

Pre-Registration of Research Plans for “Competence and Electability” (Trans Mountain Pipeline Experiment)

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1 Background

Do voters make snap judgements about competence and electability based on cues from candidates’ facial structure (Olivola and Todorov, 2010; Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007; Olivola and Todorov, 2010)? Or do perceptions of competence and electability stem from contextual social cues such as ethnicity (Terkildsen, 1993; Krupnikov, Piston and Bauer, 2016; Weaver, 2012; Stolle et al., 2016)? Here we pre-register our plan for conducting and analyzing the results of a survey experiment to answer these questions. In our study White respondents watch a video where a speaker presents an opinion. The speaker is either introduced as White, Indigenous, or no reference is made to the speaker’s background (the speaker in all three conditions is played by the same actor). We hypothesize that White speakers will be perceived as more competent and electable. We are submitting our pre-registration prior to fielding the experiment (prior to data collection). We are scheduled to begin data collection no earlier than the afternoon of February 15, 2019 (after the submission of this PRP).

2 Methods

We will recruit participants through Dynata’s (previously Survey Sampling International (SSI)’s) online panels. Participants are invited to participate in a study about opinions toward the Trans Mountain pipeline that involves watching a short video clip. Informed consent will be obtained. Respondents will then be asked some demographic questions, political attitudes, and policy preferences, including their opinion on the Trans Mountain pipeline. Participation in the study is restricted to White, English-speaking Canadian citizens.

After the pre-treatment survey questions, participants will be randomly assigned to watch a one-minute video. Participants will be randomly assigned to watch either a one-minute placebo video (where an actor talks about recycling) or one of two treatment conditions where they hear an opposing policy position from a “White” or “Indigenous” speaker. All roles (the placebo and two treatments) are played by the same actor.¹

After the intervention all participants will be asked attention/treatment checks. Respondents will be asked to identify the name of the speaker from the video, and they will be asked to identify the speaker’s position on the pipeline (pro- or anti-pipeline). These questions serve as attention checks. We will also include a timer to see whether the respondents watch the entire video they are supposed to. Then respondents will be asked to identify the ethnicity/identity of the speaker. This serves as a treatment check. We estimate the effect of the intervention by asking respondents to judge the speakers—played by the same actor, who is presented as either being White or Indigenous—on competence and electability.

A note on terminology: “Indigenous peoples” is the term “used in international or scholarly discourse” (Government of Canada, 2018). However, this term is often less familiar with non-academic audiences. The term “Aboriginal” is more commonly used. This term includes peoples of First Nation, Inuit or Métis descent “regardless of where they reside and

¹These counterargument treatments are for another experiment comparing exposure to counterarguments from ingroup and outgroup members (see “Talking Across Boundaries” also registered with EGAP as part of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Experiment).

whether or not their names appear on an official register” (Government of Canada, 2018). In our academic publications we try to use the distinct nation names that peoples commonly identify themselves by (such as Mi’kmaq, Haida, or Dene), but where a global term is appropriate we use the term Indigenous. In our surveys, we use items that ask about feelings and attitudes toward Aboriginals. We define the term “Aboriginal” for respondents the first time it appears in our survey.

2.1 Treatments and Placebo

Respondents will be asked their opinion on the Trans Mountain pipeline and then are randomly assigned to receiving a placebo or treatment. In the placebo, the actor introduces herself as “Jessica” (without mentioning anything about being a rancher or Aboriginal identity) and then talks about recycling. The placebo and treatment videos are approximately the same length (one minute).

In the treatment conditions, respondents will be randomly assigned to watch a video depicting a policy counterargument from either a “White” or “Indigenous” speaker.² The White and Indigenous speaker is played by the same Onondaga (Indigenous) professional actor, who has a fair complexion, light-eyes, and can “pass” as White (screenshots from the videos are in the Appendix). This ensures we control for facial structure on perceptions of competence and electability.

In the White counterargument condition we tell respondents “Please watch a one-minute video to get credit for this survey. In this video, Jessica Little will express her views. Jessica’s family has lived in British Columbia for generations—her ancestors were among the first Europeans to settle in British Columbia.” The actor introduces herself by saying “Hi, my name’s Jessica **Little**, proud rancher and member of the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association.”

In the Indigenous counterargument condition, we tell respondents “Please watch a one-minute video to get credit for this survey. In this video, Jessica Littlefeather will express her views. Jessica’s family has lived in British Columbia for generations—her ancestors’ traditional land is in British Columbia.” The respondents then see a video and the same actor introduces herself by saying “Hi, my name’s Jessica **Littlefeather**, proud rancher and member of the Canadian Cattlemen’s Association. **I’m a member of the Cheslatta³ First Nation band.**” In the Indigenous speaker videos the actor also wears a pair of her own beaded earrings (see screenshots in the Appendix).

²Respondents who are for the pipeline will hear an anti-pipeline argument while respondents who are against the pipeline will hear a pro-pipeline argument (we also vary communication style, rational argumentation or narrative perspective-taking). The distinction between pro- and anti-pipeline counterarguments or between communication style is not of central interest to this analysis—these conditions were included for a separate study (see “Talking Across Boundaries” also registered with EGAP as part of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Experiment). Our plan for this study is to compare counterarguments from White and Indigenous speakers, to gauge the effect of race/racism on judgements of competence and electability. As such, we plan to pool pro- and anti-treatments and the rational argumentation and narrative perspective-taking conditions. However, we will check for heterogeneous effects.

³The Cheslatta Carrier Nation lost much of their traditional lands and were displaced by a large hydroelectric dam project in the 1950s (this is important for the story the speaker in the video presents) and they are affected by the Trans Mountain pipeline.

The character Jessica Little speaks to the experiences of *ranchers*. The character Jessica Littlefeather speaks to the experiences of *Aboriginal ranchers*. Otherwise, the same points are raised in the White and Indigenous counterargument videos.

In the placebo, we introduce the video by telling the respondents “Please watch a one-minute video to get credit for this survey. In this video, Jessica will express her views. Jessica’s family has lived in British Columbia for generations.” In the video, the actor introduces herself as “Jessica” (without mentioning anything about being a rancher or identity) and then talks about recycling. In the placebo, no effort is made to prime an ethnic identity. The placebo video is the same length as the treatment (counterargument) videos.

Otherwise, the facial structure of both the Indigenous and White speaker is held constant—both roles are played by the same actor—all that is varied are contextual cues suggesting ethnic group membership. Screenshots from the videos are available in the Appendix. To watch the actual videos contact the lead author.

2.2 Main Hypotheses

Table 1: List of Main Hypotheses

H1	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” will be perceived as less competent than the same actor who does not identify themselves as such.
H1-A	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” (Jessica Littlefeather) will be perceived as less competent than the placebo (“Jessica”).
H1-B	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” (Jessica Littlefeather) will be perceived as less competent than a White rancher (“Jessica Little”).
H2	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” will be perceived as less electable than the same actor who does not identify themselves as such.
H2-A	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” (Jessica Littlefeather) will be perceived as less electable than the placebo (“Jessica”).
H2-B	A rancher who identifies themselves as “Aboriginal” (Jessica Littlefeather) will be perceived as less electable than a White rancher (“Jessica Little”).

3 Analysis

3.1 Outcomes

We measure competence by asking respondents to indicate how competent they find the speaker on a scale from 1 to 9, where higher values indicate more competence. We measure electability by telling respondents the candidate is running in the upcoming local election and asking respondents to indicate how electable they are on a scale from 1 to 9.

3.2 OLS and Covariates

For estimating treatment effects we will use OLS and control for co-variates to reduce noise and increase power. This includes measures of age, gender, ideology, immigrant, education, federal vote intention, province, employed, and living in a rural area (see Table 3). We also control for pre-treatment feelings toward Indigenous peoples (“indigfeel”). Feelings toward Indigenous peoples is computed by dividing feeling thermometer scores for Indigenous people by the mean of all feeling thermometer scores.⁴

We will also include two Likert-type items (ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree) measuring attitudes toward policy issues: “econ” (“Right now I am more worried about economic issues than environmental issues”) and “nopipelines” (“No new oil and gas pipelines should be built in Canada, even if this hurts the economy”). We also control for respondents’ opinion on the Trans Mountain pipeline (“transmount”). We will use tests for model fit and tests of multicollinearity in deciding whether to keep all co-variates.

Table 2: Covariates List

age
gender
edu
employ
immigrant
province
rural
leftright
vote
indigfeel
econ
nopipelines
transmount

3.3 Mechanisms

In addition to seeing whether salient social cues impact perceptions of competence and electability, following Todorov we will include perceptions of competence as an independent variable to see if perceptions of competence explain variation in perceptions of electability.

As a secondary research question, we will examine whether racial prejudice is a mediator that at least partially explains why people are less likely to judge Indigenous peoples as less electable. Seeing an Indigenous person presenting an opposing policy-issue can activate racial prejudice and reduce perceived electability. To measure racial prejudice we use a battery of seven Likert-type items. The response options for each question range from “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” to “Strongly disagree.” They are coded so that the higher values indicate greater prejudice.

⁴If the reviewers prefer, we can also calculate the difference of feelings toward Aboriginals from the mean score for all groups.

Table 3: Variables Measuring Racial Attitudes Toward Indigenous Peoples

“Aboriginal activists are making reasonable demands.” (reasonable)
“Aboriginals are getting too demanding in their push for land rights.” (landrights)
“Aboriginals get more favours from the education system than they should have.” (edufavours)
“Irish, Jewish, Chinese, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Aboriginals should do the same without any special favours.” (nofavours)
“More must be done to protect Aboriginal languages.” (protectlang)
“The government does not show enough respect toward Aboriginals.” (norespect)
“Aboriginals get unfair tax breaks.” (unfairtax)

We will create the dependent variables using factor analysis. We expect the seven items above to load onto a single factor (we will retain this first factor as our primary DV). As is convention, if any of the items have low factor loadings (less than 0.50) or if item analysis reveals the internal reliability of the scale increases by dropping an item then the item would be excluded from the scale. We also state in advance that if any of the items have a large number of missing they will be dropped from the scale.⁵ The factors will be rescaled to mean 0 and standard deviation 1 to allow for a natural interpretation of the size of the effects in standard deviations (higher values indicate greater prejudice).

Table 4: List of Secondary Hypotheses

H3 Perceptions of competence will at least partially explain variation in perceived electability.
H4 Racial prejudice will at least partially explain why an actor who identifies themselves as Aboriginal is perceived as less competent and electable.

3.4 P-values

We use the same procedure as Broockman and Kalla (2015) for estimating p-values for our main hypotheses: If the ATE estimate is in the predicted direction we plan to use one-tailed p-values with a rejection threshold of 0.04. If the ATE estimate is opposite the hypothesized direction we will use a one-tailed p-value with a rejection threshold of 0.01. As Broockman and Kalla (2015) note: “This preserves the property that only 5% of the sampling distribution allows us to reject the null” (see also Olken, 2015; Lin, 2016).

3.5 Missing Values

We will exclude responses for which there is missing data on the dependent variable. We recode missing values of independent variables to their means.

⁵Specifically, if more 30% are missing we reserve the right to drop items from the scale until no more than 20% are missing.

4 Other

4.1 Heterogeneity

We will also seek to identify if there is any observable heterogeneity on a larger set of pretreatment covariates, including for experimental conditions (communication style and pro- or anti-pipeline argument), respondent ideology, and respondent vote choice.

4.2 Non-Compliance and Differential Attrition

Non-compliance would entail that some participants paid limited or no attention to the videos. We gauge non-compliance by:

1. Including a timer measure to see how long respondents watched the video for,
2. including attention checks (asking respondents to identify the name of the speaker in the video and asking respondents to identify speakers' positions on the pipeline), and
3. analyzing responses to a manipulation-check (asking respondents the ethnicity/identity of the speaker from the video).

Because we are using a placebo-treatment design and the placebo is similar to the treatment (it involves watching a one-minute video) attrition is less of a concern but we will test for average differential attrition.

5 Not in the Pre-Registration Plan

5.1 Related Studies

We also plan to use variables in our experiment in two separate publications, registered under a separate registration. Search EGAP for “Trans Mountain Pipeline Experiment” and for “Measuring Attitudes Toward Indigenous Peoples.”

5.2 Variables in Dataset Not Used in This Analysis

These are all the variables in the dataset that we **do not** plan to use as dependent variables or as covariates in the regression analysis in our “Trans Mountain Pipeline Experiment.” They are for other, separately pre-registered studies (see above) or serve as distractors.

Table 5: Variables not used in competence & electability experiment

sd_wdate
sd_indigdate
sd_immdate
sd_wneigh
sd_indigneigh
sd_immneigh

sd_wwork
sd_indigwork
sd_immwork
spendhealth
spendwelfare
spendedu
spendenv
spendcrime
spenddef
spendimm
spendmin
spendindig
threat
immcrime
immjobs
fundqol
talkfriend
talkfam
buycott
petition
meet
talkmeet
compt
elect
adopt
selfesteem
rcmp
move
property
likesupport
likeoppose
transmount2

6 References

References

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