

Outline Topic IV

Elections and Voting

I. Elections are Central to Democracy

A. Free, Fair, and Open Elections are a defining characteristic of virtually all forms of Democratic Theory

1. Elections are Especially Important for Democratic Elitism
2. Elections of Elites is what makes Elitism Democratic

B. Two Broad Explanations of Election Influence on Policy-making

1. Accountability Theory -- Elections allow us to “kick the bums out” of office if they fail to represent us effectively in the policy process (retrospective)
2. Mandate Theory – Elections allow us to “send a message” to our leaders, to choose in advance what policies they will make (prospective)

II Democratic Elitist Assumptions:

For elections to operate as Democratic Elitists say they do they must meet five basic conditions or assumptions

A. Accountability Requires:

1. There must be Competing Candidates
2. Who compete (i.e., offer Choice) on Issues that matter
3. Voters must perceive and Vote based on those Differences

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B. In Addition, Mandates Require These Same Three Conditions PLUS:

4. Winning Candidates must be Able to Identify the Majority Preference on Issues based on Election Results
5. Winning Candidates must be Willing and Able to Keep their Campaign Issue Promises

III. Elections Are Imperfect in Providing Accountability or Mandates

A. Many Elections in American Provide Little Competition:

B. The Lower the Level of the Office, the Less the Likelihood of Competition.

- Most Presidential Elections Are Competitive
- State-Wide Elections (Governor, Senator) Only Moderately Competitive (Sen. McCain, Gov Ducey)
- As many as 25% of House of Representative Elections have no major party competition.
- Most Local Elections are uncompetitive (either no challenger or only a very weak challenger)

C. Even When There is Competition, There Often is Little Policy Choice

1. Examples: Romney v. Obama

2. Reasons for this:

- Candidates Try to avoid on Issues
- Voters tend to be “Single Issue, Negative Voters
- Candidates emphasize Valence not Positional Issues
- Candidates often campaign on irrelevant issues

3. WHOSE FAULT? Candidates or Voters

D. Voters Often are Not Able to Perceive and Frequently do not Vote on the Basis of Issues.

1. Public not very well informed about politics. Most don't know the name of their Member of Congress much less her name.
2. Many individuals base their votes on considerations that have nothing to do with candidates' issue positions.

E. How Do Voters Decide?

Voter Decisions typically are Products of Both Long-Term Personal Factors and Short-Term Campaign Factors

1. Long Term Personal Factors:
Attributes of the Individual Voter
that change slowly if at all from one
election to the next.
 - a. Party Identification (Party ID)
 - b. Political Ideology
2. Short Term Campaign Factors
 - a. Candidate Images (Valence
Issues?)
 - Trustworthy
 - Kind
 - Competent
 - Nice
 - Name Recognition
 - b. Party Images (Valence Issues?)
 - Reps strong on defense
 - Dems protect the poor

c. Issues (Positional Issues)

- Usually One Economic Issue (Unemployment, Inflation, Misery, Deficit)
- Usually One Social Issue (Race, Law and Order, Education, Drugs, Abortion)
- Sometimes a Foreign Policy Issue (Viet Nam, Iraq War)

3. Impact of Incumbency

- a. Visibility & Name Recognition
- b. Greater Fund Raising Ability
- c. The “Frank” (Free Mailings)

4. System Level Influences Who Wins

a. Differential Turnout,
Party ID, Race/Ethnicity
Negative Campaigning

b. Counting Votes
Electoral College
Gerrymandering
Ballot Type

F. It is very difficult after an election to determine what, if any, mandate a candidate has.

1. Candidates don't compete on issues
2. Votes tend not to vote on issues
3. When issues are important they tend to be valence issues
4. On positional issues votes tend to be single issue, negative voters.
5. As a result, candidates can win even when a majority of the public disagrees with them on most issues.

G. Candidates TRY to keep Policy Promises but frequently are UNABLE to do so:

1. Some Promises beyond the Jurisdiction of Candidate's Office
2. Wrong Level of Federal System
3. Promise not Constitutional
4. Wrong Committee Of Legislature
5. Valence Issues are Ambiguous and Difficult to Judge Compliance
6. Separation of Powers Limits Powers of ALL Elected Officials – Officials can promise to Try; cannot promise to Deliver
7. Divided authority and responsibility means that no one is responsible or accountable.

VI. Party ID and Types of Elections:

Elections in American are Described by the Relative Impact of Short vs Long Term Influences

- A. Normal Election – Long Term Influences (i.e. Party ID) Prevail and Majority Party Candidate wins (ex. 1960, 1964, 1976, 1992, 1996, 2008?)
2. Deviating Election – Short Term Influences (Issues, Events, Personalities) temporarily overwhelm Party ID and result in election of minority party candidate (ex. 1968?, 1972, 1980?, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2004)
- C. Realignment Election (Critical Election) – Short Term Influences permanently change party loyalties and produce new majority party (ex. 1932, 1968?, 1980?, 2004? 2008? 2012?)