

## Forming Choice Preferences the Easy Way: Order and Familiarity Effects in Elections<sup>1</sup>

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The present research examined the relation between choice preferences in elections and 2 peripheral cues: presentation order and familiarity. Relevant previous evidence concerns mainly voters' choices in political elections, where primacy effects were found (i.e., candidates listed earlier had an advantage over candidates listed subsequently). Also, some studies found recency effects in various competitions. However, evidence on the role of familiarity in voting preferences seems rather limited. In 3 studies, data from political and nonpolitical elections were examined with respect to order and familiarity effects. All studies demonstrated the concurrent presence of order and familiarity effects. The findings are viewed in relation to theoretical ideas pertaining to heuristic processing and to implications applying to voting situations.

It sounds like a truism to state that citizens vote in political elections according to political criteria, such as a candidate's agenda. Nevertheless, there are observations indicating that voters' decisions might also be influenced by rather nonpolitical and peripheral features, such as the candidates' name order on the ballot. For example, Miller and Krosnick (1998) found primacy effects in the 1992 Ohio elections: Candidates listed first had an advantage over their competitors.

Krosnick and his colleagues (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Alwin, 1987; Miller & Krosnick, 1998) have suggested that people often use heuristics when they vote, especially if they have no clear voting preference. Accordingly, one might pick the first available option if one has no particular

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reasons against it, thus producing a primacy effect. Moreover, Krosnick and colleagues linked the type of order effect to presentation mode: Primacy effects follow visual presentation of alternatives; while oral presentation, like in telephone surveys, results in recency effects (i.e., the last options are favored).

A further peripheral cue is candidates' familiarity to voters. Although this has not attracted much research attention with regard to election contexts, it is common sense among political candidates that one must pursue publicity. Furthermore, and more generally, there is substantial evidence showing that familiarity is related with liking (e.g., Bornstein, 1989; Harmon-Jones & Allen, 2001; Zajonc, 1968), thereby with choice preferences, allowing one to assume that familiarity should also be linked to voting preferences. Consequently, one would expect that familiar candidates are preferred by voters over nonfamiliar candidates. Following this assumption, the question emerges as to whether familiarity effects are to be expected alternatively or additionally to order effects. To investigate this question, one must examine possible order and familiarity effects concurrently.

The present article simultaneously addresses order and familiarity effects in political and nonpolitical elections. First, relevant previous research on order effects in choice preferences, especially in election contexts, is reviewed. Next, a theoretical explanation suggesting that order effects are often based on heuristic processing is considered. Then, the role of familiarity in voting preferences that result from heuristic processing is taken into account. Finally, three studies investigating elections data are presented. These studies examine both types of order effects—namely, primacy and recency effects—as well as familiarity effects.

### Order Effects in Choice Preferences: Previous Findings

The major part of research examining order effects in choice preferences appears to concern voting in political elections in the United States (Miller & Krosnick, 1998). A portion of these investigations have found primacy effects.

#### *Primacy Effects in Political Elections*

Research using data from political elections typically examines the relationship between the ballot position of political candidates' names and election outcomes. Miller and Krosnick (1998) found and reviewed 24 relevant studies. Most of these studies reported a primacy effect: Political candidates

listed earlier on voting lists tended to have an advantage over candidates listed subsequently. However, Miller and Krosnick found this evidence to be inconclusive. They argued that in 18 out of 24 studies, candidates were listed in a fixed order, which was mainly alphabetical. This allows explaining the reported order effects in terms of an alphabetic-based name preference. Specifically, (a) names with last initials at earlier alphabetical positions have higher occurrence probability than names with last initials at later alphabetical positions, at least in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>; (b) people like their own initials more than other initials (Nuttin, 1985); and (c) because the majority of people have last initials early in the alphabet and because they tend to prefer both their own initials as well as other people who share their own initials (on a similarity-attraction basis), they will prefer candidates with last initials early in the alphabet. In addition, the higher frequency of last initials early in the alphabet might enhance their attractiveness also as a result of the mere-exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968).

But Miller and Krosnick (1998) conducted their own study using elections data with a nearly randomized assignment of voters to candidate name lists. Thereby, they excluded the possibility of an alphabetic-based interpretation for their findings. What they found was, indeed, primacy effects. Furthermore, more recent studies (Ho & Imai, 2008; Koppell & Steen, 2004) also using data with a nearly randomized assignment of voters to candidate name lists, found support for primacy effects.

### *Further Order Effects*

There is also research in various domains that has examined order effects after sequential presentation of choice alternatives. The respective studies found primacy, recency, or other order effects. Concerning primacy effects, there are a few investigations, which simulated elections in the laboratory and applied an experimental design (e.g., Coombs, Peters, & Strom, 1974). These studies provide evidence in support of primacy effects. Another domain concerns responses to categorical survey questions; that is, when respondents must select a response out of a set of alternatives. Often, primacy effects were observed (for more details, see Krosnick, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2005; Schuman & Presser, 1996), but the evidence might be considered as not very consistent (Schuman & Presser, 1996).

<sup>3</sup>These studies investigated election data, mainly from the U.S., secondarily from other English-speaking countries (e.g., England, Ireland), and only few considered data from other countries (for data from The Netherlands, see Bakker & Lijphart, 1980).

On the other hand, recency effects have been found in studies investigating nonpolitical competitions in which competitors were evaluated by judges or the public. Competitors appearing later had an advantage over candidates appearing earlier in competitions such as the Eurovision Song Contest (Bruine de Bruin, 2005; Haan, Dijkstra, & Dijkstra, 2005), figure skating (Bruine de Bruin, 2005, 2006), and gymnastics (Plessner, 1999). Further, in certain studies on responses to categorical survey questions (as discussed earlier), oral presentation of alternatives seemed to consistently produce recency effects (cf. Krosnick et al., 2005). Finally, Christenfeld (1995) found different types of order effects: Participants who had to choose among equivalent routes (e.g., on maps) exhibited primacy as well as recency effects; whereas when participants had to choose among items presented in rows, the middle alternatives were preferred.

#### Order Effects in Choice Preferences: A Theoretical Explanation

Krosnick and his colleagues (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Alwin, 1987; Miller & Krosnick, 1998) offered Simon's (1957) satisficing principle as a possible explanation of order effects in political elections and other areas. Satisficing labels a heuristic. Simon coined the term to denote that when individuals select among alternatives, they often opt for a good-enough choice rather than for the best one. This happens because of cognitive limitations that restrict people to process all the information needed for the best choice, as well as to the often limited feasibility of costs (e.g., time) that are associated with thorough information processing.

Applied to a voting situation, one might think of a voter confronted with a candidates' name list. When the voter has no particular reason for or against the selection of a certain candidate, this voter would begin going through the list in a sequential order (e.g., from top to bottom) and selecting a candidate or candidates in this order just because this is the simplest way of making selections. This suggestion was supported by research using eye-tracking data (Galesic, Tourangeau, Couper, & Conrad, 2008). Therefore, candidates listed earlier are more likely to be selected than are candidates listed later.

Krosnick and colleagues (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Alwin, 1987; Miller & Krosnick, 1998) also suggested variables that influence the type as well as the extent of order effects. As mentioned previously, the type of effect is assumed to be related to presentation mode (Krosnick, 1991; also see Krosnick et al., 2005): Visual presentation of alternatives yields primacy effects, whereas oral presentation produces recency effects. This suggestion is compatible with most of the aforementioned findings.

The previous example of a voter making choices from a name list illustrates the emergence of a primacy effect in visual presentation mode. On the other hand, when alternatives are presented orally, presentation of each new item terminates processing of the preceding one. Hence, the last items have the benefit of processing time allocation, and this enhances the likelihood of a recency effect.

Regarding the extent of order effects, Krosnick (1991) suggested that satisficing is affected by task difficulty, respondent ability, and respondent motivation. Higher task difficulty and lower respondent ability and motivation should increase the amount of satisficing. For example, the presence of additional information should render a voting task easier and, therefore, reduce the likelihood of order effects. Indeed, in Miller and Krosnick's (1998) investigation, the availability of information on candidates' partisanship reduced order effects.

### Voting Preferences: The Role of Familiarity

Krosnick and colleagues' (Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick & Alwin, 1987; Miller & Krosnick, 1998) explanation of order effects can account for much of the relevant empirical evidence. Nonetheless, one might note that recency effects were found in competitions such as skating (Bruine de Bruin, 2005, 2006) and gymnastics (Plessner, 1999), where presentation of alternatives is visual. Also, in some instances, middle alternatives were selected (Christenfeld, 1995). Furthermore, it has been shown that when partisan information is available in political elections, it not only reduces order effects (Miller & Krosnick, 1998), but it is even used as a choice criterion (Schaffner & Streb, 2002; Skitka & Robideau, 1997), at least as long there is no grave reason against doing so (Skitka & Robideau, 1997). This indicates that when presentation order does not act as a cue that guides choices, voters do not necessarily engage in more extended information processing. On the contrary, there is reason to assume that individuals will utilize any handy cue, even a candidate's name smoothness (O'Sullivan, Chen, Mohapatra, Sigelman, & Lewis, 1988) to arrive at a choice by minimizing the mental effort needed (Christenfeld, 1995; Gigerenzer, 2008).

In this context, familiarity can be presumed to be a relevant cue. As mentioned previously, the relation of familiarity with liking and choice preferences is well established empirically. People tend to prefer familiar over nonfamiliar stimuli in a broad area of instances. For example, consumers prefer to buy familiar rather than unfamiliar brands (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Coates, Butler, & Berry, 2006). Thus, stimulus familiarity has heuristic value in guiding choice preferences. This seems similar to the recognition

heuristic (Goldstein & Gigerenzer, 2002), according to which recognized stimuli are evaluated more highly than are unrecognized stimuli. However, familiarity and recognition are not identical to the extent that a stimulus might be recognized without being familiar, or might seem familiar without necessarily being recognized (Zajonc & Markus, 1982).

Generally, the familiarity–liking relation has been demonstrated for a variety of stimuli (e.g., Bornstein, 1989; Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). However, the role of familiarity in the context of voting preferences seems to have been much less investigated. On a theoretical level, familiarity (in terms of exposure frequency) has been used by Miller and Krosnick (1998) in their explanation of alphabetic-based order effects.

Empirically, familiarity has been considered at best as a control variable. For example, Miller and Krosnick (1998) found that when controlling for familiarity (in terms of incumbency and amount of news media attention), order effects were reduced. However, they did not directly examine any familiarity effects. One study that comes closer to considering the relation between familiarity and voting preference was conducted by Burden (2002), who found that political candidates have higher chances to be elected when they are more rather than less familiar to voters, even when this familiarity originates from negative publicity. This interesting finding, however, is based on the interpretative analysis of two election cases.

### The Present Research

The preceding review of studies suggests that the evidence for order effects in elections is rather limited, especially if only studies with methodologically unequivocal findings are taken into account. On the other hand, one can hardly locate any studies reporting direct familiarity effects in elections. In the present investigation, three studies were conducted to examine simultaneously order and familiarity effects in political and nonpolitical elections.

In the first two studies, data from political elections were considered. In the third study, data from voting in song contests were used. With regard to order effects, choice alternatives in the first two studies were presented visually; therefore, primacy effects were expected. In the third study, presentation of alternatives was accomplished orally; thus, a recency effect was expected. Cues indicating candidates' familiarity to voters were utilized in all studies in order to test the hypothesis that familiar candidates are expected to have an advantage over nonfamiliar candidates. Finally, the question was pursued whether in the presence of order as well as familiarity cues, order as well as familiarity effects would emerge.

## Study 1

### *Method*

#### *Overview*

Data from three successive Parliamentary elections (1996, 2000, 2004) in Greece were analyzed. With regard to order effects, the relation between candidates' position on the voting sheet with candidates' outcomes was examined. Concerning familiarity effects, the relation between candidates' familiarity to voters with candidates' outcomes was considered. Candidates' familiarity was operationalized by incumbency status (cf. Miller & Krosnick, 1998); that is, by distinguishing between candidates who were elected in the respective preceding elections (high familiarity) and candidates who were not (low familiarity).

#### *Voting Procedure*

Voters are handed sheets listing the candidate parties in a random order, a white sheet for a blank vote, and an envelope. The number of parties that participate in the election varies across constituencies and usually ranges between 20 and 30. On each voting sheet, the party's candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

Voters enter the booth, and they vote by selecting a voting sheet that corresponds to a party and then by selecting a certain number of candidates on the sheet by marking their names. Thereafter, the voters place the sheet in the envelope, seal it, and drop it into a ballot box. The candidates' election depends on their party's result (seats earned in the constituency), as well as on their own result (number of votes) in their constituency relative to other candidates from their party.

#### *Data Set*

*General description.* The data set included all candidates ( $N = 853$ ) who were affiliated with four major parties in five constituencies in three consecutive Parliamentary elections (1996, 2000, 2004) in Greece. These four parties usually share between 90% and 95% of the valid votes. The five constituencies were Athens-A (Athens city), Athens-B (Athens suburbs), Thessaloniki-A, Thessaloniki-B, and Magnesia (prefecture in Central Greece). These constituencies cover roughly one third of the national electoral body.

Additionally, data from the 1993 elections were used, in order to determine incumbency status of the 1996 nominees.

*List configuration.* The voting sheets contain a name list of the party's candidates in the given constituency. List lengths in the data set ranged from 6 (Magnesia, 2004) to 47 (Athens-B, 2004). The maximum number of candidates voters were allowed to select from a list ranged from 1 (Magnesia) to 5 (Athens-B).

Candidates' names on lists were arranged in alphabetical order. An aim of the present study was to have the capability to exclude the possibility of an alphabetic-based alternative interpretation if an order effect should emerge. Despite the alphabetical order of the lists, the current data set should render such an interpretation unlikely by profiting from a certain feature of Greek names: Unlike American names, which have last initials earlier rather than later in the alphabet (Miller & Krosnick, 1998), most Greek names have last initials from the middle of the alphabet. For example, the Athens 2003–2004 telephone book contains 4,105 pages with names. Names beginning with the 8 letters in the middle of the alphabet cover about 48% of the pages, as compared to names beginning with the first 8 letters (27%) or the last 8 letters (25%; the Greek alphabet has 24 letters).

*Variables.* Three variables (position order percentile, outcome percentile, and candidate's status) were extracted or calculated from the raw data. Percentile values corresponding to candidates' position order on the list (i.e., position order percentile) and to candidates' rank order (i.e., outcome percentile) according to votes received were calculated. These values were calculated in order to make data from different constituencies and from different parties comparable with each other. With regard to candidate's status (a dummy variable), the status was *familiar* (coded as 1) if the candidate was elected in the respective preceding elections and *nonfamiliar* if not (coded as 0).

### *Results and Discussion*

To examine the possible presence of order and familiarity effects in the elections data, regression analyses were conducted separately for each election. All variables were standardized for the analyses. In each regression, candidates' outcome percentile was regressed first on candidates' position order percentiles. Next, candidates' familiarity status was added as a predictor. At a third step, the interaction between candidates' position order and candidates' familiarity was entered into the equation. The regressions yielded a consistent pattern (Table 1): There were order effects as well as familiarity effects, while no interaction between order and familiarity was apparent.



Table 1  
*Regressions of Candidates' Outcomes on Their List Position Order and Their Familiarity in Three Parliamentary Elections: Study 1*

Predictor variable	1996 election ( $n = 395$ )			2000 election ( $n = 395$ )			2004 election ( $n = 402$ )		
	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\Delta R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\Delta R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\Delta R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$
Step 1		$R^2 = .01^\dagger$ $F(1, 393) = 3.75$			$R^2 = .01^*$ $F(1, 393) = 4.86$			$R^2 = .01^*$ $F(1, 400) = 5.82$	
Order	.10 <sup>†</sup>			.11 <sup>*</sup>			.12 <sup>*</sup>		
Step 2		$R^2 = .19^{**}$ $F(2, 392) = 45.06$	$\Delta R^2 = .18^{**}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 392) = 85.56$		$R^2 = .18^{**}$ $F(2, 392) = 44.12$	$\Delta R^2 = .17^{**}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 392) = 82.38$		$R^2 = .27^{**}$ $F(2, 399) = 73.27$	$\Delta R^2 = .25^{**}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 399) = 138.71$
Order	.08 <sup>†</sup>			.13 <sup>**</sup>			.11 <sup>*</sup>		
Familiarity	-.42 <sup>**</sup>			-.42 <sup>**</sup>			-.50 <sup>**</sup>		
Step 3		$R^2 = .19^{**}$ $F(3, 391) = 30.01$	$\Delta R^2 = .00$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 391) < 1$		$R^2 = .19^{**}$ $F(3, 391) = 30.00$	$\Delta R^2 = .00$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 391) = 1.62$		$R^2 = .27^{**}$ $F(3, 398) = 49.53$	$\Delta R^2 = .00$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 398) = 1.77$
Order	.09 <sup>†</sup>			.14 <sup>**</sup>			.12 <sup>**</sup>		
Familiarity	-.42 <sup>**</sup>			-.41 <sup>**</sup>			-.51 <sup>**</sup>		
Order $\times$ Familiarity	-.02			-.06			-.06		

Note.  $N = 853$ .

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

With regard to order effects, primacy effects were observed almost consistently, with a slight exception for the main effect of the 1996 elections, which only approached significance. As hypothesized, candidates who were listed earlier on the voting sheets had an advantage over candidates who were listed later. Additionally, the magnitude of primacy effects did not change noticeably when the remaining predictors were entered into the equation. Finally, although the lists with the candidates' names were in alphabetical order, an interpretation of the results as alphabetic-based name preference can be ruled out because of certain characteristics pertaining to names' last-initial distribution across the alphabet (as discussed previously). Turning now to familiarity, familiarity effects emerged consistently over elections. As expected, incumbents attained better outcomes than did new nominees.

Taken together, in the presence of order and familiarity cues, order effects as well as familiarity effects emerged. Furthermore, the absence of an interaction and the virtually unchanged magnitude of the primacy effects, irrespective of other predictors, indicate that voters utilized all available shortcuts to arrive at a choice, rather than prioritizing the use of one cue over the other. In other words, familiarity cues did not necessarily reduce primacy effects; they elicited familiarity effects in addition to primacy effects.

More generally, however, an interaction between order and familiarity might also be possible under certain conditions, as in Miller and Krosnick (1998). In case of an interaction, the one cue—order, for instance—would be differentially utilized according to the levels of the other (i.e. familiarity). For example, in Miller and Krosnick, order was more utilized under low familiarity, rather than high familiarity. When would such a pattern be likely? Drawing on Krosnick's (1991) reasoning, one could consider the case of high task difficulty as a condition enhancing the likelihood of an interaction. In such an instance, increased heuristic processing is expected, and already achieving the utilization of one cue should be sufficient. For example, in low-information elections (e.g., O'Sullivan et al., 1988), voters would probably be happy as soon as they have one cue to utilize (be it order or familiarity; in O'Sullivan et al.'s case, it was name smoothness) and thereafter terminate their search for alternatives. This issue is examined in Study 2.

## Study 2

Study 2 was set up to examine order and familiarity effects, as well as the possibility of an interaction between order and familiarity under high task difficulty. Data from prefectural elections in Athens (Greece) were considered. The voters' task in these elections was assumed to be more difficult than in the Parliamentary elections considered in Study 1 because voters are

confronted with a considerably larger number of alternatives. Voting sheets in these elections are very long, containing nearly 100 candidates' names.

In this setting, an interaction pattern should emerge if, in the presence of two heuristic cues (order and familiarity), voters utilized the one more than the other. The cue to be utilized should be the handier one. Specifically, under low familiarity, order effects should be stronger than under high familiarity. In this study, familiarity was again approached through incumbency. In addition, it was possible to distinguish between more familiar and less familiar candidate parties.

### *Method*

Data from two successive prefectural elections (1998, 2002) for the "Super-prefecture" of Athens-Piraeus in Greece were considered. The procedure for voting in prefectural elections is the same as in Parliamentary elections (see Study 1). The data set was comparable to that of Study 1 with regard to variables and general format. A notable contextual difference is that candidate parties<sup>4</sup> can and must nominate many candidates (i.e., as many as 98). There were five parties that participated in each of the considered prefectural elections (1998 and 2002).

Data from all candidates ( $N = 849$ ) who were affiliated with the parties participating in the 1998 and 2002 elections were included. However, there was one party that participated only in 1998 and one party that participated only in 2002 (i.e., the total number of distinct parties was 6). The data from each election originated from the votes of more than 1.5 million individuals.

Similar to Study 1, candidates' status as familiar or nonfamiliar was determined. Yet, this was done only for 2002, because data from the 1994 elections (those preceding 1998) were not available. In addition, a variable denoting party familiarity was used: The parties that participated in both elections had the status *familiar*, while the two parties running in only one contest each were assigned the status *nonfamiliar*.

### *Results and Discussion*

Regression analyses were conducted separately for each election, applying the same steps as in Study 1 (see Table 2). Because incumbency information for the 1998 elections was not available, the respective analysis included only

<sup>4</sup>For the sake of simplicity, the term *parties* is used here, instead of a term such as *leagues*. It should be noted, however, that these political formations are only affiliated with established political parties, and are not parties themselves.

Table 2  
*Regressions of Candidates' Outcomes on Their List Position Order and Their Familiarity in Two Prefectural Elections: Study 2*

Predictor variable	1998 election ( <i>n</i> = 472)		2002 election ( <i>n</i> = 489)	
	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$
Step 1		$R^2 = .28^{**}$ $F(1, 470) = 186.18$		$R^2 = .25^{**}$ $F(1, 487) = 158.73$
Order	.53**		.50**	
Step 2				$\Delta R^2 = .05^{**}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 486) = 31.17$
Order			.46**	
Familiarity			-.22**	
Step 3				$\Delta R^2 = .01^{**}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 485) = 9.05$
Order			.44**	
Familiarity			-.27**	
Order $\times$ Familiarity			-.13**	

*Note.* *N* = 849.  
\*\**p* < .01.

one step. As can be seen in Table 2, order effects were obtained in both elections; these were strong primacy effects. Additionally, in the 2002 elections, a familiarity effect, as well as an interaction between familiarity and order emerged. Again, familiarity was associated with an advantage in election outcomes. The interaction indicates a differential relation between order and outcome as a function of familiarity. Indeed, whereas no order effect was evident for incumbents ( $r = .12$ ,  $n = 37$ ,  $ns$ ), a primacy effect emerged among new nominees ( $r = .50$ ,  $n = 452$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The difference between the two coefficients was significant ( $z = 2.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

With regard to the second familiarity indicator—namely, party familiarity—the relation between order and outcome was examined separately for candidates of familiar and nonfamiliar parties. In the 1998 elections, the primacy effect among candidates of the new party was stronger ( $r = .77$ ,  $n = 81$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than among candidates of familiar parties ( $r = .48$ ,  $n = 391$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $z = 4.01$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The same pattern was evident in the 2002 elections; namely, a stronger primacy effect among candidates of the new party ( $r = .67$ ,  $n = 97$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as compared to candidates of familiar parties ( $r = .45$ ,  $n = 392$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $z = 2.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In sum, the present study replicated conceptually the findings of Study 1: Order effects as well as familiarity effects were observed. Remarkably, the magnitude of the effects was considerable. This indicates extended use of heuristic cues and lends indirect support to the assumption that the voting task in the examined elections was demanding. In addition, it was suggested that in such a setting of high task difficulty, the emergence of a possible interaction between order and familiarity would be facilitated.

In support of this reasoning, the relation between order and election outcome was found to vary as a function of familiarity: Primacy effects were stronger under low familiarity, as compared to high familiarity. Moreover, this pattern was corroborated with two different familiarity indicators. As a final point, a possible limitation concerning the familiarity effects in both studies reported thus far should be noted. Incumbency as an operationalization of familiarity might confound familiarity with efficacy; that is, incumbents could be chosen because they are thought to be efficient, and not simply because their name is familiar to voters. In the next study, a different familiarity operationalization is employed to tackle this issue.

### Study 3

In Study 3, the possibility of a recency effect after oral presentation of alternatives is considered. Also, the possibility of a familiarity effect with a different familiarity indicator, as compared to the previous studies, is

examined. Specifically, data from a set of song contests were investigated; namely, from the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC), an event that is organized annually by the European Broadcasting Union. There is already evidence documenting recency effects in the ESC (Bruine de Bruin, 2005; Haan et al., 2005). Nonetheless, a more extended data set is used in the present study. Additionally, a data subset is used to examine a possible familiarity effect next to a recency effect.

### *Method*

The ESC has been held annually since 1956. The competition is among countries, mainly from Europe. Each country participates with one song. The number of contestants in the final round ranged from 10 (in 1957 and 1958) to 26 (in 2003). An additional round of semifinals has been established since 2004. The final takes place on one evening in a hall provided by a host country. Songs are performed live, one after the other. The appearance order of songs is predetermined on a random basis (i.e., by drawing lots).

After the performance of the last song, the voting session begins. Over the years, the voting format has changed; however, one feature has remained constant: Each country votes by giving a certain amount of points to a number of songs, with the limitation that voting for the song of the own country is not allowed (for a more detailed description of ESC formats and procedures, see Haan et al., 2005).

In the present study, data from all finals held (1956–2008) are considered. The 1956 contest was excluded from analyses because a scoreboard was not made public. The remaining 52 finals included 1,024 participations from 45 countries (counting Yugoslavia and Serbia–Montenegro as one entry). Three variables were extracted or calculated from the raw data. As in the previous studies, contestants' appearance order percentiles and outcome percentiles were calculated. In addition, the establishment of semifinals since 2004 has been utilized to examine a possible familiarity effect that would be unrelated to efficacy. For the contests since 2004, the contestant's status (dummy variable) was *familiar* (coded as 1) if the contestant appeared in the semifinals and in the final, and as *nonfamiliar* (coded as 0) if the contestant participated directly in the final.

### *Results and Discussion*

First, the relation between order and outcome was examined. A recency effect was apparent ( $r = -.13$ ,  $N = 1024$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As expected, songs that were

performed later had an advantage in voters' preferences over songs that were performed earlier. Further, the contest subset including the additional semifinals round (since 2004) was used for the simultaneous examination of order and familiarity effects. The respective regression (see Table 3) yielded a recency effect and a familiarity effect, but no interaction. This replicates conceptually in a very different context the simultaneous emergence of order and familiarity effects found in the previous studies.

Moreover, the present operationalization of familiarity renders an interpretation of the familiarity effect in terms of efficacy not very likely. Contestants who qualified for the final after participating in the semifinals had an advantage over contestants who were qualified to participate directly in the final. A possible explanation for this finding is that the songs that qualified for the final through the semifinals comprise a set of better songs, as compared to songs entering the final without competition.<sup>5</sup> This possibility cannot be excluded definitively and ideally should be addressed in the laboratory. Nevertheless, given the format for the initial assignment of songs to semifinals and the final, this explanation seems not highly probable after all.

The assignment format is arbitrary with respect to efficacy: With few exceptions, whether a song must compete in the semifinals or enters the final directly is determined by a country's rank in the preceding year, achieved with another song performed by another artist. Furthermore, the points earned by a song in the semifinals are not announced prior to the end of the final. It is argued, therefore, that a familiarity explanation in terms of mere exposure seems more plausible: Contestants appearing twice within a few days had an advantage over their counterparts who appeared once.

### General Discussion

Three studies provided evidence for order and familiarity effects in political and nonpolitical elections. The order effects were either primacy (Studies 1 and 2) or recency (Study 3) effects. The type of effect was contingent on the mode of presentation of the alternatives: Visual presentation of candidates in political elections was associated with primacy effects, while oral presentation of participants in song contests yielded a recency effect. Familiarity effects were evident in all studies. Familiar candidates had an advantage over nonfamiliar candidates. Order and familiarity effects were concurrently apparent. Additionally, in an assumed high task difficulty setting (Study 2), order effects were found to vary as a function of familiarity. Order effects were stronger under low familiarity, rather than high familiarity.

<sup>5</sup>Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this possibility.

Table 3  
*Regression of Contestants' Outcomes on Their Appearance Order and Their Familiarity in the Eurovision Song Contest: Study 3*

Predictor variable	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$		$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\Delta R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$	$\beta$	$R^2$ and $F$	$\Delta R^2$ and $F_{\text{change}}$
Order	-.28**	$R^2 = .08^{***}$ $F(1, 119) = 10.24$		-.25**	$R^2 = .28^{***}$ $F(2, 118) = 22.97$	$\Delta R^2 = .20^{***}$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 118) = 32.96$	-.26**	$R^2 = .28^{***}$ $F(3, 117) = 15.26$	$\Delta R^2 = .00$ $F_{\text{change}}(1, 117) < 1$
Familiarity				-.45**			-.45**		
Order $\times$ Familiarity							-.04		

Note.  $n = 121$ .  
\*\* $p < .01$ .



The present findings are generally in line with the theoretical ideas of Krosnick and colleagues on satisficing (e.g., Krosnick, 1991; Krosnick et al., 2005; Miller & Krosnick, 1998), as well as with assumptions based on the well documented familiarity–liking relation (e.g., Bornstein, 1989; Reber et al., 2004; Zajonc, 1968). Furthermore, perhaps the most important finding of the present research is the consistent evidence for simultaneous order and familiarity effects in elections. This indicates two features of voting preferences. First, in the presence of at least two cues for heuristic processing, both cues are utilized. Second, there seems to be no dominance of one cue over the other. This implies a rather cumulative use of heuristic cues, rather than an either–or use. In other words, when one cue is present, it will be utilized. When a second cue is present in addition, it will be utilized as well without necessarily reducing use of the first cue.

These implications seem plausible on the basis of the present findings, which were obtained from real-world cases. Nevertheless, further evidence from experimental research is needed to test issues systematically that were raised previously. One such issue would be to disentangle experimentally order and familiarity cues, while another would be to test the implicated cumulative use of cues. A preliminary conclusion that can be drawn here is that order and familiarity count in voting preferences. For candidates of political or other competitions, publicity seems to be a real asset, and, whenever applicable, it counts to appear first or to have the last word.

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