

SETI AS A SUBJECT OF PUBLIC OPINION

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The understanding of the dynamics of public's opinion about SETI is important because the search is dependent on public support, both morally and financially. The general trends of the dynamics of public opinion can be studied with the aid of stochastic equations. We present the results of a mathematical simulation of the dynamics of public opinion regarding SETI based on the stochastic model of Weidlich and Haag. The crucial role of the "parameter of adaptation," a , describing the readiness of the average individual to adhere to the current opinion of the majority is pointed out. The danger of high values of this parameter (a "conformist" society), is demonstrated for both a smooth and a shocked (e.g. by discovery of an ET signal) evolution of reality. In both regimes, the reaction of a "conformist" society is less consonant with the reality and less predictable. For the shocked evolution of reality (this regime is investigated for the first time), our numerical model demonstrates the possibility of **chaos** in public opinion for a "conformist" society. It is argued that a reasonable policy can decrease the a parameter of society and maintain optimal evolution of public opinion.