Interpersonal Interaction in Electorates: Some Theory and a Preliminary Empirical Application

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Abstract

The present paper offers a sociodynamic perspective on presidential approval and similar popularity-measures. I propose a model of collective attitude change based on interpersonal interaction which is inspired by epidemiological models. Approval and disapproval are modelled similar to diseases which are spread by the interaction between groups. By fitting the model to survey data an average probability of attitude change can be derived. A preliminary application shown is the rally round the flag effect after 9/11. The model is employed to predict the approval ratings of President George W. Bush using time-series data covering the periods from January 2001 until May 2002. While quantitatively Bush's popularity skyrocketed after 9/11 it appears that qualitatively Bush's popularity was negatively affected.