

CANDIDATE –CENTERED POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW OF CANDIDATES’ EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

The participation from the voters determines the propensity of the candidate to win the election. Nevertheless, various arguments from the scholars and political researchers frequently question the main mechanism or approach depicted as a moving body to get more voters to vote in the election. This central issue of this paper is on the candidate-centered politics in motivating participation among voters. This paper also finds that both physical appearances and character traits contribute to the election results.

Men judge generally made by the eye than by the hand, because belongs to everybody to see you, but too few to come in touch with you. Every one sees what you appear to be, few really know what you are.” – Machiavelli

Keywords: candidate traits, candidate evaluation, voter, physical appearances, image-based evaluation

INTRODUCTION

In an electoral campaign, candidates promise citizens that they will do certain things in office yet their promises are not in practice binding (Terai, 2005). Notwithstanding, the politicians frequently break their words or their words just become lip-service ó promises yet to be fulfilled. In a primary election, registered voters in a jurisdiction select a candidate from various political parties (Moreno & Puy, 2009). Thus, campaign promises are not wholly irrelevant but it is undeniable act that many voters profess to cast ballots for ðthe person, not the partyö (Hayes, 2008). During this period, trait illustrates the first impression of candidatesø character and personality. But traits perceptions mean different things to different voters (Peterson 2005). Traits impressions influence candidate evaluation in a straightforward manner (Goren 2007). As Funk (1999) presents in his theoretical review research, the more positively someone rates a candidate on any single dimension of character, the more positive her global evaluation of him will be (Goren, 2007). In essence, when voters evaluate, for trait reason, they will identify and capture the dominant and obstructive elements of the candidate that may impact voters. For instance, the element of competency of the candidate considered as a human trait or quality is defined as possession of required skill, knowledge, qualification or capacity (Riggio & Riggio, 2010).

To make the statement acceptable, people vote candidates' attitudes and value rather than their (individual) interest, necessarily leads to electoral outcomes that are normatively inferior (Brennan, 2008). This kind of voting behavior is reflecting the individual's expression of opinion about the candidate as well as the issue contested. This would be explained by focusing on candidate, individuals vote due to expressing themselves about the candidate (Copeland & Laband, 2002) and not because they expect to alter the election results. The argument is very simple by noting that voters would draw the line between acceptable candidate and unacceptable candidates (Brauns & Sanver, 2009). Why is it happening? Through his empirical question in the assessment of heterogeneity of the candidate's evaluation, Peterson (2005) mentioned about voter's determination in the assessments of a candidate's character traits. He found that the character traits of the candidate may influence voters to evaluate.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to share the voter's evaluation in which voters vote according to, or either for or for both external and intrinsic characters of the candidate. To this aim, the paper is organized as follows. First is clarifying the issue of candidate-centered politics. Second is pointing out the evaluation of candidate's character and personality traits by determining the particular criteria that may affect voters. Here, voters choose candidates that are able to depict the positive intrinsic characters to gain more votes. Next is to determine whether physical appearance may be considered as political attractiveness among the voters. Throughout many primary elections, candidates now have increasingly used their appearances to shuttle themselves into voter's heart. Given this structure, I finally come out with the section that tables other criteria that may affect the voter's propensity of voting. The central question of this paper is whether more and better candidate-centered politics can increase voter's participation.

Thus, legend says that Harun Arrashid, the great caliph in "The Thousand and One Nights", used to walk about the crowded streets of Baghdad at night, to find out whether his people loved or hated him. In doing so, he reacted to the need of knowing what people think about him. Nowadays, this same impulse is what has driven politicians to be concerned with their image in public opinion polls.

CANDIDATE-CENTERED POLITICS

Again, Hayes (2008) presents that many voters profess to cast ballot for "the person, not the party". The person who has been nominated as a candidate extremely runs the campaign election to get more voters. This argument has been studied by many scholars before and a few of them have called their studies as the "candidate-centered voting". The word voting is depicted as a conventional act of the citizens in electing the candidates based on their personal perception. However, Peterson (2008) observed that voters evaluate candidates like they evaluate other people they encounter. Due to this scenario, many research have focused on the factors to tell us whether people see candidates with certain characteristics to be capable of governing or otherwise (Dolan, 2010). For example skills in handling a broad set of issues, compassion, competence, etc. The arguments about "Candidate-Centered Politics" have been debated by Besley &

Coate in 1997 (Moreno & Puy 2009) and are still one of the influences in voting among the voters on the candidate (Green 2009).

In this paper, I put candidates' personal qualities to explain their influence on vote choice of many elections. The election presents as a stage of competing for more ballots papers from voters. The concern about the 'personalization' of the candidate's image is an important asset that usually plays an important role in the voters' decision on whom to vote for. This is due to people or voters who do not simply base their vote on ideological aspects (Andina-Diaz, 2006) but rather take the professional qualifications, honesty, integrity or charisma of the candidate (Andina-Diaz, 2006a, Green 2009, Fields & Bocarnea 2008, Brennan 2008) into account, when deciding for whom to cast their roles. Analyzing number of research done, it can be said that politicians should be aware of their public images, and in fact they are. The image-based evaluation more or less contributes to the electoral outcomes of the candidates.

CANDIDATE: CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY TRAITS EVALUATION

Peterson (2005) strongly emphasized in his research study that character traits are one of a few central components and one of the number of influences (Hayes 2008) of voters' choice. In other words it means that voters see and observe candidates' personal characteristics, both inside and out, as relevant. In addition to the statement by Peterson, the propensity of voting among voters is determined by the character traits of the candidate. What does a candidate own? Scholar's statement is simple. Campbell, Converse, Miller & Miller (1960) and Kinder (1986) unanimously agreed that scholars have long recognized that character matters to voters (Goren 2007). As agreed by Merola and Zechmeister (2009), both of them present that an individual typically selects a candidate on the basis of candidate's character traits. In Hayes (2008), respondents have noted a candidate 'has the people's interest at heart' or 'has a nice personality' reflecting a personality-based evaluation of a candidate. Thus, character traits of the candidate do matter!

Obviously, the perceptions of candidates' character traits (Hayes 2008) by the voters are believed to have a strong influence on voting. Several character traits chosen include being leaders, caring and compassionate, of high moral and decent, honest and trustworthy. The same approach was applied by Peterson (2005), who considers the 'candidate as a person' in regards to the general view of the quality of the candidate's character. He added other personality traits such as honesty, integrity, intelligent, morality and kindness. Charismatic and great political skills (Fields and Bocarnea 2008) such as having powerful communication skill can also become a great factor in the election outcome (Journalism 2008). Moreover, Brennan (2008) added that candidate's well-spoken also leads to the electoral outcomes as well. As a result, those characters and attitudes by which candidates are evaluated will more likely to be affected by voters who pay more attention to their political involvement.

More and more studies conducted have demonstrated that perceptions of candidates' character traits matter in voters' choice. I strongly agree that politics is a predominantly expressive arena for the candidates in tackling the voters' support. In this

case, voters have the opportunity to visualize candidates with the particular character of the personality traits. They (voters) have chosen and captured the dominant and obstructive personality traits among the candidates. Thus, Goren (2007) specifically stated in his research finding that voters made judgments about four personality traits as follows:

Table 1: Four Personality Traits by Goren

Personality traits	Remarks
Competence Impression	Reflects beliefs about the candidate's intelligence and knowledge
Leadership Impression	Represents belief about the candidate's ability to serve effectively
Integrity Impression	Judgments about candidate trust and morality
Empathy Impression	Reflects feelings about a candidate's ability to understand and connect with ordinary people

As Table 1 shows, judgment made by the voters through the personality traits will put more reflection on the Election Day. This is considered as image-based evaluations by Hayes (2008) of the candidate that will exert a larger influence on vote choice. The image-based evaluation including "candidate leadership qualities", "candidate competency qualities", "candidate integrity qualities" and "candidate empathy qualities". Among the responses which fall into personal characteristics commented by Peterson (2005) and his contributions in the impressions of candidate's activities include being intelligent, having integrity and honesty in evaluating and rating the candidate. For instance, the data taken from ANES (American National Election Study) shows that scholars demonstrate that voters indeed rely more on traits and issues when they are feeling anxious and less on party identification, a longer standing attitude (Merola & Zechmeister 2009). The findings through those data have been supported by Kinder (1986), Markus (1982), Miller & Miller (1976), Miller & Shanks (1996) and Miller et.al (1986) and that the number of studies resulted show direct and strong relationship between voters' appraisals of candidate traits and their choices for president.

In 1996, Just et al. and Popkin (1994) examine that citizens may use his (candidate) demographic profile to infer what he is like as a person; they may use details about his personal life ability to run an effective campaign to judge how competent and strong he will be as a leader (Goren 2007). Nevertheless, the less flattering side of the personality of the candidate reflects the voters of the candidate. Voters also noted that a candidate "jokes too much" or "doesn't mean what he says" or candidate has been described as "stupid" or "dumb" or "lacking dignity" (Hayes 2008) counted as the poor personal attraction of the candidate himself. Personal characteristics as mentioned by Miller, Waternberg and Malanchuk (1986) and McGraw and Steenburgen (1995) find that informed and sophisticated voters rely more on the candidate's personal traits for the overall evaluation than unformed voters do (Peterson 2005).

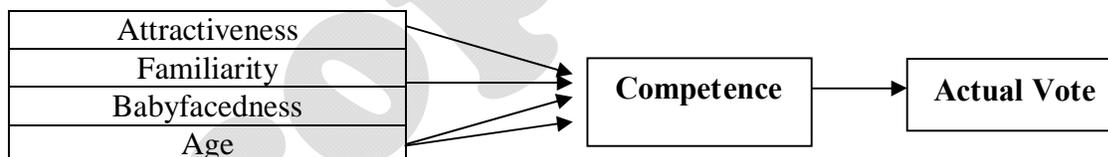
CANDIDATE: PHYSICAL APPEARANCES EVALUATION

As I would have expected, the candidate's physical appearances are also linked to the candidate's character traits. It is because voters do care about candidate's image (Hayes 2008). Image here is described as "somebody" that may portray himself visibly to the public. To be precise, the discussion of this section is demonstrating that the physical appearance of a candidate influences voters. Physical appearance will be an increasingly manipulating reason to vote for a candidate.

In 1995, Zuckerman et al. strongly noted that physical attractiveness is important in judgments of approachability, associated with increased impressions of warmth and agreeableness (Riggio & Riggio 2010). Voters based their judgment of candidate's appearances of competence based on the same facial characteristics and other surface cues (Riggio & Riggio 2010a). Specifically, the more attractive and more familiar the candidate, the more competent the candidate is perceived, which in turn increases the probability that the candidate will win the election (Verhulst, Lodge & Lavine 2010).

Another analysis by Olivola and Todorov shows that attractiveness, familiarity, babyfacedness and age are proximal predictors of vote choices. Thus, the competency of the candidates is measured through their physical projection of themselves for gaining actual vote. Riggio and Riggio (2010) present the findings by Ambady and Rosenthal 1992; Antonakis and Dalgas 2009; Ballew and Todorov 2007; that the excellent review of research by Olivola dan Todorov about the judgments of candidate competence from faces are clearly linked to actual election outcomes.

Figure 1: Competence mediates the effects of attractiveness, familiarity, babyfacedness and age on actual votes by Olivola and Todorov



As found by Baudouin & Tiberghien (2004) and Perrett et. al. (1999) that the precise characteristics may heighten perceptions of facial attractiveness. The interesting question of this section is what are the facial characteristics and expressions that we consider here in making judgments of "competence"? Various answers may explain the situation from various scholars and researchers. The research reviewed by Olivola and Todorov and their own findings suggest that several structural and expressive features of faces documented more positive competence judgments associated with greater jaw angularity and closeness of eyes and eyebrows, and decreased facial roundness (Riggio & Riggio 2010). Such physical features are most common among young to middle aged adult men, and are physical features associated with masculinity (McArthur and Apatow 1983-1984; Senoir et al. 1999). Other findings from research conducted by Olivola and Todorov explore the specific structural facial features that make political candidates

appear more or less competent (Verhulst, Lodge & Lavine 2010a). Again Olivola and Todorov find that faces are perceived as more competent as they become more angular, as the distance between the eyes and eyebrows decreases, and when the cheekbones are higher (Verhulst, Lodge & Lavine 2010b).

For McArthur and Apatow (1983-1984), facial indicators of dominance are also associated with judgments of physical strength (Riggio & Riggio 2010a). Keating et.al, (1981) added that facial features associated with strength and dominance include thinner lips, broad chins, and receding hairlines; facial gestures associated with judgments of greater social dominance, including lowered eyebrows and not smiling. (Riggio & Riggio 2010b). Are those criteria counted? McArthur and Apatow supported by mentioning that facial features associated with weakness are baby-faced features including larger eyes, smaller chin, and soft round face (Riggio & Riggio 2010c). Nevertheless, Brennan (2008) added that voters give credits to the candidates who are charming and good looking. It is important to point out that the scattered findings of the candidate facial features are different for every candidate. Voters may perceive candidates due to their dominant physical appearances that may influence the campaigns. This is the independent manipulation of the election outcomes which however as a minor contribution on the margin of victory.

DO VOTERS REALLY VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATE? OR DO ANY OTHER ISSUES MATTER?

Although many arguments were presented by previous and current scholars and researchers regarding the candidate-centered politics but throughout the years, a number of studies have found that the elements of voting choice include the voters' appraisal of party identification and policy appeal. Instead of voting on the basis of the candidate concerns for the electoral outcomes, party identification and policy, voting reflect the electoral outcomes as well (Verhulst, Lodge and Lavine 2010; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009; Goren 2007; Diaz 2006; Burns, Petalson, Cronin and David 2000, Edward III, Watternberg & Lineberg 2008, Green 2009; Brennan 2008)

Party identification matters, as it directly shapes candidate evaluations and directly shapes them by coloring the character perceptions on which they depend (Funk 1999). As studied consistently by Bibby (2009), party identification has become the major determinant of how people vote. For instance, Cebula (2005) hypothesized in his theoretical study that, the greater the public dissatisfaction with the government (including elected officials), the lower the public expected or perceived on the image of the party. The party image shapes how voters perceive the political parties (Philpot 2004a). Party image can affect not only how people vote, but also whether they choose to engage in the political process at all, who wins and loses in election and also interests represented in the political arena (Philpot 2004b).

How about the issue contested? Do issues alter the electoral outcomes? Are voters aware of the issues highlighted? These questions would explain the odd and extraordinary results. Peterson (2005) emphasized the arguments made by Converse (1994), Krosnick

(1988) and Sniderman et al. (1991) that sophisticated voters rely more on candidates' issue positions and less on perceptions of the candidates' character. What makes voters suddenly alter their direction to issue voting, instead of supporting the party of the candidate? Bibby (2003) says that issue saliency is extremely important in elections. This is due to the situation where a candidate must be perceived favorably by the voters on the issue that is currently important to them. In addition to that scenario, candidates intentionally obscure their position on issue that is important to voters (Burns, Petalson, Cronin & Mableby 2000). Table 2 summarizes the salient categories of voters' decision to vote.

Table 2: The elements of voting choice

Category	Descriptions	Recent arguments
Personal characteristics (voting on the basis of candidate)	Character and background personality traits	Candidate traits
Issue (voting on the basis on the policy)	Stand on the particular policies	Government activity/ philosophy and management
Party Identification	Candidates as party representative	People within party Party characteristics Candidate party connections
Others	Bad for/anti keep in check/cease favoring group or interest Good for/ better for/help to/made up of/ fair to group or interest Others	Group connections Miscellaneous Event unique to one campaign

CONCLUDING REMARKS

How do people really evaluate candidate? Does candidate really affect the propensity of citizens to vote? Do people really evaluate candidate on the basis of the personality traits or physical appearances? It seems fair to say that the conclusion of this paper is that they do. My concluding remarks from the perspective of candidates' characteristics lead voters to perceive some candidates have their dominant traits factor to get more votes. The issue of candidate personality quality and the competency are based on the internal capability of the candidates to project themselves in altering the election

outcome to the winning position. Candidates are struggling and competing among themselves to be the best. Their skills both internal and external traits reflect the perception of the voters upon them. On the other hand, it is fair to mention that both researchers and scholars unanimously have concluded that the three main elements of voting are election's anchor to influence voters to vote. The elements are as follows: voting on the candidates or known as candidate appeal or candidate-centered politics, voting on the basis of party or party identification and voting on the basis of the issue or policy appeal.

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