
Thinking Matters Symposium

2020 Thinking Matters Symposium

May 8th, 12:00 AM

The Process of Nominating Democratic Party Candidates

Lucy Brown

University of Southern Maine, lucy.brown@maine.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium>

Brown, Lucy, "The Process of Nominating Democratic Party Candidates" (2020). *Thinking Matters Symposium*. 69.

<https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium/2020/poster-sessions/69>

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

The Process of Nominating Democratic Party Candidates



A Qualitative Study
Lucy Brown, Student
Elizabeth Goryunova, PhD, Faculty Mentor

Abstract

At the start of the 2020 election cycle, there were twenty-three candidates running in the race for the nomination in the democratic race for President of the United States. With such a diverse group of candidates, it was unclear how voters could possibly make a decision. Research indicates that the most significant factors influencing voters in their decision making process are emotions, policy issues, gender stereotypes, and candidate image. The goal of this research study was to examine further how voters navigated the process of choosing a candidate in a highly competitive and historic election. Using a qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with registered voters to uncover the deeper and more complex decision making processes involved in selecting their desired candidate. The findings in this study are mostly consistent with prior research conducted, with an emphasis on the significance of policy issues and candidate image being the strongest influencers of their decision.

Keywords: election, voting, democratic party, primary, presidential candidate criteria, political campaign

Background

As we counted down to the first democratic debate, with twenty-three candidates running, I became curious about how people choose their preferred candidate

- Are there specific criteria?
- What do people look for in a leader?
- How is personality weighed against policy?



Background

Bernie Sanders was back in the race, but this time his contenders are many;

- how can they differentiate against each other while targeting the same, broader democratic population?
- how do the underdogs get the attention they deserve when they are outshined by people like Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, who already have big names in politics?



Research Question

How do Democrats choose the political candidate they want nominated?



Method

This qualitative study utilized the open-ended interview approach

- Conducted face-to-face interviews in neutral setting
- 10 participants (5 male, 5 female)
- Interviews consisted of 24 questions
- The content questions of the interview focused on furthering past research, connecting the influence of emotions, policy issues, gender stereotypes and image on voting behavior.

Findings

As a result of the interviews conducted with the 10 participants, the following common themes were identified that contribute to answering the research question:

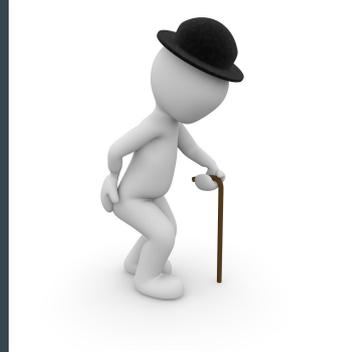
- Issues at the center of the candidates attention
- Candidate moral standards
- Candidate charisma
- Forgiveness of candidates' mistakes



Findings

The following factors were of the least concern to interview participants:

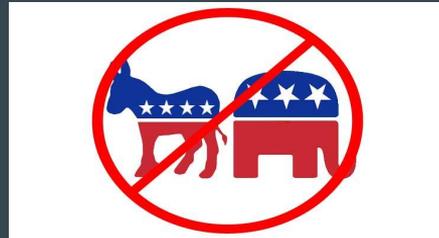
- Gender and age as considerations when voting
- Debate performance
- Political advertising as an influence



Findings

Some unexpected results from the interviews include:

- Bernie Sanders was mentioned favorably without being prompted from the interviewer on thirteen occasions
- some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the voting process in general, as well as with the two party system
- out of the 10 participants involved in the study, only two had always been registered as democrats



Discussion

This discussion of the findings in this research paper is grounded in the literature review that was initially conducted. The literature indicates that people tend to vote with their emotions. The author of this study tends to be in agreement with the literature but found that the participants in this study were unwilling to admit or did not find that their emotions directly influenced their voting choice.

The literature also indicates that policy issues matter in presidential primary elections. The findings in this study are consistent with that literature. The policy issues of concern as expressed by the majority of the participants include climate change, health care, and social/wealth inequality. The issue of polarization and a growing political divide in the country is also of great concern to the participants. Voters are more likely to vote for candidates who put these issues at the top of their lists.

Who Benefits?

- By learning what motivates and attracts people to certain candidates, I hoped to gain a deeper personal understanding of and perhaps more compassion for the differences and similarities of voters.
- It will also lead to understanding more clearly the role media has on influencing people's decisions, an important factor when analyzing how candidates are portrayed and whether or not they are all given equal and unbiased coverage.
- Ultimately, having this knowledge will help future candidates/campaigns strategize how to cater to broader demographics.
- Ideally, the DNC could take this information and put their collective energy into helping one candidate do really well against the republican nominee

Next Steps

- It would be interesting and helpful to learn how Republicans choose their presidential nominee
- The same 24 interview questions in this study could be used to interview 10 Republican voters (5 male, 5 female)
- In addition, a more anonymous approach to seek the desired information may be necessary, as it may be difficult for people to admit the role emotions play in their voting decisions. Perhaps if the study was designed differently, and participants could provide responses anonymously, the results would be different.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my Professor and Faculty Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova, for her ongoing support, guidance, and availability during this process. I would also like to thank Professor Sharon Timberlake, who has served as an additional resource and mentor, providing encouragement and levity.

I would also like to thank my classmates and peers who have been a positive influence and motivational force until the end!

