INTRODUCTION

The 2004 presidential election revealed deep polarization in the United States. Reasons for the focus on Approval ratings of the candidates:

- Popular opinion is thought to affect future policy.
- Exemplars (and their likability) for a group are predictive of attitudes toward that group.
- The Vietnam pull-out predicted by a drop in approval ratings for the war and the president.
- Society’s liking for Magic Johnson increased positive attitudes/behaviors toward people with AIDS (see suggested readings for more information on exemplar research).

Therefore, a person’s applause of George W. Bush will be related to their attitude and opinion toward Republicans in general.

Self-identified political affiliation and one’s view of the political party, and one’s views of individual members are all tightly connected.

The current study examines approval ratings for the presidential and vice presidential candidates two weeks prior to the 2004 election.

HYPOTHESES

Self-identified Republicans and Democrats would be polarized in their ratings.

Independents and those with no political affiliation would represent more moderate views.

METHOD

Participants
- 380 students participated for course credit

Gender
- 75% female
- 25% Male

Ethnicity
- 7.3% Caucasian
- 9.1% African American
- 7.3% Hispanic
- 1.0% Bi-Racial
- 4.0% “Other”

Political Affiliation
- 50% Democrats
- 54.5% Republicans
- 6.7% Independents
- 16.6% no political affiliation

Measures
- Demographic Questionnaire
- Approval Ratings Questionnaire (see example next column)

RESULTS (CONTINUED)

- Republicans and Democrats were highly polarized in their ratings of the candidates, whereas Independents and those with no political affiliation were more moderate (see Figure 1)
- Independents and those with no political affiliation generally “hover” around .50 or 50%

DISCUSSION

- The current study provides an important “snap shot” of the differences among students with different self-identified political affiliation two weeks prior to the 2004 presidential election
- Republicans and Democrats were highly polarized (presumably they vote along party lines)
- Independents and those with no political affiliation provide mid-range approval ratings (nearly .50 or 50%)
- The inability to identify strongly with major parties may drive self-identification as Independents or those having no political affiliation are more aligned philosophically with Democrats (see Poster 1).
- This suggests that exemplar driven processes (i.e., you think about) may be more important with regard to political-identification than ideology alone.
- As the current study was descriptive, additional experimental studies are required to examine the interaction of self-identification and exemplar driven processes that may underlie political affiliation

FUTURE STUDIES

We plan on examining:
- An examination of media effects on approval ratings of individual politicians and corresponding attitude change toward political parties
- The relationship of self-concept, approval ratings, and political affiliation

SUGGESTED READINGS


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