P. Loewen, “Affinity, Antipathy, and Political Participation: How Our Concern for Others Makes Us Vote,” *CJPS* 43:3 (September 2010)

**Overview**

Some citizens differ in their levels of concern for the supporters of various parties. Loewen demonstrates how such concerns can motivate citizens to vote. He presents a model that incorporates concern for others and election benefits to explain the decision to vote. By predicting substantial turnout, this model overcomes the “paradox of participation.” Loewen then verifies the model empirically by utilizing a series of dictator games in an online survey of 2000+ Cdns to measure the concern of individuals for other partisans. Loewen shows how the preferences revealed in these games can predict the decision to vote in the face of several conventional controls. The formal model and empirical results generate a more satisfactory account of the decision to vote than an explanation that relies entirely on duty.

**Background**

* Loewen conceptualizes elections as “a competition between groups of people who rely on more than self-interest when deciding when and how to participate in politics”
* Shows empirically that individuals who have stronger preferences or greater concern for some partisans than others are more likely to vote, especially as the size of these groups grows. This suggests that models of voter turnout that rely only on self-regarding considerations, including even duty and social obligation, are incomplete
* In this view, politics is not just a contest between parties fighting for support of individual citizens, rather it is a fight over scarce resources between groups of citizens and their respective representatives in political parties
* Politics as a contest between groups of people supported by 3 sets of evidence:

1. We can explain vote choice as a function of group membership
2. The rhetoric of parties frames politics in this way
3. We know that votes think about their membership in parties in the same way they think about their membership in other groups

* View of voter turnout as a product of a sense of duty is only half-right
* It fails insofar as it is a static explanation as it does not condition concern for others
* Loewen’s model assumes that two sets of benefits exist: (1) benefits to self; and (2) benefits to the supporters of the winning party

**Conclusions**

* Looking at the results from the perspective of antipathy, as a preference for some citizens over others increases, some individuals are more likely to vote. By extension this means that if groups of partisans can be made more polarized and more distrusting of one another, then their likelihood of participating should increase. In short – if politics is more negative then voter turnout should be higher. --- I don’t know that this model would hold in reality.