POSC 124 -- Elections, Parties, and Political Opinion

Fall 2007

John McAdams
288-3425
WW 417
Office Hours: M, W 3-5, T 10-noon
and by appointment

Course Objectives:

The central question of the course is whether voters are rational. More specifically: whether they are capable of the behavior necessary to exert control of the government through the electoral process. Topics include political socialization, public opinion and the role of the media (can voters be manipulated?), ideology, political knowledge, issue positions, party identification, and why people vote the way they do. Emphasis is on national presidential and congressional races, with some attention to voter turnout and participation.

Text:


Requirements:

Two papers, based on analysis of survey data. One will assess the shape of public opinion on some important public issue looking at different polls and different ways of asking the question. The other will assess the effect of a demographic variable you choose (race, income, gender, etc.) on particular political attitudes. Data will be obtained from electronic sources at Raynor Library, and from web sites. More detailed instructions will be posted on the course web page. The first paper will be due on October 5th, and the second on November 9th.

Two exams during the term (announced a week in advance) and a final will all contain both objective and essay material. There will be a study guide and a review session for each exam. Grade: each exam, 20%; final, 30%; each paper, 15%.

All readings are required. All besides the textbook will be available in a xeroxed packet.
Course Outline:

I. The Study of Public Opinion

Erikson & Tedin; Chapters 1-2.

II. Where Attitudes Come From

A. Political Socialization

Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 5.

B. Social Groups

Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 7.

C. Self-Interest


D. The Media

Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 8.
III. Attitude Dimensions - Ideology

   Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 3,4

IV. Elite Groups

   Barry Sussman, “Elites in America” (a *Washington Post* reprint)

V. The Voter at the Polls

   A. Presidential Elections

   Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 9.

   B. Voters and Parties

   Erikson & Tedin; Chapter 10.

   C. Congressional Elections

   John McAdams and John C. Green, “Fat Cats and Thin Kittens: Are People Who Make Large Campaign Contributions Different?” Cato Briefing Papers, #76 (September 25, 2002)

VI. Summarizing

   Erikson & Tedin, Chapter 11.