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Dataset(s): 1979 Pilot Study, 1980 Election Study, 1983 Pilot Study

Abstract

This paper examines the link between trait-based evaluations of potential presidents and patterns of candidate centered voting. The 1983 Pilot Study trait battery asked respondents to evaluate 30 candidate traits across five dimensions: competence, leadership, integrity, stability, and empathy. Kinder finds: (1) The trait distribution profiles of the candidates are distinctive in substantively meaningful ways. The Pilot Study results, therefore, provide support for a candidate-centered voting model in general and the five-dimension trait evaluative thesis in particular. (2) Presidential trait judgments are impressively stable over time, on both the individual and aggregate levels. (3) Trait judgments are dependent on both a respondent's political stance and their social position, though political stance plays a greater role in the formation of such assessments. (4) Two-stage least squares regression analysis indicates that trait judgments have a strong influence on evaluations of Reagan, Kennedy, and Mondale, independent of any direct effects due to party, ideology, or policy stances.