Running in Heels: Evaluating Women Candidates for Office in the Age of Appearance

Rutenberg, Rebecca

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Boston University
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Rebecca Rutenberg
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I. Introduction

As the swearing in of the 113th United States Congress drew near throughout the fledgling days of 2013, the political sphere was abuzz with chatter about the potential implications of what was dubbed yet another “year of the women” in the highest echelons of American government. With record-breaking numbers of women assuming offices in Congress than ever before – 20 female senators and 78 female members of the House of Representatives - many political pundits speculated that women’s issues would come to the forefront of political discourse throughout the 113th Congress, as they had in the election season leading up to it.

Traditionally, females campaigning for Congress have run with a high emphasis on issues that voters generally deem to be ‘women’s issues’ in nature – access to reproductive healthcare and family planning services, pay equity, healthcare, and ability to obtain affordable education, perhaps because they are able to appeal to female voters when doing so. In every single presidential election since 1980, women have voted at higher rates at men and are more likely to vote for women candidates, likely because they deem female candidates as what Jennifer Lawless refers to as ‘symbolic representatives’ of the minority group as a whole.

However, following the release of research indicating that the 2010 midterm elections marked the first time that the Republican party was able to capture the vote of unmarried American women in over 30 years, both parties reignited the so-called ‘culture war’ throughout the 2012 presidential elections in an effort to garner the vote of the average American female. As such, issue areas that have traditionally been captured by women candidates became the focus.

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of the election as a whole as Democrats and Republicans competed for the “women vote” and shifted their campaign targeting accordingly.\(^5\) No longer are women’s issues only issues that receive attention from women candidates— they’re a topic of conversation for both genders and both sides of the partisan spectrum. The question arises – what will women run on now?

The ability of women candidates to run comprehensive and ultimately successful campaigns for office has the potential to significantly improve current underrepresentation of women in the House of Representatives and the Senate, with current representation levels at 17.95 and 20 percent respectively. However, the heightened representation of women in Congress relies completely on the effectiveness of female candidate tactics in appealing to, identifying with, and mobilizing voters – voters will undoubtedly rely on a variety of other information shortcuts to guide their voting behavior\(^6\), most notably including the representative heuristic at focus throughout this work: appearance. Appearance is an information shortcut that should be of particular note to female candidates, as women in politics are more likely to be judged on a basis of appearance than their male counterparts\(^7\) and these judgments are more publicly displayed in prominent media outlets than similar considerations for male candidates.\(^8\) This research will seek to further existing scholarship on the use of appearance as an information shortcut by examining the extent to which a female candidate’s physical appearance is able to alter the level of general and specific issue competency that they are assigned by voters as well.

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as how a female candidate’s physical appearance impacts a voter’s assessment of an opposing male candidate.

II. Literature Review

Extensive existing scholarship has been dedicated to identifying issue areas in which women legislators are perceived to hold higher levels of competency as well as issue areas in which women legislators are viewed to be less competent than their male counterparts. According to Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2009) and Kahn (1994), female candidates for office and members of Congress - particularly those seen as having so-called feminine character traits including kindness, compassion, and warmth - have been perceived to be more adept in handling issues that have been categorically labeled as ‘women’s issues’, including education, healthcare, and civil rights.9/10 In 2006, Sabonmatsu and Dolan submitted a series of questions to the American National Election Studies Pilot Study regarding societal perceptions about gender as a whole as well as seemingly blunt questions about the relationship between feminine character traits and a female candidate’s competency. The response pattern they received indicates that these intrinsic competency evaluations are persistent for both male and female voters across both major parties, although they tend to benefit Democratic candidates more so than Republican candidates.

The enduring belief held amongst women voters that female candidates are more competent in working in these policy arenas is likely a result of voter identification with women candidates as a likeminded member of a shared minority group: females. According to existing sociological research by Bobo and Gillam about the benefits of electing individuals of minority

or traditionally disenfranchised social groups into power, minority candidates are perceived to provide tangible political benefits to citizens of similar backgrounds once in office.\textsuperscript{11}/\textsuperscript{12} Referred to interchangeably as ‘linked fate’ following research by Michael Dawson or ‘symbolic representation’ by Dolan, minority constituents believe that legislators of their minority group provide increased benefits to their group, both in terms of passing more substantive and effective legislation and more symbolic factors such as heightened feelings of political efficacy and voice in government. In this sense, many women candidates have succeeded in establishing a resonating sense of linked fate with the female voting population through the development of gender issue ownership of issues that are normally deemed to be of high importance to women voters.\textsuperscript{13}

Though women are widely thought to exhibit higher levels of ability in working in women’s issue areas, Huddy and Terkildsen found that traditional gender stereotypes leave many voters with the perception that male candidates are more adept at dealing with problems that are of heightened importance to the nation including foreign policy, business, and energy initiatives.\textsuperscript{14} This finding was achieved through a four-treatment survey experiment that required 297 participants to evaluate a randomly assigned a male or female candidate with masculine or feminine traits. Though males were always deemed to be more well-equipped to handle traditionally male-owned issues than females, in both sexes, candidates that displayed more masculine personality traits in a written description (such as aggression, decisiveness, etc.) were deemed as being more adept at dealing with male-captured policy arenas than their counterparts.

\textsuperscript{11} Bobo, Lawrence and Frank Gillam. “Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment.” \emph{American Political Science Review} 84:2. June 1990.
\textsuperscript{13} Herrnson, Paul.
\textsuperscript{14} Huddy, Leonie and Nadya Terkildsen. “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates.” \emph{American Journal of Political Science} 37:1 1993. 119-147. JSTOR.
with feminine personality traits (such as kindness, gentleness, etc.). These results were replicated in a study by Broverman et al, who found that while female candidates are typically described as compassionate, warm, and gentle, male candidates are more commonly stereotyped as more competent, rational, and ready to lead the nation.¹⁵

Existing theory in the discipline has also provided an interesting analysis as to how a candidate’s appearance can alter how they are viewed and ultimately perceived by voters. As one might expect, physically attractive individuals seem to outperform their peers because people draw inferences about their general character and potential abilities from their facial features. Attractive individuals are generally deemed to be more poised, interesting, social, and engaging than those of average or subpar appearance.¹⁶ Mazur and Mueller tested the ability of appearance to impact character assessments by showing a series of respondents a series of black-and-white photographs to groups of 20-40 students, providing them with information about the photo’s background and/or employment position and had them rate the faces on a seven point scale measuring confidence and submission. Overwhelmingly, the more attractive individuals were rated as being more confident and dominant.

These general trends can be extended to the political arena as more attractive candidates have been traditionally more likely to win elections, and do so at larger margins of victory.¹⁷ However, it is unclear as to whether these patterns occur as a result of selection bias on the part of political parties, information shortcuts used by low-information voters, or a combination of the two. In 2009, Atkinson, Enos, and Hill measured the effect of candidate facial competence on vote choice, controlling for electoral context and voter partisanship. Their survey estimated a

numerical attractiveness value for each candidate from the 2004 House elections and the 1990-2006 Senate elections by requiring respondents to select the more attractive individual in pair match-ups. Their findings demonstrate that not only are attractive candidates more likely to win political races, but that in competitive contests, the out-party is significantly more likely to run an attractive candidate. These results suggest that a politician’s appearance is a large portion of what will lead a political party to identify them as a high-quality candidate for office in a high-stakes political race that they desperately need to win.

According to recent research by Lawson and Lenz, however, attractive political candidates have a particular advantage in appealing to low-information voters who rely primarily on the television as a political information shortcut, as they generally win an election with a ten percentage point margin over an unattractive candidate. Through the use of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, an opt-in Internet panel survey, Lawson and Lenz first tested respondents on their political knowledge about recent elections and then showed them pairs of similarly sized photographs of opposing candidates, automatically omitting elections about which the respondent had demonstrated a significant level of knowledge. Overwhelmingly, the more attractive candidate won. However, the extremity of these results was limited to those who relied on the television as a primary source of their political information and not those who did not rely on TV to garner political information, indicating that the portrayal of candidates by the media had a high influence on viewer perception of candidates. Because women in politics are more likely to be judged on a basis of appearance than men and these judgments are much more likely to be a primary focus of attention in major news sources, it seems that women in

politics have a higher likelihood of having their competency and overall candidate quality assessed on a basis of appearance than men do.

Although there is significant scholarship on the relationship between both gender and issue competence and candidate appearance and perceived competence, there remains a lack of concentration on the interaction between the three variables together. An analysis as to the extent to which the appearance of a woman candidate impacts a voter’s perception of her overall and specific issue competency will result in a more thorough understanding of not only the specific factors that aid women in achieving electoral victories, but also how the focus of the mass media on appearance and other trivial attributes of women candidates is able to significantly alter the voting behavior of the general populace.

III. Research Questions and Methodology

This research paper seeks to explore the extent to which voters evaluate the overall and specific issue competency of women candidates on the basis of their physical appearance and whether or not these evaluations impact the way that voters make comparisons against male candidates in intergender races. For the remainder of the paper, the word competency will be defined as the sufficiency of qualifications that the candidate brings to work either in a specific policy arena or as an elected official as a whole. Through the use of three styles of randomly assigned two treatment surveys, the hypotheses listed below will be tested. In each case, the null hypothesis is that there is not enough significant evidence to conclude that there is a relationship between a woman candidate’s level of attractiveness and how competent they are perceived to be. In the aggregate hypothesis about overall competence, the candidate’s level of appearance
will matter, as predicted by Atkinson et al. When looking at assessment of competence by issue, however, it is crucial to explore the interaction between appearance and issue ownership. When exploring issue competency in an issue area that is traditionally captured by females, the use of appearance as an information shortcut will not be necessary because females will already be assessed as the more competent candidate on the basis of gender alone. When exploring issue competency in an issue area that males have captured, however, less attractive females will be assessed as more competent because they have facial features more akin to males and will be perceived as holding personality character traits associated with male figures according to the work of Huddy and Terkilson. Seemingly neutral issues that have been captured by neither males nor females will be assessed just on appearance.

**H₁: Voters will perceive more attractive female candidates as being more competent to hold elected office than less attractive candidates.**

This hypothesis will integrate the concept of candidate gender into existing research by Atkinson et al. (2009) that reports more attractive candidates as being perceived as stronger candidates. While the work of Atkinson et al. centered around the relationship between a candidate’s appearance versus their opponent (of both genders) and how it impacted their likelihood to win the race, this hypothesis looks at the extent to which variations of a female candidate’s appearance will impact her ability to win an election. It is expected, similarly to Atkinson et al., that more attractive female candidates will be perceived as more competent overall than less attractive women and will be more likely to win their race.

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H₂: In the realm of healthcare policy, voters will assess attractive and less-attractive female candidates as having the same level of competency in comparison to male candidates.

Because women candidates have captured stereotypically “feminine” issues such as education, healthcare, and civil rights policy, they will not need to employ information shortcuts beyond gender to assess competency. When exploring issue competency in an issue area that is traditionally captured by females, the use of appearance as an information shortcut will not be necessary because females will already be assessed as the more competent candidate on the basis of gender alone. Because healthcare policy is a readily identifiable women’s issue, appearance will not lead to any significant differences between the competency ratings of the treatments.

H₃: In the realm of foreign policy, voters will assess attractive female candidates as being less competent than unattractive female candidates in comparison to male candidates.

Because male candidates have captured stereotypically “masculine” issues such as foreign policy, voters will assess the more masculine, less-attractive female candidate as being more competent in working on foreign policy. When exploring issue competency in an issue area that males have captured, however, less attractive females will be assessed as more competent because they have facial features more akin to males and will be perceived as holding personality character traits associated with male figures according to the work of Huddy and Terkilson.

H₄: In the realm of immigration policy, voters will assesses attractive female candidates as being more competent than less-attractive female candidates in comparison to male candidates.

Because neither male nor female candidates have captured the issue of immigration as being inherently feminine or masculine and more attractive candidates are perceived as being more competent than less-attractive candidates in general\textsuperscript{24}, voters will assess the more attractive female candidate as being better equipped to work on immigration policy. Given the findings of Sabonmatsu and Dolan (2009) and Kahn (1994) regarding gender capture of specific issue areas, assessments of competence in dealing with immigration issues should have the greatest differences between attractive and non-attractive female candidates.

Throughout the design phase of the experiment, great care was taken to ensure that the survey design measures utilized were akin to those employed in existing research on the topic, and in-text citations will note when a prior design was used. In an effort to test $H_1$, $H_2$, $H_3$, and $H_4$, a two-treatment survey experiment was designed that randomly assigns respondents to either an attractive or a less-attractive female candidate and asks them to evaluate both her general and specific issue competency in comparison to a static male candidate. Respondents were found using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, an online tool that is similar to the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, an opt-in Internet panel survey that was used by Lawson and Lenz.\textsuperscript{25} The use of Mechanical Turk (MTurk) as a vehicle for performing experiments was recently analyzed in a paper by Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz, who argued that respondents recruited through the use of MTurk are, on the whole, more representative of the U.S. population than in-person convenience samples.\textsuperscript{26} When first introduced to the survey, respondents are asked a series of demographic questions to allow for later analyses of variables including age, race, party affiliation, and education. The demographic questions are presented in Appendix 1 and 2. Respondents are then


assigned one of two treatments randomly, and are informed that they will be participating in a fictitious Senate election.

Respondents are then introduced to the two candidates that they will be evaluating in a fictitious election. They will be presented with two candidates – David Smith, the male candidate that remains static regardless of which treatment the subject is shown; and Carolyn Smith, a female candidate who is either slightly unattractive or slightly attractive depending on which treatment the subject is assigned to. Regardless of appearance, the positions of each candidate will remain the same throughout both treatments. In an effort to develop a scale of attractiveness and appropriately select two female candidate treatments of attractive and less-attractive appearances, a Qualtrics survey was distributed to 499 respondents that asked them to make a snap judgment on a scale of 1 – 10 (from less attractive to more attractive) of the appearance of approximately 30 headshots. All of the candidates that respondents were asked to assess are, in real life, members of what Darcy, Welch, and Clark deem to be the “eligibility pool” of qualified individuals that would be likely to run for office, as they are all government relations professionals that have high levels of education and extensive experience working in the highest echelons of American government. To eliminate any other sources of potential biases that may alter respondent opinions, all candidates are white, blonde, an average weight, average skin tone, brown-eyed, do not have glasses, and of a similar age range. The candidates are all dressed in modest business-formal clothes, and the female candidates have similar hair lengths, facial expressions, and accessories. An “appearance standard” was established simply by taking the mean of all assessments of each candidate. For survey use, a female candidate was selected who had an appearance score of four, which was slightly below average, and six, which

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was slightly above average. This procedure of selecting appearance standard was in-line with previous work by Mazur and Mueller and Lawson and Lenz.

Figure 1

In an effort to control for partisanship and ideological differences, two two-treatment surveys were designed with policy statements relating to healthcare, immigration, and foreign relations – a general election that was very partisan, and a primary election in which the candidates had very similar views. The positions that the candidates took were varied across the experiments in an effort to see if a candidate’s partisanship impacted the manner in which they were evaluated by appearance by respondents. Respondents were required to determine which candidate they felt had a higher competency level in each policy arena. The first two-treatment survey selected policy statements from the websites of current members of Congress that are rated at roughly 50 percent on liberal ideology scales. Neither member of Congress identifies their primary policy concern as foreign policy, immigration or healthcare in an effort to ensure that one candidate isn’t an expert in the arena compared to another, and the male and female
candidate received one policy position from each member of Congress in an effort to balance differences in writing style in determining final competency levels. Though the male and female candidate statements differed slightly, both candidates referenced similar items in their statements and had comparable goals and considerations. For each candidate, respondents received an information sheets with the candidate’s picture and a series of issue positions. They were then asked to evaluate which of the two candidates they deemed to be more competent. A second two-treatment survey was designed only for independent respondents, and featured policy statements as they were released by Massachusetts Senate candidates Elizabeth Warren (Democrat) and Scott Brown (Republican) in an effort to mimic a race that actually happened and account for partisan differences. For each candidate, respondents received an information sheets with the candidate’s picture and a series of issue positions. They were then asked to evaluate which of the two candidates they deemed to be more competent. The text of both survey versions is included in Appendix 1 and 2.

Lastly, respondents were asked to determine which candidate they would vote for if they were ultimately given the choice, rate the level of competency of both candidates on a one to five scale (one being the least competent and five being the most competent) and to justify their response in an open-ended stop-and-think probe. For this question, three different response mechanisms were selected to force the respondent to make a thoughtful decision about which candidate they would select as being more competent, and to allow for analysis of the reasoning behind their decision throughout a later analysis of survey results.

Results will be analyzed using a difference of means test to assess statistical significance, which has been deemed an acceptable measure because survey treatment was randomly assigned. Simple difference in means tests are used to assess the effect of candidate Jones’ appearance on
popular assessments of her competence. Because subjects were randomly assigned to one of the two treatments, the resulting differences in means are unbiased.

IV. Results and Causal Analysis

**H₁: Voters will perceive more attractive female candidates as being more competent to hold elected office than less attractive candidates.**

As evidenced in Table 1 below, in both the partisan and nonpartisan surveys, the respondents who were asked to assess the overall competency of the attractive female were more likely to assess her as having a higher level of overall competency than did the respondents who were asked to rank the competency level of the less attractive female. These findings are statistically significant in the nonpartisan survey and lack significance in the partisan survey. An additional pattern of interest regarding the male candidate is also observed throughout these findings. Although the male candidate that is presented to respondents remains static across both treatments (in terms of both appearance and policy positions), respondents assessed him as being more competent to hold office when paired against an unattractive woman than when paired against an attractive woman.

**Table One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Type</th>
<th>Male Candidate</th>
<th>Female Candidate</th>
<th>Survey Size</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey, Attractive Treatment</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0.1 (Difference between female candidate treatments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey, Unattractive Treatment</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>158</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey, Attractive Treatment</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>0.21 (Difference between female candidate treatments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey, Unattractive Treatment</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>141</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, when respondents were asked which candidate they would likely vote for in the election (a question simply designed to serve as a precursor to assess their overall competency), both the partisan and nonpartisan surveys exhibited extreme biases towards the more attractive candidate, confirming that candidates with more pleasing appearances receive benefits at the ballot box. This is demonstrated below in Table Two. Such a finding has interesting implications on the ability of a female candidate’s appearance to influence how voters assess her, as existing scholarship renders partisanship the most important consideration when individuals are in the ballot box. However, appearance mattered in influencing vote choice even in the partisan experiment.

**Table Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attractive Treatment</th>
<th>Unattractive Treatment</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**H₂: In the realm of healthcare policy, voters will assess attractive and less-attractive female candidates as having the same level of competency in comparison to male candidates.**

As seen in Table Three, respondents in both the partisan and nonpartisan survey were more likely to assess the female candidate as being more competent than the male in the realm of healthcare policy. Table Three presents the percentage of respondents that assessed the woman candidate as being more competent than her male competitor in health care policy. In this case, a high p value would render H₂ as valid, as the hypothesis surmised that there would be no significant difference between the two treatments. In this case, respondents were significantly more likely to assign a preferable rating to the attractive candidate than they were the less-attractive candidate, indicating that appearance is still used as an information shortcut even when the issue at hand is one that is a readily identifiable women’s issues.
Table Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractive Treatment</th>
<th>Unattractive Treatment</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H₃: In the realm of foreign policy, voters will assess attractive female candidates as being less competent than less-attractive female candidates in comparison to male candidates.

Table Four presents the percentage of respondents that assessed the woman candidate as being more competent than her male competitor in foreign policy. While nonpartisan respondents demonstrated response trends that indicate that the more attractive candidate was deemed to be more competent on average than her male counterpart, the partisan survey leaned sharply towards assessing the unattractive female candidate as more competent on average than her male candidate. Both findings, however, had high p values and were not statistically significant, rendering the study unable to reject the null hypothesis.

Table Four

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractive Treatment</th>
<th>Unattractive Treatment</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When assessing the choices made on a basis of other demographic features, however, a partisan pattern occurred. Regardless of which treatment Republican respondents were assigned to, they were much less likely than Democrat respondents to select the female candidate as being more competent than her male competitor in the realm of foreign policy, as demonstrated below in Table Five. In the partisan survey, this trend should not be a surprise, as the Democratic candidate was a female with a policy position that was in line with Democratic Party principals. However, the fact that this pattern is enduring amongst Republican and Republican-leaning
respondents in a nonpartisan survey in which the candidates had nearly identical issue statements indicates that Republicans may be less willing to indicate that they trust a female representative – regardless of party or perceived level of expertise – to deal with matters of national security. This pattern of marked difference between Republican and Democratic respondents was only evidenced in an analysis of national security competency. Although potential explanations for this finding will be discussed more at length in the analysis section, future scholarship would do well to explore this issue further, as it has strong implications on a woman’s ability to attain political office and do meaningful work while in office.

**Table Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Selection: Democrat Respondents</th>
<th>Female Selection: Republican Respondents</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Republicans were much less inclined to select female candidates as being more competent in national security policy than their Democratic peers and were much more likely to bash the female candidate in the stop and think probe at the end of security about their ability to appropriately handle these issues, especially older respondents. Some of the more extreme responses included “As a voter who view political placards and look at the demeanor of the candidate, Carolyn Jones doesn't look like a strong candidate and appears to be more of a school teacher mommy type who possibly won't be able to handle foreign affairs or anything above grading school papers” and “They both said things I didn't like so I had to choose the one I liked least. I think Smith was a little more even handed than Jones. She seems to want to punish everyone and I think Smith is more calm and thoughtful. We're hurting enough as a nation. A little soft talk might go further”.
H₄: In the realm of immigration policy, voters will assesses attractive female candidates as being more competent than less-attractive female candidates in comparison to male candidates.

Table Six presents the percentage of respondents that assessed the woman candidate as being more competent than her male competitor in immigration policy. As shown below, respondents in both the partisan and nonpartisan survey were slightly more likely to assess the female candidate as being more competent than the male in the realm of immigration policy with no marked differences between the attractive and less-attractive treatments. In the nonpartisan survey, respondents more likely to use appearance as an information shortcut to guide their assessment as to which candidate would be more successful in dealing in immigration policy. Partisan survey respondents, however, did not rely on appearance as a tool through which to make their decision. This variation in response patterns between the two surveys is logical, however. Immigration is a highly contentious social issue, and the Democratic and Republican parties have staunchly different political views as to which policies regarding immigration are appropriate for implementation. Because of the nature of this issue, it makes sense that respondents presented with two markedly different political views will make their assessment based primarily on issue stance, while respondents presented with two moderate responses would rely on appearance as an information shortcut.

Table Six

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attractive Treatment</th>
<th>Unattractive Treatment</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Analysis

As demonstrated through the findings above, this series of experimental two-treatment surveys uncovered interesting patterns about the means through which a female candidate’s appearance impacts how voters evaluate her in terms of both general and specific issue competency. On the whole, respondents were much more likely to express heightened perceptions of candidate competence when they were presented with a more attractive female candidate, a pattern that is in line with the findings of Atkinson et al. Although these biases held strong when respondents were asked to assess competency on a scale of zero through five for both candidates, they were especially prevalent when respondents were asked to determine which candidate they would ultimately vote for, perhaps because this was a case in which respondents were able to make a determination on their overall judgment of the candidate without having to justify their response by assessing the other candidate’s competency as well. On a larger scale, these findings indicate that a female candidate’s appearance has a strong relationship with the level of competence to hold office that she is attributed and, ultimately, her resultant ability to win her race. These findings have large implications on the ability of women to win races given current prevalent biases in American media, as women in politics are more likely to be judged on a basis of appearance than men\textsuperscript{28} and these judgments are much more likely to be a primary focus of attention in major news sources.\textsuperscript{29} The focus of the American media and, ultimately, American populace on the appearance of female candidates has the potential to stifle the voice of less attractive female candidates and potentially shortchange the nation out of leaders with the ability to impact significant legislative changes.


These findings also exposed interesting patterns on the interaction between a candidate’s appearance and gender issue ownership. As a readily identifiable ‘women’s issue’, respondents in both surveys and both treatments were likely to overwhelmingly consider the female candidate to be more competent than her male competitor in dealing with healthcare. However, the level of expertise that they were attributed was strongly correlated with their appearance, indicating that appearance strongly impacts the breadth of knowledge that a female candidate is believed to have on a particular policy issue, even if their gender benefits them. To better assess the interaction at play, future studies would do well to consider a policy realm other than healthcare as a prominent women’s issue. Though healthcare has traditionally been a policy arena that is ‘owned’ by female politicians, recent healthcare reform and resultant media coverage could potentially have transformed it into an issue captured by neither sex.

When exploring the relationship between issue ownership of national security and candidate appearance, there is no evidence that appearances affected assessments of a female candidate’s issue-specific competence on foreign policy and immigration, two issue areas that are not “owned” by women candidates. In this case, the net effect was the opposite of what was hypothesized in H\(^3\) and H\(^4\), as appearance only mattered when respondents’ were assessing a candidate’s competency in dealing with women’s issues, not with issues that have been captured by males or captured by neither sex. However, appearance does have a large influence on the overall assessment of a female candidate’s competence, how respondents assess her male competitor, and resultant overall vote choice.

After further review, a strong relationship was demonstrated between a respondent’s partisanship and their willingness to select the female candidate as being the more competent of the pair in dealing with national security issues. Republicans were much less inclined to select
female candidates as being more competent in national security policy than their Democratic peers and were much more likely to bash the female candidate in the stop and think probe at the end of security about their ability to appropriately handle these issues, especially older respondents. Additional scholarship is needed to determine a decisive answer as to why such a partisan difference occurs when assessing the competency of candidates specifically in the realm of foreign policy to determine what exactly drives Republican biases against female candidates.

Respondents exhibited interesting response patterns when asked to assess competency in the realm of immigration policy. Individuals who participated in the partisan survey exhibited no statistically significant biases towards either treatment while those who participated in the nonpartisan survey were much more likely to use appearance as an information shortcut to guide their assessment as to which candidate would be more successful in dealing in immigration policy. Although this difference in means was not statistically significant, this variation in response patterns makes sense when considering the nature of immigration policy as an inherently contentious social policy about which people generally hold strong partisan opinions. When provided with two strong political views in opposition with one another, respondents in the partisan survey did not need to use appearance as an information shortcut because they were instantly inclined to side with the candidate whose views most closely mirrored their own. Respondents in the nonpartisan survey were presented with two very moderate issue statements that had no apparent differences relied on appearance as an information shortcut. More scholarship is needed on this particular topic to find statistically significant results.

Although the findings of the survey definitively indicate the extent to which appearance is used as an information shortcut when assessing the overall competency of women candidates and has large implications on their ability to win races, the results of the survey and
generalizability could be strengthened with the modification of several survey design features that could possibly mask the extent to which appearance impacts vote choice. First of all, the variable under consideration – appearance – is a highly subjective quality that, despite even the most methodological and stringent efforts to quantify, is based entirely on an individual’s own preferences and tastes. Although it is presumed that most respondents would be able to confirm that the candidate with an appearance score of 6.0 is traditionally more attractive than the candidate with an appearance of 4.0, this does not indicate that the respondent either deems them to be attractive at all or whether or not they would consciously or unconsciously make an assessment of competency based on appearance. To further complicate the picture, different people place different weights on the importance of appearance in assessing the intellectual, professional, and social potential of an individual. This and future studies will be limited in their abilities to extract information on the impact of physical appearance on competency ratings for elected office.

The generalizability of the results are also limited as a result of experimental design flaws in the survey. Although respondents are asked to assign a numerical value to the competency of both the male and female candidates for office at the end of the survey, when evaluating specific-issue competency, they are only asked to determine which of the two candidates they would deem to be more competent in dealing with the issue. Because they are not asked to assign a specific numerical value for a competency rating for both candidates, these series of questions only measure the extent to which a female candidate’s appearance impacts whether or not a respondent assesses them to hold a higher level of competency in comparison to their opposing male candidate. Such a question would have more generalizability and the ability to provide further insight as to the impact of a candidate’s appearance on specific issue competency ratings.
if the overall competency rating for both candidates could be compared to determine how one
female candidate ranked compared to the other. Such a survey design problem could be fixed
simply by adding a competency ranking prompt following the issue positions, which would also
avert the respondent from simply selecting a random candidate by requiring them to justify their
decisions through numerical values.

Lastly, the external validity of both survey experiments is further brought into question
by the average demographic characteristics of most individuals that took the survey. Table
Seven, below, shows that overwhelmingly in both surveys, almost all respondents identified
themselves as white (or, in the case of the partisan survey, Asian), male, between the ages of 18-34, and either as having recently completed or being in the process of completing a college
degree. The survey overwhelmingly focused on either Democratic or Independent respondents
and had a lack of Republican respondents. Although these results provide interesting trends as to
the voting behavior of respondents in each of these cohorts, they are hardly generalizable to a
larger population of diverse voters across the nation who may be less likely to rely on appearance
as an information shortcut and may consider other factors when making voting decisions. Future
research in this field would do well to take pains to find a sample that is more representative of
the general population.
Table Seven

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<tr>
<th>RESPONDENTS BY GENDER (PERCENT)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nonpartisan Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partisan Survey</td>
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<tr>
<th>RESPONDENTS BY AGE (PERCENT)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 17</td>
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<td>18-24</td>
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<td>25-24</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
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<td>55-64</td>
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<td>65 or older</td>
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<tr>
<th>RESPONDENTS BY RACE (PERCENT)</th>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>African American</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<td>Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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VI. Topics for Future Investigation and Concluding Remarks

Future studies focusing on the extent to which voters use appearance as a shortcut through which to determine a women candidate’s overall and specific issue competency would benefit from increased sample sizes that are more representative of the general population and that take great pains to assure that the respondent was evaluating a candidate that he or she truly found to be attractive, perhaps by priming them by asking them to select the most attractive candidate from a group of potential candidates. Alternative experimental design measures, such as the use of an excuses survey design modeled after the one put into use by Carmines and
Sniderman in their 1997 work on race, would allow for the measure of attitude towards appearance and level of competency without tipping off respondents as to the true motivations of their survey. These experiments would offer respondents a socially acceptable excuse to make a negative judgment of uglier candidates in an effort to see if they take advantage of it more often than they would if faced with a prettier candidate, and would be less likely than the measure taken already to underrepresent bias towards more or less attractive candidates.

In conclusion, the results of this survey provide interesting insight on the extent to which the voting behavior of the average voter is modified in response to changing appearance of women candidates despite the lack of statistically significant responds to validate many of the hypotheses listed. Prettier candidates are perceived to hold heightened qualifications that would render them competent to hold office and, as a result, receive benefits for their appearance from voters at the ballot box. Although the picture becomes more complicated when assessing the relationship between gender issue ownership and candidate appearance, prettier female candidates are also assessed on the basis of appearance when they are presented with relatively uncontroversial policy agendas, as demonstrated in the immigration question and when they are perceived as “owning” the issue, as demonstrated in the healthcare question. Gender also comes into play when considering a female candidate’s competence in dealing with traditionally male-owned issues such as national security, with different political parties exhibiting different patterns. These results provide interesting insight into the necessary elements allowing for women’s victories, what variables can heighten perceptions of the competencies of female candidates, and what factors may limit their ability to overcome barriers to entry in the highest echelons of American government.

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Appendix One
Survey Questions: Nonpartisan Survey

1. What is your gender?
   Male, female
2. What is your current age?
   Less than 17, 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 or over
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   Less than high school, high school / GED, Some college, 4-year college degree, masters degree, doctoral or professional degree
4. What is your race?
   White/Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, Other
5. In which state do you currently reside?
6. What political party do you think best describes you?
   Democrat, Republican, Independent
7. Which ideological standpoint do you think best describes you?
   Very liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, slightly conservative, conservative, very conservative

// You have been selected to evaluate potential candidates for Senate in your state's general election. Read the position statements of both candidates on issues of importance this election season and select which candidate you feel would be better qualified to deal with the issue at hand. At the end, you will have the opportunity to cast your ballot for the candidate of your choice. //

Healthcare:

Male candidate: Health care reform must focus on access to services and a reduction of costs. I support the Affordable Care Act, but understand that it is not perfect. I also support the principle of individual responsibility and the conservative idea of the individual mandate. On average, 1 in 5 dollars every Mainer makes is spent on health care - that is too much. Solutions must be found to fix this failing system in order to keep it from breaking completely and leaving Americans unable to afford the health services they need. As a country, we must reduce the cost of healthcare in part by moving toward outcome-based models of compensation, rather than fee-for-service. Further, there needs to be a much greater focus on primary and preventative care.

Female candidate: While healthcare in America can be the most advanced in the world, it is not accessible to many because of high cost, discrimination, and lack of effectiveness. Our nation had been facing a healthcare crisis with average cost of insurance ballooning by over 130% since 1999. This burden has been stretching the finances of families, hurting the profitability of employers, and causing our national deficit to balloon. The status quo was unsustainable and jeopardized the health of our citizens and the health of our economy. That is why I support the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which put into place reforms that are strengthening the quality of care in the United States and taming the out of control increases in the costs of medical care that have been common over the past decade. While the debate around this law was often controversial and seen as partisan, the President's fiscal commission made up of both Democrats and Republicans endorsed many of the changes made by the ACA and actually encouraged that implementation of some of the provisions be sped up in order to realize savings more quickly.

8. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with health care?
   Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

Foreign Policy:

Male candidate: Success in Afghanistan and Pakistan is critical to our national security. The central front in the battle against terrorism and extremism is – and always has been – in the dangerous border region between these two countries. It represents the nexus between extremist ideology, terrorism, and nuclear capabilities, and it is where
militants continue to plot to target the United States. There are no easy answers to the challenges we face in this unstable and volatile region.

After years of mismanagement and neglect of our effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan under the previous administration, President Obama and his administration have laid out a joint military and civilian effort in Afghanistan, while seeking a long-term approach to working with the government of Pakistan to address our security challenges.

Though our commitment to working with our partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan is long-term, our military engagement cannot remain open-ended, and our ultimate objectives need to be realistic and focused on transferring responsibility for security and governance to the people of Afghanistan.

I will work to ensure rigorous oversight of our efforts in Afghanistan and with Pakistan. Real progress will require a commitment from the governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan to not only address military threats, but to make progress on the civilian front, by fighting corruption and improving governance.

Female Candidate:

While the road to stability in Afghanistan is still fraught with challenges, the most viable way to sustain security gains is to build the capabilities of the Afghans themselves. Although our mission to train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces has been a top priority for some time, we are beginning to hand off security responsibilities to Afghan forces, who will have the lead security role throughout the country by late 2014. Pakistan is also a significant part of the challenge we face, and we must continue to hold it accountable - a message I have delivered to the highest levels of the Pakistani government.

I am deeply disturbed by the trend of so-called “insider attacks” by Afghan security forces against our troops, and by the increasing number of Taliban attacks against civilian targets. I continue to monitor the situation closely and receive frequent updates from our senior military leaders and diplomatic personnel in the region, and I will continue to support all American service members who are serving with great courage and honor.

As we move forward, I intend to keep our mission in Afghanistan focused on achievable and specific goals that rely not only on our military power but also on diplomacy and civilian expertise.

9. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with foreign policy?

Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

Immigration:

Male Candidate: I believe that commonsense immigration reform in the United States is long overdue and am pleased to see both parties coming together to address this issue.

I believe any immigration reform proposal must ensure the security of our nation’s borders. We have doubled the number of agents patrolling our borders over the past ten years, but there is more work we must do. We must ensure law enforcement has adequate resources to keep us safe, and we must strengthen the infrastructure and technology necessary to combat transnational crime and prosecute national security threats. I am committed to providing businesses across the country tools they need to ensure their workers are legal. We must crack down on businesses that hire undocumented workers and improve our efforts to combat fraud and identity theft. We also must ensure that electronic employment verification requirements do not unduly burden small businesses.

Female Candidate: With more than 12 million illegal immigrants already residing within the U.S. and an additional 500,000 crossing our borders each year, it's clear our current immigration system is broken and the status quo is unacceptable. America is a nation founded by immigrants, but it's also a nation founded upon the rule of law, and I believe it is imperative we respect both of these traditions.

I support legal immigration. However, I oppose measures that reward illegal immigrants for their unlawful behavior. That includes granting amnesty to illegal immigrants or allowing illegal immigrants to receive federal assistance. I have repeatedly stated my belief that enforcing penalties against employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants is the key to curbing the problem of illegal immigration in this country. I believe that if U.S. employers were unwilling to hire illegal immigrants for fear of serving jail time themselves, then immigrants would be less likely to illegally cross our border.

10. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with immigration policy?

Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

11. If given the choice today, which candidate would you vote for?
Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

12. What factors most influenced your opinion?

13. What level of competency do you think each candidate would bring to office?
0 represents a low level of competency. 5 represents a high level of competency.
Appendix Two
Survey Questions: Partisan Survey

1. What is your gender?
   Male, female

2. What is your current age?
   Less than 17, 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 or over

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   Less than high school, high school / GED, Some college, 4-year college degree, masters degree, doctoral or professional degree

4. What is your race?
   White/Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, Other

5. In which state do you currently reside?

6. What political party do you think best describes you?
   Democrat, Republican, Independent

7. Which ideological standpoint do you think best describes you?
   Very liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, slightly conservative, conservative, very conservative

// You have been selected to evaluate potential candidates for Senate in your state's general election. Read the position statements of both candidates on issues of importance this election season and select which candidate you feel would be better qualified to deal with the issue at hand. At the end, you will have the opportunity to cast your ballot for the candidate of your choice. //

Healthcare:

**Male candidate:** I believe that all Americans deserve health care coverage, but I am opposed to Obamacare, voted to repeal it and will continue to support its repeal in Congress. With its higher taxes and cuts to Medicare, Obamacare is a bad deal for our state. Until we are able to repeal the entire bill, I will continue working to get rid of the worst components. I have introduced multiple bills to repeal the 2.3 percent medical device tax that would crush the more than 200 medical device companies in our state that provide thousands of good-paying jobs. I believe states should be allowed to implement health care reform that works best for them on an individual basis, like we have done here in our state, without raising taxes or cutting care to seniors.

**Female candidate:** Our state has been a leader in health care, but there is still more to do. Today, there are two pressing challenges: too many want to repeal health reforms that will make a big difference in people's lives and the cost of health care remains too high. We cannot let those who want repeal to succeed. Consider what health care reforms have accomplished:

- Ending the practice of insurance companies denying people with preexisting conditions
- Allowing young people to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26
- Providing tax breaks for small businesses who provide health care
- Preventing insurance discrimination against women

We should not roll back these gains - they are too important for families. We also must take action to reduce the cost of health care. About half of all families in bankruptcy are there in the aftermath of a serious medical problem, and millions more are under enormous financial pressure when a loved one is ill. Massachusetts has been a leader in developing innovative ways to improve quality while reducing costs, and we are a leader in medical research that can lead to breakthroughs that save both lives and costs. We must do more to lead the way to a more affordable and higher quality system.

8. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with health care?
   Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

Foreign Policy:
Male candidate: I believe in peace through strength and that a strong American military is crucial to safety and security, both at home and around the globe. I have sponsored legislation to combat global terrorism, toughen sanctions on Iran and strip domestic terrorists of their American citizenship. I believe America must be clear and unmistakable in its position that Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon. Regarding Afghanistan, I supported President Obama’s troop surge and his plan to bring down those troop levels, but we must constantly monitor the situation and be careful not to sacrifice the security gains we have made. Preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe-haven for terrorist groups seeking to attack our country is critical to America’s national security. We need to continually re-evaluate our progress there based on reports from commanders and conditions on the ground. Last summer, I completed my annual National Guard training requirements in Afghanistan, which gave me an additional perspective about the conditions on the ground. I am continually impressed by the dedication of the men and women of our military serving on the frontlines to keep our country safe. They deserve the highest levels of gratitude and respect of all Americans.

Female Candidate: For more than a decade, our country has been engaged in wars abroad - wars that stretched our military, our families, and our finances. We should always exhaust all other options before going to war, and we must never again put wars on a credit card for our grandchildren to pay for. If a war is avoidable and in our national interest, then we should be willing to pay for it as we fight it. I believe it is time for our service members to come home from Afghanistan. We need to get out as quickly as possible, consistent with the safety of our troops and with a transition to Afghan control. Ultimately, it is the Afghans who must take responsibility for their own future. In the Middle East, the facts on the ground are changing rapidly. I support the approach President Obama - joined by a bipartisan consensus in Congress - has taken in working to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. A nuclear Iran would be a threat to the United States, our allies, the region, and the world. I support strong economic sanctions in conjunction with other countries that have placed serious political pressure on Iran, as well as vigorous diplomacy to try to resolve the situation through negotiations. Like the President, I believe that careless talk of rushing to war is unhelpful, and, like the President, I believe the United States must take the necessary steps to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. As a country, we have been fortunate to have avoided any devastating attacks since 9/11. It’s a testament to the hard work of our intelligence, law enforcement, homeland security, and military personnel. As recently as May, these professionals disrupted an Al Qaeda plot to target civilian aircraft using an explosive designed in Yemen. It has now been more than one year since the death of Osama bin Laden, and the President's assertive operations have eliminated many of Al Qaeda's senior leadership and weakened its affiliates. But the threat of terrorism remains, and we must remain vigilant. We must continue our political, military, economic, and diplomatic efforts against Al Qaeda and its affiliates, and we need to continue to support the efforts of our intelligence, law enforcement, homeland security, and military professionals.

9. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with foreign policy?
Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

Immigration:

Male candidate: I recognize that our strength as a nation is built on the immigrant experience in America. However, we are also a nation of laws, and government should not adopt policies that encourage illegal immigration. I oppose amnesty. I believe we ought to strengthen our border enforcement and institute an employment verification system with penalties for companies that hire illegal immigrants. It is wrong to provide driver’s licenses and in-state tuition to illegal immigrants because it will act as a magnet in drawing more people here in violation of the law and it imposes new costs on taxpayers.

Female candidate: The rich tapestry of our country came together through immigration. We are a unique country precisely because we embrace so many differences. Our diversity makes us stronger, more innovative, and more creative. My son-in-law and the father of my three grandchildren immigrated here as a young adult. His story and countless stories from millions of other families reach back for generations, creating our uniquely American story. We weave together in new ways and it helps keep us vital. We need common sense, comprehensive immigration reform. Any reform should have three components:
• It must uphold existing laws, protecting our borders and enforcing our laws against recruiting, hiring, and exploiting undocumented workers.
• It needs to be fair to all taxpayers and to legal immigrants. There should be a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, but one that would require them to pay taxes and go to the back of the line.
• It needs to help us retain talent trained at our world-class institutions and support job creation. That kind of immigration reform would be true to the rule of law, to our tradition as a nation of immigrants, and to our need to invest in the future.

10. Which candidate do you think would be more competent in dealing with immigration policy?
   Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

11. If given the choice today, which candidate would you vote for?
   Richard Smith, Carolyn Jones

12. What factors most influenced your opinion?

13. What level of competency do you think each candidate would bring to office?
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