

Put on Your Best Face! Facial Displays Influence on Perceived Trust and the Governing Capability

¡Pon tu mejor cara! La influencia de la expresión facial en la confianza percibida y la capacidad para gobernar

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Abstract

This article evaluates to what extent political candidates' facial expressions influence voters' perception of trust and governing capability. It's conducted a within-subject (four candidates) and in-between groups (facial expression: smile/neutral) experimental design. Participants evaluated the perceived trust and governing capability after looking at each candidate's image (smile or neutral). Findings show that a smiley face is perceived as more trustworthy, and with a higher governing capability. Moreover, trust completely mediates the relationship between facial expressions and govern capability. Thus, a smiling facial expression (vs. a neutral expression) influences voters trust, which in turn, is positively related to the perceived governing capability. In terms of theoretical and practical implications, there is a discussion about the tools that can help strengthen citizens involvement in democratic processes, such as the election process, and the ways politicians can engage citizens.

Keywords: Facial Expressions; Trust; Govern Capability; Neutral Face; Smile.

Resumen

Este artículo evalúa el efecto de las expresiones faciales de los candidatos políticos en las percepciones de confianza y capacidad de gobernar que tienen los votantes. Se condujo un diseño experimental intra-sujeto (cuatro candidatos) y entre grupos (expresión facial: sonriente/neutral). Los participantes evaluaron la confianza percibida y la capacidad para gobernar después de mirar la imagen de cada candidato (sonriente o neutral). Los resultados muestran que una cara sonriente incrementa la confianza percibida y capacidad para gobernar. Adicionalmente, la confianza percibida media completamente la relación entre expresiones faciales y la capacidad para gobernar. Así, una expresión facial sonriente (frente a una neutral) influencia la confianza de los votantes, lo que a su vez impacta directamente la capacidad para gobernar. En términos teóricos y prácticos, se discuten herramientas que pueden ayudar a fortalecer el involucramiento de la ciudadanía en los procesos democráticos como en las elecciones y la forma cómo los políticos logran un compromiso ciudadano.

Palabras clave: capacidad para gobernar; cara neutral; confianza; expresión facial; sonrisa.

Introduction

In democracies, a candidate accesses public office through a popular election (Dahl, 1999). Voting is the heart of democracy. The population is capable of legitimizing free and fair elections, decision-making, and governing capability. This may seem a rational process. However, because elections are complex, people may use psychological heuristics to guide their decisions (Olivola and Todorov, 2010; Kahneman and Tversky, 1982). Elections' processes are so complex, and require a high amount of information, that most voters are uninformed about political details and use heuristics to choose (Downs, 1957).

Numerous studies on political psychology show that external factors surround the exercise of voting, this determines individuals' voting behaviors: emotions, facial expressions, climate, and a large number of contextual issues (Lazányi, 2009). Previous research reveals the effect of context on the perception of facial expressions. An individual's face is a static and isolated image. But it usually appears within a situational context (Wieser and Brosch, 2012). These shallow considerations are a significant concern if they are genuinely influencing citizens' choices and decisions.

A series of studies seem to validate those concerns, suggesting that candidates who look more attractive or capable of performing do better in elections (Lenz and Lawson, 2011). Moreover, psychological research indicates that people often judge unfamiliar individuals based on their appearance, inferring personality traits such as competence, intelligence, honesty, and trustworthiness from facial features alone (Bar, et al., 2006; Hassin and Trope, 2000; Zebrowitz, 1997). As people use faces as heuristics, they make quick judgments about other people that impact their own choices (Olivola and Todorov, 2010).

The importance of facial expression analysis has been a central issue for psychologists (Masters and Sullivan, 1989), first as an irrational expression of the self (Lazányi, 2009); secondly, as a communication tool that could be controlled effectively (Archer and Akert, 1977). This control becomes a valuable mechanism for political science, especially for leaders as an instrument of influence and control on their relationship with followers (Lazányi, 2009). Leader-followers relationship is defined from social exchanges, thus, influenced by different perceptions triggered by empathy or antipathy (Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002).

Experiments evaluating the effects of facial expressions on political and social interactions aim to understand the dynamics that determine

the success of an influential leader –who wins electoral votes, and characteristics that condemn a leader to electoral failure (Visser, et al., 2013).

As in any communication process, non-verbal expressions such as facial expressions, tone, posture or handshake, impact the perceptions of the messages that leaders seek to communicate (Humphrey, 2002). The relationship between communication and receptors' perception results from a cognitive process that generates an emotional response (Masters and Sullivan, 1989). Moreover, when sending a verbal message, the emotions generated depend on facial expressions, the communication channel, and the content of the message (Archer and Akert, 1977). Consequently, emotional exchanges are the basis for social interactions, which is also the case for the relationship between candidates and their voters.

From facial expressions in social interactions, voters can infer the intentions and personality of the issuer (Trichas and Schyns, 2012). Therefore, leaders can use their facial expressions to motivate and influence others perception (Lazányi, 2009). Citizens' recognition of facial expressions plays a leading role in the definition of preferences (Masters and Sullivan, 1989), and voting motivations (Niedenthal, et al., 2010).

For instance, Trichas and Schyns (2012) demonstrated that facial expressions are grouped into two categories: strong and soft. A strong facial expression generates a greater perception of leadership than a soft one, because it endows the leader with qualities of strength and power. Hence, the characterization of facial expressions as a tool requires a conscious treatment because its proper management can lead to a candidate's success, but also his failure and loss of prestige if they do not know how to handle it (Humphrey, 2002). Hence, facial expressions imply a relationship between the leader and the potential voter. Facial expressions may influence the voting intentions, the perception of trust, and governing capacity, using emotional contagion that implies synchrony and sympathy (Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002).

Even though facial expressions are inherent to the human being, and they're considered impulsive, previous studies show these can be managed. Learning to use facial expressions properly is now a necessary tool for the performance of leadership (Lazányi, 2009). By managing their facial expressions, leaders can be aware of their influence upon voters' emotions, and perceptions of trust and govern capability. This influence is needed when trying to positively impact audience emotions and perceptions (Humphrey, 2002).

This article intends to explain how the political candidates' facial expressions influence voters' perception of trust and govern capability of candidates. Therefore, we assume an interaction between the voters and the candidate, which is established from the moment when a candidate seeks to connect with potential voters through different communication channels (Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002).

This study is a valuable tool from different perspectives: first, it allows understanding the motivations of individuals within the elections; citizens' motivations constitute a fundamental element of a democracy. Second, from a candidates' communication management perspective, this study evaluates facial expressions that could influence people's perceptions of candidates and future decisions. The results are a knowledge tool for candidates searching for votes, and training around the relationships with their followers (Lazányi, 2009).

Candidate's facial expression

Faces are a significant source of information, and an expression of emotions cue within social interactions (Haxby, et al., 2000). Psychologists have long recognized the face as the primary channel for the communication of emotion (Ekman, et al., 1972; Izard, 1971; Stouten and De Cremer, 2009). People use faces to make inferences about others competence, trustworthiness, and integrity (Rosenberg, et al., 1991). These inferences are created so fast that 100-ms (millisecond) of exposition to a face may be enough for creating perceptions about other people. Similar to those created if people took all the time, they needed to create an image of someone (Willis and Todorov, 2006). Moreover, people's ideas when looking at faces can influence political, financial, and legal outcomes (Olivola, et al., 2014).

In political science, researchers explore the relevance of these ethological and psychological findings to the relationship between leaders and their supporters (Masters, 1976; Schubert, G., 1982; Schubert, J., 1984; Sullivan et al., 1985). This approach relates to party identification, attitude to the individual leader, and ideology to the nonverbal and verbal behavior. Thus, emotional responses to leaders need to be acknowledged (Kraus and Perloff, 1985; Hastie, 1986). Political candidates are no longer qualified only by their words or party identification, but appearance and attitude also play a decisive role. In politics, perception is a reality.

According to Valdez (2006), words communicate to persuade and seduce the audiences, but images persuade, having a highly seductive power.

The judgments about political candidates based on their faces can accurately predict the results of an electoral process because subjects base their choices on appearance (Olivola and Todorov, 2010). Subjects can use photographs of past elections or elections that happened in contexts when there is no information, in order to predict the outcomes (Martin, 1978). Moreover, based on inferences of trustworthiness, competence, and likability after looking at faces, subjects could predict elections in Senate and House races in the United States (Todorov, et al., 2005).

Ekman and Friesen (1969) state that facial expressions evidence many emotions. They developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) to classify all expressions of human face. Gestural actions can illustrate, accentuate, or attenuate the content of the message, and even contradict it. When there is an agreement between the word and the gesture, the reception improves, and the impact increases. Conversely, when there is a divergence, this contradiction creates a disturbing effect. Facial micro-expressions can be used to detect the lies with a certain degree of reliability (Ekman and Friesen, 1969). As Muñoz (1988) suggested, all face-to-face communicative interactions are conditioned by the information attributed to the bodies, postures, gestures.

The deep understanding of the gestures and actions that goes within the discourse, and the political image of the candidates in an election place, receives a great deal of attention, in order to build a meaning within the interaction between candidate and voters. As Todorov et al., (2005) suggested, facial expressions affect directly how the electorate views a candidate.

Abelson, et al., (1989) conducted a study in the United States presidential election in 1984. They found that four crucial emotions could tip the voters towards one candidate or into another. According to the results, a candidate will be successful, insofar as he knows how to stimulate feelings of hope and pride in the voters, and avoid anger and fear. Facial expressions are emotional behaviors that produce changes associated with feelings. In this way, concrete expressions enhance the language, affecting the impressions transmitted to others (McCanne and Anderson, 1987).

Facial expressions of political candidates are an essential tool in a political campaign, seizing the attention and promptly adhering the content of the message to the politician's image, and so, influencing the voter

decision. Thus, facial expressions, images, emotions, and perceptions are key elements of political campaigns.

An approach to trust

Trust is a primary form in which people evaluate others and decide if they build a relationship (Fiske, et al., 2007). The importance of trust has been cited in the literature on communication, leadership, management, negotiation, game theory, performance, and political campaigns. Although researchers have expressed interest in the concept of trust, its study in organizations remains problematic (Mayer, et al., 1995). According to the authors, “trust” is:

The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (Mayer, et al., 1995, p. 712)

This definition of trust applies to a relationship with another identifiable party who is perceived to act and react, with volition toward the trustor. Rotter (1967) defined interpersonal trust as an expectancy, held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group is reliable.

Moreover, Moorman, et al., (1993) indicate that interpersonal factors are the most predictive of trust. Therefore, trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman, et al., 1992). This definition introduces two general approaches to trust in the literature. In the first one, considerable research in marketing acknowledges trust as a belief, confidence, or expectation about an exchange partner’s trustworthiness, that results from the partner’s expertise, reliability, or intentionality. The second one acknowledges trust as a behavioral intention or behavior, that reflects a reliance on a partner, and involves vulnerability and uncertainty on the part of the trustor. Moorman, et al., (1993) argue that both belief and behavioral intention components must be present for trust to exist. If politicians would expect to inspire trust among the potential voters, their communication should guarantee they would keep their campaign promises.

An important mechanism to communicate this is through facial expressions that signal emotions of happiness, a positive emotion (Stouten and De Cremer, 2009; Sutherland, et al., 2016). Individuals that

demonstrate facial expressions of happiness (or anger) are interpreted as trustworthy (or not trustworthy), and their verbal communication is perceived as honest (less honest) and meaningful (less meaningful) than individuals that express negative or neutral emotions in their face (Stouten and De Cremer, 2009; Sutherland, et al., 2016). This effect of facial expression works even when there is no voluntary expression or expression in response to stimuli: Faces that structurally resemble happy faces are perceived as more trustworthy (Montepare and Dobish, 2003; Said, et al., 2009). As a result, facial expressions associated with positive emotions will be perceived as trustful and will find more support in social interaction.

- *Hypothesis 1:* A political candidate with a smiling facial expression increases subject trustworthiness than a candidate with a neutral facial expression.

Governing capability

Governing capability refers to the government capacities as properties of the government system, concerning the needs of government as properties of the governed system. In other words, the political demands of a society that give adequate responses to the real problems of society. The concept of governing capability refers to the interaction between the governors and the governed. It puts into question the system of government, as a producer of political decisions and responsible for their execution, and its ability to be up to the problems to be solved (Nohlen and Thibaut, 1992). The concept of governing capability is related to the exercise of a power, or the function of governing, and is associated with improving the correctness and efficiency of government. This means all the necessary conditions so that this function can be performed effectively, legitimately, and with citizenship support.

Governing capability has been used extensively to explain government processes. According to Pierre (2000), governing capability is related to the coherent coordination between various actors with different objectives, such as political actors, institutions, civil society, and transnational organizations. Moreover, Newman (2001) stated that the concept opens the discussion about different forms of power, authority, and relationships that could typify a particular form of government.

Governing capability may be related to competence. How well someone can develop a task. However, the concept of governing capability is

more inclined to the exercise of power. Therefore, understanding it as a competence is essential because it is one of the attributes that people evaluate on politicians (Kinder, et al., 1980; Gosling, et al., 2003). Hence, as governing capability is about the exercise of power, it also reveals how an organization is managed. In this sense, Rhodes (1997) states three fundamental values in a public or private organization: the openness of information, integrity, and responsibility. These are a precondition that inspires the perception of honesty and benevolence.

Previous research states that as the perception of trust increases, so does the perception of the effectiveness of formal procedures and law enforcement (Draude, et al., 2018). Trust can affect govern capability because the perception of reliability and benevolence predisposes social cooperation, and strengthens the collective identity of individuals within a society. In political terms, even when some research suggests that trust is not related to real-life outcomes in elections (Todorov, et al., 2005). Trust is a requisite in contexts with a high competence required. Thus, people perceived as trustworthy may govern well.

Because of this, some scholars think that trust is a precondition for an effective governing capability (Putnam, 1993). Trust is how people form competence judgments. This sequence of perceptions makes sense if we think that trustworthiness is a primary perception that people make of someone, and later there are formed judgments about competence (Brambilla, et al., 2011). Thus, when individuals feel that the government can enforce the law and institutional norms while taking care of overall citizens' needs, such individuals will feel that the government can respond to long-term societal demands.

Finally, different studies suggest that faces do influence the perception of competence. For instance, competence is correlated with being attractive, having a babyfaced appearance, being familiar, and looking like someone that evokes a sense of experience and positive emotions (Olivola and Todorov, 2010). Attractive people have more chances of winning elections and are highly related to the final victory (Berggren, et al., 2010; Todorov, et al., 2005).

- *Hypothesis 2:* The relationship between the facial expression of the political candidate and the subjects' perception of the governing capability is mediated by trust.

The overall model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The mediating effect of trust

Note. Elaborated by authors.

Methodology

This experimental work focuses on two facial displays, that can be defined objectively by using a combination of explicit criteria for facial expressions of neutrality and happiness, developed by Masters and Sullivan (1986). This is a mixed experimental design: between-groups condition (facial expression: smiley/neutral) and within-group evaluations (four candidates).

Subjects

100 graduate and undergraduate students from a private university in Colombia participated in the study: 52 % were female, and their age range was 18-60 years ($M = 28$; $SD=10$). The majority of them (85 %) had the intention to vote on the next election period following the experiment, an indicator of their interest in participating in politics. They were invited to think about (mock) mayor candidates for the next election period, without knowing the real purpose of the study.

Instrument and stimuli

Four volunteers participated as candidates for mayor: two men and two women, with an average age of 45 years, and characteristic traits of people from the city. The four subjects consent to having their picture taken for this study and approved including their image in a journal publication. Hence, pictures of subjects were taken, controlling for different aspects that may bias results: all of them wore white clothes, they were not allowed to use jewelry, and women had to use neutral make-up. We manipulated candidates' facial expressions using two pictures from each candidate: one with a smiling face and one with a neutral face (Figure 2).

The inbetween-group evaluation consisted of a random assignment of individuals to either the smiling-face or natural-face condition.

Additionally, within each condition, there was a within-subject evaluation of the four candidates. In the questionnaire, the four candidates appeared randomly throughout the different candidates.

Figure 2. Stimuli: Candidates' facial expressions



Note. Elaborated by authors.

Procedure and measures

Subjects voluntarily responded to an online questionnaire that invited them to evaluate four candidates running for the next mayor elections. All questions were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1=total-ly disagree; 7= totally agree).

Environmental features, such as verbal descriptions, provide strong contextual cues, which influence facial expression perception (Wieser and Brosch, 2012). This is particularly important for political communication, because the context can affect how people perceive the candidates' facial expressions.

The questionnaire introduction read as follows: Respond to the following questions assuming that Election Day is tomorrow. You will rate to what extent you feel each candidate is trustworthy and capable con running the city. After the candidate's picture, the subject responded to ten items that evaluated their perception of trust in the candidate.

This set of items was adapted from Kumar, et al., (1995). Five of these items are concerned about the candidate's honesty: (a) Even when the candidate gives us a rather unlikely explanation, I am confident that they are telling the truth; (b) The candidate provides accurate information; (c) The candidates usually keep the promises they made; (d) Whenever the candidate gives advice to citizens of the city, we know this is for the best; (e) Citizens can count on the candidate to be sincere.

Five items are concerned about the candidate's benevolence: (a) Though circumstances change. We believe that the candidate will be ready and willing to offer assistance and support. (b) When making important decisions, the candidate is concerned about our welfare of the citizens. (c) When we share our problems with the candidate, we know that he/she will respond with understanding. (d) In the future, we can count on the candidate to consider how his/her decisions and actions will affect us. (e) When it comes to things that are important to us, we can depend on the candidate's support (Cronbach alpha= 0.98).

The governing capability was assessed through six items, drawn and adapted from the World Bank (1997, 2018). The question and items read as follows. In case these candidates were elected as city mayor, rate the following items that will characterize their governing capability: (a) Government economic policies implemented will adapt quickly to changes in the economy. (b) The public service will be independent of political interference. (c) Government decisions will be effectively implemented. (d) Bureaucracy will not hinder business activity. (e) The distribution infrastructure of goods and services will be generally efficient. (f) Policy direction will be consistent (Cronbach alpha= 0.97).

Finally, the questionnaire included a manipulation check and some demographic and control information: gender, age, and intention to vote.

Manipulation checks

Subjects were asked to determine if the observed pictures of the four candidates had a smiling or a natural expression (Figure 2). When they evaluated a smiling face, the subject's response was consistent on a 96.7 % for candidate one, 97.8 % for candidate two, 95.5 % for candidate

three, and 90.3 % for candidate four. Additionally, subjects rated a neutral face as neutral on 97.8 % of the cases for candidate one, 99.3 % for candidate two, 97.0 % for candidate three, and 95.2 % for candidate four.

Design and data analysis

We run different one-way ANOVAs through IBM SPSS Statistics, 26 with the self-reported data that resulted from our experiment, using the facial expression of the candidate as the independent variable (two cells= smiley vs. neutral expression), govern capacity as the dependent variable, and trust as the mediator in the relationship between both variables (Figure 1). The mediation analysis was run with PROCESS v.3 (Hayes, 2013), using model 4, with a confidence of 95 % and doing 5000 bootstrap samples.

Results

First, in our analysis, we check for the differences in the within-subject condition. Secondly, we describe the results for the effect of the candidate’s facial expression on trust and govern capability. Third, the mediating effect of trust.

Stimuli (candidate) variance

As a within-subject preliminary analysis, we control for individual candidate characteristics, and evaluate the perceived differences between the four candidates (Table 1).

Table 1. Candidates’ Evaluations

Candidate	Sex	Trust		Governing capability	
		Mean	St.Dev.	Mean	St.Dev.
C1	F	3.73	1.57	3.52	1.58
C2	F	3.66	1.52	3.62	1.50
C3	M	3.27	1.44	3.23	1.38
C4	M	2.95	1.50	2.92	1.44
Total		3.40	1.54	3.32	1.50

Note. Elaborated by authors. F= Female; M= Male; C= Candidate; presented in the same order as Figure 2.

We find there are significant differences among the candidates regarding perceptions of trust ($F(3, 796) = 11.54; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.042$) and governing capability ($F(3, 796) = 9.19; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.033$). A *post hoc* evaluation (Scheffe) shows that the significant differences among the pairwise comparisons are between the two men compared to the two women ($p > 0.0001$ between candidates of different sex). Hence, perceived trust and govern capability are different only by candidates' sex. Thus, candidates' sex was included in the model as a control variable.

Facial expression

Descriptive statistics show that candidates' facial expression is significantly related to trust and governing capability (Table 2). That is, without accounting for any other information, compared with a neutral facial expression, a smiling facial expression increases subjects' perception of trust and governing capability.

The effect of candidate's facial expression

Our first hypothesis predicts that a candidates' facial expression (smiley vs. neutral) will predict how trustworthy the candidate is (Table 3). This relationship was supported with a one-way ANOVA $F(1, 796) = 21.051; p < 0.05; \eta^2 = 0.074$), even after controlling for the candidate's gender and subjects characteristics (age, gender, and intention to vote). A smiley expression ($M = 3.57; S.D. = 1.60$) increases the perceived trustworthiness of a candidate compared to a neutral expression ($M = 3.23; S.D. = 1.45$). Additionally, the subjects' age was a significant control variable. The younger the subject, the higher the perception of trust towards a candidate. Subject's sex and intention to vote are excluded from the model because these were not significant predictors. Hence, results support Hypothesis 1.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	St.Dev.	1	2	3	4
1. Expression	0.50	0.50				
2. Cand_Sex	0.50	0.50	0.00			
3. Age	28.15	10.66	-0.02	-0.01		
4. Trust	3.40	1.54	0.112**	-.190**	-.157**	
5. Govern capability	3.32	1.50	0.077*	-0.166**	-0.184**	0.854**

*** $p < 0.001$. * $p < 0.05$.

Note. Elaborated by authors.

Trust and governing capability

Table 3 shows mediation analysis. First, the facial expression (neutral in the intercept), significantly predicts trust with a positive load. Hence, a smiley facial expression will increase the perception of the trustworthiness of the candidate. Additionally, sex of the candidate and age of the subject (covariables) proved to have a significant effect on the perception of trust. When candidates are males the trustiness perception decreases, and age has a negative relationship with trust, such that when subjects are younger, they tend to rate candidates as more trustable. Secondly, we prove that a smiley expression also is significant in predicting the subjects' perception of governing capability –age and sex being also significant, with the same direction of the effect as when trust is the dependent variable.

Nevertheless, when including trust in the model where the facial expression predicts the subjects' perception of governing capability, the effects of candidates' facial expression loses its significance. Moreover, age is not significant anymore, and the candidates' sex beta coefficient is reduced. In this sense, as the facial expression of the candidate loses its significance, results show that trust is an antecedent of the subjects' perception of governing capability, and a mediator in the relationship between the candidates' facial expression and the perception of governing capability. The higher the perception of trust towards a candidate, the higher the perceived governing capability. To conclude, the mediation model shows that the mediator effect of trust in the relationship between candidates' facial expression and perception of governing capability is total. Hence, our results support H2.

Table 3. Mediation effect (B; standard errors in parenthesis)

	Path coefficients			Indirect effects		
	To Trust (T)	To Govern capability (GC)	To Govern capability	Estimate	Sobel Z	Symmetric 95% CI
From Trust (Mediator)			0.826 (.019)***			
From Smiley expression	0.337 (.105)**	0.223 (.103)*	-0.056 (.055)			
Controls						
Sex (Candidate)	-0.589 (.105)***	-0.503 (.103)***	-0.016 (.056)			
Age (Subject)	-0.023 (.005)***	-0.026 (.103)***	-0.007 (.003)**			
Indirect effects						
Smiley _{T→GC}				0.279	3.201***	0.110;0.297
R ²	.074	.067	.732			
Overall effect	F (3,796) = 21.0512***	F (2, 796) = 19.176***	F (4, 795) = 543.1095***			
Size effect (η ²)	0.074	0.067	0.780			

***p<0.001; **p<.01; *p<.05

Note. Elaborated by authors.

Discussion

This study evaluates relevant factors on citizens’ perceptions of those who participate in a political campaign by managing candidates’ facial expressions: trust and governing capability. The theoretical background acknowledges citizens’ heuristic behaviors on the evaluations of political candidates, suggesting that people deviate from the classical model of rational choice towards other forms of limited rationality. Biases implicit in the context, emotional and physical attributes, social preferences, and personal beliefs and values explain this limited rationality (Ariely, 2008; Ariely and Wertenbrochm, 2002; Ariely, et al., 2003; Masters and Sullivan, 1989).

We confirm that people judge others based on observable and subtle details in their appearance and facial expressions, even when they are not fully aware of it (Ekman and Friesen, 1969). The relevance of the influence

of facial expressions is related to behavioral intentions and consequences. Our study shows that facial expressions can decisively influence voters' perceptions. Specifically, in terms of theoretical contributions, our research finds a total mediation of trust in the relationship between facial expressions and perceived governing capability. That is, facial expressions influence candidates perceived governing capability because of the trust they inspire in citizens.

An interesting contribution of our paper is the effect of age. The lower the respondents age, the greater the perception of trust, and younger participants have a greater and better perception of governing capability. This could be explained either because they are more optimistic or less involved into political participation, have less democratic experience, and have had fewer opportunities to confront their voting decision. These results differ from those presented by Delli (2000). The author shows a pessimistic representation of younger voters, seen as more cynical, less interested in public affairs, less likely to register or vote, and significantly less knowledgeable about politics than the older population.

This disagreement can be explained due to the experimental design because, contrary to previous research on political candidates, which states today's young citizens are more cynical about and disillusioned with politics. As a result, they are less likely to engage with or participate into political processes such as elections than older generations of voters (Bennett, 1997). However, in our experimental design, subjects' response arises from their perceptions of unknown people's facial expressions and not from known politicians and political candidates. This means, by using unknown models, not known politicians or political candidates, we were able to capture the respondents' perceptions of facial expressions while controlling for political bias.

As the literature shows, an important mechanism to communicate is through body language and facial expressions (Stouten and De Cremer, 2009). Therefore, political candidates would expect to inspire trust among the potential voters to communicate that they will keep the campaign promises. Consequently, facial expressions associated with positive emotions will be perceived as trustful and will find more support in social interaction. Besides, as the perception of trust increases, so does the perception of the effectiveness of formal procedures and law enforcement (Draude, et al., 2018).

The perception of trust affects the perception of governing capability because the perception of reliability predisposes to social cooperation

and strengthens the collective identity of individuals within a society. Therefore, in terms of practical contributions, this research provides conceptual support to communication strategies for political campaigns. We explained why facial expressions are essential when designing a political campaign. A candidate with the proper facial expression generates a perception of trust and, consequently, is perceived as one who can govern. Therefore, at the moment of setting up an electoral campaign, it will be essential to acknowledge physical appearance and facial expressions (Archer and Akert, 1977; Masters and Sullivan, 1989). This influences the perceptions that the audience has about the candidates (Ekman and Friesen, 1969), and so, can influence in the election process (Lazányi, 2009).

Conclusions

Previous research has recognized the face as the primary channel for the communication of emotion (Ekman, et al., 1972; Izard, 1971; Stouten and De Cremer, 2009). Following this idea, facial expressions put in evidence subjects emotions (Ekman, 1969). Thus, by having the appropriate facial expression, a candidate can communicate trustworthiness, and, indirectly, governing capability. In the opposite sense, this means that an inappropriate facial expression can undermine citizens' trust. Consequently, because those perceived as trustworthy are perceived as capable of governing, facial expressions are central elements in political campaigns.

Facial expressions as a predictor of attitudes towards political candidates do not seem sufficient to explain social or political problems. However, in terms of practical implications, facial expressions of political candidates are an essential tool in a political campaign (Archer and Akert, 1977) because, in political communication, perceptions and emotions require spontaneous judgments from citizens evaluating their candidates. Accordingly, we find that expressed emotions presented in an illustration or photograph influence perceptions of trust and, in turn, governing capability.

A critical practical implication in societal terms is that the perception of trust can be translated into confidence in democracy, the democratic process, and democratic institutions. This is particularly important in emerging democracies, where there is limited political knowledge and understanding. Then trust will be the heart of a good, stable, and efficient government. Moreover, our results are particularly important for

a young population. The younger the participant, the more trustworthy and stronger the expected governing capability. This calls for strategic actions to involve youth in democratic processes. Thus, it is important to continue communicating appropriately to gain younger people's trust and democratic participation in elections.

We account for some limitations in the study. Although the experimental setting has a strong internal validity, it is limited in terms of the external validity of our results. We do not use genuine political candidates. The image of politicians has a strong background on citizens expectations that should complement their communication strategy. Consistently, those participants who have more experience in the democratic and electoral process, and have been exposed to elections, are prompt to develop different perceptions of politics and political candidates.

Finally, another limitation in our study and a window for future research is that our questionnaire assessed facial expressions for candidates and not for rulers. Participants were asked to evaluate candidates as if the elections were tomorrow. Future research may lead us to assess the facial expression of a ruling governor. In a more extended period, facial expressions could influence the outcome of the election, and probably the government's legitimacy.



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