Getting the Picture: Defining Race-Based Stereotypes in Politics

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This article considers electoral inter-group dynamics in Quebec, Canada, by focusing on what White voters expect from political candidates of color. While significant work has been done on the use of political heuristics such as race or gender-based framing by the media, we do not know as much about the way voters interpret and use these stereotypes in a political context. In this article, we consider voters' interpretation of race-based cues using qualitative evidence gathered in six focus groups. First, we explore the content of stereotypes typically associated with politicians of color in the province. Second, this article provides an assessment of some of the ways in which race-based stereotypes are used to understand politics and evaluate politicians of color. We find that race-based stereotypes contribute to defining expectations regarding politicians' behavior. While voters may consciously choose to favor politicians of color, the perception of social distance between a marginalized candidate and them can also lead to negative cross-ethnic attitudes.

Keywords: Quebec, race, inter-group relations, elections, political stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

When Dominique Anglade, a woman whose parents immigrated from Haïti in 1969, ran to become the leader of the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) in 2019, she faced an unexpected problem when partisans voiced concerns regarding the negative impact her skin color could have on her chances to one day become Premier of the province. They believed that Quebecers outside of Montreal may not be "ready" to vote for a woman of color. These claims sparked a controversy province-wide and were dismissed by most politicians as groundless. Indeed, a growing body of literature sheds doubt on the notion that politicians of color could be penalized by White voters in Canada (see for example Tossutti and Najem, 2002; Black and Erickson, 2006). Nonetheless, some evidence remains. For example, in Quebec specifically, Bouchard (2021) showed that voters were fairly critical of Jagmeet Singh, practicing Sikh and leader of the federal New Democratic Party (NDP), during the 2019 elections, a negative attitude that did not extend to his party.

While the question of the impact of candidates' ethnicity on voting behavior receives mixed answers in the literature, and while the interaction between politicians and voters does not start nor end at the polls, the meaning different sociodemographic cues take to citizens has received far less attention. For one, citizens are routinely exposed to politicians in the media outside of the campaign period. More importantly, even if ethnicity does not drastically influence voting behaviors, it can nonetheless contribute to shaping the way voters think about politicians and what they may expect from them. Using qualitative methods, this article considers the nature and impact of stereotypes related to politicians of color.

A substantial body of work has considered the influence of ethnicity on voters' behavior in the United States, focusing notably on the attitudes toward Black and Latinx politicians (see

for example Terkildsen, 1993; Sigelman et al., 1995; Pantoja and Segura, 2003a,b; Barreto, 2007; McConnaughy et al., 2010; Lerman and Sadin, 2016). The Canadian case has received far less attention, but offers interesting characteristics. Notably, it should first be noted that most politicians of color have been local candidates who are seen as carrying little influence on vote intentions (Blais et al., 2003) given Canada's first-past-the-post electoral system. While quantitative investigations of the voting behavior of Canadians seldom reveal negative cross-ethnic voting patterns (see for example Black and Erickson, 2006), a qualitative assessment of the views of candidates of color nonetheless show that they themselves could expect to be discriminated against by voters (Black and Hicks, 2006). We chose to focus specifically on the case of Quebec, where political parties are not only distinguished on a left to right dimension but also on a nationalist dimension (between independence and support for Canadian federalism; Johnston, 2017). Consequently, discussions related notably to multi-culturalism and secularism have been at the forefront of Quebec politics for over a decade (Lamy, 2015).

Our goal is to answer the following question: how do voters in Quebec stereotype politicians of color and what are their expectations toward them? This article first considers the content of these stereotypes, then explores the way stereotypes are mobilized by Quebecers while thinking about and discussing politicians of color and candidates' ideology. This article should, therefore, be understood as an analysis of certain political narratives in Quebec, notably among highly educated White voters.

While the stereotypical portrayal of marginalized politicians by the media has gathered attention in Canada (see for example Wagner et al., 2019), we do not know as much about the use of these stereotypes by voters (Lemarier-Saulnier, 2018), particularly when it comes to their reaction to race-based cues. In particular, evidence offered up to that point has mostly been quantitative or experimental (see for example Black and Erickson, 2006; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014; Bird et al., 2016). While observational and experimental studies typically focus on causality, this article, through its qualitative methodology, offers a look at some of the *meaning* of ethnicity to White voters. We rely on qualitative data gathered through six focus groups held outside of Montreal[1] in 2018 and 2019. The focus groups discussed participants' impressions of politics, politicians, and political campaigns both at the provincial and federal level and focused on diversity in politics. When faced with the puzzle of understanding the role ethnicity may play in politics, qualitative data allows a deeper look at how individuals *use* stereotypes and the way participants ultimately interpret others' appearance and rely on it, voluntarily or not (Fortin, 1996). We find that ethnicity-based stereotypes contribute to defining expectations about politicians of color, their ideologies and behaviors. However, the impact of ethnicity in politics is not straightforward. Appearance, therefore, interacts with what is known about a group and a person as well as with the observer's values and ideology.

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[1] Montreal is the most racially diverse city in the province.

2. RACE-BASED STEREOTYPES AND POLITICS

This article centers on two aspects of the perception of candidates and politicians of color, namely the nature of the stereotypes associated with them and their use.

2.1. The Nature of Stereotypes and Their Content

What are stereotypes? To navigate the social world, humans rely on cognition (thoughts) and affects (feelings) to determine proper behavior. Stereotypes refer to the first component of this chain, cognition, known as the "mental activity of processing information and using that information in judgment" (Stangor et al., 2014, p. 20). When someone sees another person for the first time, their brain associates this individual to several social categories (Allport, 1954). Stereotypes could therefore be understood as culturally transmitted mental images. They are composed of generalized beliefs about social categories notably based on the way these groups are portrayed in one's environment (Payne and Hannay, 2021). Consequently, even though they intervene in each person's mind, the content of stereotypes nonetheless tends to be shared. As part of a cultural narrative, they are not strictly individual: they are socially built and conveyed. Therefore, members of the same community may describe certain social groups in a similar manner. According to Haslam et al. (1998), stereotypes' strength lie in their relatively consensual nature (see, for example, Kleinert and Mochkabadi, 2021 on gender roles and stereotypes). Moreover, even when one's own opinion of another social group differs from the norm, they will nonetheless be aware of broad social narratives associated with that group.

As socially rooted objects, the content of these political stereotypes varies in time and space. Socialization to a political culture itself is a continuous process influenced notably by migration (White et al., 2008). Nadine[2], a participant born in France, provides an example of that:

> "I noticed a slip in my perception between what I thought a politician should look like when I was in France before and since I've arrived in Quebec. It's not because of Quebec's politicians, but more about Quebec's society. [...] There is no hierarchy when you compare it to France where authority is an important aspect. It encouraged me to review my position regarding what politicians should look like. Competence is not related to one's clothing. [...] Before I expected a politician to have a formal image: men should wear a suit and women had to be more chic."

Contrary to Allport's (1954) original claim, stereotypes aren't necessarily inaccurate. Some stereotypes stem from the observation of genuine differences between the situations social groups normally face (Bodenhausen et al., 2012). For example, the expectation that women lean toward the left of the political spectrum can be encouraged by noticing certain statistical tendencies, such as the traditional support of women

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[2] To protect their identity, the name of the participants used in this article are fictional.

for the center-left NDP in the Canadian case (Bouchard, 2021). However, those expectations can be self-fulfilling: not only are stereotypes the product of excessive generalization, but they can pressure individuals into maintaining the status quo and adopting certain behaviors to justify the system they live in (Jost et al., 2004; Madon et al., 2018; Towson et al., 2020). Stereotypes can also be the product of blatant hatred or of a paternalistic attitude toward historically stigmatized social groups. Stereotypes then act as part of a "culturally shared belief system" rooted, for example, in racist, ageist, sexist, ableist, or heterosexist ideas (Dovidio et al., 2013, p. 7).

When it comes to politics, one of the main sources of stereotypes analyzed in the literature is the media. In Canada, Trimble et al. (2015) claim that those stereotypes, and the expectations they encourage, are omnipresent. They note, in particular, that the characteristics of non-prototypical candidates' bodies are emphasized "in ways that (mark) them as aberrant and inauthentic in their desire for political power" (p. 324). Consequently, other authors have shown that the portrayal of female politicians (e.g., Goodyear-Grant, 2013) and candidates of color (e.g., Tolley, 2016) by the media can both quantitatively (Duval and Bouchard, 2021) and substantially (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003; Lemarier-Saulnier and Lalancette, 2012) diverge from the norm. Lemarier-Saulnier (2018) also showed that citizens can resort to stereotypes fitting these media frames when they discuss politics.

2.2. Stereotype Use

Stereotypes exist for a reason: they allow someone to swiftly guess how another person may be and how they may react. All in all, stereotypes contribute to defining the expected, in politics like in many other facets of social life. They are simply part of the cognitive set of tools humans have developed to make sense of the world they live in (Whitley and Kite, 2010). Contrary to the portrayal of human cognition proposed by theories of rational choice in politics (e.g., Downs, 1957), humans do not constantly engage in careful evaluation, may it be because of a lack of resources, time or motivation. Therefore, instead of seeking the optimal decision like the *homo economicus*, people are "satisficers" who aim most of the time for satisfactory decisions rather than perfect ones (Fiske and Taylor, 2017). Stereotypes serve that purpose. This notion is coherent with concepts routinely used in political and economic science such as bounded rationality which underlines the limitations to rational thinking (Simon, 1990). Research has notably shown that political information can be inferred from stereotypes. For example, Koch (2000) shows that voters can rely on gender stereotypes to determine a candidate's ideological position. For McDermott (1997), McDermott (1998), McDermott (2007), and McDermott (2009), voters routinely infer ideological values from candidates' characteristics.

Not everyone interprets stereotypes in the same way. While dual processing models highlight differences between culturally prevalent stereotypes and a person's conscious beliefs regarding intergroup differences (Monteith et al., 2013), there is still much debate regarding the strength of the effect of one's situation on one's biases (Machery, 2017). Nonetheless, scholarship does show that one's implicit biases (the "the accessibility of mental associations" related to given social groups, p. 928) aren't stable over time and remain influenced, to a certain extent, by how, and how often, different groups are portrayed and discussed in one's environment (Payne and Hannay, 2021). Pertaining to Canadian politics, Murakami (2014) shows that individuals who tend to rely heavily on negative associations related to race are less likely to support candidates of color, whereas no bias was perceptible in the electoral behavior of the "average" Canadians.

In politics, even though voters are expected to react negatively to an increase in perceived social distance between a politician and them (Cutler, 2002), authors have shown that neither candidates (Tossutti and Najem, 2002; Black and Erickson, 2006; Black and Hicks, 2006; Murakami, 2014) nor leaders of color (Bouchard, 2020, 2021) *systematically* suffer from an electoral penalty in the case of Canada. Nonetheless, occurrences of affinity-based voting behaviors have been reported in the same country (Landa et al., 1995; Cutler, 2002; Berdahl et al., 2011; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014; Besco, 2015; Bird et al., 2016; Bouchard, 2020, 2021), meaning that citizens who identify with marginalized social groups can be more likely to support a politician associated with their in-group. However, this support is not unconditional and depends notably on one's political preferences (Griffin and Keane, 2006; Bouchard, 2020). In the end, a wide range of political behaviors may be expected when voters are faced with non-prototypical candidates (Sigelman et al., 1995), depending notably on which groups they associate with. And while certain behaviors like co-ethnic or affinity voting have received empirical support both in Canada and in the United States (see for example Collet, 2005; Griffin and Keane, 2006; Barreto, 2007), the mechanism(s) underlying these decisions remain unclear. The importance of context has notably been raised. For example, in the case of voters of color, it has been shown that the feeling of alienation from the political life and mistrust in institutions may prime specific issues (Pantoja and Segura, 2003a,b), whereas some authors have also proposed other possibilities ranging from the presence of a candidate of color acting as an "ethnic cue" (McConnaughy et al., 2010) to them being perceived as representing voters of color's interests (Besco, 2015). Similarly, there is no consensus regarding the behaviors that can be expected from White voters toward a politician of color (Terkildsen, 1993; Sigelman et al., 1995). It should be noted that most of these studies have been observational or experimental. While the former is useful in documenting the occurrence of statistical associations and the latter investigates causal links, the use of qualitative tools allows us to pay particular attention to the context and also to document the reasons behind voters' reasoning.

Canada's first-past-the-post system grants little visibility to local candidates. However, even in circumstances where one does not expect to find a statistically significant effect on electoral behavior, it does not mean that ethnicity has no meaning for voters. One of the assets of qualitative tools is the ability to understand the mechanisms between candidates' appearance and voters' perceptions of the political world instead of focusing only on the measurable *effects* of politicians of color's presence. Revealing the intricacies of causal mechanisms, including the

one that could be at play between race-based cues and voters' perceptions of politicians, can notably be achieved through a qualitative inquiry (Seawright, 2016). In the end, through a holistic lens, this qualitative insight expands on observational and experimental quantitative accounts and shows the complex nature of the social meaning of race-based cues in politics (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

3. METHOD

Qualitative data were collected during six focus groups in Quebec city. Participants were either current students, former students, or members of staff at Université Laval[3]. The first three groups were composed of some of the participants to the experimental phase of a wider research project on the influence of appearance on politics. Participants in the experiment were asked if they agreed to be eventually re-contacted to take part in a focus group. Three groups were organized in April of 2018. The first had six participants, the second had four, and the third had two. In spite of the lower number of participants in that last group, the discussions lasted as long as other groups and their content doesn't substantively differ.

The second round of focus groups, targeting this time individuals who had not previously participated in the experiment, was organized during the winter semester of 2019. Three other groups were put in place during the months of February and March. Each of them had three participants.

Overall, a single participant was a person of color (group one) and all other participants were White. While the presence of a person of color may have made participants cautious and that it is impossible to claim that it had no influence on social desirability, we note that issues related to race in politics were nonetheless raised by participants of group one. Overall, they did not appear to avoid these discussions. All participants were francophones either born in Quebec or in France. The discussions were therefore held in French and the quotes presented here have been translated by the author. There was one person identifying as a woman in each group, with the exception of one where there were two. While most participants were either undergraduate or graduate students, group 1 included two postdoctoral fellows and a retired university employee, group two included a professional as well as a retired employee, group three included a retired employee and a professional, group four included a professional, group five included a retired employee, and group six included a professional.

These meetings lasted more than 2 h each. The same questions were asked each time. There were four parts to the discussion[4]. The first (about 20 min) was devoted to politicians in Quebec. Participants were asked how aware they were of politics and if they knew what candidates looked like in Quebec, and what was expected of candidates' appearance in the province. The second (about 30 min) was focused on electoral campaigns and voting. Participants were asked about the way they followed campaigns and their voting process. The third

(30 min) discussed the appearance of the ideal candidate and featured discussions surrounding images of fictional political candidates. The last part of the discussion (about 30 min) asked participants to name gender-based, age-based, and ethnicity-based differences in politics. Participants were also asked about their views regarding sociodemographic similarity and political representation. Questions were asked in French, as all participants were francophones[5].

All the groups were moderated by the researcher. The frequency of the moderator's interventions depended on the section of the discussion as well as the speed at which participants began to mention appearance-related cues. As a rule, the interviewer did not mention appearance in the course of the discussions before participants did themselves. However, the wording of the questions could refer specifically to looks. The discussions were fairly directed as the participants had access to the questions that would be asked. The moderator did intervene and ask follow-up questions in-between predetermined ones. The moderator's role was neutral. While she engaged with participants to encourage them to share their thoughts with the group, she did not express any opinions herself and did not comment on participants' answers beyond asking for clarifications, development or feedback from other members of the group.

Focus groups specifically encourage participants to reproduce social behaviors through a directed conversation (Fortin, 1996). Even though the questions are pre-determined, participants are given the time and space to elaborate on their ideas and interact with each other. In comparison to one-on-one interviews, more time is therefore dedicated to "free-flowing conversation" during focus groups (Gerring and Christenson, 2017). As Gerring and Christenson (2017) also note, focus groups allow the moderator to be less obstructive, therefore possibly reducing interviewer effects. Consequently, focus groups provided the moderator with the opportunity to observe how often and how participants mobilized race-based stereotypes in political conservation while minimizing the moderator's interference. Nevertheless, this method also differs from a passive form of data collection as the use of stereotypes or contradictions by participants, after they occur, can also be brought to the participants' attention by the moderator.

The groups were recorded and their content was transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were coded in QSR NVivo by the researcher. This analysis followed an inductive process, as categories (codes) had not been identified prior to coding. Instead, the transcripts were read once before the researcher developed a first set of labels that were also refined throughout the second reading. In the end, the research process was inductive and its goal was to make use of qualitative methodology to organize the "patterns, categories, and themes" that emerge from

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[3]Université Laval is located in Quebec City, in the province of Quebec.
[4]See **Supplementary Material**.

[5]Parts 1–3 of the interview guide used the gender-neutral form. This was done to see if participants would bring up gender identity by themselves when discussing "politicians" in general terms. Part 4, which was distributed later to participants, once part 3 had been completed, was written using doublets and the topic of gender was explicitly mentioned. This was done to encourage participants to think about gender diversity when answering these questions. These particularities of the French language cannot be accurately portrayed in the English translation.

the participants' testimonies (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p. 181) instead of looking for predetermined themes highlighted in the existing literature. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) explain, "in the qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research of that writers express in the literature" (p. 181).

4. RACE-BASED STEREOTYPES: THEIR CONTENT AND USE

4.1. Describing Candidates of Color

We first consider the nature of the stereotypes respondents associate with politicians of color. We find that the image of a person of color is not readily compatible with the representation of a politician. As underlined by the racial mediation framework (Tolley, 2016), political activities are associated with what she calls dominant cultural norms. Therefore, when asked to speak freely about politicians, participants referred to whiteness as a standard. Many blatantly noted that most politicians in Quebec were White. Another revealing example is provided by the first discussion group, who were asked to discuss the impact of different sociodemographic characteristics in politics. Participants were first asked to discuss the differences between men and women in politics. Second, they were asked their thoughts about different age groups in politics. Finally, they were asked to express their thoughts about politicians of different origins. Those three questions were formulated in the same manner. While conversations about gender and age had typically been centered around politicians, people of color were framed as voters instead of candidates by the respondents. For example, Ian, a White undergraduate student who participated in the first focus group, claimed:

> "I think immigrants will vote for stability. They will vote for the politicians who say: 'We won't change a lot what is happening. We will just make some small changes'."

It took the intervention of Ali, a student of color, for the others to realize that they had been expected to talk about candidates:

> Ali: I think (candidates of color) still have fewer chances than White people. [Speaking to the other participants] Because we're speaking about politicians here.
> Ian: Ah...
> Ali: The differences between people of different origins in terms of politics, not the way they vote.
> Claude: Ah, so not the electorate.

Not only the stereotypical view of people of color can be dissimilar to the stereotypes associated with politicians, but it can also show little nuance. More similarity was assumed among members of certain cultural communities than among Caucasians. For example, Joseph, an older White man, justified his ambivalence toward the fictional Sikh politician he was shown by saying that he did not know any Sikhs. He claimed to know people from other regions of the world better as he had friends

who came from these areas. This statement attests to the influence of the out-group homogeneity bias. It refers to the impression that members of an out-group are similar to one another (Park and Rothbart, 1982; Shilo et al., 2019), while more differences are seen among members of the in-group (Brauer, 2001). This effect was coined by Ackerman et al. (2006) as the "they all look the same to me" phenomenon.

Joseph added that White voters could welcome politicians of color better if they took the time to learn more about them. According to him, distrust was rooted in the fear of the unknown. That "contact hypothesis" is well-documented in social psychology (Schäfer et al., 2021). In our case, the idea of increasing contact to fight prejudice was seen by participants as viable in a political context. To claim that learning more about a politician of color may be done by meeting other people who share their ethnicity implies that the respondent's mental image of the out-group is (1) homogeneous and (2) distinct or isolated from the in-group. For comparison, the increase of inter-group contact is not proposed as a solution to sexism (Becker et al., 2014) while a relatively great social distance is assumed between White voters and politicians of color.

4.2. Considering People of Color's Political Affiliations

Beyond sociodemographic cues, and the stereotypes associated with these social groups, we find that stereotypes also contain political ideologies inferred from politicians' appearance alone. During the second part of the discussions[6], participants were shown pictures of real American politicians[7], many of whom were people of color. The use of pictures of politicians they did not know without a descriptive text allowed respondents to openly guess these candidates' ideologies without suggestions.

Heuristics allow individuals to quickly grasp a situation with minimal information (Gigerenzer and Brighton, 2009). In politics, American research has hypothesized, for example, that black candidates are perceived by White voters as more liberal (Lerman and Sadin, 2016). More precisely, to associate the picture of a person with an ideology, one primarily relies on the representativeness heuristic (Kahneman and Tversky, 1972; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Individuals will try to assess the likelihood of a person belonging to a given category (or, in the words of Tversky and Kahneman, 1974, "the probability that object A belongs to class B"; p. 185) by evaluating how well the person "fits" with the stereotype of the category (Clark et al., 2009; Fiske and Taylor, 2017). By asking participants to apply this heuristic and evaluate how likely it was that a given politician held certain political beliefs, we were able to gather information about the nature of the stereotype associated with politicians of color.

This process uncovered what we call here the federalism heuristic. We observe that Caucasian voters in Quebec tend

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[6]See the **Supplementary Material** for the interview guide.
[7]Current or former members of the Georgia State House of Representatives. Individuals who had participated in the lab experiment had been exposed to the same pictures at that moment. During the experiment, no descriptive text was provided. These participants were still unaware of the identity of the politicians shown when they took part in the focus groups.

to assume that candidates of color are against the secession of Quebec. This concept is best illustrated by Claude, a middle-aged man who supports Quebec's sovereignty. When his group was asked to discuss the picture of a Sikh male candidate, he declared:

"Forget it. The Liberal Party is full of [people like] that[8]."

When asked to elaborate, he explained:

"[...] as he's coming from cultural communities, he has more chances of being a Liberal voter, a federalist. He's clearly not in my camp, so he is eliminated right away. If he were a PQ partisan[9], I'd vote for him, but statistically, he's not a PQ partisan and he's not a separatist. He might even be more integrated into the anglophone side than the francophone side [...]."

In fact, participants agreed that all the candidates of color could have been part of the Liberal party. Although other parties were named as a possibility, the PLQ[10] most often came first. Beyond associating those politicians to a federalist political party, the expected stance of people of color on the issue of secession was one of the rare issues participants did not hesitate to discuss directly. Paul, an older educator, and Stephanie, a younger translator, were also among those who displayed the use of this heuristic when discussing a young Asian candidate:

Moderator: Is he a federalist or a sovereigntist?
Stephanie: Clearly he's a federalist.
Paul: Of course. We don't know where he is right now. If he's in an anglophone province, then he is a federalist. If he's in Québec, he's an immigrant, so he's a federalist. [...] I have 95% of chances to be right. It's not that there are no exceptions...

Several participants provided reasons why they believed that the prediction they were making was accurate. The two main reasons mentioned were a belief that immigrants preferred stability and that they choose Canada before Quebec, as illustrated by Joseph:

"I think a Haitian doctor will vote Liberal. Just the federalist fear makes a difference for them. The fear of leaving Canada."

This heuristic also seems to stem from an association between people of color and the anglophone community, as shown by participants to the second focus group who, when asked to share their impressions of a young Asian male candidate, had this exchange:

Joseph: I think it's the kind of person that fits more in English Canada than in Quebec.
Moderator: He would fit in English Canada?
Marc: That's true, that's a good one.
Moderator: Why is that so?
Joseph: Because [in Quebec City] we don't have many people like that.
Moderator: What about Montreal?

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[8]The Liberal Party of Quebec is the main federalist party in the province.
[9]PQ, or Parti québécois, is the main secessionist party in Quebec.
[10]Parti Libéral du Québec.

Joseph: [Laughs] I don't go there often enough.
Maxime: Indeed, there aren't many Asian candidates. [...]
Joseph: I think [Asian candidacies] aren't common here.
Suzie: It's more of an English Canada thing.

While the participants did mention exceptions, they nonetheless applied this logic to determine, at first sight, if a person was likely or not to support Quebec's independence. It is interesting to note that while examples of associations between candidates' sociodemographic characteristics and ideologies are reported in the literature (see for example Sigelman et al., 1995; McDermott, 1998; Lerman and Sadin, 2016), the association discussed here is both conscious and deliberate rather than implicit. When participants were questioned about it, they acknowledged the association and provided reasons to explain it.

4.3. Using Political Stereotypes

In a heavily mediated world where perpetually increasing attention is devoted to politicians as individuals (McAllister et al., 2007; Gingras, 2009), voters are routinely exposed to politicians' images. We consider in this section participants' awareness and use of race-based stereotypes. Our goal is to better understand the mechanisms underlying the intervention of race-based stereotypes in politics.

The focus groups were stretched over a long period of time (over 2 h) to overcome certain challenges. First is the subtle nature of these cognitive processes: while individuals may constantly register politicians' appearance when looking at them, they are rarely aware of doing so. For example, when Arthur, a union retiree, was questioned about his knowledge of politicians' appearance in Quebec, he had the following thoughts:

"I think it's an interesting question because I realize that I think I don't pay much attention to what they look like. But when I think about it, of course, when I hear a name I tell myself 'he or she looks like this.' But strangely, it's not something I realized before now."

Overcoming the impression that appearance is irrelevant to politics was, therefore, a lengthy process. Moreover, the consideration of appearance in politics has a negative social connotation. As a testimony to this phenomenon, some participants did not hesitate to question the education or the intelligence of those who, they said, relied heavily on stereotypes to judge politicians. The third barrier is the complex nature of social cognition. When considering a candidate, the activation of thoughts related to social groups or categories depends on the relevance of these categories as well as on the context of the encounter and the goals of the observer (Macrae et al., 2005). Given time, information, and motivation, one can avoid automatic stereotypical associations altogether and engage in individuation which implies considering a person beyond these categories (Fiske and Neuberg, 1990; Fiske et al., 1999; Fiske and Taylor, 2017). Therefore, the activation of stereotypes (and following thoughts that fit those stereotypes) is neither a certain nor a straightforward process. One can very well try to repress any stereotypical thoughts, but these efforts may cause these ideas to become persistent (Monteith et al., 2013).

Discussing appearance was inherently difficult given the possibility of association with "socially reprehensible" (p. 288) attitudes, such as racism or sexism (Machery, 2017). In our case, the analysis of the *content* instead of the *bodies* appeared more desirable to participants. We, therefore, encourage the interpretation of the notion of social desirability beyond the possibility to give a dishonest, socially acceptable answer: participants can be honest while providing a socially desirable answer. We do not doubt the intentions and honesty of participants who declared that they do not care about appearance, as they expressed their sincere values and beliefs on the matter. However, claiming not to care about appearance and believing that appearance is not a relevant variable does not make its influence disappear.

The intrusion of stereotypes in human cognition sometimes without conscious awareness, as well as their overall negative social connotation, led most participants to strongly deny, at first, taking candidates' physical cues into account when thinking about politics. They claimed that candidates' appearance had nothing to do with the way they evaluated them and also downplayed the possible influence of one's social position on their political ideas. Politicians were portrayed, at first, as "all the same," regardless of their social position.

4.3.1. Seeking Diversity

In spite of the sometimes persistent claim that politicians are "all the same," several participants in the focus groups voiced a will to actively favor individuals associated with a minority group in politics. Not only did they state that electing diversified candidates was important, but, in contrast, opinions expressed regarding the "average" politician, a middle-aged White man, were rather negative. Participants, therefore, expressed the need to diversify the profile of politicians using two main arguments that were often employed together. The first was the need to improve the descriptive representation of people of color. Descriptive representation refers, in this case, to the number of seats held by politicians of color (Pitkin, 1967). This need to display more diversity in politics was justified by participants using notions of parity or justice. They considered that it was important that diverse Canadians could be represented and "see themselves" in the legislative assembly (as worded by Chloe). The reasons behind this claim varied, ranging from a principle of equality to the assertion that political behavior and values are influenced by one's sociodemographic profile. This idea is coherent with the concept of substantive representation, as raised by Pitkin (1967), defined in this case as the idea that politicians of color would act "in the interest" of people of color. Such assertions could quickly become conflicting with participants' subsequent controlled claims that ethnicity, or other sociodemographic characteristics, are irrelevant in politics. Although centered on gendered differences in politics, this exchange with Thomas, a White student in his twenties offers an example of these contradictions:

> Thomas: So I don't think there are differences (between men and women in politics), both of them have ideas that can be put in common... (that are) identical. We got different lifestyles but still...

> Moderator: Different lifestyles but identical ideas?
> Thomas: ...Yeah. We don't have the same kind of jobs either. We don't advocate for the same things either, depending on our respective gender. And... (pause) What did I want to say?[11]

The need to diversify the profile of politicians was also often motivated by a set of characteristics specifically expected from non-traditional candidacies, an assertion that once again undermines the frequent claim that there is no difference between different groups in politics. In other words, beyond the idea that politicians of color would represent people of color's interests, marginalized politicians were overall strongly expected to get involved and generally do politics "differently" and bring forward "change." It is necessary to underline that although these ideas were frequently raised, they remained rather vague, and little clear information was provided regarding what difference and change specifically implied. Perhaps the most common claim was that these politicians could bring forward ideas and care about topics "mainstream" politicians paid little attention to. These claims were typically made by participants who were critical of the way "older White men" behave in politics (notably by being too combative, self-centered, and focusing on tradition). They generally expected non-traditional candidates not to share what they perceived as flaws. This is similar to what was raised by Trimble et al. (2015) regarding former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin who was criticized for his status as a "White, male senior citizen" out of touch with voters' hunger for change in politics. In the end, non-prototypical candidates, on the other hand, are expected to embody that "change."

To conclude, different standards can be applied to marginal groups when it comes to the political behavior expected from them. Just like other stereotypes discussed earlier, the expectation that politicians of color will do things differently also relies on a stereotype based on one's ethnicity.

4.3.2. Social Distance and the Influence of One's Social Position

The evaluation of politicians of color is strongly influenced by the social group voters associate with. In this article, we have focused on White voters, whose social position could be considered as more distant. What is registered about others as well as how it is interpreted depends on the observer's social position. Social perception is a process that depends as much on the eyes of the observer as on the sociodemographic profile of the person observed (Dovidio et al., 2010). As such, it is unsurprising that participants considered their own social position when they evaluated their stance regarding issues of affinity voting and diversity in politics.

The issue of social distance (Bogardus, 1933) is intertwined with the effects of the combination of sociodemographic characteristics. While a single person can be associated with multiple social groups at once, certain characteristics carry more weight than others when comes the time to evaluate one's distance from another individual (Dion, 1985). While

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[11] The expression used by the participant is the following: *"où est-ce-que je voulais m'en aller avec mes skis, là?"* (Where was I heading with my skis?).

Cutler (2002) showed that, overall, Canadian voters "respond negatively to increasing sociodemographic distance from party leaders," (p. 466) participants expressed the idea that not all sociodemographic characteristics are as politically salient or as important to their eyes.

> Nadine: I think that if there were a woman in an election, I would vote for her unless she has ideas like Marine Le Pen[12]. Besides that, either a woman or a man who is also part of a minority group. Because regarding the question of voting for someone who looks like us, it depends on how you identify yourself. What is important in your identity. For example, I think my identity as a woman is more important than the fact that I'm White. So the fact that she's a woman is more important to me, but I don't care about the fact that she's White. If she had been a woman of color, I think even that I would have been more likely to support her. Between a White woman and a woman of color I think I'd support the woman of color more. Because as Chloe said, in the context we live in, she probably won't get elected.

Although participants did employ wide generalizations regarding particular groups of people, they did not accept appearance as a perfect proxy for political ideology either. They easily recognized that there were exceptions and that observations were not infallible. However, some participants concluded that it was ultimately more likely that a political candidate who shared their sociodemographic characteristics would also share their political opinions than a candidate who did not resemble them.

> Samuel: It's when we share the same ideas. Appearance can be an indicator of that. Younger people will say, "someone young should normally share my values." Like, it's a form of pre-supposition, but we kind of expect it in a way that is a bit logical.

Not only can this resemblance be used as an imperfect tool to guess one's political stance and ideas, but sociodemographic similarity may also encourage someone to evaluate a politician positively.

> Chloe: Maybe some people are less tempted to vote because they don't feel represented. The political issues that are discussed do not matter to them. I think it would be more likely, if you're a young woman and that you have to vote for your first elections. If you could vote for a woman then, maybe that would motivate you. If you're a Muslim, and there are a lot of tensions right now regarding religion if you got a candidate that is a Muslim too and who thinks like you, who speaks like you, and who looks like you… That would be tempting to go vote.

On the other hand, the increase of that sociodemographic distance can be met with doubt. This case was illustrated repeatedly when participants discussed the case of Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the federal NDP who identifies as a Sikh and wears a turban. Even participants who had a positive opinion of Singh readily admitted that his appearance was a major electoral obstacle in Quebec.

> Maxime: People who look like me, who look like a Quebecer, they will attract me more than a person who… well we were talking about Sikhs earlier, I'm less attracted to a person with a turban.

> Marie: I won't vote for things that are the opposite of me. Like, regarding religious signs. Of course, we think of […] the leader of the NDP. I still… I looked at his resume, I really tried to get information about him because I wanted to go beyond this obstacle, that prejudice. But… I would really need to go talk to him […] so that I could realize that, OK, he is cooler than his turban […]

> Arthur: Take the case of Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the NDP. It's a center-left party in Canada. The guy is a Sikh, so he wears a turban and he won't pass in Quebec. Not at all. He won't get any votes because of the turban. Because of his looks. He could have the best intentions, he could be the most progressive person, but because of his turban, it will never work.
>
> Chloe: Even though he's probably less religious than Andrew Scheer[13].

The topic of Jagmeet Singh, in particular, highlighted the impact of increasing social distance on the perception the participants had of politicians of color. In the case of Arthur and Chloe, while they claimed that they were indifferent to Singh's appearance themselves, they nonetheless expected other Quebec voters to have a negative reaction.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While political opinions are, under most circumstances, not determined by candidates' appearance alone, voters are not completely oblivious to ethnicity either. First impressions will influence subsequent thinking (Fiske and Taylor, 2017). Put otherwise, first impressions may not guide voting behavior but, in the end, they remain at the roots of opinion formation (Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al., 2005; Bodenhausen et al., 2012; Freeman and Johnson, 2016). This article considers *how* politicians' ethnicity can influence White voters and, ultimately, their behaviors. More precisely, we considered the content and meaning of race-based political stereotypes in Quebec. Qualitative methods allowed us to pay more attention to the context as well as the reasoning and emotions behind participants' claims. Our outlook on the causal mechanism at play also includes an exploration of participants' reasoning, their awareness of these biases and how they react to these stereotypes. We showed, for example, that participants make conscious associations, notably between being a non-prototypical candidate and doing politics "differently."

We looked at the content of political stereotypes and how candidates of color may be thought to differ from "normality" in Quebec politics. Just as Van Trappen et al. (2020) showed in the case of Belgium, we find that certain ideologies are associated with the stereotypical portrayal of people of color in politics. Notably, we show that people of color can be associated with federalism and support for the Canadian state. We also show that participants were, in fact, fully aware of the

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[12]The leader of far-right *Rassemblement National* in France.

[13]Scheer was the leader of the federal Conservative party at the time of the interview and one of Singh's opponents during the 2019 federal campaign.

sociodemographic distance between them and politicians. For example, some of them claimed that they could more easily relate with politicians who resembled them, while others explicitly expressed ambivalence or doubt toward politicians they deemed too different.

Despite the importance of partisanship in Canada (Kevins and Soroka, 2018), political parties may not override the importance of individual physical cues. Instead, both dimensions can be expected to interact. For example, the presence of an MNA of color identifying with the secessionist PQ may raise far more surprise in voters than within the federalist PLQ. In the end, non-prototypical candidates can be met with surprise or puzzlement (Trimble et al., 2015).

Pertaining to the use of race-based stereotypes, we found that they contribute, in many ways, to defining political expectations in Quebec. When participants expressed support for marginalized candidates, they frequently added the expectations that these candidates would do things "differently." As such, electing diverse representatives becomes not only a matter of principles but can also be seen as a tool to achieve changes in the political arena. In the end, the association between "change," "difference," and politicians of color is but another appearance-based inference.

Nonetheless, this study has limits. First, participants were all university-educated individuals residing in a single city. Therefore, their opinions should be interpreted as examples of phenomena, rather than as a representative portrayal of all Quebecers. Moreover, the number of respondents remains limited. More work needs to be done in other parts of the province, as well as in the rest of Canada, to achieve a more exhaustive portrayal of what it means to be a politician of color in Quebec and in Canada.

As it turns out, ethnicity has political meaning in Quebec and a role to play in the definition of political expectations. Even though, as mentioned, this article featured college-educated individuals who claimed, on average, a strong interest in politics, it is important to note that stereotypes were nonetheless mobilized by that group. Although it may be to another extent or differently, it appears that the intrusion of stereotypes in political discussions is not something to be expected solely from individuals deemed politically unsophisticated, contrary to popular belief (Cutler, 2002).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because, doing so would betray participants' confidentiality. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to jbouch22@uwo.ca.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Comités d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains de l'Université Laval. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JB performed the interviews, their analysis, and wrote this article.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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