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The Social and Kennedy Influence on People's Feeling for Candidates in 1980 Election

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Abstract

Feeling for the candidates implicitly implies the political trends during the presidency

election. I analyzed social condition and feeling for Kennedy as the significant factors of voter's

feelings for their candidates in the 1980 election through cross tabulation table and try to build a

linear regression model for the feelings and feeling change for both candidates. From my statistic

modeling from 1980 NES Panel Study, I built a multiple variables linear regressions with

feelings and feeling difference for Reagan and Carter as dependent variables. Interestingly, social

and economic problem and people's feeling about Kennedy indeed significantly affect the

feeling for Carter and Reagan. I extend my hypothesis and believe Carter's feeling change are

strongly related to voter's feeling for Kennedy. The relative feeling model generalize the bitter

battle between Kennedy and Carter is a pivot point during the election, the supporters of

Kennedy changed their feeling dramatically after the nomination competition.

The presidential election of 1980, which contests of personalities of both candidates, is one of the most consequential election in United states history. Before the election, almost every people believe it would be a highly fierce competition between Carter and Reagan. Surprisingly, the final result turns out to be a one-side dominance. Reagan beat Carter for almost 10% more votes and Republican gained control of Congress for the first time in 28 years. To deeply delve the election, I seek for what is the significant factors that overturn the balance or even main dominance situation to the Republican victory. Before the election, Democratic Party chose its nominee for President of the United States between Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy since United State are not in a good time during Carter's presidency. The incumbent president Carter was still finally selected as the nominee for Democratic Party through a series of election and beat his strong opponent Kennedy. I specifically interested in analyze the social influence and how people's feeling about Kennedy related to both of the candidates during the election.

According to McAdams, John C., and John R. Johannes, there is a high degree of policy-oriented voting in 1980 and challengers' campaign spending had a large effect, with Republican spending being large in magnitude and well targeted against the most vulnerable Democrats. Before the election the Democrats with Carter as the president, United States suffer a bad period. Both inflation rate and deposit interest rate had raised to a relative high level in the history record. Abramowitz, Alan indicate that national issues that the presidential economic policies during contest in directly affected voting decisions in both elections. Additionally, Conover, Pamela Johnston, and Stanley Feldman mentioned that emotional reactions to both personal and national economic conditions are important in explaining political evaluations. Bad shaping economy seem to be a significant factor that result in Reagan's victory, and thus I also set economy as my start point in my statistic analysis. Furthermore, In April of 1980, the Iran

hostage crisis had influence the citizen's credence to the government. The social problem during Carter's presidency also may be the key component that affect voter's choice. In my statistic model, I include plenty of socioeconomic variables as independent variable to represent people's economic and social status.

The bad unpleasant of presidency alert President Carter to realized that so as to win the election, the only way is to allow voters to believe that his opponent will lead the country to a more hazardous circumstances. However, even though Reagan is 69 years old during the election, his resolution in liberty and optimism eventually lead him win dominantly over Carter. During the whole election, beliefs about the personal qualities and capabilities has been thoroughly expressed in the feeling about the candidates. The overall voter's attitudes would affect the election outcome if the net distribution of the opinion favor particular one candidate. To investigate the political attitudes during 1980 election, Gregory B. Markus analyzed individual attitude underlies the trends that the rates at which voters become familiar with the presidential candidates and their policy positions provides. I, for the same reason, want to explore some factors that affect voters' feelings about the candidates and thus use feeling thermometer for both of the candidates as my dependent variables. I believe simply analyze the feeling towards Reagan and Carter is not enough to demonstrate the Kennedy's influence on the election. I conduct the regression of the change of feeling from January to September for both candidates in order to have dynamic view of the voter's feeling for the candidates.

To demonstrate my hypothesis that voter's feeling for Kennedy mediate their attitude toward Reagan and Carter, I first conduct two cross tabulation tables to show that social economy and feelings for Kennedy is significant for our analysis of election. Then I did a multiple variable linear regression to interpret voter's feeling difference for each of the

candidates. Finally, I multiple variable linear regression again to see if the feelings for Kennedy relative to the difference for feelings both of the candidates returns a better result. The dataset I used is the 1980 national elections panel study (NES). The unit of my analysis is each individual that participate to express their feeling for both of the candidates. The data for my dependent variables as feelings for President Jimmy Carter and feelings for challenger Ronald Reagan has been divided into 4 waves, which the data is collected on January, July, September, and November respectively. While feelings for Kennedy only has first three waves since he lost the nominee competition against Carter. The feelings for Reagan, Carter, and Kennedy are represented by feeling thermometer from 0 to 100, which mean low to high respectively.

Individual's feeling for the candidates is a subjective measurement that can be depend on plenty of factors. I have mentioned that socioeconomic variables and feelings for Kennedy are important independent variable in my regression. In order to discover more comprehensive view about how does attitudes towards candidates behave under different kind of situation. I use total ten different independent variables in my multiple variable linear regression. Within these ten independent variables, I classified them into three classes which are related to socioeconomic status, feeling about other candidates, and political position. In my socioeconomic independent variables, I include the income, age, sex, and education level. Voter's own political position and their friends political position constitute the political position independent variables.

In order to ensure the quality of my choice of independent variables. I conduct chi-squared test to see the significant of my independent variables for the election analysis. As I discussed above, socioeconomic variable and people's feeling about Kennedy are the two major field of variables that I want to test. From my test result, Carter's supporters from high-level education people is far behind the those for Reagan. The relationship in the table 1 is between

voters' education level and their choices of president. The variable education level is measured by the years of education range from 0 to 17. we categorized the level of education into two classes at 12 years, which is the time interval of high school education. From the table 1, we could see that Reagan won since he gained more support in the higher education level voters. As it seen in table 1, Reagan and Carter do not have a significant difference percentage of support from voters with high school or lower education. However, Carter's support in the higher education level is dramatically lower than the Reagan's support directly caused Carter's loss. More than 30% of difference in high education voters, allows us to pay attention to education as the independent variables. To see the problem from another perspective, we could also generate the same problem analyze education level within both candidates' voters. In table 2, Carter's voter group has a tremendous gap between lower education level people and higher education level people while Reagan's voters are average distributed. The imbalance for Carter' s supporter implies the same insight that education level is important factor that determine people's voting behaviors

 (Insert table 1 and table 2 here.)

Income, as a significant standard of individual economic situation, is also a social and economic variable that affect people voting behavior. The income level often has a proportional relationship with education. Not surprisingly, for the higher income level, Reagan gained 33% more support than Carter did in lower income class. Since our chi squared tests for both income and education level have a very small p-value, our observation that social and economic factors are significant for our analysis of 1980 presidency elections.

(insert table 3 here)

Before the 1980 election, the competitive battle for election nominee between Carter and Kennedy allows me to view feeling for Kennedy as a significant independent variable. From my chi square test result, no matter how people's feeling about Kennedy, Carter's supporters is behind the those for Reagan. The variable feeling for Kennedy is measured by the feeling thermometer and I categorized the thermometer into two classes at people's average feeling towards Kennedy. As we can see in table 4, there is a significant difference between percentage of support among people feel not so good about Kennedy. For people, who favored Kennedy, they also support more Reagan than Carter. Even though Reagan win the election and he should be gain more vote than Carter. Furthermore, after losing the competition for the nomination, Kennedy delivered a speech in support of Carter. These action should also lead people who have good feeling for Kennedy to support Carter but result shows an opposite fact. The huge difference still triggers an interesting question that people who have good feeling for a democratic senator Kennedy, would support the republican candidates.

(insert table 4 here)

According to my cross tabulation table, we know that society, economy, and feeling about Kennedy are very important factors that affect the 1980 presidency election. In order see how would those variables affect the trends of the election, I conduct a multiple variable linear regression to with voters' feeling towards both candidates as well as their feeling difference

between January and September. Based on my classification of independent variables, my socioeconomic independent return a similar result as cross tabulation table. I set region as my control variables since it may significant related to the social and economic problem I discussed above. The socioeconomic variables behave differently between model of feeling for Reagan's and model of feelings for Carter's. As shown in table 5, Income and age has a positive slope, while sex and education has a negative slope for the linear regression of Reagan's feeling thermometer. However, these socioeconomic variables do not generate a significant p-value. On the other hand, according to table 6, in Carter's feeling thermometer model, education level in Carter's model has very small p-value which demonstrate the significance of this independent variable toward the feeling thermometer for Carter. The large negative slope also conveys a result that high educated people tends to have a worse feeling about Carter. These result is coinciding with our result in the cross tabulation table. I believe that education motivated people to understand the social concept, enable them to solve the problem and achieve their goal better with their own rights. In the election, high educated people can more easily see the nature of a social problem and they are more eager to solve the problem with their suffrage right. Under the circumstance of bad economy and hostage crisis, it is not surprisingly that high educated people realized the problem and voted for Reagan.

(insert table 5 and table 6 here)

In my regression model, I include feeling for Kennedy and interesting for politics for feeling independent variables. Voter's feeling toward Kennedy, which is the focus point in my model, both has positive slopes in accord with Reagan and Carter feeling thermometer

respectively. Moreover, the small p-value in both of the regression confirm the significance of the independent variables. It is not strange that feeling for Kennedy has a positive slope in Carter's model. Because, it is highly possible that a high feeling about Kennedy implies the surveyor is a supporter to the Democratic Party. Both Carter and Kennedy are Democratic and it is apparently that high feeling in Kennedy will result in a high feeling for Carter. However, the positive slope in Reagan's regression model is really interesting, since Reagan and Kennedy are from different party. To explain the statistic value, we should realize that Senator Kennedy is a candidate of strong liberal wing of Democratic party. Kennedy's liberal wing background matched with Reagan political proposition which is resolute in liberty and optimism. The similar political style may be the reason that the feeling for Kennedy is positive proportional to the Reagan's feeling. Additionally, the voter who support to Kennedy might see problem of Carter's political position. They simply transfer their support from Kennedy to Reagan because their first choice of candidate lost at the nomination competition.

The last kind of independent variables in my analysis is voter's friends intended candidates. According to table 5 and table 6, voter's feeling about candidates are affected by their friend's decision. The sign of the slope in the regression indicate that people prone to make same decision if their friend favor particular party. The sign of the slope can be easily explained because peer pressures intensify voter's feeling about the candidates. However, the significant value is different between Carter's model and Reagan's model. As a result, the feeling of Reagan is not easily affected by the voter's living background, while voter's feeling for Carter are easily get worse by the peer position in politics. The reason behind this phenomenon might be the crisis credence in Carter's presidency. Since bad situation happens in the first term of Carter's presidency, people loss trust on Carter and even his supporters are uncertain about their decision.

The direct result would be reflected in the feeling of the candidates and the negative slope is the indication of losing trust in Carter's presidency.

Above regressions only analyze the people's feeling for Reagan and Carter in a specific time period, but I want to delve whether social economy and people's feeling about Kennedy is a pivot that influence the whole election. I conduct the multiple variable linear regression of the change of feeling from January to September, to have dynamic view of the voter's feeling for the candidates. As shown in table 7, all of the independent variable do not generate the significant result in the Reagan's feeling change model. However, in Carter's feeling change model, as seen in table 8, the feelings for Kennedy plays a significant role. The small p-value with the positive slope suggest that people with high feeling about Kennedy tends to increase their feeling about Carter from January to September. As discussed above, 1980 Democratic National Convention nominated Carter for the election in August 1980. The battle between Carter and Kennedy is over before the third wave of our dataset feeling thermometer. Before Democratic nomination battle, voters may feel relatively low about Carter since their ideal candidate for the president is Kennedy. But after the national convention, most of the supporter of Kennedy transfer their support to Carter, since Kennedy and Carter are both Republican. Kennedy also ask for his voter to support Carter after he losing the challenge. All those factor will cause people have good feeling about Kennedy to increase their feeling after August.

(insert table 7 and table 8 here)

The socioeconomic variables do not generate significant result in the feeling change model since the big environment for society and economy did not change dramatically in only

three months. The situation of society and economy change in a relative slow pace compare to democratic party nominee competition. People can easily change their feeling since the battle between Kennedy and Carter are over in several months. However, to feel the change of society and economy, it would take a long time to allow voters to change their mind. Income, education level, age, gender are not factors that can lead a voter to change their feeling for a specific candidate, unless the presidency candidate has a political preposition that would severely affect particular social group. Before the election, it is widely presumed that Reagan's political proposition only cater to men but alienate women. I decided to use dummy variable to represent gender and try to discover the insight behind gender related to voters' feeling for Regan. The intercept dummy variables with gender can provide an insight of difference between men's and women's feeling about Reagan. To see the initial feeling difference between men and women, the intercept dummy variables for gender were introduced to represent a conditional variable that changes the constant term. In my linear regression model, intercept dummy variable represents the initial difference between men and women's feeling towards Reagan. As shown in table 8, the intercept dummy variable for men and women have about the same value. To see whether there is a feeling gap between men and women toward Reagan, I did a F-test to my intercept dummy variable. I compute the F test statistics and conclude that there is no difference in the men's and women's feeling toward Reagan when all other constant are controlled. As a result, social economic variable did no significantly change people's feeling during the election.

(insert table 9 here)

We have determined that voter's feeling about Kennedy is the key factor that lead to a dramatic change in people's feeling toward Carter. However, in my point of view, it is better to analyze people's feeling change relative to feeling to Kennedy. Before the election, Carter is the president and normally a party would support the incumbent president after the four-year term. However, in the 1980 election, democratic party do not let Carter go easily. Kennedy, as a very strong opponent, challenge the nominee position for democratic party. All those unusual case allow us combine the change of feeling for Carter with feeling for Kennedy. Moreover, because of the significance of the Kennedy's feeling as the independent variable, voter's feeling change are supposed to have close relationship with feelings about Kennedy. If we use feeling difference divided by feelings for Kennedy, it would generate us a regression about how people's feeling change relative to their feeling toward Kennedy. I set up the regression with same independent variable but change the dependent variable to the relative feeling change. As is seen in table 9, the new multiple variable linear regression model for feeling change about Carter shows us a better R^2 result. The increase in R^2 suggest that our feeling change model are more reliable if we concern it relative to feelings for Kennedy.

(insert table 10 here)

To investigate the accuracy of my model, I want to test whether my test statistic is good. Robert B. Eubank's and David John Gow's study demonstrates that there is a pronounced proincumbent response bias to the reported House vote in the 1980 National Election Studies. The magnitude of the bias ranges from approximately 7 percentage points to 14 percentage points in 1980. To perfect my regression model, I decided to test whether my choices of

independent variables are good. I test the multicollinearity of all my independent variables. I did the variable inflation factor test and ridge regression. According to table 10, all the independent variable returns a variable inflation factor less the two. The ridge regression, as is seen in figure 1, also turn to be stable. Based on my constructive test result, the stability of my linear regression model is good.

(Insert table 11 and figure 1 here.)

Based on above analysis, I think social, economic problem are long-term factors that mainly affect people's feeling toward Reagan and Carter, while feeling about Kennedy are short term-factors that change people attitude. The reason beyond that people are sensitive to those factors are the neutralize of the partisanship. If people strictly hold their partisanship, the factors I discussed above would not be significant in the regression models. Because people realize their right to vote for their own benefit and prevent the restrict of partisanship, economic problem can lead people to vote their optional candidates and the feeling for Kennedy change people's attitude. According to Martin Wattenberg, the link between parties and candidates has been substantially weakened over the years and hence that political parties have become increasingly meaningless to the electorate. The neutral of partisanship allows people to have more freedom on their decision and also keep improve the government performance.

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Table 1: Education by Vote between candidates, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	155 51.495%	146 48.505%	301 58.447%
Low	147 68.692%	67 31.308%	214 41.553%
	302 58.641%	213 41.359%	515

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 15.25052$ d.f. = 1   p = 0.0000941507

Table 2: Education by Vote within each candidate, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	155 51.325%	146 68.545%	301 58.447%
Low	147 48.675%	67 31.355%	214 41.553%
	302 58.641%	213 41.359%	515

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 15.25052$ d.f. = 1   p = 0.0000941507

Table 3: Income by Vote, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	85	96	181
	46.961%	53.039%	38.758%
Low	191	95	286
	66.783%	33.217%	61.242%
	276	191	467
	59.101%	40.899%	

Pearson's Chi-squared test: χ^2 = 18.01811   d.f. = 1   p = 0.00002188136

Table 4: Kennedy feeling by Vote within each candidate, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

	Reagan	Carter	
High	72 72.727%%	27 27.273%	99 19.920%
Low	220 55.276%	178 44.724%	398 80.080%
	292 58.753%	205 41.247%	497

Pearson's Chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 9.96261$ d.f. = 1   p = 0.001597514

Table 5: Feelings for Reagan – Model 1, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	37.86947	8.19502	4.621	<0.005
Income	0.18662	0.17659	1.057	0.2910
Age	0.13705	0.05889	2.327	0.0203
Gender	-2.61472	1.92659	-1.357	0.1752
Region	-0.62427	0.45781	-1.364	0.1732
Education	-0.74125	0.39325	-1.885	0.0599
Kennedy Feeling	0.08150	0.03670	2.220	0.0268
Political interest	0.47396	0.26626	1.780	0.0756
Republican friends	6.07457	4.67226	1.300	0.1940
Democratic friends	-9.46070	4.74582	-1.993	0.0467
Partisan	4.84886	0.51469	9.421	<0.005

$R^2 = 0.1833$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.1699$, N = 621, $df = 611$

Table 6: Feelings for Carter – Model 1, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	81.52845	8.07242	10.100	<0.005
Income	-0.01796	0.17493	-0.103	0.918261
Age	0.08866	0.05839	1.518	0.129433
Gender	2.29123	1.91925	1.194	0.233005
Region	-0.61948	0.45635	-1.357	0.175130
Education	-1.33271	0.37480	-3.556	<0.005
Kennedy Feeling	0.09496	0.03645	2.605	0.009407
Political interest	-0.10328	0.26408	-0.391	0.695873
Republican friends	-13.88715	4.59430	-3.023	<0.005
Democratic friends	10.54863	4.59189	2.297	0.021937
Partisan	-4.47034	0.51551	-8.672	<0.005

$R^2 = 0.2444$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.2322$, N = 632, $df = 622$

Table 7: Feelings change for Reagan – Model 2, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	-4.33404	9.26443	-0.468	0.6401
Income	0.31888	0.19344	1.649	0.0998
Age	0.06401	0.06509	0.983	0.3258
Gender	-2.48306	2.1303	-1.166	0.2443
Region	-0.64371	0.49907	-1.29	0.1976
Education	-0.11182	0.44472	-0.251	0.8016
Kennedy Feeling	0.07221	0.04032	1.791	0.0739
Political interest	0.1713	0.29395	0.583	0.5603
Republican friends	5.34065	4.92259	1.085	0.2784
Democratic friends	-8.25139	5.29456	-1.558	0.1197
Partisan	1.15215	0.55808	2.065	0.0394

$R^2 = 0.03725$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.01997$, N = 567, $df = 557$

Table 8: Feelings change for Carter – Model 2, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	-7.102381	7.548445	-0.941	0.347
Income	0.033186	0.163235	0.203	0.839
Age	-0.003554	0.05433	-0.065	0.948
Gender	-1.321153	1.787801	-0.739	0.46
Region	0.358156	0.423879	0.845	0.398
Education	-0.231796	0.349496	-0.663	0.507
Kennedy Feeling	0.188578	0.033947	5.555	<0.05
Political interest	-0.28753	0.245596	-1.171	0.242
Republican friends	0.435415	4.256944	0.102	0.919
Democratic friends	-0.26188	4.334461	-0.06	0.952
Partisan	-0.618757	0.478456	-1.293	0.196

$R^2 = 0.07759$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.06264$, N = 627, $df = 617$

Table 9: Feelings change for Reagan – Model 3, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variable	Estimates	Standard Error	t-ratio	Prob value
Male	-6.8171	8.47088	-0.805	0.4213
Female	-9.30016	8.17058	-1.138	0.2555
Income	0.31888	0.19344	1.649	0.0998
Age	0.06401	0.06509	0.983	0.3258
Region	-0.64371	0.49907	-1.29	0.1976
Education	-0.11182	0.44472	-0.251	0.8016
Kennedy Feeling	0.07221	0.04032	1.791	0.0739
Political interest	0.1713	0.29395	0.583	0.5603
Republican friends	5.34065	4.92259	1.085	0.2784
Democratic friends	-8.25139	5.29456	-1.558	0.1197
Partisan	1.15215	0.55808	2.065	0.0394

$R^2 = 0.06865$ Adj. $R^2 = 0.05026$, N = 568, $df = 557$

Table 10: Feelings change for Carter relative to Feelings for Kennedy – Model 3, 1980 NES Panel data, September Panel

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	-0.2209852	0.3234774	-0.683	0.495
Income	0.0032051	0.0069375	0.462	0.644
Age	0.0003422	0.0023326	0.147	0.883
Gender	-0.089301	0.0760661	-1.174	0.241
Region	0.0011769	0.01792	0.066	0.948
Education	-0.0093155	0.0145745	-0.639	0.523
Kennedy Feeling	0.0081223	0.0015072	5.389	<0.005
Political interest	-0.0143321	0.0104981	-1.365	0.173
Republican friends	-0.0752059	0.181228	-0.415	0.678
Democratic friends	0.0587642	0.1754241	0.335	0.738
Partisan	-0.025467	0.020242	-1.258	0.209

$R^2 = 0.09032$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.0722$, N = 612, $df = 602$

Table 11: Variance inflation factor for Carter model 3 of feeling change relative to feelings for Kennedy

Independent Variable	Variance inflation factor
Income	1.322691
Age	1.191661
Gender	1.100278
Region	1.028971
Education	1.308327
Kennedy Feeling	1.193586
Political interest	1.109953
Republican friends	1.082284
Democratic friends	1.056003
Partisan	1.219109

Figure 2: Ridge regression for Carter model 3 of feeling change relative to feelings for Kennedy