"The Rational Voter, Thinly Sliced: Personal Appeal as an Election Forecaster."
Dan Benjamin

We construct a measure of gubernatorial candidates' personal appeal by showing 10-second, silent video clips of unfamiliar gubernatorial debates to a group of experimental participants and asking them to predict the election outcomes. The participants' predictions explain more than 20 percent of the variation in the actual two-party vote share across the 58 elections in our study, and their importance survives a range of controls, including state fixed effects. Adding policy information to the video clips by turning on the sound tends, if anything, to worsen participants' accuracy. In a horse race of alternative forecasting models, personal factors as measured in our study significantly outperform economic variables in predicting vote shares, and are comparable in predictive power to a measure of incumbency status.