

Pol 157: American Political Opinion
Electoral Choice Models Evaluation Essay
SPRING 2019

1 Assignment Introduction

This assignment is designed to get you to think about some of the dominant political science models that are prevalent in the systematic inquiry of American political behavior. Throughout this course, we describe these models in detail and the implications of these models on how well these models explain how citizens make “correct” decisions with respect to electoral choice. Your task in this assignment is to choose a model discussed throughout this course, describe the model in detail, and evaluate how well this model explains how citizens formulate their preferences with respect to electoral choice. The latter part of the paper, your analysis of the model, should feature an argument as to the usefulness of the model in explaining a certain this aspect of political behavior. The models of electoral choice are listed below.

- ★ Michigan Model of Partisanship
- ★ Valence Model of Electoral Choice
- ★ Spatial Model of Electoral Choice

The next section of this prompt describes the requirements of the assignment. Pay close attention to this section of this assignment. It is *highly* recommended you outline your paper along these points. The essay should be between *3-5 double spaced pages*.¹

2 Assignment Parameters

2.1 Introducing & Describing the Model

After choosing your model, be sure to describe the model in detail. Consider the following points:

1. **Setting the context of representation:** What does Madison’s *Theory of the Republic* suggest about the role of citizens in American democracy? What do contemporary political scientists argue is the faulty assumption behind Madison’s model with respect to variation in political participation?
2. **What’s your model and what does it explain?** How does your model work with respect to explaining how citizens make electoral decisions? Specifically, what are the “moving parts” (i.e., mechanisms) of the electoral choice model you chose to analyze?

¹This is a *recommended length*. I recognize many stellar & comprehensive essays may go over the five page recommendation. That’s ok! However, I would be hard-pressed to believe one can write a thorough essay in under 3 double spaced pages(equivalent to 1.5 single-spaced pages).

An example could be that the *Spatial Model* of voting posits that citizens weigh their ideological preferences (self-interest) relative to both election candidates and, as a consequence, will vote for the candidate closest to them in ideological proximity. This is the real substantive area of the model introduction part of the essay and the model should be described in careful detail.

3. Does your model make any assumptions about the behavior of its units?

After identifying what your chosen model explains and at what level of analysis, ask does the model make any assumptions? For example, does your model assume sophisticated or ambivalent voters? Does your model assume that candidates appeal to their partisan bases or move closer to the pivotal median voter in the electorate? Be sure to state the assumptions of your model, if any.

2.2 Critiquing the Model

- 1. What's the utility of the model?** After introducing the reader to the model (i.e. what it tries to explain, its assumptions, how it works), state whether you think the model does a "good job" explaining electoral choice or if the model falls short. A good strategy could be to compare & contrast your model with another model seeking to explain the same political phenomena, if applicable, or point out whether the model leaves out an important variable (consideration).
- 2. Is there evidence for your argument?** Provide evidence for the argument you present above. You could use other scholarly sources or data analysis done by other publications to strengthen your argument. Empirical sources could include FiveThirtyEight, Vox, the New York Times, etc. For example, if you are writing about the partisan model of voting, you could use exit polls from the 2016 election to argue the model's utility. You could argue that the model is unrealistic in predicting electoral choice in certain political contexts, such as the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries or ballot propositions.
- 3. Sum up your argument:** Provide a short conclusion (paragraph) as to what the model explains and whether it does a serviceable job of explaining electoral choice.