

American Government and Politics

The Political Leanings Activity

Ole J. Forsberg, Ph.D.

Resident Assistant Professor: Creighton University

The primary purpose of the political leanings activity is to have you think about where you are in relation to others in terms of your political ideology. If you answer the questions accurately, the results will be accurate. You may be surprised where you are in the political spectrum.

Take the political leanings test located at <http://www.politicalcompass.org/>. This should take about fifteen minutes to do thoughtfully. The more time you spend thinking about the questions and your views, the closer the results will be to your true political leanings.

After getting the results, click on the “Show graph on separate page for printing” link and print out two copies of the graph. Date both copies. One copy is for you to keep in your notebook to refer to at later points in this class. The second copy is to be handed in. (Make sure staple it to the back of your answers to the following questions.) Also on your copy of the results only, copy down the books and authors the website suggests for your particular leanings.

Now, read (and think about) the following pages on the Political Leanings site: your analysis page, US Election 2004, UK Parties 2006, and the FAQ.

Lastly, answer the following ten questions using proper style and formatting.

Discussion

1. What do the two dimensions on the political leanings graph represent?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the test results? Why? In your answer, reflect on what it means to be ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ in the United States and what it may mean in other countries.
3. On your attached graph, label where the Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Socialists, and Greens would be placed. There are right and wrong answers to this, so make sure you do a little research as to what each of the parties represents in the United States.
4. To which political party do you most closely identify? What is it about that party that draws you?
5. Are you a _____ (your political party) because you hold certain views on the issues or do you hold certain views on the issues because you are a _____ (your political party)? In other words, which is more fundamental, your political party or your views?
6. Candidates for president tend to score very close to one another on this test. As an example, look where George W. Bush and John Kerry placed relative to each other (and to you). Does this similarity of the positions of the candidates reduce our real choice of elected officials, or is it a result of our nation being very homogenous?

7. How does the movement of the Labour Party to the right affect the fortunes of the Liberal Democrats? Think about why people vote for one party over another before you answer. Perhaps do a little reading on Median Voter Theory (Wikipedia should be helpful here).
8. In Political Science, 'cooption' means that a party (or person) begins to take on the views of some of its opponents simply to gain their support. An example would be the Democratic Party vocally taking some of the Green party positions regarding the environment in the 2000 election simply to get more of the Green vote. In what way does the graph of the locations of the British parties suggest a certain level of cooption may be taking place in British politics? Do not just write out some random fact, show how that fact supports your contention that cooption may be taking place.
9. Besides the example given previously, give a specific example of cooption in American politics.