Abstract:

Little is known about how voters acquire information about the general state of the economy, and how this information is then used to determine vote choice. To better understand this process, we asked a series of questions on the 2006 ANES Pilot to illicit respondents’ perceptions of the unemployment rate and gas prices. We first analyze how individual characteristics are correlated with respondents’ perceptions of gas prices and the unemployment rate. We then test how respondents’ perceptions of gas prices and the unemployment rate are correlated with political preferences. We find that perceptions of gas prices and unemployment rates derive from different sources of information. Information about unemployment rates come from media sources, and are systematically biased by partisan factors. Information about gas prices, in contrast, comes only from everyday experiences. While there are significant demographic differences in respondents’ perceptions of both gas prices and unemployment rates, only unemployment rates affect a respondent’s political outlook. Moreover, perceptions of unemployment rates can be used to isolate the effect of economic evaluation on partisan preferences.