

Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Vote Choice

- Compare and contrast the different models of vote choice:
 - Columbia school: sociological model, vote choice based in social groups
 - Michigan school: psychological model where party identification is a ready guide for making political judgments
 - Economic models, beginning with Downs: vote for party providing greater utility, try to reduce information costs by voting on performance or on broad symbols like party identification
 - How do these perspectives vary as to how fixed or malleable the relevant factors are; how proximate they are to vote choice; how much they demand of voters; how well they explain cross-sectional and over-time variation in vote choice; how generalizable they are or how limited to the case study or time period examined?
- For Fiorina and Kinder/Adams/Gronke:
 - Does the public care more about means or ends, more about policy instruments or policy outcomes?
 - Are voters retrospective or prospective – do they look behind or ahead?
 - What kind of economic evaluations matter – national (sociotropic) or well-being of group or self (pocketbook)
 - How available are these pieces of information, and how does info vary across demographic subgroups?
- Petrocik:
 - What is the role of issues in vote choice?
 - By what mechanisms do issues matter?
 - What is issue ownership and how is it generated?
 - Does the role of issues vary across time and campaigns?
- Rahn/Aldrich/Borgida/Sullivan:
 - How do people form candidate evaluations? Is this an easy or hard task? Does the task vary by levels of political sophistication?
 - Is the role for campaigns the same or different compared to the Petrocik model?
 - What are the informational requirements for this model?
 - How proximate are voters' feelings/candidate affect to vote choice? Is this a concern in constructing an explanation of vote choice?
- How good are these models at explaining empirical phenomena such as (1) the Republican domination of the presidential vote vs. the Democratic domination of the normal vote; (2) or the increased Republican success in recent decades at all levels of government