Avinash Lal Psych 15 Project Proposal

For my final project I would like to examine the question “Does counterfactual thinking and emotional amplification in politicians after a close presidential election loss manifest itself in stringent partisan congressional voting patterns?”

Beginning with the definition of counterfactual thoughts, these are thoughts of what might have, could have, or should have happened "if only" something had occurred differently. Along a similar vein, emotional amplification is an increase in an emotional reaction to an event that is proportional to how easy it is to imagine the event not happening. I am interested in how these thoughts and reactions may affect self-perception as a part of a group that experienced an unpleasant outcome. The specific and interesting area that I would like to apply this exploration in is United States politics. I hypothesize that following closer presidential elections, politicians from the losing party will be more subject to counterfactual thoughts, and the loss will be emotionally amplified and as a result losing politicians will vote along party lines to spite the victors.

In order to measure this, I will be checking for correlation between presidential margin of victory and the number of cross party votes in the month following presidential elections. The non-election years in the time frame can be used as a control group. The number of cross party votes will be collected from the ProPublica Congress API, which collects vote data from the [Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives](http://clerk.house.gov/legislative/legvotes.html). The margin of victory in the presidential election will be collected from the New York Times. I do acknowledge that voter data is available since 1991, which only leaves 7 presidential elections and thus may be too small of a sample size. However, if some pattern is found it may be worth additional investigation into past presidential elections or other victories/losses along partisan lines.

Based on the theory proposed above, I would expect a positive correlation for the number of cross party votes and the margin of victory in the presidential election. I hypothesize that the losing political group will feel the loss more because of the counterfactual thoughts and thus feel more drawn to make up for that loss by uniting with their party members.

However, it could be the case that the data comes out with the opposite correlation than hypothesized. In this case, a possible explanation could be a perception of the nation as divided and thus invoking an increased willingness to cooperate for the vision of America as one.

If the data does not show any statistical significance it could be that different individuals in Congress reacted differently in each case. This may be less interesting but very possible.

There is no clear, foreseeable outcome and thus this experiment is mostly explorative in nature.