

# WHY DO VOTERS VOTE THE WAY THEY DO?

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Do people vote solely based on a political candidate's views and policy ideas? Or do other, more subtle things shape our voting choices? Here are some factors that may determine who we pull the proverbial lever for.

## HYPOTHESIS #1: THE BEER QUESTION

One of these factors is the “**beer question**”. This is the idea that someone will vote for whichever candidate they’d prefer to “get a beer with,” or spend casual time with.

An example is the 2004 electoral contest between George W. Bush and John Kerry. According to polls, most Americans reported they would rather have a beer with Bush than with Kerry. Supporting the theory, Bush won the election.



Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. President, drinks a beer.

## HYPOTHESIS #2: CANDIDATE APPEARANCE



*Kennedy-Nixon debate*  
September 26, 1960

In one famous example, the first televised U.S. presidential debate featured John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. According to political legend, Kennedy stood out a lot more on TV as he was wearing stage makeup and a dark suit that created a physically appealing contrast, thus making him appear more attractive than Nixon. Sweaty, pale Nixon, wore a light-colored suit that blended into the background. Kennedy ended up winning this election.

Another element that may impact the voter's decision is the **candidate's appearance**.

## HYPOTHESIS #3: PARTISAN EFFECT

Yet another factor that can affect voting behavior is the **partisan effect**, which creates misconceptions about members of “the other group” in political contests, encourages the villainization of political opponents, and disincentivizes compromise. This leads to the spread of inaccurate ideas about candidates and political misinformation, political stasis, and potentially worse.

One recent example of the partisan effect occurred in the aftermath of the 2020 elections. Polls showed that millions of Trump supporters erroneously believed, due to false partisan reports, that the election had been rigged and that the incumbent president had won re-election. On January 6, hundreds of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C., leading to four deaths.



Washington D.C., January 6, 2021

Informing yourself about things that may influence your voting decisions can help you make more informed decisions and avoid bias in your choosing. This can lead to better choices based on the candidate's political decisions and abilities.