

**The Formation of Attitudes toward Presidential Candidates and Political Parties:
An Asymmetric Nonlinear Process**

Abstract

Most models of how citizens combine information about political candidates into attitudes toward them presume that symmetric linear processes are at work. We propose a model predicting asymmetric nonlinearity (the ANM) in the impact of favorable and unfavorable beliefs on attitudes. Cross-sectional NES data (1972-1996) show that this model describes attitudes toward presidential candidates and political parties better than a symmetric linear model (SLM) among respondents high and low in political involvement. Longitudinal NES data (1980-1996) show that the ANM outperforms the SLM in describing the impact of beliefs on changes over time in attitudes toward presidential candidates. And the ANM revealed that voter turnout is enhanced by a stronger preference for one preferred candidate, as long as at least one candidate is disliked, whereas the SLM failed to detect this effect. These findings have important implications for understanding the impact of election campaigns on citizens' preferences and actions.