

The Effects of Appearance on the Evaluation of Candidates in Quebec

A Preliminary Analysis

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Abstract

There is a debate in the Canadian literature on electoral behaviour about the influence of candidates' appearance on voters. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of the case of Quebec which has received little attention up to now in the literature. Using experimental and qualitative data, I show that voters are not indifferent to candidates' age, gender, and ethnicity.

Keywords: Appearance, Gender, Race, Age, Heuristics

Work in progress. Please do not cite without the author's consent.

INTRODUCTION

In the province of Quebec in 2015, the nomination of Gaétan Barrette to the head of the Ministry of Health caused a controversy because of his weight. Two years earlier, then Prime Minister Pauline Marois had already raised doubts about his capacity to lead the ministry given the fact that he was overweight, even though he is a radiologist and had been the president of Quebec's federation of medical specialists since 2006. Around the same time, an online petition, raising thousands of signatures, had urged Barrette to adopt "healthy living habits."¹ This event shows that appearance alone can influence one's perception of politicians for better or for worse. A great deal of attention is now devoted to political leaders and their image (McAllister, 2009). However, talks about appearance in politics are not only a way to feed the tabloids. Just like any other information provided to the public, appearance-related cues can be used to form judgments about the ones who aspire to or already represent the

¹Boisvert Yves. (April 25, 2014) Le poids santé du Dr Barrette. La Presse. <http://www.lapresse.ca/debats/chroniques/yves-boisvert/201404/25/01-4760737-le-poids-sante-du-dr-barrette.php> (consulted on May 16, 2017).

people in the political arena. The evaluation of political figures is part of ordinary citizens' everyday contact with politics.

Cues associated with race, age, and gender are the first three types of characteristics detected upon encountering an individual. Put otherwise, a new face is first categorized based on these three categories, which are referred to as “basic” or “primitive” in social psychology (Jackson, 2011). These specific cues also have social meaning. Among sociodemographic characteristics, race and gender are particularly visible and “politically salient” (Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014). Age has also been shown to mainly influence the appearance of competence (Kite et al., 2005; Fiske, Cuddy and Glick, 2007; Löckenhoff et al., 2009; Bowen and Skirbekk, 2013). The influence of negative prejudices toward women and minorities in politics has already gathered academic attention (see, for example, Banducci et al. (2008), Tolley and Goodyear-Grant (2014), and Cutler (2002)). As for age, it is the topic of far fewer analysis (Sigelman and Sigelman, 1982; Piliavin, 1987). In Canada, little attention has also been granted up to now to the Quebec electorate. Do gender-based, age-based, and race-based stereotypes influence the evaluation of political candidates in Quebec? If yes, how? First, to determine if appearance can matter, I consider answers provided by the participants to a voting experiment (N=47). Then, a brief and exploratory analysis of two focus groups provides examples of ways in which appearance-related stereotypes are mobilized by citizens in a real-life political context.

APPEARANCE AND ELECTIONS

IMPORTANT PROMISES

Human interactions are based on a triad: cognition or thoughts; affect or feelings ; and behavior. First comes cognition, the “mental activity of processing information and using that information in judgment” (Stangor, 2011). Upon seeing a person, the human brain spontaneously associates facial features with social categories which allows instantaneous classification (Allport, 1954). A person is then given the opportunity to quickly guess –more or less accurately– others' interests or personality through the use of stereotypes – the mental images used to define social groups (Bodenhausen, Kang and Peery, 2012). For that reason, for many researchers, appearance matters in politics. Some, such as Carpinella et al. (2016), go as far as to claim that “facial cues are consequential for voters' behavior at the polls.” It is even argued that a candidate's electoral success can be predicted by his or her appearance (Olivola and Todorov, 2010). While these claims are bold, studies in both political science and social psychology do provide theoretical foundations for the study of physical cues. In order to compensate for a lack of knowledge, citizens can take into account the appearance of politicians. Accurate or not, the importance of stereotypes pertaining to the evaluative judgment of others is great: they influence impressions, knowledge, and memories associated with a person (Freeman and Ambady, 2009). However, all stereotypes do not carry the same weight, or any weight at all. As Bauer (2015) explains, there is no direct link between the existence of stereotypes in a person's mind and the perception of others. Therefore, in politics, voters do not always rely on stereotypes to form an opinion about candidates. Stereotype reliance depends on their activation (how accessible stereotypes are in one's mind)

and application (the extent to which stereotypes are used to form judgment) (Kunda and Spencer, 2003; Bauer, 2015).

Voters' ignorance has often been blamed for the intrusion of appearance in politics. Empirical research shows that voters rarely possess enough knowledge about candidates and parties to make a decision compatible with the standards of normative democratic theory (Banducci et al., 2008). Since *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), the literature on day-to-day politics has underlined the gap between what voters should know to "properly" evaluate candidates and reality (Déloye, 2007). Campbell et al. (1960) and the *Michigan Voting Behaviour School* showed that voters have little interest in their political role. Citizens' "formal" political competence, which can be more or less limited, rests on information accumulated through socialization and organized in specialized schemas (Joignant, 2007). Analyzing a candidacy is a complicated process involving multiple dimensions of political and social life. According to Déloye (2007), only a minority of voters possess the cognitive and political tools to do so. In other words, as Bourdieu (1973) argues, political competence is not always within citizens' reach. Thus, according to these authors, when the schema voters possess are unfit or insufficient to make sense of political situations - or in order to save time and energy -, they can rely on other general or practical knowledge completely unrelated to politics (Joignant, 2007). These shortcuts, known as cognitive heuristics, are used "as a bridge between the realities of a grossly uninformed electorate and the demands of normative democratic theory" (Banducci et al., 2008). Given that such esthetical criteria can be used when the schemas are lacking, it is not surprising that empirical research points toward a particularly heightened relevance of physical cues in low-information contexts (Banducci et al., 2008; Lenz and Chappell, 2011; Matson and Fine, 2006; McDermott, 1997, 1998). Nevertheless, social categorization is an automatic mental process (Allport, 1954; Bodenhausen, Kang and Peery, 2012; Dovidio, Glick and Rudman, 2005; Freeman and Johnson, 2016), which means that even though the use of such heuristics is encouraged by ignorance, voters with little political knowledge are not necessarily the only ones who might take physical cues into account. Studies have shown, for example, that individuals with "negative racial affects and attitudes" (Murakami, 2014) are less likely to vote for a candidate who belongs to a minority (Murakami, 2014; Street, 2014), regardless of their mastery of political information. Moreover, according to Bauer (2015), citizens are more likely to rely on stereotypes if they are "activated" during the campaign (when certain issues become salient). As a result, citizens' contact with the political world is guided in part by emotions (Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson, 2002) or by esthetical cues that are used to classify individuals or groups and to locate oneself in comparison to them (Joignant, 2007). In other words, the evaluation of candidates is a relational process, as voters compare politicians' characteristics to their own (Sigelman and Sigelman, 1982).

MITIGATED RESULTS

According to McGraw (2011), the link between the perception of candidates, their evaluation and the final act of voting has been the topic of a "long and distinguished history of scholarly studies." A rapidly growing body of literature analyzes the specific effect of candidates' appearance on voters' behaviour. However, the results emanating from these studies are highly

mixed. As Bird et al. (2016) state, findings are, in fact, contingent upon the methodology that is used. Observational studies suggest little or no influence of the candidate's identity on voters' choice. Back in 2010, Bartels (2010) already noticed what he called a "failure" of causal modeling when observational data is used. For example, little evidence of voting affinity was found, in Canada, at the federal level (Goodyear-Grant and Croskill, 2011; Landa, Copeland and Grofman, 1995). However, still in the Canadian context, experimental studies involving the manipulation of fictional candidates' characteristics revealed a mixed effect of race and gender on voting behaviour (Besco, 2015; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014). It should be added that none of them considered the impact candidates' age could have on voters. Moreover, due to linguistic constraints, the Quebec population has frequently been omitted from the samples studied (Murakami, 2014; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014). Even when an effect is perceived, its direction remains a topic of debate. For example, authors like Adams (1975) and Brouard and Tiberj (2011) report that minority candidates can receive a boost in electoral support while others, like Petrow (2010), find the opposite. As for the influence of age, it is rarely considered. One notable exception is Sigelman and Sigelman (1982) who investigated the influence of sexism, racism, and ageism on electoral behaviour in an experimental setting (fictional mayoral elections) with surprising results. In fact, according to them, age was the strongest influencer of voting. Given the reported influence of age, its relative absence from the literature remains puzzling.

Several hypotheses could explain these mixed results. First, as McGraw (2011) notices, there is a tendency in the literature to assume that voting for a candidate and judging candidates rely on the same underlying processes, which is wrong according to behavioural decision theory. The evaluation of a candidate – whether they are personally liked or disliked – may very well influence electoral behavior, or it may not at all, depending on what is taken into account by voters at the polls. As portrayed by the *Michigan School of Voting Behaviour's* funnel of causality, candidate evaluations is one out of many factors influencing voters' final choice, along with partisan affiliation and issue positions for example (Campbell et al., 1960). Other factors could have greater impacts than candidates' sociodemographic characteristics, mitigating or canceling its effect. As a result, in certain circumstances, candidates' sociodemographic characteristics could not matter at all. For example, in Canada, according to Blais et al. (2003), partisan affiliation and party leaders carry greater weight than the identity of local candidates. In fact, several others claim that partisanship has the greatest influence on vote choice (Alvarez and Nagler, 1995; Campbell et al., 1960; Miller and Shanks, 1996; Weisberg, 2008). This hypothesis was tested by Kam (2007) who found that party cue is a "limiting condition on the effect of group attitudes." Physical cues could also have a greater influence in low-information settings. When more information is easily available, many other cues would be provided for voters to rely on (Matson and Fine, 2006). Also, according to Street (2014) and Murakami (2014), sociodemographic cues could have an effect only on a limited group of voters. Aggregation would then lead to its dissipation. Lastly, for Bird et al. (2016), the influence of ethnic or gender affinity voting during an actual campaign could also depend on the occurrence of incidents or events adding salience to these identities. Gender and race would then carry greater weight and influence voting behaviour (Plutzer and Zipp, 1996). In a similar manner, Bauer (2015) justifies the study of the events surrounding the campaign by highlighting the importance of stereotype activation.

In brief, a general overview of the existing literature highlights several issues. First, for Campbell and Cowley (2014), “the literature on candidate effects is large, but it is also partial and geographically skewed,” with a majority of work focused on the “biological sex and race” of the candidates and restricted to the United States. Most studies focus on the influence of a single or a few perceived cues on voters’ opinion without much comparison (Cutler, 2002). Few studies have adopted an intersectional posture to understanding the influence of candidates’ identity (Bird et al., 2016), which is problematic, given the fact that the interaction of different sources of stereotypes is a complex phenomenon. Intersectional authors like Philpot and Walton (2007) argue for the necessity to examine multiple cues simultaneously to take their “mutually reinforcing relationship” into account. This paper seeks to fill some of these gaps in the literature.

Moreover, even if appearance had little or no impact on vote, politicians may still be routinely judged based in part on physical characteristics. For this reason, this paper focuses not only on voting, but also on the overall evaluation of political candidates or, in other words, voters’ reaction to politicians.

DATA AND METHOD

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

This paper presents preliminary experimental results gathered at Laval University in Quebec City among forty-seven students and members of staff.² The sample is predominantly Caucasian, young and highly educated. Table 1 presents its main characteristics. Figure 1³ shows the self-placement of participants on an ideological scale from left to right.

Characteristics	Number
Male	27
Female	20
Minimum Age	19
Maximum Age	71
Average Age	36
Professional Diploma (CÉGEP)	11
Undergraduate Diploma	15
Masters	14
Ph.D.	4
Post-Doctorate	3

Table 1: Main characteristics of the experimental sample

The experiment was carried on campus. Respondents were recruited by email and met during a solo thirty minutes appointment during which they were asked to perform a

²The experiment is still ongoing. A non-student sample will also be recruited. Therefore, the results presented here come from a limited sample of participants and do not necessarily portray the author’s final conclusions.

³See appendix.

computerized voting task following preferential voting. The experimenter manually assigned respondents to one of two conditions (the two conditions feature the same elections and candidates but in a different order). Each time, the respondents were only shown the candidates' image. No other information was provided. Certain physiological data were also gathered (heartbeat, sweat, and facial expressions) but are not considered in this paper. All respondents were first exposed to a control or practice round during which geometrical shapes were displayed instead of human faces. Participants had to vote for these shapes and were thus given the opportunity to learn how the experiment worked beforehand. Then, three electoral waves were performed. The pictures used are those of members of the Georgia House of Representatives, selected as they are real politicians with whom the respondents have had no prior contact. The picture of Ravi Bhalla, mayor of Hoboken (New Jersey)⁴, is also used⁵. The control candidate is male, middle-aged, and Caucasian. In one wave, respondents are exposed to candidates of varying age and race, holding gender (male) constant. In another wave, candidates' race and gender are manipulated, so all candidates are middle-aged. In another, the age and gender vary, but all candidates are Caucasian. Each time, the participants are asked to order the candidates from their first choice (1) to their last (4) following preferential voting. Doing so provides more data to the researcher without betraying the concept of experimental reduction, which implies the simplification of real-life questions to their "core" (Kagel and Roth, 1995). In the case electoral behavior, that "core" is the vote or, put differently, the action of choosing between two or more candidates. Several researchers investigating the effect of physical cues on votes, such as Moskowitz and Stroh (1994), have violated that third principle by using a single picture of a fictional candidate and asking respondents if they would be willing to vote for that candidate. Such an experiment does not adequately reduce the phenomenon investigated (voting) to its simplest form as they do not imply choice (Murakami, 2014).

QUALITATIVE DESIGN

Qualitative data was collected through focus groups organized with some of the participants of the experimental phase of the research. Participants to the experiment were asked if they agreed to be eventually re-contacted to take part in a focus group. Two groups were organized in April of 2018. The first had six participants and the second had four. Interviews can be performed to deepen one's understanding of the cultural systems guiding behaviours (Fortin, 1996). In other words, the aim of this part of the research is to offer an understanding of what candidates' appearance means to citizens. Moreover, unlike in the case of surveys, respondents are given the opportunity to explain the reasons behind their answers and to nuance their thoughts. This type of data allows a deeper investigation of the reasons motivating political behaviour which is valuable in research as, as Gauthier (1997) explains, "it is often more important to understand the motives of an answer than to obtain the answer itself" (my translation). Discussion groups are often used in the study of the behaviour and attitudes of a group. One of their principal assets is that the questions asked, and the following discussions, are open. In other words, participants are encouraged to exchange

⁴See appendix

⁵Those images will later be evaluated in terms of traits and attractiveness (Banducci et al., 2008)

with others and given time to develop and communicate their ideas. New topics may thus emerge following the input of a participant. Discussion groups further distinguish themselves from one-on-one interviews by setting up a controlled interaction space between participants (Gauthier, 1997). Answers given by an individual may be taken into account or discussed by others, thus emulating the social environment into which political discussions normally take place. After all, ordinary citizens are constantly exposed to political speech through their peers, mass media, and new media (Beck et al., 2002; Chadwick, 2013). As a result, information or opinions provided by others routinely factor into the formation of political opinion. Nevertheless, the social space created by the group discussion remains artificial (Gauthier, 1997). Although group discussion can nurture a feeling of safety and encourage participants to mirror others' truthfulness (Gauthier, 1997), these groups may nonetheless encourage the social desirability response bias, as participants are asked to express themselves in front of their peers. Opinions thought to be unpopular may thus remain unspoken. To lessen its effects as much as possible, participants were asked to freely write down their thoughts in the participant's handbook during a few minutes before the different parts of the discussion.

VOTING RESULTS

Table 2 presents the results of the three experimental elections.

Position	1st Election	2nd Election	3rd Election
1st	Young Asian Male	Middle Aged White Female	Young White Female
2nd	Old Black Male	Middle Aged Black Female	Middle Aged White Male
3rd	Middle Aged White Male	Middle Aged White Male	Old White Male
4th	Young White Male	Middle Aged Sikh Male	Old White Female

Table 2: Electoral Results

Even though the sample of participants was predominantly White and that the vast majority of politicians in Quebec are Caucasians, it appears that most of the candidates associated with minorities fared well. In particular, among similarly aged individuals, only the older Black candidate was able to reach the second place. According to literature related to affinity voting, the opposite should have been expected. Moreover, while politics remains a predominantly male space, the majority of the female candidates in this experiment performed well, with the notable exception of the older White woman who landed in last place. Contrary to theoretical expectations (Cutler, 2002), participants did not seem to favour candidates who shared their sociodemographic characteristics, as shown by Table 3.

Casting doubt on the prevalence of affinity-voting cannot, however, be equated with the absence of effect of appearance on political behaviour.

Table 3: Influence of Voters' Characteristics on their Support for Specific Candidates

	Support of Female Candidates	Support of Young Candidates	Support of Old Candidates
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Voter's Gender	0.10 (0.09)	0.07 (0.11)	0.02 (0.09)
Voters' Age	0.04 (0.33)	-0.50 (0.39)	-0.11 (0.33)
_constant	0.71*** (0.14)	0.67*** (0.16)	0.26 (0.14)
N	94	94	94
Log Likelihood	-52.90	-67.89	-53.49
AIC	111.80	141.78	112.97

Note: Binomial logistic regressions.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

AVOIDING SOCIAL DESIRABILITY?

The electoral results presented in Table 2 may raise concern regarding the impact of the social desirability response bias. The experimenter was physically present most of the time during the experiment ⁶ and could see who the participants were voting for. The presence of the researcher was rendered necessary by the use of biomonitors during the experiment. While the presence of a person may encourage socially desirable responses, wearing physiological measurement apparatus can also convince participants that their true feelings will be discovered no matter what (an effect known as the “bogus pipeline” (Jones and Sigall, 1971)), therefore diminishing dissimulation efforts. That belief is illustrated by participant 434. When he was asked to comment on the picture of a non-prototypical Black candidate, he claimed:

“It’s a shame that my body probably reacted to him. If he had been only Black, me, I don’t react with Black people.”

He then added that his main concern with this candidate was that he believed that he was unattractive.

Can bias be nonetheless blamed for the experimental results? Table 4 shows that the overall median vote time for a middle-aged White man (MAWM) candidate is consistently longer than when all candidates are taken into account. ⁷ As longer decision time can be associated with doubt or conscious processing (Correll et al., 2013), a reluctance of participants to vote for stereotypical candidates can be suspected. However, Table 4 also shows that the presence of the experimenter probably did not increase socially desirable behaviour, as unobserved participants did not hesitate less before supporting “MAWM” candidates ⁸.

Investigating race-based, age-based, and gender-based stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination rests on their measurement, which is complex as it can only be done indirectly.

⁶The experimenter was present for thirty-seven out of the forty-seven experimental sessions. Biomonitors were still installed on the ten unobserved participants.

⁷“MAWM” voting time was quicker during the third election. It is interesting to bring to the reader’s attention that this election is the only one featuring only Caucasian candidates.

⁸It is nonetheless advisable to remain cautious given the small number of “MAWM” supporters.

Candidates	Election 1	Election 2	Election 3
All Participants (N=47)			
All Candidates	4,9	3,4	4,2
MAWM	11	7,5	6,1
Observed Participants (N= 37)			
All Candidates	5,9	3,3	3,3
MAWM	10,7	7,5	5,6
Unobserved Participants (N=10)			
All Candidates	4,7	4,7	4,2
MAWM	20,1	NA	9,5

Table 4: Median Vote Time per Election in Seconds

By consequence, concerns are most often raised regarding the reliability and validity of measurements because prejudiced participants can provide an “insincere “right” answer” (Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens, 1997). However, when participant 46 was asked if he felt better represented by political candidates who looked like him, he wrote “maybe unconsciously”, which illustrates the fact that social desirability should not be understood simply as a means to disguise blatant sexism or racism. Participants may consciously favour unconventional candidacies if they genuinely believe that it is the right thing to do. They may very well remain unaware of their bias and attitudes (Correll et al., 2013). In brief, unlike what Kuklinski, Cobb and Gilens (1997) claim, providing the “right” answer is not necessarily insincere.

Because voting experiments require conscious introspection, the answers gathered tap into *controlled* cognitive processes. Implicit measures, such as voting time, are taken without participants’ awareness and aim at uncovering what are called *automatic* or *uncontrolled* cognitive processes, “sentiments of which respondents may not themselves be aware” (Correll et al., 2013). In the end, both controlled and uncontrolled answers are of interest. As Correll et al. (2013) explains:

“The complexity of [prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination] has given rise to a profusion of measurement techniques, making it clear that there is no ‘best’ or preferred measurement approach. Multiple approaches exist because the constructs, themselves, are multifaceted.”

In this case, uncontrolled answers are used here to determine if stereotypes can influence voters. Controlled answers, provided through the focus groups, allow an assessment of some of the ways these stereotypes are routinely mobilized by citizens when they think and discuss about politics.

DISCUSSION

DOES APPEARANCE MATTER?

Participants' Unconscious Reaction to Candidates' Appearance

Table 5 shows that different social groups received different treatments during the experiment. Before the vote, participants were shown all the candidates. They had to press a key to pass to the next one. The consideration time of each candidacy was thus recorded, providing an implicit ⁹ measurement of attention.

Group	Display Time	Difference
All Candidates	2,29	Baseline
Men	2,48	+ 0,19
Women	1,88	- 0,41
White	2,24	- 0,05
Minorities	2,52	+ 0,23
Middle Aged	2,12	- 0,17
Old	2,22	- 0,07
Young	2,5	+ 0,21

Table 5: Median Display Time in Seconds

Table 5 shows that women, in particular, receive less attention than average, while younger individuals or those associated with minorities had longer display times. Before discussing the results any further, it is necessary to refer to Table 6 which presents variations in display time within the same group and highlights the fact that a single individual always belongs to multiple perceived categories at once. Feminist theory, through concepts such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), emphasizes the influence of the interaction of multiple identities on one's social position and asserts that the intersection of different sources of prejudice is of scientific relevance.

Group	Display Time	Difference
Female Minority	1,71	- 0,58
Sikh Male	1,79	-0,5
Other Minority Males	3,1	+ 0,81

Table 6: Median Display Time of Minority Candidates

As shown by Table 6, while female candidates were granted less attention than their male counterparts, the effect is even stronger in the case of minority women. In fact, the display time of the female minority candidate is closer to the median display time of White

⁹A measure is considered implicit when participants are unaware that their behaviour is being assessed and that their response cannot be modified (Correll et al., 2013)

women than to the one of most other candidates associated with a minority racial group. Table 6 also shows the effect of a salient religious garment on participants through the Sikh male candidate. In the end, the treatment of that specific candidate by participants was different to the one of the other men associated with a racial minority. He is, in fact, the only candidate who did not receive a single vote on the first round.

But why would participants spend considerably more time evaluating the candidacy of other males associated with a minority? Terkildsen (1993) hypothesized that participants who hold egalitarian beliefs which may be come in conflict with racial stereotypes could engage in the conscious repression of spontaneous stereotypes. The overall process is longer. This hypothesis seems coherent with my results. It also appears that neither the candidacy of the Black female nor the Sikh male were reconsidered.

These preliminary results tend to indicate voters do react to candidates' physical cues. However, the experiment was carried in a fictional low-information environment. The second part of this paper focuses on qualitative data and provides examples of how citizens react to and mobilize stereotypes in their daily contact with politics.

HOW APPEARANCE MATTERS

Participants' Conscious Reaction to Candidates' Appearance

A MASCULINE AND WHITE FRAME

While the gendered mediation theory highlights that masculine stereotypes are treated as a standard in politics (Goodyear-Grant, 2007), according to the racial mediation framework (Tolley, 2016), political activities are also associated with the "dominant cultural norms". When asked to speak freely about politicians, participants tended to refer to masculinity and whiteness as the norm. A revealing example is provided by the first discussion group, who were asked to discuss the impact of different characteristics in politics. They thus talked about male and female politicians. A conversation about individuals of different age groups in politics followed. Lastly, they were asked to express their thoughts about people of different origins in politics. While they instantaneously referred to men and women as well as younger and older people in terms of politicians, individuals of different origins were framed as voters instead of candidates. Participant number 6, for example, claimed:

"I think immigrants will vote for stability. They will vote for the politicians who say: "We won't change a lot what is happening. We will just make some small changes"."

It took the intervention of participant number 228, a man of colour, for the others to realize that they had been expected to talk about candidates:

228: "I think [candidates of colour] still have fewer chances than White people. [Speaking to the other participants] Because we're speaking about politicians here."

6: “Ah...”

228: “The differences between people of different origins in terms of politics, not the way they vote”.

4: “Ah, so not the electorate.”

As for gendered framing, participants mainly used expressions related to war or sports when discussing politics. For example, when participant 46 was asked what he remembered from leaders’ debates, he wrote:

“[Debates] can turn into a very aggressive joust. The media is looking for a winner and a loser.”

Other participants made use of similar terms:

11: “Charest¹⁰ didn’t score points, it was Landry¹¹ who lost some.”

[...]

228: “It’s just like Legault. His performance... many journalists said that in the end the CAQ¹² owes their electoral score to his performance at the leaders’ debate. He did score some points.” [...]

11: “What I remember are lines of attack and traps. [...] What Parizeau¹³ faced, it was a bear trap.”

When asked to comment on the performance of a female candidate, Françoise David, the contrast was stark. Participants did not refer to sports anymore, but to a stereotypical feminine activity rarely associated with politics: cooking.

11: “During that debate, she was a kind of grandmother, saying, “listen little boys, you will get your brown sugar pudding.” “Grandma, what do you think about that?” She was respected and she did well, but she wasn’t dangerous. She could promise an apple pie with ice cream on top because she knew she would never get the whole fridge the next day.”

Far greater attention was also given to female candidates’ appearance. For example, describing the ideal candidate, participant 4 summarized:

“You asked me what kind of candidate will win. For a man, I would say Bill Clinton when he started politics or Jacques Chirac. For a woman, I would say Marion Maréchal-Le Pen¹⁴. Young and pretty.”

¹⁰The participant is referring to Jean Charest, a former leader of the Liberal Party

¹¹The participant is referring to Bernard Landry, a former leader of the Parti Québécois

¹²The CAQ, or Coalition Avenir Québec, is a political party lead by François Legault

¹³The participant is referring to Jacques Parizeau, a former leader of the Parti Québécois

¹⁴Marion Maréchal-Le Pen is a French politician from the Front National

Participants to the second focus group also discussed women's appearance when they were asked to comment on the picture of a fictional female candidate.

217: "I'm going to say something very feminine¹⁵ and something very mean: she's too beautiful."

46: [laughs] "It's the pretty girl syndrome."

[...]

434: "There's something true about it though. I'll say something worse. In the case of women who are too beautiful like that, we say: "If she's there, it's not because she's competent, it's because she's pretty." There's this reflex, this reflection."

THE FEDERALISM HEURISTIC

The last part of this paper addresses a notion that specifically applies to voters in Quebec that I call the federalism heuristic. Heuristics allow individuals to quickly grasp a situation with minimal information (Gigerenzer and Brighton, 2009). In politics, American research has shown, for example, that Black candidates are perceived by White voters as more Liberal (Lerman and Sadin, 2016). Such heuristics rely on stereotypes.

The accuracy of stereotypes is a complex and controversial matter. According to the classic work of Allport (1954), prejudices (and stereotypes) result from overgeneralized and erroneous beliefs. That definition has, however, been nuanced by modern psychology (Whitley and Kite, 2010). Some stereotypes may reflect genuine perceived differences between the social situations social groups normally face (Bodenhausen, Kang and Peery, 2012). In other words, "... because stereotypes are based to some extent on observations made about the social world, they may contain a kernel of truth " (Whitley and Kite, 2010).

I hypothesize that, just like White American voters tend to believe Black candidates are Liberal, White Quebec voters tend to assume that candidates of colour are federalists. This concept is best illustrated by participant 4 who supports Quebec's sovereignty. When his group was asked to discuss the picture of the Sikh male candidate, he declared :

"Forget it. The [Quebec] Liberal Party¹⁶ is full of [people like] that.¹⁷"

When asked to elaborate, he explained:

"[...] as he's coming from cultural communities, he has more chances of being a liberal voter, a federalist. He's clearly not in my camp, so he is eliminated right away. If he were a PQ¹⁸ partisan, I'd vote for him, but statistically he's not a PQ partisan and he's not a separatist. He might even be more integrated in the anglophone side than the francophone side [...]"

¹⁵Participant 217 is a woman.

¹⁶The Liberal Party of Quebec is commonly associated with federalism

¹⁷Participant 4 is referring to partisans. No candidates in Quebec wear religious garment.

¹⁸The PQ, or Parti Québécois, is the main sovereignist party in Quebec

This heuristic may stem from an association between people of colour and the anglophone community, as shown by the participants in the second discussion group who, when asked to share their impressions of the young Asian male candidates, had this exchange:

434: “I think it’s the kind of person that fits more in English Canada than in Quebec.”

Interviewer: “He would fit in English Canada?”

217: “That’s true, that’s a good one”.

Interviewer: “Why is that so?”

434: “Because [in Quebec] we don’t have many people like that ”.

Interviewer: “What about in Montreal?”

434: [Laughs] “I don’t go there often enough.”

437: “It’s true there aren’t many Asian candidates.”

[...]

434: “I think [Asian candidacies] aren’t common here.”

46: “It’s more of an English Canada thing.”

When participant 217 said, hesitantly, that she could maybe picture the young Asian candidate as a politician in Quebec City, participant 46 disagreed :

“Even Quebec City... are there any in Quebec City? It’s always White people.”

CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a preliminary investigation of experimental and qualitative results aimed at better understanding the impact of appearance on candidates’ evaluation by voters in Quebec. While implicit measurements show that candidates’ characteristics do have an influence on first impressions, qualitative results tend to demonstrate that voters make use of stereotypes when they have to consider political activities and politicians. As summarized by a participant:

223: “I’m persuaded that there are more differences between White people from the Front National and the Socialist Party than between a Black and a White person from the Socialist Party. ¹⁹ I think the biggest difference is in the vision voters have of them.”

Interviewer: “What do you mean?”

223: “About everything we just said. Be it about immigrants, younger people, older people, men, and women. The idea that a woman is more emotional, closer to her emotions, and that the man is more rigid. That old people will take more

¹⁹Participant 223 refers to French political parties.

time, will be more regular, while younger people are wild. I think that's where it matters: in the mind of the electorate, in the mental image they have of these people, rather than in real differences between candidates."

The results and analysis presented here are both preliminary and exploratory and their aim, modest. Lastly, it is important to re-assert that it is not my objective to claim that appearance determine the results of real-life elections. However, contacts between citizens and politicians do not stop after an electoral campaign. The role of stereotypes should be understood as a first layer of information quickly gathered about an individual, setting certain expectations. Citizens can go beyond those automatic thoughts and rely instead on the deliberate mode of social cognition. First impressions will, nevertheless, influence subsequent thinking (Fiske and Taylor, 2017). Put otherwise, first impressions may not guide voting behavior but, in the end, they remain at the roots of opinion formation (Allport, 1954; Dovidio, Glick and Rudman, 2005; Bodenhausen, Kang and Peery, 2012; Freeman and Johnson, 2016).

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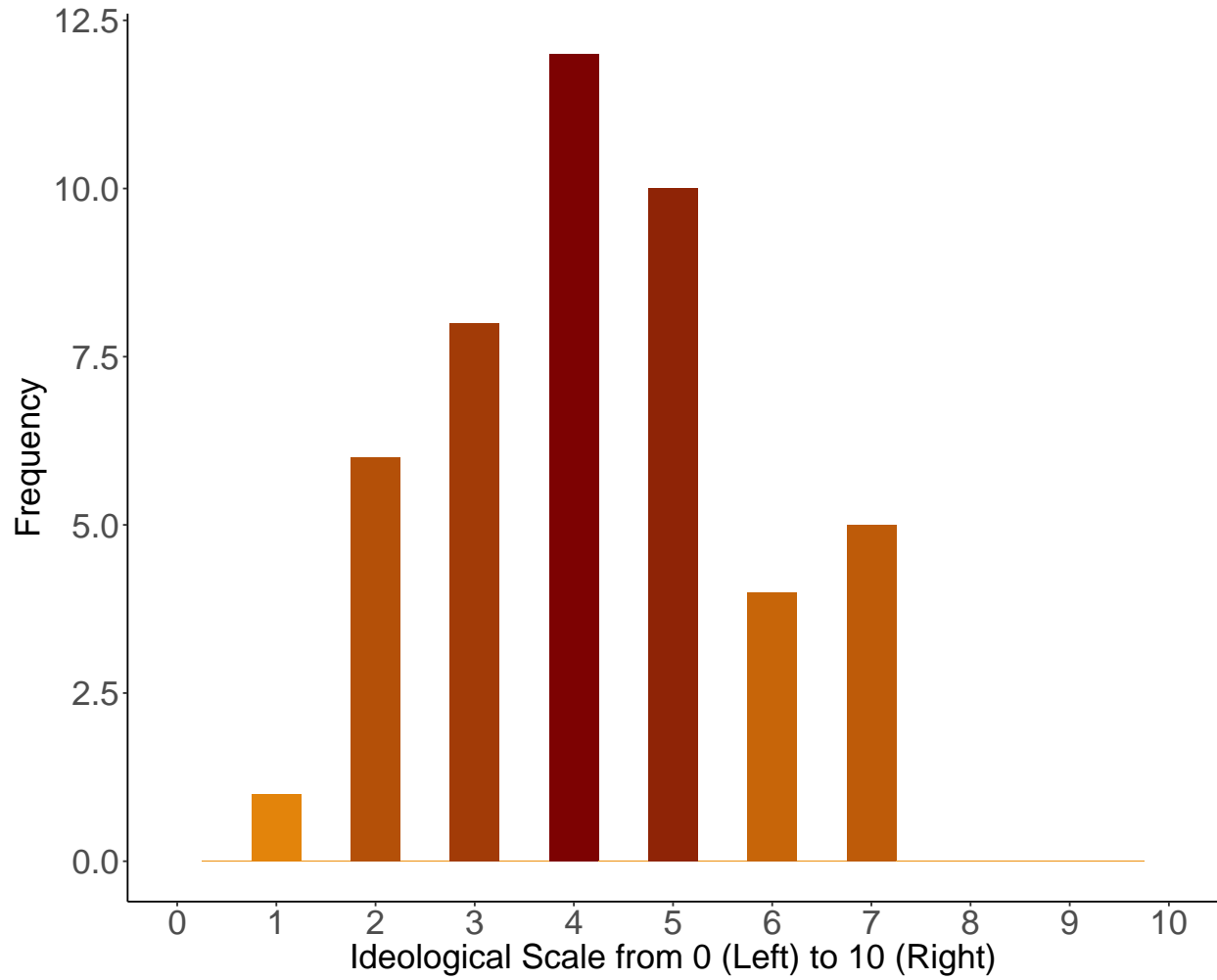
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APPENDIX

center

Figure 1: Ideological Distribution of the Participants



Candidates' Picture



Figure 2: Young Asian Male



Figure 3: Middle Aged Caucasian Male (Election 1)



Figure 4: Young Caucasian Male



Figure 5: Old Black Male



Figure 6: Middle Aged Caucasian Male (Election 2)



Figure 7: Middle Aged Black Female



Figure 8: Middle Aged Caucasian Female



Figure 9: Middle Aged Sikh Male

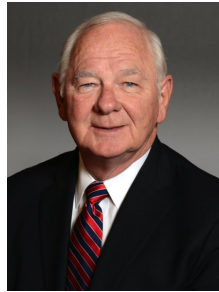


Figure 10: Old Caucasian Male



Figure 11: Middle Aged Caucasian Male (Election 3)



Figure 12: Young Caucasian Female



Figure 13: Old Caucasian Female