Recitation: Rational Voters

17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process

Table of contents

- 1. What Explains Ordinary People's Voting Choice
- 2. Facial Competence?

What Explains Ordinary People's Voting Choice

Lecture Materials

- Intellectual History: Columbia School, Michigan School, and others.
- Three Modes of Voting:
 - Issue Voting: voters select politicians with policy platform that reflects voters' policy preferences © ©
 - Retrospective Voting: people make voting decisions based on incumbent politicians' performance ©
 - Identity Voting, Clientism, Vote Buying... ©
- Do ordinary voters cast their ballots based on how good the candidates look?

Facial Competence?

• "Face Competence" is nothing new:



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- Do candidates' appearances have independent impact on voters' choices?
- Is facial competence just a reflection of age, health, personal wealth, competent PR team or interest group endorsement?

- Atkinson et al. 2009 asked participants to rate the facial qualities of a pool of male candidates from 2004 House and 1990-2006 Senate elections.
- Obtained the facial scores of 972 congressional candidates
- Estimated the effect of candidate appearance on vote choice

• How good could a candidiate look?



Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI, 1993-2011)

 $Image\ by\ U.S.\ Senate\ Photographic\ Studio\ -\ Renee\ Bouchard.\ Source: \\ \underline{Wikimedia\ Commons}.\ This\ image\ is\ in\ the\ public\ domain.$

• How ugly could a candidiate look?



Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-MI, 1995-2001)

 $Image\ by\ Department\ of\ Energy.\ Source: \underline{Wikimedia\ Commons}.\ This\ image\ is\ in\ the\ public\ domain.$

• Who was the median?



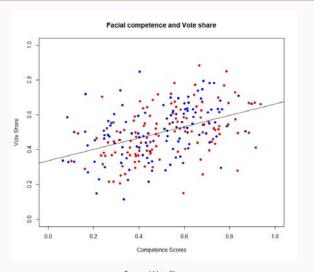
Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)

Image by U.S. Government. Source: Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain.

Atkinson et al. 2009, Findings

- Facial competence and vote-share were correlated
- Conditioning on the election competitiveness and partisanship, the effect of facial quality was particularly pronounced for Senate Challengers.

Atkinson et al. 2009, Findings



Face and Vote Share

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Atkinson et al. 2009, Findings

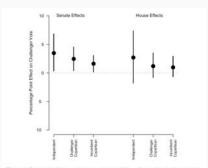


Figure 1. Estimated effect on challenger vote probability of increasing challenger facial competence, by respondent partial antifiliation with 95 percent confidence intervals. Each point represents the estimated difference in challenger vice probability moving the challenger's face from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile, bolding meaning that can at their means, the Cook report at likely going to the incumbent, and the incumbent's face at the chandre medium. The points represent the average estimate areas 500 samples from the clustered coefficient distribution, and the lines the 2.5th percentile to the 97.5th percentile of the sampled effects.

Atkinson, Matthew D., Ryan D. Enos, et al. "Candidate Faces and Election Outcomes: Is the Face-Vote Correlation Caused by Candidate Selection?" Quarterly Journal of Political Science 4, no. 3 (2009): 229–49. © Now Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/.

Implications?

• Is facial quality a viable short-cut?

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