ETH zürich

Computational Social Science

Too Young to Run? Voter Evaluations of the Age of Candidates

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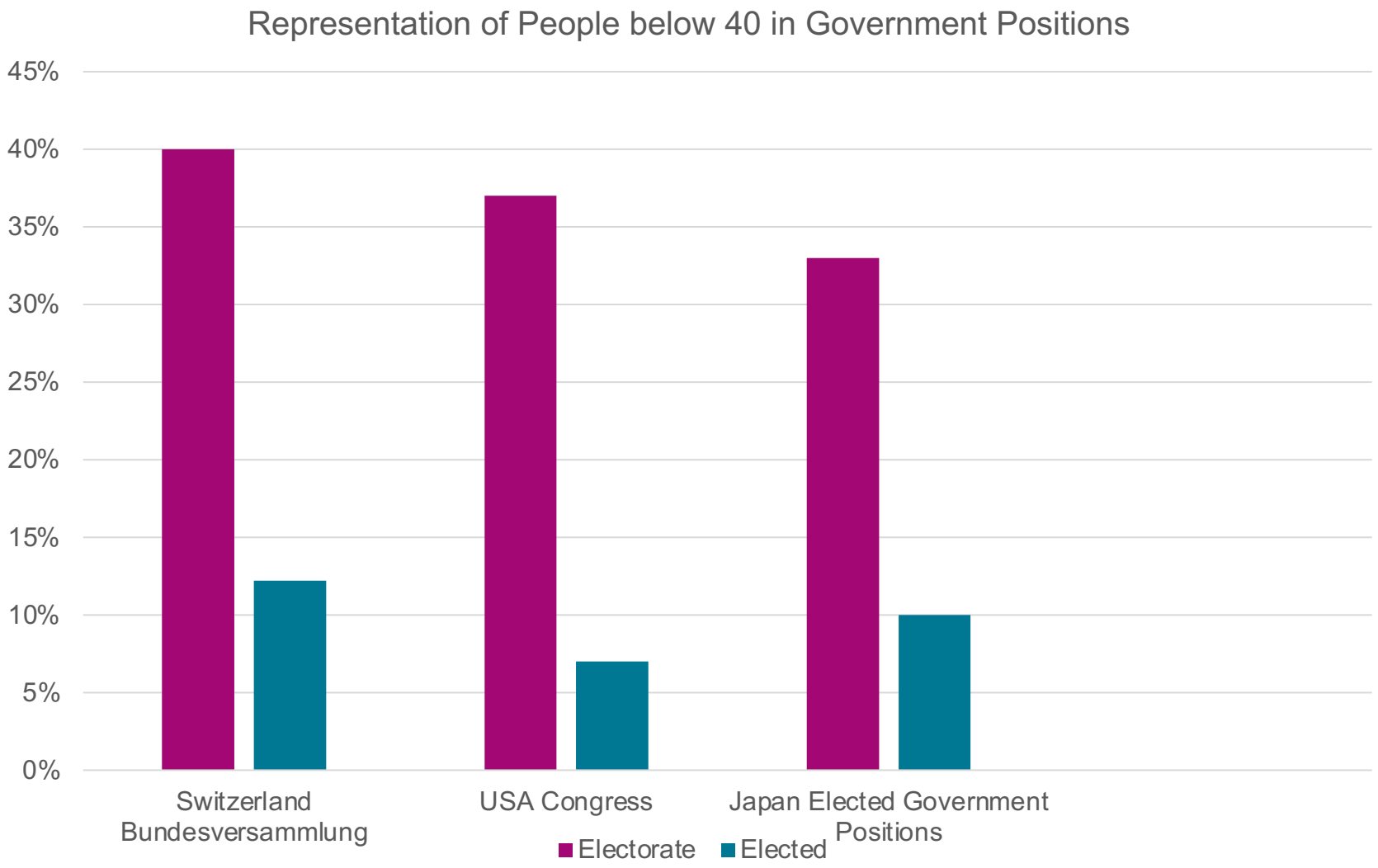
Underrepresentation of Young People



Problems of Institutional Age Bias

Underrepresentation of Interest

A lack of young adults in in office decreases the chance of debating and implementing policies important to their age group.

Discourages Young People from Politics

A shortage of young politicians can also discourage young people from participating in elections, further reducing the already limited political influence of the young.

Possible Mechanisms Behind Institutional Age Bias

Distaste for politicians in young people

Young people have less political ambition because they feel alienated from contemporary politics; view elected officials as corrupt, dishonest, and inefficient; and believe that they can best enact change in their communities through other means. [1]

Institutions prefer candidates with experience

Comparative studies point to institutions that favor candidates with more experience and financial ressources, as well as, absent and ineffective youth quotas. [2]

Voter bias ► focus of this paper

1. Lawless and Fox 2015; Shames 2017
2. Belschner and Garcia de Paredes 2021; Joshi 2013; Stockemer and Sundström 2018

Hypothesises of the paper

Age bias:

- H1: Voters will be less likely to vote for younger candidates than older candidates

Group favouritism:

- H2: Voters will be more likely to vote for candidates closer to them in age

Age Stereotypes:

- H3a: Voters will expect younger candidates to prioritize childcare, education, and climate change more than older candidates
- H3b: Voters will expect older candidates to prioritize elderly welfare and health-care more than younger candidates
- H5: Voters will expect younger candidates to be less likely to win an election than older candidates

Why Japan?

- Young adults are significantly underrepresented in mayoral offices in Japan
- Strong norms emphasizing respect and deference to one's seniors
- Aging population
- Homogenous candidate pool: 99% ethnically Japanese, 98% male

  ➔ nicely isolated age variable
- Japanese political campaigns are highly regulated, with candidates prominently featuring large photos of their faces on posters in high-traffic areas as a primary means of voter engagement

► Ideal for this experiment

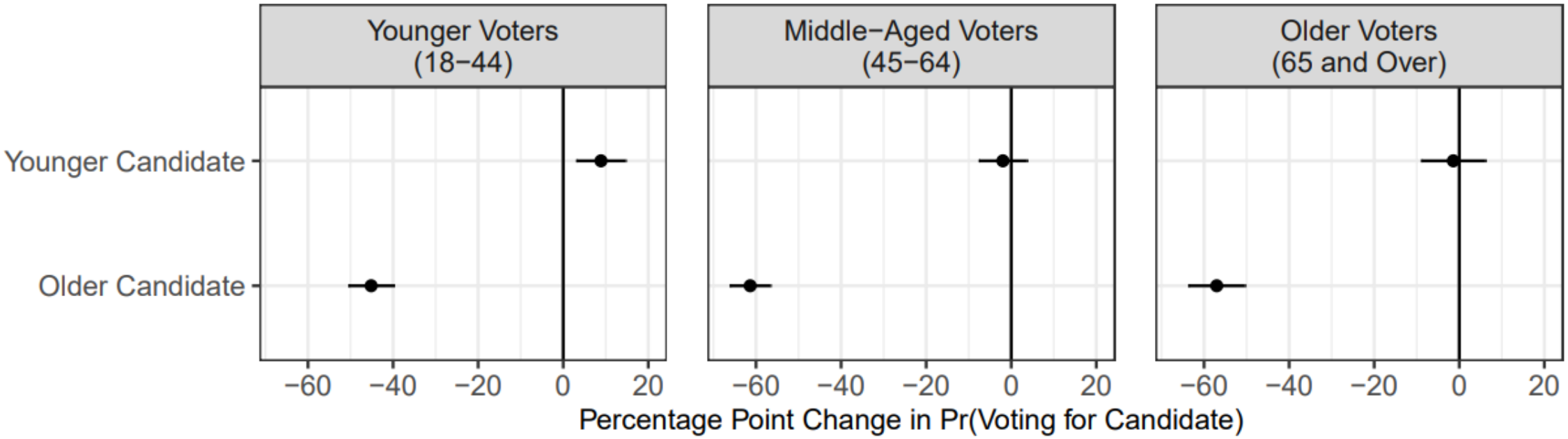
Methods

	Younger 25-44	Middle-Aged 45-64	Older 65+
Candidate 1			
Candidate 2			

- 2 candicates
- Both candidates were aged with “FaceApp”, while keeping other features such a clothes and expression the same
- They were presented as independent candidates running for the mayor position in the surveyors hometown.
- Candidate 1 estimated to be 37, 60, and 79 years old
- Candidate 2 estimated to be 36, 58, and 78

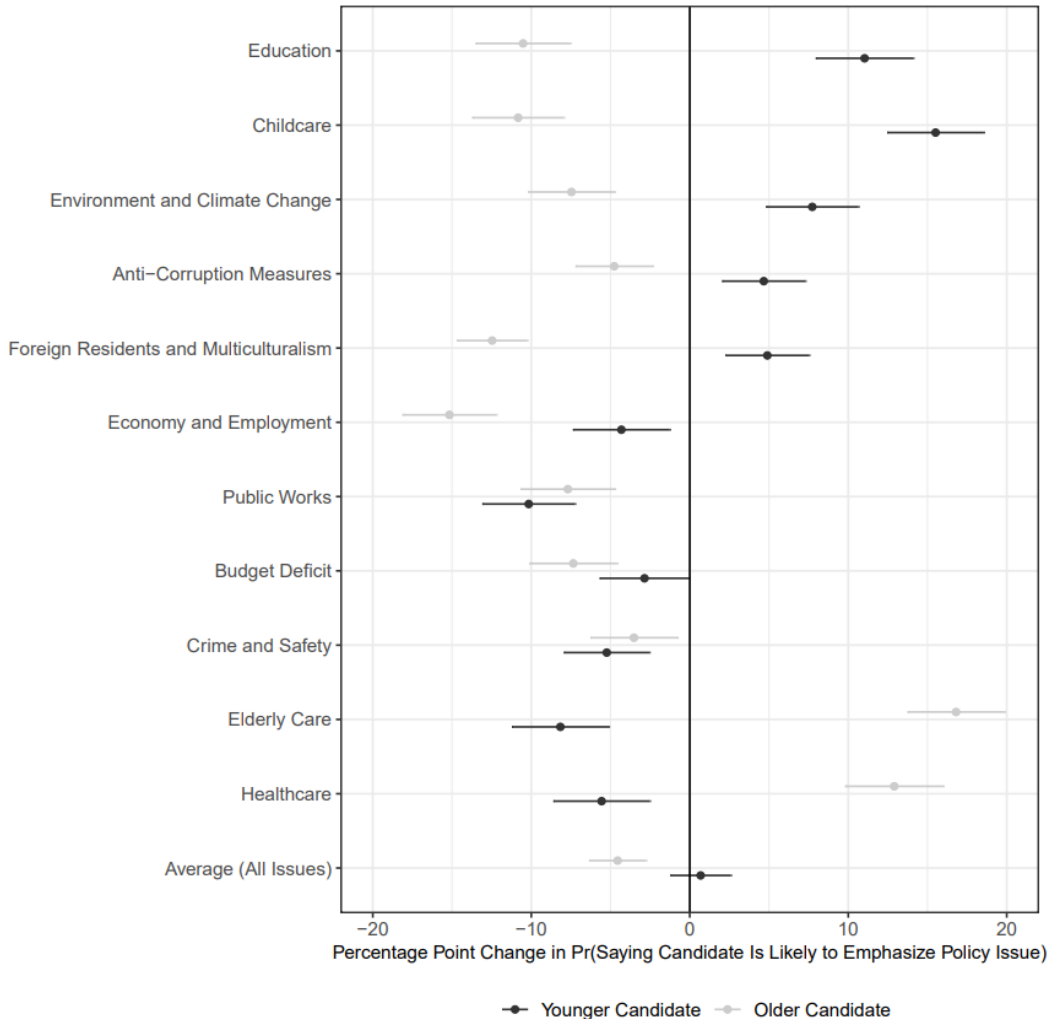
Experiment 1: Age Bias & In-group Favoritism

Each respondent recieved a pair of photos, randomly sampled from the six available ones. They then indicated which candidate they would vote for in the election and completed the survey only once.



Note: Middle-Aged Candidate is the baseline category

Experiment 2: Age Stereotypes



Younger candidates are estimated to be less likely to win than middle-aged candidates, but more likely than old candidates.

Discussion

Authors discussion:

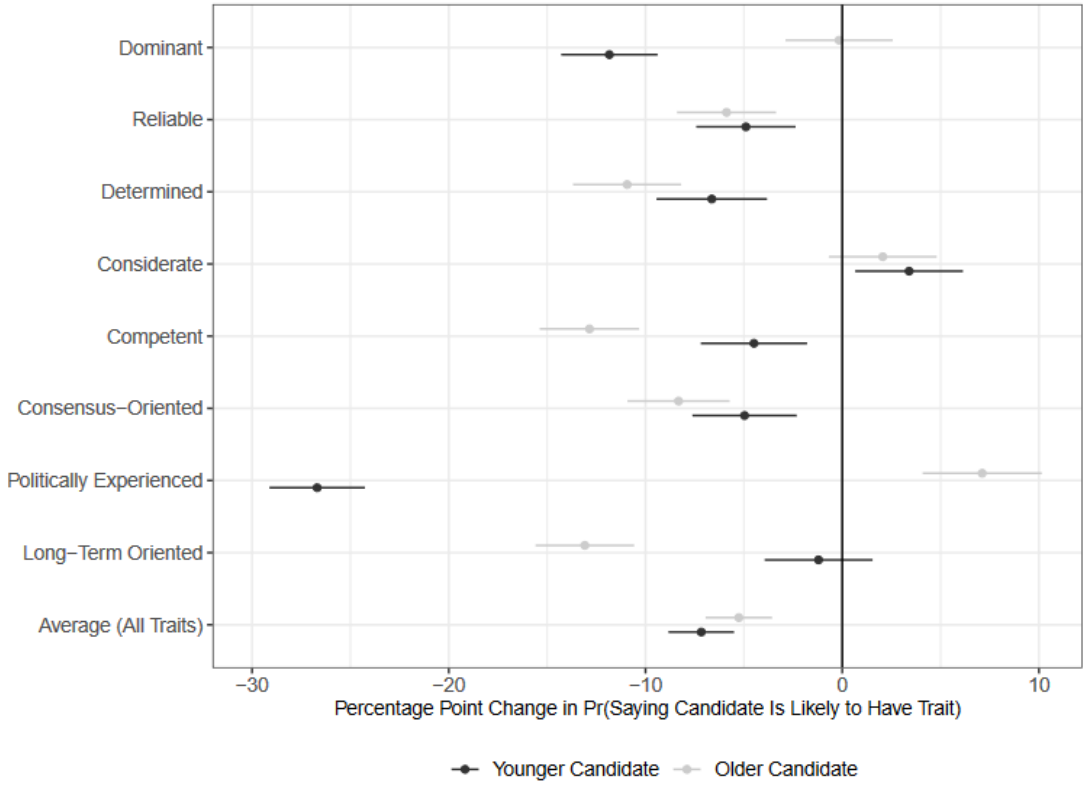
- Across the experimental analyses, they observe a preference for younger candidates over elderly ones
- They conclude voter biases are unlikely to pose a substantial obstacle for young adults
- Real-life candidates typically invest effort to appear younger
- Translates to other places

Additional Issues:

- Individuals don’t represent age group
- Artificially aged candidates may seem fake
- Generalisation to other cultures/countries

Backup: Hypothesis 4

- H4a: Voters will expect younger candidates to be more long-term oriented than older candidates
- H4b: Voters will expect younger candidates to be less experienced, competent, and reliable than older candidates



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