often seen as harshly undemocratic for suggesting that experts, and not ordinary citizens should run the government, the most vivid example, perhaps, being provided by his “parable of the ship,” in Book VI (488-9), illustrating that perhaps a trained pilot, rather than an untrained crew-member, might be the best choice to command a vessel. What is meant here implicitly is, “ordinary citizen” members of an assembly in a direct democracy are comparable to an untrained man wishing to command a ship even though expert sailors are available. In modern nation-states, these kinds of division-of-labor schemes are particularly unavoidable. Even in the “Cincinnatus” model of government service, in

which each citizen takes a turn at governing and then returns to private life, one must at least temporarily become an expert specialist in governance, with knowledge of the issues for which policy or legislation will be formulated, parliamentary procedure, and other government processes. Political representatives or agents must also master the technical aspects of issues such as taxation, defense, business regulation, civil rights, education, and so forth. I therefore argue that the process of voting is more akin to selecting an expert professional than it is akin to selecting an ideological path, policy platform, or some other completely transparent, fully disclosed and predictable political program. I also reason that it is enough for voters to know that one party wants, for example, more regulation of abortion, contraception, sexuality, banking, workplaces, pollutants, or land use, and another wants less regulation, without reference to ideological labels or other overarching categorical descriptors.

We choose expert service providers regularly – from accountants to physicians to architects; from food preparers to boiler repairmen to hairstylists, and we need not possess the same knowledge, training, and experience as these experts. In fact, it is not particularly rational for a client to invest in gaining these skills and duplicating the expert's efforts. There is, of course, some appropriate level of knowledge required that enables the customer to provide “client input” and to be able to assess whether the professional has done a good job. But anything further would be superfluous and a waste of time energy, and resources.

If indeed “the guest will judge better of a feast than the cook,” as Aristotle wrote in the *Politics* (Aristotle trans. 2004), certainly some knowledge of food may be needed for such judgmental ability – whether fish has been over-cooked, wine spoiled, curry too

liberally added, balsamic vinegar overpowering truffle oil. Medical patients are expected to know details of their food intake, exercise habits, and allergies, whether they have been experiencing abnormal breathing, elimination, or sleep patterns and so on as we see in physician's questionnaires. Patients, clients, and diners must all have a fairly detailed understanding of the problem they want to solve – and the ability to judge whether it has in fact been solved satisfactorily. But they need not know, for example, how hot an oven should be to bake cheesecake, what kind of ophthalmic microscope to use in an examination, how much weight a ten-inch diameter steel column can carry, what case law supports the tax deduction of a home office, or what kind of drill speed is needed to clean out a cavity in a molar. In political decision-making, the ability to categorize a policy position as liberal or conservative may be helpful, but it is not necessary. Even political scientists have a tough time making this kind of distinction. Is F.A. Hayek a “liberal?” He seems to think so (Hayek [1944] 1994, xxxvi, 21). David Harvey (2007) calls free-trade, free-market policies “neo-liberal.” Yet the proponents of these policies are routinely referred to as “conservatives” because of their approach to government budgets.¹⁰⁷ This is not the place to engage in an etymological and rhetorical analysis of how these terms are used and misused, and what subtle distinctions might be made among them. It should be enough to say that these terms can be confusing, and often provide, instead of precise descriptions of specific political attitudes and ideas, categories of politics that are largely unnecessary to understanding the political choices voters confront.

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, conservatives, in the tradition of Burke ([1790] 1987), are so because they presumably are not in favor of supplanting long and “naturally” established institutions with idealistic and untested ones. This is a notion that has little relevance to preserving thrifty government under the assumption that the government's form must be one that regulates economic activity minimally.

One standard worth considering is the application of the kinds of assessment procedures businesses use to hire personnel to choosing politicians – with criteria such as training, experience, personality and interpersonal skills, and ethics. But there are two key differences between hiring in civil society and hiring a politician through the electoral process: 1) politicians, assuming all of these other things are equal, may have different goals – “ends,” or “ideologies” – and 2) the disposition of services that politicians provide are often contested by competing interests on the part of constituents, for example, a politician who provides work-related benefits to public employees may be subtracting benefits from property owners in the form of higher taxes. Such zero-sum results are not the kinds of outcomes that occur after hiring a worker to perform a specific productive task. Choosing a public official is unlike the hiring of an employee who is presumably hired to work cooperatively toward an agreed-to goal within an organization rather than competitively toward contentious goals within a government. Voting for a political representative is, however, much like choosing a legal advocate to provide representation in a multiplicity of cases. I assume voters know that politicians make hundreds of decisions, and not just a few salient ones. Accordingly, voters may care a great deal about who their government advocate is in a general, attitudinal way with regard to competence – in the absence of deep knowledge of political processes, or of the many policy questions that may arise, as is argued in Chapter III.

Why These Measures?

Having reviewed past approaches to the measurement of political sophistication and having assessed their shortcomings in Chapter III, a less normatively confounded approach to measuring political sophistication may now be formulated. One

commonsensical starting point is that different types of voters gather and process political information differently (Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994). They may make voting decisions and formulate political opinions on the basis of their own pre-existing stances on specific political issues, overall ideology, or on the basis of candidate or party attitudes they later encounter. Or, they may simply vote for certain parties or candidates by force of habit and familiarity. A combination of these factors, as is found in most analyses of political decision-making and opinion formation, are usually in play, and the combination of these forces, according to some theories, will often produce cross-pressure in the mind of voters (Hillygus and Shields 2008; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968).

In accordance with what I have argued in chapter III, I employ direct measurement of education, political knowledge, interest, and engagement evidenced by some action related to politics other than voting, and also, a five-point (0-4) composite sophistication scale consisting of the variables just mentioned. Using these measures, the analyses provided below show there is a far greater proportion of politically sophisticated citizens than such scholars as Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980), Converse (1964, 218), Field and Anderson (1969, 388), Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 279) and Nie et al. ([1976] 1999, 15) have alleged. I do, however, for purposes of comparison with earlier studies, and as a gauge of the effect of cross-pressure, provide analyses in Chapter VIII in which measures of ideological consistency are used as predictors of political sophistication.

2. Data and Method

The most pressing question in an analysis of this sort is, of course, how “sophistication” is to be defined. What level of political knowledge and engagement must a voter exhibit in order to qualify as sophisticated? Standard measures in past studies

have included education (Sniderman et al. 1991, 21), and knowledge of which party controls the House of Representatives (Converse 1967a, 139), as well as measures of engagement which can be evidenced by regularity of political discussion, contacting a public official, and expressed interest in political campaigns.¹⁰⁸ All of these measures have been shown to be useful and valid, but all necessarily capture only fragments of a voter's overall political behavior and aptitude. I have therefore constructed a composite variable consisting of all four of these measures. Those respondents who provide positive indications of sophistication in two or more of these measures are considered sophisticated.

I have argued in the first section of this chapter that high levels of sophistication are not necessary to voting in a "correct" or "rational" manner. But I also argue that it is necessary to establish what amount of political comprehension is required in order for the citizen to judge whether a political result has been achieved. Fiorina (1981, 7-11) maintains that for a voter to make an issue-based retrospective voting decision, that voter should be able to comprehend an issue and recognize whether an outcome has been achieved with respect to that issue. The voter need not, however, be conversant in the workings of the instruments used to achieve political outcomes. Fiorina used war and peace as an example, arguing that voters will all agree that they want peace, but may not care about how it is achieved policy-wise. This is too simplistic a standard. Voters may *not* all have the same policy goals in mind. Voters might, for example, actually *want* war, as the high levels of support for attacking Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington would indicate. Or, they might not care

¹⁰⁸ Shaw (2008) uses a measure of whether a respondent is "informed" or not, but does not specify the source of this data.

about lower taxes on investments because they are not wealthy. Such political ends that may be desired by voters are prior to political means, and voters inevitably have differing political goals – and choose candidates whose positions align with those goals. They must not only cognize issues and assess whether outcomes related to those issues have been achieved, but also cognize whether the outcomes achieved are the ones they think are good – for them personally, and for the nation in which they live. This standard of voter competence requires that a voter not only be cognizant of politics but have the ability to place political developments into a context that makes their political cognizance meaningful and valuable. I have therefore established that a positive indication of sophistication in two of these four variables will stand as an overall indication of sophistication because while one positive response would certainly indicate a voter's desire or ability to process political information; any two would either indicate high levels of engagement, a combination of high engagement level with high knowledge level, or a high level of intellectual aptitude along with either high engagement or high political knowledge – in effect, some potential, at minimum, for active intellectual *application* of elements of political sophistication.

Selection of Variables and Construction of Measures

Variables that are related to political sophistication differ somewhat in each of the ANES panels used, and the reasons for selecting each of these variables are explained in the discussion accompanying the analyses of each panel survey. Two of four questions are identical across all three panels. In the other two questions, due to an overall change in questions used by the ANES, somewhat different questions had to be used. The sample

sizes vary somewhat in each period in which an accounting of political sophistication is provided due to item non-response in the surveys.

In order to gauge political sophistication as a bundle concept using direct measures, a five-point scalar variable was constructed using four dichotomous ANES variables gauging political sophistication and engagement. The assembly of this variable is described in the next several pages. A score of “0” on the scale indicates no positive responses among the four dummy variables, while a score of “4” indicates positive responses for all variables. Percentage distributions of voters providing positive responses for each separate measure of sophistication across the ANES panel study samples are shown in Table 9.¹⁰⁹ The choice of measures of political knowledge and engagement that are available in the ANES is, however, somewhat limited. Of these variables, some lack validity, and some largely duplicate the measurement being made by other variables. Measures of media usage are often of dubious value because they do not distinguish between different types of media content. The ANES question asking respondents about the amount of election news they had read in the newspaper, is however, more specific, and that has been used in this study to gauge respondent media usage. Education was chosen because of its straightforward expression of a respondent’s engagement with the systematic attainment of knowledge. Numerous arguments have been made supporting the correlation of education to other key indicators of political sophistication (Fiske et al. 1990, 34, 42; Luskin 1990, 349; Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994, 21), but the use of this measure has also been criticized, and I discuss these criticisms below. The variable capturing knowledge of which party controls the House of Representatives is selected because it provides a “neutral” indication that the respondent

¹⁰⁹ A similar “additive scale” approach is employed by Taber and Lodge (2006, 760), and Zaller (1992, 339).

is in possession of factual political information, and because the validity of political knowledge measures using the ability to identify which party controls the House of Representatives has been repeatedly affirmed and is used as a standard measure (Bennett and Bennett 1993; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 117; Kingdon 1970, 258-9; Zaller 1992, 340). Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) find that there is a “consensus” that “factual” political knowledge gauges sophistication “most effectively” while Zaller (1992, 21, 335-6) argues that “neutral factual information” is the most valid and robust indicator of political “awareness.”¹¹⁰

As noted earlier, Fiske et al. (1990) found that political knowledge and print media use were strong and significant predictors of superior political information processing ability, but that political activity, general interest in politics, and electronic media use were not (1990, 45). Education was found to be a “redundant” measure, predicting all other factors well, and lending support to the claim of Sniderman et al. ([1991] 1994, 21) that education is a good proxy for political sophistication. The data analyses in this chapter, however, show aggregate higher education attainment increasing historically while no parallel increases in political interest, engagement and activity can be found (see Table 9, below, and Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 116-17). The analyses provided in this dissertation therefore do not rely on the use of education a single proxy variable as an indicator of sophistication.

I use a measure of media usage – specifically newspaper readership related to politics – as a separate variable with which to analyze the behavior of volatile voters and volatile sophisticates as is shown later in this paper. Other measures of print media usage

¹¹⁰ Zaller considers “awareness” to be roughly synonymous with “political expertise” and “sophistication,” and articulates this measure usefully as “the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered” and “intellectual or cognitive engagement with public affairs” (1992, 21).

are avoided for reasons of validity, as noted earlier, because they do not take into account the type of content read by respondents; they may read the newspaper every day, but only read the sports or entertainment sections. In general, the ANES variables that were selected were chosen because that they were all considered to be measurements of enough importance when the surveys were conducted to have been included in the ANES questionnaires. Variables such as attendance at political meetings or wearing a campaign button were not included because they are lopsided in terms of distribution. These variables were avoided because they show no variation in respondent behavior other than distinguishing behaviors that are relatively rare. Only those respondents displaying inordinately high levels of political participation score positively on these measures, therefore they have not been used. Such measures can also be confounded by the degree to which they gauge the respondent's partisanship.

The 2000-2002-2004 ANES panel variables used are:

1. P000913 – “What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?”
2. P001356 – “Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington BEFORE the election (this/last) month?”
3. P025084 – “Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?”
4. P001492 – “During the past twelve months, have you telephoned, written a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue?”

Dummy variables were created for each of these ANES variables as follows:

1. If respondent attained a bachelor's degree or higher, s/he was coded 1. All other respondents were coded 0.
2. Correct answers to this question were coded 1. Incorrect and “don't know” (DK) responses were coded 0.

3. Those who indicated “most of the time” were coded 1. All others were coded 0.

4. Those who responded “yes,” were coded 1. All others were coded 0.

Using the scheme of measurement employed in here, the minimum level of political sophistication for a sophisticated respondent could include:

- College educated and follows politics regularly
- College educated and has contacted a public official
- College educated and knowledgeable about government
- Contacted a public official and follows politics regularly
- Contacted a public official and knowledgeable about government
- Knowledgeable about government and follows politics regularly

A respondent who provides a positive response on only one or on none of these measures is coded as unsophisticated.

The 1972-1974-1976 ANES panel variables used are:

1. VAR 720300 – Education of respondent
2. VAR 763683 – Majority party before election: Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington BEFORE the elections (this/last) month?
3. VAR 720476 – General interest in politics: “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?”
4. VAR 720474 – Written to public official: “Have you ever written a letter to any public officials giving them your opinion about something that should be done?”

Dummy variables were created for each of these ANES variables as follows:

1. If respondent attained a bachelor's degree or higher, s/he was coded 1. All others were coded 0.

2. If a respondent correctly answered this question, s/he was coded 1. Those providing incorrect and “don't know” (DK) responses were coded 0.

3. Those who indicated “most of the time” were coded 1. All others (“some of the time,” “only now and then,” and “hardly at all”) were coded 0.

4. Those who indicated that they had written a public official were coded 1. All others were coded 0.

In this panel, a minimally sophisticated respondent may be:

- College educated and follow politics regularly
- College educated and has written to public official
- College educated and knowledgeable about government
- Follows politics regularly and has written a public official
- Follows politics regularly and knowledgeable about government
- Knowledgeable about government and written a public official

A respondent who provides a positive response on only one or on none of these measures is coded as unsophisticated.

The 1956-1958-1960 ANES panel variables used are:

1. VAR 560181 – Education of Respondent
2. VAR 580317 – “Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the election (this/last) month?”
3. VAR 600681 – “Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics – a great deal, somewhat, or not at all?”
4. VAR 600674 – “Voting is the only way that people like me can have a say about how the government runs things.”

Dummy variables were created for each of these ANES variables as follows:

1. If respondent attained a bachelor's degree or higher, s/he was coded 1. All others are coded 0.

2. If a respondent correctly answered this question, s/he was coded 1. Incorrect and “don't know” (DK) responses were coded 0.

3. Those who indicated “a great deal” were coded 1. All others were coded 0.

4. Those who indicated that they disagree with the proposition that they can influence government only by voting were coded 1. All others were coded 0.

Using the scheme of measurement employed in here, the minimum level of political sophistication for a sophisticated respondent could include:

- College educated and highly interested in politics
- College educated and believes political participation can influence government
- College educated and knowledgeable about government
- Highly interested in politics and believes political participation can influence government
- Highly interested in politics and knowledgeable about government
- Knowledgeable about government and believes political participation can influence government

A respondent who provides a positive response on only one or none of these measures is coded as unsophisticated.

3. Data Analyses

Levels of Voter Sophistication: 1956-2004

Frequency distributions of ANES respondents who provided a positive response to four sophistication-related questions are provided in Table 9 for all three historical periods examined. These figures exclude consistent non-voters. From 1956 to 2004, between 52.4 and 71.6 percent of American voters could identify which party controlled the House of Representatives while only between 24.8 and 35.6 percent indicated that they contacted a public official to express views, or expressed a belief that they could

influence government in ways other than voting. Between 34.1 and 43.4 percent expressed a high interest in politics. The simultaneous increases of 19.1, 5.0, and 6.4 percent, respectively, in these variables as of 1976 show changes that could be correlated to issue salience as Nie et al. ([1976] 1999) have asserted. As can be seen in figure 5, the number of people attaining a bachelor's degree has risen dramatically since 1952. Other measures of political sophistication, including the composite measure, however, have not paralleled this trend. This increase in the percentage of the American public that has attained a bachelor's degree has helped to drive the overall increase in composite sophistication from 1960 to 1976 shown in Figure 5, but the further increase in bachelor's degree attainment has a strangely inverse relationship to other forms of sophistication between 1976 and 2004. The 1972-76 period, arguably one of the more highly politicized in American history, is one in which all measures of sophistication and involvement show a substantial increase, but after this period, there is a substantial decrease in overall sophistication.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ My first impulse, when I see this kind of data, is to question whether it may be an artifact of the survey, or a bias in the sample. But the fact that 1) not all sophistication-related variables exhibit this kind of sharp increase while several others do suggests that no such bias or artifact-creating feature exists in the overall survey sample, question wording, and administration.

Table 9.
Political Sophisticates in the United States

	2000-02-04 ^a	1972-74-76 ^b	1956-58-60 ^c
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	62.0	71.6	52.4
Follows Politics Regularly/Interested in Politics	34.1	43.4	37.0
Attained Bachelor's Degree	38.7	18.1	11.1
Contacted Public Official to Express Views*	24.8	35.6	30.6

Percentages. ^aTotal survey N = 1187 (between 66.4 and 71.4 percent valid depending on variable). ^bTotal survey N = 1320 (between 77.7 and 83.1 percent valid depending on variable). ^cTotal survey N = 1239 (between 73.3 and 74.6 percent valid depending on variable). *For the 1956-58-60 panel, the question used inquires whether the respondent believes s/he can influence government in ways other than voting. This analysis excludes consistent nonvoters.

Accounting of Sophistication Using A Constructed Scale Comprised of Positive Responses to a Dummy Variable

Table 10 shows the percentage of respondents in the three ANES panel surveys providing between 0 and 4 positive responses to four political-sophistication related questions that were recoded as dummy variables. Clearly those respondents in the 2000-2002-2004 panel who are simultaneously college educated, knowledgeable and interested in politics, and active political participators, make up a small minority of the electorate – just 6.4 percent of it. But those who have provided a positive response to three or more of these questions total 22.1 percent of the electorate, and those who have provided two or more positive responses total 50.5 percent of it.

Table 10.
Distribution of Sophisticates in the Electorate Using Composite Variable
Sophistication Scale (ANES panels)

Positive Sophistication Responses	2000-02-04	1972-74-76	1956-58-60
0	21.0 (160)	17.2 (172)	25.7 (231)
1	28.4 (217)	28.7 (286)	33.4 (301)
2	28.4 (217)	27.3 (272)	27.6 (248)
3	15.7 (120)	20.5 (205)	10.2 (92)
4	6.4 (49)	6.3 (63)	3.1 (28)
Total	100 (763)	100 (998)	100 (900)

Percentages (N). The samples used in this analysis exclude consistent nonvoters.

Data from the 1972-1974-1976 panel shown in Table 10 shows again that those respondents who are simultaneously college educated, knowledgeable and interested in politics, and active political participators, make up a small minority of the electorate, just 6.3 percent of it. But those who have provided a positive response to three or more of these questions total 26.8 percent of the electorate, and those who have provided two or more positive responses total 54.1 percent of it.

Finally, respondents in the 1956-58-60 panel who are simultaneously college educated, knowledgeable and interested in politics, and who believe political participation can influence government make up a tiny minority of the electorate, just 3.1 percent of it. Those who have provided a positive response to three or more of these questions total 13.3 percent of the electorate – also a rather small minority. But those who provided two or more positive responses total 40.9 percent.

The number of respondents in the 1956-1958-1960 panel who attained a bachelors degree, 11.1 percent of the sample, is substantially lower than the two later panels – 18.1 percent in 1972-76 and 38.7 percent in 2000-04. This factor accounts for a substantial portion of the differences measured using the composite sophistication variable.

While education and political engagement, participation, interest and knowledge are of course measures that have been normatively selected, they are less biased by a standard of how political information or opinions should be organized and processed than standards based on constraint according to a preconceived notion of “what goes with what.”

Comparison of Voter Sophistication Levels Across Three Time Periods

As shown in Table 11 and Figure 5, the overall political sophistication of the American public, measured using the composite sophistication variable described above, increased sharply between 1960 and 1976, but drifted downward between the mid-1970s and the first years of the 21st century. A noticeable surge occurred in the period from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, which, as will be shown in Chapter IX, somewhat parallels a historical surge in party-choice volatility in presidential elections.

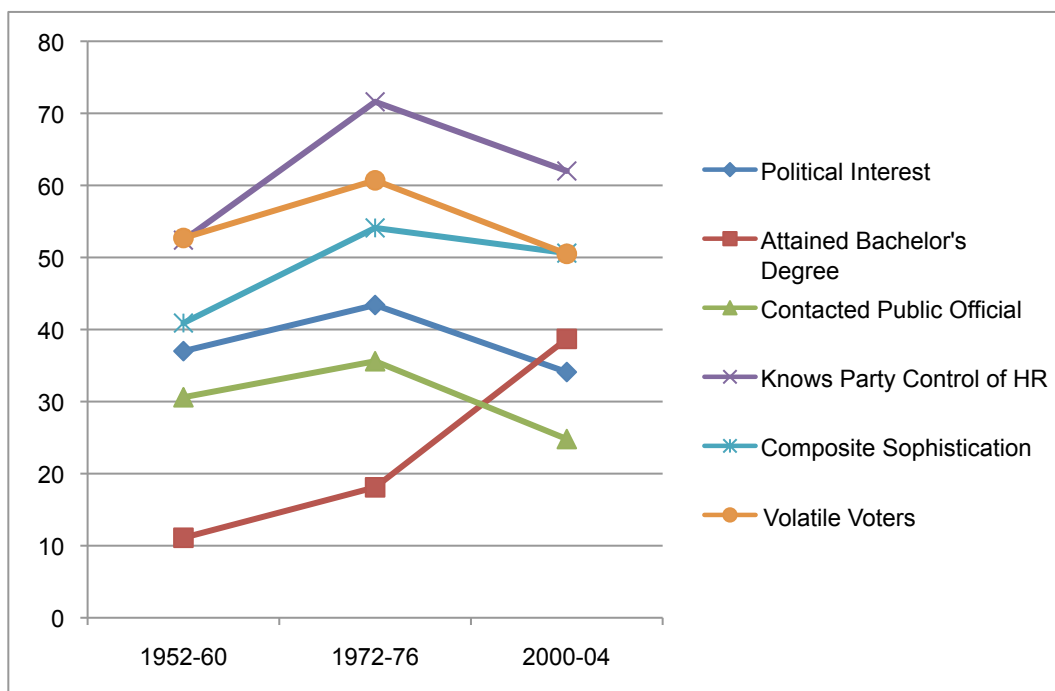
The most noticeable increase in separate measures of sophistication has been in education, with 18.1 percent of the ANES samples having attained a bachelor’s degree as of the 1972-76 panel survey, and 38.7 percent attaining bachelor’s degrees as of the 2000-04 survey.

Table 11.
Distribution of Respondents Providing Two or More Positive Responses on Measures of Sophistication Using 5-Point Scale (ANES panels)

	2000-02-04	1972-74-76	1956-58-60
Sophisticates	50.5 (386)	54.1 (540)	40.9 (368)
Total Sample N (valid)	100 (763)	100 (998)	100 (900)

Percentages (N). Excludes consistent nonvoters.

Figure 5.
Distribution of Sophisticates in the Electorate Using Composite and Separate Variables, (ANES 1956-58-60, 1972-74-76, and 2000-02-04 Panels)



4. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter has provided a description of, and rationale for, approaches to measuring political sophistication. I have argued that political sophistication is required in order to select expert representatives in government and assess the performance of

these professional servants, and accordingly, I have suggested that much more latitude may be allowed in producing thresholds for political sophistication necessary to those ends (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 3). In order to measure this kind of sophistication, I have found it satisfactory to use standard variables provided in the ANES (which have been dichotomized) and have also constructed a novel composite variable for gauging a more general type of sophistication and that, importantly, can accommodate a variety of types of political sophistication with which citizens may navigate politics in a variety of ways.

Sophistication Measurement Strategy and Findings

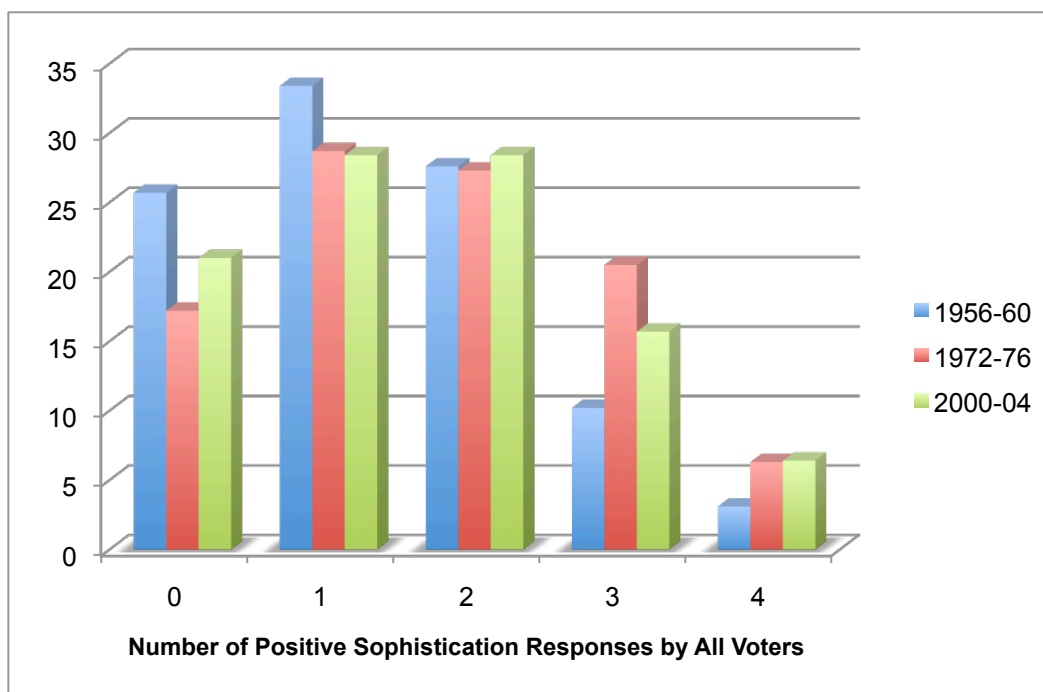
While the increase in overall political sophistication between 1956 and 2004, as measured by the composite sophistication variable, is clearly due to a great extent to the sharp increase in the number of citizens who have attained a college education. Notably, the spike in aggregate volatility that appears in Figure 9 (Chapter IX) parallels a spike in the political sophistication of the electorate. But the increase in overall political sophistication also parallels a dramatic increase in the reach of media of all kinds that carry political information and opinion, including the dramatic increase in the number of households with televisions between the 1950s and 1970s¹¹² and the advent of widespread internet use in the late 1990s.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 122) concluded, however, after reviewing quite a large range of political knowledge-related data from multiple sources, that “levels of knowledge for most aspects of politics have not changed dramatically over the last fifty years.” These authors also find “dramatic group differences in levels of political

¹¹² In 1950, 9.0 percent of American households had television sets. By 1955, 64.5 percent had them, and by 1975, 97.1 percent had televisions (Television Bureau of Advertising).

knowledge” (1996, 18) with the “most disadvantaged in the social and economic spheres,” including “women, blacks, low-income citizens, and younger citizens” exhibiting lower levels of political knowledge. Yet they also note that while there are “sizable differences in what the most and least informed citizens know,” “the overall distribution of knowledge very much approximates a normal curve” (18). The majority of citizens, these authors argue, are neither politically sophisticated nor unsophisticated. My data analyses somewhat support this latter view, as shown in Table 10 and Figure 6.

Figure 6.
Distribution of Sophisticates in the Electorate Using Composite Variable Sophistication Scale (ANES 1956-58-60, 1972-74-76, and 2000-02-04 Panels)



VIII. An Accounting of Ideological Eclecticism in the Electorate

1. Overview

In Chapter III, I endeavored on theoretical and methodological grounds to dismiss the use of “levels of conceptualization,” “ideological consistency,” and “constraint” (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964), as valid measures of political sophistication. But I also thought it useful to show how these measures may not only be theoretically wanting, but lacking in empirical support. Certain common positive indicators of political sophistication such as respondent education, interest in politics, and political knowledge have been shown to be poorly associated with positive indicators of ideological constraint in past studies (Converse 1975, 104; Luskin 1987, 866, 887; Smith 1980; Weisberg 2010, 550-1). Those lacking in ideological consistency, as measured according to the ideological congruence of their issue opinions, are, as Converse (1964, 218) showed, and as I also show in this chapter, quite prevalent in the electorate.¹¹³ The difference between my findings and Converse’s is, however, that I show the ideologically consistent to be not nearly as politically ignorant and disengaged. In this chapter, I show that there have consistently been, when using neutral, factual measures, more *ideologically eclectic* sophisticates than *ideologically consistent* sophisticates in the electorate, as presented in Table 22. Multivariate logistic regression analyses I provide however show that ideological eclectics are less likely than consistent to be sophisticated on a case-by-case basis.

This chapter provides an accounting of ideological eclecticism in the electorate using responses to ANES survey questions designed to capture voter attitudes about a

¹¹³Converse shows that 15.5 percent of voters are “ideologues” or “near ideologues;” his lower three stratum in the hierarchy of ideological constraint make up the remaining 84.5 percent.

variety of political issues. I reference indicators of ideological eclecticism to indicators of political sophistication described in the previous chapter.

Ideological inconsistency is a widespread attitude set as has been long thought. But it is not, by any means, limited to the politically unsophisticated. There have been, since 1948, many more politically sophisticated ideological eclectics than sophisticated ideological consistents in the electorate, but probabilistically, sophisticated voters exhibit a statistically significant 38.0 percent lower odds of being ideologically eclectic than unsophisticated voters in the 2000-04 period as shown in the binary logistic regression analysis reported on in Table 24. Likewise, sophisticated voters display statistically significant 35.7 percent lower odds of being ideologically eclectic than unsophisticated voters in the 1956-60 period. The relationship of eclecticism to sophistication does not reach statistical significance in the 1972-76 period. These results tend to affirm the arguments of Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980), Converse (1964), Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, 280-86), and Zaller (1992, 110-114) that ideological eclecticism is, overall, negatively associated with political sophistication. While there is a mild indication that eclectics can be identified by low levels of political sophistication in two of three time periods – as well as a strong indication that religiosity predicts eclecticism, ideological eclectics, are, as shown in these models, quite difficult to identify demographically, and in terms of media usage and perception of the economy. The very low pseudo R-squared figures in these models, and the lack of statistical significance for the overall model in two of three time periods demonstrate the difficulty in finding strong predictors of ideological attitude sets, and the high prevalence of ideological eclecticism in the electorate, tending toward a random distribution, is surely one of the reasons for this weak association.

Once the overall bloc of ideologically eclectic voters is broken down into sophisticated and unsophisticated categories, however, two strikingly different tendencies among these two groups are revealed as will be shown in the next chapter: *sophisticated* eclectics are significantly *less* likely to be volatile in their voting behavior, and *unsophisticated* eclectics are significantly *more* likely to be volatile – in all three time periods – as shown in Tables 38 and 39. There is a substantial number of voters who are both volatile in their voting behavior and politically sophisticated, and, there is also a substantial number of voters who are volatile in voting behavior, sophisticated, and also ideologically eclectic as shown in Tables 33 through 35 in the next chapter. These latter voters made up 10.4 percent of the electorate in the 1996-2004 period, 17.1 percent of the electorate in the 1968-1976 period, and 13.4 in the 1948-1956 period. The large number of eclectics can be explained by the fact that greater complexity of information creates more opportunity for attitude inconsistency, by a normative orientation of Americans toward unideological thinking, and by the fact that members of the mass public, unlike media personalities and politicians, have the luxury to be able to be ideologically inconsistent and moderate.

Treier and Hillygus (2009, 680) argue that members of the mass public maintain political belief systems that are “multidimensional,” with many holding “liberal preferences on one dimension and conservative preferences on another.” “Political elites,” on the other hand, are more ideologically consistent. The data Trier and Hillygus provide tend to support the argument made by Fiorina (2004) that most American citizens are moderate in their political views, whereas political candidates and media personalities tend to be highly partisan and polarized due to competitive pressures such as the need to

differentiate a personal brand or a media brand and create awareness and memorability for these things. “Moderates,” however, according to Treier and Hillygus (2009, 692) are “made up of at least two very different kinds of people – policy centrists and the ideologically cross-pressured.” Some, therefore, are ideologically “eclectic” while others are simply ideological centrists, and still others may hold disengaged “nonattitudes” of the type Converse (1964) described. But Treier and Hillygus note, importantly, that “individuals with divergent economic and social preferences are more likely to call themselves moderate than to use a liberal or conservative label” (2009, 695).¹¹⁴

In Chapter IV, I put forth the hypothesis that “cross-pressures” and instability in voting behavior are, in a substantial fraction of the electorate, associated with high levels of political engagement and awareness due to greater intake of political information. Accordingly, the more information intake by respondents, the greater likelihood of ideological inconsistency there should be. This relationship does not, however, apply to ideological inconsistent as a whole, although as noted above, there is a greater number of sophisticated ideological *inconsistent*s in the electorate than of those who are sophisticated and ideologically *consistent*. The hypothesis that ideological inconsistency is the result of higher political information intake is supported in the abstract by the simple fact that as the number of issues considered by the respondent increases, the more opportunity there will be for ideological inconsistency (see Sniderman et al. [1991] 1994, 26). Yet in the 2000-2004 and 1956-1960 periods, as shown in the data presented below in Table 24, sophistication is negatively associated with eclecticism in two of three periods at a significant level. There is not significant association between high political

¹¹⁴ Trier and Hillygus (2009) show that ideologically moderate identification is a positive indicator of cross-pressure when computed using a respondent’s expressed policy preferences.

media intake and eclecticism, however, when controlling for sophistication, religiosity, perception of the state of the economy, or standard demographic measures.

Set forth below in this chapter is a theoretical analysis of ideological eclecticism in section 2, followed in section 3 by a description of how this attitude set is measured in the electorate in the present study using ANES variables, and an accounting of its prevalence. Section 4 provides analyses relating individual-level ideological eclecticism in the electorate to measures of political sophistication that were described in chapter VII. A summary historical comparison of these measures across all three ANES panel survey periods is also provided. Section 5 summarizes the arguments and findings in this chapter. In Chapter IX, analyses are provided relating individual ideological eclecticism and sophistication to indications of volatile voting behavior.

2. The Political Philosophy of Ideological Eclecticism

Tables 16 to 22 show that there are many more sophisticated eclectics in the electorate than sophisticated consistents. While sophisticates are less likely to be eclectics than unsophisticates, a greater number of citizens who are politically informed and engaged are thus not tethered to fixed and “consistent” ideologies, despite the fact that they are fed such belief sets on a regular basis by pundits and politicians. This prevalence of ideological eclecticism reflects long-standing norms in American political thought – pluralism, pragmatism, and intellectual freedom. And, far from being the result of a lack of knowledge or disengagement from politics, I theorize that this pluralism and inconsistency is a norm that is quite consciously maintained as an expression of long-standing American attitudes. Inconsistency is seen as an intellectual *right* that is aligned with the norms of freedom of conscience and inquiry that America’s founding political

philosophers wrote and spoke of repeatedly,¹¹⁵ and saw codified in the Constitution. Whether or not Americans actually *behave* this way is another matter. But much evidence argues that this is how Americans would like to believe they think – and they often do (Dahl 1961; Dewey [1939] 1993, 206; Hartz [1955] 1991). I qualify this statement by noting that all too often, that nation’s opinion leaders are constrained by boundaries drawn according to what is really advantageous to publishers and broadcasters, and that market research and the demands of advertisers often limit what appears in media. They are therefore much more consistent in the political ideas they express than private citizens may be. But this type of putatively unbounded philosophy is the DNA of American political philosophy that has been magnified over two centuries and indoctrinated into the American citizenry. Such a normatively liberal and defiantly unconstrained collage of visions marks American literature, art, architecture, music, poetry, popular culture, industry, and social networks. This American *ideal* flies in the face of notions of consistency, hierarchy, dogmatism, and authority, and may be why Americans will often vote against their practical, material interests – because they wish to vote *for* idealized images of both themselves and the “American way,” as inaccurate as they often are, or claim to be “rugged individuals” when in fact they are highly conformist and conventional (Hartz [1955] 1991), and reliant on big business and social institutions.

Recognizing these attitudes, Converse (1964, 247) wrote:

A realistic picture of political belief systems in the mass public ... is not one that omits issues and policy demands completely, nor one that presumes widespread ideological coherence; it is rather one that captures with some fidelity the fragmentation, narrowness, and diversity of these demands.

¹¹⁵ The Jefferson quote at the beginning of this dissertation being one such example.

Converse saw that the opinions of the “mass public” reflected the incongruity and complexity of real-world political phenomena. The mass public, and the ideologically inconsistent are, however, according to the present findings, not quite as politically unengaged and unsophisticated as he thought.

While campaigning in support of the Democratic party in the 2010 midterm election season, former president Bill Clinton framed the election as “not a referendum,” but a “choice between two different sets of ideas” (Kristof 2010). Indeed, electoral choices are between two different sets of ideas, but they need not be – and rarely are – ideologically consistent. Historically, American politics has been characterized not by monolithic ideologies, but by an inconsistent and conflicting mix of political norms. Dahl’s conception of polyarchy in American government (Dahl 1956), Fiorina’s (1992, 399) data showing that divided government is a normative outcome desired by the public, and Huntington’s “promise of disharmony” (Huntington 1981, 14-17) all describe a polity that is expected to function by virtue of patchwork, competition, compromise, checks and balances, trial and error, and less than ideal alliances. Indeed, the very organization of American government, comprising federalism, separation of power, and the “structured conflict” that Hamilton and Madison articulated in the *Federalist* posits a diverse republic drawing strength from adversarial and critical processes, deliberate confrontation, and alloying of norms. This notion that the American political tradition is a continually improvised hodgepodge full of internal tensions and contradictions¹¹⁶ was famously articulated by Rogers M. Smith (1993) in his “multiple traditions” thesis arguing that

¹¹⁶ As was the very foundation of American government in the Constitutional convention in 1787. See Roche (1961).

Although liberal democratic ideas and practices have been more potent in America than elsewhere, American politics is best seen as expressing the interaction of multiple political traditions, including *liberalism*, *republicanism*, and *ascriptive forms of Americanism*, which have collectively comprised American Political culture, without constituting it as a whole (550).

American political philosophy for Smith – if it even deserves a name implying a coherent system — is one in which no unifying logic has ever emerged; here

Americans share a common culture but one more complexly and multiply constituted than is usually acknowledged ... at its heart, the multiple traditions thesis holds that the definitive feature of American political culture has not been its liberal, republican or “ascriptive Americanist” elements but rather, this more complex pattern of apparently inconsistent combinations of the traditions, accompanied by recurring conflicts.” (558)

Eclectic political philosophy is not, however, simply found at the aggregate level in the American polity or as the outcome of retrospective analysis; it is also found at the individual level, and it is arguable that in the United States, individual political philosophies reflect the diverse, pragmatic, pluralistic nature of the American sociopolitical environment as a whole – supporting the notion that most Americans do not imagine themselves to be dogmatic, one-dimensional adherents to abstract and immutable political ideologies. Most Americans may be, instead, as Fiorina (2006) argues, politically moderate and unideological.

Despite the apparent attitudinal coherence of opinion leaders in American media and government, evidence that Americans do not think of politics in a strongly ideological or partisan manner abounds. In addition to Fiorina’s findings, noted above, Wattenberg (1991, 34) reports that party independence is the embodiment of a pervasive normative belief among voters that “one should vote for the candidate, not the party.” He reports that “Even in 1956 when most voters were in fact voting straight tickets, 74 percent of respondents in a Gallup poll agreed with this general belief; by 1968, this

figure had risen to 84 percent.” Wattenberg also cites a 1980 ANES study in which 45 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “It would be better if, in all elections, we put no party labels on the ballot” (Wattenberg 1991, 34-35). And, as noted above, ANES data from the 2000-2002-2004 panel show that 51.2 percent of respondents say that they prefer it when party control “is split” between the Congress and White House.

These citizens may, at the very least, be expressing a political philosophy that is pragmatic and focused on specific problems of the day and a perceived ability of candidates to solve them, or some set of political actions, rather than needlessly consistent sets of political beliefs – systems conceived in the abstract and that privilege abstract reason over practical considerations. Whether voters are “sophisticated” or not, there is wide consensus among political scientists that citizens generally don’t bother themselves constructing such philosophical systems. The belief systems that are either developed by citizens or handed down to them are generally not logically consistent at all. They may only be thought of as consistent by force of habit and may very well have been formulated in much more opportunistic ways – with actors jamming together ideologically disparate ideas to be held together under coats of partisan varnish. And, as Friedman (2006, vi) notes, just because citizens may be ideologically aware or “constrained,” does not mean they are well informed.

3. Ideological Eclecticism in the American Electorate

Selection of Variables and Construction of Measures

The measures of ideological consistency used in the analyses in this chapter have been constructed using commonly understood liberal and conservative positions on three

political issues of importance in each historical period about which respondents were queried. Respondents who expressed a consistently liberal or consistently conservative opinion on all three-issue questions were coded “consistent.” But if respondents expressed a mixture of opinions, ideologically speaking, they were coded “inconsistent.”

The subject matter of questions related to political issues, which vary across the three ANES panels conducted in three different time periods, and the reasons for selecting these variables, are explained separately for each analysis provided. All data used in this section are provided in the ANES panels capturing responses related to political issues in and around the 2000-04, 1972-76, and 1956-1960 periods. All issue-related variables used to discern ideological consistency and eclecticism were selected from the first wave of the panel to avoid sample attrition that occurs in later waves. The sample sizes vary somewhat in each variable due to item non-response in the surveys. All variables were filtered so no consistent non-voters were included.

To construct measures of ideological consistency, a series of dummy variables capturing strength of opinion aligning to ideological positions on each of three major political issues were created in each panel dataset. On questions for which a respondent indicated a strong *liberal* opinion on an issue s/he was coded (1). When a respondent indicated a strong *conservative* opinion on an issue s/he was coded (0). I then computed a “consistency” variable using dichotomous responses for all three issues. Respondents for whom three “1” scores or three “0” scores were tabulated were coded as “ideologically consistent.” These ideologically consistent cases were in turn coded with a score of “0.” All other tabulations were coded as “ideologically eclectic” (and were given the score “1”).

2000-2002-2004 ANES Panel

For the 2000-2002-2004 panel the issues used were:¹¹⁷

1. *Gun Control*: an opinion in favor of gun control aligns with liberalism, while an opinion against gun control aligns with conservatism

2. *Abortion*: an opinion in favor of broad abortion rights aligns with liberalism, while an opinion in opposition to broad abortion rights aligns with conservatism

3. *Gays in the Military*: an opinion in favor of permitting gays to serve openly in the US military aligns with liberalism, while an opinion in opposition to gays serving in the military aligns with conservatism

Table 12 shows the distribution of “eclectics” in the sample for this time period, with indicators of ideological eclecticism constructed using two issue variables as well as three.

1972-1974-1976 Panel

For the 1972-1974-1976 panel the issues used were:¹¹⁸

1. *Vietnam War Involvement*: an opinion against American involvement in Vietnam aligns with liberalism, while an opinion in favor of Vietnam involvement or a “depends” response aligns with conservatism. Others were coded as missing.

2. *Abortion*: an opinion in favor of abortion rights aligns with liberalism, while an opinion in opposition to abortion rights aligns with conservatism. Others were coded as missing.

3. *Demonstrations and Sit-ins*: an opinion approving of the use of “sit-ins, mass meetings, [and] demonstrations” to “stop the government” when people disapprove of its

¹¹⁷ ANES 2000 variables used are P000694 (abortion), P000731 (gun control), P000727 (gays in military).

¹¹⁸ ANES 1972 variables used are 720050 (Vietnam War), 720238 (abortion), and 720277 (approval of demonstrations and sit-ins).

policies aligns with liberalism while an opinion disapproving of such protest action aligns with conservatism.¹¹⁹ Others were coded as missing.

Table 13 shows the distribution of “eclectics” in the sample for this period, with indicators of ideological eclecticism constructed using two issue variables as well as three.

1956-1958-1960 Panel

The construction of ideology related variables was a bit more complicated for this panel than for the other two. In all three issue-related questions, one about Medicare, another about using the American military to oppose the spread of communism, and a third regarding school integration, respondents were given the choice of stating agreement, disagreement, or “not sure, it depends.” I coded all “liberal” responses 1 and all “conservative” responses 0. All “not sure” responses were coded 9, and when ideological consistency was computed, a “not sure” response renders the case “inconsistent.”¹²⁰

1. *Should Government Subsidize Medicare?:* An opinion indicating agreement that the government should subsidize Medicare was coded as liberal; those disagreeing were coded conservative.

2. *Should the United States Keep Soldiers Overseas to Help Countries that are Against Communism?:* Those approving of foreign military deployments to help fight the

¹¹⁹ Respondents who indicated “approve” and “depends; pro-con” were coded as liberal; respondents who indicated “disapprove” were coded as conservative. “Don’t know” (DK) responses were deleted from the analysis.

¹²⁰ ANES variables used are 560038 (Medicare), 560056 (sending soldiers abroad to fight communism), and 560074 (school integration). I also ran a distribution coding all “not sure” responses as missing (N=664, 53.6 percent valid). 78.2 percent were tabulated as inconsistent using this scheme, as opposed to 83.3 percent obtained when allowing the “not sure” response to render a case inconsistent.

spread of communism were coded conservative; those disapproving were coded as liberal.

3. *Should the Government Stay Out of the Question of Whether White and Colored Children Go to the Same School?:* Those agreeing that government should stay out of the matter of school desegregation were coded conservative; those disagreeing that the government should stay out of the matter were coded as liberal.

Some respondents indicated “no opinion” for these variables. For variable 560038 (the Medicare question), there were 117 (7.7 percent of total sample); for 560056 (the sending soldiers abroad to fight communism question), there were 207 (13.7 percent of the total sample); for 560074 (the school integration question), there were 115 (7.6 percent of the total sample). These responses have been coded as missing.¹²¹

Table 14 shows the distribution of “eclectics” in the sample for this period, with indicators of ideological eclecticism constructed using two issue variables as well as three.

Distribution of Ideological Eclectics

Tables 12 through 14 provide an accounting of the percentage of ideologically *inconsistent* “eclectics” in the electorate using tabulations of issue opinions across both two and three issue variables in accordance with the coding scheme described above. When opinions across *three* issues are tabulated, there is a greater opportunity for inconsistency. In the 2000-04 panel 63.5 percent of the sample is shown to be ideologically inconsistent; 66.7 percent of the sample are inconsistent in the 1972-76

¹²¹ These responses might have been coded as “undecided,” which would have added to the number of ideological inconsistencies tabulated. The present accounting, leaving out “no opinion” responses, results in a more conservative tabulation of ideological inconsistency.

panel, and 83.0 percent of the 1956-60 panel are ideologically inconsistent with regard to major issues of the day.

Table 12.
Ideological Eclectics in the Electorate (2000-2002-2004 ANES)

	Valid Survey N	%
Gays in Military/Gun Control	803	37.6
Abortion/Gun Control	821	45.2
Abortion/Gays in Military	787	45.1
Abortion/Gays in Military/Gun Control	784	63.5

Table 13.
Ideological Eclectics in the Electorate (1972-1974-1976 ANES)

	Valid Survey N	%
Vietnam/Abortion	929	47.9
Vietnam/Demonstrations	944	46.6
Abortion/Demonstrations	989	38.5
Vietnam/Abortion/Demonstrations	920	66.7

Table 14.
Ideological Eclectics in the Electorate (1956-1958-1960 ANES)

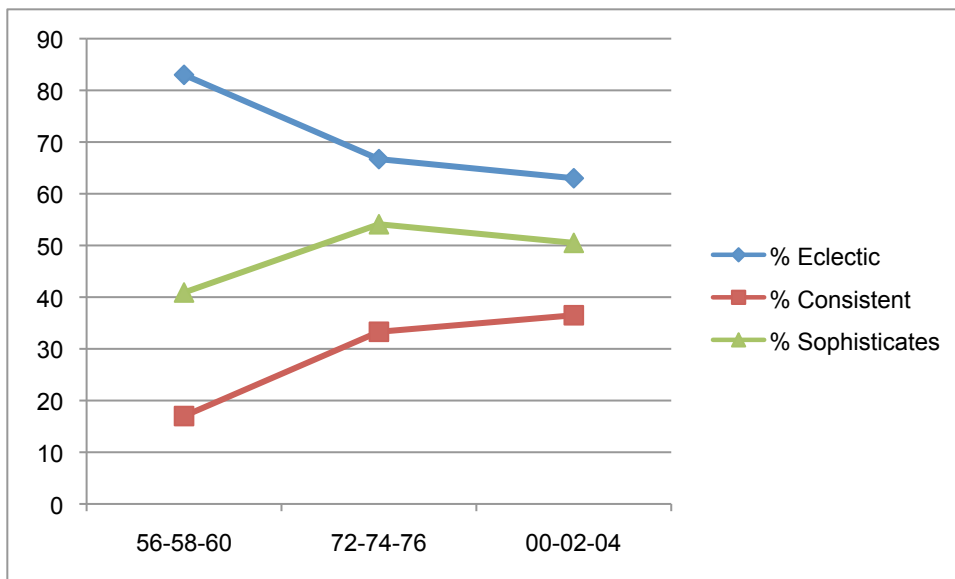
	Valid Survey N	%
Medicare/Fight Communism	737	66.9
Medicare/Integration	785	56.3
Fight Communism/Integration	725	58.1
Medicare/Fight Communism/integration	690	83.0

Interestingly, as shown in Table 15 and Figure 7, using the composite measure of ideological consistency described above, the proportion of ideological “eclectics” in the electorate has *decreased* since the 1950s. Note the fluctuation in the number of sophisticates indicated in Table 11 in the previous chapter – particularly the increase and leveling off since 1972, and, note that the proportion of Americans possessing a bachelor’s degree has risen dramatically in the same period, from 11.1 percent to 38.7 percent as shown in Table 9. These aggregate trends and fluctuations provide support for the argument that there is a positive relationship between political sophistication and ideological consistency. Furthermore, the trend of increasing ideological consistency lends support to arguments that the United States is becoming increasingly polarized in terms of ideology.

Table 15.
Historical Comparison: Ideological Eclectics and Consistents in the United States

	Valid Survey N	% Eclectic	% Consistent
2000-02-04 ANES Abortion/Gays in Military/Gun Control	784	63.5	36.5
1972-74-76 ANES Vietnam/Abortion/Demonstrations	920	66.7	33.3
1956-58-60 ANES Medicare/Fight Communism/integration	690	83.0	17.0

Figure 7.
Time Series: Increasing Ideological Consistency in the United States



4. The Relationship of Ideological Eclecticism to Political Sophistication

Indications of ideological eclecticism that have been accounted for using the variable construction described in section 3 above are cross-tabulated in this section to 1) separate standard measures of political sophistication, and 2) the scalar, composite sophistication variable described in the previous chapter. These cross-tabulations are provided for all three ANES panels used in this dissertation. Multivariate binary logistic regression models are also provided in Table 24 for all three historical periods. These models gauge the degree to which levels of political sophistication can be said to predict ideological consistency, as well as the degree to which other standard demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral variables predict such consistency.

Binary Logistic Regression Model: Association of Sophistication and Volatility

The key independent variable used in the logistic regression models provided below is the composite sophistication variable (x_1) described in Chapter VII. Standard

controls for age (x_2), race (x_3) and (x_4), marital status (x_5), and gender (x_6), are provided along with indicators of religious service attendance (x_7), attention to political media (x_8), and negative perception of the state of the economy (x_9).

Dependent variable:

y_1 Ideological eclecticism across three political issues (1); Ideological consistency across three political issues (0). The construction of this variable excludes consistent nonvoters.

Independent variables:

- x_1 Political sophistication composite variable (dichotomous; 1 = sophisticate)¹²²
- x_2 Age below 30¹²³
- x_3 Race (1 = African-American)
- x_4 Race (1 = Hispanic/Asian/Native American)
- x_5 Marital status (1 = married)
- x_6 Gender (1 = male)
- x_7 Attends religious services (religious = 1)
- x_8 Attention to election campaign news (print media; high attention = 1)
- x_9 Perception of state of the economy (1 = respondent thinks economy is worse)

1996-2000-2004 Panel

As shown in Table 16, the number of eclectics providing positive responses in all measures of political sophistication and engagement exceeds the number of sophisticated consistents, although not all of these cross-tabulations produce statistically significant associations. Furthermore, as shown in Table 17, of the 705 valid cases in the ANES sample, 450 (63.8 percent) are ideological eclectics ($P = .01$). Of the valid sample, 28.6 percent are eclectics who provided two or more positive responses for levels of political sophistication versus 21.7 percent of the sample for consistents. Logistic regression analysis, however, summarized in Table 24, shows that controlling for age, marital status,

¹²² As explained in Chapter VII, this variable includes measures of education, political interest, political knowledge, and political participation.

¹²³ As noted in Chapter V, section two, this age break is a standard cutoff at the end of young adulthood. See Flanagan et al. (2009).

gender, race, religiosity, perception of the economy, and campaign news readership, there is a statistically significant but 38.0 percent lower odds that a sophisticated respondent will be ideologically eclectic than an unsophisticated respondent. In this panel, there is a statistically significant 45.1 percent higher odds that those who attend religious services will be ideologically eclectic than those who do not, suggesting that these voters may be cross-pressured by religious beliefs with regard to homosexuality and abortion, two of the three issue components in the eclecticism variable for this period. The low pseudo R-squared figure, however, indicates that the overall model explains only around 3 percent of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, indicating that the relationship between political sophistication and ideological consistency in this period analysis is quite weak.

Table 16.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Ideological Eclectics and Ideological Consistents
(2000-2002-2004 ANES)

	Eclectics N (%)	Consistents N (%)	Valid Survey N (% of total)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	171 (21.8)	130 (16.6)	784 (66.0)	-.11**	9.49**
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	281 (37.0)	189 (24.9)	759 (63.9)	-.10**	7.90**
Contacted Public Official	108 (14.2)	74 (9.7)	759 (63.9)	-.05	1.91
High Attention to Political Campaigns	164 (29.8)	116 (14.8)	784 (66.0)	-.08*	4.60*
Watched Presidential Debate	483 (47.7)	211 (27.8)	759 (63.9)	-.02	.21
Follows Politics	156 (21.4)	93 (12.8)	728 (61.3)	-.01	.15
Read Campaign News	224 (28.6)	131 (16.7)	784 (66.0)	-.01	.05

Total survey N = 1187. **Significant at <.01. *Significant at .05.

Table 17.
Sophistication Levels of Political Eclectics and Consistents
(2000-2002-2004 ANES)

Positive Sophistication Responses	Eclectics	Consistents
0	106 (15.0)	40 (5.7)
1	137 (19.4)	68 (9.6)
2	119 (16.9)	85 (12.1)
3	64 (9.1)	44 (6.2)
4	24 (2.6)	18 (3.4)
Total	450 (63.8)	255 (36.2)

N = 705. Chi-Square = 8.83 (Sig. at .01). R = $-.112$. Percentages of total N are listed in parentheses. The four variables used in the composite sophistication measure are: college educated (bachelor's degree), knows which party controls House of Representatives, contacted public official to express views, follows politics regularly.

1968-1972-1976 Panel

As shown in Table 18, the number of eclectics providing positive responses in all measures of political sophistication and engagement exceeds the number of ideologically consistent respondents, although only education is associated with ideological consistency at a statistically significant level. Furthermore, as shown in Table 19, of the 896 valid cases in the ANES sample, 596 (66.5 percent) are eclectics. Of the valid sample, 35.3 percent are eclectics who provided two or more positive responses for levels of political sophistication versus 19.8 percent of the sample being consistents who have provided responses indicating sophistication. Logistic regression analysis, however, summarized in Table 24, shows that controlling for age, marital status, gender, race, religiosity, perception of the economy, and campaign news readership, there is a modest

and statistically insignificant 18.2 percent lower odds that a sophisticated respondent will be ideologically eclectic than an unsophisticated respondent. Furthermore, the low pseudo R-squared figure indicates that the overall model explains only around 2 percent of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, which, along with the lack of a statistically significant chi-square figure, further indicates that the relationship between political sophistication and ideological consistency is virtually null in this period. In this panel, there is a statistically significant 119.0 percent higher odds that those who attend religious services will be ideologically eclectic than those who do not, suggesting that these voters may be cross-pressured by religious beliefs with regard to abortion, one of the three issue components included in the eclecticism variable for this period.

Table 18.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Ideological Eclectics and Ideological Consistents
(1972-1974-1976 ANES)

	Eclectics	Consistents	Valid Survey N (% of total)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	100 (10.9)	70 (7.6)	920 (69.7)	-.08*	5.89*
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	431 (48.0)	221 (24.6)	898 (68.0)	-.02	.26
Contacted Public Official	210 (22.9)	122 (13.3)	919 (69.6)	-.06 [#]	2.79 [#]
High Attention to Political Campaigns	242 (26.4)	129 (14.1)	918 (69.5)	-.03	.77
Watched Presidential Debate	534 (59.5)	266 (29.6)	898 (68.0)	.01	.08
Follows Politics	269 (29.3)	141 (15.4)	918 (69.5)	-.02	.37
Read Campaign News	431 (46.8)	223 (24.2)	920 (69.7)	-.03	.71

Total survey N = 1320. Percentages of valid survey N in parentheses. **Sig. at <.01. *Sig. at <.05. [#]Sig. at <.10

Table 19.
Sophistication Levels of Political Eclectics and Consistents (1972-1974-1976 ANES)

Positive Sophistication Responses*	Eclectics	Consistents
0	99 (11.0)	47 (5.2)
1	180 (20.1)	76 (8.5)
2	158 (17.6)	90 (10.0)
3	131 (14.6)	56 (6.3)
4	28 (3.1)	31 (3.5)
Total	596 (66.5)	300 (33.5)

Valid survey N = 896. Total survey N = 1320. Percentages of total N are listed in parentheses. Chi-Square = 13.32 (Sig. = .01). R = .06 (Sig. = .07). Ideological eclectics are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across three issues: Vietnam War involvement, abortion, approval of demonstrations and sit-ins. * Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained bachelor's degree, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in politics, contacted a public official to express views.

1948-1952-1956 Panel

As shown in Table 20, the number of eclectics providing positive responses in all measures of political sophistication and engagement exceeds the number of ideologically consistent respondents, although none of the associations in this cross-tab are statistically significant. Furthermore, as shown in Table 21, of the 671 valid cases in the ANES sample, 557 (83.0 percent) are eclectics. Of the valid sample, 35.0 percent provided two or more positive responses for levels of political sophistication versus 12.3 of consistents providing responses indicating sophistication ($P = .06$). Logistic regression analysis, however, summarized in Table 24, shows that controlling for age, marital status, gender, race, religiosity, perception of the economy, and campaign news readership, there is a

statistically significant 35.7 percent lower odds that a sophisticated respondent will be ideologically eclectic than an unsophisticated respondent. The low pseudo R-squared figure, however, indicates that the overall model explains only around 3 percent of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, which, along with the lack of a statistically significant chi-square figure, further indicates that the relationship between political sophistication and ideological consistency is quite weak in the analysis of this period.

Table 20.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Ideological Eclectics and Ideological Consistents
(1956-1958-1960 ANES)

Dependent Variable	Eclectics	Consistents	Valid Survey N (% of total)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	67 (9.8)	17 (2.5)	687 (55.4)	-.03	.77
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	306 (44.3)	69 (10.0)	690 (55.7)	-.04	1.22
Believes S/he Can Influence Government	179 (26.5)	43 (6.4)	676 (54.6)	-.04	1.30
High Attention to Political Campaigns	221 (32.2)	40 (7.3)	686 (55.4)	-.03	.62
Watched Presidential Debate*	472 (77.1)	101 (16.5)	612 (49.4)	-.03	.59
Follows Politics	226 (33.2)	48 (7.0)	681 (55.0)	-.01	.08
Read Campaign News	432 (62.6)	92 (13.3)	690 (55.7)	-.03	.56

Total survey N = 1239. Percentages of valid survey N in parentheses. *Only 6.9 percent of those surveyed indicated that they did not watch the 1960 debate.

Table 21.
Sophistication Levels of Political Eclectics and Consistents (1956-60 ANES)

Positive Sophistication Responses	Eclectics	Consistents
0	131 (19.5)	24 (3.6)
1	191 (28.5)	27 (4.0)
2	155 (23.1)	43 (6.4)
3	57 (8.5)	17 (2.5)
4	23 (3.4)	3 (3.4)
Total	557 (83.0)	114 (17.0)

Valid N = 671. Total survey N = 1239. Percentages of total N are listed in parentheses.
 Chi-Square = 9.09 (Sig.at .06). R = .06 (Sig. at .12).

Historical Comparison

As shown in Table 22, the number of sophisticated eclectics in the electorate has historically exceeded the number of sophisticated consistents. Sophisticated respondents are defined as those providing two or positive responses to four measures of political sophistication used in the composite sophistication variables (which differ slightly in each panel). Notably, the number of sophisticated eclectics *and* consistents both increased between the 1972-76 panel and the 2000-04 panel, somewhat paralleling the dramatic increase in citizens earning a bachelor's degree, as shown in Table 23.

Table 22.
Historical Comparison: Two Or More Positive Sophistication Responses, Eclectics and Consistents (percentage of valid survey N)

	Eclectics	Consistents	Total Sophisticates	R	Chi-Square
2000-04 (N=705) ^a	28.6	21.7	50.3	-.11**	8.83**
1972-76 (N=896) ^b	35.3	19.8	55.1	.06 [#]	2.73 [#]
1956-60 (N=671) ^c	35.0	9.4	44.4	.10**	6.55**

^aTotal survey N = 1187. ^bTotal survey N = 1320. ^cTotal survey N = 1239. **Significant at <.01. *Significant at <.05. [#]Significant at .10.

Table 23.
Historical Summary: Distribution of Sophisticated Ideological Eclectics (figures are percentages of valid survey samples)

	2000-04	1972-76	1956-60
Attained Bachelor's Degree	21.8 (9.49**)	10.9 (5.89*)	9.8 (.77)
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	37.0 (7.90**)	48.0 (.26)	44.3 (1.22)
Contacted Pub Official/Believes S/he Can Influence Govt	14.2 (1.91)	22.9 (2.79 [#])	26.5 (1.30)
High Interest in/Attention to Political Campaigns	29.8 (4.60*)	26.4 (.77)	32.2 (.62)
Watched Presidential Debate	47.7 (.21)	59.5 (.08)	77.1 (.59)
Follows Politics	21.4 (.15)	29.3 (.37)	33.2 (.08)
Two Or More Positive Sophistication Responses	28.6 (8.83**)	35.3 (13.32**)	35.0 (9.09 [#])

Percentage (Chi-Square). **Significant at .01. *Significant at .05. [#]Significant at .10.

Table 24.
Logistic Regression: Likelihood of Ideological Eclecticism (ANES Panel Studies)

	2000-02-04 ^a	1972-74-76 ^b	1956-58-60 ^c
Sophisticated ^d	.620**	.818	.643*
Age (under 30 = 1)	.964	.808	.829
Race (black = 1)	.942	1.049	1.751
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	1.240	1.654	--
Marital Status (married = 1)	1.204	1.008	.690
Gender (male = 1)	1.004	1.045	.956
Attends Religious Services	1.451*	2.190*	.874
Reads Campaign News	.988	.910	.862
Economy Worse ^e	.766	.828	1.289
Constant	1.887**	1.235	10.238***
Chi-square	18.23*	12.19	9.99
Cox-Snell R-Square	.026	.014	.015
Nagelkerke R-Square	.035	.019	.025
N	707	885	666
(Valid % of Total Survey N)	(59.4)	(67.0)	(53.8)

Predictive power of independent variables expressed as odds ratios (Exp (B)).

***Significant at .001. **Significant at .01. *Significant at .05. #Significant at .10.

^aIdeological eclectics are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across three issues: gun control, abortion, and right of gays to serve openly in the military.

^bIdeological eclectics are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across three issues: Vietnam War involvement, abortion, approval of demonstrations and sit-ins.

^cIdeological eclectics are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across three issues: support for Medicare, support for sending soldiers overseas to fight communism, government involvement in ending racial segregation.

^dDichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained bachelor's degree, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, high interest in politics, and political participation (or, in the case of 1956-60, a belief that political participation can be effective).

^e"1" is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

For 1956-58-60; Total survey N = 1239 including consistent nonvoters; for 1972-74-76; Total survey N = 1320 including consistent nonvoters; for 2000-02-04; Total survey N = 1187 including consistent nonvoters.

5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

This chapter has accounted for the high frequency of ideological eclecticism in the electorate, and endeavored to explain the cultural and philosophical reasons for its

prevalence. A novel approach to gauging the ideological consistency of respondents has been provided, and the resulting indicator has been related to variables indicating political sophistication and volatile voting behavior. Distributions of ideological inconsistencies in the electorate are provided for three historical periods, and an increase in ideological consistency since the 1950s is shown.

Cross-tabulations of ideological eclecticism to indicators of political sophistication described in Chapter VII are provided, and these analyses show that across the three ANES panels analyzed in this chapter, covering a 56-year period from 1948 to 2004, the proportion of ideological eclectics has remained somewhat high, between 63.5 and 83.0 percent of the electorate, as shown in Table 15. In this same period, the number of sophisticated consistents has increased, more than doubling between 1956 and 2004, as shown in Table 22. Multivariate binary logistic regression, however, shows that in the 2000-04 and 1956-60 period analysis, sophisticates are significantly less likely to be ideologically eclectic.

Additionally, the logistic regression model provided in this chapter (Table 24) indicates that there is no gender gap in eclecticism – men are no more or less likely than women to be ideologically eclectic. There is also no significant association between reading political campaign news and ideological eclecticism, which suggests that newly acquired political information is not a moderator of cross-pressure, at least among ideological eclectics as a whole.

IX. Volatile Voting Behavior and Political Sophistication

1. Overview

Judged according to many common measures of knowledge, interest, and engagement found in political science literature, Americans who are volatile in their presidential voting behavior do not, on average, appear particularly sophisticated. By some lofty standards of democracy, they are fairly unqualified for citizenship. This dissertation, however, provides data analyses showing, as a consequence of the higher prevalence of volatile voters in the electorate revealed in this research, and the use of standards of political sophistication other than ideological consistency, that the American voter is not quite as politically ignorant and indolent as many scholars have indicated (Berelson et al. 1954; Campbell et al. [1960] 1980; Converse 1964; Smith 1989; Zaller 2004).

As shown in Chapter VI, more than half of voters since 1948 have been volatile in party choice, turnout, or both in presidential elections. The modal American statistically represented in ANES surveys has therefore been what is commonly called a “swing voter.” Furthermore, the more expansive accounting of volatility in American voting behavior provided in Chapter VI also reveals a larger number of politically “sophisticated” volatile voters than can be seen in analyses that undercount volatile voters such as have been provided in most previous studies of this aspect of voting behavior (Key 1966; Converse 1967a; Dobson and St. Angelo 1975; Janowitz and Marvick 1964; Pomper 1977; Pedersen 1978; Keith et al. 1992).¹²⁴

¹²⁴ These authors undercount volatile voters due to their tracking of volatility across *two* presidential elections. Beckman (2009) tracked volatility across *three* elections, revealing a far greater incidence of volatility in American voting behavior at the individual level.

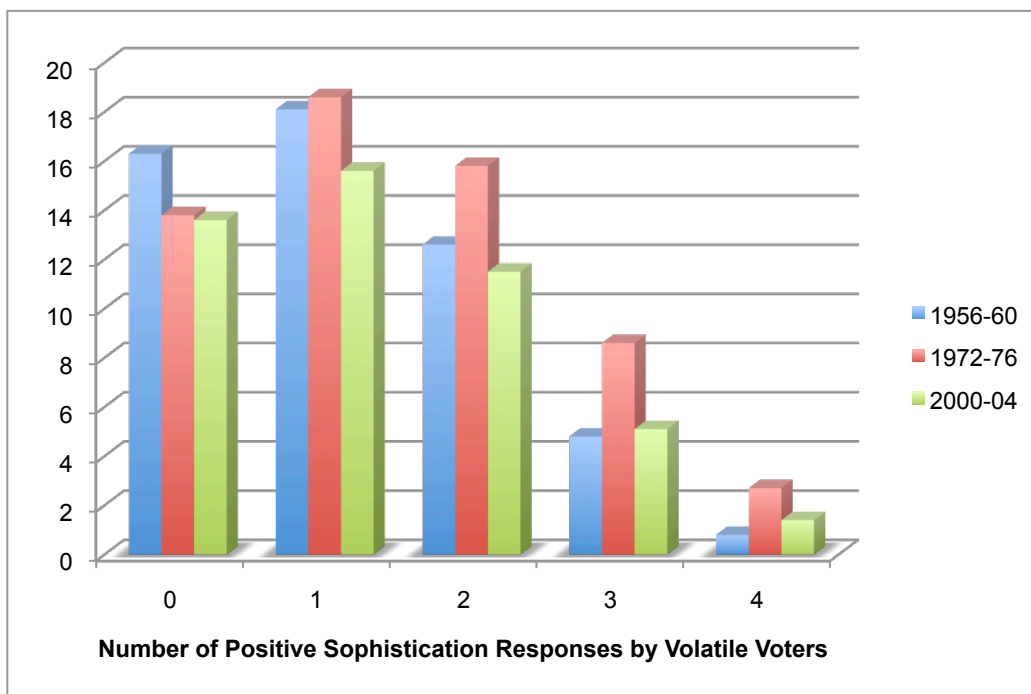
Volatile voters are also shown in the present study to more likely be politically unsophisticated. But while logistic regression analyses provided in this chapter show that this is so probabilistically, on a simple percentage basis, a substantial portion of volatile voters are nonetheless politically cognizant and interested in politics, and have constituted a pivotal segment of voters who are mutable in their party preferences, their desire to turn out to vote, or both. I hypothesize that these voters' responses to political information and issues drives their volatility. This hypothesis is the alternative to the thesis that voters are making political decisions in an essentially random fashion as both Caplan (2007) and Converse (1964; 1970) have asserted.

The data analyses shown below demonstrate that sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile voters are distinct. But as Figure 8 shows, there is in fact a continuum of sophistication among volatile voters; they do not comprise two uniform blocs of political sophisticates and non-sophisticates. I have dichotomized this continuum in order to employ a decisive, threshold level of sophistication (positive responses for two of four variables). The commonsense hypothesis I test is that the sophisticated segment of volatile voters – those who may be educated, politically knowledgeable, or politically interested and active, or some combination of these attributes – are reached by a substantial amount of political information that drives their individual shifts in voting behavior. The models shown in Tables 37 and 38 below similarly illustrate the differences between two kinds of ideologically eclectic voters: one subset that *is* politically sophisticated and less likely to be volatile in voting behavior, and another that is *not* politically sophisticated and more likely to be volatile. Unlike what Hillygus and Shields find, *neither* of these groups have been, from 1968 to 2004, likely to read

campaign news, suggesting that political information does not create cross-pressure or volatility in these voters – at least when it is in the form of *printed* campaign news.¹²⁵

As shown in Table 36, sophisticated volatile eclectics made up 13.4 percent of the electorate in the 1956-60 ANES; 17.1 percent in the 1972-74-76 ANES, and 10.4 in the 2000-04 ANES. But sophisticated volatile eclectics make up only one-third to less than one half of the volatile eclectic segment, indicating that many volatile eclectics may be driven to volatility by reasons other than issues and information.

Figure 8.
Number of Positive Responses to Sophistication Questions by Volatile Voters
1956-1960, 1972-1976, and 2000-2004 ANES



2000-2004; N = 763. Chi-Square = 51.70. R = -.21. P < .001.

1972-1976; N = 998. Chi-Square = 43.50. R = -.25. P < .001.

1956-1960; N = 900. Chi-Square = 26.32. R = -.16. P < .001.

As shown in the previous chapter, the more issue dimensions that are considered by a respondent, the less ideological consistency will be found, which should

¹²⁵ The inclusion of an indicator of television viewership of campaign news does not produce significant association between this variable and volatility in voting in any of the three historical periods examined.

demonstrate, conceptually, that the more information one has taken in, the greater the potential there will be for ideological inconsistency. Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980, 264), Converse (1967a, 138), and Zaller (2004, 166; 194-5) however, tell us that less ideological consistency is strongly associated with a higher likelihood of volatility in voting *behavior*. Analyses shown in this chapter, however (Table 28; the “general model”) indicate no significant relationship between these variables, casting doubt upon the validity of “levels of constraint” as a measure of political sophistication.

Macaluso (1977) found that when measures of general political information are used (knowledge about government budgets, the ability to name members of Congress, which party had a majority of seats in Congress, etc.), support for the conventional wisdom – that low information voters are more apt to be floaters – is “seriously weakened” (1977, 256 and *n*256). The data analyses I present in section 3 below, however, confirm the floating voter hypothesis when volatile voters are examined in the aggregate. But analyses shown in this chapter show strong distinctions between volatile sophisticates and volatile unsophisticates.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first provide a discussion of general data and method considerations, and then turn to a presentation of analyses using measures of political sophistication referenced to volatile voting behavior in section 3. I then break the volatile voter category down into sophisticates and non-sophisticates in section 4, and examine the demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics of these two groups across three time periods, with attention to the role of ideological eclecticism as a predictive variable. Finally, in section 5, I examine the demographics and attitudes of both sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile eclectics using multivariate binary logistic

regression models.

2. Data and Method

In this chapter, I provide a set of baseline analyses of the sophistication of volatile voters using conventional measures of voter engagement and sophistication as well as a composite measure of political sophistication. Importantly, as mentioned above, the hypothesis that volatile voters are politically sophisticated is tested using voting *behavior* rather than self-reported party identification as the dependent variable. The behavior to be explained is manifested in patterns of party loyalty and non-loyalty across three sequential presidential elections that are captured by a dichotomous variable, the construction of which is described in Chapter VI. This analysis includes active voters and occasional non-voters but excludes consistent non-voters. Volatile voting behavior is related to a composite measure of political sophistication, described in Chapter VII, along with control variables such as age, gender, marital status, and race, and opinions about key issues that can also help demonstrate that there *are* in fact discernible attitudinal patterns associated with volatile voting behavior in addition to distinct demographic patterns. I also examine the demographics, behavior, and attitudes of volatile sophisticates and non-sophisticates, and of sophisticated and non-sophisticated volatile eclecticists as distinct groups using these latter four statuses as dependent variables in multivariate logistic regression analyses.

Independent Variables

The two key independent variables used in multivariate binary logistic regression models provided below are the composite “sophistication” variable (x_1) and the ideological eclecticism indicator variable (x_2). Standard controls for age (x_3), race (x_4)

and (x_5), gender (x_6), marital status (x_7), are provided along with indicators of attention to political media (x_8), and negative perception of the state of the economy (x_9). Variables capturing the ideological positions of respondents on important issues of the day in each historical period are also included in certain models. For the “general model” of volatility regressed on sophistication in voting behavior (shown in Table 28), the set of variables shown immediately below is used.

General Logistic Regression Model: Volatility Regressed on Sophistication

Dependent variable:

y_1 Respondent voting behavior across three presidential elections using ANES panel data.* This is a dichotomous variable; voters who do not vote consistently for one party are coded as volatile (1); voters who do vote consistently for one party are coded as “standpatters.” (0). This variable excludes consistent nonvoters.

Independent variables:

x_1 Political sophistication composite variable (dichotomous; 1 = sophisticate)¹²⁶

x_2 Ideological eclecticism (1 = ideologically eclectic)

x_3 Age below 30¹²⁷

x_4 Race (1 = African-American)

x_5 Race (1 = Hispanic/Asian/Native American)

x_6 Gender (1 = male)

x_7 Marital status (1 = married)

x_8 Attention to election campaign news (print media; high attention = 1))

x_9 Perception of state of the economy (1 = respondent thinks economy is worse)

A second model is provided that regresses a dichotomous variable that captures whether a respondent is or is not a *volatile sophisticate* on standard demographic and behavioral variables (x_3 through x_9), along with attitude measures related to selected

* Note: these data include the respondents’ reported vote for president in the 2004 and 2000 elections and respondent recollection of presidential vote in 1996, reported presidential votes for 1976 and 1972, and recollected vote in 1968, and reported vote in 1956 and 1952, and recollected vote in 1948.

¹²⁶ As explained in Chapter VII, this variable includes measures of education, political interest, political knowledge, and political participation (in the 1956-1960 panel, the positive “participation” indicator is a belief by a respondent that citizens can influence government in ways other than voting.

¹²⁷ As noted in Chapter V, section two, this age break is a standard cutoff at the end of young adulthood. See Flanagan et al. (2009).

political issues. Volatile sophisticates are those respondents who score “1” on both y_1 and x_1 in the first model. A third such model is provided using a dichotomous indicator of status as a *volatile sophisticate* as the dependent variable. Fourth and fifth models (Tables 37 and 38, respectively) regress volatility in voting behavior on indicators of sophisticated and unsophisticated ideological eclecticism (using x_1 and x_2 in the general model) as well as standard demographic and behavioral independent variables (x_3 through x_9) as tests of the degree to which cross-pressures mediate volatility in voting behavior.

3. Association of Volatile Voting Behavior and Political Sophistication

1996-2000-2004 Period

In cross-tabulations of measures of political sophistication and indicators of volatility and party loyalty in the 1996-2000-2004 period, shown in Table 25, a higher frequency of standpatters consistently show up as educated and politically engaged, interested and knowledgeable, and as measured using a composite political sophistication scale, nearly twice as many standpatters are sophisticated as volatile voters. There are, nonetheless, a substantial number of volatile sophisticates in the electorate, with 18.1 percent of the 2000-2004 ANES panel sample being made up of volatile voters providing two or more sophistication responses on the composite sophistication variable scale described in Chapter VII. The statistically significant Pearson’s R scores in these cross-tabs indicate negative associations of sophistication with volatile voting behavior in varying strengths. Logistic regression analysis shown in Table 28 shows that an indication of respondent sophistication is associated with a statistically significant 55.6 percent lower odds of volatility in voting behavior than unsophisticates when holding

constant measures of ideological consistency, perception of economic conditions, campaign news readership, age, race, gender, and marital status.

Table 25.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Standpatters and Volatile Voters, 1996-2000-2004

	Standpatters	Volatile	Valid N (% of Total N)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	194 (22.9)	134 (15.8)	847 (71.4)	-.15***	19.57***
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	304 (36.9)	206 (25.0)	823 (69.3)	-.22***	39.46***
High Interest in Political Campaigns	199 (30.3)	132 (20.1)	656 (55.3)	-.14***	12.29***
Contacted Public Official	111 (13.5)	93 (11.3)	823 (69.3)	-.04	1.24
Watched Presidential Debate	357 (43.4)	269 (32.7)	823 (69.3)	-.21***	37.62***
Reads Campaign News	225 (26.5)	162 (19.1)	849 (71.5)	-.16***	21.38***
Two Or More Positive Responses for Composite Sophistication Variable	248 (32.5)	138 (18.1)	763 (64.3)	-.23***	41.89***

Percentages in parentheses. *Significant at <.05. **Significant at <.01. ***Significant at <.001. Total survey N = 1187. Association is a positive indication of voter volatility versus a positive indication of sophistication in the independent variable.

1968-1972-1976 Period

Unlike the 1996-2000-2004 period, analysis of the 1968-1972-1976 period, shown in Table 26, reveals a higher frequency of volatile voters who show up as politically engaged, interested, and knowledgeable. Education is the only measure by which standpatters turn up in higher numbers – by 0.5 percent more. According to the composite sophistication and education measures, the frequency of sophisticated standpatters and volatile voters in this period are virtually the same. As shown in Table 26 and Figure 10, 27.2 percent of survey respondents are made up of volatile voters

providing two or more positive responses on the composite sophistication variable scale described in Chapter VII. The statistically significant Pearson's R scores in these cross-tabs indicate negative associations of political sophistication with volatile voting behavior in varying strengths, and logistic regression results shown in Table 28 show that an indication of respondent sophistication in this time period is associated with a statistically significant 50.7 percent lower odds of volatility in voting behavior than for unsophisticates when holding constant measures of ideological eclecticism, perception of economic conditions, campaign news readership, age, race, gender, and marital status.

Table 26.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Standpatters and Volatile Voters, 1968-1972-1976

	Standpatters	Volatile	Valid N (% of Total N)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	96 (9.3)	90 (8.8)	1027 (77.8)	-.12***	14.34***
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	339 (33.9)	377 (37.7)	1000 (75.8)	-.23***	50.52***
High Interest in Political Campaigns	194 (18.9)	212 (20.7)	1026 (77.7)	-.14***	20.37***
Contacted Public Official	175 (17.0)	191 (18.6)	1027 (77.8)	-.13***	17.12***
Watched Presidential Debate	369 (36.9)	520 (52.0)	1000 (75.8)	-.06*	4.08*
Reads Campaign News	340 (33.1)	383 (37.3)	1028 (77.9)	-.24***	60.99***
Two Or More Positive Responses for Composite Sophistication Variable	269 (27.0)	271 (27.2)	998 (75.6)	-.21***	43.50***

Percentages in parentheses. *Significant at <.05. **Significant at <.01. ***Significant at <.001. Total survey N = 1320. Correlation is a positive indication of voter volatility versus a positive indication of sophistication in the independent variable.

1948-1952-1956 Period

Cross-tabulations of measures of political sophistication and indicators of volatility and party loyalty in the 1948-1952-1956 period, provided in Table 27, show that more standpatters than volatile voters are sophisticated according to four of six individual measures, although the difference is slight in three of these six comparisons. Only in measures of education and attention to political campaigns is there a substantially larger frequency of standpatters displaying sophistication. According to the composite sophistication measure, the frequency of sophisticated standpatters is nearly twice that of sophisticated volatile voters. As shown in Table 27 and Figure 10, 18.1 percent of the usable sample is made up of volatile voters providing positive sophistication responses on the composite sophistication variable scale described in Chapter VII. The Pearson's R scores in these cross-tabs indicate negative associations of political sophistication with volatile voting behavior in varying strengths and levels of statistical significance. Logistic regression analysis results shown in Table 28 show that an indication of respondent sophistication in this time period is associated with a statistically significant 44.7 percent lower odds of volatility in voting behavior than unsophisticates when holding constant ideological eclecticism, perception of economic conditions, campaign news readership, age, race, gender, and marital status.

Table 27.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Standpatters and Volatile Voters, 1948-1952-1956

	Standpatters	Volatile	Valid N (% of Total N)	R	Chi-Square
Attained Bachelor's Degree	66 (7.2)	36 (3.9)	919 (74.2)	-.12***	13.89***
Knows Party Control of House of Reps	252 (27.3)	232 (25.1)	924 (74.6)	-.10**	9.28**
High Attention to Political Campaigns	193 (21.0)	144 (15.7)	919 (74.2)	.15***	21.07***
Believes S/he Can Influence Government	140 (15.4)	138 (15.2)	908 (73.3)	-.04	1.45
Watched Presidential Debate	355 (44.2)	397 (49.4)	803 (64.8)	-.07	3.70*
Reads Campaign News	322 (34.8)	350 (37.9)	924 (74.6)	-.02	.38
Two Or More Positive Responses for Composite Sophistication Variable	205 (34.4)	163 (18.1)	900 (72.6)	-.14***	17.04***

Percentages in parentheses. *Significant at <.05. **Significant at <.01. ***Significant at <.001. Total survey N = 1239. Correlation is a positive indicator of voter volatility versus a positive indication of sophistication in the independent variable.

Historical Summary

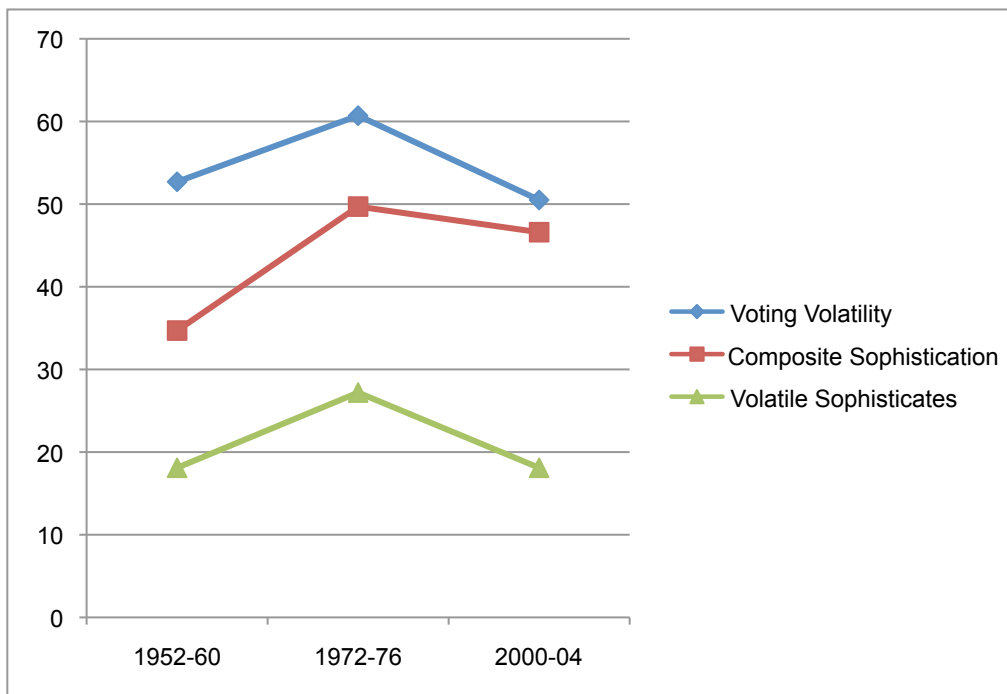
In the binary logistic regression analyses provided, the fact that (African-American) race is negatively associated with volatile voting in the 1996-2004 and 1968-1976 periods and yet strongly positive as a predictor of volatile in voting in the 1948-1956 period (183.0 percent greater odds of volatility than all other races, albeit at a .08 level of significance) is particularly striking in light of historical circumstances, with the beginning of the shift of Republicans to a position aligned against civil rights and in light of fissures forming in the Democratic party around the issue of racial segregation.¹²⁸ Additionally, this is a period in which the Democratic party began reaching out to urban

¹²⁸ I refer here to the ascendancy of the Dixiecrats, but also See Campbell and Miller (1957) on what is shown to be a less dramatic shift of party loyalty in the South in the 1950s.

blacks with policies that by 1936 made this demographic segment strongly party loyal (Mollenkopf 1983, 62-64). Age, in all three time periods examined, is a dramatically strong predictor of volatile voting behavior, with respondents under 30 exhibiting 367.7 percent higher odds of volatility than those over 30 in the 1948-1956 period, a 195.8 percent higher odds in 1968-1976, and a 223.9 percent higher odds in the 1996-2004 period. A positive indication of sophistication, using the composite sophistication measures formulated in the present study, consistently predicts a significant, lower odds of volatility compared to unsophisticates with a range of 44.7 percent less to 55.6 percent lower odds for sophisticates.

As shown in Figure 9, the change across time in aggregate volatility in voting somewhat mirrors the change in composite sophistication from 1948 to 2004 indicating that sophistication is somewhat positively associated with volatile voting in the aggregate despite the negative association shown at the individual level. This relationship becomes more apparent, as I explain below, when volatile sophisticates are broken out of the category of volatile voters and in that analysis, a strong parallel between overall volatility and sophisticated volatility is shown.

Figure 9: Historical Comparison of Voting Volatility and Composite Sophistication (ANES Panel Surveys)



See tables 25 to 27 for composite sophistication figures. Accounting of volatile voters does not include consistent nonvoters. All associations are statistically significant ($P = .001$).

Table 28.
Logistic Regression: General Model - Likelihood of Volatile Voting Behavior
(ANES panel surveys)

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Sophisticated ^a	.444***	.493***	.553***
Ideologically Eclectic ^b	1.331 [#]	.826	1.007
Age (30 and under = 1)	3.239***	2.958***	4.677***
Race (black = 1)	.504*	.359***	2.830 [#]
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	1.979 [#]	.969	--
Gender (male=1)	1.268	1.063	.940
Marital Status (married=1)	.368***	.714*	1.058
Reads Campaign News	.725 [#]	.418***	1.181
Economy Worse ^c	.816	1.000	1.580*
Constant	2.278***	5.096***	.852
Chi-Square	113.53***	112.64***	69.83***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.149	.119	.099
Nagelkerke R-Square	.199	.160	.132
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	889 (67.3)	668 (53.9)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. # Sig. ≤.10

^a Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Sophisticates are those who have responded positively on two or more items.

^bIdeological eclectics in the 1996-04 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of gun control, abortion, and the right of gays to serve openly in the military; Ideological eclectics in the 1968-76 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of Vietnam War involvement, abortion, and approval of demonstrations and sit-ins; Ideological eclectics in the 1948-56 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of support for Medicare, support for sending soldiers overseas to fight communism, and government involvement in ending racial segregation.

^c"1" is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

4. Volatile Sophisticates and Unsophisticates

In studies dating back to the 1940s, scholars have repeatedly found that voters who do not consistently turn out and vote in a party-loyal manner in presidential elections are more likely to be politically unsophisticated. The present study, however, shows that among voters who are inconsistent in party choice, turnout, or both, there are two strikingly different groups: one that is politically quite knowledgeable and engaged, and one that is not. Volatile voters who score highly on at least two of four standard measures of political sophistication (education, political knowledge, political engagement, and interest in politics) have, since 1948, comprised between 18.1 and 27.2 percent of the electorate. Studies by Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004) supporting the floating voter hypothesis argue that *low-information* voters are significantly more likely to be volatile in voting behavior than high-information voters. When performing analyses that aggregate all volatile voters in one group, my data affirm this hypothesis. Binary logistic regression analyses using the volatility and composite sophistication variables shown in Table 28 support Converse and Zaller. But when the volatile segment of the electorate is broken down into sophisticated and unsophisticated components, several significant voter tendencies are revealed about volatile voters' political media usage, attitude strength regarding political issues, and demographics that stand as challenges to the floating voter hypothesis as it has been articulated and supported in past literature.¹²⁹

As shown in Table 31, men have become increasingly more likely to be volatile sophisticates from 1968 to 2004. In the 1968-1976 period, men displayed 56.3 percent

¹²⁹ Analyses using separate sophistication variables – education, and political knowledge, engagement, and interest – were performed and produced similar results, but using all four of these measures in a composite variable captures a variety of aspects of sophistication, and, using this latter standard, respondents must be sophisticated according to more than one measure.

higher odds than women of being volatile sophisticates, and in the 1996-2004 period, men displayed 145.2 percent higher odds of being volatile sophisticates than women. Those who are ideologically liberal with respect to certain key political issues, and those who have read about campaign news regularly in a newspaper, as members of a group that is highly engaged in politics, were also significantly more likely to be volatile sophisticates than reference groups in the 1968 to 2004 period, although this latter association has decreased over time, possibly because of the increased usage of television and the internet. From 1948 to 2004, volatility is strongly and significantly predicted in voters under age 30 (Table 28) compared with those over 30, and from 1948 to 1968, voters under 30 had between a 71.1 percent to a 134.6 percent higher odds than older voters of being volatile sophisticates (Table 31). As of the late 1990s, those who were married were significantly less likely to be volatile sophisticates. Finally, in the late 1960s to early 1970s, blacks were much less likely to be volatile sophisticates, evidently reflecting strong and consistent loyalty to the Democratic party that begins growing in the mid-1930s.

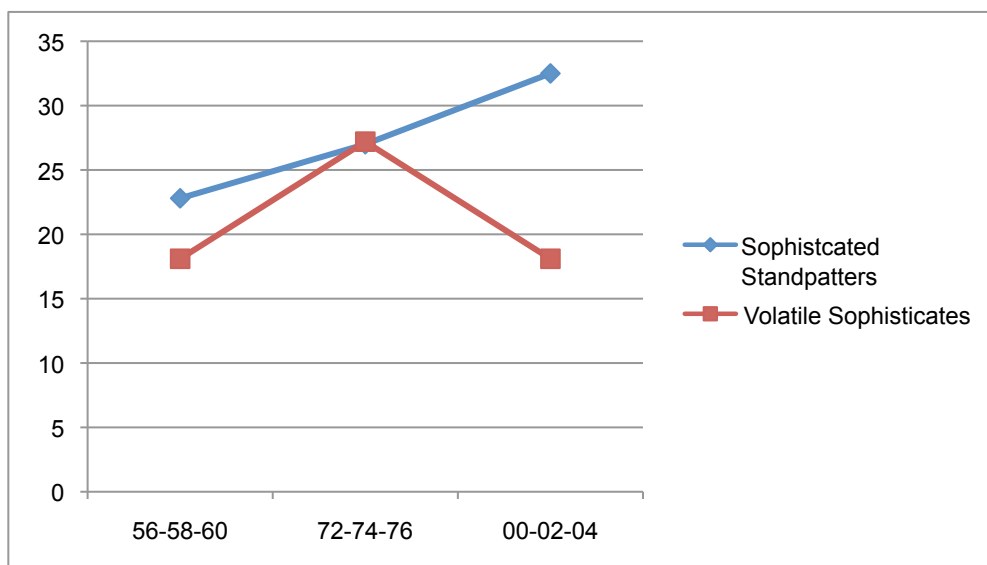
Those who exhibit strong issue opinions are more likely to be volatile sophisticates than those who do not. In the 1996-04 period, those who favor gun control are significantly more likely to be volatile sophisticates than those who do not, and in the 1968-76 period, those who favor abortion rights are shown to more likely be volatile sophisticates than those who do not. Strong issue opinions do not show up as significant predictors of sophisticated volatility in the 1948-56 period.

Notably, the presence of opinions about economic conditions do not show up as significant predictors of volatile sophistication in any time period but 1948-56, or of

volatile voting in general as shown in Table 28 (the general model). In the 1948-56 period, a perception that the economy has gotten worse is associated with 58 percent higher odds of volatility than those who did not perceive worsening economic conditions. This finding is at odds with those of Zaller (2004), who shows that volatile voting driven by economic opinions is most prevalent among the least sophisticated, and challenges a wide variety of economic voting literature arguing the primacy of this kind of issue voting (Lewis-Beck and Tien 2004; MacKuen et al. 1992; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001).

Figure 10 shows that the proportion of volatile sophisticates in the electorate increased dramatically between the 1956-1960 and 1972-1976 surveys, providing strong support for the claim by Nie et al. (1976) that issues such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, Watergate, and many other highly salient political events and controversies in this period, along with the advent of mass electronic media, drove widespread citizen awareness of, and engagement with, politics. These data also support the notion that increased sophistication in the electorate in turn drove volatility in political behavior in this period. The increase in sophistication of the American public, shown in Chapter VII, Figure 5, somewhat reflects an increase in the number of Americans who have obtained a college degree. At the same time, the data in Table 29 and Figure 10 show a steady increase in the number of sophisticated standpatters in the electorate.

Figure 10.
Distribution of Volatile Sophisticates and Sophisticated Standpatters Using Composite Sophistication Variable (percentage of total N)



Data derived from tables 25 to 27. Accounting of volatile voters does not include consistent nonvoters. All associations are statistically significant ($P = .001$).

Sophisticated voters are said to more frequently be opinion leaders and influencers (Converse 1964, 232; Kingdon 1970; Stimson 2004, 19) and due to the “miracle of aggregation,” their effect on political outcomes, when averaged with the more normally distributed preferences of citizens who hold less politically intense opinions and who possess less political sophistication and interest, may be substantial (Campbell et al. [1960] 1980, 271; Converse 1964, 231; 1967a, 154; Kingdon 1970; Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968, vi; Stimson 2004, 20). Most interestingly, Kingdon (1970, 260) found that there is a “disproportionate frequency” of opinion leaders among volatile voters. A preliminary analysis I have done, however, does not confirm this finding; this model, using an independent variable capturing whether a respondent has tried to influence others in their voting decisions, does not yield evidence of a significant association between “influencer” behavior – a self report of attempting to influence another’s voting

behavior – and volatile voting. The appendix to this chapter provides a summary of this model for all three time periods.¹³⁰

Table 29.
Sophisticated Volatile Voters and Sophisticated Standpatters (ANES panel surveys)

Time Period	Sophisticated Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile Sophisticates (% of valid N)	Total (% of valid N)	R	Chi-Square	Valid Survey N (%)
1948-1956 ^a	205 (22.8)	163 (18.1)	368 (40.9)	-.14***	17.04***	900 (100)
1968-1976 ^b	269 (27.0)	271 (27.2)	540 (54.1)	-.21***	43.50***	998 (100)
1996-2004 ^c	248 (32.5)	138 (18.1)	386 (50.6)	-.23***	41.89***	763 (100)

***Significant at $P < .001$. ^aThe 1956-58-60 panel survey includes 1948, 1952, and 1956 presidential voting data; ^bThe 1972-74-76 panel survey includes 1968, 1972, and 1976 presidential voting data; ^cThe 2000-02-04 panel survey includes 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential voting data. Accounting of volatile voters excludes consistent nonvoters. For 1956-60, total survey N = 1239; for 1972-76, total survey N = 1320; for 2000-04, total survey N = 1187. All of the total survey N figures include consistent nonvoters. Valid survey N exclude these respondents and those for whom data are missing as described in Chapter V.

¹³⁰ This analysis is reported in the appendix to Chapter IX in Table 49.

Table 30.
Volatile Unsophisticates and Unsophisticated Standpatters (ANES panel surveys)

Time Period	Unsophisticated Standpatters (% of valid N)	Volatile Non-Sophisticates (% of valid N)	Total (% of valid N)	R	Chi-Square	Valid Survey N (%)
1948-1956 ^a	222 (24.7)	310 (34.4)	900 (100)	-.14***	17.04***	900 (100)
1968-1976 ^b	134 (13.4)	324 (32.5)	998 (100)	-.21***	43.50***	998 (100)
1996-2004 ^c	154 (20.2)	223 (29.2)	763 (100)	-.23***	41.89***	763 (100)

***Significant at $P < .001$. ^aThe 1956-58-60 panel survey includes 1948, 1952, and 1956 presidential voting data; ^bThe 1972-74-76 panel survey includes 1968, 1972, and 1976 presidential voting data; ^cThe 2000-02-04 panel survey includes 1996, 2000, and 2004 presidential voting data. Accounting of volatile voters excludes consistent nonvoters. For 1956-60, total survey N = 1239; for 1972-76, total survey N = 1320; for 2000-04, total survey N = 1187. All of the total survey N figures include consistent nonvoters. Valid survey N exclude these respondents and those for whom data are missing as described in Chapter V.

Table 31.
Logistic Regression: Volatile Sophisticates^a (ANES panel surveys)

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Age (30 and under = 1)	.988	1.711**	2.346**
Race (black = 1)	.527	.108***	1.378
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	.966	1.776	--
Gender (male=1)	2.452***	1.563**	1.078
Marital Status (married=1)	.599**	.798	1.462
Reads Campaign News	1.383	1.443*	2.979***
Issue 1 ^b	1.635**	1.206	1.017
Issue 2 ^c	1.550 [#]	.814	.943
Issue 3 ^d	1.211	1.490**	.957
Respondent Thinks Economy Worse ^e	1.054	1.036	1.328
Constant	.075***	.225***	.058***
Chi-Square	35.94***	66.39***	35.86***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.050	.072	.052
Nagelkerke R-Square	.082	.104	.083
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	889 (67.3)	668 (53.9)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. [#]Sig at .10.

^aDichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores 1 for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Sophisticates are those who have responded positively on two or more items.

^b For 1996-04, issue 1 is gun control (1 = in favor) for 1968-72, support of protest demonstrations (1 = in favor) for 1948-56 issue 1 is subsidizing Medicare (1 = in favor).

^c For 1996-04, issue 2 is allowing homosexuals to serve in the armed forces (1 = in favor) for 1968-72, issue 2 is support for the Vietnam War; for 1948-56 issue 2 is sending soldiers to fight communism (1 = in favor).

^d For 1996-04, issue 3 is abortion rights (1 = in favor) for 1968-72, issue 3 is abortion rights; for 1948-56 issue 3 is school integration (1 = in favor).

^e "1" is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

For 1956-58-60; Total survey N = 1239 including consistent nonvoters; for 1972-74-76; Total survey N = 1320 including consistent nonvoters; for 2000-02-04; Total survey N = 1187 including consistent nonvoters.

Unsophisticated Volatile Voters

Volatile voters who are politically *unsophisticated* exhibit several strong tendencies that are the inverse of volatile sophisticates, as shown in the logistic regression analyses presented in Table 32. Since the late 1960s, men are much less likely to be volatile unsophisticates than women, and on the matter of abortion rights, since the late 1960s, those holding conservative opinions are significantly more likely to be volatile unsophisticates than those holding a liberal opinion on abortion. Voters under age 30 exhibit a strong likelihood of being volatile unsophisticates across all three periods, which would at first glance seem to contradict the data shown in Table 39. Can voters under the age of 30 exhibit a strong likelihood of being both volatile *sophisticates* and *non-sophisticates*? Given that voters under the age of 30 in the aggregate display much higher odds of being volatile, as shown in Table 28, yes. This interpretation also applies to marital status, which is negatively associated with sophisticated and non-sophisticated volatility in the 1996-2004 period. Unsophisticated voters are in the aggregate more likely to be volatile as shown in Table 28. Importantly, as shown in Table 32, volatile unsophisticates were significantly less likely to read campaign news in all time periods, a finding that challenges the thesis that short-term political information has a disproportionate effect in creating volatility in unsophisticated voters (Converse 1967a; Zaller 2004). These voters may, however, be getting political news from television, but analyses I have performed show no significant association of volatile unsophisticate status with viewership of political news on television.

Table 32.
Logistic Regression: Volatile Unsophisticates^a (ANES panel surveys)

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Age (30 and under = 1)	3.131***	1.894***	2.275***
Race (black = 1)	.765	1.240	2.129
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	2.236*	.472	--
Gender (male=1)	.599**	.607**	.835
Marital Status (married=1)	.423***	.881	.797
Reads Campaign News	.398***	.272***	.551**
Issue 1 ^b	.982	.912	.977
Issue 2 ^c	.842	1.164	1.038
Issue 3 ^d	688*	.480***	.970
Respondent Thinks Economy Worse ^e	.679 [#]	.973	1.345
Constant	1.855*	1.660*	.789
Chi-Square	107.46***	118.37***	35.43***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.141	.125	.052
Nagelkerke R-Square	.201	.176	.072
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	889 (67.3)	668 (53.9)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. [#]Sig at .10.

^a Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Sophisticates are those who have responded positively on two or more items.

^b For 1996-04, issue 1 is gun control (1 = in favor) for 1968-72, support of protest demonstrations (1= in favor) for 1948-56 issue 1 is subsidizing Medicare (1 = in favor).

^c For 1996-04, issue 2 is allowing homosexuals to serve in the armed forces (1=in favor) for 1968-72, issue 2 is support for the Vietnam War; for 1948-56 issue 2 is sending soldiers to fight communism (1 = in favor).

^d For 1996-04, issue 3 is abortion rights (1 = in favor) for 1968-72, issue 2 is abortion rights; for 1948-56 issue 2 is school integration (1 = in favor).

^e "1" is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958. For 1956-58-60; Total survey N=1239 including consistent nonvoters; for 1972-74-76; Total survey N = 1320 including consistent nonvoters; for 2000-02-04; Total survey N = 1187 including consistent nonvoters.

Volatile Sophisticates and Media Usage

As shown in Table 31, voters who have read about political campaigns in the newspaper, “regularly,” “often,” “from time to time” or “some” between 1948 and 1968 display significantly higher odds of being volatile sophisticates than those who do not read about politics in the newspaper with some degree of frequency. Those who indicated that they read about politics in a newspaper only rarely or not at all, or provided “don’t know” or “refused” responses, were coded as not being readers of political content in newspapers. In the 1968-76 period, regular readers of campaign news display 44.3 percent greater odds of being volatile sophisticates than those who do not regularly read campaign news, and in the 1948-56 period, regular readers of campaign news display 197.9 percent greater odds of being volatile sophisticates than those who do not read campaign news regularly. The relationship of volatile sophistication and campaign news readership is not statistically significant in the 1996-04 period.

As shown in Table 28, regular readers of campaign news since 1968 have been significantly less likely to be volatile voters when the volatile voter category includes both sophisticates and non-sophisticates. Campaign news readers exhibit 58.2 percent lower odds of being volatile voters than non-readers in the 1968-76 period, and 27.5 percent lower odds of volatility than non-readers in the 1996-04 period (at a $\leq .10$ level of significance). Political news readership is not a statistically significant predictor of volatile voting behavior in the 1948-56 period. There is therefore some support for the argument that a substantial segment of the electorate is affected by political news, and, as V.O. Key argued, “moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public

policy” (1966, 7-8) to vote in a manner “not straitjacketed by social determinants” (1966,7).

Volatile Sophisticates: Discussion and Conclusions

There are significant tendencies among volatile sophisticates with regard to age and gender as well as with regard to media usage and their opinions on key political issues. There is also a statistical suggestion that African-American race is, as of 1968, negatively related to volatile sophistication. Additionally, age, gender, liberal issue opinions, and media usage are significant predictors of volatile sophistication across two or more historical periods. With respect to age having a strong relationship with volatility in general (Table 28) as well as among volatile sophisticates (Table 31) one explanation for this pattern may be that younger voters (under age 30) are not politically developed enough to be set in their ways in political behavior. They may also be moving from place to place as they go off to college or graduate school and return, move to other cities to start careers, or enter military service, or move to different homes upon getting married or starting families, and may not always be registered to vote (see Gentry 2010). They are therefore more likely to be volatile. African-Americans have long been highly loyal to the Democratic party (Green et al. 2002, 12; Page and Shapiro 1992, 308; Stanley and Niemi 2001, 389), and are hence very unlikely to be volatile regardless of sophistication level. I do not attempt to offer any detailed theory here as to why men are more likely to be both volatile and sophisticated, although literature on gender gaps in voting behavior abounds. Notably, with regard to the female preference for Democrats, Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999) write that “continuous growth in the gender gap is largely a product of the changing politics of men” (1999, 865) whereas they find that the partisanship of women

has “changed very little, if at all” (1999, 867). Some studies also suggest that women continually favor more compassionate policies, whereas men are divided on issues such as social welfare (Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004; Schlesinger and Heldman 2001; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). One possible explanation, of course, for the volatility of male sophisticates – as for all volatile sophisticates – is that they may simply be more susceptible to cross-pressure produced by higher information intake and therefore more likely to be volatile in voting behavior. The long-standing political “knowledge gap” between men and women explained above might therefore account for the gender gap in sophisticated volatility. And, since men are more likely to be politically sophisticated than women, if gender is not significantly associated with volatility in general (as shown in Table 28), men will naturally be more likely to be volatile sophisticates.

A liberal opinion about key issues of the day is an increasingly strong predictor of volatile sophistication whereas volatile non-sophisticates are less likely to be indicated by a liberal position on issues, but this is more weakly shown. While men are, overall, more likely to be Republicans as the previously cited gender-gap literature tells us, men who are both volatile and politically sophisticated are more likely to be liberal with regard to issues.

The findings in this dissertation, then, may be a step toward solving Converse’s paradox. *The sophisticated and volatile segment of the electorate is very engaged with politics and political issues, while the volatile and unsophisticated segment of the electorate is not.* A substantial portion of this latter segment may also, as Kingdon (1970) suggested, be made volatile by the effect of opinion leaders who are volatile

sophisticates, although such a hypothesis will require further study to evaluate.¹³¹ Get-out-the-vote efforts must also be taken into account as forces driving more apathetic voters to turn out, and may hence be drivers of more aggregate volatility, and while this paper offers a pointed qualification to the way in which the “floating voter hypothesis” has been explored by Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004), the “short-term” information effects they describe may still go a long way toward explaining the behavior of volatile voters who are *not* sophisticated.

5. Volatility of Sophisticated and Unosophisticated Eclectics

The analyses that follow gauge the sophistication of voters who are 1) volatile ideological eclectics, 2) volatile ideological consistent, 3) ideologically eclectic standpatters, 4) ideologically consistent standpatters. These voter types are accounted for using the volatility indicator described in Chapter VI, the composite sophistication variable described in Chapter VII, and the ideological eclecticism variable described in Chapter VIII. Cross-tabulations of sophisticated and unsophisticated voters in these four categories of eclecticism and volatility are provided along with multivariate binary logistic regression analyses showing the likelihood of volatility of sophisticated and unsophisticated eclectics in models for three historical periods. These models control for commonly used demographics, political (print) media usage, and the respondent’s perception of the economy. The analyses reported in Tables 37 and 38 show that ideological eclectics who are *sophisticated* are far less likely to be volatile than ideological eclectics who are *unsophisticated*, and these findings suggest that issue-related cross-pressure in the unsophisticated voter creates volatility, while issue-related

¹³¹ A preliminary analysis indicates that this may be so, but it is not indicated with statistical significance.

cross-pressure in the sophisticated voter creates stability in voting behavior, much in keeping with Zaller's 2004 findings.

Furthermore, when these analyses are compared with the "general" model shown in Table 28, it becomes apparent that sophistication is the driving force in volatility rather than eclecticism or cross-pressure. In the "general" model, the indicator of sophistication, when not controlled by the indicator of ideological eclecticism, is statistically significant and produces a robust relationship across all three time periods. Ideological eclecticism on its own is not a statistically significant predictor of volatility, and this is surely due to the fact that both volatile voting and eclecticism are so highly prevalent in the electorate, both distributions tend toward that of the normal curve. Thus it can be inferred that the volatility of *unsophisticated* eclectics and the stability of *sophisticated* eclectics are primarily due to the sophistication levels of respondents and less so to their ideological consistency, eclecticism, or cross-pressure. Furthermore, if the theory of volatile voting described on Chapter III is correct, political sophistication will be a necessary condition for eclecticism and volatility driven by issues. This theory would, however, only apply to sophisticated eclectics who make up between 10.4 and 17.1 of the electorate.

As shown in Figure 11 and Tables 33 to 36, the percentage of volatile ideological eclectics decreased from 38.4 to 32.1 between 1976 and 2004 while the percentage of ideologically consistent standpatters in the electorate sharply increased in that period. These patterns suggest both an electorate that is increasingly polarized in terms of ideology, and more stable in terms of party support.

Figure 11.
Time Series: Volatile Eclectics and Consistent Standpatters (% of Total N)

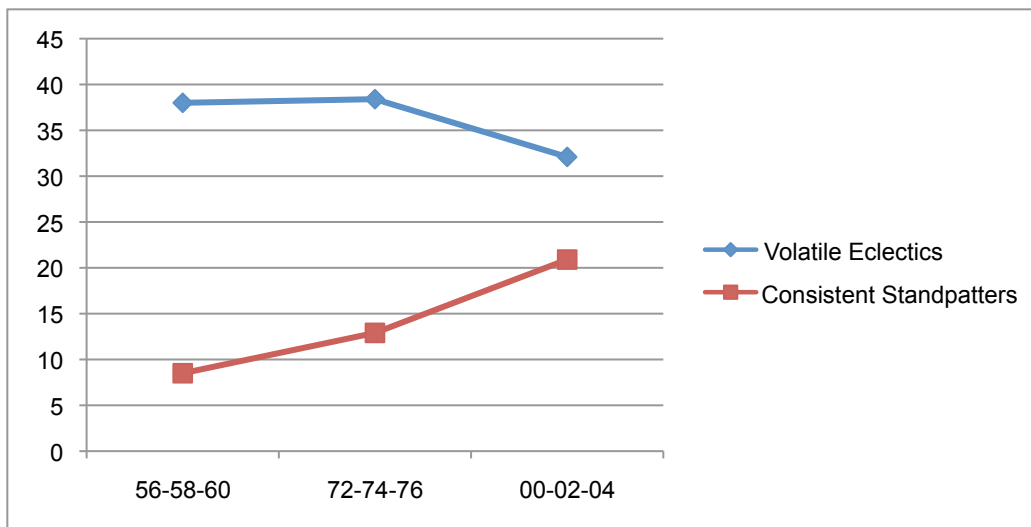


Table 33.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Volatile Eclectics and Ideologically Consistent Standpatters Using Composite Sophistication Variable (2000-2002-2004 ANES)

	Unsophisticated	Sophisticated	Total	R	Chi-Square
Consistent Standpatters	52 (7.4)	95 (13.5)	147 (20.9)	.15***	15.43***
Volatile Eclectics	153 (21.7)	73 (10.4)	226 (32.1)	-.25***	42.69***
Eclectic Standpatters	90 (12.8)	134 (19.0)	224 (31.8)	.13***	12.13***
Volatile Ideological Consistents	56 (7.9)	52 (7.4)	108 (15.3)	.02	.217
Total	351 (49.8)	354 (50.2)	705 (100)		

Percentages of total valid survey N are in parentheses.

Table 34.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Volatile Eclectics and Ideologically Consistent Standpatters Using Composite Sophistication Variable (1972-1974-1976 ANES)

	Unsophisticated	Sophisticated	Total	R	Chi-Square
Consistent Standpatters	35 (3.9)	81 (9.0)	116 (12.9)	.11***	11.63***
Volatile Eclectics	191 (21.3)	153 (17.1)	344 (38.4)	-.17***	25.64***
Eclectic Standpatters	88 (9.8)	164 (18.3)	252 (28.1)	.13***	14.02***
Volatile Ideological Consistents	88 (9.8)	96 (10.7)	184 (20.5)	-.03	.820
Total	402 (44.9)	494 (55.1)	896 (100)		

Percentages of total valid survey N are in parentheses.

Table 35.
Crosstab: Sophistication of Volatile Eclectics and Consistent Standpatters Using Composite Sophistication Variable (1956-1958-1960 ANES)

	Unsophisticated	Sophisticated	Total	R	Chi-Square
Consistent Standpatters	23 (3.4)	34 (5.1)	84 (8.5)	.09*	5.86*
Volatile Eclectics	165 (24.6)	90 (13.4)	255 (38.0)	-.14***	13.85***
Eclectic Standpatters	126 (18.8)	118 (17.6)	244 (36.4)	.06	2.42
Volatile Ideological Consistents	48 (7.2)	40 (6.0)	88 (13.1)	.05	.01
Total	373 (55.6)	298 (44.4)	671 (100)		

Percentages of total valid survey N are in parentheses.

Table 36.
Crosstab: Historical Summary: Sophisticated and Unsophisticated Volatile Eclectics

Time Period	Unsophisticated (% of valid N)	Sophisticated (% of valid N)	Total (% of valid N)	R	Chi-Square	Survey N (% of total N)
1956-58-60	165 (24.6)	90 (13.4)	255 (38.0)	-.14***	13.85***	671
1972-74-76	191 (21.3)	153 (17.1)	344 (38.4)	-.17***	25.64***	896
2000-02-04	153 (21.7)	73 (10.4)	226 (32.1)	-.25***	42.69***	705 (59.4)

Percentages of total are in parentheses *** $P < .001$. Sophistication measured using composite variable described in Chapter VII.

Table 37.
Historical Summary: Likelihood of Volatility of Sophisticated Eclectics (Exp (B))

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Sophisticated Eclectic ^a	.627**	.551***	.584**
Age (30 and under = 1)	3.281***	2.673***	4.675***
Race (black = 1)	.561 [#]	.365***	2.905 [#]
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	2.083*	.880	--
Gender (male=1)	1.163	.955	.951
Marital Status (married=1)	.385***	.723 [#]	1.057
Reads Campaign News	.659**	.391***	1.135
Attends Religious Services	.868	.715*	.992
Economy Worse ^b	.740	.957	1.589*
Constant	2.581***	5.099***	.816
Chi-Square	93.57***	101.52***	67.00***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.124	.112	.096
Nagelkerke R-Square	.166	.151	.128
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	851 (64.5)	666 (53.8)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. [#]Sig. at .10

^a Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Sophisticates are those who have responded positively on two or more items. Ideological eclectics in the 1996-04 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of gun control, abortion, and the right of gays to serve openly in the military; Ideological eclectics in the 1968-76 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of Vietnam War involvement, abortion, and approval of demonstrations and sit-ins; Ideological eclectics in the 1948-56 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of support for Medicare, support for sending soldiers overseas to fight communism, government involvement in ending racial segregation.

^b" 1" is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

Table 38.
Historical Summary: Likelihood of Volatility of Unsophisticated Eclectics (Exp (B))

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Unsophisticated Eclectic ^a	2.333***	1.640**	1.701**
Age (30 and under = 1)	3.258***	2.684***	4.724***
Race (black = 1)	.552 [#]	.369***	2.743 [#]
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	1.950 [#]	.794	--
Gender (male=1)	1.225	.944	.954
Marital Status (married=1)	.375***	.728 [#]	1.085
Reads Campaign News	.706*	.389***	1.153
Attends Religious Services	.815	.714*	1.003
Economy Worse ^b	.784	.979	1.559*
Constant	1.643 [#]	3.519***	.503*
Chi-Square	110.24***	95.77***	67.46***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.145	.106	.096
Nagelkerke R-Square	.193	.143	.128
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	851 (64.5)	666 (53.8)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. [#]Sig. at .10

^a Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Non-sophisticates are those who have not responded positively on two or more items. Ideological eclectics in the 1996-04 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of gun control, abortion, and the right of gays to serve openly in the military; Ideological eclectics in the 1968-76 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of Vietnam War involvement, abortion, and approval of demonstrations and sit-ins; Ideological eclectics in the 1948-56 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of support for Medicare, support for sending soldiers overseas to fight communism, government involvement in ending racial segregation.

^b "1" is positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

6. Conclusions and Implications

When using conventional measures of political sophistication, the general model of volatility in voting shown in Table 28 confirms the floating voter hypothesis, although

it does so in an undramatic manner. Furthermore, some important qualifications to the floating voter hypothesis and some significant distinctions among volatile voters have, however, been revealed. The present study is based on an accounting of volatile voting behavior that demonstrates a much larger prevalence of volatility in the electorate than has been reported in the past. Thus the prevalence of voters in the electorate who are not party-loyal is sufficiently large that their distribution is more diffused across all sophistication levels than in past studies. Another novel finding provided in this dissertation is that between 1948 and 2004, between 18.1 and 27.2 percent of voters surveyed by the ANES have been volatile sophisticates, and a notable spike in their numbers occurs in the early 1970s, most likely due to the exceptionally volatile nature of politics in America at that time. There is, however, a negative likelihood in all periods that sophisticated voters will be volatile. Across the three historical periods examined, the models reported in Table 28 indicate that respondents who are sophisticated will have 44.7 percent to 55.6 percent lower odds of being volatile in voting behavior than unsophisticates.

The strong and significant association of sophisticated volatility with high intake of political campaign media lends support to the notion that in two of the three historical periods examined, such information intake produces cross-pressure in these voters' decision-making processes that in turn produces volatility. Zaller (2004) shows that such information intake does indeed alter the behavior of voters, but argues that the effect of such information on "floating" voters is short-term, sensational in nature, and inordinately related to economic news. Furthermore, Zaller shows that "low information" voters are driven to volatile voting behavior while "high information" voters are driven to

stand pat. The data presented herein on volatile sophisticates, however, supports the notion that a substantial number of high-information voters are driven to volatility. But concurring with Zaller (2004), and the floating voter hypothesis in general are the present findings that low-sophistication voters are more likely to be volatile in voting behavior. At the same time, many high sophistication voters are driven to stand pat, suggesting that ideology and party labels may function as information shortcuts for these types of voters, or that information simply clarifies decisions for them.

How Rational are Ideological Eclectics?

While the data sources I have used cannot provide a demonstration of whether short or long-term political information is decisive, the analyses in this chapter show that issues do matter to voters, and that it is not simply the politically indolent who are volatile. It is quite frequently voters who are actively taking in issue-related information – and acting upon this intake as shown section 4 and Table 31. Arguments that most voters are not “rational” have been based on findings of widespread deficits in political sophistication. But what may in fact constitute irrational behavior in voting and nonvoting is adherence to abstract political belief systems with little regard to issues and choices in specific political situations, or the benefits citizens may or may not receive as a result of their voting decisions. Adherence to political abstractions such as ideology is a behavior a good many voters do indeed engage in, as is suggested by the fact that unsophisticated standpatters make up between 13.7 percent and 22.2 percent of the voting public (as shown in Tables 33 to 35). By maintaining party loyalty irrespective of political developments and issues, and by screening out phenomena that would create cross-pressure in their minds, these voters may be acting rationally in terms of

information costs, but not in terms of making decisions based on the best reasonably available information. At the same time, the majority of voters have been ideologically eclectic since the mid-1950s – between 63.5 and 83 percent of the electorate. And, between 28.6 and 35.3 percent of the electorate has been comprised of sophisticated ideological eclectics since the mid 1950s (Chapter VIII, Table 22). Between 10.4 percent and 17.1 percent of sophisticated eclectics have also been volatile in voting behavior (Table 36). Although this is a somewhat small fraction of the electorate, it is nonetheless substantial and large enough to be decisive in elections.

Voting is in fact a costly act¹³² and an “indolent” and uninterested citizen would simply not bother with the decision-making process, the trip to the polling place, the possibility of waiting in a time-consuming line, or the cost of learning how to use the balloting system. The long-standing controversies over levels of political sophistication and their relationship to volatility in voting behavior should therefore be placed in perspective.

There are certainly differences between political sophisticates and unsophisticates as has been shown in this chapter. But these differences are highlighted by a limited number of data points – both in this dissertation and previous studies, and while they are statistically supported, I would urge caution in taking these findings too far in support of the notion that citizens making a costly effort to vote are so blind to politics as to be virtually random in their preferences.

¹³² See Niemi (1976) for an opposite perspective on this assertion arguing that voting is not at all costly. This article acknowledges some costs, however, and is mostly focused on bringing some perspective to many “rational choice” arguments that arguably exaggerate voting costs in terms of time and energy. My argument is simply that voting is a costly *enough* act that few, in my estimation, would spend the time going to the polls in order to express a preference formed in a haphazard manner.

X. Summary, Discussion, and Implications

“Any practical politician worth his salt knows a great deal about the stratification of the American electorate. It is part of his everyday working equipment to know what kinds of people are likely to be dyed-in-the-wool Republicans or traditional Democrats. He would not be in business long if he did not know who was the most susceptible to the arguments of either party.”

— Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People’s Choice* (1944)¹³³

1. Key Findings

The analyses presented in this dissertation offer several new assessments of party loyalty in American presidential elections that are substantially different from previous studies, along with several significant qualifications to existing scholarship examining the relationship of voter volatility to political sophistication and the ideological consistency of voter attitudes. Key findings in these analyses are:

1) *Volatile voting is far more widespread in the electorate than previous studies have indicated.* More than half of all ANES respondents (excluding consistent nonvoters) in the 1948-1956, 1968-1976, and 1996-2004 periods can be qualified as volatile. Because a larger sample of voters, nonvoters, and occasional nonvoters has been extracted from the datasets, because of the use of a broader time frame, and because occasional voters have been included, more volatility in voting behavior in the American public has been revealed.

2) *Select groups of volatile voters display high levels of political sophistication.* An important effect of this data interpretation is that the proportion of these voters exhibiting high levels of political sophistication and engagement becomes substantially larger than previous studies have shown (Converse 1967a, 139; Zaller 2004, 178-9)

¹³³ Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968, 16).

which serves to dilute the claim that volatile voters are disproportionately unsophisticated and unengaged as has been widely reported. My analyses show that aggregating volatile sophisticates and unsophisticates obscures features of the behavior of a substantial segment of the electorate that is both volatile and sophisticated (18.1 to 27.0 percent of it) who act in an arguably “responsible” manner at the polls.

When examined across the past 60 years in American presidential elections, political sophistication and stability in voting behavior are not strongly related in the ways that have been suggested by Campbell et al. ([1960] 1980), Converse (1967a), Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1960), and Zaller (2004). Volatile sophisticates, who are highly attentive to political information and may be more likely to be “influencers,” may perhaps be the most important targets of all for political campaigns. They are more likely to be young, male, and liberal on certain issues, and regular readers of political content in print media.¹³⁴ They are also less likely to be black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. Interestingly, volatile sophisticates are more likely to be ideologically consistent, suggesting that their preferences are stable and that they shift voting preferences rationally when candidates or parties change their goals.

3) Issues do indeed matter in American politics, particularly to a large segment of the voting public that is politically active and persuadable. Volatile sophisticates are politically knowledgeable, active, educated, interested in politics, and regular readers of political content in print media. They have also, historically, held strong opinions about political issues.

¹³⁴ This is indicated with statistical significance in the 1956-60 and 1972-76 periods, but not in the 2000-04 period.

4) *Levels of volatility in party-choice and turnout differ substantially from election to election.* Each electorate is unique, and the composition of each one is itself volatile across time. Furthermore, sophistication levels and ideological consistency levels have changed over time. Given that these variables have been shown in this dissertation to relate significantly to volatility in voting, it is reasonable to expect covariance in volatility levels over time as well, as has been shown.

5) *“Ideological eclectics” have long constituted the majority of American voters, but their numbers have been declining – this trend lends support to the thesis that America is becoming increasingly polarized about politics.* As shown in Chapter VIII, and affirming Converse’s (1967a) findings, 83.0 percent of respondents in the 1956-60 ANES panel indicate ideological eclecticism, along with 66.5 percent in the 1972-76 panel, and 63.8 percent in the 2000-04 panel. There is a clear trend toward more ideological consistency in the United States, lending support to arguments that the nation is becoming more politically polarized.¹³⁵ But evidence is also provided in this dissertation against this thesis. On one hand, trend data shown in Chapter VIII indicate that Americans have become increasingly consistent in terms of ideology. On the other hand, the fact that the majority of Americans – well over 60 percent – have nonetheless remained ideologically eclectic since 1956 (see Table 15 and Figure 7) argues against the thesis that Americans think in an ideologically monolithic manner, although this is clearly changing. Additionally, the high levels of voting volatility reported in this dissertation add support to arguments against the polarization thesis.

¹³⁵ For perspective on political polarization in the United States, see Fiorina (2006), Hetherington and Weiler (2009), and McCarty et al. (2006).

6) *Significantly more members of the electorate who are ideologically eclectic are politically sophisticated and engaged than ideological consistent.* In contrast to conventional findings in voting and elections literature, I have found that such lack of “constraint” in political belief systems (Converse 1964, Zaller 2004) often corresponds to a high level of issue awareness and political knowledge. Holding consistent and strongly ideological beliefs, and having a propensity to thinking in ideological terms is by no means a strong indicator of political sophistication. Indeed, as Pederson (1978), Shively (1979), Niemi and Weisberg (2001, 105-6) and Popkin (1991, 51) have argued, party labels and ideological schemas can in fact be employed as “information shortcuts” that compensate for information deficits and provide a mechanism for avoiding investment in obtaining political knowledge or engaging in political discourse and processes. The fact that between 13.7 percent and 22.2 percent¹³⁶ of the voting public has been made up of unsophisticated standpatters suggests that a substantial, but not overwhelming number of voters may be using such shortcuts and relying on party and ideological “brands,” foregoing a great deal of political cognition in election day decision making. The findings presented in this dissertation showing the widespread presence of sophisticated volatility, ranging from 18.1 to 27.2 percent of the electorate since 1948 (excluding consistent nonvoters; see Chapter IX, Table 29), and sophisticated ideological eclecticism, ranging from 28.6 to 35.3 percent (see Chapter VIII, Table 22) support Hillygus and Shields (2008) who have argued that cross-pressure and ideological inconsistency can often be sign that a citizen has internalized the complexity of politics – as opposed to the conventional finding that such volatile members of the electorate are disengaged from

¹³⁶ 22.2 percent in the 1948-1960 period, 13.7 percent in the 1968-1976 period, and 20.2 percent in the 1996-2004 period, as shown in Chapter IX, Tables 33 to 35.

politics and politically ignorant. While there has historically been a substantially greater prevalence of sophisticated eclectics in the electorate than sophisticated consistents (Chapter VIII, Table 22), these eclectics are less likely to be sophisticated than consistents, as shown by multivariate logistic regression (Chapter VIII, Table 24). Additionally, the number of sophisticated eclectics has declined since the 1970s.

7) *The electorate overall is far less politically ignorant and unengaged than has often been asserted.* The “levels of conceptualization” employed in Converse (1964) were used to produce data in which the top two levels, “Ideology” and “Near Ideologues” equaled 15.5 percent of voters (1964, 218). The use by Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) of these measures in 2000 showed that these top two levels equaled 24.5 percent of voters (2008, 279). The composite sophistication measure used in this dissertation, however, indicates that 40.9 percent of respondents in the 1956-60 panel were sophisticated, 54.1 percent in the 1972-76 panel, and 50.5 percent of the 2000-04 panel as shown in Table 11 (Chapter VII). Much of this increase from 1948 to 2004 is due to the component in the composite variable accounting for education level, which has increased sharply since 1948.

8) *Measures of political sophistication based on ideological consistency are inadequate and lack validity.* These measures *do* predict the likelihood of voter volatility well, but are not strongly related to more practical and less normatively confounded measures of political sophistication such as education, or political knowledge, interest and engagement.

9) *Standards of voting “correctly” or “responsibly” must be redefined.* This dissertation has offered such a definition (in chapters III and VII), based on a practical standard of knowledge sufficient for hiring expert policy providers. To be sophisticated

enough to opine on more nuanced policy matters such as taxation, monetary and trade policy, and international relations requires a kind of political sophistication and critical thinking ability that is unfortunately rare. To expect voters to have this level of political interest and knowledge about a multiplicity of issues would be to expect an irrational level of political involvement.

One key conclusion that may be made from this research is that the public may not have excellent technical or academic political knowledge, and may not display much political engagement, or have much interest in politics, but they do have enough information to make a fairly well-considered choice in an election between two potential expert policy providers – candidates seeking to be retained, between two party ideologies, claims and norms, and among stands on major issues such as war and peace, civil rights, and the economy. What Sniderman et al. call “affect” – an emotional response that I suspect these authors devalue, I think could be called “intuitive” or “impressionistic” knowledge which I would describe as years of experience dealing with people and practical situations – the collective, micro-level, subtle perceptions that tell us whether one choice is more advantageous to us than another.

10. *There is an increasing gender gap among volatile sophisticates.* A gender gap among volatile sophisticates has existed since the 1960s, and increased substantially since then. In the 1968 to 2004 period, men have been significantly more likely to be volatile sophisticates than women. The long-standing political-knowledge gap between men and women is reflected here.

11. *The youth vote is a volatile vote.* In all three of the time periods examined, ANES respondents under the age of 30 exhibit at least twice the odds of being volatile in

voting behavior as those over 30. There is no significant association between age and ideological eclecticism, however, suggesting that cross-pressure plays a limited role in youth voting volatility.

2. Hypothesis Test Results

There are several other findings in this dissertation that can be stated in the form of results of testing the hypotheses outlined in Chapter IV:

Hypothesis that volatile voters in the aggregate are sophisticated is disconfirmed. Volatile voters, in the aggregate, are less likely to be sophisticated on a case-by-case basis than standpatters. There is, however, a substantial prevalence of “volatile sophisticates” in the electorate whose voting behavior can be decisive in presidential elections. Zaller’s (2004) claim that increased political information makes the sophisticated stable in voting behavior and the unsophisticated volatile must be qualified by the finding that many volatile voters are sophisticated – a proportion of the electorate that can be quite decisive in presidential elections.

Hypothesis that volatile voters are issue voters is somewhat supported. Those who think the economy is worse (regardless of actual conditions) are more likely to be volatile in the 1956-60 period. There is no significant association between opinion about the economy and volatile sophisticate status. A substantial portion of volatile sophisticates and unsophisticates exhibit strong issue opinions. Volatile sophisticates tend to be more liberal with respect to issues while volatile unsophisticates tend to be more conservative. Sophisticated eclectic are significantly less likely to be volatile, while unsophisticated eclectic are significantly more likely. This suggests that cross-pressures related to political issues drive the former to volatility, and the latter to stability.

Hypothesis that volatile voters are demographically targetable is supported.

Voters under the age of 30 are significantly more likely to be volatile, as are unmarried voters. Volatile sophisticates are more likely to be male. African-Americans are, since 1968, significantly less likely to be volatile.

There are several additional findings related to these hypothesis tests. These are:

Unsophisticated eclectic voters are much more likely to be volatile than sophisticated eclectic voters. Sophisticates are somewhat less likely to be eclectic than non-sophisticates (in two of three historical periods, as shown in multivariate logistic regression analyses (Chapter VIII, Table 24). There has been, however, a substantially greater number of “sophisticated eclectics” in the electorate than sophisticated consistents in all time periods examined, as shown in Chapter VIII, Table 22. That unsophisticated eclectics are more likely to be volatile than sophisticated eclectics suggests that cross pressure and issues drive the former to volatility and the latter to stability. This in turn may indicate that sophisticates rely on information short-cuts provided by party labels more so than unsophisticates, and that sophisticates also rely more on their pre-existing store of political knowledge and preferences, as suggested by Converse (1967a) and Zaller (2004).

Volatile sophisticates are many and may play a decisive role in presidential elections. These voters have constituted between 18.1 and 27.2 percent of the electorate since 1948. Their votes are decisive in presidential elections, and given that only four of the 16 presidential elections since 1948 were won by popular vote margins

between the Democratic and Republican parties larger than 10 percent (Leip 2011) this segment of persuadable voters has surely been pivotal over the past 60 years.¹³⁷

Low-information voters are not more driven to volatility by media usage.

“Converse’s paradox” proceeds from findings that volatile voters are politically unsophisticated – presumably not consuming a great deal of information about politics – yet highly influenced by “short-term” campaign-related stimuli. I found that volatile voters are in the aggregate only somewhat less likely to read campaign news than standpatters; they are significantly less likely to do so in 1968-76 period, but not in the other two periods. Volatile sophisticates are significantly more likely to read campaign news in two of three historical periods while volatile unsophisticates are significantly less likely to read campaign news than all other voters (Chapter IX, Tables 31 and 32). This suggests that the distinction between sophisticated and unsophisticated volatile voters may be a resolution of Converse’s paradox. Disaggregating volatile voters into the volatile sophisticate and volatile unsophisticate categories shows that many voters are volatile based on more durable and robust capacities for political reasoning while others – unsophisticates – make decisions on the basis of far less developed political information and ideas.

Zaller’s (2004) refinement of Converse’s (1967a) “paradoxical” findings, stating that political information intake drives sophisticates to be standpatters but drives low-information voters to be volatile is not refuted by my analysis insofar as it may describe the behavior of *unsophisticated* volatile voters. My data analyses show that volatile

¹³⁷ There was a popular vote difference between the Democratic and Republican candidates of 21.2 percent in 1984, 23.2 percent in 1972, 15.4 percent in 1956, and 10.9 percent in 1952. In two elections, third-party candidates garnered more than a minimal percentage of the popular vote – 1992 (18.9 percent), and 1968 (13.5 percent) from voters who are, by definition, volatile.

unsophisticates are significantly unlikely to consume campaign news in all historical periods, and this fact leaves Converse's paradox in place in Zaller's study as it applies to these voters. Zaller's finding cannot, however, apply to *volatile sophisticates* who display at least two positive indications of political sophistication (political knowledge, participation, or interest, or attainment of a bachelor's degree), and a high level of media usage. Volatile sophisticates are numerous enough to play a decisive role in elections, and my findings suggest that the way in which volatile voters have been defined in Zaller's study obscures an important phenomena.

Economic voting is not a significant driver of volatility. Notably, the presence of opinions about economic conditions do not show up as significant predictors of either volatile voting in general, or of volatile sophistication in any time period but 1948-56, as shown in Table 28 (the general model) where a perception that the economy has gotten worse is associated with 58 percent higher odds of volatility than those who did not perceive worsening economic conditions. This finding is at odds with those of Zaller (2004), showing that volatile voting driven by economic opinions is most prevalent among the least sophisticated, and challenges a wide variety of economic voting literature arguing the primacy of this kind of issue voting (Lewis-Beck and Tien 2004; MacKuen et al. 1992; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001).

3. Areas for Further Research

Many questions of course remain to be addressed by further research. Three areas in particular, however, stand out as deserving the most immediate attention: the role of opinion leaders, influencers, and heuristics in driving volatility in voting behavior; the role played by the reinforcement effect in standpatter behavior; and the causes of the

gender gaps that exist in accountings of political sophistication and sophisticated volatility.

Opinion Leaders, Influencers, and Heuristics

The roles of opinion leaders, influencers, and heuristics on both volatile voting behavior and stability in voting behavior are moderating factors in the relationship of political sophistication to volatility in voting. Knowing the degree to which opinion leaders and influencers drive the behavior of the “indolent majority” who are either volatile or stable in voting behavior would clarify much about ways in which voters may or may not rely on their own political information and aptitude. Drawing a precise portrait of who these opinion leaders and influencers are would of course be a prerequisite to such a study. It would also be important to identify which voters are influenced by opinion leaders and heuristics. The voting behavior of unsophisticated volatile voters might, for example, be more driven by influencers while that of unsophisticated standpatters may be more motivated by force of habit. Further study of the role of opinion leaders, influencers, and heuristics on volatility or stability in voting behavior could reveal such relationships if they exist.

The Reinforcement Effect

Another area for further research that deserves priority would be an analysis of ideological inconsistency and volatility in voting with respect to a voter's propensity to the reinforcement effect and the “backfire” effect – the tendency to reject challenges to one’s existing beliefs. Such a study would also involve the attempt to demographically and attitudinally identify those most and least susceptible to the habit of filtering out messages that challenge a respondent's existing views, and would also attempt to trace

the cognitive processes associated with these effects. It is possible that much about stability of preference could be explained by exploring these areas of opinion development.

High intake of information for some voters results in greater party loyalty, while high intake of information for others results in greater volatility. Some of this phenomenon might be explained by a study of reinforcement effects in voter information processing. As Lazarsfeld et al. ([1944] 1968) observed, “The prospective voter ... elects to expose himself to the propaganda with which he already agrees, and to seal himself off from the propaganda with which he might disagree” (Lazarsfeld et al. [1944] 1968 xxxii). Taber and Lodge (2006, 767) similarly write of “motivated skepticism” on the part of some individuals about new information that might challenge a long-held belief because “people are often unable to escape the pull of their prior attitudes and beliefs” (2006, 767). Unwelcome information, can, in this respect, also produce a “backfire effect” that causes individuals to dig their heels in even deeper when their long-held opinions have been challenged (Nyhan and Reifler 2010, 307). Such reinforcement effects and backfire effects might be irrational and *unsophisticated* because they insulate the individual from important information needed for decision-making. Thus examining the utilitarian economics of these behaviors would also provide a useful baseline for the study of these effects. Understanding reinforcement effects, under what circumstances they occur, and who is most susceptible to them, could provide valuable insight into what *prevents* voter volatility and persuadability. Laboratory experiments, as were conducted by Taber and Lodge (2006) and Nyhan and Reifler (2010) would most likely be necessary for this type of research.

The Gender Gap among Volatile Sophisticates

As Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) have shown, there has long been a gender gap in political sophistication with men displaying greater sophistication levels than women. Data presented in this dissertation additionally show that volatile sophisticates are more likely to be men. Voting decisions involve many variables in addition to sophistication, and further examination of the sophistication gender gap among volatile voters could potentially help to explain the sophistication gap in the overall universe of voters.

4. Peroration

Much of what I have presented in this dissertation offers a challenge to the widely reported finding, most poignantly presented by Converse over 40 years ago, and extended and amplified more recently by Zaller (2004) and Shaw (2008), that the least sophisticated voters, susceptible to short-term influences, may be the most significant slice of “volatile voters” in the electorate, and those whose votes may be decisive in close elections in terms of persuadability. The data analyses I provide offer a substantial qualification to these findings by showing that while there is a very large population segment of volatile unsophisticates, there is also a very large segment of volatile *sophisticates* – one amply large enough to play a pivotal role in elections. I have also argued that even unsophisticates can vote responsibly.

In the preface to *The Responsible Electorate*, V.O. Key ([1966] 1968, 7) stated, “the perverse and unorthodox argument of this little book is that voters are not fools.” Key was a delightful and exquisite writer of political analysis. But here, I submit, Key may have gone a bit too far in using the term “perverse.” There is a great deal of common sense to such an assertion, and the data support it to a great extent. A rather large swath

of the electorate is both sophisticated and labile in voting behavior – and not constrained by ideological abstractions – and assuming the voters in this segment make use of their sophistication, and the media they consume in large amounts, it can be said that these voters are rational and reasonable in their voting behavior. One can also argue just as readily that a decisive and much larger segment of the electorate that is stable in its preferences and behavior *and* sophisticated (Chapter IX, Tables 25 to 27) is also reasoning and rational – between 27 and 34.4 percent since 1948. Additionally, voters who are less sophisticated surely make use of what sophistication they do possess, and are unlikely to invest time and energy in the making of an essentially random choice as is stated by Kaplan and suggested by Converse (1964).

Between 40.9 and 54.1 percent of voters since 1948 can be categorized as sophisticated by virtue of having responded positively to ANES questions about education, and political knowledge, interest, and involvement (Chapter VII, Table 11). Some have been driven to cross party lines or abstain, while others have been driven to remain party loyal. All of these voters have either had the capacity to understand some amount of politics by virtue of education or expressed political knowledge, or have expressed a high level of political interest or engagement. Furthermore, many of the less engaged, educated, or knowledgeable voters may be using cues provided by influencers in order to make their vote choice, or may otherwise using limited information to make a decision about which of (usually) two candidates for the job of expert public-service provider will make the best decisions, and deliver the best leadership and representation. These citizen-sophistication data in themselves support Key. Most voters may not be experts at the technical or philosophical aspects of government. But they have good

reasons for taking the time to vote or deciding to abstain and for being party loyal or not. They are thinking about politics – and have very real feelings about the world around them. This is not to say they may not be woefully misunderstanding politics as Converse (1967a; 2006) has illustrated. But if democracy means anything, it must certainly mean that each citizen has an equal say in choosing a government even if political sophistication differs vastly from person to person. It would simply not be realistic – or fair – to expect otherwise. If such diversity in political knowledge, engagement, comprehension, and aptitude was not to be expected in human experience, we would indeed live in conditions of “perfect information” in which persuasion and political discourse would be unnecessary. And under such circumstances, it would have to be quite a bland and featureless world – one in which the political variety and competition that define democracy would be non-existent.

Finally, the analyses provided in this dissertation argue that the majority of the American public is persuadable when it comes to voting. Some – perhaps the better part of the persuadable segment – are persuadable by way of “short-term,” sensationalistic appeals, as Zaller (2004) and Converse (1967a) tell us. But a substantial portion of the American public is persuadable on the basis of issues and truly substantive candidate qualities and political ideas. Much of the American electorate may not vote “responsibly.” They may vote out of reinforced habit, or on the basis of little, poorly understood, or distorted information. A rather large segment of the electorate, however, does vote responsibly, and not in a consistent manner with respect to either political parties or ideologies. These voters drive political change in America and can be identified

by demographic and attitudinal measures. And, they remain reachable and persuadable by political communications and both rational and emotional appeals.

Appendices

Appendix to Chapter V

The binary logistic regression analyses provided in Table 39, below, are designed to determine whether cases coded as missing in the analyses of voting behavior provided in Chapter VI are more likely to be standpatters or volatile voters. The dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of whether or not the case has been coded as missing. The analyses reported in Table 39 regresses the dependent variable just described on a set of independent variables used elsewhere in this dissertation.

These analyses show that missing observations in the ANES datasets used throughout this dissertation are significantly more likely to be under age 30 in all periods. In two of three periods they are also shown as significantly less likely be married, and sophisticated, and readers of political campaign news. All of these variables indicate a higher likelihood of volatility in voting. On the other hand, these respondents are also significantly more likely to be black, and blacks have been shown to be very party loyal. Blacks do, however, represent a much smaller segment of the electorate than those who are unmarried, under the age of 30, politically unsophisticated, and non-readers of political campaign news. This model, then, provides evidence that confirms what has been claimed in Chapter V about missing observations in the ANES panel datasets – that these cases are more likely to be respondents who are volatile in voting behavior. Hence the non-missing portion of the ANES datasets used in this dissertation most likely oversamples respondents who are party-loyal and politically sophisticated.

Table 39.
Likelihood of Missingness in ANES Datasets (ANES panel surveys)

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Age (30 and under = 1)	1.557 [#]	3.197 ^{***}	2.862 ^{***}
Race (black = 1)	1.916 [*]	.871	2.846 ^{**}
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	1.789 [#]	1.178	--
Gender (male=1)	1.153	1.288	.689 [#]
Marital Status (married=1)	.550 ^{***}	.546 ^{***}	.840
Reads Campaign News	.838	.448 ^{***}	.607 [*]
Respondent Thinks Economy Worse ^a	1.173	1.041	.916
Sophisticated ^b	.810	.382 ^{***}	.427 ^{***}
Ideologically Eclectic ^c	1.143	1.121	.993
Constant	.244 ^{***}	.402 ^{***}	.385 ^{**}
Chi-Square	36.33 ^{***}	121.28 ^{***}	78.81 ^{***}
Cox-Snell R-Square	.039	.107	.091
Nagelkerke R-Square	.062	.179	.150
N (valid)	918 (77.3)	1070 (81.1)	826 (66.7)

Predictive power of independent variables expressed as odds ratios (Exp (B)).

***Significant at .001. **Significant at .01. *Significant at .05. #Significant at .10.

^aIs a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

For 1956-58-60; Total survey N=1239 including consistent nonvoters; for 1972-74-76; Total survey N=1320 including consistent nonvoters; for 2000-02-04; Total survey N= 1187 including consistent nonvoters.

^b Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained bachelor's degree, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, high interest in politics, and political participation (or, in the case of 1956-60, a belief that participation can be effective).

^cIdeological eclectics in the 1996-04 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of gun control, abortion, and the right of gays to serve openly in the military; Ideological eclectics in the 1968-76 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of Vietnam War involvement, abortion, and approval of demonstrations and sit-ins; Ideological eclectics in the 1948-56 period are those who have ideologically inconsistent opinions across the issues of support for Medicare, support for sending soldiers overseas to fight communism, government involvement in ending racial segregation.

Appendix to Chapter VI

Voting Patterns Across ANES Panels

The tables included below break out vote patterns for each panel. D = Democratic vote; R = Republican vote; I = Independent vote; N = abstention from voting; M = missing data

Table 40.
Vote Patterns Across the 1996-2000-2004 Period

Vote Pattern	N	Percent
M	1	0.1
DMM	19	1.6
DDM	93	7.8
DDD	218	18.4
RMM	13	1.1
RDM	27	2.3
DDR	30	2.5
RRM	67	5.6
RRD	44	3.7
RRR	202	17.0
IMM	2	0.2
IDM	15	1.3
DDI	19	1.6
IRM	23	1.9
DIR	13	1.1
RRI	31	2.6
NMM	28	2.4
NDM	37	3.1
DDN	44	3.7
IIM	3	0.3
IID	28	2.4
NDR	13	1.1
IIR	2	0.2
RRN	23	1.9
NIM	6	0.5
DIN	10	0.8
III	3	0.3
NIR	6	0.5
NNM	72	6.1
NND	22	1.9
IIN	1	0.1
NNR	26	2.2
NNI	1	0.1
NNN	45	3.8
Total	1187	100.0

Table 41.
Vote Patterns Across the 1968-1972-1976 Period

Vote Pattern	N	Percent
M	0	0.0
DMM	10	0.8
DDM	58	4.4
DDD	135	10.2
RMM	9	0.7
RDM	39	3.0
DDR	80	6.1
RRM	68	5.2
RRD	116	8.8
RRR	269	20.4
IMM	3	0.2
IDM	4	0.3
DDI	16	1.2
IRM	9	0.7
DIR	27	2.0
RRI	24	1.8
NMM	6	0.5
NDM	38	2.9
DDN	27	2.0
IIM	0	0.0
IID	25	1.9
NDR	42	3.2
IIR	2	0.2
RRN	51	3.9
NIM	5	0.4
DIN	10	0.8
III	1	0.1
NIR	13	1.0
NNM	43	3.3
NND	43	3.3
IIN	0	0.0
NNR	43	3.3
NNI	6	0.5
NNN	98	7.4
Total	1320	100.0

Table 42.
Vote Patterns Across the 1948-1952-1956 Period

Vote Pattern	N	Percent
M	8	0.6
DMM	21	1.7
DDM	28	2.3
DDD	198	16.0
RMM	32	2.6
RDM	18	1.5
DDR	73	5.9
RRM	45	3.6
RRD	98	7.9
RRR	239	19.3
IMM	0	0.0
IDM	0	0.0
DDI	3	0.2
IRM	0	0.0
DIR	0	0.0
RRI	5	0.4
NMM	38	3.1
NDM	24	1.9
DDN	45	3.6
IIM	0	0.0
IID	44	3.6
NDR	32	2.6
IIR	0	0.0
RRN	101	8.2
NIM	0	0.0
DIN	0	0.0
III	0	0.0
NIR	0	0.0
NNM	118	9.5
NND	22	1.8
IIN	0	0.0
NNR	21	1.7
NNI	1	0.1
NNN	25	2.0
Total	1239	100.0

Appendix to Chapter IX

The logistic regression models provided in Table 44 show the likelihood that a volatile voter has tried to influence another person in their voting behavior, with controls for standard demographics, media usage, opinion about the state of the economy, and about other major issues. This model demonstrates that such “influencer” behavior is not significantly associated with volatile voting behavior, in disagreement with Kingdon (1970, 260).

Table 43.
Logistic Regression: Volatile Sophisticates^a as Influencers (ANES panel surveys)

	1996-04	1968-76	1948-56
Age (30 and under = 1)	.987	1.603**	2.404***
Race (black = 1)	.543	.112***	1.368
Hispanic/Asian/Native American	.966	1.293	--
Gender (male=1)	2.427***	1.540**	1.088
Marital Status (married=1)	.589**	.848	1.435
Attends Religious Services Regularly	.914	.830	1.095
Reads Campaign News	1.348	1.415 [#]	2.776**
Issue 1 ^b	1.674**	1.221	1.003
Issue 2 ^c	1.633 [#]	.833	.939
Issue 3 ^d	1.150	1.396*	.963
Respondent Thinks Economy Worse ^e	1.053	1.008	1.290
Tried to Influence Others in Voting	1.377	1.226	1.228
Constant	.070***	.231***	.055***
Chi-Square	38.42***	60.71***	35.55***
Cox-Snell R-Square	.053	.069	.053
Nagelkerke R-Square	.087	.100	.085
N (valid)	705 (59.4)	851 (64.5)	648 (52.3)

Predictive power of independent variables are expressed as odds ratios (Exp(B)).

***Sig. at .001. **Sig. at 01. *Sig. at .05. [#]Sig at .10.

^a Dichotomous variable based on a scale of 0 to 4; the construction of this scale is such that a respondent scores one point for each of the following dummy variables: attained higher education, can identify which party controls the House of Representatives, high interest in political campaigns, and participates in politics (or believes participation can influence government). Sophisticates are those who have responded positively on two or more items.

^b For 1996-04, issue 1 is gun control (1=in favor) for 1968-72, support of protest demonstrations (1= in favor) for 1948-56 issue 1 is subsidizing Medicare (1=in favor).

^c For 1996-04, issue 2 is allowing homosexuals to serve in the armed forces (1=in favor) for 1968-72, issue 2 is support for the Vietnam War; for 1948-56 issue 2 is sending soldiers to fight communism (1=in favor).

^d For 1996-04, issue 3 is abortion rights (1=in favor) for 1968-72, issue 2 is abortion rights; for 1948-56 issue 2 is school integration (1=in favor).

^e Is a positive indication that the respondent thinks the economy is worse in 2000, 1976, and 1958.

For 1956-58-60; Total survey N=1239 including consistent nonvoters; for 1972-74-76; Total survey N=1320 including consistent nonvoters; for 2000-02-04; Total survey N= 1187 including consistent nonvoters.

Appendix A: Dataset and Data Processing Note

All quantitative data analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics GradPack 17.0.0 software for Apple Macintosh OS 10.5.8. All datasets were downloaded from the American National Election Studies Data Center at <http://www.electionstudies.org> (accessed July, 2009).

Appendix B: ANES Variable Codes

ANES filtering variables were used in all analyses of ANES data in order to assure that only panel respondents have been included. The variables used were:

1952-56-60 panel: VAR 600841, VAR 600842, and VAR 600843
 1972-74-76 panel: VAR 764002
 2000-02-04 panel: P021001

Other variables used are listed below by chapter.

Chapter I

P000397 – “Do you think it is better when one party controls both the presidency and Congress, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn’t it matter?”

Chapter VI

Data derived from responses to the ANES query in 1976 and 1980 whether the respondent has always voted for the same or different parties for president:¹³⁸

1980: VAR MP3331
 1976: VAR 763180

¹³⁸Unfortunately, the ANES discontinued this question after 1980.

Voting Behavior-Related Variables

The variables in this section provide respondent voting behavior across three presidential elections using ANES panel data.

1996-2000-2004 ANES

P001249 – Respondent vote for President in 2000 general election
 P045049a – Respondent vote for President in 2004 general election
 P000304 – Respondent vote for President in 1996 general election
 P045049 – Did Respondent vote for President in 2004 general election
 P045045x – Did Respondent vote for President in 2004 general election
 P001248 – Did Respondent vote for President in 2000 general election
 P001241 – Did Respondent vote for President in 2000 general election
 P000303 – Did Respondent vote for President in 1996 general election

1968-1972-1976 ANES

VAR 763665 – Respondent vote for President in 1976 general election
 VAR 720478 – Respondent vote for President in 1972 general election
 VAR 720160 – Respondent vote for President in 1968 general election
 VAR 763655 – Did Respondent vote for President in 1976 general election
 VAR 720477 – Did Respondent vote for President in 1972 general election
 VAR 720156 – Did Respondent vote for President in all, most, or some elections since 1968
 VAR 720159 – Did respondent vote for President in 1968 general election

1948-1952-1956 ANES

VAR 600663 – Respondent vote for President in 1956 general election
 VAR 560096 – Respondent vote for President in 1952 general election
 VAR 560095 – Respondent vote for President in 1948 general election
 VAR 600661 – Did Respondent vote for President in all, most, or some elections since old enough to vote
 VAR 560093 – Did Respondent vote for President in all, most, or some elections since old enough to vote

Appendices to Chapters VII-IX

Sophistication-Related Variables

2000-2002-2004 ANES

P000913 – “What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?”

P001356 – Majority party before election knowledge: “Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington BEFORE the election (this/last) month?”

P025084 – “Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?”

P001492 – “During the past twelve months, have you telephoned, written a letter to, or visited a government official to express your views on a public issue?”

P000337 – Political media usage: “How much attention do you pay to newspaper articles about the campaign for president – a great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or none?”

P001201 – R Interest in campaigns: “Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns this year?”

P001644 – Did R watch a presidential debate on television: Did you watch a televised presidential debate between Al Gore and George W. Bush?

1972-1974-1976 ANES

VAR 720300 – Education of respondent

VAR 763683 – Majority party before election knowledge: Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington BEFORE the elections (this/last) month?

VAR 720476 – General interest in politics: “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Others aren’t that interested. Would you say you follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?”

VAR 720474 – Written to public official: “Have you ever written a letter to any public officials giving them your opinion about something that should be done?”

VAR 763646 – Political media usage: “How much did you read newspaper articles about the election – regularly, often, from time to time, or just once in a great while?”

VAR763606 – Did you watch any of the televised debates between the presidential or vice-presidential candidates?

1956-1958-1960 ANES

VAR 560181 – Education of Respondent

VAR 580317 – Majority party before election knowledge: “Do you happen to know which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the election (this/last) month?”

VAR 600681 – “Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics – a great deal, somewhat, or not at all?”

VAR 600674 – “Voting is the only way that people like me can have a say about how the government runs things.”

VAR 600756 – Political media usage: “How much did you read newspaper articles about the election – regularly, often, from time to time, or just once in a great while?”

VAR 600762 – “Did you watch any of the TV debates where Kennedy and Nixon appeared on the same show together?”

VAR 560097 – “Some people don’t pay much attention to the political campaigns. How about you, would you say that you have been very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns so far this year?”

Political Issue-Related Variables

2000-2002-2004 ANES

P000731 – Gun Control
 P000694 – Abortion
 P000727 – Gays in the Military
 P023027 – Economy Worse (2002)

1972-1974-1976 ANES

VAR 720050 – Vietnam War Involvement
 VAR 720238 – Abortion
 VAR 720277 – Demonstrations and Sit-ins
 VAR 742313 – Economy Worse (1974)

1956-1958-1960 ANES

VAR 560038 – Medicare
 VAR 560056 – Send soldiers overseas to fight communism
 VAR 560074 – Segregation
 VAR 580347 – Economy Worse (1958)

Demographic Variables2000-2002-2004 ANES

P023153 – Gender
 P000908 – Age
 P0123150 – Race; black
 P0123150 – Race; Hispanic/Asian/Native American
 P000909 – Marital Status
 P000913 – Education; attained bachelor's degree
 P000877 – Attends Religious Services

1972-1974-1976 ANES

VAR 720424 – Gender
 VAR 720294 – Age
 VAR 720425 – Race
 VAR 720425 – Race; Hispanic/Asian/Native American
 VAR 720295 – Marital Status
 VAR 720423 – Attends Religious Services

1956-1958-1960 ANES

VAR 560171 – Gender
 VAR 600688 – Age
 VAR 560172 – Race
 VAR 560172 – Race; Hispanic/Asian/Native American
 VAR 560177 – Marital Status
 VAR 560133 – Attends Religious Services

Other Variables2000-2002-2004 ANES

P001225 – Tried to Influence Others in Voting

1972-1974-1976 ANES

VAR 720468 – Tried to Influence Others in Voting

1956-1958-1960 ANES

VAR 560215 – Tried to Influence Others in Voting

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