

POLS 541
Fall 2006
Prof. Baumgartner

Questions for Week 10 Nov 9

Readings: cue-taking models from various disciplines

1. Granovetter and Crenson are among the earliest cites in this literature. Both sought to answer some interesting social puzzles. What were the substantive puzzles that they sought to explore and how well do their models help understand it?
2. Paul and Arthur focus on what are sometimes called “first-mover effects”—that is, the advantage that comes from being the first off the block. Yet, as they show, what might be good for the firm (or typewriter designer) who gets his standard adopted first may not be good for the market overall. Explain the lock-in effect and discuss its applicability.
3. The articles by Becker, Bikhchandani, and Kirman all have in common a desire to explain decisions where the decision-maker takes a lot of cues from the environment rather than making up their own mind independently. Is this common? Where is it more common and where would it be less common? Do decisions have different characteristics in the two settings? Would you jay-walk if no one else ever did?
4. Lohmann presents a sophisticated model, with actual evidence, drawing on Granovetter’s model of threshold effects in a real-world setting. Evaluate the evidence, the theoretical contribution, and the substantive contribution of the article. Do we learn more about theory, about whether the theory works, and/or about the substance of the collapse of the East German regime?
5. Path dependency as explained by Pierson has become a very hot topic in comparative politics. Discuss how this article relates to choices governments make and to the other readings this week.