Voting and Visible Minority Candidates in Canada:
An Experimental Investigation

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Abstract: Despite the underrepresentation of visible minorities in Canadian politics, and the extensive research detailing the electoral effects of prejudice in the United States and Europe, there is little evidence of this in Canada. This experiment addresses gaps in current research by eliminating ignorance of candidates as an explanation, providing choice between candidates, and testing the effect of party labels. The results show a striking – and positive – effect of visible minority status on vote choice. A large part of this effect is connected to need for cognition, suggesting that socially desirable effects are not limited to reducing prejudice but may actually benefit visible minority candidates.

Introduction

The numbers and influence of visible minority citizens in Canada are growing, both in terms of percentage of the population (Belanger and Malenfant 2005) and as candidates for office (Black 2009). Visible minorities are underrepresented in terms of their political success (Black 2009), and it is generally accepted that racial dynamics structure the social (Reitz and Banerjee 2007) and media (Tolley 2011) context of politics. Yet there is essentially no evidence of the direct impact of race or ethnicity on electoral politics in Canada.

If visible minority status is an important psychological category for Canadians, we should expect it have a strong impact on electoral choice for two reasons. First, attitudes toward social groups – rather than, say, opinions about policy – are a primary driver of political choice (Converse 1964, Sniderman Brody and Tetlock 1991, Green Schickler and Palmquist 2004). Second, the ethnicity of candidates is an obvious way for citizens to engage those attitudes toward social groups in their political choices. Candidate demographics are a simple and easy-to-use cognitive heuristic (Popkin 1991, Cutler 2002).

In the United States there is a long research history demonstrating the impact of race on political choices, both in terms of policy (Sears, Citrin, and Kosterman 1987) and vote choice (Key 1949). Prejudice of white voters toward minority candidates is in many ways the norm (Reeves 1997, Highton 2004). In addition, literature related to Latino candidates (Kam 2007) shows essentially the same effects of prejudice. European evidence is more limited (Saggar 1998, Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2010), but given the scale of prejudice (Sniderman 2000, 2007) and the rise of far right parties, it would be difficult to imagine racialized candidates not being penalized.

In Canada, however, there is remarkably little evidence of the influence of race or ethnicity on political opinions and decisions. Black and Erickson's (2006) study of federal election results, for example, found no evidence that visible minority candidates are disadvantaged electorally, and also no evidence such candidates they need better qualifications to succeed (*per* the "compensation" hypothesis). However, there are competing explanations for this null finding. It may be that Canada is simply a more tolerant society than others – certainly this is suggested by experimental studies that look at non-electoral settings, such as support for welfare benefits, and still find little evidence of discrimination (Harrel et al. 2012). On the other hand, the domination of Canadian politics by the Prime Minister and other party leaders is well known (Clarke et al., 1979 Savoie 1999), though there is some debate about local campaigns and candidates (Blais et al. 2003, Eagles 2004). Citizens may not know if their local candidate is a minority, either because they know very little about politics, or because they know quite a bit and realise that in Canada their local candidate is not important. Ignorance, rather than tolerance, may be at work. There is one Canadian study on municipal politics that addresses this point by using experimental methods, but even when presented with obviously non-white candidates, there was still no evidence of white citizens displaying prejudice (Bird 2011).

This study tries to disentangle several of these influences, address weaknesses of previous research, and also examine factors that should moderate the impact of candidate race. By presenting participants with information about candidates directly, this experimental study avoids the possibility that participants are simply ignorant of their local candidates, as citizens in Black's research may be. If they do not display prejudice, it is not because they are not aware of the candidate's ethnicity. In addition, the two experimental studies directly addressing this issue - Bird (2011) and Kam (2007) - did not ask participants to choose between candidates; rather, they simply measured levels of support for a single candidate. Not only is this not a realistic representation of the electoral process, it is likely to increase social desirability effects since participants must actively reject a candidate instead of simple choosing different plausible candidate. The current study presents participants with a pair of candidates and asks which they would vote for. In addition, the only Canadian study of this kind (Bird 2011) focused on municipal politics, and so did not make use of party labels. By manipulating the presence of party labels, this experiment tests the interaction of partisanship and the impact of visible minority candidates, as well as interactions with specific parties.

Methodology

The experiment is a choice between two fictional candidates. Participants are presented with two short candidate biographies and asked "Which Candidate would you vote for? The candidate names are experimentally manipulated, with either two broadly "white" names (John Hawkes, Arthur Dorre), or a white name and an obviously visible minority name (John Hawkes, Satveer Chaudhary). Specifically, the visible minority name is Indian but does not show clear religious origins. This name was chosen because South Asian candidates are quite common in Canadian politics (Siemiatycki 2011), which, therefore, increases the plausibility of the candidate and the validity of the experiment. South Asian was also the ethnicity used in the Bird study, enabling comparison. Examples of the biographies are provided in Fig. 1 below.

In addition to manipulating the perceived ethnicity of the candidates, the experiment also manipulates the candidate's party labels. There is good reason to think that party labels will moderate the effects of visible minority status – it has long been well known that party identification is the strongest single predictor of vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960, Johnston 2006), and so a lack of party labels clearly diminishes the external validity of the experiment. In addition, Kam (2005) found effects for race heuristics without party labels but no effects when partisanship was included, and Bailenson et al. (2008) found candidate appearance effects were attenuated by partisanship. Therefore, this experiment varies whether or not the candidate's party is stated. Since there may be an interaction between visible minority status and a specific party, such as the Liberal Party, the experiment also manipulates which party label is applied to the visible minority candidate. This produces three party conditions – Liberal/Conservative, Conservative/Liberal, and No Party Labels -- and two visible minority conditions – two white candidates, or one white candidate and one visible minority candidates -- for a total of six cells. The factor structure is illustrated in Table 1.

Figure 1: Candidate Biographies with experimental manipulations bolded in brackets

Candidate 1
John Hawkes is an entrepreneur, founder of the local company Allsort Inc. Despite a busy schedule Mr. Hawkes still finds time to volunteer with a number of organizations, including Kids Help Phone, and served as Vice Chair of the Municipal Safety Committee. **(John Hawkes is running for the Conservative Party/Liberal Party/Sentence deleted).**

Candidate 2
(Satveer Chaudhary/Authur Dorre) is an active local businessman, who was recently honoured as the Businessman of the Year for his many contributions. A strong believer in volunteering, Mr. Chaudhary is a volunteer sports coach, and is the fundraising Chair for the Hospital Foundation. **(Satveer Chaudhary is running for the Liberal Party/Conservative Party/Sentence deleted)**

Which Candidate would you vote for?

Since party and visible minority status already produce six cells, concerns about required sample size prohibited the additional manipulation of the bio placement. In other words, it is Candidate 2 whose visible minority status varies – Candidate 1 is always white. Therefore, the candidate biographies are deliberately written as brief and non-controversial, to avoid possible interactions with the experimental manipulations.

The experiment also avoids using pictures of candidates. While recent Canadian research has used photographs (Harrel et al 2012), there is a considerable amount of research that shows that the facial features candidates can have significant effects (Sigelman, Sigleman and Flower 1987, Bailenson et al. 2008) . Since matching the "quality" levels of the manipulated white and non-white candidates on various dimensions is difficult, not using pictures avoids this issue.

The participants are drawn from an undergraduate research participant pool at an Ontario university. The pool is composed of four second-year classes who were notified at the beginning of term that they would have a chance to participate in studies, for which they will receive extra credit. The survey was administered online. Each participant received a recruitment email with a link to the online survey, which they could complete at a time and place of their choosing. There were 491 students in the pool, of which 358 responded to the present study, for a participation rate of 72.9%. 11 participants did not answer the main dependant variable question, and so have been dropped from the analysis.

Table 1: Vote Choice by Party and Candidate Condition

	Liberal/ Conservative	Conservative/ Liberal	No Party Labels
Candidate 2 White	John Hawkes: 61% (39) Arthur Dorre: 39% (25)	John Hawkes: 28% (17) Arthur Dorre: 72% (44)	John Hawkes: 51% (17) Arthur Dorre: 49% (44)
Candidate 2 Visible Minority	John Hawkes: 59% (32) Satveer Chaudhary: 41% (22)	John Hawkes: 28% (14) Satveer Chaudhary: 72% (36)	John Hawkes: 32% (18) Satveer Chaudhary: 68% (39)

Note: Main cell entries are candidate vote shares within cells, expressed as percentages and frequencies (in parentheses).

Results

The most surprising result is obvious even from the crosstab - visible minority status does not diminish support, and without party labels it increases support quite dramatically. Where party labels are present, visible minority status has essentially no impact on the percentage of votes Candidate 1 (John Hawkes) receives. This is the case regardless of which party the visible minority belongs to, suggesting there is no interaction between party and visible minority status. Without party labels there is a very large impact of visible minority status. Surprisingly, from the perspective of American and European findings, this impact is actually positive – participants are much more likely to support the visible minority Candidate 2 (Satveer Chaudary) than the white Candidate 2 (Arthur Dorre). When both candidates are white with no party labels, the choice is 49%-51%, but when one candidate is south Asian, the result is 68%-32%, a gap of 36%.

To examine these results in more detail, a logistic regression is used. The dependent variable is support for Candidate 1 (Hawkes), who does not vary on visible minority status. Interaction terms between party and visible minority status are included. Conservative party status is negatively correlated with support, suggesting that the sample has anti-Conservative preferences. The *p*-values of the interaction terms are not statistically significant, however, the significance of interaction terms cannot be reliably determined this way (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006). Given that there certainly appears to be an interaction in the cross-tabulation, this deserves further investigation.

Table 2: Logistic Regression: Modeling Vote for Candidate 1

Variables	Coef.	P>z
C1 Lib	0.411896	0.256
C1 Con	-0.9837661	0.01
C2 Vismin	-0.8059797	0.035
C1Con_vmcan	0.8124944	0.156
C1Lib_Vismin	0.7359873	0.171
_cons	0.0327898	0.898

Next, predicted values are generated using the Clarify program (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2003). These results in Fig. 4 bear out the expectations generated by previous research, and are consistent with the cross tabs – when political party labels are present, visible minority status makes little or no difference in vote choices. Given the strength of partisan effects generally, this is not surprising. Moreover, it confirms Kam's (2007) results, which showed effects from candidate race without party cues, but no race effects when party labels were applied. However, without political party labels there is a dramatic difference between support for the white and visible minority candidates. In this case, the predicted probability of a vote for Candidate 1 is 0.51 when Candidate 2 is white, but only .32 when Candidate 2 is a visible minority. This result is surprising not just because of its size, but because of its direction. Not only is no prejudice displayed, there is actually a strong preference for the visible minority candidate. To put the size of this effect in context, here the marginal effect of visible minority status without party labels (.32) is nearly as large as the impact of party where both candidates are white (.27). Why would there be such a strong positive effect? Several possible explanations are explored in the next section.

Fig. 4 Predicted values for support of White and Visible Minority Candidates by Party Condition
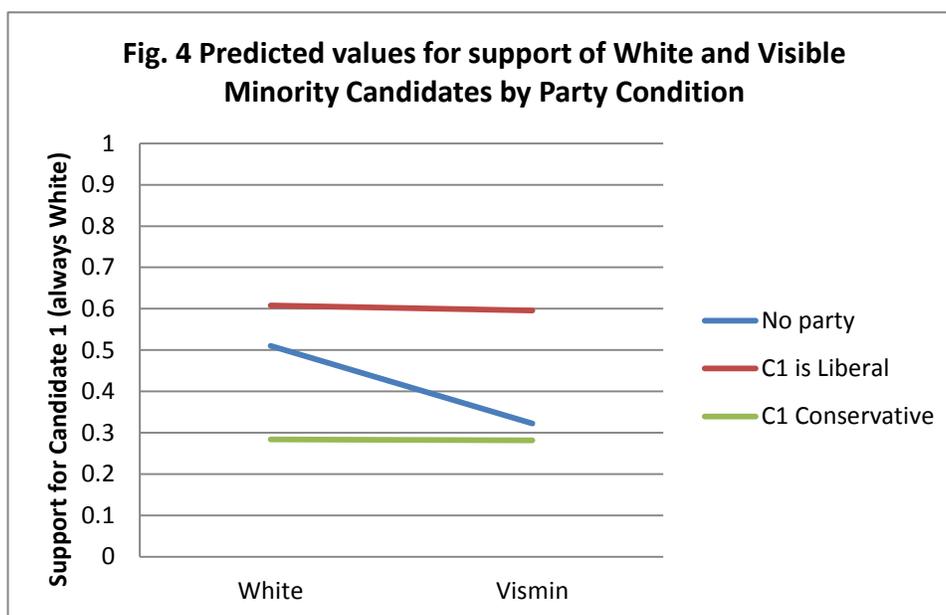
Possible explanations: Partisanship, Ideology, Visible Minority Participants, Political Knowledge, Need for Cognition

The puzzle here is why participants displayed such as strong preference for the visible minority candidate. This is contrary to current research – to my knowledge there are no studies which show racialization as a positive influence among white voters. Four possible explanations will be explored – partisanship, ideology, political attentiveness or knowledge, and need for cognition.

The first explanation may be the partisan identities of the participants. Since the effect of party labels is strong, and the impact of visible minority status only emerges in their absence, visible minority status may be a heuristic for party labels. There are a number of reasons to

expect that partisans of the Liberal Party and NDP are more likely to prefer a visible minority candidate. For example, participants may wish to express their partisan preferences and guess that the visible minority candidate is more likely to be a Liberal. Given the historical association of multiculturalism with the Liberal Party of Canada, this would not be an unreasonable assumption. Alternatively, partisans of left parties could simply have policy or social outcomes they wish to express or enact – they may want to elect a visible minority candidate because they believe that diversity of representation is good. The number of partisan identifiers in the sample is not insignificant – there are 84 Conservative, 141 Liberal, and 55 NDP partisan identifiers out of the total of 358 participants. While the survey also asked about the Green Party and the Bloc Quebecois, these parties had few partisans. To explore this possible explanation, the partisan identification of participants as Conservatives, Liberals, and NDP are included in the logit model, as well as two and three way interactions with the party of the candidates and visible minority status of the candidate. In addition, NDP and Liberal Party supporters were combined in a separate model. Not surprisingly, partisanship is an excellent predictor of support when the candidates have party labels (results not reported). However, without party labels none of the partisan variables is statistically significant, showing no support for the partisan heuristic explanation.

A related possibility may be that visible minority status is an ideological heuristic, rather than a partisan one. McDermott (1998) argues that voters make use of ideological stereotypes as heuristics. She finds that both Black and female candidates are perceived as more left-wing than white or male candidates, and this makes left of centre voters more likely to support them. If visible minority candidates in Canada are also perceived as more left-wing than white candidates, then this might function as an ideological heuristic.

The survey contains two questions on perceptions of candidate ideology, repeated for both candidates that the participant saw. The first question asked, "do you think that this candidate is more left-wing or more right-wing" on a seven point scale. This question also included an example definition, noting that "often we say that a candidate is more right-wing, such as preferring lower taxes, or more left-wing, such as preferring more spending". The second question was also a seven point scale, asking, "do you think this candidate is more right-wing or more left-wing than other candidates of their own party." These questions were then combined into a single 14 point scale. However, when included in the logit model, the variable for perceptions of candidate ideology is also not significant, suggesting that the preference for the visible minority candidate is not the result of an ideological heuristic (results not reported). When perceptions of ideology of the candidate and partisanship of the voter were combined there were similar null findings.

Rather than ideology or partisanship, the result could be at least partially explained by the social identities of participants themselves. Just as there is evidence that female (Dolan and Sanbonmatsu 2009) or black voters are more likely to support candidates with the same social identity, we might expect analogous results here. Of course, the identity issues here are complex, but there are 54 visible minority participants in the sample (defined here as students who identified as at least one of Aboriginal, Asian, Black, African Canadian or Caribbean Canadian, Hispanic or South American, or South Asian). The visible minority status of the participant as a dichotomous variable was not statistically significant, although this may be because of the small number of visible minority students.

Two further explanatory variables are suggested by the literature on heuristics and cognitive psychology: political attentiveness or knowledge, and need for cognition. In general, heuristic use increases with the difficulty of decisions and decreases with more knowledge, time, or interest. Citizens with less political knowledge in general tend to rely more on simpler party cues and less on more sophisticated issue related values (Kam 2005). Circumstances may also increase heuristic use, such as if the public good in question is unfamiliar (Schläpfer, Schmitt, and Roschewitz 2008), or the candidates under evaluation are new and unfamiliar, such as during American primaries (Popkin 1991, Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Similarly, candidate appearance is more likely to be used by the less politically sophisticated (Lau and Redlawsk (2006), and need for cognition is negatively correlated with the use of simple cues (Haugevault and Petty 1992) and stereotyping more specifically (Carter et al 2006). At a general level the pattern is clear – citizens use heuristics, and simpler heuristics, when they have less knowledge or interest. The expectation generated by the research is that we should expect the influence of party and visible minority cues to be negatively correlated with political interest, knowledge, and need for cognition.

One piece of research is particularly relevant – Cindy Kam's (2005) study comparing the relative influence of need for cognition and what she calls "political awareness" on the influence of party cues. Political awareness is measured as objective political knowledge about institutions and political figures. She considers this "domain specific" interest, which should moderate the use of heuristics. People with low levels of political awareness should be more likely to use cues such as party labels, and people with high levels of political awareness should be less influenced by simple cues and more influenced by issues. Using an experiment that measured support for a policy discussed in a newspaper article, and manipulating party support for the policy, Kam (2005) found that higher levels of political awareness were correlated with less reliance on party cues, but not with need for cognition. This study has three relevant sets of questions – objective political knowledge or political awareness, media use and political discussion, and need for cognition.

The measure for political awareness is similar to Kam's, with four questions about institutions and political figures, modified to fit the Canadian political system. These questions are combined to form a four point scale. While Kam (2005) finds that political awareness is negatively correlated with use of party cues, nonetheless there is no support for her arguments here – the composite political awareness variable is not statistically significant in the logit model.

A second set of questions suggested by heuristics literature, political interest, is measured by media consumption and discussion related to politics. Two questions ask about how many times per week participants read the news on the internet, or watch the news on TV. While surveys often ask about newspapers, it was expected that in this sample the amount of newspaper use would be very small. A third question asks how often participants discussed politics over the internet. None of these questions were statistically significant, nor was a combined scale.

Need for Cognition and Social Desirability Bias
While at first the literature on heuristics and cognitive psychology seems to suggest that the use of cues should be negatively correlated with need for cognition, this is complicated by social desirability bias. I argue that the interpretation and use of cues to model socially desirable behaviour is actually cognitively demanding, and so the positive impact of racial cues should be related to high levels of need for cognition.

Need for cognition is a widely used concept in cognitive psychology, and a key part of dual process theories of persuasion. This concept taps into the fact that individuals vary in the extent that they generally enjoy or are motivated to think. Interestingly, the disposition is uncorrelated with many other measures, such as gender and income, and has only a weak correlation with education. Need for cognition is motivation to think, rather than ability – it does not imply that people will think better or more rationally, just that they will think more (Petty et al. 2009). This variation in motivation to think leads to differences in how people are persuaded or make decisions. Dual process theory argues that the content of a message and the characteristics or source of a message may have varied effects. People with low need for cognition tend to make their decisions based on the characteristics of the message source, such as credibility and attractiveness. People with high need for cognition are likely to be more influenced by the content of the message or information itself, and less by the characteristics of the source (Petty and Cacioppo 1984). As part of dual process theory, need for cognition fits well with research on political heuristics – both suggest that people who think less will be more likely to be influenced by simple cues, and those who think more will be more influenced by issues or things that require more complex reasoning.

Although at first glance this suggests that the influence of candidate race or ethnicity should be a simple cue connected to low need for cognition, citizens may be using race in ways that require substantial amounts of cognition. Certainly it is well established that people often consider the social desirability of the answers they give (Berinsky 1999, Krysan 1998, McConahay 1986). However, this process of providing socially desirable answers may well be more cognitively demanding than simple responding to the question without self-reflection. In the context of the study, rather than simply noticing the race of the candidate and considering their own feelings and opinions, the participant must also consider the social implications of their answer, and perhaps the likelihood that someone will judge their answer. This implies that people with higher need for cognition actually may be more likely to support visible minority candidates than people with lower levels of need for cognition.

To evaluate the impact of need for cognition, the survey contained two questions from Petty and Cacioppo's battery (1984), and a five-point scale that asks participants to reply if the statement was "very characteristic of them" or "very uncharacteristic of them". The two questions provided reversed answer orders – "I enjoy complex problems" and "thinking is not my idea of fun". These questions were combined into a single scale, and included in the logit model discussed above. The results show that the effect of need for cognition on the impact of visible minority status is negative and highly statistically significant. Higher need for cognition is correlated with a greater likelihood of support for Candidate 2, who varied on visible minority status.

**Fig. 5. Logistic Regression: Likelihood of Vote
for Candidate 1, Including Need for Cognition**

Dependant Variables	Coef.	P>z	
C1 Lib	0.1904411	0.592	
C1 Con	-1.251716	0.001	***
C2 Vismin	-1.073819	0.004	**
C1Con_vmcan	1.013983	0.076	
C1Lib_Vismin	1.055238	0.049	*
Needcog	-1.887974	0.009	**
_cons	1.711738	0.003	**

In Fig. 6 I split the sample at the mean of the need for cognition variable, and plot the predicted values generated using Clarify. While the plot lines show essentially no difference when the candidates have party labels, without party labels the high and low need for cognition groups clearly diverge. In fact, the effect of visible minority candidate status is about three times larger for high need for cognition participants than for low need for cognition participants.

Fig. 6 Need for Cognition and Visible Minority Status - No Party Lables
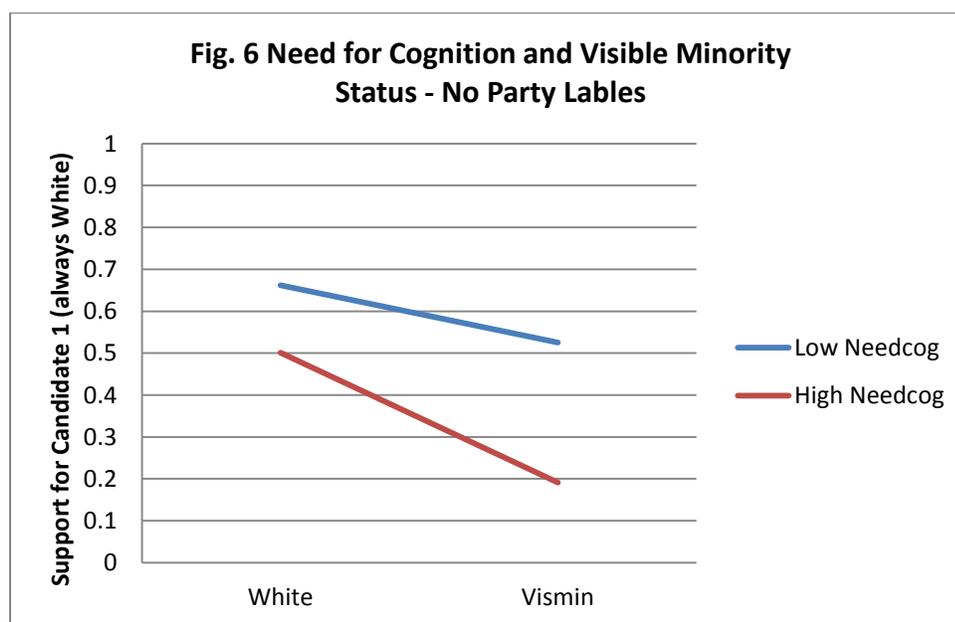
These results support the hypothesis that supporting the visible minority candidate for reasons of social desirability bias requires relatively high levels of cognition. Unlike Kam's finding (2005), here, need for cognition has a large and significant impact on political choice. Specifically, participants who think more are also more likely to be influenced by the visible minority cue, and more specifically that they are more likely to support a visible minority candidate. Rather than being a "simple" cue, the way candidate demographics are usually

conceived (Cutler 2002), this evidence suggests that the impact of racialization on support for candidates is actually relatively sophisticated and cognitively demanding.

Social Desirability Bias and Self-Deception

Despite my use of the term social desirability, I argue that these results also suggest that participants are being honest in their evaluations, rather than being deceptive. It is important to recognise that Petty and Cacioppo (1982) actually suggest that need for cognition is unrelated to social desirability, and Osberg *(*1987) found need for cognition to be negatively correlated with public-self consciousness and social anxiety. Given that, such a strong correlation between need for cognition and the "socially desirable" candidate is surprising.

The conflict between this study and previous results can be explained by the fact that social desirability is not one-dimensional. Psychological research has identified two distinct factors in social desirability bias – impression management and self-deception (Paulhus 1991). The first, impression management, is what we typically think of as social desirability bias – self-conscious behaviour modification for a particular audience to avoid social sanction or improve status. This is often measured by questions like "would you lie about your qualifications if you really needed the job". The second factor is self-deception - rather than being a conscious modification for the sake of others, it is focused on an "honest but overly optimistic self-evaluation" (Paulhus 1991: 22). This is connected with personality traits such as optimism and self-esteem. Hippel, Lakin and Shakarchi found that need for cognition was positively correlated with the Self-Deception subscale of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR-SD; 1991). Since need for cognition is connected to self-deception, it seems likely that the participants in this study are being overly optimistic, rather than deliberately deceptive.

In addition, this study goes to considerable lengths to avoid social pressure. Certainly a computer-based study seems less likely to induce social desirability bias than face-to-face or phone interviews. The survey is also done online, likely on the participants' personal computer at home, rather than in a laboratory. Moreover, the study design presents a choice between two plausible candidates, and therefore does not require blanket acceptance or rejection of a candidate in the way that Bird's (2011) study does. The design provides a socially acceptable reason to chose the well qualified alternative white candidate, rather than the visible minority candidate. Nor does the study prime racism, or emphasize it in any way other than through the candidate names – recall that no picture was provided. Finally, the design reiterated that the survey was anonymous – in fact, the sentence immediately before the "vote" question reminded participants that their answers could not be associated with any identifying information.   While these measures are not foolproof, they provide reasons to expect less socially desirable behaviour than other studies and standard surveys such as the CES.

As Blinder, Ivarsflaren, and Ford (2005) argue, anti-racist norms have a force all their own - they are not simply a lack of prejudice. Canadians know they are not supposed to be racist. By choosing a visible minority candidate, they are living up to the values they believe they should, rather than faking them for an external audience. This is, admittedly, an optimistic interpretation. A different perspective might be that this evidence shows a real barrier to anti-racism, in that it is difficult to solve a problem that people do not believe they have. In addition, of course, this is not a representative sample – these participants are likely to be less prejudiced than average if only because they are young and well educated.

Nonetheless, while we might hope for citizens who are truly colour-blind, and evaluate candidates on their opinions and abilities rather than their origins, these findings suggest that visible minorities can actually benefit from their status. High need for cognition citizens ought to be more likely to support visible minority candidates, regardless – those that are prejudiced will act as less prejudiced, and those that are tolerant will still be more likely to support visible minority candidates. In addition, this effect is not simply a façade, a response given to avoid social censure. We have some reason to think that the link is really between need for cognition and self-deception, rather than appearance management. If people are overly optimistic in their self-evaluations, at least they accept anti-racist norms and aspire to live up to them.

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