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# **Causal Attributions in a French Electoral Context** Tania Wittwer, Aurélie Mouneyrac, Jacques Py & Colin Tredoux

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### Introduction

Attribution theory is defined as "a theory about how people make causal explanation, about how they answer questions beginning with 'why?'. It deals with the information they use in making causal inferences, and with what they do with this information ton answer causal questions" (Kelly, 1973).

As causal attributions were well studied in an academical way (cite) to rate its own behaviors, it has also been used to rate one's behavior "Numerous investigations have demonstrated that people tend to explain another person's behavior in terms of something about the person at the expense of explanations emphasizing the role of the situation (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Nisbett & Ross, 1980)"

Further, political analysts often invoke both personal and situational reasons to explain the outcomes of elections. That is, candidates are said to win or lose, sometimes because of personal characteristics or actions, at other times because of situational factors outside their control. Burger & Pavelich1994 – they show more internal than explanation for both winner and looser

Research has found the tendency to overattribute another person's behavior to something about the person so pervasive that it has been dubbed the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). Attribution theory is "a theory about how people make causal explanation, about how they answer questions beginning with 'why?'. It deals with the information they use in making causal inferences, and with what they do with this information ton answer causal questions" (Kelly, 1973). Attribution theory is "a theory about how people make causal explanation, about how they answer questions beginning with 'why?'.

## Main Objective

The aim of this study was to explore the causal attribution of voters after the first round of presidential elections (April 2017).

- $\Rightarrow$  H1: The success of the preferred candidate is expected to be awarded to internal explanations (i.e., relative to the candidate him.herself) white failure should be awarded to external explanations;
- $\Rightarrow$  H2: The attribution of success is expected to be related to a lower score in Personal Control and Locus of Causality as well as a higher score in Stability and External control white failure attribution should show the reversed patterns.

### Methods

**Population.** One hundred and two people (33 Men; rang = 18-76;  $M_{age} = 31$ ; SD =14.5) were recruted online on Social Media or thought colleagues, friends and family connexions.

### **Procedure.**

1) The experiment was build as an online survey. The scores obtained by each candidate were reminded to participants: E. Macron (23.86%), M. Le Pen (21.43%) [Candidates selected for the second round], F. Fillon (19.94%), J.L. Mélenchon (19.62%), B. Hamon (6.35%), N. Dupont-Aignan (4.73%), J. Lassale (1.21%), P. Poutou (1.10%), F. Asselineau (0.92%), N. Arthaud (0.65%), J. Cheminade (0.18%).

2 Questions and items of the French validated Causal Dimension Scale II (Fontayne, Martin-Krumm, Buton, & Heuzé (2003) were administrated asked.

1/ Do you consider the score obtained by the candidate you voted for...  $\diamond$  rather as a success  $\diamond$  rather as a failure 2/What are, according to you, the reasons which can explain this success/failure? 3/What are, according to you, the *main cause* which can explain this success/failure?

	$\checkmark$	
The main cause you mentionned i	s something	
1. That reflects an aspect of yourself	123456789	re
2. Manageable by you	123456789	n
3. Permanent	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	te
4. You can regulate	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	У
5. Over which others have control	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	0
6. Onside of you	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	0
7. Stable over time	123456789	$\mathbf{V}$
8. Under the power of other people	123456789	n
9. Something about you	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	S
10. Over which you have power	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	0
11. Unchangeable	$1\ 2\ 3\ 4\ 5\ 6\ 7\ 8\ 9$	c]
12. Other people can regulate	123456789	0

Table 1. Four dimensions: Personal control (2, 4 & 10), Stability (3, 7 & 11), Locus of causality (items 1, 6 & 9), External control (items 5, 8 & 12)

# Results

 $\Rightarrow$  H1 Causal attribution type (failure vs success) and given explanation (internal vs external):

- $\checkmark$  All voters of E. Macron, considered the results as a success, and 80% of them gave it a internal explanation (e.g., program, charisma). Since voters for M. Le Pen < 5, they were remove from the analysis.
- Voters of J.-L. Mélenchon were split: 45% considered the result as a failure among whom 92.6% gave an external explanation (e.g., division within the political party, other voters' lack of boldness) while 55% considered the result as a success and 87.5% gave an internal explanation (e.g., program, charisma)
- $\checkmark$  All voters of another non-qualified candidate considered the result as a failure, and 74.2% gave an external explanation (commonly: media).

 $\Rightarrow$  H2 According to the CDS II, half of our expectation were validated:

- $\checkmark$  Voters who considers the score as a success rate lower in Locus of Causality (items 1, 6 & 9), meaning they attribute significantly most the score internally than voters who considers consider the score as a failure.
- $\checkmark$  Voters who considers the score as a failure rate lower in External Causality (items 5, 8 & 12), meaning they attribute the score significantly most to something under other's control than voters who considers consider the score as a success
- X There are neither significant differences for Personal control (items 2, 4 & 10), nor for Stability (items 3, 7 & 11)







- reflects an aspect of the situation
- not manageable by you
- emporary
- ou cannot regulate over which others have no control
- outside of you
- variable over time not under the power of other people
- something about others
- over which you have no power
- hangeable
- other people cannot regulate



Figure 1: Box plot with distribution regarding to attribution type (Failure (F) or Success (S)) for each dimension: Stability, Locus of Causality (LocCausa), Personal Control (PersoCtrl) and External Control (ExtCtrl). Note. \*\*p < .01; \*\*p < .001

# Conclusions

Which has to be related to the content analysis ut neque. Aenean sapien est, viverra vel lacinia nec, venenatis eu nulla. Maecenas ut nunc nibh, et tempus libero. Aenean vitae risus ante. metus id ultrices porta, risus enim cursus sapien, quis iaculis sapien tortor sed odio.

As unexpected:

- explained by ...

Fontayne, P., Martin-Krumm, C., Buton, F., & Heuzé, J. P. (2003). Validation française de la version révisée de l'échelle de mesure des attributions causales (CDSII). Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale, 58, 59-72.

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**COMPANION STUDY** Fluctuation of the desirability bias of voters during the 2017 French presidential elections. Mouneyrac, A., Wittwer, T., Lemercier, C., & Le Floch, V.

• even though people who voted for candidate who did not pass the first round considered the score as a failure, surprisingly voters of J.-L. Mélenchon were obviously split into two groups. In fact, slightly more that the half considers the score as a success, and should have rated the score itself instead which was higher that medias' expectation, instead of the success/failure in being selected for the second round.

• The administration of the Causal Dimension Scale II did not show any differences for both Stability and Personal Control dimensions, which could respectively be

#### References