



Politics as Performance

Will American Fascination with 'Trump Style' Survive the 2018 Midterm Elections?

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- Public talk sponsored by the Department of Government and US Centre | LSE
- Zayed Theatre, New Academic Building | LSE
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Competing communication logics

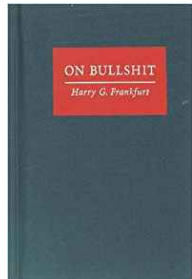


- Both of these girls are **not spouting bullshit**
 - One actually knows what she is talking about
 - For the other, an imaginary and stylistic strategy (a nascent 'communication logic') is in play
- Shall we see...?
 - Find the video at:
<https://www.dictionary.com/e/kids-know-whats-up-video-playlist/>

Backdrop for today's politics

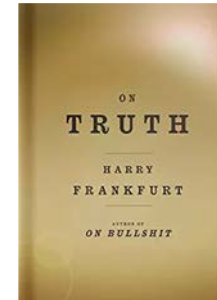


- Given the complexity and challenges of modern society, a certain amount of BS is **unavoidable**
 - Today, at all levels, both uncertainty and willful ignorance prevails
 - *“Politicians lie and bullshit constantly. When they’re caught in a lie, there’s a big commotion. [But] there is no corresponding response to bullshit.” – H. Frankfurt (2016)*



Defining Bullshit

Unlike lying, BS is marked by **indifference** to the truth.



bullshit

exclamation, noun [U] • UK  /'bʊl.ʃɪt/ US

 /'bʊl.ʃɪt/ OFFENSIVE

- ★ complete nonsense or something that is not true:

Bullshit! He never said that!

us *He gave me some excuse but it was **a bunch of** bullshit.*

uk *He gave me some excuse but it was **a load of** bullshit.*

bullshit

verb [I or T] • UK  /'bʊl.ʃɪt/ US  /'bʊl.ʃɪt/

-tt- OFFENSIVE

- ★ to try to persuade someone or make them admire you by saying things that are not true:

You're bullshitting me!

Quit bullshitting, will you!

Words can obscure

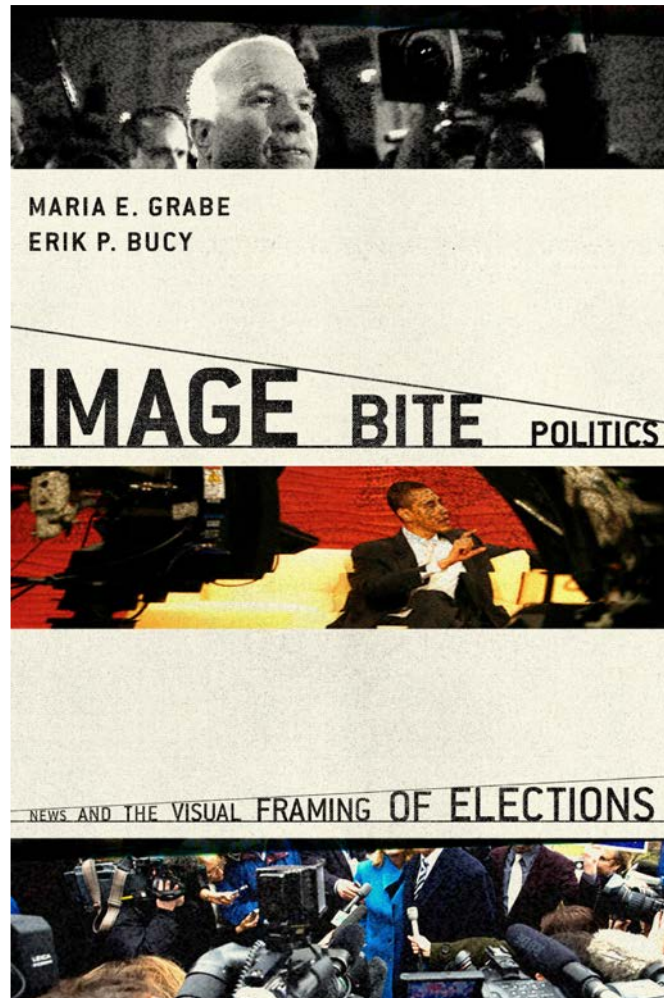


“Politicians have always told some lies. This is different. The people running our government, and their key supporters, have launched a war on honest journalism, on facts, and on freedom of expression in general. They are using misinformation as strategy. They want the public to become so confused by what is true and what is false that people will give up even on the idea that journalism can help sort things out.”

**– Dan Gillmor, Medium
15 June 2018**



Visuals as heuristics



- Where to turn? **Nonverbal indicators**, which can be more reliable (heuristic) than fact-based assessments
- **'Thin slice' forecast** studies (still photographs, 10 sec. video clips) show how little it takes to spot a winner (see Todorov et al., 2005)
 - Short duration exposures to image-only conditions can predict election outcomes
- **Sound ruins it:** ability to predict winners decreases with the sound on – even as confidence increases (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009)
 - Hearing the candidates talk **confuses matters**

Expressing intent



- Expressive leader displays within newscasts and other media evoke a range of **emotional and evaluative** responses (Bucy, 2000; 2003)
 - Both favorable and unfavorable
 - Affecting viewer attitudes and serving as motivational cues or **dispositions to action**
 - Whether the leader's voice is heard or overlaid with a reporter's narration (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Masters et al., 1986)



Bill Clinton in response to the Los Angeles riots following the Rodney King verdict (April 1992)

Cutting through the clutter



- Leadership has a large nonverbal component (Bucy, 2011; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Masters et al., 1986)
 - Myriad **character traits** are manifested nonverbally, both enduring and situational
 - Dominant individuals have an **'attention binding' quality**
 - Literally the most watched (Chance, 1976)
- Humans neurologically **wired for visual processing**
 - Visuals contribute to political learning, are **their own form of knowledge**
 - Readily encoded, easily retrieved

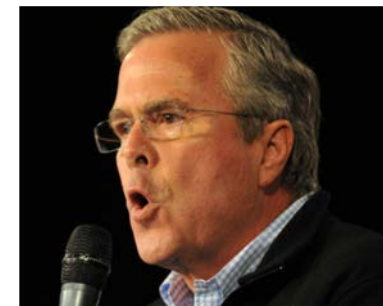
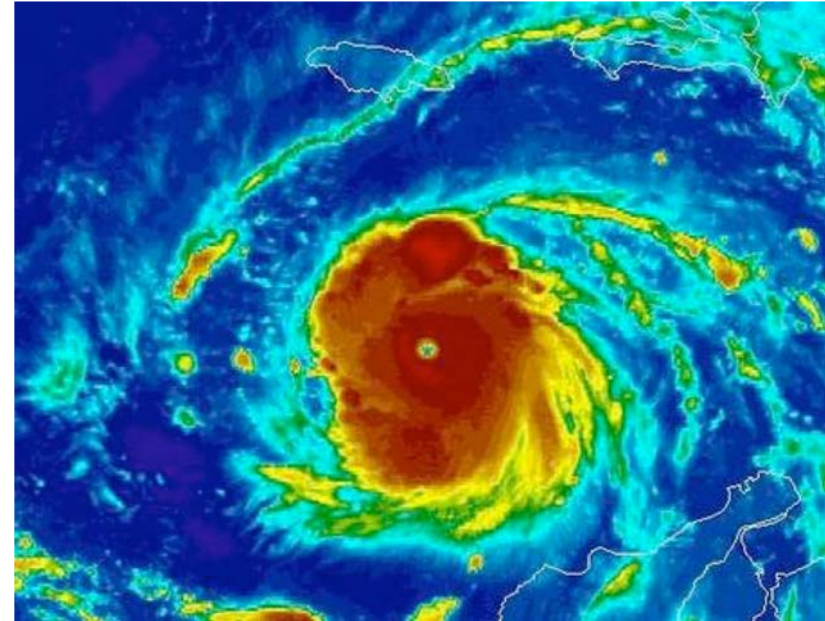


Obama in Berlin, July 2008
communicating affinity

Visuals as information



- Like radar images of clear weather patterns and incoming storms, **political visuals can serve as reliable sources** of information (Bucy, 2003; Grabe & Bucy, 2009)
 - Require minimal literacy, or background understanding of politics
 - Enable quick inferences of politically relevant traits
 - Equalize some knowledge gaps in the electorate, e.g., 'visual knowledge' (see Prior, 2014)



Are top and bottom panels equally valid forms of information?

Expressions and gestures



Ronald Reagan, c. 1984:
The 'Great Communicator'?

- Facial expressions work with gestures and voice tone to communicate **emotion and motivational intent**
 - Anger/threat
 - Happiness/reassurance
 - Fear/evasion
 - Sadness/appeasement
- **Reassurance** discourages aggressive or flight responses
 - Thereby promoting bonding
- **Threat displays** strengthen dominance attributions; also,
 - Promote bonding, esp. among followers (Bucy & Bradley, 2004)

Major display types showing emotion/behavioral intention

Table 1. Criteria for classifying facial displays.

	Display Type		
	<i>Anger/threat</i>	<i>Fear/evasion</i>	<i>Happiness/reassurance</i>
Eyelids	Opened wide	Upper raised/lower tightened	Wide, normal, or slightly closed
Eyebrows	Lowered	Lowered and furrowed	Raised
Eye orientation	Staring	Averted	Focused then cut off
Mouth corners	Forward or lowered	Retracted, normal	Retracted and/or raised
Teeth showing	Lower or none	Variable	Upper or both
Head motion			
Lateral	None	Side-to-side	Side-to-side
Vertical	Upward	Up-down	Up-down
Head orientation			
To body	Forward from trunk	Turned from vertical	Tilted from vertical
Angle to vertical	Down	Down	Up

From Roger D. Masters, Dennis G. Sullivan, John T. Lanzetta, Gregory J. McHugo, and Basil G. Englis, "Facial displays and political leadership," *Journal of Biological and Social Structures*, 1986, 9:330). Copyright 1986. Reprinted with permission from Elsevier. As modified by Roger D. Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996, p. 141).

Prototypical displays



Happiness/Reassurance



Neutral Expression



Fear/Evasion



Anger/Threat



Bucy & Gong (2016)

Prototypical displays



Anger/Threat



Fear/Evasion



Neutral Expression



Happiness/Reassurance



Bucy & Gong (2016)

Integrating different literatures

- **Display appropriateness** defined as situational nonverbal behavior that is compatible with the message and tone of the setting in which it occurs
 - Congruency between the candidate's expressions and immediate rhetorical context
 - **Inappropriate displays** defined as evasive and socially submissive nonverbal behavior in juxtaposition to verbal attacks (see Bucy, 2000; 2011)
- Nonverbal behaviors that fall outside of what's considered appropriate and typical for a particular setting or purpose constitute **expectancy violations** (Burgoon & Hale, 1988)
- In politics, evaluations of appropriate behavior often turn on questions of **social dominance** (see Bucy, 2016b; Bucy & Gong, 2018)
 - Ability to assert authority while avoiding signs of submission, evasion, or appeasement in the face of challenge
- **Contentious politics** literature, which finds that viewing incivility in TV talk shows increases interest but erodes trust
 - Amplified by production choices, effects increase when close-ups are used (see Grabe & Bucy, 2009)

Inappropriate: avoidance



Appropriate: engagement



Obama-Romney, 2012 Debate 3

Appropriate displays rated higher



Appropriate Displays Rated More Favorably With higher dial test (CRM) and self-report scores

	Obama				Romney			
	CRM		Self-Report		CRM		Self-Report	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Appropriate	(56.40)	11.83	4.50	1.28	(66.09)	13.56	5.25	1.20
Inappropriate	(48.79)	12.61	3.14	1.41	(52.32)	13.11	4.49	1.26

CRM ($t(59) = 6.25, p < .001$), self-report evaluation ($t(59) = 8.40, p < .001$)

Gong & Bucy (2016)

Inappropriate displays watched more



Gaze Fixations and Durations by Partisanship

Both are higher for inappropriate displays

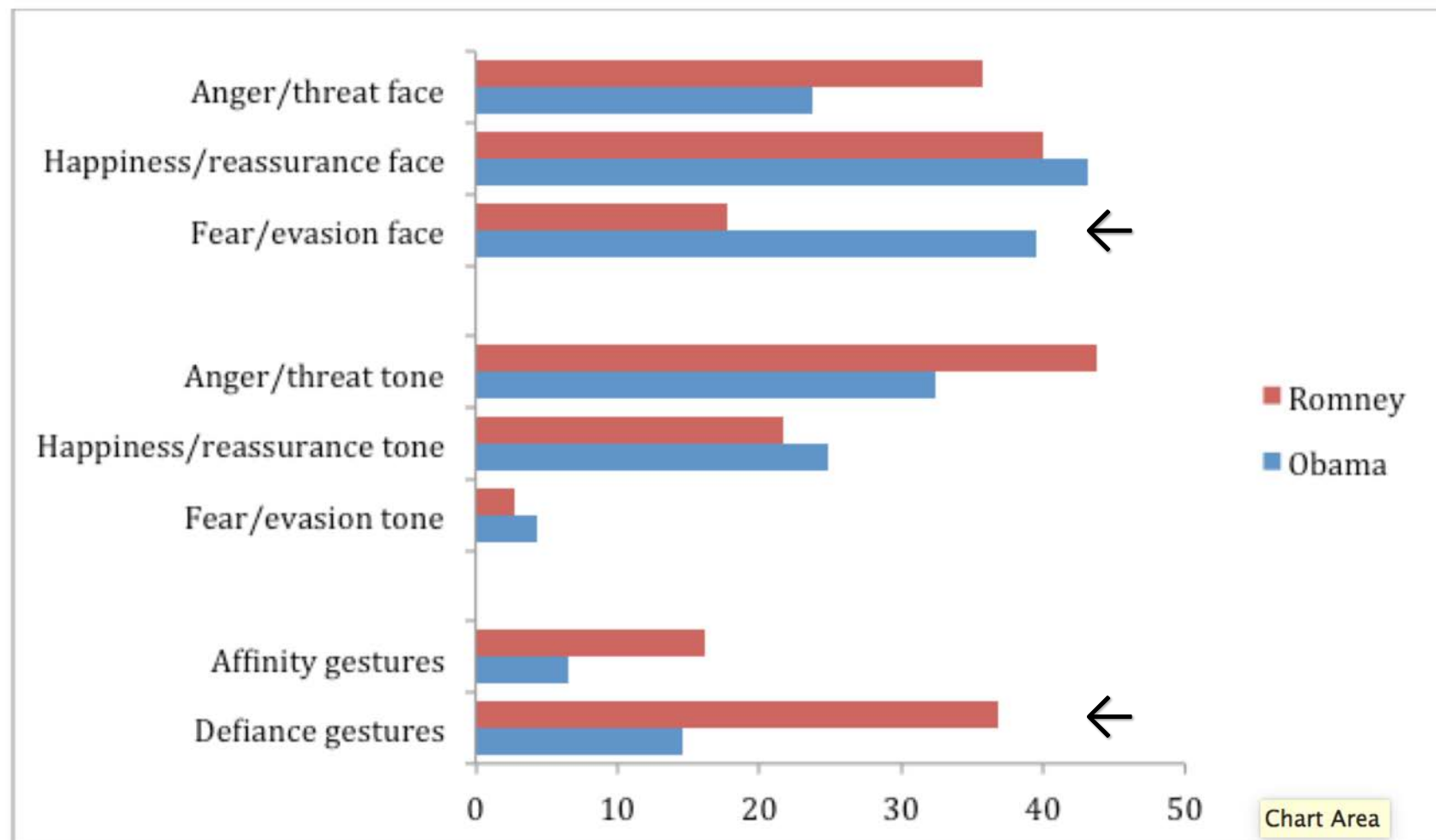
		Political Affiliation		
		Democrat	Republican	Independent
Appropriate Displays	Mean duration (in seconds)	(26.25)(SD =22.45)	(30.37)(SD =16.89)	(38.44)(SD =14.45)
	Fixation Frequency	15.47 (SD =12.99)	16.50 (SD =8.52)	20.64 (SD =6.74)
Inappropriate Displays	Mean duration (in seconds)	(43.50)(SD =14.65)	(38.83)(SD =22.27)	(48.81)(SD =14.12)
	Fixation Frequency	23.90 (SD =8.81)	22.61 (SD =11.14)	26.12 (SD =7.16)

Gong & Bucy (2016)

Look of losing, 2012 edition



Figure 3. Nonverbal Display Frequencies, Debate 1

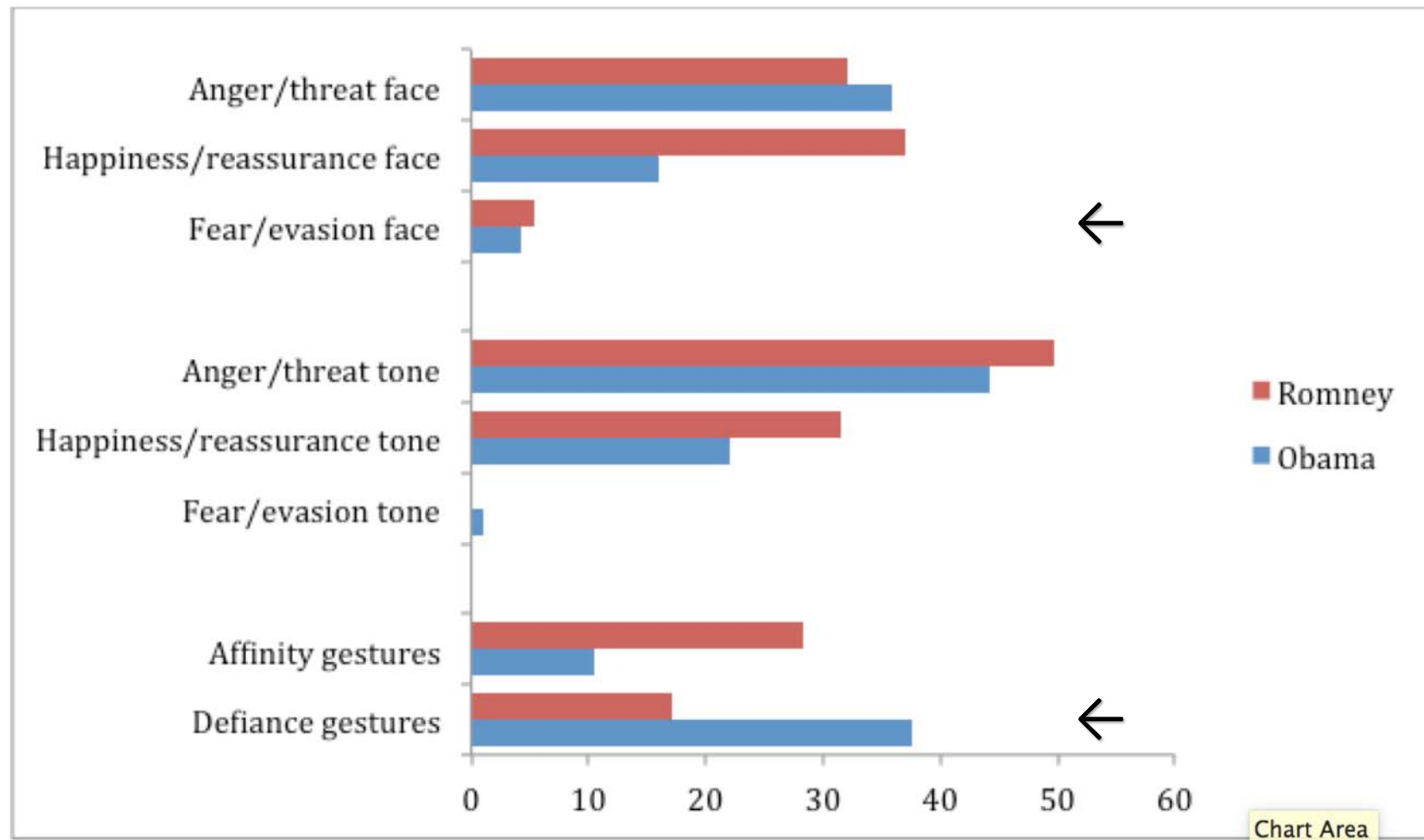


Bucy & Gong (2016)

Look of losing, 2012 edition



Figure 4. Nonverbal Display Frequencies, Debate 3

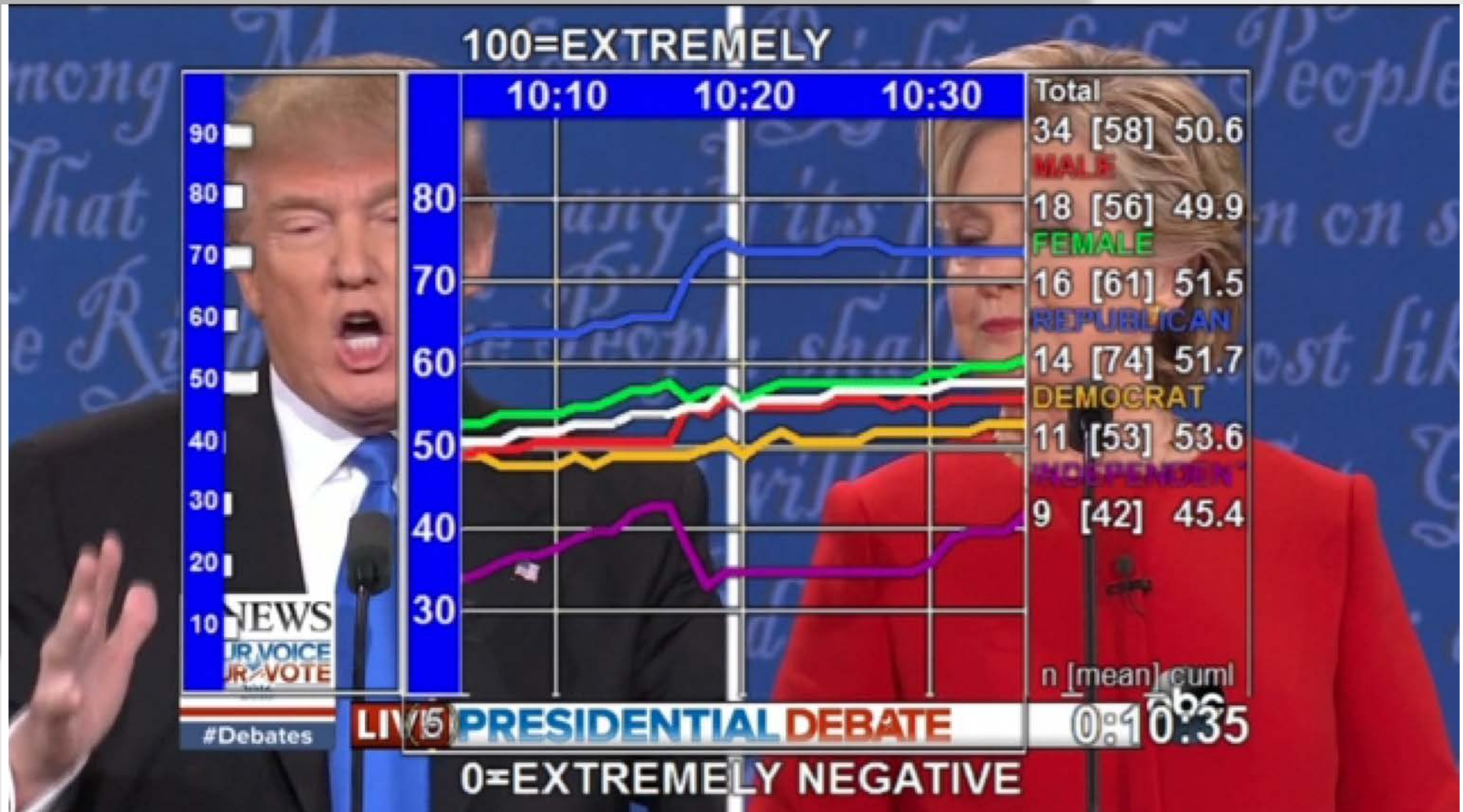


Bucy & Gong (2016)

And along comes Trump



Attacks rally partisans



Overlay from dial tests conducted at the CCR lab, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Bucy, 2016a).

Identifying a populist (verbal) style



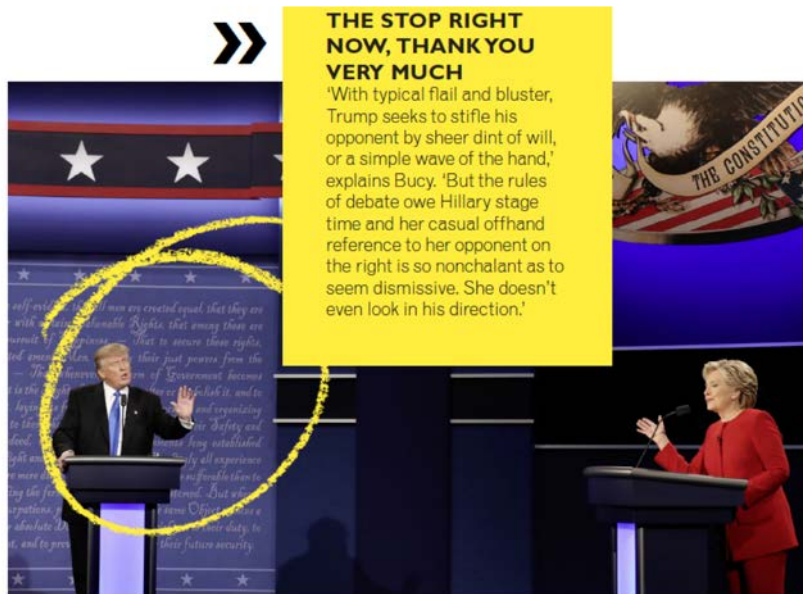
- Populism described as a thin, fragmented, or unelaborated ideology (Engesser et al., 2017)
 - With a **communication logic** that encompasses ideology (content), strategy (aims), style (form), messengers
- Populist discourse marked by **key stylistic features**
 - Drama, polarization, moralizing, ostracism, directness, mass appeal, vulgarity, (Bos et al., 2017)
- Core elements of a **populist style** (Engesser et al., 2017)
 - Simplification
 - Emotionalization
 - Negativity

Identifying a populist (nonverbal) style



- Nonverbal behavior and televised presidential **debate dynamics**
 - e.g., signs of “losing” in 1960 vs. 2012 (Bucy, 2016b)
- Thinking about nonverbal indicators of populism, we would expect
 - **Simplification** to manifest as easy to understand displays, even nonfluencies
 - **Emotionalization** in anger/threat displays, defiance gestures, tone of voice, interruptions (impatience), inappropriate displays
 - **Negativity** to manifest as the valence in each of the above indicators—and in character attacks

Key variables



Trump vs Clinton

Bucy (2016c)

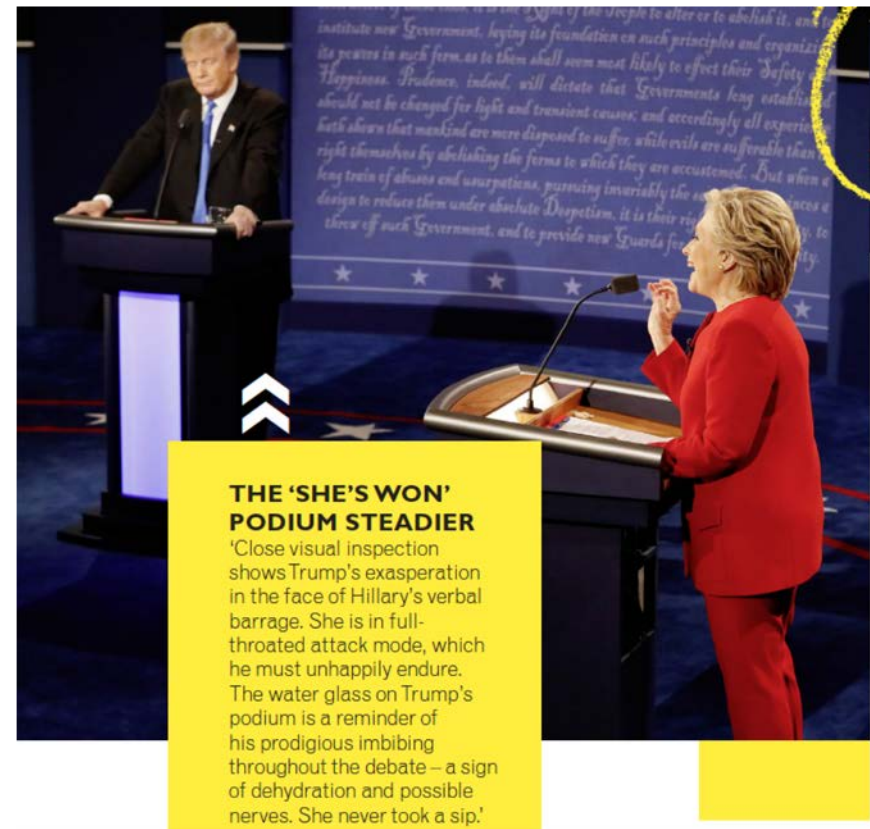
- **Anger/threat displays** include frowning, fixed stares, negative and rigid facial expressions that have a hostile feel (biobehavior)
- **Defiance gestures** signal an antagonistic relationship between the candidate, opponent or an implied enemy “out there” (raised fist, finger shaking, pointing, etc.)
- **Nonverbal disagreement** illustrated by head shaking, finger wagging, etc.
- **Inappropriate displays** includes nonverbal behavior that is compatible with the message and tone of the setting in which it occurs
 - Congruency between the candidate's expressions and immediate rhetorical context
- **Hostile interruptions** are designed to disrupt and feature *interjections*, *hostile takeovers*, and instances of *verbal chicken*

Variable definitions



Key variables (cont.)

- **Verbal nonfluencies** include broken phrases, incomplete sentences, repeated words, stammering, mispronunciations, *non sequiturs* or unrelated comments
- **Character attacks** include personal put downs and assertions about the opponent's character, not policies
- **Angry/threatening tone** when the speaker's voice tone has a menacing, accusatory, or hostile feel; also, revealing a desire to fight, do political battle
- **Sophistication** is indexed by percentage of 6+ letter words in transcript
- **I/They** scores derived from LIWC coding, relative to each candidate's baseline
- **Blame** constructed from DICTION scores, also relative to candidate baselines

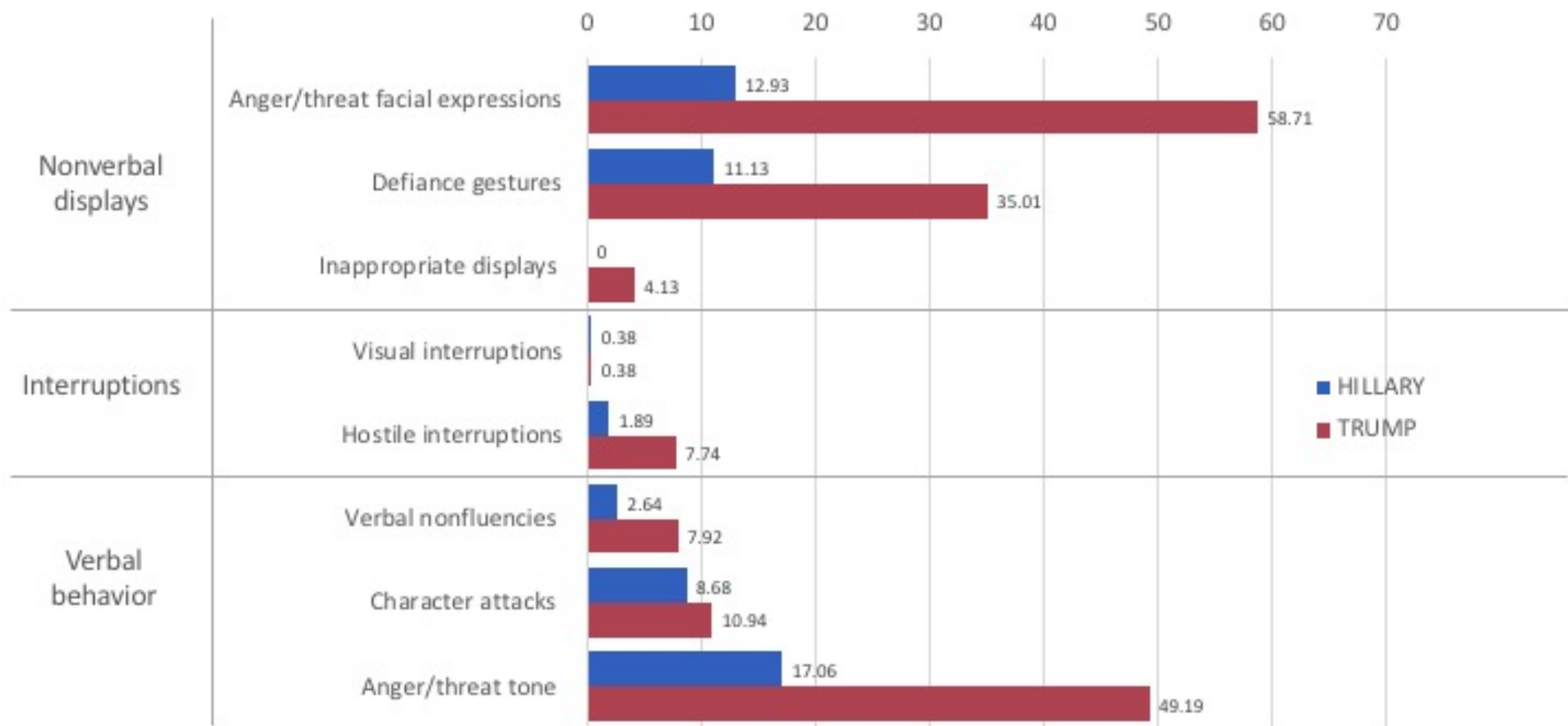


Bucy (2016c)

'Populist' candidate behaviors



2016 Debate 1: Trump vs. Clinton (%)

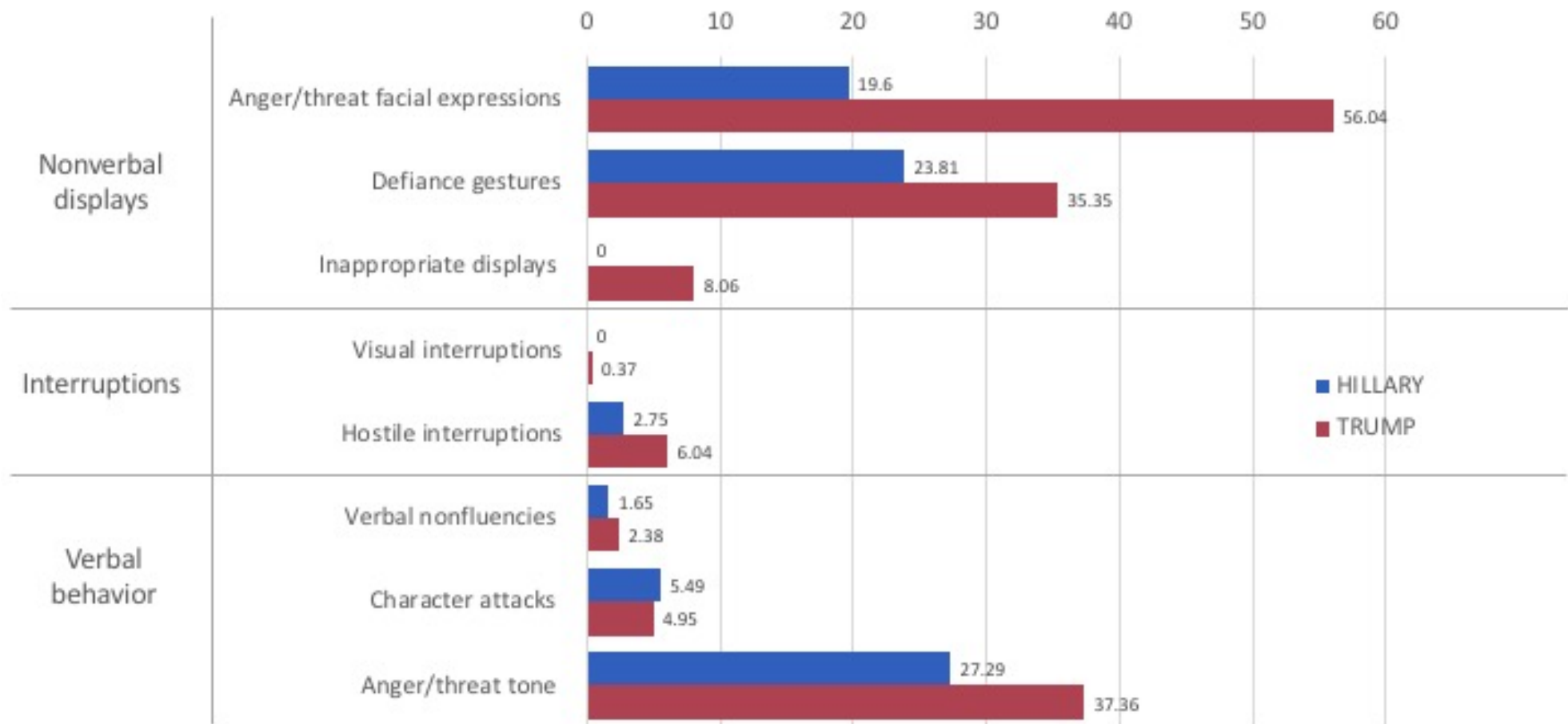


Percent occurrence within 10-second intervals, $N = 533$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

'Populist' candidate behaviors



2016 Debate 3: Trump vs. Clinton (%)

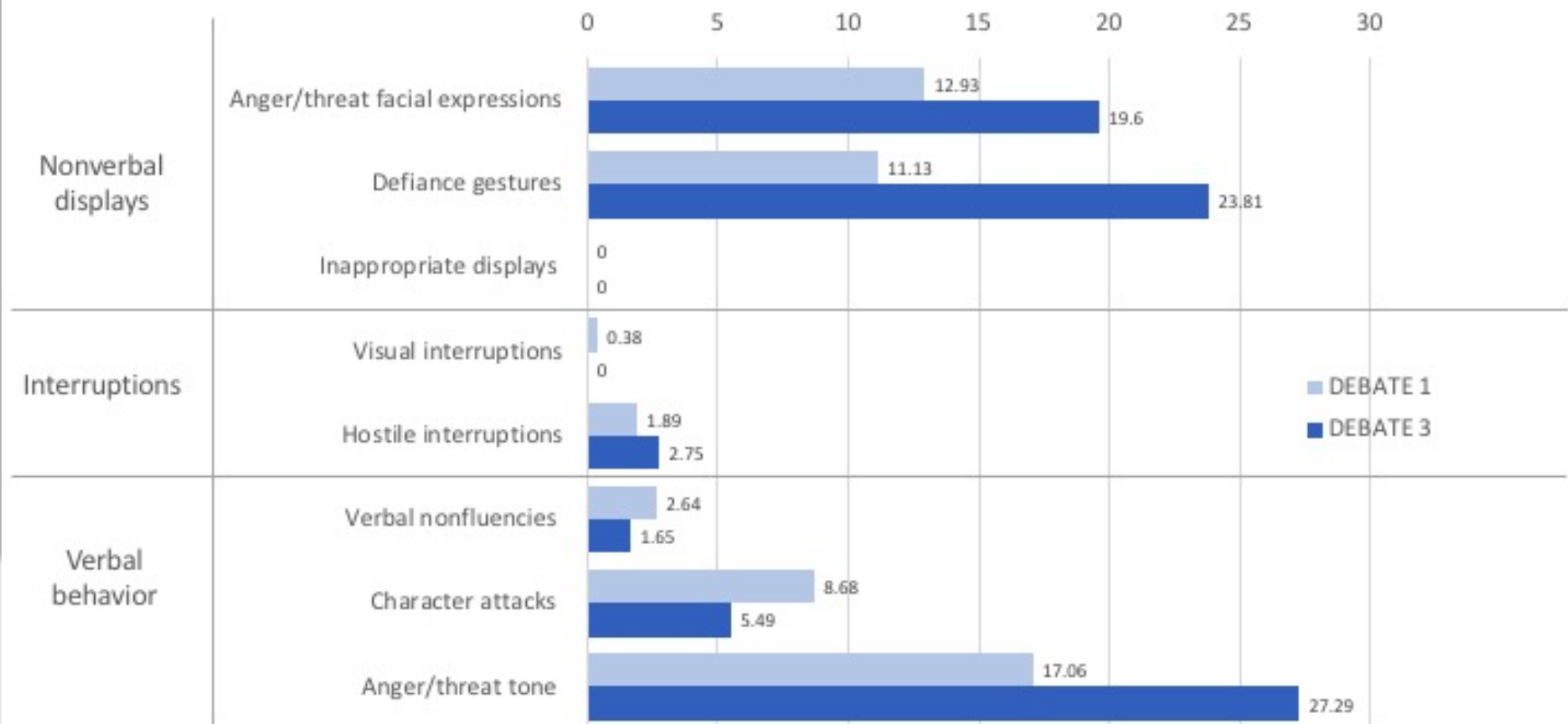


Percent occurrence within 10-second intervals, $N = 533$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

'Populist' candidate behaviors



Clinton vs. Clinton 2016: Debate 1 – Debate 3 (%)

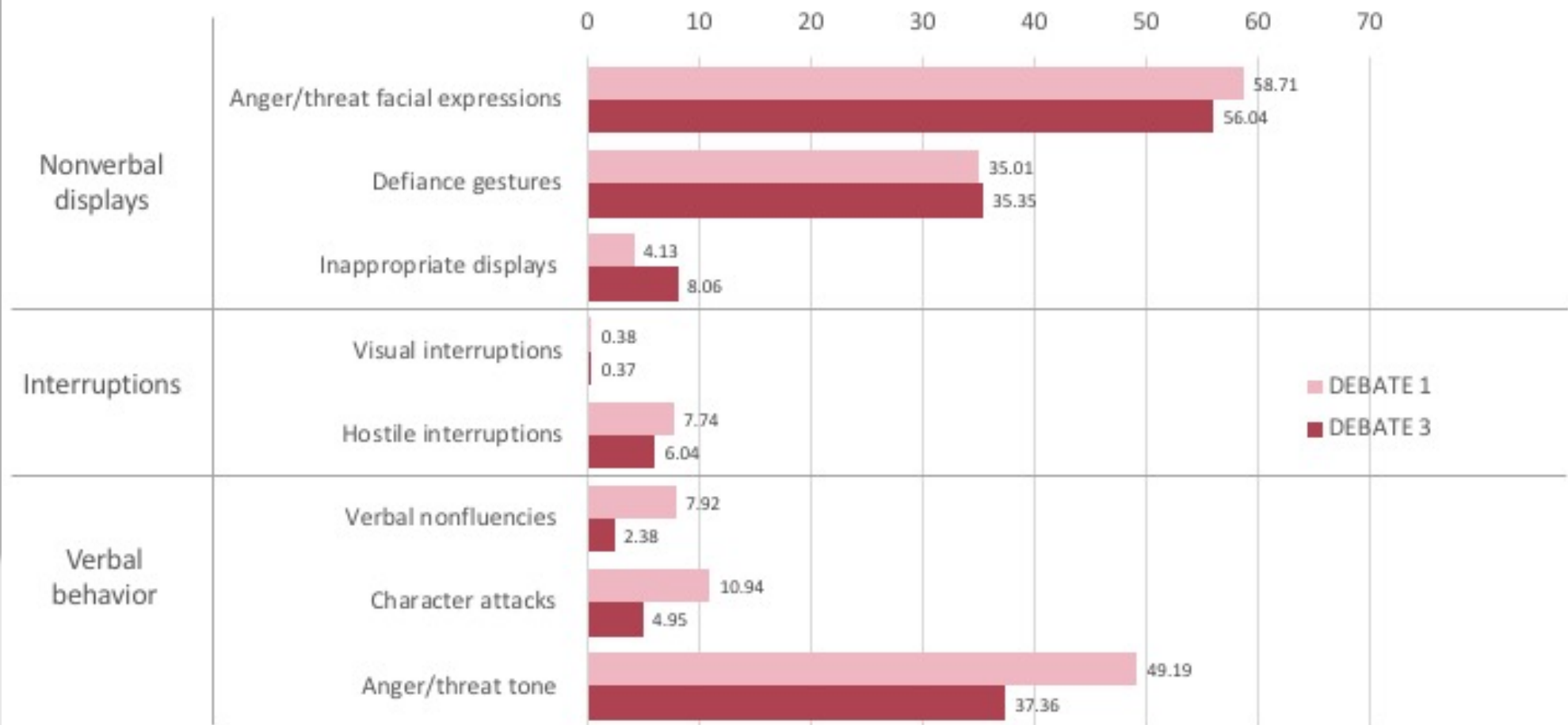


Percent occurrence within 10-second intervals, $N = 533$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

'Populist' candidate behaviors



Trump vs. Trump 2016: Debate 1 – Debate 3 (%)

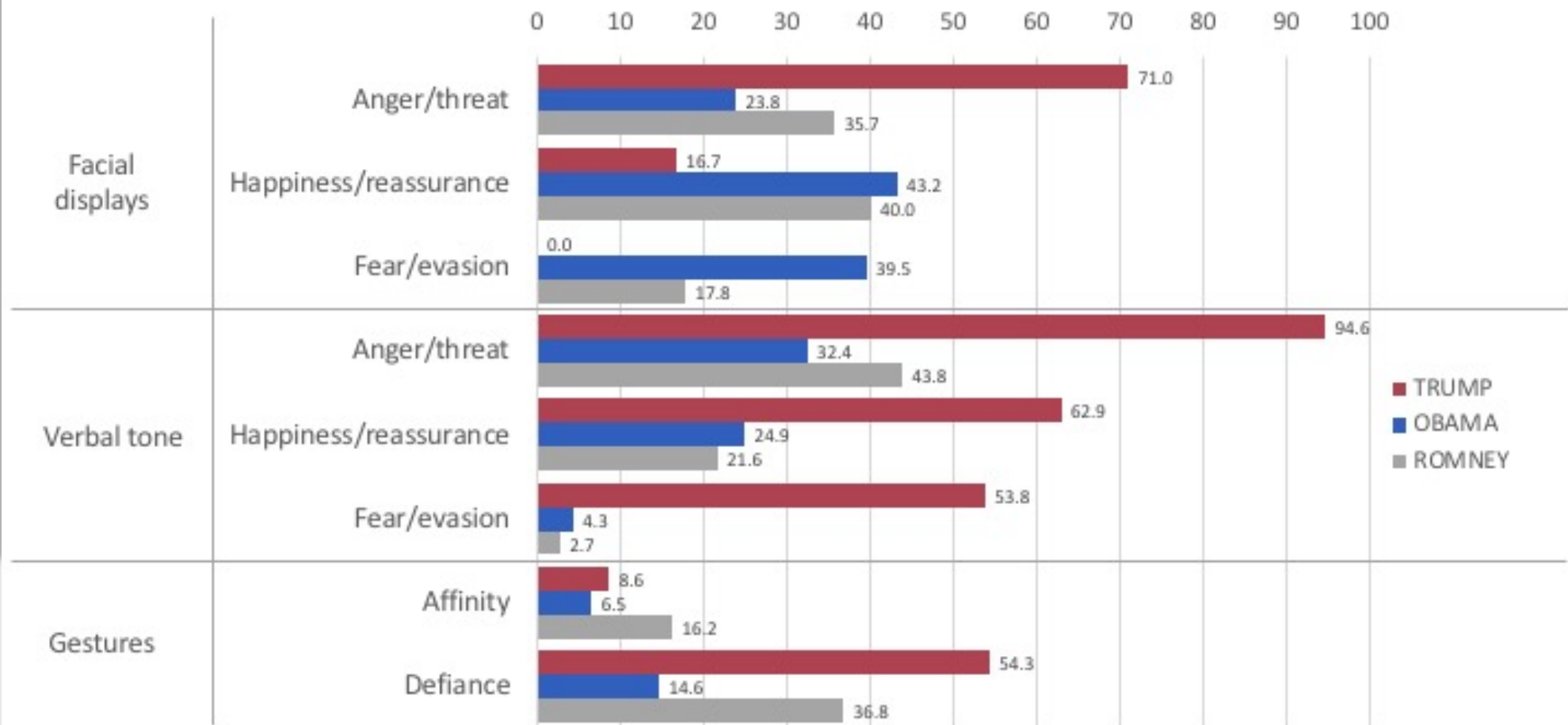


Percent occurrence within 10-second intervals, $N = 533$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

'Populist' candidate behaviors



Trump 2016 vs. Obama and Romney 2012: Debate 1 (%)

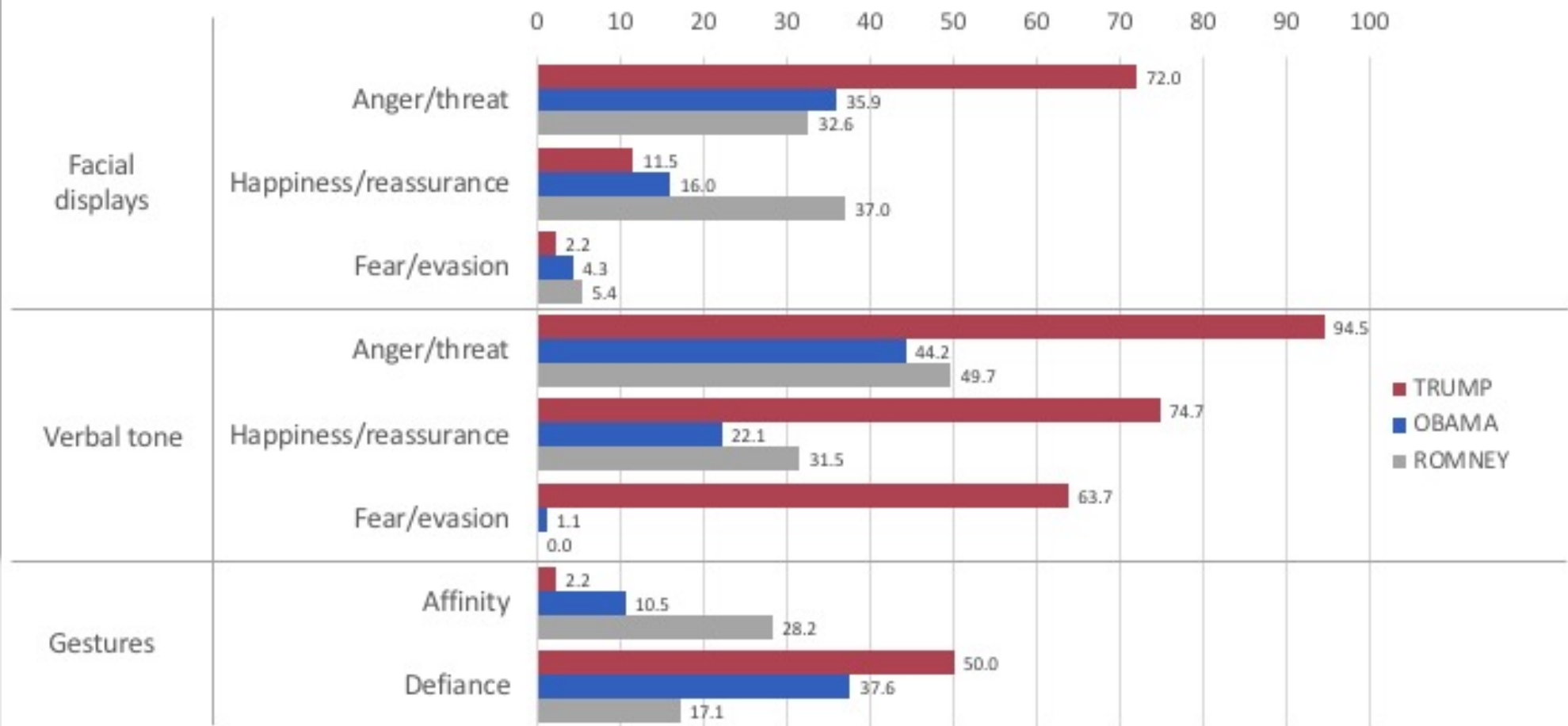


Percent occurrence within 30-second intervals, $N = 177$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

'Populist' candidate behaviors

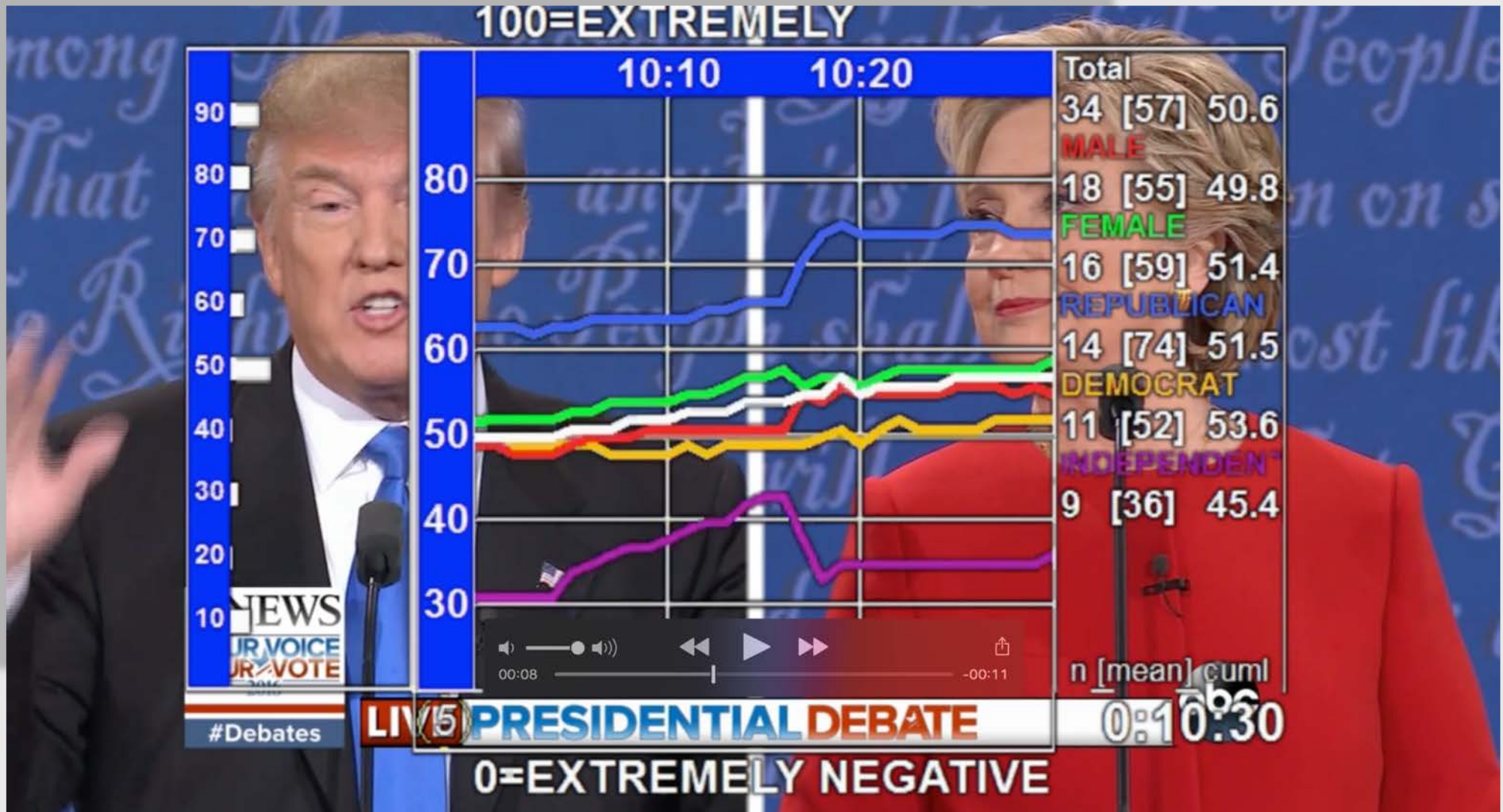


Trump 2016 vs. Obama and Romney 2012: Debate 3 (%)



Percent occurrence within 30-second intervals, $N = 177$ (Bucy et al., 2018).

Trump aggresses, Clinton waits it out



Overlay from dial tests conducted at the CCR lab, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Bucy, 2016a).

Characterizing 'Trump style'



- **Trump's display repertoires**

- A melange of anger, threat, aggression + defiance, punctuated by interruptions and protestations
 - Betrayed signs of stress in his tics: sniffing, fidgeting, water gulping (aka, leakage)
 - Attempted to modulate the sound of his voice early in the debates but couldn't sustain it
 - Ultimately, a **challenger style**
- In which Trump engages in **inappropriate aggression**
 - An equal opportunity offender except when it comes to other authoritarians



Trump won the nomination with the early acquiescence of his opponents.

Clinton's softer approach



- **Clinton's display repertoires**
 - A softer, more fluid and reassuring style, more typical of incumbents, e.g., the **'happy warrior'**
 - Also more verbally and policy oriented—reassuring to the world
 - But **beholden to the rules** of televised debate (and establishment politics more generally)
 - The more experienced and articulate debater in 2016, but **not able to sustain** audience attention (Bucy et al., 2018)
 - A point that becomes evident in Twitter analysis of viewer activity during the 1st debate



Clinton approached the debates with a lawyer's outlook, perhaps restrained by gender stereotypes that penalize women for aggressing.

'Trump style' in action



Panel A

Debate 2 – Visual interruption



Panel B

Debate 3 – Anger/threat display



Debate 2 – Hovering in the background



Debate 3 – Defiance gesture



Bucy & Gong (2018)

Rattling Clinton in Debate 2



- *“This is not okay, I thought.”*

“It was the second presidential debate and Donald Trump was looming behind me. Two days before, the world heard him brag about groping women. Now we were on a small stage and no matter where I walked, he followed me closely, staring at me, making faces. It was incredibly uncomfortable. He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled.”

– *What Happened* (H. R. Clinton, 2017, p. 136)



Trump eyes Clinton wearily as he enters her visual space, possibly looking to see if she will react.

Inappropriate physicality



- Theme
 - **Physicality as leverage to interrupt, steal attention intimidate**
- *“He was over her shoulder the entire time and trying to make her stress or trying to apply some pressure to mess with her delivery.” (Diana, age 19)*
- *“He hovered over her the entire time. It’s a bullying tactic.” (James, age 24)*
- *“I was really trying to listen to her, but I couldn’t because he was just standing there... If everybody’s just looking at him like, What is he doing? [and] not listening to her, nobody can hear what she has to say.” (Madison, age 20)*



Analyzed in Bucy & Gong (2018), *The Facial Displays of Leaders* (Ch. 4)
Carl Senior, Ed.

Focus group analysis



- Observations
 - ***Trump presents a perplexing, menacing presence, demanding attention + deference***
 - ***Hijacks the process of idea exchange by relying on character attacks and attempts to dominate***
- *“Trump sends so many messed up signals. It’s very confusing to watch him. Like, I have a hard time reading him as a person—and it scares me. Admittedly, Clinton isn’t the most personable [candidate], either.” (Bruce, age 22)*

A Reese's moment



Social media and viewer response



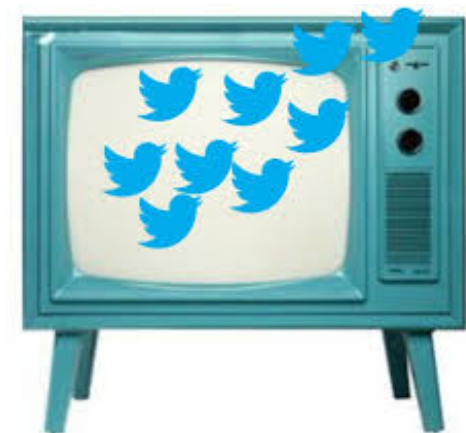
- Social media as a **generator of Big Data**—until recently, did not exist, at least not in usable form
 - Allows real-time, **moment-to-moment tracking** of communication behavior by audiences
 - Particularly during moments of national focus and conversation, e.g., presidential debates
 - An outcome variable not restricted to the lab that enables **analysis of continuous response** on a mass scale (see Shah et al., 2015)



Considerations



- Identifying the key variables that show the **most promise** in predicting viewer response
 - Whittling a long coding instrument down to the essentials
- Addressing the technical issue of **synchronizing Twitter responses** with our debate coding
 - Using each segment's start/stop time
- **Determining the right "lag"** or delay to fit an effects model
- Running complicated time series models so as to **isolate the variance** of different communication elements



Analysis strategy

1. Characterize behavioral landscape of the debates

- 1st and 3rd debates of hand-coded at 10-sec. intervals
 - 90 min. debates parsed into approx. **530 segments**
 - Variables **coded nominally**: present or absent in any 10-sec. interval (1, 0)
 - 10 percent of the content double-coded for intercoder reliability
- Coding instrument had **other variables**
 - Happiness/reassurance, fear/evasion
 - Voice tone, display emotion
 - Gesture valence (affinity, defiance)
 - Memes, rhetorical functions
 - Communal, agentic style
 - Nonverbal tics (stress indicators)
 - Blink rate (mean and *SD*)

2. Link biobehavior + rhetorical coding with comp. data

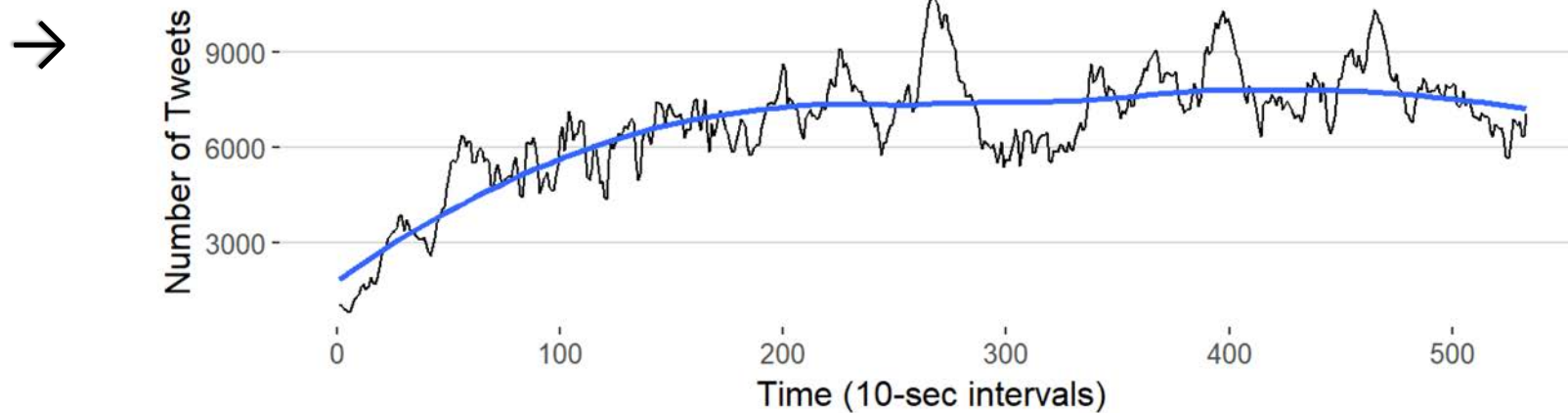
- Twitter harvesting and analysis
 - Purchases data from GNIP: All Tweets during 90 minutes of each debate mentioning Clinton or Trump
 - Approximately 5 million tweets from Debate 1 and 3 million tweets for Debate 3 that meet search criteria
 - Still misses debate tweeting that does not mention of the two candidates
- Outcome measures
- **Volume of mentions**
 - Tweets that only mentioned Trump or Clinton, not both
- **Sentiment of tweets**
 - To be determined

Modeling the Twitter data

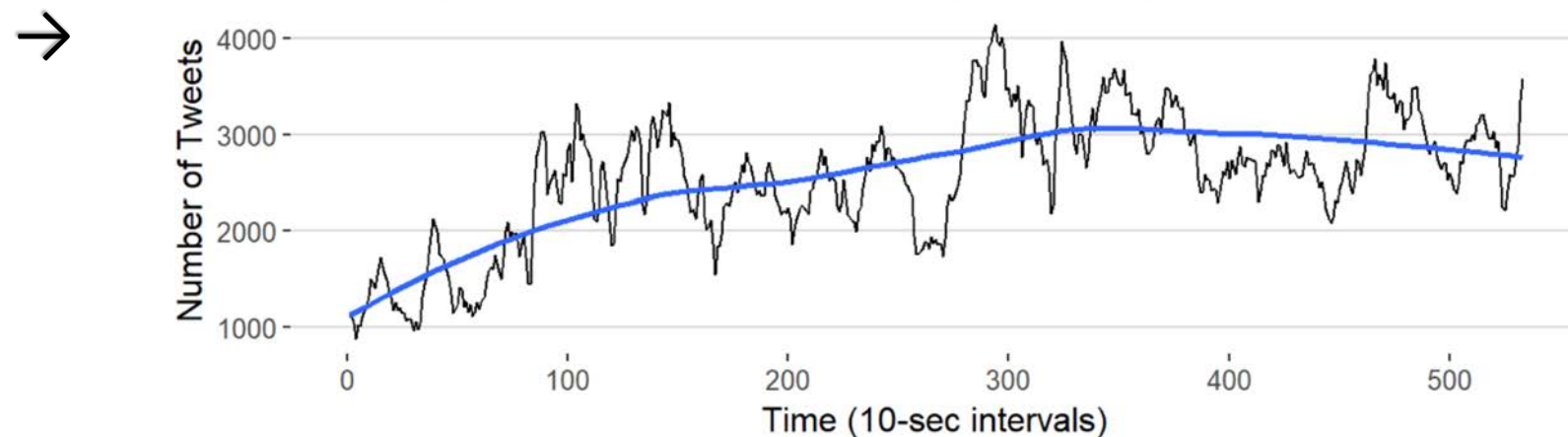


Volume of mentions

Tweets from 1st Presidential Debate (2016) - Trump



Tweets from 1st Presidential Debate (2016) - Clinton



Bucy et al. (2018)

Trump's visuals trump verbals



Trump's visuals significant across all lag times

Table 3: Regression of Trump Twitter Mentions Using Synchronous to 60-Second Lags: Sub-indices

VARIABLES	t	t-1	t-2	t-3	t-4	t-5	t-6
Clinton Mentions	1.657** (0.074)	1.396** (0.071)	1.435** (0.073)	1.446** (0.070)	1.375** (0.067)	1.424** (0.070)	1.402** (0.071)
Visual Pop. Index	24.845 (14.012)	41.265** (12.496)	71.127** (12.378)	68.640** (12.309)	38.928** (11.857)	54.417** (12.312)	51.115** (12.503)
Tonal Pop. Index	58.861* (27.467)	9.764 (24.627)	-32.102 (24.750)	1.783 (23.857)	97.866** (23.100)	33.272 (23.884)	-15.747 (24.424)
Verbal Pop. Index	-21.641 (23.866)	1.292 (21.294)	-46.319* (21.072)	-9.578 (20.749)	46.584* (19.999)	7.569 (21.314)	26.392 (21.822)
Constant	-52.436* (21.178)	-49.451** (19.045)	-61.654** (19.226)	-87.779** (18.670)	-108.397** (17.672)	-86.040** (18.542)	-58.256** (18.865)
Observations	533	532	531	530	529	528	527
R-squared	0.490	0.425	0.440	0.458	0.504	0.460	0.437

Standard errors in parentheses; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Bucy et al. (2018)

Verbals slower on the uptake



Clinton's arguments take longer to resonate

Table 4: Regression of Clinton Twitter Mentions Using Synchronous to 60-Second Lags: Sub-indices

VARIABLES	t	t-1	t-2	t-3	t-4	t-5	t-6
Trump Mentions	0.288** (0.013)	0.299** (0.016)	0.306** (0.016)	0.306** (0.016)	0.292** (0.015)	0.296** (0.015)	0.304** (0.016)
Visual Pop. Index	18.312 (10.968)	33.809** (10.880)	3.193 (11.231)	4.439 (11.117)	21.525 (10.962)	23.184* (10.993)	30.023** (11.066)
Tonal Pop. Index	16.586 (14.622)	18.324 (14.507)	20.272 (14.731)	27.888 (14.588)	11.783 (14.382)	4.487 (14.416)	7.246 (14.496)
Verbal Pop. Index	9.774 (12.511)	10.834 (12.396)	19.871 (12.696)	37.675** (12.427)	50.259** (12.284)	50.715** (12.323)	35.045** (12.433)
Constant	-8.692 (6.546)	-15.021* (6.520)	-7.418 (6.755)	-12.728 (6.622)	-16.717** (6.427)	-16.429* (6.449)	-16.337* (6.541)
Observations	533	532	531	530	529	528	527
R-squared	0.479	0.421	0.406	0.421	0.435	0.434	0.428

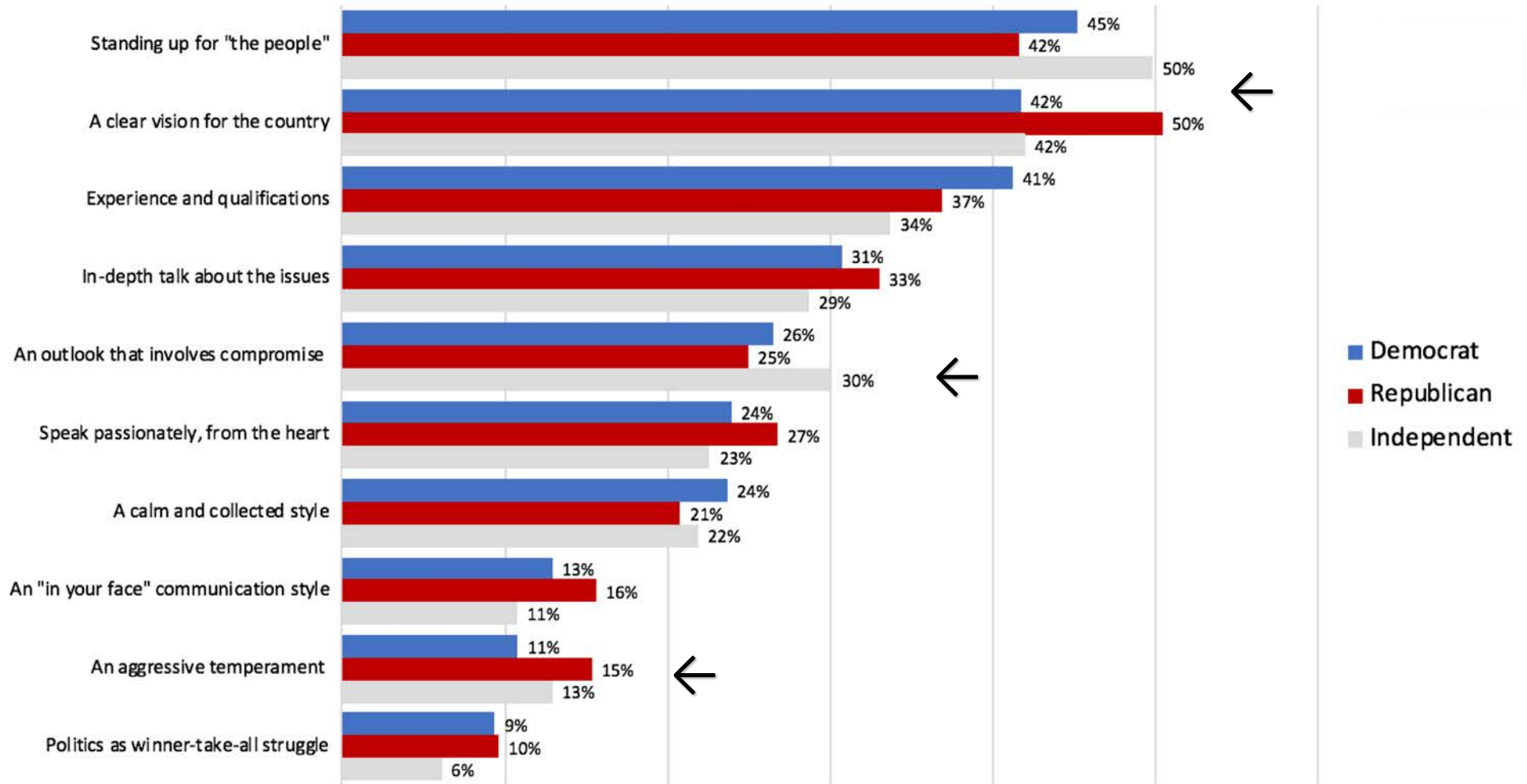
Standard errors in parentheses; ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Bucy et al. (2018)

Preferences by party



Champion the people, have a vision, *avoid* aggression

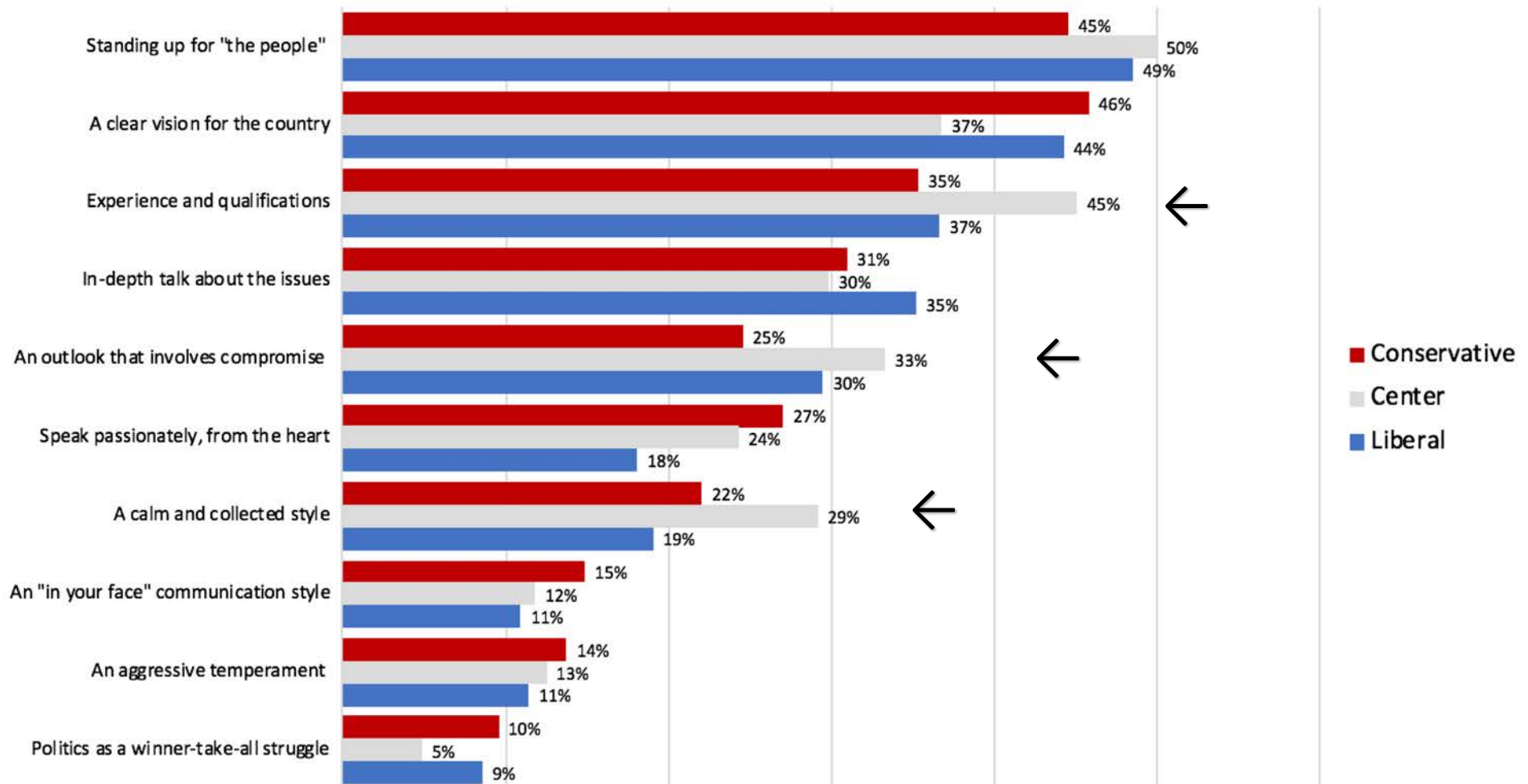


From an original national sample of U.S. voters, fielded Oct. 17-24, 2018, N = 1,215. Qualtrics online panel.

Preferences by ideology

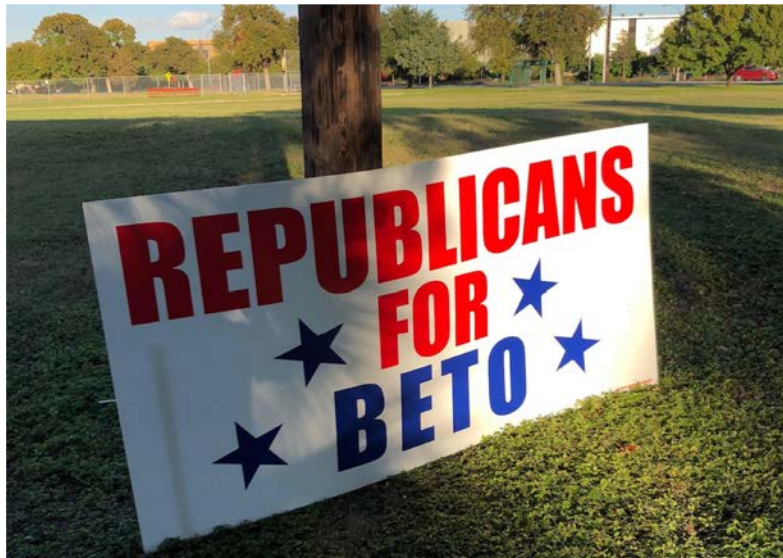


Centrists attuned to experience, compromise, *calm*



From an original national sample of U.S. voters, fielded Oct. 17-24, 2018, N = 1,215. Qualtrics online panel.

Looking to next Tuesday's election



- *"There was an overflow of 300 people when he spoke the other day IN LUBBOCK. He went outside and spoke for another 15 mins to those who couldn't enter." (TTU colleague)*



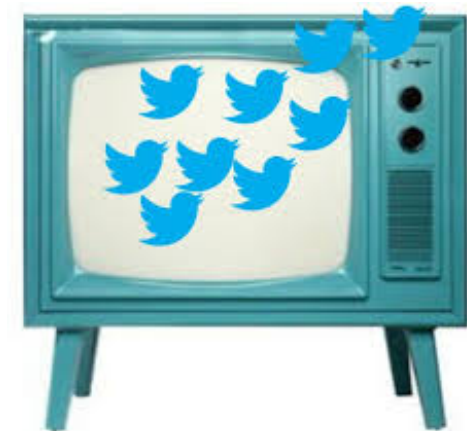
Signs for Beto O'Rourke in Lubbock, TX, in a conservative part of the state (Oct. 2018).



Takeaways



- Along with its grievances and resentments, populism can be seen as a **nonverbal communication phenomenon**
- Responses to **populism's performance** can be observed in second-screen expression
- Twitter-using public reactive to **aggressive debate behavior**, even if the overall public prefers a 'kinder, gentler' politics
 - Responses to nonverbal behaviors significant at every time lag
 - Arguments/rhetorical tactics take longer to draw a response
- In the face of populist attacks, waiting only **lessens your resonance** and effectiveness



Neutralizing populist attacks



Images: TF1



American candidates hoping to neutralize populist attacks and claims could learn from Emmanuel Macron in France.

'Visual bullshit' as an emerging form



The Guardian
International edition

'Bullshit is a greater enemy than lies' - lessons from three new books on the post-truth era

From Trump's phoney claims to the Brexit '£350m a week for the NHS' promise, we have become mired in a sea of bogus truths. But what can we do about it?



▲ Donald Trump pledges to 'drain the swamp' in Washington, November 2016. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

Stuart Jeffries

Mon 22 May 2017 17:15 BST

- Finally, viewing '**visual bullshit**' as an emerging form, part of the communication logic of populism
 - Important to document, given heavy audience reliance on visuals and forms of **social information**
 - A major pillar, perhaps, of populism's **stylistic appeal**
- The gestures, expressions, and nonfluencies **often don't add up or fit** the rhetorical setting
 - But work on a more primitive level
- Visual BS is short on words but **long on disruptive theatrics**—and threatening intent
 - Understanding its resonance is key to countering an outsized influence

Rolling up our sleeves



Erik Bucy @erikpbucy · Aug 20

Important race to watch, with potential implications for 2020



Beto O'Rourke: can the upstart Texas Democrat eject Ted Cruz?

Cruz paints him as 'hard-left like Bernie Sanders' but the challenger for the Senate seat is drawing crowds in conservative suburbs

amp.theguardian.com



- Intensive nature of this work suggests the **importance of collaboration** and team-based approaches to multi-methods research
 - Key to finding new modes of communication influence
- Co-authors, collaborators, students
 - **Maria Grabe, Younei Soe, James Ball**
 - *Indiana University*
 - **Harrison Gong, Bingbing Zhang, Duncan Prettyman, Riley Davis, Shawn Hughes**
 - *Texas Tech University*
 - **Dhavan Shah, Chris Wells, Alex Hanna, plus many UW-SMAD + MCRC student collaborators**
 - *Wisconsin-Madison, Boston U., Google*
 - **Jungseock Joo, Patrick Stewart**
 - *UCLA, University of Arkansas*



Thank you.

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