

DEMOCRACY  
FOR  
REALISTS

*Why Elections Do Not Produce  
Responsive Government*

CHRISTOPHER H. ACHEN  
LARRY M. BARTELS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

# Contents

*List of Illustrations ix*

*Preface xiii*

## CHAPTER ONE

Democratic Ideals and Realities 1

## CHAPTER TWO

The Elusive Mandate: Elections and the Mirage of Popular Control 21

## CHAPTER THREE

Tumbling Down into a Democratical Republic:  
“Pure Democracy” and the Pitfalls of Popular Control 52

## CHAPTER FOUR

A Rational God of Vengeance and of Reward?  
The Logic of Retrospective Accountability 90

## CHAPTER FIVE

Blind Retrospection: Electoral Responses to  
Droughts, Floods, and Shark Attacks 116

## CHAPTER SIX

Musical Chairs: Economic Voting and the Specious Present 146

## CHAPTER SEVEN

A Chicken in Every Pot: Ideology and Retrospection  
in the Great Depression 177

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The Very Basis of Reasons: Groups, Social Identities,  
and Political Psychology 213

*Contents*

CHAPTER NINE

Partisan Hearts and Spleens: Social Identities and Political Change 232

CHAPTER TEN

It Feels Like We're Thinking: The Rationalizing Voter 267

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Groups and Power: Toward a Realist Theory of Democracy 297

APPENDIX

Retrospective Voting as Selection and Sanctioning 329

*References* 335

*Index* 371

# Illustrations

## FIGURES

Figure 1.1.	Democratic Aspirations and Perceptions, 2010–2014	5
Figure 2.1.	District Opinion and Representatives' Roll Call Votes, 2011–2013	47
Figure 4.1.	Blind Retrospection Impairs Voters' Judgment of Good Incumbents	103
Figure 4.2.	Blind Retrospection Erodes Incumbents' Diligence	105
Figure 4.3.	American Mayoral Terms and Support for Fluoridation	111
Figure 5.1.	Support for Woodrow Wilson in New Jersey Counties, 1916 versus 1912	123
Figure 5.2.	Change in Woodrow Wilson's Vote Share (1912–1916) in Counties and Townships with Shark Attacks	125
Figure 5.3.	Change in Woodrow Wilson's Vote Share (1912–1916) in Ocean County Townships	127
Figure 5.4.	Election-Specific Estimates of Drought and Flood Effects, 1900–2000	133
Figure 6.1.	Short-Term Income Growth, Tenure, and Presidential Election Outcomes, 1952–2012	154
Figure 6.2.	Income Growth by Presidential Administration, 1947–2013	160
Figure 6.3.	GDP and Income Growth through the Electoral Cycle, 1949–2012	172
Figure 7.1.	U.S. Income and Incumbent Electoral Support, 1928–1940	182
Figure 7.2.	Election-Year Income Changes and Roosevelt's Popular Vote, 1936 (non-southern states)	185
Figure 7.3.	Election-Year Income Changes and Congressional Votes, 1938 (non-southern states)	195
Figure 7.4.	Depression and Recovery in Eight Countries, 1928–1940	201
Figure 7.5.	The Legacy of the Great Depression in Alberta Provincial Politics	209
Figure 9.1.	Catholic Support for Democrats, 1952–2012	243

*List of Illustrations*

Figure 9.2.	Southern White Party Identification and Presidential Votes	248
Figure 9.3.	Southern White Party Identification by Birth Cohort	249
Figure 9.4.	Southern White Party Identification by Views about Government-Enforced School Integration	251
Figure 9.5.	Southern White Party Identification by Views about Government Aid to Blacks	253
Figure 9.6.	Retention of 1982 Republican Identifiers in 1997	262
Figure 9.7.	Conversion to 1997 Pro-Choice Views by 1982 Pro-Life Respondents	263
Figure 10.1.	Party Identification and Perceptions of Issue Proximity for Spending/Services, 1982–2012	271
Figure 10.2.	Perceptions of Budget Deficit by Party and Information Level, 1996	282

**TABLES**

Table 3.1.	Referendum and Initiative Votes on Direct Democracy, 1904–1912	71
Table 3.2.	Referendum and Initiative Votes on Prohibition, 1904–1912	72
Table 5.1.	The Effect of Shark Attacks on the 1916 New Jersey Presidential Vote	123
Table 5.2.	Droughts, Floods, and Presidential Elections, 1900–2000	130
Table 5.3.	The Effect of Drought on the 2000 Presidential Vote	134
Table 6.1.	Long-Term and Short-Term Economic Voting in Presidential Elections	152
Table 6.2.	Alternative Models of the Timing of Electoral Responses to Income Growth	156
Table 6.3.	Discerning the Economic “Competence” of Presidential Administrations Based on Six-Month Growth Records	162
Table 6.4.	Post-Election Economic Growth under Old and New Administrations	165
Table 6.5.	Economic Voting on the Basis of Post-Election Income and GDP Growth	167
Table 7.1.	Retrospective Voting in FDR’s 1936 Landslide	186
Table 7.2.	The 1936 Presidential Election with a 1938 Economy	190
Table 7.3.	Retrospective Voting in Congressional Elections, 1934–1940	193
Table 7.4.	Cumulative Retrospection in Congressional Elections, 1934–1940	199

*List of Illustrations*

Table 9.1.	Southern Regional and Racial Identity and Democratic Partisanship, 1964–2008	256
Table 10.1.	Perceptions of the Budget Deficit by Party Identification, 1996	281
Table 10.2.	The Impact of Watergate Attitudes on Perceptions of Issue Proximity, 1972–1976	288
Table 10.3.	The Impact of Watergate Attitudes on Issue Preferences, 1972–1976	292