

STUDY THEME 1D

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, VOTING AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

2007

The Additional Member System gives voters more choice and better representation than does First Past The Post.

Discuss.

2008

Assess the influence of social class on voting behaviour.

2009

Critically examine the view that the media is the most important influence on voting behaviour.

2010

The Single Transferable Vote electoral system provides for better representation than First Past the Post.

Discuss.

2011 Prediction

Of course it is impossible to be sure what the 2011 question will be .. and we all know that making a guess and revising only one topic would be the strategy of a complete fool who deserves to fail.

Nonetheless, we can balance probabilities and decide what topics we will spend most time revising.

From the above, we can say it is not likely to be a question on STV and it could well be a question on the factors which affect voting behaviour. So let's start by looking at this ...

An essay on the factors which affect voting behaviour.

The easiest question would be: *What are the various factors which affect the way people vote?*

This would allow you to simply list the various factors in your introduction and then let you decide which three or four of these you want to look at in a some depth, providing statistics / examples and points of analysis as you go. Then perhaps finish off with a conclusion about which factors are the most important.

However, it is more likely that a question will pinpoint one factor and ask you to discuss how important that factor is. (Look at the 2008 & 2009 questions above for examples of this.) If this is the case you should start by looking at the factor you are given in reasonable depth before going on to look at two or three other factors which affect voting behaviour.

Let's assume the question focuses on social class. Start with a general intro

INTRO

- social class is an important when analysing voting behaviour - but other factors such as the media, gender, age, region, religion, ethnicity and even apathy also have effect - you could then say you will look at some of these but cannot cover all.
- Before looking at the various factors however, it should be remembered that voting behaviour differs for the type of election – e.g. UK general election seen as important – much media attention so high turnout (give figure) – Scottish Parliament – lot of media attention– relatively high turnout – however – council elections and European Parliament elections – little media attention – not seen by many voters as so important - low turnout

MAIN PART - SOCIAL CLASS

- start with the factor you are given in the question – do not leave this to the end as some did in a recent essay, because it shows you are trying to avoid the question, and are looking to answer the question you *want* to, rather than the question which is there (a common and serious mistake)
- for the social class element there are various ways you could answer - you could refer briefly to
 - socio-economic groups & traditional model of middle & upper classes voting Conservative & lower / working classes voting Labour
 - **however** de-alignment due to economic change (explain but not too much detail) – party loyalty reduced – new working class - Mrs Thatcher's Conservatives benefited - more floating voters - **however** effect on Labour policies - success of New Labour in capturing Tory voters – Mondeo Man. - some reference to election results 97-05. Refer to 2010 to show you are up-to-date – dealignment has continued – Labour did poorly **but** rather than mass return to Tories, result was no clear winner and coalition govt – suggests long-term change in voting behaviour
- Finish this section with a 'mini-conclusion' such as. “As we can see, social class is a major factor in determining voting behaviour. However it is not the only one.”

NOW YOU MAY CHOOSE TO GO TO THE MEDIA – some points you could mention (though you wouldn't manage all) are ...

- role of newspapers (often biased and support parties) – politicians keen to win support of newspaper editors / owners – could mention Sun headlines etc but not too much detail if very dated (but to be up-to-date could mention Sun's recently announced support for SNP in May 2011 election) – impact of print media may be shrinking because newspaper circulation dropping
- on the other hand broadcast media – required to be neutral - (however parties still complain of biased programmes) – growing importance – more channels, 24 hour TV, etc. - now main source of news for many – TV leadership debates good example of power of TV – helped boost 2010 turnout
- because media is important parties try to control image in media – role of spin doctors to 'manage' party image and limit damage of negative stories – a lot of success – however some spectacular failures e.g. Gordon Brown 'bigoted woman' comment or Nick Clegg who was big success in TV leader debates but now is having major problems with his image (e.g. over tuition fees)
- on the other hand new media (internet, blogs, forums & social media) even more difficult to control - – unclear how this will affect politics in the future – could undermine traditional party politics (e.g. could see mass online campaigns on single issues rather than a focus on party manifestos covering a range of policies)
- new media difficult for parties to control e.g. Gordon Brown broadcast on YouTube when his 'smile' was ridiculed – Cameron has had more success but still widespread scepticism on whether it has helped him – on the other hand, many agree internet helped Obama so may be useful in UK politics if parties learn to use skilfully
- Finish this section with a 'mini-conclusion' such as 'From this it is clear that politicians and many commentators believe the media also has a key and growing influence on voting behaviour'

NOW YOU MAY DECIDE TO BRIEFLY LOOK AT GENDER or LEADERS or REGION or perhaps APATHY

- Use your notes on these to make up a few bullet points on one other factor – if you don't have your notes use the Modern Studies Club website and go to 'Factors Affecting Voting Behaviour'
- Try to end with a mini-conclusion (just like the two sections above) which refers back to the question

CONCLUSION

- finish the whole question with a short conclusion which sums up that social class is clearly a major factor influencing voting behaviour but that it is important to remember it is not the only factor. Others, including the media and apathy, also play an important and perhaps increasing role.