

TITLE What is the Role of Perceived Leadership Capacity in Presidential Politics?

RESEARCHER Adrian B. Popa, Michael Hazel, Lachlan Whatley, Anthony Andenoro, and Heather Crandall
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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this research was to investigate how young voters' perceptions of presidential candidates leadership practices impact intent to vote for a particular candidate after accounting for party affiliations and to examine the differences in perceived leadership practices of the two candidates based on party affiliations.

METHODOLOGY

Participants were 812 students (24% freshman, 23% sophomores, 25% juniors and 26 percent seniors) enrolled at a midsized, private university (19% of the total student body). Fifty-eight percent were female; 42 percent identified as Democrats, 33 percent as Republicans, 21 percent as others, and 4 percent did not identify party affiliation. Data were collected in the Fall 2008 and students rated their perceptions of both presidential candidates (Obama and McCain) using the Leadership Practices Inventory. The internal reliability coefficients for the LPI scales were Model (Obama .88 and McCain .81), Inspire (.88 and .82), Challenge (.91 and .82), Enable (.90 and .81), and Encourage (.85 Obama and .81 McCain); and overall LPI internal reliabilities were .97 Obama and .95 McCain. Students also completed the Political Efficacy scale (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991), indicating their political ideology (from very conservative to very liberal), intent to vote, candidate choice, direction of the country (from generally headed in the right direction, off on the wrong track, and not sure which direction the country is headed in), their gender

KEY FINDINGS

Democrats rated Obama more favorably as a leader than Republicans, while Republicans rated McCain more favorably as a leader than Democrats. The authors conclude: "The findings indicate that perceptions of leadership practices, in combination with other variables can accurately predict candidate preference, but are not a significant factor in predicting intent to vote" (p. 34).