Diana Mejia

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Professor Weiner

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Body Language Influencing Election Results

When thinking of elections, influence is thought to be instilled through a candidate's declaration of promises the public and nation hold at a higher value in comparison to the competing political opponent's ideals. More often than not, people who vote fail to realize the subliminal nature of *body language*, which unconsciously plays a role in presidential preferences, ultimately affecting the results of the election. A question that is then elicited falls along the lines of: Does body language during presidential debates significantly affect election results? If so, to what extent? Following three crucial steps, social power is achieved by outshining the political opponent's debut, creating a loyal base of adherents, and winning over the press and public. All of these are closely intertwined with visually-based human-to-human interaction, whether physically or through a screen, which would imply the presence and influence of body language.

First and foremost, body language during presidential debates exerts influence over political opponents. One may not think much of these encounters, however multiple body language enthusiasts, such as Mike Allen from the *TIME Magazine,* have been "thrilled" by the number of information leaks that ensue during press conferences. Although invisible to the common eye, customary social interactions such as shaking hands or simply walking into a room can reveal a lot about an individual's current state of self-security and intention. According to

Nichole Russell, and Patrick A. Stewart from *The Washington Post,* Trump brushed off the dandruff of French President Emmanuel Macron's jacket, and on a separate occasion participated in an awkwardly long handshake, "resulting in white knuckles and clenched jaws." Similarly, "brusquely shoving Prime Minister Dusko Markovic of Montenegro out of the way [...]" demonstrates how encroaching in another individual's space reveals the underlying tensions between political opponents and figures because physical invasion demands a certain level of assertion. As a general rule, the more space one takes up and invades, the more power the assertive individual holds. By touching President Macron's shoulder and shoving Prime Minister Markovic, Trump showcases power and assertion over the personal space of high-standing figures. The handshake on the other hand can be best described as a stalemate of control— both parties want to dominate the other resulting in an abnormally long interaction. According to Adrian Furnham and Evgeniya, authors of *Body Language in Business*: "Those who *are, wish to be seen or are judged as being* more dominant [...] touch more (and stand) closer to others" Handshakes and physical touch as a means of exerting confidence is not limited to the interactions between President Trump and Macron however. As claimed by Brigid Schulte in *The Washington Post,* during President Obama's State of the Union address, Obama responds to House Speaker John A. Boehner's snarky body language "with a kind of tug-of-war handshake." Again the theme of a "tug-of-war" approach to a handshake reflects the notion of power being exerted on the opposing party. A handshake is not just a gesture, it is a competition— a competition that places the winner at an advantage due to the implications touch has on the other.

Furthermore, body language furthers polarity between Republicans and Democrats, creating a loyal following and social pressure to choose a side. Humans have the tendency to be unmotivated by fruitless endeavors— by having a stark difference between political parties,

motivation is generated through competition and pressuring voters to support one party over the other. Most commonly seen in social settings, people often have to make a split-second decision on how to present themselves in a room full of people. The genre of politics is no different. When presented with two perspectives– the Democratic and Republican perspectives, the human tendency to want to assimilate and fit in will override the decision to not engage at all. The desire to conform can be seen in Politics Reporter Amber Phillips' *The Washington Post* article, "Congress's Telling Body Language during Six Key Moments of Trump's Address [...]" in which Philips points out the stark differences in reaction regarding Republicans and Democrats during Donald Trump's address. Democratic standing voters had, " [...] their arms folded curtly, (and) [...] wouldn't be caught dead in a photo shaking hands with Trump." By deciding to reject the handshake and present closed-off body language, Democrats established social standing, which put in motion a sequence of nonverbal actions. Regardless of the intensity of political standing, the people on the Democratic spectrum engaged in mirroring- which is defined by the *Psychology Dictionary* as, " [...] the process of emulating, or copying exactly the behaviors, speech, and characteristics of another individual." Mirroring levels depend on whether the individual is "cooperating" or "competing" with the other party. In a study published in 1985 by Marianne LaFrance, four conditions were presented to two groups of subjects, the goal of the experiment was to measure the *extent* of mirroring in regard to a coacting, cooperating, or competing environment. The results showed mirroring levels were higher in cooperating groups versus those who were competing (LaFrance). Mirroring is seen to be a clear indicator of connectivity. In other words, voters mirrored the actions of the candidate which evoked the most mental cooperation or feelings of harmony. By deciding which party to cooperate with, the room was divided between Republicans who cheered and stood when Trump spoke and Democrats

who were not willing to shake hands and audibly "guffawed" at Trump's speech, creating competition. Interestingly, Phillips also notes: "There is no assigned seating at these kinds of speeches, yet Democrats tend to sit on the left and Republicans on the right." Any person who is stuck in the middle will feel pressured to partake in either action, either *side*, tipping toward the group reflecting similar beliefs, increasing the voter pool for each side.

Thirdly, body language exerts influence over the voting press and the public. In a world where most forms of communication are televised or on social media, and media itself has been shown to affect individuals, then the concept of subliminal influence through televised body language is not difficult to grasp. The human brain is visually hardwired to perceive a person's state of being, meaning it can draw conclusions from even a still frame. The brain's ability is instinctual to the point where, as stated by Laura King in *The Science of Psychology*, even "Members of the Fore Tribe, an isolated Stone Age culture in New Guinea, were able to match description of emotional situations with photographs [...]" No matter the medium, body language is transmissive. Virtually anyone has access to speeches and presidential debates, meaning the person running for the presidency has a wider audience and can reach people physically, and through the added medium of social media and photography. One notable example of a video that provides insight into self-deduced perception is the Ted Talk delivered by Human Behavior and Body Language Expert Mark Bowden. Bowden subliminally influences the audience by crafting a likable persona through the use of positive body cues such as smiling, open gestures, an animated voice, and raised brows. Simultaneously describing what makes a person trustable in the mind's eye, Bowden sets the stage for the second part of the Ted Talk in which the crafted persona is dropped. Through the comparison, the audience grows aware of the previously present manipulation. Therefore, the effects of body language are not limited to an in-person experience,

because even through a screen, whether the speaker is trusted is still up to the viewer. Naturally, any person who watches speeches, or other presidential-related forums through digital media is under a similar influence.

Undeniably, the ascendancy of body language over character judgment is prevalent, however, its strength is undermined by scholars who believe voters are most likely to choose a candidate through variation in education levels and genes, and skeptics who assert internal thoughts and feelings are not always projected through body language. According to Christopher Dawes, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America,* there is a correlation between the level of education of an individual and the likelihood to be involved in politics. This is due to the passing of behaviors from the parent to the offspring. If the parents are educated the children will be too, and the child's upbringing influences who they partner with, producing children who will continue this cycle. Individuals with preened genetic makeup are more involved in general, which includes politics and the willingness to vote. While it is true specific traits can be highlighted through a selection of breeding, traits are not bound to genetics. As suggested by *BBC*, despite the offspring being born with changes to the "chemical tags," if the correct environment is present, trauma-exposed people are able to live healthy lives as it is not certain the gene will be passed because it is, "actually a very rare event." Additionally, "Healing the effects of trauma in our lifetimes can put a stop to it echoing further down the generations," says Researcher Brian Dias to *BBC*. Genetics cannot be used as a predetermined path for voting preferences. If the argument claims genetic codes are *more* reliable than body language, yet people's actions are not bound by genetics, then how reliable is genetics in the first place? Both methodologies of observing people's genetic makeup and their body language are not definite. However one key difference between the two is regardless of intelligence, body

language can be understood by all. While the likelihood of voting is attributed to people of higher intelligence, this does not account for the rest of the population. Laura King would argue involvement has nothing to do with perceived intelligence, as part of what makes body reading an isolated variable is the fact it is almost innate in nature. Of course, knowledge of people reading can be improved upon with intelligence. But to elevate genetic intelligence, which is a smaller percentage, over the human instinct to form mental decisions over a person, is limiting to the remaining percentage of people who still vote despite not being as genetically intellectual. As for people filled with skepticism towards body language, the ideology is even simpler to understand. According to Leanne ten Brinke and other authors from the *University of British Columbia,* there is insufficient research surrounding "the manifestation of emotional facial expressions during this common human experience" or the difference between real or "fabricated" feelings, labeling nonverbal communication as non-credible. The sentiment of not having enough gestures match the inner thought is one of the more common attacks on body language. Skeptics believe a dissonance between action and thought creates a margin of error with the nonverbal cues, especially when there seems to be an absence of movements within the observed subject. Phillips, however, would be quick to refute the claim because stillness does not equate to an *absence* of body language. Rather, stillness often suggests smaller, imperceptible movements, holding a lot more tension. The human body is never empty of anything, just because it requires more attention, does not mean its impact is gone. Bowden would also oppose Brinke's claim of fabricated expressions not being credible. Bowden would point out an excerpt from Brinke's research: " [...] face-to-face contact with the offender impaired the parole officers' judgments, such that high-risk offenders were more often released" Showing strong similarities in Bowden's ability to charm a crowd in order to deliver a message, Boden would highlight how

deceitful body language is *still* body language and has an underlying effect on the audience. Even though there was a dissonance between the true beliefs of the incarcerated offenders and the body language itself, it was still effective in helping provide the offenders freedom from incarceration.

In conclusion, body language may not be the sole reason behind a voter's final choice, but it is imperceptible enough that people are affected to a great degree. Not only do Presidents gain leverage over political opponents, but individuals are encouraged to decide between the Democratic and Republican parties through means of covert social pressure, and the audience reached is wider and more expensive than other forms of advertisements. The reason why body language is so effective is that it derives from an instinctual part of human evolution that is deeply ingrained in every person. Plus, regardless of a person's culture, upbringing, or level of intelligence, body language is still perceived and understood, especially through facial expression. Therefore body language is one of the most unbiased forms of gaining a group following. Even when body language is subtle, or deceitful, it can still provide the audience with the illusion of truth, making them perceptible and in agreement with the person exerting the nonverbal communication. Those who discredit body language due to fear of deception, forget campaigns are planned meticulously anyway. As far as voting propaganda goes, body language is the only method not attached to any concerns relating to the law or other major setbacks, meaning it is an effective tool in subliminally guiding the voter for the desired side and should therefore be used more liberally in elections.

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