

Why Don't People Interact with Politics Solely on the Basis of Self-interest

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Abstract: Politics is often seen as something only humans do that differentiates us from animals; it is also assumed to be straightforward to predict someone's political action. It is intuitive to assume that citizens donate or vote based on the candidate or party that best benefits them. The flaw in this assumption is its lack of consideration of the design of human nature, which is the result of generations of natural selection that has crafted adaptations in mate selection, and other forms of human behavior, leading to a strategic line of actions from parties and voters. In fact, politics is observable in other species and our own political behaviors are not that different from what they were in the ancestral environment. In other words, they're not exclusively based on logic and self-interest. Here we examine the current evidence of how political behavior deviates from self-interest.

Keywords: Politics, Mate Selection, Voters

1. Introduction

Frans de Waal illustrated that chimpanzees engage in politics through "social manipulation to secure and maintain influential position.", which suggests that human beings may have started to use politics earlier in evolutionary time than many may think [1]. Evolutionary psychology argues that, with all things being equal, humans seek high status and high fitness mates. This expresses itself in attraction. Attraction is complicated and sometimes confusing at best, and feels like it is anything but rational. By contrast, it is easy to assume that political participation is done on a rational basis and that people act logically in their self-interest. In this paper, we argue that neither mate selection nor politics is straightforwardly rational or irrational. Rather, they both follow a different kind of logic—the logic of natural selection. From neurological adaptations like the behavioral immune system (BIS) to cognitive biases to mate selection, things that are known to be tied to or driven by evolutionary adaptation also seem to be tangled up in political behavior. This suggests a connection between political behavior and evolutionary adaptations as well.

2. Mate Selection

In our current world, where anything can be ordered online, families can connect from miles away, and organized governments are voted for, some seem to think that humans are somehow a species that is “post evolution.” The reality is that evolution is not a step to civilization that is overcome, evolution is a fact that has already happened and forms the base of our cognitive toolbox. Old adaptations are apparent in our current civilization, like disgust or cognitive biases that helped us survive in the ancestral environment but lead to mistakes made in the modern world, such as not understanding things like probability very well. These adaptations that can be considered “primal” still play a role in human behavior today. If mate selection is driven by adaptations, could politics be as well?

Mass politics, a relatively new feature of society, turns out to be intertwined with mate selection which is known to be a very old adaptation. The importance of politics as a factor in mate selection has been shown through testing to be similar to other forms of homophily in mating, also referred to as political assortative mating. Politics can even override other preferences in mate selection.

“Opposites attract” may not hold true for politics. Attraction is rooted in a series of confounding factors [2]. Political opinion is one of these factors, and is highly weighted [3]. But what if political similarity between mates develops after they get together? [2] argue that it does not, and that it is present early in the relationship. Huber et al. confirmed through an experiment with online dating profiles containing political stances that political homophily is there even before the relationships start [4]. Politics has been proven to have a significant impact on mate selection, but it is not the most influential. When juxtaposed to other largely significant points of sameness, political opinion is equal in its effects on educational homophily but only half as important as race homophily [4]. Moreover, a survey conducted on the American public found that individuals tend to prefer not to have friends of opposing political party [5]. We know that mate choice is affected by politics, but what if politics is just a proxy for other factors?

Politics could be a proxy for physical strength. Perceived physical strength is known to affect how attractive a potential mate is [6]. But politics and strength could be connected. Stronger individuals might think of themselves as more independent and capable of surviving without the resources of others. Peterson et al. found that physically strong men are less likely to support economic redistribution, a political position [7]. One example of this is that male action movie stars, who tend to be physically more imposing than male drama or comedy stars, are more likely than those other stars to vote Republican [8]. Therefore, someone seeking a strong male mate might use their politics as a proxy for whether they are physically strong.

Nevertheless, politics can also change existing perceptions of physical attractiveness. That is to say, political opinion can make someone seem less physically attractive. Perceived physical attractiveness can change after a potential mate is revealed to have disagreeable political opinions [9]. Homophily is of profound importance, and can be more important than physical attraction. The factors that contribute to attraction may operate on a hierarchy, with some more important than others. For example, race homophily is a bigger factor in mate selection than educational homophily. Because politics can override physical attraction, it suggests that politics may not be simply a proxy for that attraction. This doesn't rule out the connection physical attraction has with politics, but it does complicate it. Factors relevant to attraction vary from person to person; some might prioritize physical attraction over politics and vice-versa. Assortative mating could very well be an adaptation that varies from person to person like handedness. In other words, for most people, it is a dominant factor but for the rest, it is not. The correlation between political homophily and relationships could therefore be an example of polymorphism, variance in the human population that should have an evolutionary benefit. It is unclear at this moment why the importance of political homophily can vary

in different people, or what the benefit from this example of polymorphism would be, both important questions that deserve more attention. Nonetheless, the connection between political behavior and adaptations like those involved in mate selection is clear. Politics, like other forms of human behavior is bound by evolution.

3. Political Preference and Mechanism

Imagine that you are an American who needs to vote for the 2021 US Election. After watching the television debate of the US election, as Americans, you have the right to choose one of the candidates to be the president. Even though you do not actually know what they are debating about, you tend to choose the Conservative Party because four years ago, you chose the Conservative Party as well. You feel it is normal and common because it is just like a natural process that is based on your intuition and your life will not be changed because of this small political voting.

Just as this example showed, political voting in our daily life is naturally happening when people tend to vote even when uninformed, or even do not need deep thoughts though [10]. Some people may question that even if political attitudes are from the deep emotional attachment of group loyalty, people still consciously investigate the No.1 considering factor when people are making the decision [11]. However, researches show that most decisions happen out of consciousness, which means human brains will automatically deal with information based on intuition [12]. There are a series of cognitive abilities organized in human brains and human minds have an intuitive theory among these abilities. Intuitive theory can help people cognize, reason, and learn different dominance including physical objects, living things, language, tools, numbers, and others' minds. With decades of evolution, intuitive theory helps people handle questions that have happened a lot in the evolutionary process such as getting rid of danger and threats [13-20]. Hence, under the intuitive model, there are several systems that can help human beings vote in politics.

3.1. Behavioral Immune System (BIS) and Disgust

Firstly, the behavioral immune system (BIS) and disgust sensitivity combine together as the scientific model that works a lot in mental mechanisms of intuition of political emotion such as automatically making people tend to choose particular policies [21-22]. During the evolution process, disease deeply threatens human beings fundamentally. And the immune system is the most complicated physiological system that is against the invasion of pathogens [22]. Meanwhile, BIS is a system that is continuing to scan the potential threats of the pathogens like some infective things or humans out of the cognition. Furthermore, after scanning, it will motivate the psychological mechanisms of individuals to help prevent contact with the pathogens [23-26]. Disgust, as a basic human emotion such as anger, anxiety, and sadness, exists in different cultures and shows common physiological traits such as widely accepted facial emotions and nausea [27-28]. Just like the BIS system, the evolutionary function of disgust is to protect human beings by avoiding sources of infection. While in politics, research has found that people with higher levels of disgust sensitivity are more likely to have conservative political preferences no matter whether they are liberal or conservative parties [29]. For instance, people who easily disgust can tolerate the inequality in society and take a more conservative perspective toward sexuality and more negative opinions toward homosexuality [30]. The logic of disgust is that it detects sources of infection and keeps you away from them. Disgust sensitivity in conservatives is directed towards groups of people that activate their disgust psychology (immigrants, sexual minorities they view as 'impure', etc.).

3.2. Social Dominance Theory (SDT)

Now, unfortunately, imagine that you are a member of Dalits in India and you live in one of the poorest communities in India. Even worse, you do not even have a last name because you are just a dispensable person who has low. You admire those people who are Brahmins, they have the most beautiful name like Shukla and Yadav. Your whole life is to live in this poor community and never see the light.

This situation normally happens under the Indian Caste System which is known in the picture shown below:



Figure 1: Indian Caste System [31].

As we can see, the Indian Caste System has clear boundaries which separate the public into 5 main classes. Because people at the low caste level hardly have the chance to change their social class, as time passes by, even though there are some people who are against this unequal system, the classes have already solidified. Based on this strict hierarchy structure, social dominance theory (SDT) provides a new sight to understand the maintenance of caste policy. Considering the relationship among the groups, SDT examines the caste features based on hierarchies and their maintenance [32-33]. According to SDT, individuals have differences based on social dominance and inequality, or social dominance orientation [34]. Since different people in different hierarchies have different living conditions and treatment, then one question comes out: Is the caste system the selfish product of people seeking greater political power? This leads to another theory called Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). As a personality, RWA illustrates a group of people who are naturally submissive to their authority figures, act aggressively in the name of said authorities, and are conformists in thought and behavior [35]. RWA is an individual difference variable to express outer-group biases and discrimination, which means people with different degrees of RWA act differently toward preferences [36]. To be more specific, the legalization of unequal preference in groups of people who have high SDO provides a mechanism for individuals who have high RWA a way to argue that it is legal for them to have a preference that is related to reality and tradition. For instance, if someone with relatively high RWA tends to prefer existing and traditional social arrangements, he or she possibly supports this opinion to make the arrangements more like supernatural things [36]. Therefore, the combination of SDT and RWA shows us the causation of political preferences based on hierarchical aspects and individual differences, which will make people feel they automatically have those opinions in their minds.

3.3. Conclusion

In this section, even though people consider their self-interest when they are comparing things, in the whole completed political system, people seemed automatically have their political preferences and emotions. This does not mean the process of comparing benefits and drawbacks is shrink. Instead, humans use a mechanism which is totally different. Instead of self-interest, individual political preference is highly influenced by theories like BIS and SDT.

4. Influence of Political Strategy

People tend to assume that they vote in their self-interests. But do they? This intuitive decision-making model, or in other words, this kind of mindset contradicted by observing various cognitive biases. What are cognitive biases? Rather than making decisions soberly & dispassionately, people's choices often reflect contextually contingent predispositions for particular solutions which have been acquired through the course of human evolution [37].

When facing the prospect of gains and losses, people tend to weigh losses heavier than the objectively similar prospect of gain. Other exhibitions of cognitive biases include anxiety against threats to undesired outcomes. And that is just a fraction of the predisposition that lies in the nature of human beings. A built-in preference against losses makes sense in the context of human evolution in which our distant ancestors lived in a subsistence society where even small losses threatened their chances of survival [38]. All of those stated biases make the public inferior to the elites when facing political debate and persuasive competition [39]. Another common cognitive bias is when people encounter figures connecting with discounts and prices. One can see the decimal dot there but it does not prevent the desire to purchase. Those inner psychological factors are calculated and weighed precisely in order to manipulate the crowd. It is just like the trick of the salesmen, it is just that this time instead of a substantial product, those eloquent politicians are trying to get the public into buying a so-called belief or legislation.

When confronted with competing arguments, individuals are often motivated to consciously evaluate and reconcile the opposing considerations raised by each argument [40]. The attractiveness of prospective solutions and the perceived persuasiveness of arguments, however, can be altered by cognitive biases. The reason why cognitive biases can have this much influence on the public is that mostly there is something that we have been ignoring and constantly denying. We are unconscious of the cognitive biases' influence on our own decisions. Most of those decisions that people make are made subconsciously. Human brains are fascinating objects, that is, when seeing obvious stuff people search for evidence, weigh facts and we reach a precise conclusion. To some degree, we do believe that we have conscious control over our own decision over our own bodies.

But how exactly do the politicians infiltrate people's brains with the hope of manipulating their votes using the weakness of the cognitive biases? In democracies, "politics is, at the core, about persuasion" [41]. In the course of policy debates, political elites compete to craft the winning argument that resonates with citizens, triumph over opposing arguments, and, ultimately, guarantee enough support for their policies. The methods and the tricks are just quite simple actually: defeating the opposing arguments. When referring to some of the cognitive biases that we have stated above. It is quite easy to find some practical applications for those psychological frailties. Of course, by nature, some argument is stronger than other, but this wittiest politician will tell you that even with a weaker argument, one can easily win the fight by resorting to mind manipulation [42]. The tobaccoists would tell you that if I can prove that the opposing argument is wrong, I'm right. Here is a perfect example cited in the recently released series "Thank You for Smoking" all the tobaccoists want their customers to be more than healthy, you (referring to the media) just want a horrible death so you can

accuse us to get profit!" Even though his status might still appear to be a bargainer, their statement surely presents to be a political competition.

The premise of the political announcement or statement or debate is the seize the currently presenting concerns of the public and to avert the view into the ways the steerer wants. Placed in the context of political communication research, we believe that this intuitionist account of human decision-making offers useful insights into the factors shaping argument strength.

To conclude that the intuitive model of politics which people think that they are based on to vote is to some degree can and will be swayed to alter in order to fulfill the need of the politician. And the underlying mechanism of this phenomenon is because of cognitive biases. The public as a group can not lose the trait of this influence.

5. Conclusion

In everyday life, we often hear a question about selection: what's your preference on wine, desert, weather, mate, and even a candidate for a presidential job? As a result, we have very specific preferences under typical situations. Is this preference out of sole self-interest? This is the answer this paper intends to seek. We include three perspectives in this paper, mating, political candidate and voters, and strategy, three common elements that impact our lives much. As a whole, we believe that preference actually originates from cognitive bias. Race, social hierarchy, education, or conflict of interest could weigh differently in all these decision-making progresses, mate selection, political decision, or the choice of a voter, while self-interest is only the façade.

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