

# Effects of Gender and Social Status on How Filipinos Perceive Political Candidates

MA. ELIZABETH J. MACAPAGAL  
Ateneo de Manila University

The study investigated the influences of respondent's gender and social class, and politician's gender on perceived traits of political candidates. The survey used a 2 X 3 X 2 factorial design covering 536 respondents aged 18 to 35 years old. The respondents rated a hypothetical political candidate who was either male or female using a Shah scale. Research results show that respondents perceived political candidates positively. The females and respondents from the lower social classes showed a more favorable perception of politicians. Respondents believed that female politicians are more attractive, emotional, intelligent, and religious but male politicians are more corrupt. Findings also show that identity politics seems to be present wherein females tend to view female politicians more positively. Moreover, the males from the lower classes tend to prefer male politicians. The implications of the findings for construal research, voter education, consciousness-raising, and political campaign strategies are discussed.

Women comprise half of the world's population but ironically, they continue to lag behind in positions of decision-making and political affairs in every country. Women make up only 15% of national parliaments worldwide as of April 2005. In Asia, 15.2% of the members of the Lower House and 13.5% of members of the Upper House are women ("Women in National Parliaments," 2005).

Power and decision-making in the Philippines continue to be male-dominated. In the Philippine Senate, the highest ratios of

elected female senators since 1946 has only been 4 out of a total 24 senators in 1992, and 3 out of 12 senators in 1995. Based on the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) data, the average participation rate of women in the House of Representative and local government is roughly 10%. Why is there such an imbalance of power? Explanations for this sparse representation of women in leadership roles traditionally focused on the idea that there is a lack of qualified women or that women display fewer traits and motivations necessary to attain and achieve success in political office (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, it is important to look into other possible explanations. Could it be that women politicians are still perceived differently from male politicians? Does bias against women candidates exist? This research examines perceptions of political candidates in terms of character traits in relation to the gender of both perceiver and candidate. Moreover, the socioeconomic status of the respondents is also considered because public opinion surveys in the Philippines report that attitudes toward politicians and political issues vary according to social class (Mangahas & Guerrero, 1998).

The following questions are addressed in this research: (a) Does respondent's gender influence perceived traits of political candidates? (b) Does respondent's social class influence perceived traits of political candidates? (c) Does politician's gender influence perceived traits of political candidates? The study also investigates possible two-way and three-way interaction effects among the variables respondent-gender, respondent-social class, and politician-gender on perceived traits of political candidates.

### **Gender Differences in Political Attitudes and Behavior**

Past researches show that males and females differ in political information and interest (Bourque & Grossholtz, 1998; Fife-Schaw & Breakwell, 1990; Kolinsky, 1993). Results of these Western studies reveal that males consistently know more about politics whereas females express less interest in the field. Aside from

variations in political interest and information, men and women were also found to differ in political participation such as voting and running for public office (Appleton & Mazur, 1993; Bennett & Bennett, 1993; Pharr, 1981; Tancangco, 1992).

In the Philippines, a study of political values of Filipino women by Tapales (1992) reported that Filipino women are politically aware and knowledgeable but refrain from participating in political discussions, do not have direct contact with government leaders, and are not members of political organizations. Moreover, their major political activity is voting in elections and attending rallies. They regard major political activity as basically for men, preferring to engage in economic activities.

In sum, the results of previous research on political attitudes and political participation have shown that women continue to be less interested and involved, compared to men. The socialization process continues to encourage political passivity among women and promotes the idea that politics is more suited for males. Thus, in this study, I posit that men and women respondents have varied perceptions of political candidates' traits. Similarly, men and women have varied attitudes toward male and female politicians.

### **Social Class Differences in Elections**

Social class is the distinction of wealth and status. In the Philippines, the existence of social classes is very evident. Public opinion surveys consider socioeconomic status as a variable to determine differences in how the different social classes think (Mangahas & Guerrero, 1998). Surveys classify households into the following socioeconomic classes according to their type of dwelling: the rich and the middle Class ABC, the poor Class D, and the poorest Class E (Arroyo, 1990). Based on this scheme, majority of respondents belong to Class D, roughly 65%, the ABCs, who amount to about 20%, and the Es, about 15% (Mangahas & Guerrero, 1998).

In politics, the D and E classes, the masses and the very poor respectively, were the ones responsible for Joseph Estrada's victory in the 1998 presidential election (Mangahas, 1998). It was *social class*, rather than region, or religion, or gender, or age that was critical to that election, because Estrada lost among the ABC votes—the votes of the rich, the well to do, and the middle class (Mangahas, 1998). In the 2004 presidential election, the SWS survey showed that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had a commanding lead in classes ABC versus Fernando Poe Jr. (FPJ) but FPJ failed to pull away in classes D and E (Olivares-Cunanan, 2004).

The perceiver's social class likewise interacts with politician's gender. Whether people would accept women as politicians was found to depend on the social class of the perceiver. For example, respondents from all over the Philippines were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "A woman is as capable as a man in performing the job of President of the Philippines." The highest net agreement with this statement came from Class E. The lower the socioeconomic status, the more the agreement with the statement (Mangahas, 1998).

What accounts for the reported variations in the way the different social classes think? According to cognitive psychologists, this could be due to the fact that perceptions are dependent on the subjective meaning that the actor attaches to a situation (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). What matters for behavior is often not the objective situation but the subjective interpretation of this situation. Moreover, some research efforts have emphasized that cognition is always social and context dependent (Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1981; Nye & Brown, 1996). Cognition is not an intra-individual process and cannot be reduced to individual cognition; it involves processes that are uniquely social in character (Forgas, 1981). Our social representations are a product of a delicate interplay between information processing strategies and sociocultural processes (Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1981). Just as cognition cannot be properly understood without placing it into a social context, society and culture must be studied as the product

of cognitive efforts of individuals. Social cognition, therefore, must synthesize the individual and collective spheres in explaining everyday knowledge.

Krauss (as cited in Forgas, 1981) argued that in social cognition, the crucial problem is not how to process the information once given, but how to decide what the information is in an immensely complex, confusing, and subtle social environment. The way we categorize, represent, and react to social information is often unpredictable and impossible to comprehend without a careful analysis of the surrounding culture.

I hypothesize that perceptions of political candidates' traits vary according to social class because perceptions are a subset of social cognition (Oskamp, 1981) and social class is a contextual variable.

### **Voters' Evaluation of Political Candidates' Traits**

How do voters evaluate candidates? Studies show that voters use several criteria in determining who to vote for. Pierce (1993) studied how voters evaluate candidates for president in the US. Four dimensions were found to be significant, namely, leadership (commands respect, inspiring, strong leadership), competence (hard working, intelligent, knowledgeable), integrity (decent, moral, good example), and empathy (compassionate, kind, cares about people, sincere).

Eagly, Diekmann, Schneider, and Kulesa (2003) considered three facets of perceived candidate characteristics: political effectiveness (strong leader, intelligent, respected), agentic personality (competitive, dominant, aggressive, daring, and communal personality (sympathetic, sensitive, warm, kind).

In the Philippines, Montiel (1986), and Sy (2001) studied the preferred characteristics in politicians. Montiel's 1986 study of nontraditional political leadership showed that Filipinos prefer the following characteristics: democratic, kept promises, held

consistently political views, was for the masses, did not lie or cheat, and was not sexist. Sy (2001) studied political candidate evaluation in the Philippines. She found that urban poor voters use several candidate-related variables such as background, sociopolitical status, promises, popularity, and behavior in evaluating political candidates. Voters also consider whether the candidates are godly (*maka Diyos*), relates well with people (*maka-tao*), is capable (*may kakayahan*), has principle (*may paninindigan*), for the country (*maka-bayan*), keeps one's word (*may isang salita*), for the poor (*maka-mahirap*), approachable (*madaling lapitan*), and does not hide true self (*di pakitang tao*).

In the studies of Pierce (1993), Montiel (1986), Sy (2001), and Eagly et al. (2003), traits were used to evaluate candidates. Moreover, gender was not a variable or did not appear as one of the criteria in evaluating political candidates. In this present study, perceived traits as well as gender of both respondent and politician are considered.

### **Attitude Toward Women and Men Political Candidates**

Previous studies have shown that men and women political candidates are perceived as having different traits (Duke, 1993; Kaid as cited in Fox & Smith, 1998; Leeper, 1991; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). In 1991, Leeper found that voters infer in women candidates stereotypical *female traits*. Voters believe women are more honest. However, another study in the US conducted by Kaid (as cited in Fox & Smith, 1998) reported contradictory findings. Students viewed women candidates as more sophisticated, honest, attractive, aggressive, strong, and active. Duke (1993) reported that in one study, women candidates were rated more intelligent and concerned about people, but men candidates were still perceived as more knowledgeable about politics and considered strong. Males, regardless of gender role, were perceived as being more likely to win a presidential election.

According to a study conducted by Aguilar in 1990, Filipino women politicians were perceived as weak in facing problems. Other perceptions include the following: They cannot sustain themselves in crisis; their freedom of movement is limited even in going around and knowing the constituency; they cannot travel without a companion; they may be soft in making decisions that will require toughness; they may become pregnant and this may hamper their performance of political duties. The respondents of the study who were career women politicians argued that the advantages of having women politicians include: Women have more patience and perseverance; they are more sincere; the women voters may tend to support female politician; constituents' request will seldom be refused; there will be more fairness in government and politics; women are more sympathetic and considerate. They think the best woman politician model must be one who is competent, tough, dynamic, and energetic, has well-rounded knowledge, and is strong-willed, decisive, good, and strong.

Studies also show that a bias by voters against women candidates, especially in the US still exists (Fox & Smith, 1998). Fox and Smith (1998) conducted a classroom experiment to explore how voters evaluate candidate sex. They compared Wyoming and California college students on their voting preferences for hypothetical elections with male and female candidates. The Wyoming sample significantly chose the male candidate, and thus exhibited bias against women candidates. However, the more liberal California students did not exhibit any gender bias.

In the 1970s, college students evaluated hypothetical candidates roughly equally, but both young men and young women assumed that the male candidate would win office and that the women would lose (Sapiro as cited in Rinehart, 1992). Even more disturbing was Bowman's finding (as cited in Rinehart, 1992) that a physically attractive woman fared even worse among student voters in simulated elections—although handsomeness worked distinctly to the advantage of the male candidates.

Because of their deeply-rooted biases, male and female voters in the Philippines have a prejudicial outlook against female candidates such that between a man and a woman candidate with equal qualifications, they exhibit an irrational preference for the former (Romero as cited in Tangcangco, 1992). Moreover, the man of the house can dictate to the women voters whom to vote for. However, this does not mean that women voters do not consider women candidates. They still do but they vote for a woman candidate not because they are of the same gender but because the women candidates are capable, qualified, and deserving (Tangcangco, 1992).

In sum, these studies conducted in both developed and developing nations report that there is indeed a difference in the way male and female politicians are perceived. In many countries, a promale bias continues to exist among voters. However, attitude towards female candidates in terms of character traits have also been positive, although still following stereotypical perceptions such as being moral and honest. Thus, my third hypothesis is respondents have varied perceptions of the traits of women and men political candidates.

### **Identity Politics**

Would female voters tend to view female politicians more positively? In other words, would an interaction exist between gender of voter and gender of politician? Previous studies suggest that an interaction does exist (Lewis & Bierly, 1990; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). Female university students followed a profemale sentiment in evaluating female politicians' competence (Lewis & Bierly, 1990). Plutzer and Zipp (1996) found evidence that sex of the voter is significantly related to voting for female candidates in 8 of the 13 states they studied. They suggested that gender identity exists, that is, female voters identified with female candidates, especially if they espoused feminist values.



Identity politics refers to the formation of political allegiances on the basis of some demographic similarity, such as sex, race, and religion (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). An example would be in 1960 in the US when John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, won the support of approximately 80% of Catholic voters but he lost enough of the much larger Protestant vote to produce a net loss nearly costing him the presidency.

In the 1992 elections in the US, a then-record 14 women ran for governor or US senator, and many made their gender a salient aspect of their candidacies. According to Plutzer and Zipp (1996), given the increasing numbers of women running for office and the higher turnout rates of women voters in the US, the existence of identity politics represents a threat to the current party system and may play a pivotal role in deciding electoral outcomes. In this study, I posit that an interaction exists between gender of voter and gender of politician because of identity politics.

## METHOD

The study employed a precoded survey for data gathering and analysis. The survey employed a 2 X 3 X 2 factorial experimental design resulting in 12 groups or cells. The gender (male or female) and socioeconomic status (ABC, D, E) of the respondent were the subject variables. The variable manipulated was the gender of the politician (whether male or female). The dependent variable was the perceived character traits of the political candidate as measured by a Shah scale.

### **Participants**

The survey covered 536 respondents aged 18 to 35 years old, which comprise the largest voting age bloc (44%) according to the Social Weather Stations. There were 253 males and 283 females. Their mean age is 24.44 years old. The participants were divided into three groups according to socioeconomic status, namely,

ABC, D, and E. The ABC respondents have a household monthly income of Php 15,000 and above, the D respondents Php 7,500 to Php 14,999 whereas the E participants' families earn below Php 7,500 a month. There were 189 respondents from the ABC Class, 161 from Class D, and 186 from Class E.

Quota sampling was used to choose at least 40 respondents per group using convenience and purposive techniques. The participants were randomly assigned to receive either male or female politician.

## MEASURES

**Shah Scale.** The main instrument used is a scale patterned after Shah's instrument (1999), which is attitude scale based upon trait adjectives. The first step was to explore different trait adjectives relevant to the attitude object, in this case, politician. In the next step, the evaluative values of the trait adjectives were determined for the target population. Finally, the mean likeability scores and standard deviations of the trait adjectives computed were used to operationalize numerical scale positions, similar to Thurstone's method.

**Construction of the Shah scale.** The sources of the adjectives for the attitude scale included the literature and results of an open-ended survey on 40 Psychology majors from the Ateneo de Manila University. The students were asked to think of a hypothetical male or female politician in the Philippines and to list negative, positive, and neutral traits associated with him or her. I was able to generate a list of 66 trait adjectives from the literature and surveys, which I administered to 54 respondents of varied socio-economic classes, with a mean age of 29 years old. They were instructed to think of a hypothetical politician described by each trait adjective and to rate the adjective according to how much they would like the politician if she or he had that trait. They were asked to use a 7-point rating scale:

-3 (*very much disliked*), - 2 (*disliked*), -1 (*dislike a little*), 0 (*neither liked nor disliked*), +1 (*liked a little*), +2 (*liked*), and +3 (*very much liked*).

The mean likeability and standard deviation scores of each trait were computed. Adjectives that had no similar mean likeability scores were included in the final list. In cases where there was more than one adjective per scale position, I selected the trait with the lowest standard deviation. In cases where the adjectives had similar standard deviations, I chose the trait that was simpler to understand based on the comments of the pretest sample or was more relevant in describing politicians in the Philippines. The following 18 traits were chosen (see Table 1). The sum of the mean likeability scores for the negative traits is -16.57 whereas the sum for the positive traits is 16.53 with a difference of .04.

Table 1. Traits in the Final Shah Scale With Their Corresponding Mean Likeability Scores

Negative traits	Score	Positive traits	Score
Emotional ( <i>Maramdamin</i> )	- .04	Rich ( <i>Mayaman</i> )	.39
Loud ( <i>Maingay</i> )	- 1.11	Popular ( <i>Sikat</i> )	.81
Moody ( <i>Sumpungin</i> )	- 1.54	Attractive ( <i>Maganda o Guapò</i> )	.98
Impatient ( <i>Walang pasensya</i> )	- 1.75	Religious ( <i>Maka-Diyos</i> )	1.81
Fickle-minded ( <i>Pabago-bagong isip</i> )	- 2.09	For the poor ( <i>Maka-masa</i> )	1.93
Indifferent ( <i>Walang pakialam</i> )	- 2.19	Moral ( <i>Mabuti</i> )	2.43
Power-hungry ( <i>Sakim sa kapangyarihan</i> )	- 2.35	Intelligent ( <i>Matalino</i> )	2.57
Turncoat ( <i>Balimbing</i> )	- 2.61	Competent ( <i>May kakayahan</i> )	2.74
Corrupt ( <i>Kurakot</i> )	- 2.89	Honest ( <i>Tapat</i> )	2.87
TOTAL	- 16.57	TOTAL	16.53

**Scoring.** To manipulate gender of politician, half of the respondents were asked to rate a male politician, Mario del Rosario and the other half were asked their perceptions of a female politician, Marie del Rosario. The names of the political candidates, Mario and Marie del Rosario, were fictitious to control

for possible biases linked with actual or real personalities in the political scene.

The respondents were given the list of scaled adjectives arranged in an alphabetical order. They were instructed to check those adjectives that in their opinion could be used to describe the qualities of the target person. The mean likeability scores of the adjectives that the respondent checked were added. For example, a respondent checked emotional (-.04), religious (1.81), and intelligent (2.57). The respondent's score is +4.34. The highest possible score is +16.53 which means the respondent checked all the positive traits associated with the target politician. On the other hand, if a respondent checked all the negative traits, his or her score would be -16.57.

**Reliability and validity.** The construction of the Shah attitude scale and its use to measure the attitudes of people has been validated in several studies, including a study with politicians as the target attitude object in Pakistan (Shah, 1999).

Shah established the validity of his scale by correlating the results with two other scales measuring attitudes of people towards politicians. An  $r$  of .57 and .73 were obtained.

The reliability of the present scale was determined by split half and the measure of internal consistency. The Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient was .72 which is significant at  $p = .00$ . The coefficient alpha was .82.

## RESULTS

### **Overall Perceived Traits of Politicians**

The data show that in general, respondents perceived political candidates favorably. Majority of the respondents think political candidates are competent, intelligent, religious, for the poor, moral, and honest.

The descriptive statistics also revealed overall positive perceptions of political candidates, in terms of character traits. When all the mean likeability scores were added per respondent, an overall mean of 7.04 and standard deviation of 7.81 were obtained. With a highest possible positive score of 16.53, this result indicates a positive perception of political candidates, in general. Majority of the respondents (80.4%) obtained a positive score indicating overall favorable perceptions of traits of political candidates.

As revealed in Table 2, the three-way ANOVA for perceived traits produced four significant results with two main effects, namely, gender of respondent and SES of respondent, and two interaction effects—gender of politician X gender of respondent and gender of politician X SES of respondent X gender of respondent.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance of Perceived Traits

Source	df	F	p
Gender of respondent	1	6.14 **	.01
SES of respondent	2	10.79 **	.00
Gender of politician	1	1.19	.27
Gender of politician X SES of respondent	2	1.43	.24
Position of politician X SES of respondent	2	1.43	.24
Politician's gender X gender of respondent	1	5.56 *	.02
SES of respondent X gender of respondent	2	0.47	.63
Politician's gender X SES X gender of res.	2	3.86 *	.02

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Further analysis of the data on perceived traits revealed significant differences on particular traits as well. Aside from conducting three-way ANOVA for overall perceived traits, a chi square test was conducted per trait to determine significant differences of each trait on the three independent variables. These differences are discussed under each independent variable.

### **Respondent's Gender**

The findings suggest that respondent-gender differences exist in perceived traits of political candidates. The male respondents had a mean rating of 6.08 whereas the females gave significantly higher ratings to politicians with a mean of 7.73 ( $p = .01$ ). On specific traits, chi square analysis revealed significant gender differences, namely, competence ( $p = .00$ ), emotional ( $p = .00$ ), fickle-minded ( $p = .03$ ), impatient, ( $p = .03$ ), indifference ( $p = .02$ ), intelligent ( $p = .04$ ), and loud ( $p = .00$ ).

The male respondents significantly rated politicians as more emotional, fickle-minded, impatient, indifferent, intelligent, and loud whereas the female voters gave more ratings of competence to the politicians.

### **Social Status of Respondent**

Respondents from the different socioeconomic status varied significantly in their perceptions of traits of politicians ( $p = .00$ ). The E class gave the highest ratings ( $M = 8.98$ ), followed by the D class ( $M = 6.22$ ), with the ABC Class giving the lowest ratings ( $M = 5.52$ ).

The following traits obtained significant chi square results among the three SES groups: attractive ( $p = .00$ ), competent ( $p = .03$ ), corrupt ( $p = .00$ ), intelligent ( $p = .04$ ), moral ( $p = .00$ ), popular ( $p = .02$ ), power-hungry ( $p = .00$ ), religious ( $p = .00$ ), and rich ( $p = .01$ ).

Compared to the D and E voters, the ABC respondents perceived politicians as more corrupt, popular, power-hungry, and rich. The E voters perceived politicians as more attractive, competent, for the poor, honest, moral, and religious. Both ABC and E respondents, on the other hand, concur that politicians are intelligent but the D subjects think less so.

### **Gender of Politician**

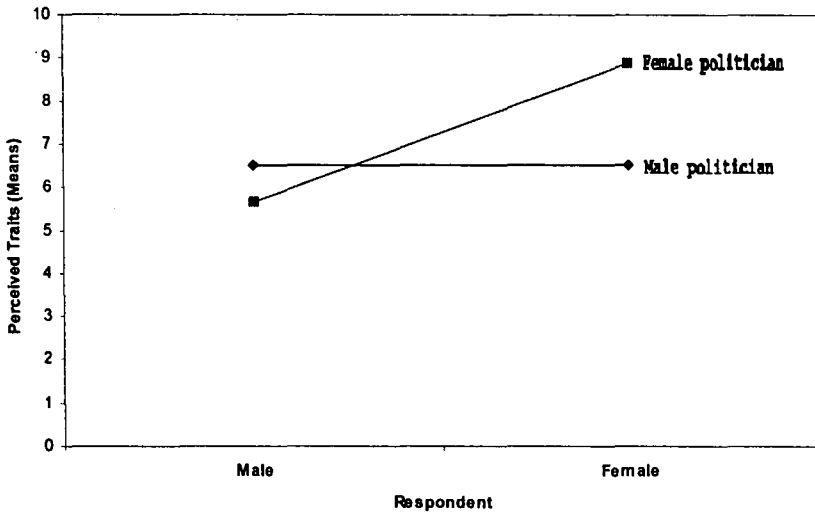
Contrary to expectations, there was no significant difference in the overall perceived traits of male and female politicians ( $p = .29$ ) although the mean scores revealed that female politicians were perceived slightly more positively ( $M = 7.26$ ) compared to male politicians ( $M = 6.55$ ). The chi square analyses revealed that certain traits are associated more with female than male politicians. For example, female politicians are perceived as more attractive ( $p = .04$ ), emotional ( $p = .00$ ), intelligent ( $p = .00$ ), and religious ( $p = .02$ ) but male politicians are perceived as more corrupt ( $p = .05$ ).

### **Interaction Effects**

Based on the three-way ANOVA of overall perceived traits, only two interaction effects were found to be statistically significant—a two-way interaction (the gender of the politician X the gender of the respondent) and a three-way interaction (gender of politician X SES of respondent X gender of respondent).

***Gender of politician X gender of respondent.*** The results reveal that an interaction exists between respondent-gender and politician-gender (see Figure 1). The female respondents perceived female politicians ( $M = 8.86$ ) significantly more positively compared to male respondents ( $M = 5.66$ ). However, male and female voters perceive male politicians in a similar fashion with almost the same mean ratings ( $M = 6.50$ ).

Figure 1. Male and female respondents' perceived traits of male and female politicians.



**Gender of politician X SES of respondent X gender of respondent.** The perceptions of traits of male and female politicians were found to depend on both the gender and social status of the respondents (see Figures 2 and 3). The male respondents from ABC perceive male politicians as the least positive in terms of traits ( $M = 3.30$ ). The male respondents from the D Class, on the other hand, think quite lowly of female politicians ( $M = 3.56$ ). The female respondents from the E Class ( $M = 11.73$ ) think very highly of female politicians, in terms of traits. Both male and female respondents from the E Class think highly of male politicians ( $M = 8.1$ ).

### Summary of Results

In sum, here are the highlights of the findings:

1. In general, respondents perceived political candidates positively.



Figure 2. Female respondents from ABC, D, and E social classes and their perceived traits of male and female politicians.

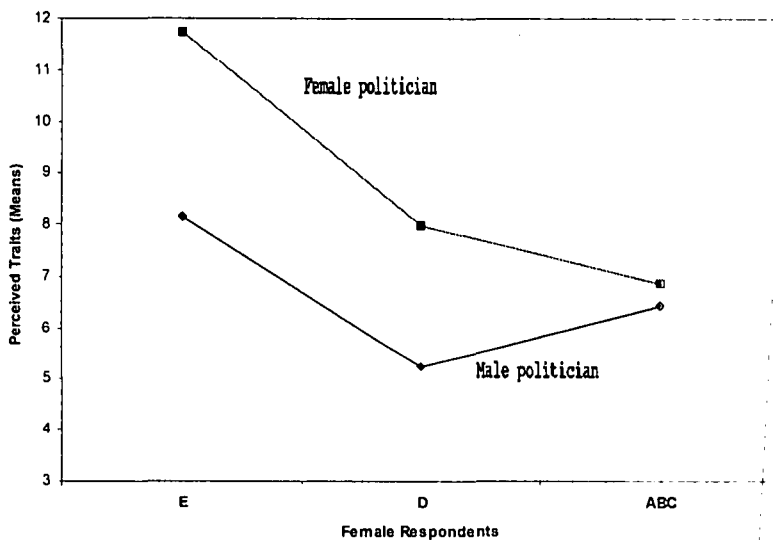
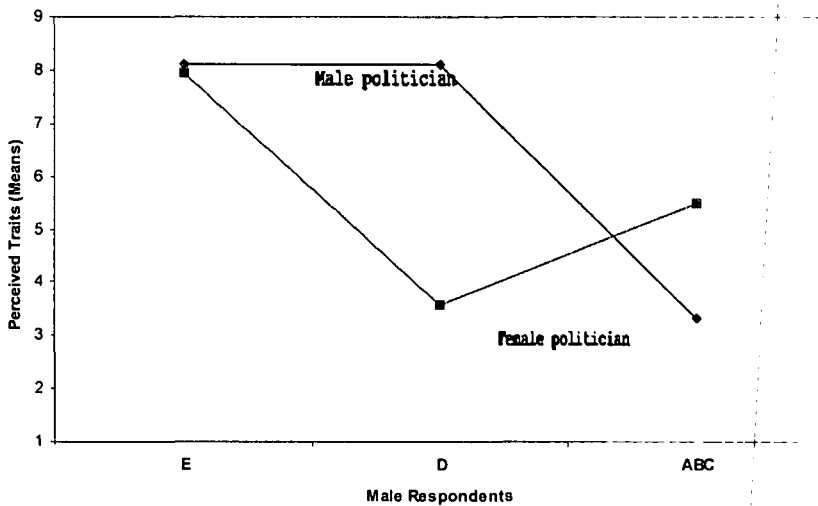


Figure 3. Male respondents from ABC, D, and E social classes and their perceived traits of male and female politicians.



2. Respondent's gender influenced perceived traits of political candidates. The females consistently gave more favorable ratings to politicians.
3. Respondents' socioeconomic status influenced perceived traits of political candidates.

The higher the social class, the less favorable the perception towards politicians.

4. There are no overall differences in traits of male and female politicians. However, there are gender differences that are trait-specific. For example, respondents believe that female politicians are more attractive, emotional, intelligent, and religious but male politicians are more corrupt.
5. A respondent's gender X politician's gender interaction effect was reported.

Female respondents tend to evaluate female politicians more favorably whereas male respondents tend to think more highly of male politicians.

6. A respondent's gender X respondent's SES X politician's gender interaction effect exists. Female respondents from the E Class think very positively of female politicians whereas male D respondents think lowly of female politicians. Males from the ABC think less positively of male politicians.

## DISCUSSION

### **Perceived Character Traits of Political Candidates**

The results showed that respondents think that the hypothetical political candidate possesses mostly positive character traits. This may seem counterintuitive as many

Filipinos think that a stereotypical politician is dirty, corrupt, and power-hungry. However, the respondents think otherwise. This is an interesting finding indeed. It is still possible that the respondents answered based on what is more socially desirable and thus checked mostly positive traits. Likewise, it is also possible that the respondents were rating on the basis of their ideal political candidate instead of the actual. But because these problems were foreseen and steps were taken to avoid giving socially desirable responses, it is safe to say that Filipinos in this sample really think positively of candidates for public office. The political candidates in the scale were fictitious and not associated with any real politician. Although they were told that Mario or Marie represents a typical politician, she or he remains faceless. Nothing was said about Mario or Marie's education, previous experience with politics, or personality. Thus, the respondents were free to project whatever image they have of a faceless person running for public office. And it turned out that their perceptions of Mario and Marie were generally positive. This is a very encouraging and optimistic discovery. It tells us that Filipinos generally think highly of people running for public office.

The top two traits used to describe the fictitious political candidate were competent and intelligent. Pierce (1993) considered these two traits as falling under the competence dimension in evaluating political candidates. This finding suggests that the political candidates' capability and competence are salient in the minds of the voter when evaluating them, more than descriptions of their integrity and empathy.

### **Respondent-Gender Differences in Perceived Traits**

This study has shown that males and females differ in their perceptions of the traits of political candidates. The females in the present study consistently showed a more favorable perception of politicians. This finding coincides with a study in the United

Kingdom by Fife-Schaw and Breakwell (1990) that males were more likely to be critical and cynical about the handling of political crises. In the present study, the male respondents significantly rated politicians as more emotional, fickle-minded, impatient, indifferent, and loud whereas the female voters gave more ratings of competence to the politicians.

Why do women perceive traits and effectiveness of political candidates in a more positive light, compared to men? It is possible that women are more attentive than men to candidates' personality characteristics and thus rated them more liberally (Eagly et al., 2003).

The fact that women think more highly of politicians may be related to the welfare state dismantlement hypothesis (Erie & Rein as cited in Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau, & Nevitte, 2002) in the US. According to this proposition, women should be more supportive than men of the government's efforts in providing employment and social welfare. It would thus be reasonable to assume that women would support politicians in the Philippines more than men.

Another explanation for this gender difference focuses on differences in women's and men's values and priorities that have their origin in childhood socialization (Gidengil et al., 2002). According to Gilligan's work (as cited in Gidengil et al.) on gender differences in moral reasoning, females are less individualistic than males. Applied to the world of politics, it is possible that women are more willing to endorse government solutions that translate to their perceptions of politicians in general on behalf of the needy.

Moreover, men are more critical of political candidates perhaps because politicians are generally male and thus with males perceiving males, there might be a tendency to be more competitively critical due to their macho image.

### **Social Class Differences**

The present study confirmed the second hypothesis that social class influences the perceived traits of political candidates. In particular, the highest social class consistently perceived political candidates in a more negative manner. The lower the socio-economic status, the more favorable the perception of candidates. Compared to the D and E voters, the ABC respondents perceived politicians as more corrupt, popular, power-hungry, and rich. The E voters perceived politicians as more attractive, competent, for the poor, honest, moral, and religious, which are all positive traits.

This finding suggests that the more educated ABC class may be more critical and have higher standards and expectations from personalities running for public office, compared to the less educated and politicized citizens. As Oskamp (1981) said, the less educated citizens often focus on personalities of political candidates.

The results are also consistent with the findings on gender of respondent. It appears that the lower status groups, the females and poor people, tend to be more hopeful about political candidates. Both low power groups, the females and E class perceive politicians more positively. Because of their lower status in society, these groups may conceivably look up to politicians as people who will help and serve them. For an aspiring political candidate, this implies that the Filipino females and poor people seem to be easier to satisfy, compared to the males and higher status voters.

Results of conformity and persuasion studies have shown that women are slightly more influenceable than men (Eagly & Wood as cited in Myers, 2004). Wood (as cited in Myers, 2004) claimed that this gender difference is more a function of social roles. In reality, women are in lower status roles in society and thus, experience accepting more influence. Perhaps it is the same case with respondents from the lower social class and with attitudes toward politicians.

These findings support the assertion that cognition is social and context dependent (Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1981; Nye & Brown, 1996). All the respondents in the study share an identical social environment yet have varied perceptions about an identical target person, that of a political candidate. This finding indicates that different groups of people can subjectively view the same contextual stimulus in varied ways. In the case of this study, men and women, and high and low status groups differ in opinions, insights, and observations of male and female political candidates.

One of the more significant pursuits in the study of social and political cognitions has been the effort to view cognition as context dependent. Social cognition and social context are interdependent (Nye & Brown, 1996). Our social representations are a product of a delicate interplay between information-processing strategies and sociocultural processes (Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1981). Just as cognition cannot be properly understood without placing it into a social context, society and culture must be studied as the product of cognitive efforts of individuals. Thus, it is important to recognize the different cultures surrounding high and low status groups in the Philippines.

The impact of any objective situation depends upon the subjective meaning that the actor attaches to that situation (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). According to Ross and Nisbett (1991), the construal process has typically illuminated that what matters for behavior is often not the objective situation (i.e., "how things are") but the potentially variable, subjective interpretation of this situation (i.e., "how a person sees things"). Thus, in the case of politicians, perception may be very crucial; how voters see things may be more important than objective reality. And as this study has shown, different groups vary in how they see politicians.

### **Gender of Politician**

Although no overall significant differences were reported in the survey, the current research has shown some evidence that

men and women political candidates are perceived as having different traits.

Respondents have not decided that male politicians are better overall than female politicians or vice versa. This finding implies that Filipinos may be beginning to think in egalitarian ways, that women and men politicians are perceived as equal.

However, respondents associate different traits with men and women political candidates. Respondents of the survey reported that women political candidates are more attractive, emotional, intelligent, and religious but male politicians are perceived as more corrupt. The interviews support this observation and add that female politicians are also more fickle-minded, impatient, and moral. Male politicians, aside from being corrupt, are also competent, popular, and power-hungry. These results may be explained in terms of the social context when the survey was taken which was after People Power II when President Joseph Estrada was toppled due to corruption charges.

Except for intelligence, all the traits associated with female politicians are stereotypical of a woman, namely, being attractive, emotional, fickle-minded, and religious. These have something to do with one's physical attributes and personality. In Rocas' 1998 study, she asserted that women politicians in the Philippines have to use feminine practices in order to maximize their exercise of power. For example, being a female candidate allowed them to appeal to the audiences' emotions during campaigns. They could also draw more crowds because of their physical attractiveness.

The perception that female politicians were more intelligent than males coincides with the findings of Duke (1993) who also reported that women candidates were rated as more intelligent.

### **Respondent's Gender and Politician's Gender Interaction Effect**

Would female voters tend to view female politicians more positively? The answer is a resounding yes. The female respondents perceived female politicians significantly more positively compared to male respondents, when it comes to character traits. Male respondents perceived male politicians more positively, but to a lesser degree compared to female respondents. Male and female respondents perceived male politicians in a similar fashion with almost the same mean ratings.

These findings imply that identity politics seems to be working, especially for female respondents. Perhaps, female respondents were able to identify with the politician of the same sex and thus, perceived them in more positive terms. As mentioned in the introduction, identity politics refers to the formation of political allegiances on the basis of some demographic similarity, such as sex, race, and religion (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). In this case, it was sex or gender that mattered.

Previous studies suggest that an interaction does exist between respondent's gender and politicians' gender (Eagly et al., 2003; Lewis & Bierly, 1990; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). Female university students followed a profemale sentiment in evaluating female politicians' competence (Lewis & Bierly, 1990). Plutzer and Zipp (1996) found evidence that sex of the voter is significantly related to voting for female candidates in 8 of the 13 states they studied.

Eagly et al. (2003), predicted a similar result but in relation to voting. Their experiments supported that attitudinal gender-congeniality effect in which participants of each gender reported greater likelihood of voting for the candidate who endorsed positions typically favored more by their own sex than the other sex. Women were also found to favor the interests of their gender. Women consistently favored the female-congenial candidate.



Eagly and Karau (2002) provides an explanation for this interaction effect. Because men have a more masculine perception of leadership roles, they are thus expected to show a stronger tendency to view women as less qualified. They also stated that the tendency for men to view women as less qualified for leadership roles derives from men's greater social power, which can enhance their tendency to use gender-stereotypical information rather than available individuating information.

The findings of the present study suggest that women adhere more to the interests of the female gender than men adhere to the interests of the male gender. This is a logical conclusion as women's movements are very active in the Philippines whereas there is no comparable social movement organized to promote men's interest. Thus, it is expected that women be more conscious in perceiving more positively candidates who are also women.

However, just because women think favorably of women candidates does not immediately follow that women would vote for women candidates. Remember in this study, all other factors were controlled for but in reality, many other variables come into play in the decision to vote. But certainly, for women to have more favorable perceptions of women candidates is a crucial step but it remains to be seen whether identity politics will translate to voting.

### **Respondent's Gender X Respondent's SES X Politician's Gender Interaction Effect**

A three-way interaction effect between respondent's gender, politician's gender and respondent's social class was reported for perceived traits of political candidates. According to the results, females from the ABC, D, and E social classes think more positively of female candidates. The male respondents, on the other hand, have varied perceptions, depending on their social status. The ABC males prefer female candidates. While the males from the D and E social classes believe that male politicians are better, character-wise.

The D and E classes comprise majority of the voting population in the Philippines. It is thus crucial to look into their perceptions. Despite being in the same economic class, the males and females from the D and E classes disagree on their perceptions of political candidates. The females consistently think highly of female candidates and the males consistently think highly of male candidates. Thus, identity politics seems to be the strongest at the D and E classes.

This implies that gender consciousness efforts should focus on males from the D and E classes.

### **Implications**

In terms of practical implication, this research can be a vehicle for raising consciousness about the underrepresentation of women in politics, gender differences, and gender bias in perceiving and evaluating political candidates.

Many lessons are learned which can be of practical use to politicians, in particular.

Male politicians need to improve their image of integrity because they are perceived as corrupt. Women politicians now have an advantage with female voters who seem to identify with them.

When facing an audience, politician's appeal also matters. It seems easier to satisfy females and the E Class. But when facing a crowd of males and from the ABC Class, politicians need to be more prepared because these groups are more critical.

In raising consciousness about gender equality, one way is to change stereotypes about men and women, but another way, which may be easier, is to change perceptions of leadership roles. Providing examples of success stories of women politicians will help in making the politician's role as less macho. The D and E class males would need more consciousness-raising on gender equality in politics.

## REFERENCES

- Aguilar, C. (1990). Women in politics in the Philippines. *Philippine Political Science Journal*, 31, 39-74.
- Appleton, A., & Mazur, A. (1993). Transformation or modernization: The rhetoric and reality of gender and party politics in France. In J. Lovenduski, & P. Norris (Eds.), *Gender and party politics* (pp. 86-112). London: Sage Publications.
- Arroyo, D. M. (1990, June). The usefulness of the ABCDE market research system: A means to check social welfare and class attributes. *Social Weather Bulletin*, 90, 11-12.
- Bennett, L., & Bennett, S. (1993). Changing views about gender equality in politics: Gradual change and lingering doubts. In L. Duke (Ed.), *Women in politics: Outsiders or insiders? A collection of readings* (pp. 46-56). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Bourque, S., & Grossholtz, J. (1998). Politics an unnatural practice: Political science looks at female participation. In A. Phillips (Ed.), *Feminism and politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duke, L. (1993). *Women in politics : Outsiders or insiders?: A collection of readings*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Eagly, A. H., Diekmann, A. B., Schneider, M. C., & Kulesa, P. (2003). Experimental tests of an attitudinal theory of the gender gap in voting. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 1245-1258.
- Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573-598.
- Fife-Schaw, C., & Breakwell, G. (1990). Predicting the intention not to vote in late teenage: A U.K. study of 17- and 18- year-olds. *Political Psychology*, 11, 739-755.
- Forgas, J. (Ed.). (1981). *Social cognition: Perspectives on everyday understanding*. London: Academic Press.
- Fox, R., & Smith, E. (1998). The role of candidate sex in voter decision-making. *Political Psychology*, 19, 405-419.

- Gidengil, E., Blais, A., Nadeau, R., & Nevitte, N. (2002). Women to the left? Gender differences in political beliefs and policy preferences. In M. Trambly & L. Trimble (Eds.), *Women and electoral representation in Canada* (pp. 140-159). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Kolinsky, E. (1993). Party change and women's representation in unified Germany. In J. Lovenduski, & P. Norris (Eds.), *Gender and party politics* (pp 113-146). London: Sage Publications.
- Leeper, M. S. (1991). The impact of prejudice on female candidates: An experimental look at voter inference. *American Politics Quarterly*, 129, 248-261.
- Lewis, K., & Bierly, M. (1990). Toward a profile of the female voter: Sex differences in perceived physical attractiveness and competence of political candidates. *Sex Roles*, 22, 1-12.
- Mangahas, M. (1998, May 22). *Characteristics of the presidential vote. The social climate*. Retrieved August 5, 2002, from <http://www.sws.org.ph>.
- Mangahas, M. (1998, February 4). *Filipinos don't mind having another woman president. SWS poll on election issues*. Retrieved August 5, 2002, from <http://www.sws.org.ph>.
- Mangahas, M. (2001, May 15). *No surprises in exit poll. The social climate*. Retrieved August 5, 2002, from <http://www.sws.org.ph>.
- Mangahas, M., & Guerrero, L. (1998, August). *Social weather reporting in the Philippines. Paper presented at the 14th World Congress of Sociology, Working Group 6/Social Indicators at Montreal Canada*. Retrieved August 5, 2002, from <http://www.sws.org.ph>.
- Montiel, C. J. (1986). Non-traditional Filipino political leadership in the Aquino Cabinet. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 34, 102-109.
- Moscovici, S. (1981). On social representations. In J. Forgas (Ed.), *Social cognition: Perspectives on everyday understanding* (pp. 181-209). London: Academic Press.
- Myers, D. (2004). *Social psychology (8th ed.)*. USA: McGraw Hill, Inc.

- Nye, J., & Brown, A. (1996). *What's social about social cognition?: Research on socially shared cognition in small groups*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Olivares-Cunanan, B. (2004, May 3). Macapagal hold on E class spells difference. Retrieved July 25, 2005 from [http://www.inq7.net/opi/2004/may/03/text/opi\\_bocunanan-1-p.htm](http://www.inq7.net/opi/2004/may/03/text/opi_bocunanan-1-p.htm).
- Oskamp, S. (1981). *Attitudes and opinion*. New Jersey: Prentice-hall.
- Pharr, S. (1981). *Political women in Japan*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pierce, P. A. (1993). Political sophistication and the use of candidate traits in candidate evaluation. *Political Psychology* 14, 21-35.
- Plutzer, E., & Zipp, J. (1996). Identity politics, partisanship, and voting for women candidates. *Public Opinion quarterly*, 60, 30-57.
- Rinehart, S. (1992). *Gender consciousness and politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Roces, M. (1998). *Women, power, and kinship politics*. Westport: Praeger.
- Rosenwasser, S., & Dean, N. (1989). Gender role and political office: Effects of perceived masculinity/femininity of candidate and political office. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, 77-85.
- Ross, L., & Nisbett, R. E. (1991). *The person and the situation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Shah, A. (1999). Measuring attitudes in test alien-cultures: When illiteracy and unfamiliarity do not matter. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 2, 245-264.
- Sy, B. (2001). *Choosing political candidates in the Philippines: A look at how urban poor voters evaluate political candidates*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Ateneo de Manila University.
- Tancangco, L. (1992). Women's political participation in the Philippines: The cultural dimension. In P. Tapales (Ed.), *Filipino*

*women and public policy* (pp. 59-108). Diliman, Quezon City: University Center for Women's Studies.

Tapales, P. (1992). *Filipino women and public policy*. Diliman, Quezon City: University Center for Women's Studies.

Women in National Parliaments (2005). Retrieved July 13, 2005, from <http://www.ipu.org>.