

Perception of Political Candidates' Electability: Examining the Impact of Gender and Race

Voters' perception is crucial to the success of anyone seeking public offices of all levels. We set out to study this subject because we wonder how Asian American candidates are perceived, compared to candidates of different ethnic backgrounds. In the 2004 Democratic presidential primary, Howard Dean—although widely supported and leading in the polls for a substantial period of time—made the notorious shout in Iowa that was broadcast and relayed repeatedly. Partially because of this incident, he was perceived as being less likely to beat the incumbent, George W. Bush, in the presidential election (Brooks, 2004). From that time forward, Dean was overshadowed by another Democratic candidate, John Kerry, who appeared to be more moderate and conventional, and thus more electable (Shaw, 2004). The *Economist* reported that "Kerry's perceived ability to beat George Bush—that magical aura of electability—has gone from being an important advantage to the decisive one" ("He's Got a Ticket to Ride," 2004). Democrats would rather choose a less divisive candidate to beat the incumbent than to pick a candidate popular inside their party who would be less electable across the nation. To many political observers, the electorate's assessment of whether a candidate is electable determines how one votes in the election and is, perhaps, more crucial than the candidate's platforms. Therefore, *electability* became the buzzword in the 2004 campaign circle and seems to merit a more serious look (Calmes, 2007; Meyrowitz, 1992; Welch & Studlar, 1996).

Perception of electability not only shifts across candidates' political platforms, but also among their innate attributes—demographics (Calmes, 2007; Meyrowitz, 1992; Welch & Studlar, 1996). Although gender and

race have been studied in a wide range of fields of social sciences, little research has systematically investigated the combined impact of both gender *and* race—beyond Blacks and Whites—of political candidates on election results, as well as how perceived electability is intertwined with gender and race. Recent census data indicate that more and more Americans are non-Whites; moreover, given that more females have actively participated in public affairs and run for public offices since the mid-20th century, it is important to investigate whether women's ultimate realization of political participation—holding public offices—has been truly equal and fair.

Given the unlikelihood of having candidates of all kinds of demographic backgrounds in the same race, this study resorts to a test of hypothetical setting by conducting a 2×4 experiment that used diverse adult subjects to evaluate congressional candidates of different gender and races with identical credentials, issue stances, and political experience. This research aims to explore the impact of the perceived candidate attributes derived from gender and races on people's voting decision and assessment of their electability.

Because this experimental research examines whether a candidate's gender and race influence support from potential voters, this research can serve as a benchmark that measures the overall attitudes toward races and gender roles of public office holders among Americans at the beginning of the 21st century. Future research that focuses on candidates' demographic backgrounds could therefore be compared with the findings of this study. In addition, several key variables that might influence voters' perception, including participants' experience of interaction with other races, their attitude toward equality in the society, and media usage, were taken into account in this study. The design of this study is likely the first to systematically examine the relationship between race and gender and candidate assessment.

ATTITUDES TOWARD RACE AND GENDER IN THE UNITED STATES

Most studies on racial attitudes in the United States focus on White Americans' attitudes toward African Americans (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1998; Rada, 2000; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Tuch & Martin, 1997). It appears that contemporary racism has gradually replaced blatant discrimination in the United States (Entman, 1990, 1994). Whites have become more likely to believe—or at least to voice publicly—that African Americans are equal and should be

treated equally in the society. In recent years, a larger number of African Americans have been elected to state or federal offices, indicating some progress in political involvement. Nevertheless, it is too early to proclaim the end of racism because those who still harbor racist thoughts often resort to more disguised, subtle, and indirect ways of expressing it (Dovidio, Gaertner, Nier, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2004; Sniderman, Piazza, Tetlock, & Kendrick, 1991). For instance, in a recent study, fictional applicants with White-sounding names are significantly more likely than those with Black-sounding names to receive an invitation for job interviews (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

In recent years, Latino Americans have gained more political clout with increasing population in the United States (Affigne, 2000). Latinos are the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the United States, and their growth-rate, surpassing all other ethnic groups in the country, will remain high in the future (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Evidence of Latino power was showcased in the August 22, 2005, issue of *TIME* magazine, which published a cover story on prominent Latino figures in the United States, entitled "The 25 Most Influential Hispanics in America." Not only were more Latinos sent to Washington in the last decade, but the Latino voting bloc has gained a great deal of notice across the political spectrum.

In sharp contrast, Asian Americans are not considered to have much political clout partially because, regardless of their citizenship, they have often been perceived as aliens or outsiders in the United States (Larson, 2006; R. Lee, 1999; F. Wu, 2002; Yee, 1992). For instance, during World War II, Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps because their "mother country" was at war with the United States, although their German or Italian American counterparts did not receive the same treatment (Tung, 1974; J. Wu & Song, 2000). The perpetual sojourner image prevails until today. Matt Fong, a fourth-generation Chinese American who ran for a Senate seat against Barbara Boxer in 1998, was repeatedly asked about the issue of national loyalty in his campaign trail. David Wu, a congressman of Oregon, even with his official pass, was barred from entering the U.S. Department of Energy building by security guards who did not believe he looked like an American (Barnett, 2001). According to a recent nationwide survey, 25% of Americans interviewed hold strong negative views toward Chinese Americans, 23% of Americans would not want a Chinese American to be the president, and 7% would not work for an Asian American CEO (Anti-Defamation League, 2001).

Racial attitude is normally measured by scale of opposite adjectives, such as *violent* versus *peaceful*, *hardworking* versus *lazy*, and *responsible* versus *irresponsible*, or by descriptive statements such as "African Americans are intellectually bright" and "Asian Americans are buying up too

much land in the United States" (Ho & Jackson, 2001; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). Although Americans' attitudes toward Asian Americans are generally negative, at least they can be straightforward. When it comes to African Americans, participants seem less willing to voice their honest opinion, which reflects a sensitized, politicized mechanism of public opinion. Researchers had to use alterative measures to tease out Whites' true attitudes toward Blacks (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). In a method called the Excuse Experiment, researchers created a situation in which White participants "who say they think well of blacks are deliberately given a socially acceptable excuse to make a negative judgment of blacks, precisely in order to see if they take advantage of it" (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997, p. 13). An example is, using a 2 (White vs. Black) \times 2 (high school graduates vs. dropouts) design about a mother on welfare, subjects were asked whether they think this welfare mother is likely to make an honest effort to exit welfare the following year (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). This study found that those who spoke well about Blacks sincerely meant it because the subjects did not take advantage of socially acceptable excuses. Nevertheless, a substantial number of respondents were found to express negative feelings toward Blacks, saying they are violent, lazy, and irresponsible.

Partially due to the feminist movement and legal protections, blatant discrimination against women in the workplace and other social arenas has become less common. Nevertheless, achieving complete gender equality in U.S. society still has a long way to go. For instance, women consistently earn a lower wage than men at a roughly .75 ratio (Bernstein, 2004). There is also a "glass ceiling" and a wide gender gap—in terms of both numbers and salaries—among top executive positions in corporate America (Bertrand & Hallock, 2001). In the political arena, female office holders are still outnumbered by men. The number of women in the U.S. Congress, for example, still lags far behind the percentage of their population. People's entrenched attitudes about women's roles could be at work.

One can attribute the efforts of promoting diversity in U.S. society to the improved relationships between races and gender. The logic behind such efforts is the prior contact hypothesis. Essentially, this hypothesis posits that contacts with people of different racial backgrounds can alleviate negative stereotypes of the groups and, therefore, foster positive or normal attitudes toward each other (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Fujioka, 1999; Pettigrew, 1998; Tan, Fujioka, & Lucht, 1997). Although diversity has not been focused on in the literature of political representation, it is reasonable and logical to link prior contact as a factor in the perception

of candidates' electability. Therefore, variables testing formal and informal contacts with various races are included in this study.

COMMUNICATION THEORIES AND RACIAL AND GENDER ATTITUDES

Three bodies of knowledge in communication contribute to the theoretical framework of this study are (a) cultivation analysis, (b) uses and gratifications (U&G), and (c) third-person effect.

First, cultivation analysis theorizes that heavy TV use may lead to believing in the reality constructed by the media industry (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979). Due to the constant representation of violence on the TV screen, heavy viewers may perceive the world as mean and scary. These audiences tend to overestimate the chance of being victimized and the number of people involved in law enforcement and crimes. These viewers also are more likely to consider their fellow citizens untrustworthy. Although most cultivation literature focuses on TV viewing, other media were found to cultivate as effectively as TV (Signorielli & Morgan, 1990).

Cultivation theory, at least in the earlier versions, assumes that the audiences are passively influenced by media content. The U&G approach, however, presents an opposite view. Technically, U&G is more of a research perspective than a solid communication theory. U&G aims to explain why, how, where, and when people consume specific media to meet their needs and wants. Specific social and psychological needs or motives of audience members help determine their media consumption (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Severin & Tankard, 1997). For instance, teenagers who are sensation-seeking, aggressive, and alienated are attracted to violent films, websites, and computer content (Slater, 2003).

The insights from both theoretical approaches helped establish a connection between media consumption and attitudes toward different races and genders. Communication scholars have long argued that negative media portrayals of racial minorities contribute to discrimination against these groups. At the same time, women are often portrayed as being inferior (e.g., passive, less intelligent) to men and as exploitable sex objects, especially in advertising. Such negative depictions of women can lead to lower evaluation, discrimination, or even violence against women (Cortese, 2004; Goffman, 1976; Kilbourne, 1999; T. Lee & Hwang, 2002; Meyers, 1999).

Negative, stereotypical portrayals of minority groups are still common in the mainstream media in the United States (Lester, 1996). Entman and Rojecki (2000) reported that both news and entertainment media constructed African Americans as inferior in many ways, which helped shape or reinforce Euro-Americans' ambivalent attitudes toward them. A content analysis by Dixon and Linz (2000) revealed that Blacks and Latinos are overrepresented as law-breakers on TV news. J. Lee (1994) discovered the largest number of news stories on Asian Americans were reported in connection to illegal immigration, crime, and gang violence. Hamamoto (1994) and R. Lee (1999) argued that the media tend to portray Asians and Asian Americans as aliens or outsiders who could never become part of the mainstream America. Valentino (1999) reported the news media's ability to activate racial attitudes via stereotypic portrayals of minorities, which subsequently affect voters' evaluations of political candidates.

Busselle and Crandall (2002) found that only a few studies have investigated the true linkage between media exposure and perception toward minorities, but the unveiled linkage seems solid. For instance, a higher level of attention to news on race relations may lead to a perception that greater socioeconomic disparities exist between White and African Americans. Such attention also is positively related to the belief that such difference is likely due to discrimination and lack of job opportunities (Gandy & Baron, 1992). Viewing entertainment programs on TV was found to be associated with the belief that Blacks are more successful than Whites, but news viewing was found to contribute to the contrary perception (Armstrong, Neuendorf, & Brentar, 1992). In an experiment, participants were more likely to judge that a Black perpetrator in a news story was "lazy" and had a "lack of intelligence" compared with a White perpetrator (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998).

In addition, Busselle and Crandall (2002) found that watching different genres of TV programs (drama, sitcom, and news) influences respondents' estimates of the income and education of White and African Americans, as well as possible reasons behind such achievements. News viewing is positively related to the belief that lack of motivation results in socioeconomic differences between Blacks and Whites. Watching sitcoms is positively related to the education and income level of African Americans. TV drama viewing predicts the perception that Whites are better educated than African Americans (Busselle & Crandall, 2002). Because of the linkage between media consumption and racial attitudes, the questionnaire of the present study included a number of media use variables.

The third group of communication literature that led to the present study is the third-person effect theory. Since Davidson's (1983) seminal

study, dozens of articles have been written on this subject (Perloff, 1993, 1999). Essentially, this theory argues that people tend to believe that media content would have a stronger effect on others (third person) than on themselves. We extrapolated from the theory that one would overestimate his own political openness and assume others to be more sexist or racist when assessing diverse candidates. Insights from the Excuse Experiment mentioned above and the third-person effect theory helped us measure potential voters' racial attitudes in terms of how likely they would vote for a candidate who is either female or a member of a racial minority, or both.

Although the Excuse Experiments by Sniderman and colleagues (1991, 1997) reported that their participants proved sincere about their feelings toward Blacks, modern racism literature (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2004; Entman, 1990, 1994; Sniderman, Brody, et al., 1991; Sniderman, Piazza, et al., 1991) still suggests that many citizens are reluctant to express their true racial attitudes. Therefore, asking whether a participant would vote for a Black, Asian American, or woman candidate is likely to receive a socially desirable answer. To tease out their true racial and gender attitudes as operationalized by voting for a racial minority and/or female politician, respondents should be asked to estimate how likely others would support such a candidate. Based on the literature reviewed, the following research questions and hypotheses were formed:

RQ1: Do the race and sex of candidates predict participants' perceived electability and voting likelihood?

RQ2: Does participants' belief in equal opportunity predict their assessment of non-White candidates?

In light of the literature on third-person effect, it is reasonable to posit that people tend to portray themselves in a more positive light. Supporting non-White and female candidates is a politically correct and/or socially desirable action, which could result in a discovery of reverse third-person effect or first-person effect. Therefore, we hypothesized that

H1: Participants' assessment of their own voting likelihood for non-White candidates is better than others'.

Literature shows that people's direct or mediated experience with other races may play a role in their judgment of the racial group and,

therefore, influence their perception of minority candidate. In light of this rationale, the following hypothesis was formed:

H2: Participants' personal experience with the race of the candidate may predict electability and voting likelihood for non-White candidate.

METHOD

Experimental Design

The present study employed a 4×2 experimental design that incorporated four races/ethnicities (White, African, Asian, and Latino Americans) and both sexes (female and male) into the stimuli that participants read. The experiment device consists of a detailed instruction, a pretest, one of the eight stimuli (a congressional candidate's color direct mail) inserted in the middle, and a posttest questionnaire.

All participants in this experiment first received a pretest that aimed to capture their prior political experience, attitude toward gender and races in general, and frequency of contacts with all four races socially and formally (e.g., at work). The stimulus of the experiment is a typical letter-sized, color campaign material (double-sided and printed in quality, glossy paper) that includes a candidate's headshot, short biography, education background, political experience, and issue stances. The four issues covered in the print campaign material are education, health care, economic development, and national security, on all of which the candidate advocated moderate solutions and therefore did not resemble the political platform of a typical Republican or Democratic ticket.

The setting of the race is a congressional (U.S. House of Representatives) seat in Pennsylvania, a considered toss-up state in the 2004 election. The fact that the race is set in Pennsylvania could compel participants to think more about electability. The researchers purposely selected this state, with which participants from the South and Pacific Northwest are less likely to be familiar. The only variation in the stimulus (i.e., the manipulation) is the candidate featured. There are eight candidates rotated as the candidate for the subjects to read about—White male, White female, Latino male, Latina female, Asian male, Asian female, Black male, and Black female. These eight candidates' names and pictures are the only two cues to disclose their gender and race. It is worth noting that the two Latino photos used in the stimuli appear more like White than other races—so their Spanish last names (Sanchez) served as

an additional cue. To ensure the photos' homogeneity, aside from their identical photo size, all eight fictional candidates are in their mid-40s, dressed formally, and rated to be in the same level of attractiveness by 30 college students. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed no difference of attractiveness among any of the candidates.

Each participant of the experiment was exposed to only one of the eight candidates who were competing for the congressional seat. After the exposure, participants were asked to assess the likelihood of voting for the candidate under different circumstances and to evaluate the candidate's credibility, competency, and electability on 4-point Likert scales. They also were asked to state how likely they and others would vote for the feature candidate. For example, the specific wording in two items is: "If you were a Pennsylvanian, how likely would *you* vote for this candidate" and "If your friends and family were Pennsylvanians, how likely would *they* vote for this candidate?" In addition, the participants were asked to assess the likelihood that the candidate they read about can be elected under four discrete circumstances. The first scenario is a simple assessment from the participant. The second scenario was described as the feature candidate running against an incompetent incumbent. The third and fourth scenarios included a third White, highly qualified candidate in the race—the only difference between the two scenarios is that the fourth assessment was the likely assessment of participants' friends and family. The manipulation check in the posttest consists of three multiple-choice questions: the sex of the candidate, the office this candidate is running for, and the race/ethnicity of the candidate.

Participants

The participants in the experiment were recruited from the staffs (including a few of their spouses or partners, as well as other family members who are adults) of two public universities. One is located in the South, the other in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. The rationale behind the recruitment strategy is that these two regions are culturally and politically different, with the South leaning toward the Republican Party and the Northwest slightly favoring the Democratic Party. Having subjects from both geographic regions can elevate the level of representation of the sample. Another step the researchers took to ensure a higher validity was to have university staffs rather than college students—mostly more than 20 years old, with more voting experience and a higher age variance—as participants. The practice of having college students as subjects has been criticized repeatedly for concern of validity (Gordon,

Slade, & Schmitt, 1986). It seems particularly important for this project to include participants who have more political experience than undergraduate students. Those who participated in the experiment were given a \$5 coupon to a local restaurant or bookstore. About half of the 296 subjects were recruited from the South ($n = 143$, 48.3%), and the rest came from the northwest region ($n = 153$, 51.7%) of the United States; 288 participants reported their age, ranging between 19 and 76, with a mean age of 39.34 ($SD = 12.23$) and median of 40. As for their race, the majority ($n = 211$, 72%) were White, 47 (16%) were Black, 10 were Latino/Latina (3.4%), 7 were Asian Americans (2.4%), 4 were Native Americans (1.4%), 14 (4.8%) answered "other," and 3 did not indicate their racial background and therefore were coded as "missing."

RESULTS

Our first research question examined the impact of race and gender on candidates' electability and winning assessment. Of the four groups, the White candidates' electability is the highest¹ ($M = 1.93$, $SD = .673$), closely followed by the Hispanic candidates ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .711$). Asian American ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .763$) and African American ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .768$) candidates are not perceived as being as electable as the above two ethnic groups. The one-way ANOVA test indicates that the race factor is statistically significant in predicting a candidate's electability ($F = 3.57$, $df = 3$, $p = .015$), although the post-hoc tests (Tukey-HSD and Scheffe) did not show any of the differences among the four groups to be statistically significant at the 5% level. The electability differences between White and African Americans and between White and Asian Americans are significant only at 6.6% and 8.7%, respectively.

As to gender's prediction on a candidate's electability, males ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .697$) seem to score slightly better than females ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .772$), although the gender difference appears to be on the edge of statistical significance ($t = -1.944$, $df = 293$, $p = .053$). However, it is interesting to point out that when both race and gender of candidates were entered into ANOVA, the gender factor turns out to be statistically significant ($F = 4.102$, $df = 1$, $p = .044$). The interaction term between race and gender, however, is not statistically significant ($F = 1.558$, $df = 3$, $p = .200$).

¹Because the scale used in the measurement device designates 1 as *most likely* and 4 as *least likely*, the smaller the means, the better the likelihood.

As indicated in the "Method" section, subjects were asked to assess the likelihood the candidate they read about can be elected under four discrete circumstances. MANOVA was executed to see whether race and gender might have led to different assessments. The results show that the race factor is a significant predictor ($F = 2.288, p = .007, \Delta^2 = .032$), but gender is not ($F = 1.832, p = .123, \Delta^2 = .026$), nor is the interaction term between gender and race ($F = 1.522, p = .111, \Delta^2 = .021$). Specifically, race is a significant factor predicting winning likelihood in two election scenarios in which there is an incompetent incumbent and a third candidate who is White and equally competent as the candidate featured in the campaign material. One interesting finding is that the race factor affected a participant's own assessment about the feature candidate's electability when there is a third White candidate ($F = 3.057, p = .032, \eta^2 = .031$) in the election less than a participant's estimate of others' assessment ($F = 6.008, p = .001, \Delta^2 = .060$), suggesting a third-person effect in the assessments. In other words, other people (third persons) are more likely to be affected by the candidate's race. As to gender effect on winning likelihood assessment, the scenarios in which gender led to different assessments are those when the opponent in the race is an incumbent ($F = 4.969, p = .027, \Delta^2 = .017$) and when there is a third White candidate in the race ($F = 4.969, p = .027, \Delta^2 = .013$). Female candidates ($M = 2.09$) were perceived as being less likely than male candidates ($M = 1.87$) to beat incumbents.

The second research question pertains to the potential impact of subjects' attitude toward equal opportunity on their assessments of the non-White fictional candidates. As shown in Table 7.1, this attitude significantly influences the subjects' *support* for non-White candidates ($t = -3.86, p < .001, R$ square change = .064) when other demographic, interaction, and exposure variables are held constant. However, when assessing the non-White candidate's *electability* for a Pennsylvania congressional seat, the experiment participants were not affected by their belief in equality ($t = .76, p = .45, R$ square change = .003). These two results are quite interesting because the former seems to indicate a subjective or idealistic voting inclination, whereas the latter unveils a more objective or realistic evaluation.

The first research hypothesis was intended to examine the potential gap between a participant's own voting likelihood and his or her assessment of others' voting for non-White candidates. Two dependent variables were used in the hypothesis testing: (a) the likelihood the participant would vote for the candidate, and (b) the extent to which the candidate reflects the participant's view. Two pairs of *t* tests were executed. The results show that both differences of likelihood are

Table 7.1
Predicting Voting for Non-White Candidates

Block	Beta	t	p	ΔR^2
1 Interaction with the candidate's race	-0.09	-1.39	0.17	
Media use	0.01	0.21	0.83	0.009
2 Male	0.02	0.24	0.81	
White	-0.09	-1.24	0.22	
Age	-0.18	-2.49	0.01	0.073
Education level	-0.09	-1.22	0.22	
Income level	-0.03	-0.37	0.71	
3 Index of equality attitude	-0.27	-3.86	0.00	0.064
(Constant)		9.98	0.00	

$F = 4.237$, $df = 8, 197$, $p < .001$.

$R^2 = 0.147$

statistically significant. Participants see themselves as more likely than others to support non-White candidates (self $M = 1.79$ vs. others $M = 2.05$, $t = -5.141$, $df = 221$, $p < .001$), and they see the non-White candidates reflecting their views more than others' views (self $M = 1.77$ vs. others $M = 2.00$, $t = -4.699$, $df = 220$, $p < .001$). This finding shows a more pessimistic assessment of others' view on non-White candidates. Thus, the first hypothesis is supported.

Our second hypothesis focuses on the potential influence of one's formal and informal interaction with the race of the candidate. Similar to the procedure of the prior tests, only those subjects who were exposed to the stimuli of non-White candidates were included in the regression models. Also, because vicarious exposure to non-White groups through the media could elevate one's familiarity, media exposure variable—including exposure to newspaper, TV news, and Web news—was incorporated into the regression model. The results (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2) show that the interaction predictor in both regression models (voting and electability) is not statistically significant. However, according to the beta values of the two independent variables, it appears that an individual's experience of interaction with the race of the feature candidate plays a slightly greater role in predicting his voting tendency than his assessment of the non-White candidate's electability. Even with the share of media exposure variable included, the entire block in both cases contributes less than 1% of the total variance to the regression models. Therefore, the second hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7.2
Predicting *Electability* of Non-White Candidates

Block	Beta	t	p	ΔR^2
1 Interaction with the candidate's race	-0.01	-0.10	0.92	
Media use	-0.06	-0.88	0.38	0.009
2 Male	0.15	2.18	0.03	
White	0.01	0.09	0.93	
Age	-0.17	-2.36	0.02	0.065
Education level	0.09	1.26	0.21	
Income level	-0.05	-0.61	0.54	
3 Index of equality attitude	0.06	0.76	0.45	0.003
(Constant)		5.78	0.00	

$F = 2.063$, $df = 8,197$, $p < .041$.

$R^2 = 0.077$

A couple of other findings in the regression tables are worth mentioning. Overall, demographics contribute to the dependent variables (voting and electability) substantially. Among them, in particular, age is negatively related to being willing to support non-White candidates (beta = -0.018 , $t = -2.49$, $p = .01$) and also is negatively related to positive assessments of non-White candidates (beta = -0.017 , $t = -2.36$, $p = .02$). This finding is rather intriguing. Another interesting demographic determinant is gender. Albeit with statistical insignificance ($p = .81$), males are less likely than females to support non-White candidates, and men are prone to see a slim chance for non-White candidates to win public offices ($p = .03$).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the impact of race and gender on political judgment and led to some intriguing results. For one thing, race turns out to be a greater factor than gender in predicting people's perception of a candidate's electability. In particular, African- and Asian American candidates appear to be in a disadvantaged position because the electorate simply cannot picture them as winning seats in the Congress. Without the "winning picture" in voters' heads, it would be extremely hard for them to show any type of support to these two groups of candidates. The common scenario that African- and Asian American candidates would face is

exactly like the scenario faced by Howard Dean in the campaign of 2004: Without the prospect of winning, few votes are cast for him. Therefore, the fulfilling prophecy of the public could deeply hurt the participation and representation of these two racial groups in the political arena.

This study generates some good news for female political candidates. It appears that people look at them as serious contenders for political office and perceive them to be *almost* as electable as men. Although in reality women are still outnumbered by men in the Congress and other levels of public offices, this research finding may shed new light on the prospect of women attaining public offices at the federal level. The public in general seems accustomed to seeing female politicians. Perhaps the political system can invest more energy and time to recruit and retain women as viable candidates; however, more motivated women politicians are needed to balance the gender gap in American politics.

It is surprising that the interracial interaction variable fails to predict one's likelihood of voting for non-White candidates. The vicarious interaction—media exposure—also does not affect people's voting and winning assessments. In essence, what this finding suggests is that one's familiarity or understanding of a race does not equate his support for candidates of that race. In other words, a person's political judgment and evaluation are not based on one's personal experience with the race of the candidate, but something potentially more complicated and tactical. This finding, however, could be positive for non-White candidates especially if they run campaigns in regions where the population of their race is small.

The most significant single determinant of the regression models from this study is a person's belief in equality. It systematically predicts well for one's own support for non-White candidates, but not so well for assessments of others' political action. This finding makes sense because believing in equality does not block one's capability to objectively assess political situations. The problem, however, is how far one can go—ideally—in the face of the cruel political reality. If the assessments are overwhelmingly negative for a person's favored non-White candidate, will she be able to stick it out to the end or go the extra mile to support her candidate? Will she not cave in to peer pressure or strategic voting? These questions lead us to the impact of third-person effect on voting.

The findings show that, overall, participants demonstrated a gap between their voting likelihood and others' for non-White candidates. It is highly possible that this gap is a pure miscalculation of their—and perhaps others'—voting intentions. But if the majority of voters had this tendency to overestimate other people's biases and reservations, then their situation analysis would be almost always unfavorable to non-White candidates. Additionally, given that many voters have access

to polling results and ponder about the electability factor before even considering supporting or casting their votes, it will always prove a daunting task for African- and Asian American candidates to campaign and win elections.

Unfortunately, this study does not deliver a rosy picture for those aspiring minority candidates nor a prospect of truly diverse political representation in the near future. However, it is important to bear in mind that our conclusions are derived from an experiment with unknown, fictional candidates in an election race unattached to the participants. As they are in every race, the contexts and situations of real elections vary dramatically and could very well affect election outcomes. Sometimes a candidate's charisma or popularity can simply overcome the race or gender barrier. There are bound to be other crucial factors that determine the result in real races. This is exactly one of the shortcomings in experiment research. Future studies should benefit from data of real elections when people can form more grounded opinions about real candidates of different races and gender. The findings of this study should only serve as a springboard for better understanding the impact of race and gender on electability.

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