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# Has the American Electorate Changed its Concept of an Ideal President? Candidate Traits and Their Impact on Voter Favorability

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# Has the Concept of an Ideal President Changed?

## Candidate Traits and their Impact on Voter Favorability

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## Introduction

### Candidate Traits

The 2016 Presidential election has shown us something quite remarkable about what voters look for in a President. Arguably the most qualified individual in the history of the United States to run for the Presidency was defeated seemingly not for her lack of experience or ability, but personal attribute, her character.

Previous research has demonstrated that the American electorate has a set of characteristics it looks for in Presidential candidates. (Petrocik, 1996). That among perceived attributes there is a prejudged mental image of traits the electorate finds appealing in candidates while other traits are found have a more repulsive effect. Candidate traits can have a pronounced impact on voting decision, and further, certain issues and candidate characteristics are "owned" by parties within the American political landscape. Ownership that brings more expectation and an even more solidified image of what traits a candidate should possess on the notion of party affiliation. (Holian and Prysby, 2014; Hayes, 2005; Petrocik, 1996, Doherty and Gimpel, 1997).

### Gendered Politics

Issue ownership of parties has furthered these expectations adding another facet to candidate prejudging; increased usage of gendered language in the description of political parties and party members has lead to the gendered labeling of parties. (Winter, 2010). And as a further byproduct, gender labeling and the social normative gender behaviors that come along with them have become attached to candidate trait expectations as well. These compounded expectations of candidates, party members, and social normative gender roles have contributed to a vicious cycle that makes it difficult for female candidates in particular to attain leadership positions. This effect is described further by Role Congruity Theory. (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

### Role Congruity Theory

Perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to 2 forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. Consequentially, it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles. (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

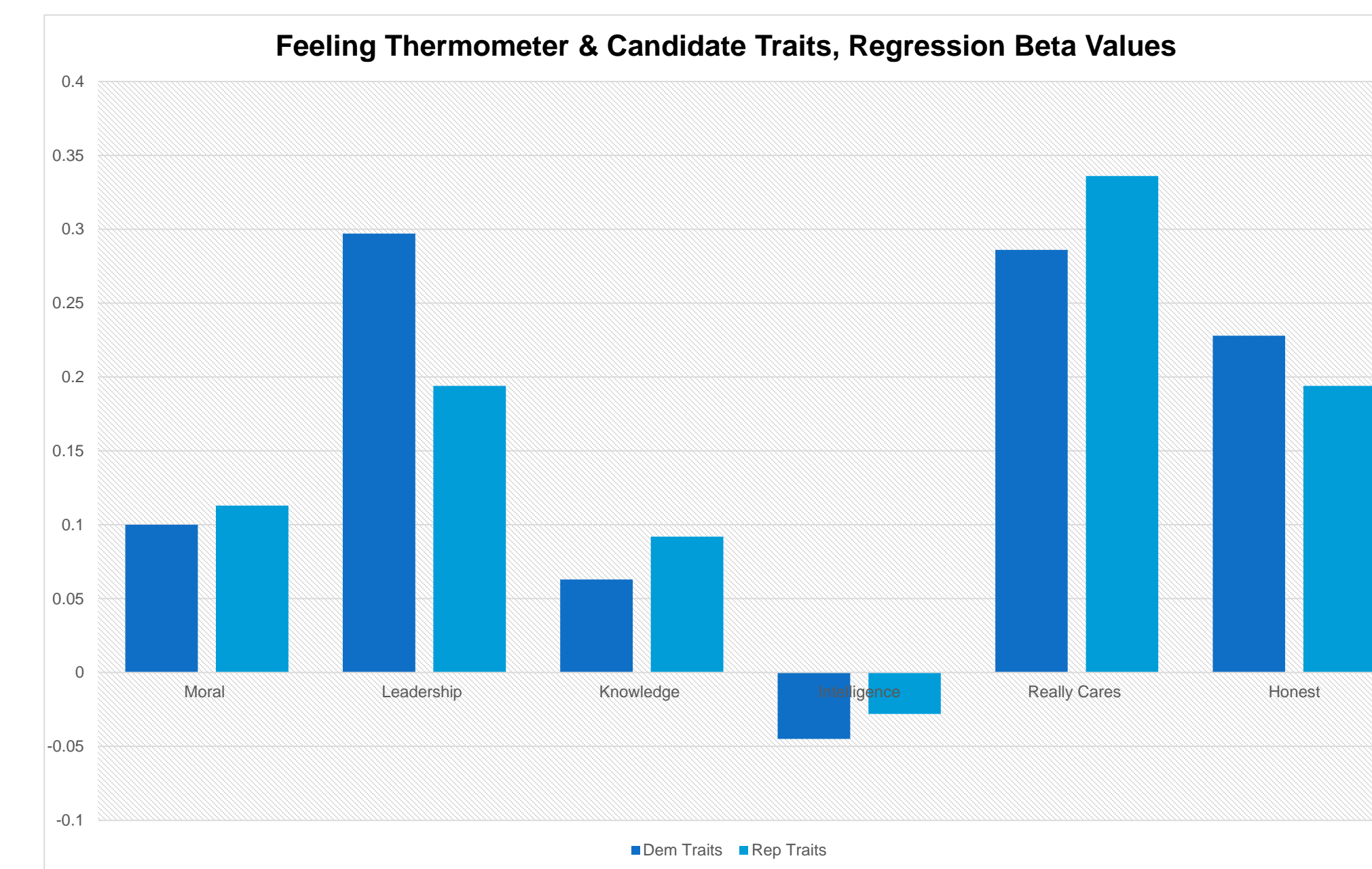
## Hypotheses

**H1: "Strong leadership" the most positive and significant perceived trait influencer to candidate favorability.**

**H2: Given that leadership is inherently a masculine trait, feminine and gender androgynous characteristics will be far less impactful than masculine traits.**

**H3: Democratic Party members will be more influenced by feminine candidate traits and Republican Party members will be influenced by masculine candidate traits.**

### Explanatory Value of Traits by Party:



### Trait Correlation Heat Map:

Trait and Gender	Democratic Feeling Thermometer, Pearson Correlation	Republican Feeling Thermometer, Pearson Correlation	Statistical Significance
Leadership (Masculine)	0.808	0.717	.000
Really Cares (Feminine)	0.817	0.757	.000
Moral (Androgynous)	0.765	0.679	.000
Knowledge (Androgynous)	0.715	0.638	.000
Intelligence (Androgynous)	0.628	0.557	.000
Honest (Androgynous)	0.812	0.744	.000

## Interpretation

**H1:** The data configured utilizing data from the American National Election Study (ANES) of 2012 shows that firstly, there is a difference between parties in how the 'Strong Leadership' trait is weighted to the Feeling Thermometer. When running Bivariate Regressions, Beta values determine the weight of which a Dependent Variable impacts the overall effect upon the Independent variable. In this model, the Candidate Feeling Thermometer was the independent variable and the individual traits, in this case leadership, was the dependent variables. Leadership did have a positive and significant impact on Feeling Thermometers, however, it was only the most significant trait to Democrats and only by a narrow margin. Among Republicans, it was marginally less impactful than the candidate really caring about the respondent and was nearly equal in explanatory value to candidate honesty.

**H2:** Corresponding with the results from H1, whether a candidate was seen as *honest* and *really cares* about the people being surveyed were the most significant candidate traits that correlated with higher Feeling Thermometer ratings. Really cares being a feminine trait and honesty being a gender androgynous trait. This is particularly of note because leadership, as described by Role Congruity Theory, is stereotypically masculine, however, the two most significant traits to candidate feeling thermometer were feminine and gender androgynous.

**H3:** Correlations with higher degree of likeability to candidate Feeling Thermometer are portrayed by the Trait Correlation Heat Map. 'Really Cares' and 'Honest' traits had the highest correlation with Feeling Thermometers; Really Cares being a *feminine* candidate trait and Honesty being *gender androgynous*.

## Conclusions

**H1:** "Strong Leadership" while having a positive and significant impact on Candidate Feeling Thermometers, did not have the *most* significant impact in comparison to other observed candidate traits. Whether a candidate *really cares* and is *honest* have slightly less or more explanatory value when observing what traits lead to higher degrees on Candidate Feeling Thermometers that measure favorability.

**H2:** The Trait Correlation Heat Map reflects that whether a candidate "Really Cares" and is "Honest" hold the most substantial correlation values to higher candidate favorability measured by Candidate Feeling Thermometers. Leadership, the masculine trait that was measured for correlation value, held 3<sup>rd</sup>-highest Pearson Correlation value behind "Really Cares", a *feminine trait*, and "Honest", a *gender androgynous trait*.

**H3:** Regression Beta Values that measure explanatory significance to correlations reflect that Democratic candidate Feeling Thermometer was most influenced by perceived candidate *leadership* and whether the candidate *really cares* about the respondent. Leadership being only slightly higher in value. Republican candidate Feeling Thermometer was impacted most by whether the candidate *really cares* about the respondent and whether the candidate appeared *honest*.

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