

How nonverbal cues in presidential debates are interpreted by voters

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Research on nonverbal vocal communication in the presidential debates, published by two Kent State University sociology professors, demonstrates that subtle, non-consciously perceived cues in candidates' voices may provide a clue to dominance in electoral contests.

While the researchers, Drs. Will Kalkhoff and Stanford W. Gregory Jr. were able to draw conclusions that predicted popular vote victors in prior races, this year's contest proved to be more of a challenge, when attempting to balance nonverbal vocal dominance against Gallup polling results.

Kalkhoff and Gregory concluded that the nonverbal vocal debating styles of the two candidates varied during the course of all three debates. During the first and middle third of the debates, Senator John McCain showed dominance in the lower, nonverbal frequencies of his voice, while Senator Barack Obama finished each debate more strongly than did McCain.

The researchers reviewed current literature available during this election season that seeks to explain voters' tendencies to rely on non-conscious information in decision-making processes. Kalkhoff and Gregory conclude that through a "recency effect," in which voters may take away more of an impression from the end of a debate, Senator Obama is demonstrating a "rope-a-dope" debating style akin to the technique of boxing legend Muhammed Ali. Ali would hang back during the beginning of a fight until his opponent exhausted himself and then would

dominate the end of the match, winning most of his contests with this style.

Kalkhoff and Gregory agree that these findings require additional study to substantiate their veracity.

The findings were recently published online in the peer-reviewed journal *Current Research In Social Psychology*, available at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~grpproc/crisp/crisp.html>.

The research pioneered by Dr. Stanford Gregory over the past several election cycles tracks the lower end of the frequency of the candidates' voices during the debates and measures acoustic variation in this range.

Source: Kent State University

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