Empirical Analysis on Voters’ Approval on Pres. Obama as POTUS and Favorability toward Presidential Candidates

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“Is Trump’s Popularity the Result of the Current Administration?”

Introduction
- Donald Trump’s race for the 2016 Presidential Ballot has created one of the most unique and divisive campaigns in our nation’s history. We seek to identify causes of the candidate’s rise in popularity, namely sentiments towards the current administration and the partisan divide.
- Partisanship has long-standing roots within the American political system, and is a preeminent determinant of individual voting preferences (Bonneau et al., 2013).
- The degree to which individuals vote along party lines in U.S. Presidential election cycles has increased overall since the 1950’s (Bartels, 2000 & Weischenk, 2013). Graph 3 shows the estimated outcomes of Weischenk’s probit model predicting voting behavior in Presidential election years based on party identification. A negative value indicates a decrease in the likelihood of voting for a Republican official, and a positive value would increase that likelihood.
- While incumbent parties typically have an advantage in election cycles where the sitting official is running, defection rates are higher amongst incumbents than challengers when the sitting official is not running (Weisberg, 2002).
- Resulting political gridlock has been the cause of economic inefficiencies, such as the 2013 sequestration. The partisanship may be significantly higher than current literature accounts for (Farina, 2015).

Hypotheses
- H0: Favor and lack of favor for the current administration are not significant determinants of approval for presidential candidates.
- H1: Favor and lack of favor for the current administration are significant determinants of approval for presidential candidates.

Results and Discussion
- Based on our survey data, Graph 1 indicates that among those who approve of President Obama, 85% have unfavorable opinions of Trump as a candidate, and 11% have favorable opinions. Conversely, Graph 2 indicates that 24% of those who disapprove of the Obama administration have unfavorable opinions of Trump as a candidate, compared to 69% with favorable views.
- Our analysis in Chart 1 shows that both positive and negative sentiments towards the current administration are significant determinants of approval of Donald Trump as a candidate.
- Our findings are also consistent with Weisberg’s findings on incumbents, and show the existence of partisanship in the 2016 election cycle.

References