Present

Hanne Marthe Narud
Professor in the Department of Political Science
University of Oslo, Norway

"The Impact of the Economy on the Electoral Performance of Governments"

Abstract:

Former British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, once stated that: “All political history shows that the standing of a Government and its ability to hold the confidence of the electorate at a General Election depend on the success of its economic policy”. It is a widely recognized assumption among politicians, political commentators and social scientists is that elections are referenda on the economy. The belief is that voters will reward the government when economic conditions are good, whereas they will punish it in times of economic recession. This more or less universal “truth” has been subject to an extensive amount of empirical research, in which students have attempted to define which types of conditions are most relevant for the economic vote. Much of this research indicates that there is a relationship between the economy and the vote, but the direction and the strength of this relationship is complex and less intuitive than the simple notion of economic voting would predict (see e.g. Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000; van der Brug et al., 2007; Duch and Stevenson, 2008). Moreover, the electoral fortunes of incumbent parties are not conditioned by economic factors alone. Systematic research across countries reveals that electoral performance varies according to system-specific variables such as type of government, critical events and changes in the political environment of political parties (Bengtsson, 2004; Narud and Valen, 2008).

These observations form the point of departure for this paper, in which I will explore the electoral rewards and punishments of incumbent parties in a Northern European context. Four questions are analyzed: First, to what extent are incumbent parties held to more severe standards than opposition parties? Second, to what extent is their electoral performance conditioned by economic factors? Third, under which conditions is the economy a constraint on incumbent parties? And finally, what is the overall impact of the economy compared to other types of issues, e.g. factors related to social structure and ideology?

Tuesday, February 1st, 2011
SSB 107 at 3:00pm
Light refreshments will be served