Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Vote Choice

• Compare and contrast the different models of vote choice:
  o Columbia school: sociological model, vote choice based in social groups
  o Michigan school: psychological model where party identification is a ready guide for making political judgments
  o 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
  o 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:
  o Does the public care more about means or ends, more about policy instruments or policy outcomes?
  o Are voters retrospective or prospective – do they look behind or ahead?
  o What kind of economic evaluations matter – national (sociotropic) or well-being of group or self (pocketbook)
  o How available are these pieces of information, and how does info vary across demographic subgroups?

• Petrocik:
  o What is the role of issues in vote choice?
  o By what mechanisms do issues matter?
  o What is issue ownership and how is it generated?
  o Does the role of issues vary across time and campaigns?

• Rahn/Aldrich/Borgida/Sullivan:
  o How do people form candidate evaluations? Is this an easy or hard task? Does the task vary by levels of political sophistication?
  o Is the role for campaigns the same or different compared to the Petrocik model?
  o What are the informational requirements for this model?
  o 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