

Understanding the Minds of Voters

Electoral Psychology under the Microscope

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Outline of Presentation



- ICEP – Who are we and what do we do?
- What is electoral psychology?
- Voters' electoral memory and emotions associated with the vote
- What do voters think about when they stand in the polling booth?
- What can ICEP offer?

The International Centre for Electoral Psychology



ICEP is a research-oriented organisation.

- Our aim is to help decision-makers to better understand the psychology of voters and to provide optimisation of the ergonomics of electoral mechanisms to best fit the profiles of the voters of specific countries.
- Our objective is to make elections as effective, trusted, and democratically fulfilling for citizens as possible.
- Previous projects conducted: 20 countries+, multi-year multi-wave panel study surveys, in-depth interviews, resps aged 18-100+, spot 1 sentence interviews on election day, election diaries over 3-4 weeks, direct polling station observs., field and lab experiments (e-voting, social media, booth, etc), spotlights (16-18 pre-voters, primo-voters, etc
- We study the role of personality, memory, emotion, and electoral identity on the vote and democratic value of elections. We look at psychological effects and their interaction with systemic organisation.

What is electoral psychology?

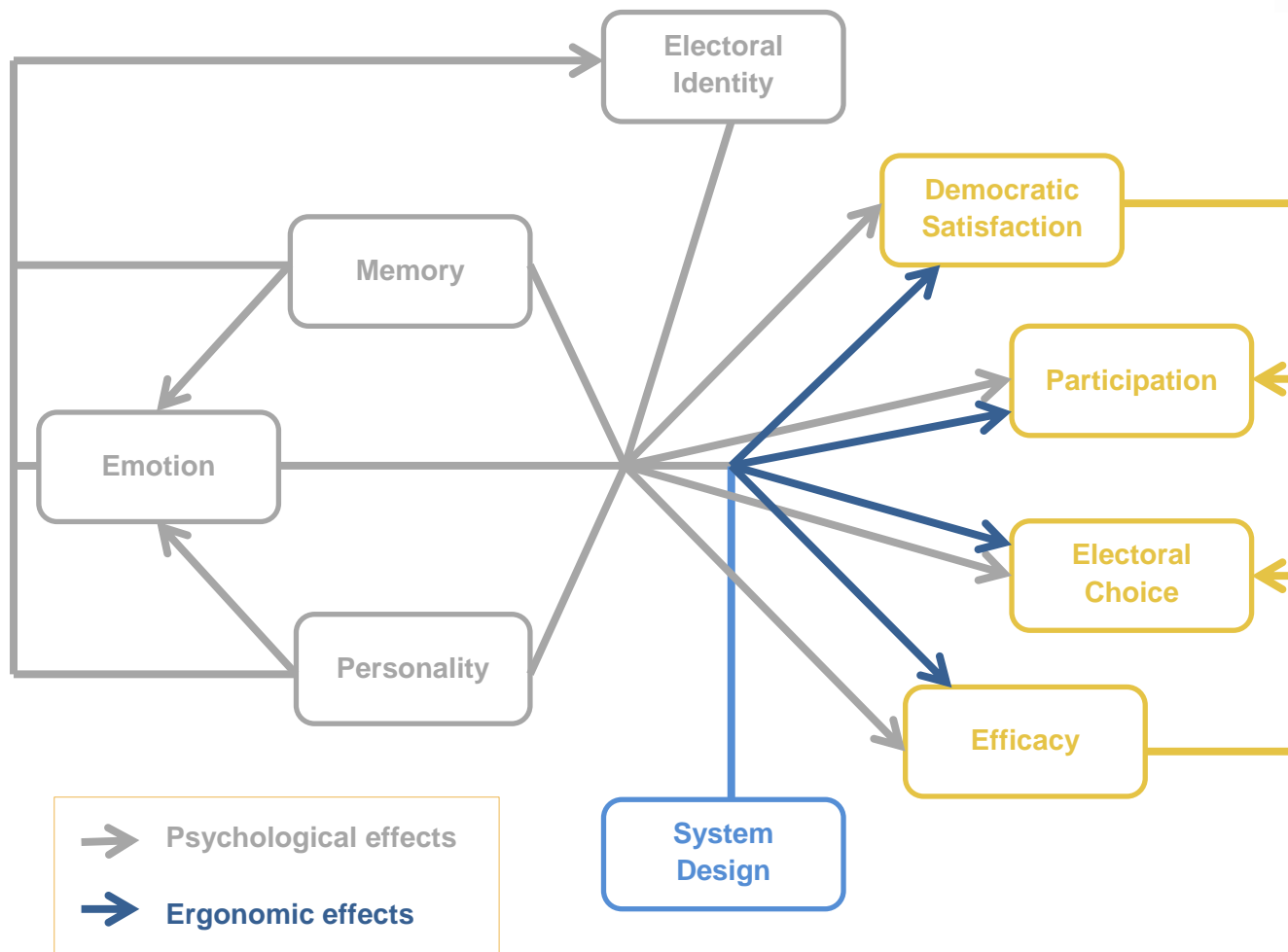


Aim: to better understand what citizens think and feel about elections in order to optimise electoral democracy

Key research questions:

- What do people think about when they stand in the polling booth?
- What is the impact of electoral memory, sense responsibility, and individual-societal connection on electoral behaviour?
- What emotions are associated with the voting experience?
- What is the impact of electoral arrangements on the psychological processes mobilised during the vote and how does it impact voting behaviour?

Psychological model of the vote



The Role of Emotion in Elections



- 29% of Americans & 40% of French voters have changed their mind on the day of an election.
- 20-30% make up/change their minds within a week of the elections

WHY?

- **EMOTION:** 25% of Americans have already cried because of an election. 63% say that election night makes them feel emotional
- **EXCITEMENT:** 79% say elections are an important moment for them, 60% feel excited in the polling booth
- **PRIDE:** 74% feel proud in the polling booth
- **WORRY:** 53% also say that it makes them feel worried

Memories of Elections



- Some memories of elections are very ‘physical’ – impact of station location, arrangement, atmosphere
- Some citizens recall problems associated with specific elections (fraud, shock result, queues or organisational problems). These memories are particularly vivid
- Other memories are very individualised (personal discussions about the election with friends and family members, arguments or disputes, etc)

The Role of Memory in Elections



WHAT ELECTIONS?

- ❑ Sociotropic: 94% of French voters remember 2002;
- ❑ Egocentric: 82% of Americans recall 1st election, 70% a childhood election

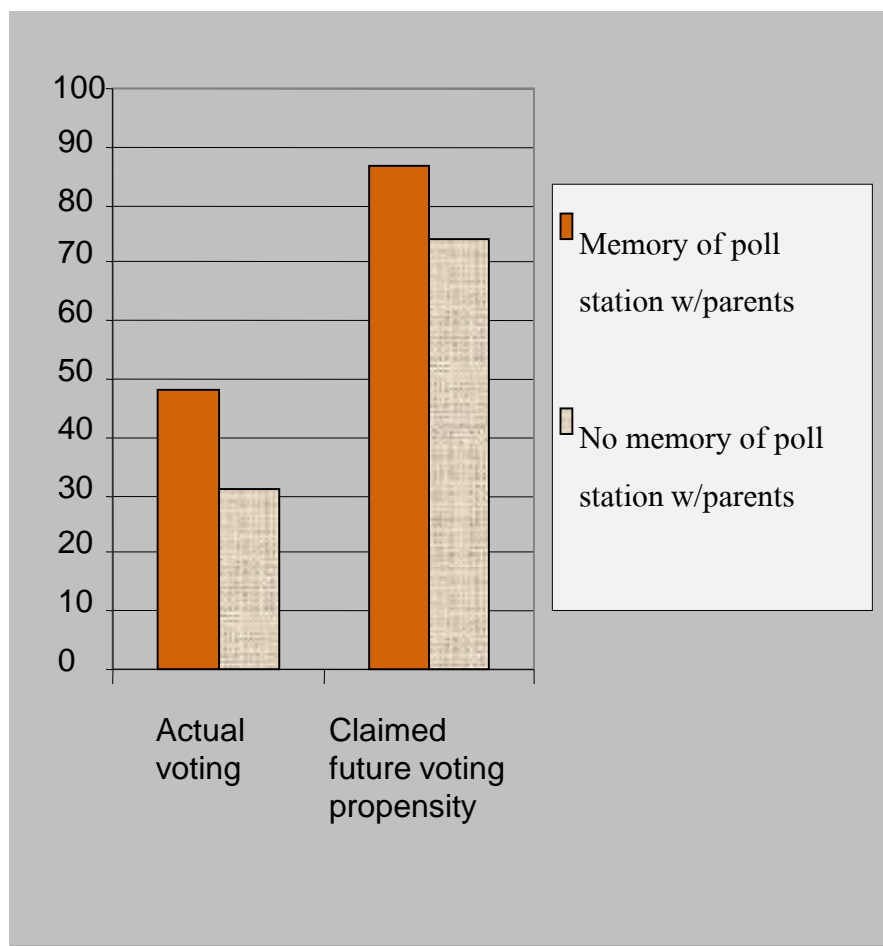
WHAT MEMORIES?

- ❑ Elections - personalised. 80% remember a discussion with family & friends; 60% an argument/dispute about an election

AUDITIVE, VISUAL, HAPTIC, AND MENTAL COMPONENTS

- ❑ 79% remember images from election night; 75% recall feeling in the polling station; 62% recollect whether they hesitated about electoral choice

Impact of Memory - young people & memories of poll station



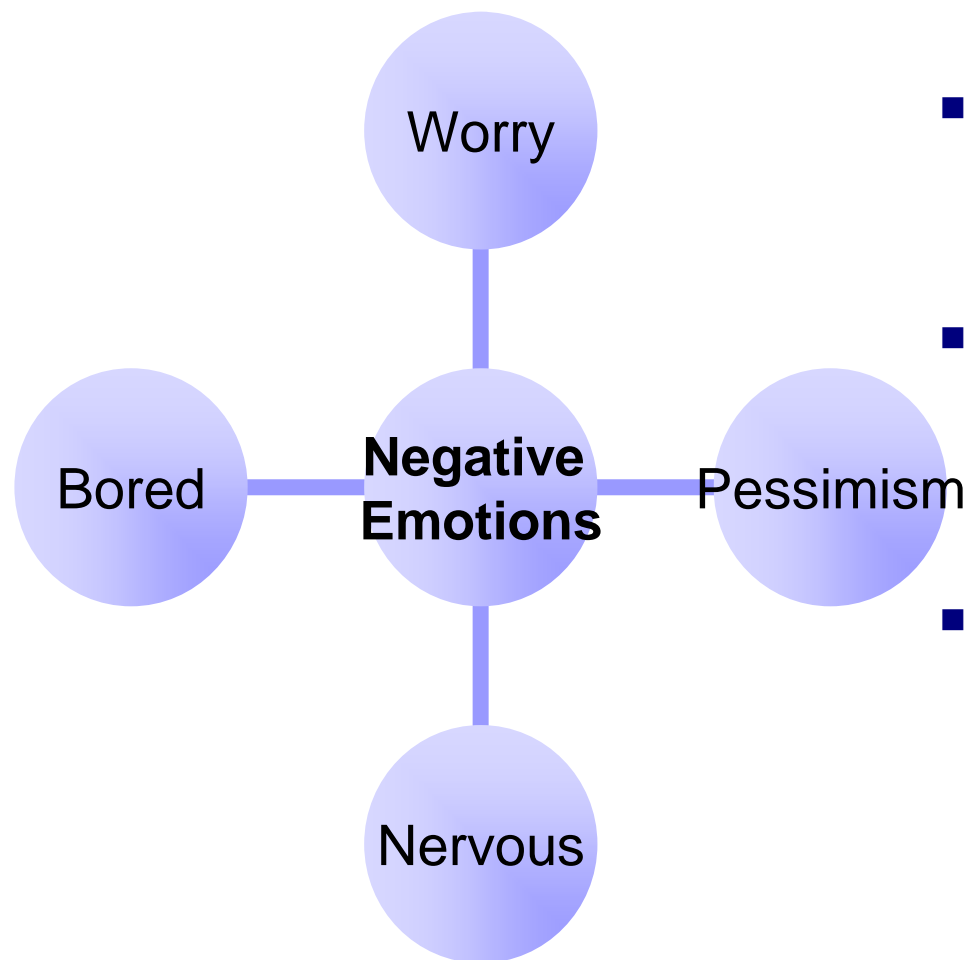
- **Memory - highly consequential for young citizens' participation - early experience of elections significantly increases propensity to participate**
- **48% recall accompanying parents to poll station have voted in an election,**
- **Only 30% of those with no memory of poll station w/parents have voted in an election**
- **IMPACT - expected future turnout - positive memory of having been taken to a polling station are 20% more likely to vote in future elections as compared to those who have not**
- **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? Young people who do not go to vote in the first 2 elections - likely to become long-term habitual abstentionists**
- **Essential to capture their interest in participating in elections at an early age**

Emphasising Positive Emotions at Elections



- Causal effects of emotions on long-term participation. Enjoyment of elections = crucial determinant of turnout & consolidation of participatory practice ~ Critical to emphasise the exciting & fun aspects of participation
- Experience democratic participation & encourages long-term involvement in political and civic practice by younger generations
- Not just relevant to young people - UK 2010 GE found that feeling of importance (for the country and oneself), pride, excitement, closeness to fellow citizens and happiness were all listed as main emotions in polling booth

Minimising Negative Emotions at Elections



- Alongside positive emotions, some negative emotions were also expressed
- Most common negative emotion = pessimism (36%), followed by worry (19%), nervous and bored (19% & 13%)
- Interviews of voters confirm this trend & reveal – citizens take duty of voting seriously & feel conscious of need to ‘make the right decision’

What do voters think about when they are in the polling booth?



	% who thought of it
Responsibility	78.8
Possible prime ministers	66.6
Constituency candidate	65.4
Vote of the rest of the country	61
'Historical' moment	51.8
Previous election	39.1
Family	38.8
Discussion about the election	37.2
Emotional thought	31.9
Happy thought	31.1
Some previous election	29
Something from the debates	28.9
Campaign message	28.2
Angry thought	25
Argument about the election	14.1
Campaign image	13.1

What can we offer?



- Independent & unbiased research on voters' psychology, perceptions of democracy, motivations, emotions, trust enhancement, systems transparency
- Multi-method & dynamic approach (including surveys, sustainable panel surveys, policy evaluations, experimentation, simulation, qualitative modules, etc), which is fully integrated to produce robust & reliable data.
- Bespoke research targeting specific voters groups (first time voters, women, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, voters with a lower educational background, elderly voters, etc)
- Help inform decision-makers understand what goes on in the minds of their voters, what emotions, motivations, and perceptions are at play when they vote, how they feel about elections and electoral procedures, and how to improve trust, confidence, and perceptions of transparency amongst an electorate.



Thank you!