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The Individual Attitude 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 voter's feeling for their candidates in the 1980 election and try to build a linear regression model for the feelings for both candidates. From the survey data in 1980 NES Panel Study, I built a multiple variables linear regressions with feelings for Reagan and Carter as dependent variables. Interestingly, education level, people's feeling about Kennedy, and friends' partisanship significantly affect the feeling for Carter, while voter's feeling toward Reagan also depends on the feeling about Kennedy. Behinds all the statistic, we could generalize that the economic crisis and hostage problem seriously affect people feeling about Carter. The bitter battle between Kennedy and Carter also becomes a pivot point during the election, the supporters of Kennedy changed their feeling dramatically after the nomination competition.

In the presidential election between Reagan and Carter in 1980 is a collision between personalities of both of the candidates. 1980 is not a very good period in United States. Both inflation rate and deposit interest rate had raised to a relative high level in the history record. In April of 1980, the Iran hostage crisis had influence the citizen's credence to the government. Before the election, President Carter realized that to win the election, the only way is to allow voter 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.

In order to demonstrate attitude toward candidates is depend on many different factors, I conduct multiple variable linear regression to analyze voter's feeling about both Reagan and Carter. The dataset I use is from the 1980 national elections panel study (NES). Both 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. The unit of our analysis is each individual that participate to express their feeling for both of the candidates.

Individual's feeling for the candidates is a subjective measurement that can be depend on plenty of factors. In order to discover more comprehensive view about how does attitudes towards candidates behave under different kind of situation. I use ten different independent variables in my multiple variable linear regression and feeling thermometer asked of the survey respondents in September of 1980 as my dependent variable. Within these ten independent variables, I classified them into three classes which are related to socioeconomic status, feeling about other candidates, and voter's friends political position. Since our dataset has collected voter's feeling for candidates in four waves, I also did an analysis about how those independent variable related to the individual's change of the feelings for both candidates from January to September during the election year.

In my socioeconomic independent variables in the linear regression, I include the income, age, sex, region, and education level. The independent variables behave differently between Reagan's and Carter's model. As shown in table 1, Income and age has a positive slope, while sex, region and education level has a negative slope for the linear regression of Reagan's feeling thermometer. Deeply look into each of the independent variable, income, sex, region and even education level have a relative high p-value. As a result, they may not be so significant in response to the Reagan's feeling thermometer. On the other hand, according to table 2, in Carter's feeling thermometer model, age and sex has a positive slope. Income, region and education level have the negative slope. Only the education level in Carter's model has 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.

(Insert table 1 and table 2 here.)

As discussed above, 1980 is not a great time for United States. At Carter's first term of presidency, the country's economy, which was in a bad shape, require an immediate political incentive. Highly educated people prone to recognize the defect of Carter's political proposition. Carter's comparatively pessimism about economic with fiscal discipline instead of an economic recovery plan incur that bad feeling of intellectual. Additionally, the sense of citizen duty is also positive proportional to the level of education. The hostage crisis in Iran cause a crisis of confidence in Carter's presidency. Carter's powerless attitude to the hostage problem leads to a dissatisfaction of citizens. Highly educated people, with stronger sense of citizenship, would be triggered more about this issue, and thus reflect a low feeling about Carter.

Before the 1980 election, there is a competitive 1980 Democratic national convention between Carter and Kennedy. The competitive result allows me to set feeling for Kennedy as an independent variable in both model of feeling thermometer of Reagan and Carter. In my regression model, the feeling for Kennedy, has positive slopes in accord with Reagan and Carter feeling thermometer respectively. Moreover, the p-value in both of the regression for the feeling for Kennedy are small as well. As a result, feeling for Kennedy is a significant independent variable in my regression model for both Reagan and Carter. 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. In addition, after losing the competition for the nomination, Kennedy delivered a speech in support of Carter, which also suggest the positive slope in Carter's model.

However, the positive slope in Reagan's regression model is really interesting, since Reagan and Kennedy are from different party. The estimate should be negative and behave like Carter's feeling as independent variable in Reagan's model, shown in table 1. To explain the statistic value, we should take deeply look at the bitter primary battle in the Democratic party. 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 is an important factor that the feeling for Kennedy is positive proportional to the Reagan's feeling. Additionally, the voter support to Kennedy in Democratic nomination battle, because they might see problem of Carter's political position. After Carter's victory in the party, the Kennedy supporter, is highly possible be force to support Reagan since their first choice of candidate lost at the nomination competition and they saw the social problem of Carter's presidency. To transfer their support for Kennedy, their feeling for Reagan would be thus increase and reflect a high result.

Another kind of independent variable in my analysis is voter's friends intended candidates. If all friends of the voters are the support of Republican or Democratic, the peer pressure would cause their feeling for Reagan and Carter to change. According to table 1, in Reagan's model of regression voter's friends are supporter of republican has positive slope while supporter of Democratic has a negative slope. The sign of the slope can be easily explained because peer pressures intensify voter's feeling about the candidates. As is seen in table 2, Carter's model has the same situation with sign of slopes. However, the significant value for voter's friends are supporter of Republican party as independent variable is very small. As a result, it is highly possible that the friend's republican political position would deteriorate voter's feeling about Carter. Relative high p-value in Reagan's regression suggest that the feeling of

Reagan is not easily affected by the voter's living background. On the other hand, 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.

In order to have dynamic view of the voter's feeling for the candidates, I also conduct the multiple variable linear regression of the change of feeling from January to September. As shown in table 3, all of the independent variable has a relative high p-value in the Reagan's feeling change model. However, the Kennedy's feeling independent variable has a small p-value, which indicates the significance of the independent variable, in the Carter's feeling change regression. The small p-value with the positive slope suggest that people with high feeling about Kennedy tends to increase their feeling about Carter. 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 favor Carter.

(Insert table 3 here.)

To sum up, people's feeling for the candidates are determined by many factors. Education level, feeling about Kennedy, and friend's political position are all significant factors that affect people's feeling about Carter. Voter's feeling about Carter also change dramatically after his victory over Kennedy in the Democratic nomination competition. As for Reagan, the feeling of Kennedy provides significant influence on the feeling for Reagan since Reagan's political position is similar to the Kennedy's liberal proposition. All these factors that affect people's feeling for the candidates might be the reason of Regan's dominant victory, since people's feeling would determine their vote for the election.

Works Cited

Markus, Gregory B. "Political Attitudes during an Election Year: A Report on the 1980 NES Panel

Study." *The American Political Science Review* 76.3 (1982): 538. Web.

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

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	47.53952	8.66657	5.485	6.05e-08
Income	0.18608	0.17661	1.054	0.29248
Age	0.15957	0.05823	2.740	0.00632
Gender	-2.73005	1.92391	-1.419	0.15641
Region	-0.62300	0.45746	-1.362	0.17375
Education	-0.71256	0.39081	-1.823	0.06875
Kennedy Feeling	0.08164	0.03682	2.217	0.02699
Carter Feeling	-0.08258	0.04045	-2.042	0.04163
Republican friends	6.55746	4.62910	1.417	0.15712
Democratic friends	-8.28419	4.75515	-1.742	0.08199
Partisan	4.43449	0.54786	8.094	3.13e-15

$R^2 = 0.1832$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.1698$, N = 620, $df = 610$

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

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	83.76916	8.18100	10.239	< 2e-16
Income	-0.02729	0.17634	-0.155	0.877061
Age	0.09017	0.05833	1.546	0.122668
Gender	2.22158	1.92030	1.157	0.247770
Region	-0.70783	0.45615	-1.552	0.121236
Education	-1.30700	0.38732	-3.374	0.000787
Kennedy feelings	0.10213	0.03665	2.786	0.005495
Reagan feelings	-0.08218	0.04025	-2.042	0.041627
Republican friends	-11.26374	4.60292	-2.447	0.014683
Democratic friends	8.67497	4.74241	1.829	0.067853
Partisan	-4.15308	0.55000	-7.551	1.58e-13

$R^2 = 0.2379$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.2254$, N = 620, $df = 610$

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

Variables	Estimates	Standardized Estimates	t-ratio	Prob value
Intercept	-9.349090	7.673234	-1.218	0.224
Income	0.065260	0.165514	0.394	0.694
Age	0.002822	0.054596	0.052	0.959
Gender	-1.017514	1.797958	-0.566	0.572
Region	0.371086	0.425953	0.871	0.384
Education	-0.299576	0.363389	-0.824	0.410
Kennedy Feeling	0.195566	0.034311	5.700	1.88e-08
Reagan Feeling	-0.030737	0.037724	-0.815	0.416
Republican Friend	-0.158571	4.286359	-0.037	0.971
Democratic Friend	-0.568379	4.502337	-0.126	0.900
Partisan	-0.510170	0.514273	-0.992	0.322

$R^2 = 0.07525$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.05997$, N = 615, $df = 605$