

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBTLE PSYCHOLOGICAL CUES AND VOTER  
PREFERENCES AMONG UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE STUDENTS**

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**Declaration**

I, Ngara Tatenda. T., declare that

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBTLE PSYCHOLOGICAL CUES AND VOTER PREFERENCES AMONG UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE STUDENTS**

Is my own work and it contains no material that has been submitted in part or whole for any degree, except where due reference and acknowledgement has been made in and out of text.

**Supervisor’s signature:** ..... **Date:** ...../...../.....

**Student’s signature:** ..... **Date:** ...../...../.....

## **Dedication**

I bestow this thesis to:

- My beloved late mother, Motsi, for being a vibrant example of how a little hard work, patience and faith in Christ goes a long way
- My father, Trynos, for the unconditional love and financial assistance throughout my academic endeavours
- My brother Trust, for having set good educational standards for his siblings to maintain
- My sister, Tinotenda, for putting me in your prayers and being a great source of inspiration.

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- Last but not least, I am very grateful to the University of Zimbabwe and the students who took part in my research both in the pilot study and main study. Without them, this research would be nothing.

**I hope this research makes you proud**

## Abstract

The success of any election depends on whether it was free and fair both to the candidates and the voters. Due to media coverage of national elections locally, regionally and globally, subtle psychological cues have become popular and are being used in student Representative Council (SRC) elections to harness voter preferences. This study focused on investigating the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among university of Zimbabwe students. More so, the study was focused on four operationally defined subtle psychological cues namely Ballot order effects, Halo effects, Negativity bias and Push polls on whether they would influence the participant's voter preference. The study takes the form of an experimental research design and is based on a sample of 80 purposefully selected participants. In addition, primary data was gathered using 4 ballot papers with a Likert scale and was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics, T-tests for independent samples, Chi-square tests and Pearson correlation were computed to establish the degree of the relationship between the variables in question. Results show that of the four subtle psychological cues under investigation, negativity bias and halo effects were predominantly popular due to the American presidential debates such as that of Richard Nixon against Kennedy and Barack Obama against Hilary Clinton. In addition the results show no statistically significant group differences on how gender, ethnicity and year of study affected voter preferences. Ultimately, there were three positive correlations for the experiments Ballot order effects, Halo effects and Negativity bias. However, contrary to the reviewed literature there was a negative correlation between Push polls and voter preferences. The conclusion was that there is statistically significant relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences and hence have the potential to increase or decrease the votes a candidate obtains. Therefore, the University can closely monitor SRC elections and make sure the students do not abuse psychological cues such as negativity bias and push polls as they have the potential of ruining the student's reputations. Also the organisation can add to its current SRC election policies the strategies that were implemented in this study to hold other factors at a constant such as using butterfly ballot paper ordering to help make the free and fair.

### **Acronyms**

SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRC	Student Presentative Council
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Peoples Front
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
EFF	Economic freedom fighters

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

This research looks at voting behaviour, which is understanding the psychological reasons why people vote the way they do (Rule, 2014). The debate on why people vote the way they do rages the world over, with some of the domineering arguments coming from disciplines such as economics, political science and sociology to mention but a few (Kazberouk, 2008). The reason these disciplines have been at the forefront of explaining voter preferences is because they focus on peoples immediate needs such as a having a good economy, good political relations both within and outside the country and having a good or just social system within a country (Rule, 2014). The discipline of political psychology has been less domineering in explaining voting behaviour with particular reference to African countries such as Zimbabwe that have not yet established the discipline in tertiary institutions since it is still a developing field of study (Makhubela, 2016). The research found in political psychology on voter behaviour has largely been on factors such as halo effects, ballot order effects, negativity bias, push polls, ethnicity, affection to candidates, social influence and intimidation (Asch, 1946; Thorndike, 1920; Krosnick, 1990). The current study bases on four of these psychological factors namely negativity bias, push polls, halo effects and ballot order effects as these have been seen at play in global, regional and partly in national elections.

Globally, subtle psychological cues influenced voter preferences in the famous American presidential election of 1960 in which halo effect became a major factor in the Nixon-Kennedy debates (Gorvett, 2015). John F. Kennedy supposedly won the first-ever televised debate between American presidential candidates because he appeared so poised, rested and telegenic compared to his sweaty, haggard-looking rival, Richard M. Nixon (Campbell, 2011). The voters that saw the debate on television voted for Kennedy due to his looks whereas those who heard it on the radio thought Nixon would undoubtedly win the election due to his policies (Campbell, 2011). The 2008 New Hampshire Democratic primary election pitting Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton is another global example of an election where subtle psychological cues are believed to have had played a role in the outcome of the election (Krosnick, 2008). Krosnick (2008) argues that Clinton got at

least 3 percent more votes than Obama simply because she was listed close to the top on the ballot papers.

On the African continent, the 2007 Kenyan presidential election is an example of subtle psychological cues influencing voter preferences (Wycliffe, 2017). Wycliffe (2017) contends that the opposition candidate used negativity bias to persuade the public that they had not received what they deserve from the “corrupt” Mwai Kibaki and his men. One explanation proposed for the impact of negativity bias is that when politicians emphasize the negative qualities of their opponent, it can increase the likelihood of them winning the election. Krosnick (1990) who observes that if you despise at least one of the two candidates, then you really are motivated to participate, succinctly captures this idea. Madia (2016) who claims that the conflict between South Africa’s Julius Malema (Economic Freedom fighter party leader) and Jacob Zuma ( now former President and leader of African National Congress) in parliament has had a profound effect on the way people feel about the candidates and their policies, which subsequently affects voter preferences, supports Krosnick’s observations.

In the Zimbabwe, anecdotal evidence suggest that the ruling party, Zimbabwean African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), used biased ballot papers and paper chromatography to rig the 2013 election against opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai (Matenga, 2013). Regrettably, in Zimbabwe, as is the case in other African countries such as South Africa, research on the impact of subtle psychological cues on voter preference and outcomes of elections is difficult to come across.

In light of the above discussion, this has prompted the researcher to study at a smaller local scale the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences paying particular attention to the university of Zimbabwe student’s elections. The Student Representative Council (SRC) elections are a good first step in studying the role subtle psychological cues play in an election.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

This research is motivated by the manipulation of subtle psychological cues in an election setting both at a national level and in student politics in Universities. Kazberouk (2008) suggests that subtle psychological cues affect voter preferences as candidates attempt to harness this knowledge to gain votes. More so, there has been little research on how these subtle psychological cues affect both the campaigning students and the voters and this is what warrants this study. Research shows students face the problem of overvaluing the bearing that halo effect has on other student voters such that they shun from contesting in the elections as they fear peers will not vote for them due to their looks, race or ethnicity (Caruso, 2016). More still, push polls make students assume that election outcome among students appears to be obvious as the popular students have many supporters that push for them to always win such that some students may see it as a waste of time to be a candidate or even vote as it always appears as though the race has ended before it even begun which is not always the case (Hallam, 2014). In addition, students tend to get carried away with negative campaigning which employs the psychological cue of negativity bias which sometimes unravels sensitive information about the students campaigning such that it affects the candidate's educational and social life plus in the long run may trigger bullying especially through social media (Neutrino, 2012). Furthermore with the ballot order effect, the first candidate advantage is similar across contexts as the magnitude of the effect is similar in city council and in school board elections but its effect tends to be overrated by students as they take losing an election to be chiefly attributable to having had their name listed last on the ballot (Grant, 2009). However, if these problems are not addressed, potential consequences would be students shunning SRC elections or protesting against bodies that govern them. Therefore, the first phase to disentangle all these problems is perhaps through exploring the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences specifically among students.

## **1.3 Justification of the Study**

If the study is carried out successfully, it can be an immediate eye-opener to the University of Zimbabwe students as they are the major beneficiaries of the study. The University can closely monitor SRC elections and make sure the students do not abuse psychological cues such as negativity bias and push polls as they have the potential of ruining the student's reputations. Also



the organization can add to its current SRC election policies the strategies that were implemented in this study to hold other factors at a constant such as using butterfly ballot paper ordering to help make the free and fair. Perhaps through this study, the participants of the research could benefit from the debriefing about subtle psychological cues that can affect their voter preferences such that they can avoid influenced decisions the next time they encounter a voting context. This study is also pertinent to the rest of the Zimbabwean citizens especially with the upcoming 2018 presidential elections since it may raise important issues that may encourage further research in the area locally.

#### **1.4 Aims and Objectives**

The current study aims at better understanding the effects of subtle psychological cues on voter preferences among University of Zimbabwe students.

The particular objectives in the study are therefore to:

1. Establish the relationship between ballot order effects and voter preferences
2. Establish relationship between halo effects and voter preferences
3. Determine the relationship between negativity bias and voter preferences
4. Determine relationship between push polls and voter preferences

#### **1.5 Research questions**

1. Which physical aspect in the halo effect experiment affects voter preferences the most according to the participants?
2. Are there statistically significant gender differences in the participant's voter preferences with regard to halo effects?
3. Are there statistically significant ethnic differences in the participant's voter preferences based on negativity bias?
4. Does year of study affect voter preference based on ballot order effects?
5. Are there statistically significant differences between the group given a push poll and that which did not?

## **1.6 Research Hypothesis**

The primary assumption of this research is that subtle psychological cues used in an election setting will have a significant effect on voter preferences among the University of Zimbabwe students.

## **1.7 Delimitations**

The main boundary of the study would be not covering other subtle psychological cues such as intimidation, affection to candidates, party affiliation and social influence. More so, the research is purposefully limited to four variables due to the limited time to carry out the research. Conceptually, this research will not cover much literature on former SRC and national elections in Zimbabwe as much of the information is based on anecdotal records. In addition, practically this research does not cover proportional sampling as this may prove to be costly and time consuming considering the large student population at University of Zimbabwe.

## **1.8 Operational definitions**

### *Subtle psychological cues*

Subtle psychological cues are internal or external events which have a signalling significance to an organism which subsequently affects learning and behaviour (Miller, & Manner, 2010). In the context of political psychology, subtle psychological cues are several unconscious thought processes, emotions and prejudices that can significantly influence voting behaviour (Goodrich, 2016). The study specifically focuses on four of these psychological cues that affect voter preferences which are:

### *Ballot order effects*

Ballot order effects imply that the candidate listed first on the ballot will receive a greater share of the vote, all else equal (Grant, 2009). This effect if sizable, influences the democratic process by delivering voter preference to candidates who are privileged enough to be listed first, instead of the candidates actively preferred by the most voters (Grant, 2009).

### *Halo effect*

Halo effects, also known as the "what is beautiful is good" principle, refers to the habitual tendency of people to rate attractive individuals more favourably for their physical traits or characteristics than those who are less attractive (Grcic, 2008). Therefore, in a political psychology framework, it suggests that physically attractive people get more votes as compared to the less attractive as feelings generally overcome cognitions when we appraise or vote for others (Standing, 2004).

### *Negativity bias*

Negativity bias is a phenomenon in which humans give more psychological weight to bad experiences than good ones (Neutrino, 2012). As applied in the current study, negativity bias will be the negative aspects brought about a candidate that could affect the voter's emotions leading to an influenced voter preference.

### *Push polls*

Push polls are strategies used to manipulate public opinion by providing as many "respondents" as possible with hypothetical, sometimes bluntly false information about candidates, political parties or initiatives (Gerstmann, & Streb, 2004). The polls serve to either remind voters of negative characteristics of candidates or to fabricate negative traits that then remain in the voters' minds. In the current study, to distinguish push polls from negativity bias the researcher will not use negative adjectives but a hypothetical statement to be given to respondents that suggest candidate A has 70% chance of winning over candidate B yet the candidates are identical twins.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

The preceding chapter gave the historical background of the effect of subtle psychological cues on voter preferences that has occurred globally, regionally and nationally. The purpose of the study was also unveiled through the aims and outlined objectives. It also gave operational definitions of key terms together with the assumptions and delimitations of the research in light of the statement of the problem.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Goodrich (2016) defined subtle psychological cues in the context of Political psychology as several unconscious thought processes, emotions and prejudices that can significantly influence voting behaviour. This chapter highlights what other researchers, experts and theorists have said about the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences from the early studies to the contemporary studies. The main focus being on the influence of four subtle psychological cues namely ballot order effects, negativity bias, push polls and halo effects.

### **2.2 Early Studies: The American voter (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960)**

This ground breaking research examined how identification with a political party starts in a person's early life. The conclusions were that political campaigns rarely change or convert a person's political affiliation but rather it is the debates between party leaders that is more influential in activating predispositions that were in the minds of voters before the debates began (Kazberouk, 2008). This effect on behaviour in psychology is termed *Negativity Bias* which is defined by Neutrino (2012) as "the phenomena by which humans give more psychological weight to bad experiences than good ones".

Due to the advent of this research, psychologists have brought to light that voter preference is brought about by both internal and external factors that come to the voters mind (Goodrich, 2016). A conference open to the public held at Duke University (2016), revealed that, "factors within voters' minds include (a) predispositions that are in place before a campaign and (b) cognitive and affective reactions to events during the campaign". Some internal factors have been agreed to being subtle psychological cues and some of these factors affecting the persons mind include the ballot order effect, push polls, halo effect, negativity bias and habitual voting (Kazberouk, 2008).

The present study focuses on the internal factors within voters and is aimed at determining the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among University of Zimbabwe students.

## **2.3 Psychological cues affecting voter preferences**

Past research has postulated different theories on the role psychology plays in an election. Although the theories take different routes in explaining voter behaviour, it is the researchers wish to bring to light four psychological cues that have been agreed upon by most Political psychologists to affect voter preferences.

### **2.3.1 Ballot order effects theory**

This theory states that ballot order effect works primarily upon the primacy effect which is tendency for the first items presented in a series to be remembered better or more easily, as compared to those in the end of the series (Grant, 2009). Having read the first item in a list, voters tend to get bored or tired or pay less attention to the information that follows. In an election setting this is of advantage to the political party which has its candidate on the top of the list and it is usually the ruling party or holder of the office that has this benefit (Grant, 2009). Undecided voters tend to give preferences to candidates that appear first on the ballot due to the primacy effect (Miller and Krosnick, 1998). This subtle psychological cue is of more effect in non-partisan elections when voters know less about the candidates and less pronounced in large well-advertised elections where voters are more likely to have selected a candidate before coming to the polls (Grant, 2009). Studies that confirm this effect were done by Asch (1946), when he presented subjects with the same list of positive and negative adjectives describing a person, the people given the list starting with positive adjectives gave positive feedback about the person as compared to those given the list with negatives adjectives first. This helped bring to light that ballot order effects work through the primacy effect during elections to manipulate voter preference and awareness of this prompts us to lobby for multiple ballots with different random candidate listings (Grant, 2009).

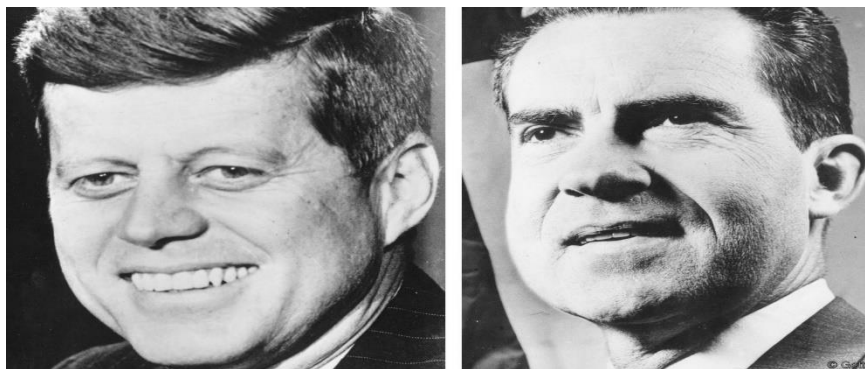
### **2.3.2 Halo effect theory**

This model of subtle psychological cues works on the beautiful is good phenomenon, which suggests that the good looking are also confident and friendly (Grcic, 2008). Halo effect in actual definition is a psychological tendency people have of judging other individuals based on one trait that they approve of and concluding that the person has other attractive traits (Grcic, 2008). In this effect people look at beauty, complexion, gender, ethnicity and physical ability just but to mention a few factors that most individuals would like and reflect on themselves. In an election setting, a candidate who looks good is generally assumed to be able to take care of the rest of the people.

Grcic (2008) goes further to demonstrate that there are gender differences on how halo effects function as males and females are likely to have different physical attributes that are appealing to them due to their gender. Studies that confirm or corroborate this effect were done by Thorndike (1920) when commanding officers in the military were to evaluate a variety of qualities in their subordinate soldiers including traits such as leadership, physical appearance, intelligence, loyalty, and dependability. Ratings were apparently affected by a marked tendency to think of the person in general as rather good or rather inferior and to colour the judgments of the qualities by this general principle of halo effects (Kazberouk, 2008).

Evidence on how halo effects affected voter preferences is during the 1960 American Presidential election between Nixon and Kennedy (Gorvett, 2015). John F. Kennedy supposedly won the first-ever televised debate between American presidential candidates because he appeared so “poised”, “rested” and “telegenic” compared to his sweaty, haggard-looking rival, Richard M. Nixon (Campbell, 2011).

Figure 1: Image of Richard Nixon and Kennedy (Campbell, 2011)



### **2.3.3 Negativity bias theory**

This subtle psychological cue has been manipulated the most by election candidates especially in countries such as the United States of America that engage in presidential debates where candidates openly say negative aspects about their opponent to win the election (Neutrino, 2012). Negativity bias is a phenomenon wherein our brain tends to remember negative information more easily than positive information and to inform decision making with negative emotions more than positive ones (Neutrino, 2012). In an attempt to show this effect at work, Krosnick (1990) studied how people’s feelings towards politicians affected their likelihood of turning up to vote and he found

that “if you dislike at least one of the two candidates, then you really are motivated to participate – so in other words it’s really disliking a candidate that motivates turnout.”.

#### **2.3.4 Push poll Theory**

Research findings have found that push polls are strategies used to manipulate public opinion by providing as many “respondents” as possible with hypothetical, sometimes bluntly false information about candidates, political parties or initiatives (Gerstmann, & Streb, 2004). In short it is a brief survey designed to give voters disinformation about a candidate via a hypothetical question. These polls serve to either remind voters of negative characteristics of a candidate or to fabricate negative traits that remain in the voters mind (Kazberouk, 2008). This subtle psychological cue is not always manipulated by the election candidate but his or her supporters can be behind this scheme. A famous example of push polling involved the 2000 South Carolina Republic primary, in which voters received phone calls asking if they would be more or less likely to vote for candidate John McCain if he hypothetically had fathered an illegitimate black child (Gerstmann, & Streb, 2004). The tactic was especially effective as McCain was campaigning in the state with his adopted Bangladeshi daughter. The smear campaign was done anonymously, and no candidate has admitted responsibility.

#### **2.5 The factors influencing Voting Preferences in local elections, “An Empirical Study”**

This study was conducted by Dr. Kurtbas (2015) to analyse the Factors Influencing Voting Preferences in local elections in the Turkish province of Elazig in March 2009. In summary, the results of the study were that 48.4% of voters conducted no or very little research about the candidates before the elections which allowed for a decision based on psychological factors such as Halo effects and ballot order effects. Approximately one out of every four voters said they would not support the candidate or the party that has no chance of winning in the elections which brought to light the effect of push polls as citizens would discuss before the election the candidate most likely to win the election. Meanwhile, 28.7%, which is a small portion of the voters, said the most important factor that influenced their preferences in local elections was the ideology of the candidate which shows that most citizens are perhaps more likely to vote due to psychological cues.

## **2.6 Summary**

To recapitulate the above section, the reasons as to why people vote the way they do has been a major bone of contention the world over and has brought about many theories and research to show that we are not rational beings, the name marked on the ballot paper is more of a result of subconscious thought rather than objective reasoning. The rich literature has prompted the researcher to investigate the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences from the perspective of the University of Zimbabwe students.



## **Chapter three: Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This research was conducted using an experimental research design. It was conducted at the University of Zimbabwe students union. The experimental designs were first tested for reliability and validity using a pilot study with 25 participants. Consequently, the unclear and insufficient test constructs were modified. As part of the procedure, ballot papers were given to each participant individually and their responses recorded. Research ethics including confidentiality, informed consent and debriefing were applied throughout the procedure to ensure the competent carrying for the wellbeing of the participants.

### **3.1 Research design**

The study takes the form of an experimental research design as the overall strategy to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way. Experimental research was chosen for this study as the researcher manipulates the variables under investigation and holds other confounding variables stable (McLeod, 2008). This design is suitable for the study as the researcher purposefully selects a sample and randomly assigns participants to 4 different experimental conditions.

### **3.2 Location of the study**

The research was conducted at the University Of Zimbabwe Mount Pleasant, main campus. The Students union (SU) is located at the centre of the University as it is surrounded by the various faculties, sports grounds, administration offices and the halls of residence therefore permitting a diverse array of respondents. Selection of this site was also necessitated by the researcher's prior knowledge that annually this university campus conducts SRC elections at the SU. The SRC elections are held between the periods of February to May which best suited the research as it was conducted during that same period in 2018.

### **3.3 Sampling**

The survey participants were selected through the use of a non-probability type of sampling, in particular purposive sampling. The sampling technique was chosen because the study does not seek to generalize the research findings to the whole student's population but to determine if there is a covariation between the two variables (McLeod, 2017). Due to the limited time and financial resources to carry out the study, purposive sampling was the best suitable technique as it enabled the researcher to achieve the sample size required to complete the study in a relatively fast and inexpensive way (Brown, 2000).

The sample purposively included a diverse range of age 18-35, an equal distribution of participants by gender, different ethnic backgrounds, various year of study and diverse voting experience in SRC elections. Out of this sampling frame, a sample of 80 students (40 males and 40 females) was selected among the students at the University of Zimbabwe (Brown, 2000). Each participant was assigned to only one procedure and this allowed equal distribution of the participants among the four procedures.

### **3.4 Pilot study**

In light of the research design, procedure, data analysis and research ethics, the researcher conducted a pilot research on 25 conveniently selected participants. This was done to test the adequacy of research instruments and assessing whether the research protocol was realistic and workable (Brown, 2011). The pilot study aided in that modifications of the Likert scale were made and instead of grouping age into three categories the participants filled in their specific age to help analysis of the data become more meaningful. More so, after conducting the procedure for halo effects the researcher found it necessary to add another section that required the respondent to identify which aspect of halo effects had mostly influenced their vote. The researcher also encountered the obstacle of mistrust from potential respondents due to the nature of the study and the current political context within the country and this brought about the formulation of an informed consent form (Appendix 1). As part of the pilot study, the data collection instruments had a reliability coefficient of .68 which was acceptable (Pallant, 2010).

### 3.5 Data collection instruments and procedure

#### 3.5.1 Experiment 1: Ballot order effects against voter preferences

**Hypothesis:** There will be a significant relationship between ballot order effects and voter preference.

**Research question:** Does year of study affect voter preference based on ballot order effects?

**Participants:** Sixteen participants (8 males and 8 females), aged 18 to 35 from the University of Zimbabwe participated in this experiment. The students excluded as participants had took part in a different procedure of the research, be it during the pilot study or the actual research, as this would have promoted bias. The other participants excluded from the study were those that felt sensitive to elections or political issues that they suspected to be linked to the study.

#### **Apparatus:**

Section A: Demographics (Please tick the appropriate)

AGE			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once	3. twice and more

Section B: Making your vote

Suppose this is a Student Representative Council (SRC) election with 3 candidates running for the social welfare office. The candidate's images and political parties have been kept anonymous to avoid bias and you are asked to vote based on the adjectives that best describe their personality but are more or less similar to one another. Vote for the candidate whom you deem best to represent

the office of social welfare among students at the University of Zimbabwe based on a list of adjectives assigned to 3 candidates.

N.B make your vote at the far right column labelled vote (X).

CANDIDATE	CANDIDATE PROFILE	VOTE(X)
A	Caring, patient, friendly, honest, sociable, ambitious, amiable, diligent, intuitive, resourceful, compulsive, aggressive, procrastinates, conceited, gullible, quarrelsome, callous deceitful, compulsive, and boastful.	
B	Honest, aggressive, sociable, procrastinates, patient, deceitful, friendly, compulsive, boastful, amiable, callous, intuitive, gullible, resourceful, deceitful, diligent, compulsive, procrastinates, conceited, quarrelsome	
C	Aggressive, procrastinates, boastful, deceitful, compulsive, callous, gullible, quarrelsome, conceited, Caring, patient, approachable, authentic, outgoing, determined, kind, industrious, intuitive, resourceful	

Section D: Tick the appropriate

The order of candidates might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**Procedure:** Of the adjectives used, 20 positive and or negative adjectives, which were more or less similar among candidates were assigned randomly and the participant asked to make their vote. The variable had 3 levels as the first candidate had positive adjectives listed first and the negative listed later and other candidates had the same adjectives but some starting with negatives and the others randomly listed. It was also imperative to note that candidates were assigned alphabetic letters and not pictures or political parties to eliminate confounding variables.

**Data analysis:** When a respondent voted for a candidate with the target subtle psychological cue it was scored as a, “Hit” but if they voted otherwise it was scored as a “Miss”. To further assist with data analysis, the respondent completed a compulsory section C Likert scale to help demonstrate if surely the ballot order effect cue influenced their vote.

### 3.5.2 Experiment 2: Halo effect against voter preferences

**Hypothesis:** There is a significant relationship between halo effect and voter preference.

**Research questions:**

- Which physical aspect in the halo effect experiment affects voter preferences the most according to the participants?
- Are there gender differences in the participant's voter preferences with regard to halo effects?

**Participants:** Sixteen participants (8 males and 8 females), aged 18 to 35 from the University of Zimbabwe participated in this experiment. The students excluded as participants like in the other procedures were those that took part in a different procedure of the research be it during the pilot study or the actual research as this would promote bias. The other participants to be excluded were those that felt sensitive to elections or political issues that they suspected to be linked to the study.

**Apparatus:**

Section A: Demographics (Please tick the appropriate)

AGE			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

Section B: Making your vote

Supposing this is an SRC election and you are asked to vote for 2 candidates (1 male and 1 female), to represent the students of University of Zimbabwe at the annual Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (Z.U.S.A) games as a duty of the SRC sports representatives. The pictures assigned to candidates are of former SRC members outside Zimbabwe taken on google images based on the

vivid description of the physical attributes required for the study and therefore do not expect to find familiar candidates.

*N.B to vote, mark an X under the 2 desired candidates. You are also required to answer to section D where you will state the physical attributes that were most influential to your vote.*

Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4)
			

Section C

The physical attributes (physic, beauty, race, gender) of the candidates might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Section D:

Tick below the physical attribute that perhaps influenced your vote.

Physic (Body build)	Beauty/ Handsomeness	Race	Gender

**Procedure:** To capture this psychological cue in effect, respondents were asked to elect 2 candidates to represent the students of University of Zimbabwe at the annual Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (Z.U.S.A) games as a duty of the SRC sports representatives. The pictures used were be of former SRC members outside Zimbabwe taken on google images based on the vivid description of the physical attributes required for the study. Of the 4 choices were (a) a male muscular or well body built candidate (b) a slim and pale male candidate (c) a slim well body built female candidate who is also curvy (d) a female candidate who has a big body or rather looks a little overweight. Carried out successfully, the demographic data would also reveal if voter preferences due to halo effects were affected by gender too. To hold other factors constant, nothing will was said about the candidates and the pictures of the candidates were be presented in 1 straight line like in the instrument above.

**Data analysis:** When a respondent voted for a candidate with the target subtle psychological cue it was scored as a, “Hit” but if they voted otherwise it was scored as a “Miss”. More so, the respondents completed compulsory section C with a Likert scale to help demonstrate if surely the halo effect cue influenced their vote preference. The respondent went further to identify the specific physical attribute that might have influenced their vote preference in Section D. This was so as to analyse which part of halo effects is more significant in affecting voter preference.

### **3.5.3 Experiment 3: Negativity bias against voter preference**

**Hypothesis:** There will be a significant relationship between negativity bias and voter preference.

**Research question:** Are there ethnic differences in the participant’s voter preferences based on negativity bias?

**Participants:** Sixteen participants (8 males and 8 females), aged 18 to 35 from the University of Zimbabwe participated in this experiment. The students excluded as participants were those that had took part in a different procedure of the research be it during the pilot study or the actual research as this would have promoted bias. The other participants excluded were those that felt sensitive to elections or political issues that they suspected to be linked to the study.

**Apparatus:** Section A: Demographics (Please tick the appropriate)

AGE			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

**Candidate A:** It is in my best interests that each students should be able to register for the semester after paying at least a third of their tuition fees due to the tough economic hardships

**Candidate B:** How then will the tertiary institution pay its staff members and maintain school property, let people pay the full fees to get access to enter campus and those who cannot do so look for work on vacations or defer until they can clear costs. Besides, **rumour** has it when you (Candidate A) were Interact club president you squandered the clubs money with your party such that teachers had to intervene and reshuffle your cabinet

**Candidate A:** Please note that was just a rumour and the university has many social clubs that are willing to volunteer help clean and maintain school property and grounds if the students are able to register without having paid full fees

**Mr. Speaker:** Ladies and gentleman let us now proceed to the vote

Section B: Making your vote

Presume this is a SRC election and you are asked to vote for the student's President among 2 campaigning candidates. Above is a presidential debate that went sour between the 2 candidates such that one candidate went out to speak negatively of the other candidate saying his main objective was to steal the students funds through the students union levy. However, the candidate spoken negatively of has policies that evidently outweigh those of his opponent. The names, images and political parties of the candidates have been kept anonymous and therefore your vote must be guided by the debate.



N.B to place your vote, mark and X under the name of the candidate you prefer among the two.

*To vote place an X under the box of the desired candidate.*

Candidate A	Candidate B

Section D

The negative aspects raised about candidate A, might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**Procedure:** The respondents read a presidential debate that went sour between the 2 candidates such that one candidate went out to speak negatively of the other candidate saying his main objective was to steal the student’s funds through the student’s union levy. However, the candidate spoken negatively of had policies that evidently outweigh those of his opponent. If the candidate spoken negatively of lost the votes then it became evident that negativity bias has no significant effect on voter preferences. This variable had 2 levels and to hold other factors constant, there was no use of a linear ballot order but a butterfly ballot order. The debate took a form of a written dialogue, and there were no pictures or political parties assigned to the paper as in the example above.

**Data analysis:** When a respondent voted for a candidate with the target subtle psychological cue it was scored as a, “Hit” but if they voted otherwise it is scored as a “Miss”. To further assist with data analysis the respondent completed a compulsory section C, Likert scale to help demonstrate if surely negativity bias influenced their vote.

### 3.5.4 Experiment 4: Push poll against voter preferences

**Hypothesis:** There will be a significant relationship between push polls and voter preference.

**Research question:** Are there statistically differences between the control and experimental groups in the push poll experiment?

**Participants:** Thirty two participants (16 males and 16 females), aged 18 to 35 from the University of Zimbabwe participated in this experiment. Consistent to other experiments, students to be excluded as participants would have participated in a different procedure be it during the pilot study or the actual research as this would promote bias.

#### **Apparatus:**



Section A: Demographics (Please tick the appropriate)

AGE			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

#### Section B: Making your vote

Supposing this is an SRC election and you are asked to vote for a candidate you want to take the financial office. Supporters of Candidate A are pushing him to win the election over candidate B through push polling that candidate A is 70% more likely to win over candidate B with 30%.

N.B to vote place an X under the candidate of choice. *NB, the candidates are identical twins*

Vote for candidate A	Vote for candidate B
	

### Section C

The chances or probability of either candidate to win the election might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

**Procedure:** Since push polls are usually used by the supporters of a candidate to hide direct involvement of the candidate in the act, an experiment was designed to show how hypothetical facts by supporters can affect an election outcome. The experiment comprised of 2 groups asked to vote for a candidate to take the finance office in an SRC election. The candidates however are identical twins and to hold other factors constant and avoid bias and the butterfly ballot order technique was adopted. Group A of 16 participants was the experimental group and was given a slip before voting suggesting that candidate A is 70% more likely to win over candidate B with 30% and group B of 16 participants was told that there is a 50/50 chance of either of the candidates winning the election or act as a control group.

**Data analysis:** When a respondent voted for a candidate with the target subtle psychological cue it was scored as a, “Hit” but when they voted otherwise was scored as a “Miss”. To further assist with data analysis the respondent completed compulsory section C Likert scale to help demonstrate if surely the ballot order effect cue influenced their vote preference.

### **3.6 General Data Analysis**

After gathering data from the respondents, analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) software version 23.0 as corroborated by O'Connor (2016). First, descriptive statistics were computed on the participant's individual characteristics and key summary statistics such as mean, median, mode, range and standard deviation presented. The data obtained was mainly expressed in the form of charts, tables and bar graphs. Secondly, the researcher also provided descriptive statistics for the physical attributes that were chosen by the participants as having influenced their vote in the halo effect experiment. Thirdly, the descriptive statistics on participant's individual characteristics were computed against their voter preferences to determine if there are any significant differences between the demographic data and the participant's voter preferences across the four different procedures. Fourthly, Chi-square tests for the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences were computed to better understand the themes of the study and how participants responded to the Likert scale questions. Lastly, Pearson correlations were computed to measure the relationship of the between the two variables under investigation.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

The study consisted of respects that are in line with psychological research ethics. The researcher informed prospective participants of the nature and objectives of the investigation through an information sheet before signing a consent form (appendix 1). The researcher at all costs considered the rights of participants and their dignity through making sure they were comfortable to make their vote and that they were assisted and answered at every call (Smith, 2003). Adequate debriefing was applied after the participants finished making their votes so they would be aware of some of the subtle psychological cues influencing voters. Participants who felt uncomfortable with the study had the right to withdraw from the study at any point (Smith, 2003). The likelihood of obtaining biased responses was significantly reduced by providing clear instructions and assuring confidentiality (Sekaran, 2003).

### **3.8 Summary**

The above section has vividly portrayed the steps taken by the researcher to determine the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among university of Zimbabwe students leaving no stone unturned in the minds of the reader.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the results obtained from the investigation of the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among the University of Zimbabwe students. Descriptive statistics were computed for the overall population before being computed against their voter preferences. A summary table of the Likert scale responses given in section C of the data collection instruments was constructed based on Chi-square tests. Correlation coefficients from the Pearson  $r$  are presented, outlining the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences. Data presentation was in line with the following:-

(a) Objectives:

- Establish the relationship between ballot order effect and voter preferences
- Determine the relationship between push polls and voter preferences
- Determine the
- relationship between negativity bias and voter preferences
- Establish the relationship between halo effect and voter preferences.

(b) Research questions:

- Which physical aspect in the halo effect experiment affects voter preferences the most according to the participants?
- Are there statistically significant gender differences in the participant's voter preferences with regard to halo effects?
- Are there statistically significant ethnic differences in the participant's voter preferences based on negativity bias?
- Does year of study affect voter preference based on ballot order effects?
- Are there statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in the push poll experiment?

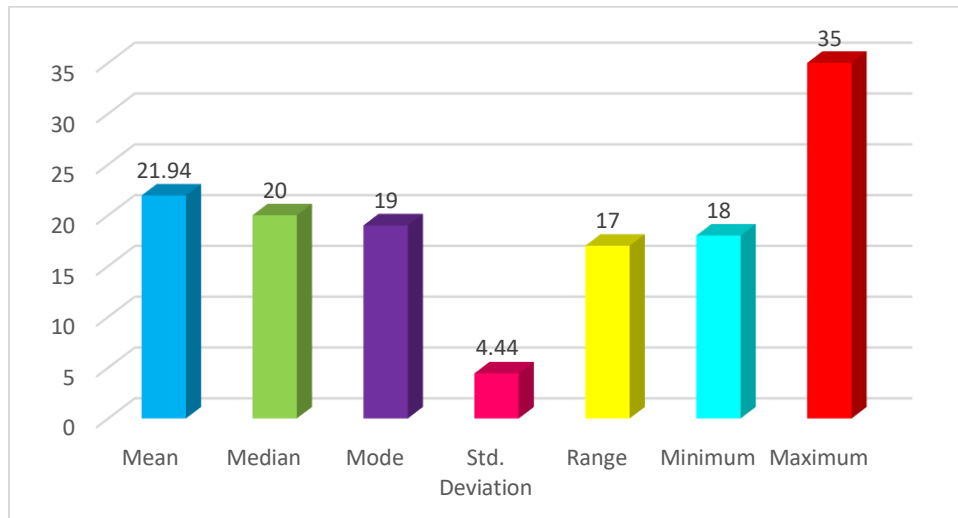
## 4.1 Demographics

The researcher found it necessary to provide descriptive statistics for the overall demographic data of the students that participated in the study. The demography information was based on age, gender, ethnicity, year of study and voting experience.

### 4.1.1 Age of participants

Since the research was not limited to a specific age group, the researcher found it significant to present the data that was found for this demography to show how varied the participants were in terms of age.

Figure 2: Age of participants (N=80)

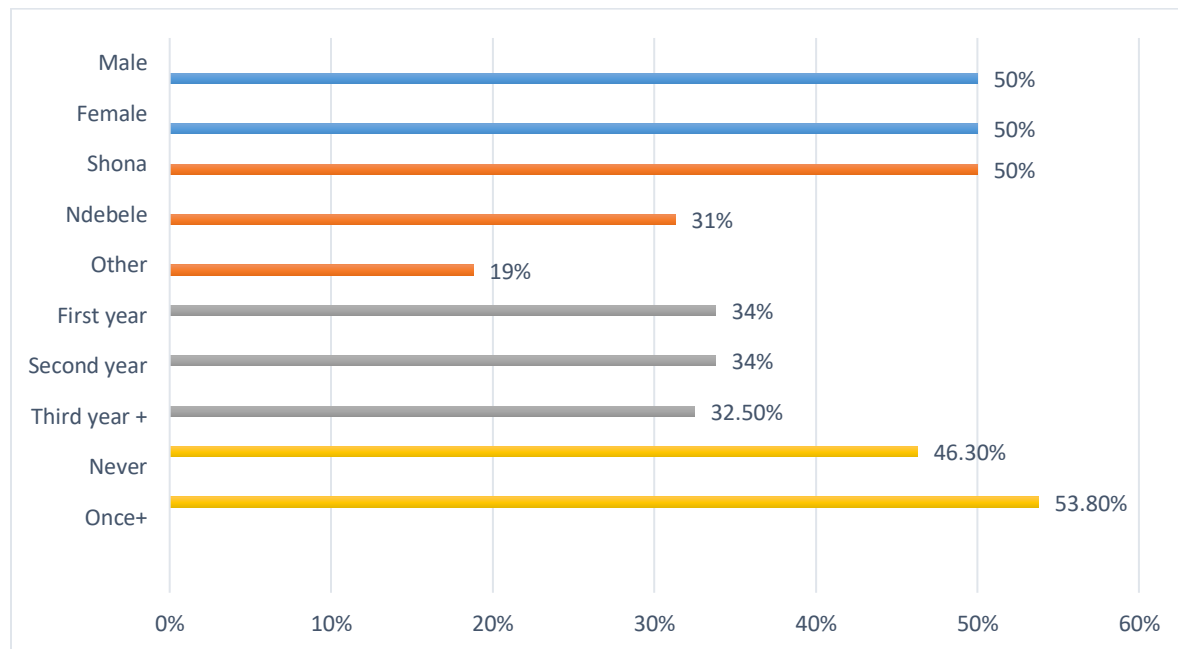


The results from the above graph show that most of the participants (22%) were 19 years old and the average age was approximately 22. More so, results show the youngest participants in the study were 18 years old and the oldest were 35 years old. More still, the age of the participants had a standard deviation of 4.44 which suggest there was a diverse series of the age responses. The range and spread from the youngest participant to the oldest was wide.

### 4.1.2 Gender, Ethnicity, Year of study and Voter experience for Participants

The researcher also found it important to compute descriptive statistics for gender, ethnicity, year of study and voting experience as this would help better understand the characteristics of the participants that took part in this study. Figure 2 below shows the results that were found for this task.

Figure 3: Gender, Ethnicity, Year of study and Voter experience for Participants (N=80)



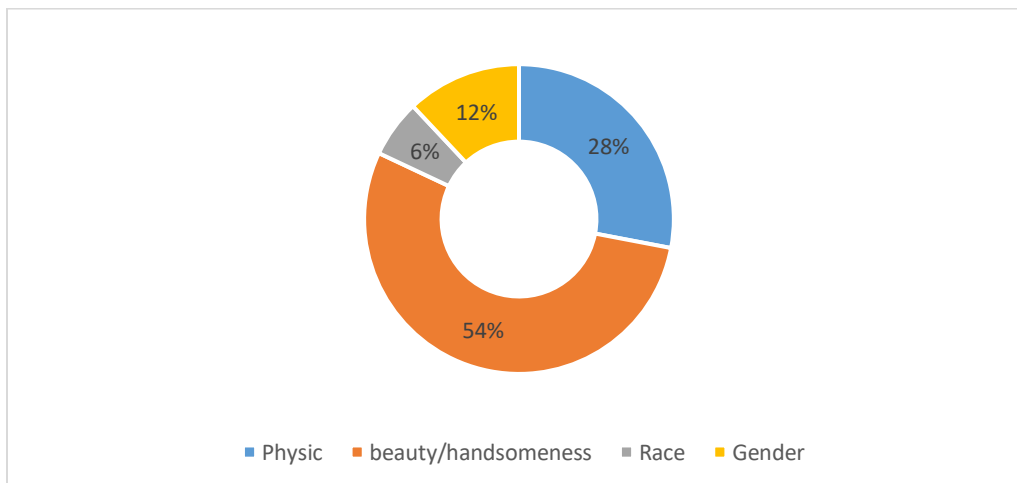
Out of the 80 participants that took part in this study, there was an equal distribution of respondents by gender, with 50% representation per sex. The researcher purposefully ensured that there was an equal distribution of the participants by gender to analyse if there would be any gender differences in regards to the Halo effects experiment in the current research. More so, in regards to ethnicity, most (50%) of the participants were Shona whereas 31% reported being Ndebele and 19% of another ethnicity namely White, Korean and Tswana. In addition, in terms of the participant's year of study, 34% were first year students and 34% second year students. The remaining participants (32.5%), reported being in their third, fourth or fifth year of study. Furthermore, there was a little difference in regard to voting experience as 46.3% of the participants said they had never encountered the privilege to vote in any elections be it in SRC elections or national elections while 53.8% reported that they had.

## 4.2 Physical attributes and Halo effects

*Research question 1: Which physical aspect in the halo effect experiment, affects voter preferences the most according to the participants?*

The experiment on halo effects was limited to four physical attributes namely physic, beauty/handsomeness, race and gender. The researcher was therefore interested in finding out which physical aspect in this experiment would be attributed by participants to have influenced their vote more than the rest.

Figure 4: Physical attributes and halo effects (n=16)



From the above pie chart, it is clear that most participants (56%), attributed the beauty or handsomeness of the candidate to lead to their vote. Despite having interracial candidates, very few participants (6%) attributed their vote to racial influence.

## 4.3 Group Differences in Voter preference for Gender, Ethnicity and Year of study

It was also imperative for the researcher to understand how the participant's voter preferences were different due to their gender, ethnicity and year of study. However, to do this effectively, gender group differences were analyzed for the halo effects experiment, ethnicity for the negativity bias experiment and year of study for the ballot order effects experiment. The results for this task are presented below:



Table 1: Group Differences in Voter preference for Gender, Ethnicity and Year of study

Groups Statistics					
Voter preference for:	Groups for condition	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Hallo effect	Male	8	1.00	.01	.000
	Female	8	1.67	.50	.17
Negativity bias	Shona	8	1.13	.35	.13
	Ndebele	8	1.25	.46	.16
Ballot order effects	First year	8	1.22	.44	.15
	Second year	8	1.00	.000	.000

*Research question 2: Are there gender differences in the participant's voter preferences with regard to hallo effects?*

The above table shows that there is a statistical difference between males and females in terms of their voter preferences based on Hallo effect  $t(16) = -3.5$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , 2 tailed. More so, in this experiment Males averaged 1.00 (SD 0.01) and females 1.67 (SD 0.5). This difference emanates from that males were more likely to vote for a candidate due to their physic whilst females voted due to beauty or handsomeness of the candidate.

*Research question 3: Are there ethnic differences in the participant's voter preferences based on negativity bias?*

The above table shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the Shona and Ndebele in terms of their voter preference  $t(16) = -.61$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , 2 tailed. Shona averaged 1.13 (SD 0.35) and Ndebele averaged 1.25 (SD 0.46). These results suggest that regardless of the participant's local ethnic group, chances were equal that they would vote for either participants.

*Research question 4: Does year of study affect voter preference based on ballot order effects?*

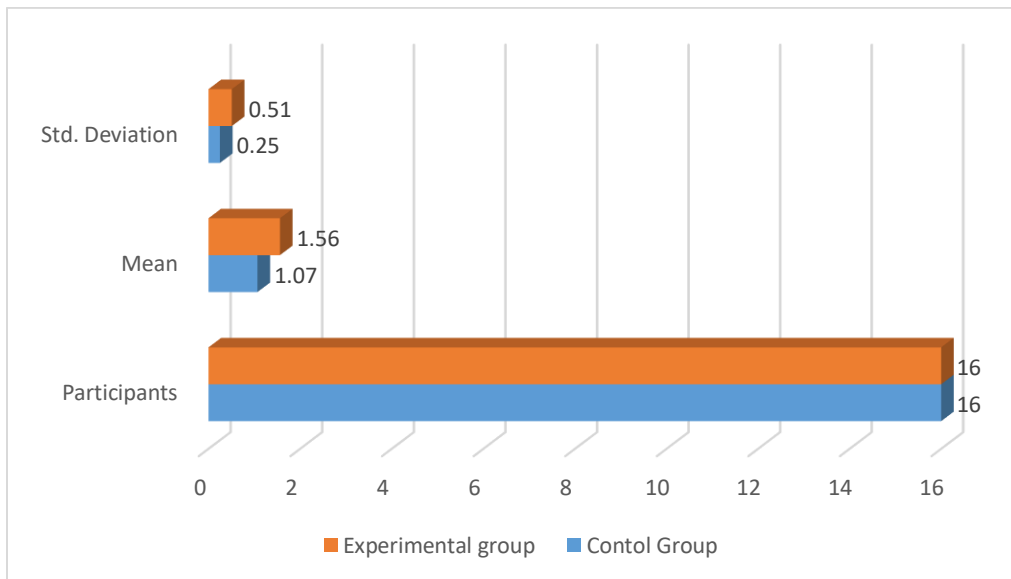
As the above tables illustrate, there is no statistically significant difference between First year and Second year students in regard to their voter preferences.  $t(16) = 1.32, p > 0.05, 2$  tailed. First year students averaged 1.22(SD 0.44) and Second year students averaged 1 (SD 0.01). Therefore, the conclusion is that voter preferences based on ballot ordering were all the same across the 2 different year of study groups that took part in the experiment.

#### **4.4 Group differences in push poll procedure against voter preferences**

*Research question 5: Are there differences between the control and experimental groups in the push poll experiment?*

This was done in order to answer the fourth research question which seeks to address if there are any differences in regard to voter preference between the group given the push poll instruction and that which did not.

Figure 4: Control and experimental group differences in Push poll experiment



The results show that there is a statistical difference between the control and experimental groups in terms of their voter preferences  $t(32) = -3.5, p < 0.05, 2$  tailed. In this Push polls experiment,

the experimental group averaged 1.56 (SD 0.51) and the control group 1.07 (SD 0.25). More so, this difference suggests the participants in the experimental group voted for the candidate who had been pushed for as compared to those in the control group.

#### 4.5 Subtle psychological cues against voter preferences

To aid analyse the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences, the researcher first found it essential to better understand the variables through computing Chi-square tests. This was so as to provide data concerning the participant’s responses when they were asked if subtle psychological cues had influenced their vote.

Table 2: Subtle psychological cues against voter preferences.

<b>Likert scale question</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Chi-square value</b>
<b>1.</b> The order of candidates might have influenced my vote?	<b>68%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.</b> The negative aspects raised about candidate A, might have influenced my vote?	<b>75%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.</b> The physical attributes (physic, beauty, race, gender) of the candidates might have influenced my vote?	<b>75%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>6.4</b>
<b>4.</b> The chances or probability of either candidate to win the election might have influenced my vote?	<b>69%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>10.2</b>

As shown in table 2 above, responses suggest that the majority of the participants agree to their vote having being influenced by a subtle psychological cue despite the different experimental procedures they were assigned to. However for question 4, the push poll experiment, a relatively high number of participants (22%) disagree to have had their vote influenced by a subtle psychological cue. This is most likely because some of the participants were assigned to a control group without the cue.

#### 4.6 The relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences

The primary aim of the research was to establish the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences. This was achieved through the use of Pearson correlations. To also help understand these correlations, previous results from the Chi-square tests will be combined with these results to give a detailed analysis of the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences. Results are shown below:

Table 3: The relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences

Correlations		
Subtle psychological cue		Voter Preference
Ballot order effects	Pearson correlation	.77**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000
	N	16
Halo effects	Pearson correlation	.52*
	Sig. (2 tailed)	0.38
	N	16
Negativity Bias	Pearson correlation	.88**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000
	N	16
Push Polls	Pearson correlation	-.53**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.002
	N	32

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the above table, it is clear that there is statistically significant and strong positive correlation between ballot order effects and voter preference of  $r(14) = .77, p = 0.01$  (2 tailed). This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that the candidate presented first on the ballot paper was more likely to be remembered better or more effortlessly, as compared to those in the end of the paper due to the primacy effect. In addition, results show a statistically significant and moderate positive correlation between Halo effects and voter preferences of  $r(14) = .52, p = 0.04$  (2-tailed). These results suggest that participants had a tendency of judging the candidates based on one physical trait that they approved of and concluded that the person has other positive qualities.

Furthermore, table 3 results highlight that there is a statistically significant and strong positive correlation of  $r(14) = .88$ ,  $p = 0.01$  (2 tailed) between negativity bias and voter preferences. These results signify that participants remembered negative information about the candidate with no trouble than positive leading to a voter preference based more on with negative emotions. However, distinct from other results, there was a statistically significant and moderate negative correlation between Push polls and voter preferences of  $r(30) = -.53$ ,  $p = 0.01$  (2-tailed). More so, these results were also different from past research findings and perhaps suggest that the lower the push polls used by a candidate the higher the votes he/she obtains and vice versa.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

The preceding chapter highlighted in the best possible way the data that was gathered by the researcher after conducting the four experiments on the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences. To address the objectives and research questions, the chapter covered descriptive statistics, Independent samples t-tests, Chi-square tests and Pearson's correlation tests computed using the SPSS version 23.0.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter advances the discussion of the presented results that were in line with the studies objectives and research questions. It also seeks to portray the limitations found by the researcher in carrying out the study and also brings out recommendations and the conclusion to this study.

### **5.1 Participation and Familiarity to Subtle psychological cues**

Of the 80 participants that took part in this study, approximately three quarters admitted that there were not aware votes could be influenced by subtle psychological cues. As in line with the views of Kazberouk (2012), of the four subtle psychological cues under investigation, negativity bias and halo effects proved to be predominantly popular due to the American presidential debates such as that of Richard Nixon and Kennedy. During the debriefing process, 65% of the respondents admitted that they had been affected by ballot order effects both in this research, SRC elections and elsewhere when they encountered the decision to vote. However, the majority of the participants about 69%, aged 18 to 21, indicated that they were familiar with push polls occurring in other countries but they had never encountered them first hand as they had never had the opportunity to participate in SRC and national elections.

### **5.2 Gender, Ethnicity and Year of study against voter preference**

To attend to most of the research questions, the researcher sought to find out how gender, ethnicity and year of study affected voter preferences. The results obtained to address these questions found are unravelled below.

#### **5.2.1 Gender differences in Halo effect experiment**

Computation of the t-test to the data showed that there was a statistically significant difference between males and females in regards to which physical aspect of a candidate affects their vote preference. This leads to the conclusion that halo effects affect gender spheres differently as males are likely to vote for a candidate due to their physic and females due to beauty or handsomeness as corroborated by Grcic (2008). This answers the second research question since there was a significant difference between males and females in terms of how halo effects voter preferences.

#### **5.2.2 Ethnic differences in Negativity bias experiment**

There was no statistically significant difference found between Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups in terms of how negativity bias affects voter preferences though there are small insignificant

differences in mean values. Therefore the conclusion becomes that voter preferences based on negativity bias were all the same across the ethnic groups. These results respond to the third research question as there is no significant difference between ethnic groups on how negativity bias affects voter preference.

### **5.2.3 Year of study differences in Ballot order effects**

The results obtained showed no statistically significant difference between First year and second year students in terms of candidate and adjective ordering and their voter preference though there are only small insignificant differences in mean values. The conclusion is that voter preferences based on ballot ordering were all the same across the 2 different year of study groups that took part in the experiment. These results also answer the second research question as there is no significant difference between first year and second year students on how ballot order effects influence voter preference.

### **5.3 Physical attributes and Halo effects**

It was imperative for the researcher to probe which physical aspect of the candidates attracted the respondent's voter preferences. Results obtained were consistent with those of Grcic (2008) who postulates that halo effects or 'beautiful is good phenomenon' suggests the good looking is also confident, friendly and gains the most public appeal. This was in line with the research findings as 54% of the participants in this experiment argued that beauty/ handsomeness of the candidates influenced their vote preference compared to the candidates physic and gender. More so, the research results also brought to light that few participants (6%), attribute a candidate's race to influence their vote.

### **5.4 Group differences in push poll procedure against voter preferences**

Kazberouk (2008), argues that push polls serve to either remind voters of negative characteristics of a candidate or to fabricate negative traits that remain in the voters mind and results found by the researcher are in line with this. After a computation of the t-test, the data indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the voter preferences between the control and experimental groups. The participants in the experimental group voted for the candidate who had been pushed for as compared to those in the control group. This supports the research hypothesis that there will be a significant difference in the voter preferences between the experimental and control groups.

## **5.5 The relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences**

The primary goal of the current research was to attend to the four research objectives which would address the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among university of Zimbabwe students. To address these objectives, Pearson correlations and Chi-square tests were computed and for the push poll experiment the researcher went further to run Independent samples t-tests. The results of these objectives are therefore to be discussed vividly below.

### **5.5.1 Relationship between Ballot order effects and voter preference**

The results obtained for this objective were consistent with the research hypothesis as there was a statistically significant relationship between ballot order effects and voter preferences. There was a very strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.77$ ) between ballot order effects and voter preference which implies that candidates presented first in a series are to be remembered better or more easily, as compared to those in the end of the series (Grant, 2009). Furthermore, the results presented from the chi-square tests signify that 68% of the participants in this experiment agreed that their vote was due to the ordering of the candidate and the list of adjectives describing them. This perhaps supports the results that there is a relationship between ballot order effects and voter preferences.

### **5.5.2 Relationship between Halo effect and voter preference**

Results from the chi-square tests for this objective illustrate that 75% of the participants in this experiment agreed to have had a physical attribute (physic, beauty, race and gender) of the candidates influence their vote. This helps show a relationship between halo effect and voter preference. Results obtained from the Pearson correlation were also consistent with those of the chi-square tests as there was a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.52$ ) between halo effects and voter preferences. These results suggest that people have a tendency of judging other individuals based on one trait that they approve of and concluding that the person has other attractive traits (Grcic, 2008).

### **5.5.3 Relationship between Negativity bias and voter preference**

As the same with the first objective, there was a statistically significant relationship between negativity bias and voter preferences. There was a very strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.88$ ) between negativity bias and negativity bias. These results denote that the brain tends to remember negative information more easily than positive information and to inform decision making with negative emotions more than positive ones which is why the candidate spoken negatively of is



likely to lose voter preferences (Neutrino, 2012). More still, after running chi-square tests, results demonstrated that 75% of the participants in this experiment agree to have had their voter preference influenced by negative feelings towards candidate A, who was spoken negatively of. This further illustrates the relationship between negativity bias and voter preferences.

#### **5.5.4 The relationship between Push polls and voter preferences**

Consistent with other correlation results, there was a statistically significant relationship between push polls and voter preferences. Results showed a moderate negative relationship ( $r = -0.53$ ) between push polls and voter preferences. However, this negative correlation was not in line with the past research findings which suggest push polls remind voters of negative characteristics of a candidate or fabricate negative traits that remain in the voters mind influencing their vote (Kazberouk, 2008). Research findings of the current study perhaps indicate that the lower the push polls used by a candidate in an election the higher the votes they acquire and vice versa.

Furthermore, results obtained from the chi-square tests demonstrate that 69% of the participants agree that the push given to candidate A, influenced them to vote for the candidate. However, a significant number of the participants (22%), also disagreed that push polls had influenced their vote. In addition, results of an independent sample t-test, exhibited significant differences between the control and experimental groups since participants in the experimental group equally voted for the rival candidate that was not pushed for.

#### **5.6 Limitations of the current study**

Due to the current political context and upcoming 2018 Presidential elections in Zimbabwe, a large number of potential participants (21), refused to participate in this study. This became a fundamental limitation as the researcher initially planned for a larger population but due to this setback the sample size had to be reduced. In response to this, the researcher created an informed consent form to help shed more light about the nature of the research to the participants who would take part in this study. More so, the study then became confined to 80 participants due to time constraints which made it impossible to make the study extensive. The use of a purposive sample made generalisations to the rest of the University of Zimbabwe students difficult to make. However, although the current study was limited to a small sample size, it was able to address the relevant issues in the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences.

Another limitation of the current study is that it was focused on 4 subtle psychological cues out of the many that can affect voter preferences. This constraint was due to the short deadline set to complete the study and still the 4 experiments conducted needed a lengthy time to construct, conduct and analyse the data found.

### **5.7 Recommendations for future study**

The foremost drawback of the study was a relatively small sample size of 80 participants therefore in future studies researchers can use a larger and randomized sample from different university learning institutions. This will guarantee more reliability and make generalisations possible to make for the whole students population. The research is also narrowed to 4 subtle psychological cues and therefore future research can include other factors such as party affiliation, affection to candidates, social influence and intimidation.

Since this research is based on student's elections, research can sooner or later be based on the particular SRC elections rather than the use of experiments. More so, since the current study is purely quantitative in nature, another recommendation would be that researchers explore the research in a qualitative manner to vividly unravel the relationship between the variables under investigation in this research.

In addition, there is a need for awareness campaigns by the bodies that govern SRC elections as results show that a significant population of the students are not aware that subtle psychological cues can perhaps influence their vote preference. More still, the researcher would also recommend that more research be done on a national scale on the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences as much of the literature on this topic is based on anecdotal records since the discipline of political psychology is still expanding in Africa.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

To recapitulate the above study, the findings show that there is a significant relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among University of Zimbabwe students. Attending to the research objectives and answering the research questions brought to light that there is consistency between the current research and past studies which support the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences. However, the researcher found a slight

difference while conducting the push poll experiment as a negative correlation was established between the variables.

Although the current study was limited in terms of the small sample size, it was able to address the relevant issues in the relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preference. A significant issue that was addressed is that subtle psychological cues can either play a negative or positive role in elections and therefore to facilitate SRC elections in a free and fair manner, tertiary institutions can perhaps run awareness campaigns through bodies that govern SRC elections as a significant population of the students are not aware that subtle psychological cues can perhaps influence their vote preference. More still, to help the students in their elections, the University can also adopt strategies that were implemented in this study to hold other factors at a constant such as using butterfly ballot paper ordering to help make SRC elections free and fair.

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**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1: Information and consent sheet**

**Researcher:** Tatenda .T. Ngara

Student at University of Zimbabwe, registration number R157303Q

**Address:** 17 Cheltenham Rd, Montrose, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

**Contact Details:** +263782436303 or [ngaratatenda1996@gmail.com](mailto:ngaratatenda1996@gmail.com)

**Objectives:** The current study aims at better understanding the effects of subtle psychological cues on voter preferences from the viewpoint of Student Representative Council (SRC) elections. It is believed that the analyses herein will contribute to the discipline of political psychology and other relevant disciplines from the perspectives of student elections in an African setting.

**Data Collection:** The data is to be collected through the use of a survey ballot paper which requires your response by filling in the appropriate space provided for your vote preference and stating whether a subtle psychological cue might have influenced your vote based on Likert scale of 1 to 5.

**Terms of the study:** The researcher will at all costs consider the rights of participants and their dignity through making sure they are in a comfortable place to make their vote and that they are assisted and answered at every call. Informed consent will be used to inform the candidates on the nature of the election process and purpose of the study. Adequate briefing will be applied to the participants soon as they finish making their votes so they may also be aware of some of the subtle psychological cues influencing voter preferences.

Participant's rights: you are privileged with the right to:

- ✓ Refuse to participate in answering the questionnaire or any particular question or discontinue participation at any time without any penalty
- ✓ Ask any questions about the study as they come along throughout and after the study.

Signing this form shows your acceptance to take part in this research study. You are required to sign below (by putting your signature only).

Participants signature.....

Date..../...../.....

## Appendix 2: Psychology Department research approval letter

University of Zimbabwe  
P.O. Box MP167  
Mt Pleasant  
Harare  
Zimbabwe

Telephone: 303211 Ext 14026  
Telex: 26580 UNVIZ ZW  
Telegrams: UNIVERSITY  
Fax: (263) (4) 333407



PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

March 2, 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN ACADEMIC STUDY**

Ngara T. Tatenda Reg Number R157303Q is a final year University of Zimbabwe student in the Department of Psychology. He wishes to undertake a study entitled "The relationship between subtle psychological cues and voter preferences among University of Zimbabwe students".

The findings of the study will be used for academic purposes only and will remain anonymous. Should you have any issues that require clarification do not hesitate to contact:

The Chairperson  
Department of Psychology  
University of Zimbabwe  
Box MP167  
Mt Pleasant  
Tel: 303211 Ext 14025/6

The Department greatly appreciates your kind assistance to the student.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Matika'.

MR M.C MATIKA





### **Appendix 3: Ballot paper Ballot order effects**

#### Introduction

Greetings, I am Tatenda Ngara, a final year student at the University of Zimbabwe pursuing Bachelors of Science Honours degree in Psychology. I am conducting a research project on the relationship between subtle Psychological cues and voter preferences among students in Student Representative Council (SRC) elections at the University. I kindly ask for your assistance through the completion of this survey ballot paper. This research is not linked to national politics and the data to be gathered is for academic use purposes only and will be kept confidential and anonymous. The research is also not compulsory and please feel free to ask any question for further clarification throughout the research. No answer is right or wrong, after placing your vote kindly respond to the statement in section D.

#### Section A: Demographics (Please circle the appropriate)

AGE (Enter data in any of the 3 boxes)			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

#### Section B: Making your vote

Suppose this is a Student Representative Council (SRC) election with 3 candidates running for the social welfare office. The candidate's images and political parties have been kept anonymous to avoid bias and you are asked to vote based on the adjectives that best describe their personality but are more or less similar to one another. Vote for the candidate whom you see best to represent the

office of social welfare among students at the University of Zimbabwe based on a list of adjectives assigned to 3 candidates.

N.B make your vote at the far right column labelled vote (X).

CANDIDATE	CANDIDATE PROFILE	VOTE(X)
A	Caring, patient, friendly, honest, sociable, ambitious, amiable, diligent, intuitive, resourceful, compulsive, aggressive, procrastinates, conceited, gullible, quarrelsome, callous deceitful, compulsive, and boastful.	
B	Honest, aggressive, sociable, procrastinates, patient, deceitful, friendly, compulsive, boastful, amiable, callous, intuitive, gullible, resourceful, deceitful, diligent, compulsive, procrastinates, conceited, quarrelsome	
C	Aggressive, procrastinates, boastful, deceitful, compulsive, callous, gullible, quarrelsome, conceited, Caring, patient, approachable, authentic, outgoing, determined, kind, industrious, intuitive, resourceful	

Section C: Survey question (Tick the appropriate)

The order of candidates might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT!

## Appendix 4: Survey ballot paper and questionnaire for Halo effects

### Introduction

Greetings, I am Tatenda Ngara, a final year student at the University of Zimbabwe pursuing Bachelors of Science Honours degree in Psychology. I am conducting a research project on the relationship between subtle Psychological cues and voter preferences among students in Student Representative Council (SRC) elections at the University. I kindly ask for your assistance through the completion of this survey ballot paper. This research is not linked to national politics and the data to be gathered is for academic use purposes only and will be kept confidential and anonymous. The research is also not compulsory and please feel free to ask any question for further clarification throughout the research. No answer is right or wrong, after placing your vote kindly respond to the statement in section D.

### Section A: Demographics (Please circle the appropriate)

AGE (Enter data in any of the 3 boxes)			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

### Section B: Making your vote

Supposing this is an SRC election and you are asked to rank order the candidates in accordance to the candidates you would want to represent the students of University of Zimbabwe at the annual Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (Z.U.S.A) games as a duty of the SRC sports representatives. The pictures assigned to candidates are of former SRC members outside Zimbabwe taken on google images based on the vivid description of the physical attributes required for the study therefore do not expect to find familiar candidates.

N.B to vote, rank order the candidates according to preference using numbers 1 to 4. You are also required to answer to section D where you will state the physical attributes that were most influential to your vote.

*To vote, rank order the candidates according to your preference 1-4*

Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4)
			

Section C: Survey question (Tick the appropriate)

The physical attributes (physic, beauty, race, gender) of the candidates might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

Tick the physical attribute that influenced your vote.

Physic (Body build)	Beauty/ Handsomeness	Race	Gender

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT!

## Appendix 5: Survey ballot paper and questionnaire for negativity bias

### Introduction

Greetings, I am Tatenda Ngara, a final year student at the University of Zimbabwe pursuing Bachelors of Science Honours degree in Psychology. I am conducting a research project on the relationship between subtle Psychological cues and voter preferences among students in Student Representative Council (SRC) elections at the University. I kindly ask for your assistance through the completion of this survey ballot paper. This research is not linked to national politics and the data to be gathered is for academic use purposes only and will be kept confidential and anonymous. The research is also not compulsory and please feel free to ask any question for further clarification throughout the research. No answer is right or wrong, after placing your vote kindly respond to the statement in section D.

### Section A: Demographics (Please circle the appropriate)

AGE (Enter data in any of the 3 boxes)			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	

### Section B: Making your vote

Presume this is a SRC election and you are asked to vote for the student's President among 2 campaigning candidates. Below is a presidential debate that went sour between the 2 candidates such that one candidate went out to speak negatively of the other candidate saying his main objective was to steal the students funds through the students union levy. However, the candidate spoken negatively of has policies that evidently outweigh those of his opponent. The names,

images and political parties of the candidates have been kept anonymous and therefore your vote must be guided by the debate.

N.B to place your vote, mark and X under the name of the candidate you prefer among the two.

**Candidate A:** It is in my best interests that each students should be able to register for the semester after paying at least a third of their tuition fees due to the tough economic hardships

**Candidate B:** How then will the tertiary institution pay its stuff members and maintain school property, let people pay the full fees to get access to enter campus and those who cannot do so look for work on vacations. Besides, **rumour** has it when you were Interact club president you squandered the clubs money with your party such that teachers had to intervene and reshuffle your cabinet

**Candidate A:** please note that was just a rumour and the university has many social clubs that are willing to volunteer help clean and maintain school property and grounds if the students are able to register without having paid full fees

**Mr. Speaker:** Ladies and gentleman let us now proceed to the vote

*To vote place an X under the box of the desired candidate.*

Candidate A	Candidate B

Section C: Survey question (Tick the appropriate)

The negative aspects raised about candidate A might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT!

## Appendix 6: Survey ballot paper and questionnaire for Push polls

### Introduction

Greetings, I am Tatenda Ngara, a final year student at the University of Zimbabwe pursuing Bachelors of Science Honours degree in Psychology. I am conducting a research project on the relationship between subtle Psychological cues and voter preferences among students in Student Representative Council (SRC) elections at the University. I kindly ask for your assistance through the completion of this survey ballot paper. This research is not linked to national politics and the data to be gathered is for academic use purposes only and will be kept confidential and anonymous. The research is also not compulsory and please feel free to ask any question for further clarification throughout the research. No answer is right or wrong, after placing your vote kindly respond to the statement in section D.

### Section A: Demographics (Please circle the appropriate)

AGE (Enter data in any of the 3 boxes)			
GENDER	1. male	2. Female	
YEAR OF STUDY	1. First year	2. 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and above
ETHNICITY	1. Shona	2. Ndebele	3. other and specify
EVER VOTED IN SRC ELECTIONS?	1. never	2. once+	



### Section B: Making your vote

Supposing this is an SRC election and you are asked to vote for a candidate you want to take the financial office. Supporters of Candidate A are pushing him to win the election over candidate B through push polling that candidate A is 70% more likely to win over candidate B with 30%. After a group of 10 people vote under this push poll, another control group of 10 candidates will be

asked to vote after being told that there is a 50/50 chance of either of the candidates winning the election.

N.B to vote place an X under the candidate of choice.

*To vote place an X under the picture of the desired candidate.*

Vote for candidate A	Vote for candidate B
	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Survey question (Tick the appropriate)

The chances or probability of either candidate to win the election might have influenced my vote?

Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND SUPPORT!