

Beginning in 1948, a discussion on the origins of voting behavior and decisions has produced a whirlwind of studies on the subject without producing a satisfying consensus. Understanding the motivation behind the individual calculi of voters is a fascinating topic with implications both for electoral theory and election prediction.

My research itself examines data from studies as far back as the 1940s to determine what effect different stimuli possess on individuals' voting behaviors. These stimuli range from socioeconomic and geographic circumstances to issue salience in voters' calculi. These studies include observational studies on towns, nationwide data sets, and theory work from noted scholars in the field.

This study makes use of new computer modeling techniques. By so doing, hundreds of iterations of virtual landscapes modeling individual agents can be constructed, each with its own unique parameters. This allows for precision in isolating causal links without waiting for alignment within reality in observational studies and without contamination by other, unwanted parameters. The outcomes from these iterations were collated for data analysis to assess whether an overall trend is present.

The preliminary, baseline models used for examination of theories and parameters showed that within geographic blocks, the very nature of those clusters appeared to be the most salient feature. Outside of these blocks, however, issues and perceptions played the largest role in voter behavior. Concluding statistical analysis provided further evidence to support these conclusions. This suggests that within predominately homogenous clusters (consistently red or blue states, in American electoral terms) issues and perceptions play a diminished role, apparently usurped by a path-dependence of legacy voting. It also suggests that within heterogenous zones (battleground states, to use the same turn of expression), issues are the driving force behind voting decisions.

This study was initially designed to produce predictive modeling for elections. The results of the work done in the summer of 2017 has provided the groundwork necessary to continue the progression of an agent-based modeling approach to this. Any future work on this subject must include necessarily an underpinning logic in what motivates voters in their decisions. This research provided the necessary first steps to constructing accurate electoral maps to predict future elections.