Perceptions of Competence, Strength, and Age Influence Voter to Select Leaders with Lower-Pitched Voices

* Voters prefer leaders with lower-pitched voices because they are perceived as stronger, having greater physical prowess, more competent, and having greater integrity. An alternative hypothesis that has yet to be tested in that lower-pitched voices are perceived as older thus wiser and more experienced.
* Numerous men and women were recorded speaking the sentence “I urge you to vote for me this Nomember”
* Study 1 tests whether voters discriminate on candidate age. The results show that male and female candidates in their 40s and 50s, the time in the lifecycle when voice pitch is at its lowest. Are preferred over candidates in their 30s, 60s, and 70s.
* Study 2 shows that the preference for leaders with lower pitched voices correlates with the perception that speakers with lower voices are stronger, more competent, and older, but the influence of perception of age on vote is the weakest of the three.
* Low male voices perceived as more attractive (1), physically stronger (1, 2) and more dominant (3, 4). For women, higher-pitched voices are perceived as more attractive (6, 7, 8), low-pitched voices are perceived as more dominant (9, 10). In both sexes, higher-pitched voices are associated with negative emotions such as panic, fear, and stress (11, 12, 13, 14, 15)
* Individuals with lower voices have higher levels of testosterone (2), are physically stronger (1, 2), and are more aggressive (2, 21, 22) so there is a potential mechanism enabling voice pitch to be a reliable signal of physical prowess and strength
* A speaker’s age can be predicted accurately from the sound of his or her voice (24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33). Because older individuals generally are perceived as wiser than younger individuals (34), the influence of voice pitch on voter preference may be driven, at least in part, by perception of age.
* Study 1. Subjects were assigned randomly to vote in one of 90 different mock elections between two hypothetical candidates. The competing candidates were presented as male vs male, male vs female, female vs male, and female vs female. This study verified that voters can perceive which voice of each pair used in this experiment is higher in pitch
* Study 2. Voters were asked which person of each pair was stronger, more competent, older, and for whom they would vote. A specific type of leadership role was not referred to in the vote question to remove this potentially confounding factor from the experiment. The data show that male and female participants found the lower-pitched male and female voices to be stronger, more competent, older and more electable
* Discussion. We show in study 1 that, when asked to discriminate on candidate age in the absence of any other information, voters prefer leaders in their 40s and 50s. This result is in line with the actual electoral outcomes. For example, the mean age of current members of the United States House of Representatives is 57.0 years, and 49.3 tears among those who were elected for the first time in 2012 (43). These findings are consistent with the idea that voters prefer leaders who are neither too young and inexperienced, nor too old and less capable of active leadership. The 40s and 50s are also the point in the human lifecycle in both men and women when the voice pitch is at its lowest (23, 24, 25), suggesting that a preference for leaders with lower voices could reflect a preference for leaders who have age and experience but are not too aged to lead effectively.
* While male and female candidates performed equally well overall, male candidates in their 50s were the most successful regardless of the sex of their opponent, and female candidates in their 40s were most successful when facing male opponents.
* Most importantly, the results of study do not support the idea that the established preference for leaders with lower voices might be best explained by correlation of voice pitch with age