

WINNING VOICES, WINNING FACES: HOW VOICE AND FACE PERCEPTION CAN “PREDICT” ELECTION RESULTS

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RESUMEN

En esta revisión bibliográfica hemos buscado información (2007-2020) acerca de cómo la percepción de la voz y la cara pueden predecir el resultado de las elecciones políticas. Esta información es relevante porque muestra que, al tomar decisiones, los humanos estamos muy influenciados por mecanismos cognitivos simples, comúnmente conocidos como *estereotipos*. Se han utilizado las bases bibliográficas de *PsycInfo* y *Web of Science* y se ha extraído finalmente una selección de 26 artículos.

Los resultados apuntan a la preferencia de los votantes por líderes políticos con un tono de voz grave, tanto en hombres como en mujeres. Dicha preferencia se correlaciona con la percepción de una mayor destreza física, competencia e inteligencia, así como de candidatos con experiencia, mostrando, además, una clara tendencia por aquellas voces que muestran un tono más variable.

En relación a la percepción de rostros, los resultados indican una preferencia por las caras bellas, pues estas correlacionan con la percepción del éxito. Sin embargo, la percepción de la belleza está influenciada por el contexto y la ideología del votante: los rasgos masculinos son preferidos en tiempos de guerra y por aquellos de ideología conservadora, mientras que los rasgos femeninos son preferidos en contextos de paz y por aquellos de ideología liberal. Así, también la belleza pierde peso cuando el votante tiene una opinión bien formada del candidato.

Como conclusión, consideramos que, al tomar decisiones, estamos influenciados por procesos estereotípicos inconscientes relativamente simples. Así, en el campo político la percepción de las voces y las caras muestra una clara relación con el resultado electoral. Sin embargo, se requieren futuros estudios para un conocimiento más preciso.

ABSTRACT

In this bibliographic review we have sought information (2007-2020) about how the perception of voice and face can predict the outcome of political elections. This information is relevant because it shows that, when making decisions, humans are highly influenced by simple cognitive mechanisms, commonly known as stereotypes. The bibliographic databases of *PsycInfo* and *Web of Science* have been used and a selection of 26 articles has finally been extracted.

The results point to voters' preference for political leaders with a low pitched voices, both for men and women. This preference is correlated with the perception of greater physical dexterity, competence and intelligence, as well as experienced candidates, also showing a clear tendency for those voices that show a more variable tone.

Regarding the perception of faces, the results indicate a preference for beautiful faces, as these correlate with the perception of success. However, the perception of beauty is influenced by the context and the ideology of the voter: masculine traits are preferred in times of war by voters of conservative ideology, while feminine traits are preferred in contexts of peace by those of liberal ideology. Thus, beauty also gives ground when the voter has a well-formed opinion of the candidate.

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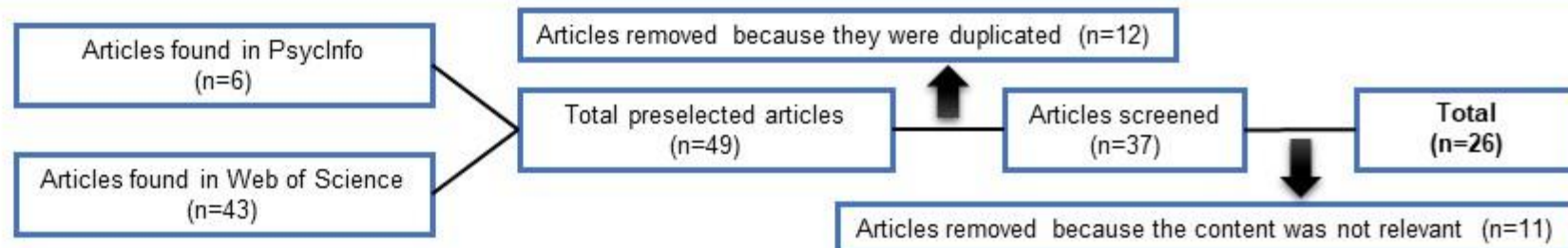
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Introduction

Decision making is a complex cognitive process. Although many pieces of information underlie every important decision, when making decisions that involve people, we are also influenced by simpler cognitive mechanisms, such as stereotypes. Accordingly along those lines, voters can often use a simplifying cognitive strategy to encode the vast amount of data available to them about their politicians. Scientific evidence suggests that even physical aspects such as candidates' voice and face influence voters' decision. Thus, the following literature review will examine how both voices and perceived facial appearances influence voters' final decision. For example, the debate between Nixon and Kennedy in the United States marked a turning point in politics. Those with visual information –television- proclaimed Kennedy a clear winner, while those who only had access to auditory information –radio- declared Nixon as the only winner (Kraus, 1988).

Method

A bibliographic review of scientific articles has been made in the databases of PsycInfo and Web of Science (2007-2020). The search criteria for the voice topic were “voice perception”, “voice pitch”, “pitch variability”, crossed with: “elections”, “voting”, “political candidates”, “presidential election”. The search criteria for the facial appearance topic were “nonverbal communication”, “facial appearance”, “competence”, “beauty”, crossed with: “elections” y “political candidates”. *See references in independent annex.



Results and Discussion

Voice pitch

- Low frequency voices correlate with success in elections. (Klofstad et al., 2015)
- Candidates with low pitched voices are more successful against male than female opponents (Klofstad et al., 2016).
- Low pitched voices are related to the testosterone level and to the perception of competition, physical dexterity, integrity and leadership (Tigue et al., 2012).
- Preference for candidates aged between 40 and 50 years when the tone of voice is lower. (Klofstad et al., 2015)
- Preference for specific candidates' voice frequency depending on voter's social context and ideology. (Lautsen et al., 2015).
- Lower pitched voices have a greater chance of winning if they have more variability. (Pavela et al., 2017).

Facial appearance

- Facial appearance correlates with election results (Little et al., 2007).
- The perception of beauty correlates with success (Berggren et al., 2010).
- Winning faces depend on context and ideology. (Lautsen et al., 2015).
- Facial appearance gives ground when the voter knows the candidate better. (Lawson et al., 2010).



Examples of stimuli used by Antonakis et al. (2009). Predictions based solely on photographs predicted electoral success above chance (60-64%).

Conclusion

For decisions apparently based on objective and critical evaluation of a wide variety of information, we are influenced by relatively simple unconscious stereotypical processes. Thus, in politics, perception of voices and faces show a clear connection to the election result. However, future studies are needed to get further insight into these stereotypic processes in politics.

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