

Preferences shaped by evolution draw voters to candidates with lower-pitched voices

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Voters prefer to choose candidates with lower-pitched voices, according to new findings by researchers at McMaster University.

A team from the Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behavior found that study subjects were more inclined to vote for [men](#) with lower-pitched voices, suggesting that perceptions developed long ago may be still be influencing the way we choose leaders.

"We're looking at men's low voice-pitch as a cue to dominance, which is related to leadership," says graduate student Cara Tigue, lead author of the paper, published on-line today in the journal [Evolution and Human Behavior](#). "Throughout our [evolutionary history](#), it would have been important for our ancestors to pay attention to cues to good leadership, because group leaders affected a person's ability to survive and reproduce within a group. We're looking at it in a present-day, 21st-century context."

To test voice-related perceptions, the researchers manipulated archival recordings of US presidents, creating lower- and higher-pitched versions of each voice.

They played the altered recordings for [test subjects](#) and asked them to rate their perceptions of the speakers' attractiveness, leadership potential, honesty, intelligence and dominance. They also asked subjects which version of the voice they would prefer to vote for, both in peacetime and wartime.

Though the motivations were different, in all cases they preferred candidates with lower-pitched voices.

While political strategists have long taken voice-pitch into account in presenting their candidates, the premise that voters prefer men with lower-pitched voices had never been scientifically tested until now.

While voice-pitch is not the only influence on voters, the researchers say, their study shows it is clearly part of the decision-making process.

"One of the implications of our research is that voters may take it into account when making voting decisions," says Tighe.

Earlier research that looked at US [presidential candidates](#) between 1960 and 2000 found that in all eight elections, the candidate with the lower voice had won the popular vote.

Other studies had concluded that both men and women find lower-pitched voices more attractive.

Subjects consider men with low-pitched voices to be both more attractive and more dominant, but the new research shows that it's the [perception](#) of [dominance](#) that has a greater influence on voting decisions.

"People think we want to vote for men with lower-pitched voices because they're more attractive," says David Feinberg, the McMaster psychology professor who supervised the research, "but it's because people perceive them as better leaders and more dominant, not just because they're [attractive](#)."

Feinberg says future projects will look at perceptions of Canadian politicians and female politicians.

Provided by McMaster University

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