

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, April 1, 2013

Where: JMHH 240

When: 12:00 noon to 1:20 PM

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Does Candidate Appearance Matter? Testing the Causal Link between Candidates' Facial Features and Voters' Choices

ABSTRACT: According to numerous studies in many countries, voters elect better looking candidates at much higher rates than worse looking candidates—a finding that raises concerns about voter competence and the quality of elected officials. This worrisome result, however, is observational and so vulnerable to alternative explanations, such as candidate effort influencing vote share and appearance ratings. To rule out alternative explanations, we conduct two field-like experiments. In studies conducted just days before elections to a variety of offices, we randomly assigned voters to receive ballots with and without candidate photos. Using ratings of candidate appearance from naïve raters, we find that better-looking candidates received a higher vote share in the photo condition. Since candidate effort (or other omitted variables) could not differentially influence voters in the picture conditions compared to voters in the control conditions, candidates' looks do appear to directly influence voters in real-world elections.