

A Bayesian Measurement Model of Political Support for Endorsement Experiments, with Application to the Militant Groups in Pakistan

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Abstract

To measure the levels of support for political actors (e.g., candidates, parties, and other political organizations) and the strength of their issue ownership, survey experiments are often conducted in which respondents are asked to express their opinion about a particular policy endorsed by a randomly selected political actor. These responses are then contrasted with those from the control group that is asked about the policy without an endorsement. This survey methodology is particularly useful for studying sensitive political attitudes. We develop a Bayesian measurement model for such endorsement experiments. Our model is based on item response theory and provides estimates of political support at both aggregate and individual levels that are measured on the same scale as the ideal points of respondents. In addition, the model estimates the strength of each political actor's issue ownership for any given policy as well as the association between respondents' characteristics and their support level for a particular actor. Finally, we provide both empirical and simulation evidence demonstrating the applicability and statistical efficiency of the proposed methodology. Our analysis of a recent survey experiment in Pakistan reveals interesting patterns of citizens' support for different militant groups.