Hypothesis

1. If candidates stake claim on issues that voters care about and frequently remind voters of that via Twitter, they will receive a bump in the polls.

2. Thus, the hypothesis evolves to when candidates own more of the total percentage of tweets, their poll numbers should go up.

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the area of issue-ownership as it applies to the 2016 presidential primaries. The central discussion of the paper features a tradeoff between viability and issues in primary contests. Viability, which is presented through The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform by Marty Cohen et al. as party elites deciding who should be the nominee, and issues that are salient to primary voters, and thus candidates, which I present as the more likely reason for how nominees are selected. Using a combination of national polls and analysis of candidates’ Twitter feeds, I hope to compare data on who primary and caucus voters support and which issues are important to them. The hypothesis is simple: if candidates stake claims on issues that voters care about and frequently remind voters of that via Twitter, they will receive a bump in the polls.

Background

• What accounts for the massive and unforeseen ascent of Trump and Sanders in 2016?

• issue ownership was the culprit for both Republicans and Democrats.

• I created a rolling percentage variable, which was an ongoing percentage of each candidates’ issue-related tweets over the time period that I tracked.

• Ultimately employed a candidate fixed effects model to estimate how candidate behavior on twitter one week would impact their polling numbers the next week.

Methods

• Analyzed candidates’ twitter feeds for issue related tweets

• Tracked Real Clear Politics’ weekly polling numbers.

• I coded the first two debates for each party and marked when candidates referenced their previous experience with one of the salient issues.

• Using a candidate fixed effects model, that was separated by party, the results for Democrats Tables 1 Figures 2; Republicans in Table 2 and Figure 3.

Results

These results call into question the validity of the issue ownership hypothesis and its impact on primary campaigns. The results suggest that as candidates discuss more of the issues that voters care about, their polling numbers drop. This may suggest, as other literature does, that primary campaigns have more to do with the personality of each candidate, rather than the issues they are running on. 

Selected References