

Eurovision voting points to more than just musical tastes

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How people vote in the Eurovision Song Contest may tell us more than just the musical tastes of a nation—according to new research.

Although this year's Eurovision Song Contest has been postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak, academics from the University of Stirling and University of Glasgow have revealed interesting patterns from previous years' public votes.

Dr. Isaac Tabner, from Stirling Management School, and Dr. Antonios Siganos, from the Adam Smith Business School, have looked at how each country's votes for its favourite song can give an indication of the likelihood and nature of business exchanges across borders.

It has long been alleged that the Eurovision Song Contest is less a talent show and more a measure of countries' geopolitical standing with others. That theory has been supported by anecdotal evidence of favourable voting between countries such as Cyprus and Greece, or Ireland and the UK.

The new research—published in the *Journal of International Business Studies* - looks in detail at voting patterns between 1999, when public voting began, and 2013 to establish that patterns of voting bias do exist. Dr. Tabner and Dr. Siganos estimated bias by subtracting the average number of points received by each country from all participants in the contest, from the number of points received from a counterpart within a particular pair.

The authors say: "This research demonstrates that simple voting in the Eurovision Song Contest actually captures more complex elements of relationships which are driven by emotions, familiarity, [psychological distance](#), and feelings of intimacy.

"We found that countries which share above average voting in Eurovision are likely to share more cross-border mergers between businesses. The flipside of this, where countries deliver below average votes for each other and share fewer business transactions, is also true.

"Voting patterns also correlate with levels of foreign direct investment and migration movements across borders. Of course, there are other factors which influence business exchanges between countries, including: sharing a border, the distance between capital cities, the degree to which languages are shared, and whether or not armed conflict has taken place between the countries in question.

"The insight into social affinity between nations which this analysis of Eurovision [voting patterns](#) provides may be a better predictor of international business exchanges than traditional measures of cultural similarity, and distance, if you believe that sometimes opposites attract, or that too much similarity, or closeness can lead to friction, clashes or even hostile rivalry.

"While much prior research focusses on similarity and distance measures, we argue that there are times when too much closeness and similarity can be counter-productive. For example, by creating destructive competitive rivalry, or just simply reminding counterparties of each-others' bad points.

"This research provides a measure of affinity by which social scientists can explore nuanced relations between the populations of participating countries, and has the additional benefit of using a sample size—in the millions—much bigger than is typically achieved by surveys."

More information: Antonios Siganos et al, Capturing the role of societal affinity in cross-border mergers with the Eurovision Song Contest, *Journal of International Business Studies* (2019). [DOI: 10.1057/s41267-019-00271-3](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-019-00271-3)

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