Specimen Response for Study Theme 1D

STUDY THEME 1D: ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, VOTING AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Question

Some factors are more important that others in influencing voting behaviour.

Discuss.   (15 marks)

Response

There are many important factors which influence voting behaviour, some more so than others, for example one of the most important is social class. Social class is determined by the registered generals classification, which is based on males of working age, people are classed on occupation, for example, the higher the social class, the better the job as social class 1, known as professionals, are people like doctors or accountants and social class 6, known as unskilled workers like cleaners. It has been tested and proven that most of the time, the higher the social class i.e. 1 and 2 vote Conservative and the lower social classes vote Labour, for example, in the 1997 general election, 42% of social classes 1 and 2 voted Conservative compared with only 21% of social classes 5 and 6. For Labour, 61% of social classes 5 and 6 voted for them compared with only 31% of social classes 1 and 2. However, social class mobility has led to many people moving up the social class ladder, but some have retained their working class background, one of which is to vote Labour. Family background plays a significant part in political attitudes. Children will normally vote for the same party as their parents. Also, the neighbourhood you live in can have an influence. There are, however, people who do not vote for the party of their class, for example, the Conservatives would not win any elections if they had not captured enough working class votes, for example, the 1992 election, 38% of social classes 5 and 6 voted Conservative.

The media also have an impact on voting behaviour. It is the main source of information about government and politics and contributes to the democratic process as it encourages political awareness amongst the public. There are certain limits to what the media can do to influence voters, for example, the main campaigns for television must be neutral but the press do not. Many newspapers are right wing, for example, Daily Mail, Express and Telegraph look warm to David Cameron and Conservatives. The Sun and the Mirror have the highest readership, mainly working class whereas broadsheet newspapers, for example the Times and the Guardian which have more in depth stories are said to attract mainly middle class. However, many people say that their influence is limited, for example, between 1979 – 1997 the Sun supported the Conservatives but working class still voted Labour. Conservatives won 4 elections in a row with the Sun support claiming in 1992 "It's the Sun wot won it"

The media now in 2006 has more of an impact as party loyalty has decreased and the number of floating voters has increased but did the media influence voting behaviour during 1950 – 1970? There was a marked coralation between the partisanship of the voters and that of newspapers, for example, there was strong support for the Labour Party from the Mirror. Evidence suggests that newspapers really only had the effect of reinforcing political opinions of floating voters. The majority of voters were aligned to political parties. It was difficult to credit the media with political influence at this time. However it would be wrong to suggest that newspapers have no influence. Editors are in the business of influencing the electorate.

Until recently, gender was quite an important factor in influencing voting behaviour. Women were more likely to vote Conservative than men. However, the 1997 general election expelled this as the election results showed a rise in the number of women voting Labour.

In Britain, regional voting variations are much in evidence. Scotland, Wales and Northern England are predominantly voting Labour. The South East mainly vote Conservative. However in the last two elections this was overtaken by other factors.

In recent years there have been increasing changes in voting behaviour in Britain. After the 1970 general election, the certainties of the 1950s and 1960s seemed to evaporate. February 1974 saw the first minority government since 1929. There was a fall in support for the Heath government and a decline in the vote for Wilson's opposition.

In conclusion, it is quite clear that there are many factors which influence voting behaviour, some more important than others. For example, the media and social class are very important factors. Recently gender has become less important in influencing voting behaviour.

Marking Instructions for Study Theme 1D

STUDY THEME 1D: ELECTORAL SYSTEMS, VOTING AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Question

Some factors are more important that others in influencing voting behaviour.

Discuss.   (15 marks)

Developed, exemplified, balanced and analytical answers may refer to:

♦ the broadcasting media, the press and the Internet
♦ social class
♦ region
♦ age
♦ religion
♦ ethnicity
♦ issue voting
♦ tactical voting
♦ rational choice model
♦ opinion polls
♦ electoral system and issue of "effectiveness" of voting
♦ turnout for different levels of election
♦ other relevant points.

'Achieve' answers must feature both knowledge and understanding and analysis.

Comments on Specimen Answer to Study Theme 1D

The candidate understands the question and knows how to answer it albeit sometimes in odd sentence construction.

Social class, the media, region and gender are correctly identified as factors and there is some good analysis, evaluation and discussion of the effects of the media and social class. There is also some good, recent exemplification as well as interesting historical perspectives. There is no mention of issue voting or of the effect of the personalities of politicians – especially party leaders.

The candidate, however, deals only with general elections – no mention of how voting behaviour can change because of other factors in local elections or by-elections. Nor is there any mention of the effect of different voting systems nor of the effects of voter apathy.

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