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Chong Lim Kim

Donald P. Racheter

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# Candidates' Perception of Voter Competence: A Comparison of Winning and Losing Candidates\*

CHONG LIM KIM  
DONALD P. RACHETER

*University of Iowa*

The purpose of the research reported in this article is to test the "congratulation-rationalization effect," a highly provocative hypothesis that John Kingdon has formulated in regard to politicians' beliefs about voters.<sup>1</sup> Comparing the beliefs that winning and losing candidates held about voters, Kingdon discovered that the winners manifested significantly more favorable beliefs than the losers.<sup>2</sup> Drawing upon a theory of cognitive dissonance of the Festinger variety, he offered an interesting interpretation of the findings.<sup>3</sup> Both winners and losers, argued Kingdon, are likely to confront a dissonance-producing situation after an election and therefore are likely to alter their beliefs about voters. This reasoning led him to hypothesize that winners tend to develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losers tend to rationalize their defeats by downgrading voters' competence. The essence of the "congratulation-rationalization" hypothesis in Kingdon's original formulation is this: As a result of the election outcomes, winners tend to change their beliefs about voters in a favorable direction, whereas losers tend to alter such beliefs in an unfavorable direction.

The hypothesis is important, for it has theoretical implications for the role of elections in

\* Research for this project was supported by two grants from the Graduate College of the University of Iowa to one of the authors and we acknowledge our gratitude. We also wish to thank John W. Kingdon of the University of Michigan for his helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> John W. Kingdon, "Politicians' Beliefs About Voters," *American Political Science Review*, 61 (March, 1967), 137-45. See also his book, *Candidates For Office: Beliefs and Strategies* (New York: Random House, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Kingdon, "Politicians' Beliefs," 139-42.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (New York: Row, Peterson, 1957); Leon Festinger and J. M. Carlsmith, "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58 (March, 1959), 203-10; Robert B. Zajonc, "The Concepts of Balance, Congruity, and Dissonance," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24 (Summer, 1960), 380-96; Jack W. Brehm and Arthur R. Cohen, *Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance* (New York: John Wiley, 1962); and Florence L. Denmark and Brunhilde Ritter, "Differential Cognitive Dissonance and Decision Latency," *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 86 (February, 1972), 69-74.

the democratic process. This hypothesis implies, in the first place, that elections produce a favorable change in the beliefs that an elected official holds about voters' competence. Because of his victory, the politician believes even more than he did previously that the voters are well informed, genuinely interested, and capable of making intelligent choices. Consequently, the elected official may pay closer attention to the voters' opinions and be more responsive to them than if he were not elected. The manifest function of elections in this case is the inducement of responsible behavior on the part of the representative through a rearrangement of the candidates' cognitions.<sup>4</sup>

The hypothesis also has implications for constituency influence on the representative. The "congratulation-rationalization effect" may magnify such influence. The politician often acts according to his conception of the voters' reactions to alternative courses of action he might choose.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which the representative anticipates the reactions of his constituency is likely to be related to his beliefs about the voters' competence. Hence, the tendency for a winning politician to develop beliefs complimentary to the voters implies that his anticipation of the voters' reactions will weigh heavily on his action. Constituency influence on a representative may therefore increase as a result of the "congratulation-rationalization effect."<sup>6</sup>

Although Kingdon demonstrated a significant difference between winners and losers in

<sup>4</sup> Political theorists have attributed various functions to elections. Elections have been considered as devices for selecting leaders and legitimizing the regime, means of giving the citizens direct and indirect control over government policies, channels for the expression of public choices, and links between officials and the voting public through which influence is exchanged. However, cognitive effects of elections such as the one stated in this hypothesis have not been explicitly formulated as part of the functions of elections. See, for example, Richard Rose and Harve Mossawir, "Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis," *Political Studies*, 15 (June, 1967), 173-201; and Gerald Pomper, *Elections in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1968), pp. 16-40.

<sup>5</sup> Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1950), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Kingdon, "Politicians' Beliefs," pp. 144-45.

their beliefs about voters, he was unable to test the hypothesis. Since his study was based on interview data collected after an election, it was not possible for him to compare candidates' beliefs about voters before and after the election, a comparison essential to test such a hypothesis.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, whether winners really change their beliefs in a favorable direction and whether losers alter their beliefs in an unfavorable direction still remains an open question.

The Iowa Election Study provides an excellent opportunity to test the "congratulation-rationalization" hypothesis. Candidates for office were asked to indicate their beliefs about voters both before and after an election. All contested candidates who ran in the 1970 Iowa general election were included in the study. The data were collected by means of mail questionnaires.<sup>8</sup> The pre-election survey, conducted in October and November 1970, included 262 candidates.<sup>9</sup> Of these, 202 candidates returned usable replies, which represents a 77 per cent response rate. Given our before-and-after design, we sent out questionnaires after the general election only to those who had responded to the pre-election survey. One hundred seventy-three of the winning and losing candidates responded to the follow-up questionnaire, an impressive 86 per cent of all those who responded to the first questionnaire. In addition to various standard information on the candidates' social and career background characteristics, we also solicited information regarding their beliefs

<sup>7</sup> The "congratulation-rationalization" hypothesis involves changes in candidates' beliefs and the direction of such changes. To test the hypothesis, one needs data on attitude changes. Interview data collected at a single point in time, the kind of data used in Kingdon's study, do not provide an adequate basis to test the hypothesis.

<sup>8</sup> Certain typical problems are associated with the use of mail surveys. Briefly, these problems relate to the type of data which can be gathered, the type of respondents who can be reached, and the response rate. In the present study, these problems were recognized and dealt with as fully as possible. First, the questionnaire used was brief, and the questions asked were simple and straightforward. Moreover, many of our questions had been used in several previous studies and their reliability had been tested. Second, our respondents were an ideal sample for a mail survey. They were candidates for public office, a relatively well-educated and articulate group. We found almost no "nonresponses" in the returned questionnaires. Finally, the response rate for the pre- and postelection surveys were impressive. For a good discussion of the problems associated with the use of mail surveys, see William J. Goode and Paul K. Hatt, *Methods in Social Research* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), pp. 170-83.

<sup>9</sup> This figure represents all contested candidates who ran in the 1970 general election in Iowa. There were also 32 candidates who were unopposed in the election. We did not include these unopposed candidates in our survey.

about voters, their pre-election anticipations of the election outcomes, their political ambition, their support for the institution of elections, and the 23 paired-item *Rotter Internal Versus External Control Scale*.

#### Measurements of Key Variables

Candidates' beliefs about voters consist of their theories, implicit or explicit, about the manner in which voters make their electoral choices.<sup>10</sup> An important part of such beliefs relates to candidates' perceptions of voters' competence, that is, the extent to which they believe the voters are deeply interested in campaigns, the extent to which they believe the voters are informed of key issues, and the extent to which they believe the voters make intelligent choices on the basis of the issues rather than on the basis of party labels or candidate characteristics. When elected, the candidates who believe that the voters are politically interested, informed, and capable of making intelligent choices are probably more likely to be constrained by the voters' opinions than are other candidates who have less favorable perceptions of voters' competence.<sup>11</sup>

Another part of candidates' beliefs is their conception of what factors influence voters' choices. The voting studies have identified three major factors of this sort: party identification, issues, and candidate orientation.<sup>12</sup> The candidates were asked both to rate and to rank the relative importance of each of these three factors, before and after the election. If the "congratulation-rationalization effect" is indeed operative, one would expect that winners change in their rankings of the three factors in the direction complimentary to voters, whereas losers change in the direction deprecating to voters. More specifically, one might expect that the winners who ranked party or issues as first in importance before an election, would subsequently rank the personal characteristics of candidates as first.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the losers who

<sup>10</sup> Kingdon, "Politicians' Beliefs," 137-38.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis A. Dexter, *The Sociology and Politics of Congress* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 151-75; Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *American Political Science Review*, 57 (March, 1963), 45-56.

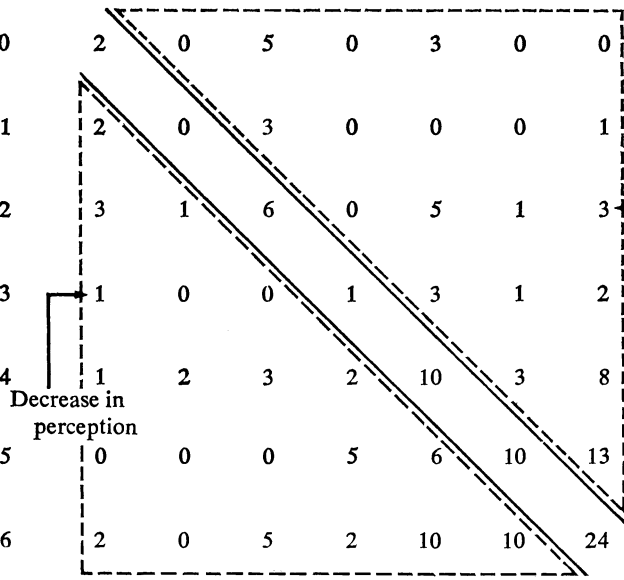
<sup>12</sup> See Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley, 1960); Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1954); and David E. Re-Pass, "Issue Salience and Party Choice," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (June, 1971), 389-400.

<sup>13</sup> We are making a number of assumptions here. Stated explicitly, (1) we assume that when a candidate rates candidate characteristics as the most important factor, he is congratulating himself and the voters, and

Table 1. Change in the Candidates' Perception of Voters' Competence(Frequency)

		After Election							Total
Before Election		Scale Scores							
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
0		2	0	5	0	3	0	0	10
1		2	0	3	0	0	0	1	6
2		3	1	6	0	5	1	3	19
3		1	0	0	1	3	1	2	8
4		1	2	3	2	10	3	8	29
5		0	0	0	5	6	10	13	34
6		2	0	5	2	10	10	24	53
Total		11	3	22	10	37	25	51	159

Scale Scores



Increase in perception

Decrease in perception

initially ranked issues or candidate characteristics as first, would rank party labels as the most important factor after an election.

The operational measurement of candidates' perceptions of voters' competence is a summated scale, constructed on the basis of the candidates' responses to three questions.<sup>14</sup> These questions have to do with the candidates' beliefs concerning voters' political interests,

(2) we assume that when a candidate rates party labels as first in importance, he is rationalizing his defeat by blaming voters for blindly voting for party. These are the assumptions which Kingdon has made in his study. We recognize at this point that another plausible assumption which contradicts our first assumption can be made: when a candidate rates candidate characteristics as the most important factor, he might be downgrading the voters. To believe that the voters make their choices on the basis of candidates' personal characteristics could mean that a candidate is disparaging their political sophistication. However, our objective is to test the validity of Kingdon's hypothesis and therefore we adopted his assumptions. See his "Politicians' Beliefs About Voters," pp. 139-40.

<sup>14</sup> When responses to several questions are aggregated to form a single measure as was the case in our summated scale, we might be in effect losing some information. Therefore we have also scrutinized responses to

their political knowledge, and their capacity to make intelligent electoral choices.<sup>15</sup> Each candidate who responded was assigned a score based on the arithmetic sum of his coded responses. The scale scores range between 0 (least favorable) and 6 (most favorable).<sup>16</sup> Table 1 displays data concerning the candidates' perceptions of voters' competence before and after the election. Of 159 candidates who re-

individual questions. The results of the item-by-item analysis did not change our basic arguments. See Donald P. Racheter, "Representation and the Congratulation-Rationalization Effect" (M.A. thesis The University of Iowa, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> The questions used were: (1) Would you indicate how important you think the candidates' issue positions are to the voters in determining their choices? (2) Generally speaking, how interested in the campaign do you think the voters in your district are? (3) How well informed do you think the voters in your district are about the candidates' issue positions? The same set of questions was repeated in the postelection survey with only the tense changed.

<sup>16</sup> Responses to the three voter competence items were coded: (0) Not important (or informed), (1) Somewhat important (or informed), and (2) Very important (or informed). These coded responses were summed to form a simple index.

**Table 2. Change in Candidates' Perception of Voters' Competence by Election Outcomes**  
(Percentages)

Election Outcomes	Change in Perception													Total (N)
	+6	+5	+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	
Winner	0.0	0.0	2.7	1.3	13.5	12.2	36.5	17.6	10.8	1.3	4.1	0.0	0.0	100% (74)
Loser	0.0	1.2	4.7	2.3	10.6	15.3	30.6	9.4	15.3	4.7	3.6	0.0	2.3	100% (85)

turned usable questionnaires before and after the election, 51 (or 32 per cent) reported an increase in their favorable perceptions of voters, while 55 (or 35 per cent) reported a decrease. Almost one-third of the candidates indicated "no change" in their perceptions. From these results, a measure of the direction and the magnitude of changes in candidates' perceptions was constructed. This measure, which ranges between scale scores of +6 and -6, is designed to indicate the degree of increase or decrease in favorability of a candidate's perception of voters' competence.<sup>17</sup>

**Findings**

**1. Changes in Candidates' Beliefs About Voters.**

The hypothesis that winners tend to develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losers tend to develop deprecating beliefs may be tested in two ways: (1) a comparison of winners and losers in terms of the direction and the magnitude of changes in their perceptions regarding the competence of voters, and (2) an analysis of changes that take place in candidates' rankings of the relative importance of three factors which influence voters' choices: party labels, issues, and candidate characteristics.

The data presented in Table 2 show little difference between winners and losers in terms of the direction and the magnitude of changes in their perceptions regarding the competence of voters. Among the winners, roughly 37 per cent did not change in their perceptions. Among the losers 31 per cent did not change, indicating a slight, but statistically insignificant, tendency for winners to have more stable perceptions than losers ( $t = 0.53$ ,  $df = 157$ , *n.s.*). While some 30 per cent of the winners showed an increase in their complimentary beliefs, 34 per cent of the losers also did. Similar proportions of the winners and losers indicated a decrease

in such beliefs: 33.8 per cent and 35.3 per cent respectively. Thus, the evidence makes it quite clear that winners do not necessarily develop complimentary beliefs more than do losers. Conversely, losers do not necessarily develop more deprecating beliefs than winners.<sup>18</sup>

A supplementary analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. Instead of relying upon the candidates' perceptions of voters' competence, we focused on changes that took place in the candidates' rankings of the relative importance of the three factors influencing voters' choices. By comparing their pre- and postelection rankings, we were able to determine shifts that occurred in their relative rankings of party labels, issues, and candidate characteristics.

According to the "congratulation effect," one might predict that the winners who initially ranked party or issues first in importance are likely to rate their own characteristics as first after an election. Conversely, the losers who ranked issues or candidates as first in importance are likely to rank party as the most im-

<sup>18</sup> Additional evidence is available. When we compared the winners and losers in terms of their pre- and postelection perceptions, we discovered as shown in Table A that the winners manifested much more favorable perceptions than the losers after the election, and that the subsequent winners also manifested significantly more favorable perceptions than the subsequent losers before the election. This means that the winners had more favorable perceptions than the losers from the outset.

**Table A. Candidates' Perception of Voters' Competence Before and After General Election**  
(Percentages)

Scale Scores	Before Election		After Election		
	Winner	Loser	Winner	Loser	
Least Favorable	0	3.4%	7.2%	2.7%	10.6%
	1	0.0	6.2	0.0	3.5
	2	9.1	13.4	9.5	17.6
	3	3.4	7.2	6.8	5.9
Most Favorable	4	19.3	20.6	21.6	24.8
	5	28.4	15.5	29.7	3.5
	6	36.4	29.9	29.7	34.1
Total (N)	100% (88)	100% (97)	100% (74)	100% (85)	
		$t = 2.04, p < .025$		$t = 2.72, p < .005$	

<sup>17</sup> The measure for the direction and the magnitude of changes in candidates' perceptions regarding the competence of voters was constructed from the two summated scales of voters' competence: the pre- and post-election scales. To obtain scores for changes in candidates' perceptions, the postelection scores were subtracted from the pre-election scores.

**Table 3. Change in the Relative Ranking of Three Factors**  
(Percentages)

Change in Ranking	Most Important Factor		Least Important Factor	
	Winner	Loser	Winner	Loser
From Issues or Candidate to Party Label	25%	78%	28%	66%
From Party Label or Issues to Candidate	75	22	72	34
Total (N)	100% (20)	100% (27)	100% (40)	100% (29)
	$\chi^2 = 12.95,$	$P < .001$	$\chi^2 = 12.10,$	$P < .001$

Note: The total in the table does not add up to 173 candidates, because many did not fit the four types of change reported above. Of all candidates, 39 per cent did not change in their rankings; 19 per cent changed from party to issues; and 10 per cent changed from candidates to issues.

portant factor after an election, due to the "rationalization effect." With respect to the shifts that occur in the least important factors, one might expect that the winners who initially ranked issues or candidates as last in importance are likely to rank party labels as the least important after an election. In a similar vein, the losers who ranked party or issues as last in importance at the outset, are likely to rank candidate characteristics as the least important after the election.

There are six logically possible types of change in the candidates' rankings of the relative importance of party, issues, and candidates.<sup>19</sup> Table 3 reports only that portion of the data most relevant to testing the hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> Focusing upon factors ranked as the most important, one finds that the winners more than the losers tended to alter their ranking from party or issues to their own characteristics, suggesting that the winners tend to congratulate voters for "making the right choices." By comparison, the losers more than the winners tended to change their ranking from issues or candidates to party label, which indicates that the losers tended to downgrade voters for "blindly voting for party labels." Looking at the shifts which occurred in the least important factors, however, one is struck by a finding contradictory to the prediction. The winners

who ranked party or issues as least important at the outset tended to rank candidate characteristics as least important after the election. Among the losers, those who ranked issues or candidate characteristics as least important tended to rank party labels "least important" after the election. Thus, the evidence about ranking shifts is also inconclusive, and does not offer confirmation of the hypothesis that winners develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losing candidates develop deprecating beliefs.

**2. Effect of Candidates' Anticipation of Election Outcome.** It is quite possible that candidates anticipate the election outcome long before election day. Because of such anticipations, the "congratulation-rationalization effect" might take place even before the actual outcome is known. The candidates were asked to rate their chances of winning in the first questionnaire.<sup>21</sup> Fifty-seven per cent rated their chances favorably, while some 30 per cent gave pessimistic assessments. If the "congratulation-rationalization effect" does take place before the election as a result of candidates' anticipations of the outcome, one might expect that among the subsequent winners, those who anticipated an election victory at the outset as compared to those who anticipated a defeat, would manifest more favorable beliefs about voters. Again, among the subsequent losers, those who anticipated a victory as compared to those who anticipated a defeat at the outset, should have more favorable beliefs.

The data presented in Table 4 show no evidence to confirm such an effect of candidates' anticipations upon their beliefs about voters.

<sup>19</sup> The six types of change in the candidates' rankings include: (1) from party to issues, (2) from party to candidates, (3) from issues to party, (4) from issues to candidates, (5) from candidates to party, and (6) from candidates to issues.

<sup>20</sup> Of the six types of change, only four are directly relevant to testing predictions derived from the hypothesis. Since we assume that changes from issues or candidates to party reflect the rationalization effect and that changes from party or issues to candidates reflect the congratulation effect, we report data on these four types of change. Nevertheless, we have also examined all six types of change separately, and have found no evidence to contradict the conclusion suggested in the text.

<sup>21</sup> The question was: "How do you rate your chances in the upcoming election?" Responses were coded: (1) Excellent chance to win, (2) Good chance to win, (3) Some chance to win, (4) It's a toss-up, (5) Probably will lose, and (6) Almost sure to lose.

**Table 4. Effect of Anticipation on Candidates' Pre-Election Beliefs**  
(Percentages)

Pre-election Perceptions of Voters' Competence		Winner		Loser	
		Anticipated Victory	Anticipated Defeat	Anticipated Victory	Anticipated Defeat
Most Favorable	6	35.5%	42.9%	32.1%	31.2%
	5	32.9	14.3	20.8	10.4
	4	15.8	28.6	20.8	16.7
	3	2.6	7.1	13.2	2.1
	2	9.3	7.1	9.4	16.7
Least Favorable	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5
	0	3.9	0.0	3.7	10.4
	Total (N)	100% (76)	100% (14)	100% (53)	100% (48)

$\chi^2 = 3.96, n.s.$                        $\chi^2 = 11.12, n.s.$

Among the subsequent winners, no significant difference was discovered between those who anticipated a victory and those who anticipated a defeat in terms of their perceptions of voters' competence ( $X^2 = 3.96, n.s.$ ). Similarly, among the subsequent losers, there was no significant difference between those who anticipated a victory and those who anticipated a defeat ( $X^2 = 11.12, n.s.$ ). A supplementary analysis in which we compared candidates' anticipations and the direction of changes in their beliefs also revealed a negative result: the anticipations of the election outcome did not effect changes in candidates' beliefs about voters.<sup>22</sup> Thus, one can conclude that neither the actual election outcome nor the anticipations of the outcome have significant effect upon candidates' beliefs about voters.

**3. Dissonance States and Changes in Candidates' Perceptions of Voters' Competence.** Thus far, our analysis has concentrated on the

<sup>22</sup> The results of this analysis are reported in Table B. It is clear that no significant difference obtains between those who expected to win and those who expected to lose within each group of the winners and losers. This indicates that differences in pre-election anticipations of the election outcomes have no visible impact upon the direction and magnitude of changes in candidates' perceptions regarding the competence of voters.

difference between winners and losers in their beliefs about voters, and changes in such beliefs. The overall evidence lends no clear support for the "congratulation-rationalization" hypothesis. Nevertheless, it seems yet possible to confirm the hypothesis if it is cast in somewhat different terms, terms more consonant with the theory of cognitive dissonance as originally outlined by Festinger. Although Kingdon acknowledged his debt to Festinger's theory, his formulation actually departed from the theory by placing a heavy emphasis upon the independent impact of election outcomes.<sup>23</sup> When Kingdon stated that winners tend to develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losers tend to develop rationalizations for their defeats by downgrading voters' competence, he was evidently assuming that dissonance is a direct consequence of the election outcome. Although a state of cognitive dissonance may result from the election outcome, it depends also upon the candidates' pre-election beliefs about

<sup>23</sup> Kingdon stated that: "winners develop complimentary beliefs about voters and losers develop rationalizations for the losses *simply by virtue of the outcome of the election*" [our emphasis]. See his "Politicians' Beliefs About Voters," p. 142.

**Table B. Anticipation of the Outcomes and Change in Perceptions**  
(Percentages)

Change in Perception	Winner		Loser	
	Anticipated Victory	Anticipated Defeat	Anticipated Victory	Anticipated Defeat
Favorable Change (Increase)	26.6%	33.3%	34.3%	35.0%
No Change	36.7	33.4	15.8	40.0
Unfavorable Change (Decrease)	36.7	33.3	49.9	25.0
Total (N)	100% (60)	100% (12)	100% (38)	100% (40)

voters. What precipitates the “congratulation-rationalization effect” may be a state of dissonance induced by the incongruence between a candidate’s beliefs and the election outcome, rather than the winning or losing in itself.

Restated in direct dissonance terms, the hypothesis asserts that within each group of winners and losers it is only those experiencing a high degree of dissonance who will change in their beliefs about voters. The dissonance, rather than the election outcome, is the critical variable in this formulation. High and low dissonance states were established on the basis of (1) the pre-election scale scores for candidates’ perceptions of voters’ competence, and (2) the election outcomes.<sup>24</sup> A candidate who entered the campaign with favorable beliefs about voters and subsequently emerged as a winner may experience less dissonance than other successful candidates who had unfavorable beliefs from the outset. Similarly, a candidate who initially had favorable beliefs but was later defeated may feel greater dissonance than other losers who had unfavorable beliefs from the outset.

In Table 5, the direction and the magnitude of changes in candidates’ perceptions of voters’ competence are compared by different dissonance states within each group of winners and losers. Looking at the winners first, one finds that as compared to the “low dissonance” group, the “high dissonance” group—the candidates who had unfavorable beliefs about voters at the outset—tended to change their beliefs in a more favorable direction. The rank-order correlation between dissonance states and changes in candidates’ perceptions was quite high ( $\tau c = .48$ ). This suggests that winners whose initial beliefs about voters were incongruent with the election outcomes tended to upgrade their beliefs. Thus, there is evidence to conclude that the “congratulation effect,” a part of Kingdon’s hypothesis, is operative, insofar as winners’ initial beliefs about voters and the subsequent election outcomes are not congruent.

With respect to the “rationalization effect,” another part of the hypothesis, a strong correla-

<sup>24</sup> The “high” and “low” dissonance groups among the winners and losers were established in the following manner:

Election Outcomes	Scale Scores for the Pre-Election Perceptions					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Won	High Dissonance Group (N=26)			Low Dissonance Group (N=48)		
	Low Dissonance Group (N=56)			High Dissonance Group (N=29)		

tion was found between dissonance states and negative changes in candidates’ perceptions ( $\tau c = -.41$ ). Among the losers, the “high dissonance” group consists of the candidates who entered the election campaign with highly favorable beliefs about voters. These candidates believed at the outset that the voters were well informed on key issues, were deeply interested in the campaign, and were capable enough to make their choices on the basis of issues rather than on the basis of a candidate’s party label or his personal characteristics. Despite the highly complimentary beliefs that these candidates held, the voters did not reciprocate with electoral support: they were subsequently defeated. Thus, these candidates were likely to perceive a dissonance between the election outcome and their beliefs about voters. The data indicate that the “high dissonance” group of the losers more than the “low dissonance” group tended to change their beliefs in the direction deprecating to voters. Evidently, the “rationalization effect” is also operative among the losers, insofar as the losers’ initial beliefs about voters and the subsequent election outcome are not congruent.<sup>25</sup>

What emerges in this analysis is this: The “congratulation-rationalization” hypothesis can be confirmed, but only if cast in terms of “dissonance states” rather than “election outcomes.” In his original formulation, probably because he lacked pre-election data, Kingdon emphasized the independent effect of the election outcomes—winning and losing. Consequently, he hypothesized that winners tend to develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losers tend to relinquish such beliefs. Clearly, this formulation obfuscates the critical importance of dissonance states by implicitly assuming that changes in candidates’ beliefs are direct effects of the election outcomes. Our analysis has shown, however, that the election outcomes do not in themselves effect changes in candidates’ beliefs. What causes change in such beliefs is dissonance induced by the *discrep-*

<sup>25</sup> The data reported in Table 5 also show considerable cognitive changes for the low dissonance groups. For instance, 54 per cent of the low dissonance winners changed their perceptions in both favorable and unfavorable directions. Among the low dissonance losers, almost 72 per cent either increased or decreased in their evaluations of voters. Thus, it seems evident that factors other than dissonance states also act upon changes in the candidates’ perceptions. These unidentified factors notwithstanding, the overall evidence clearly indicates that cognitive dissonance explains a large part of the variation in changes of candidates’ perceptions. The problems of validating dissonance theory are succinctly discussed in Natalia P. Chapanis and Alphonse Chapanis, “Cognitive Dissonance: Five Years Later,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 61 (January, 1964), 1-22.



Table 5. Relation Between Candidates' Dissonance States and Perceptions of Voters' Competence  
(Percentages)

Change in Perception*	Winner		Loser	
	High Dissonance	Low Dissonance	High Dissonance	Low Dissonance
Large increase	—	—	—	3.5
Medium increase	11.6	—	—	20.7
Small increase	53.8	10.4	25.1	27.6
No change	19.2	45.8	32.1	27.6
Small decrease	11.6	37.5	28.5	17.1
Medium decrease	3.8	6.3	10.8	3.5
Large decrease	—	—	3.5	—
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(26)	(48)	(56)	(29)
	Kendall's $\tau_{bc} = .48$		$\tau_{bc} = -.41$	

\* These seven categories were established from the scale scores for the direction and the magnitude of changes in perceptions of voters' competence: Large increase (+6, +5), Medium increase (+4, +3), Small increase (+2, +1), No change (0), Small decrease (-1, -2), Medium decrease (-3, -4), and Large decrease (-5, -6)

ancy between a candidate's beliefs and the election outcome. Therefore, whether or not winners will develop complimentary beliefs and whether or not losers will develop deprecating beliefs depends upon the states of dissonance that such candidates confront after an election, rather than on the election *per se*.

### Conclusions

The analysis has disclosed no clear evidence to support the hypothesis that winners tend to develop complimentary beliefs about voters while losers develop deprecating beliefs. Although nearly two-thirds of the candidates were found to have changed in their perceptions of the competence of voters, no significant difference in direction and magnitude of such changes was discovered between the winners and losers. The evidence was again inconclusive when we focused on the shifts that took place in the candidates' rankings of the relative importance of three factors influencing voters' choices: party labels, issues, and candidate characteristics. The winners did not change their rankings of the three factors in a direction visibly more complimentary to voters than the losers, nor did the losers change their rankings in a direction more deprecating to voters than the winners. Therefore, it seems evident that winners do not necessarily develop more complimentary beliefs than losers. Conversely, losers do not necessarily develop more deprecating beliefs.

The "congratulation-rationalization" hypothesis, however, was strongly supported in the analysis when it was refined. In this new formulation, the state of dissonance rather than the election outcome was made the major in-

dependent variable. The results of analysis show that among the winners, the "high dissonance" group more than the "low dissonance" group tended to upgrade their beliefs concerning the competence of voters. By contrast, among the losers, the "high dissonance" group more than the "low dissonance" group tended to downgrade their beliefs about voters. Thus, the evidence suggests that the "congratulation-rationalization effect" is operative to the extent that candidates' beliefs about voters and the election outcomes are incongruent.

Finally, one may ask whether the congratulation-rationalization hypothesis formulated by Kingdon offers a sound explanation of the divergent beliefs held by winning and losing candidates. The findings reported in this article suggest that the hypothesis does not provide an efficient explanation for the phenomenon that winners manifest markedly more favorable beliefs than losers do. It seems clear that winners more than losers have favorable beliefs, but not because winners change their beliefs in a favorable direction as a result of their election victories nor because losers alter their beliefs in an unfavorable direction. Alternative explanations must be sought for the divergent beliefs that winning and losing candidates manifest.<sup>26</sup> Possibly such explanations might be found in such factors as the incumbent status of candidates, the degree of competitiveness in their districts, their career socialization, and the level of their political ambition.

<sup>26</sup> Kingdon suggested alternative explanations based on the incumbent status of candidates and the marginality of the district. We plan to test some of these explanations in future research. See Kingdon, "Politicians' Beliefs About Voters," pp. 142-43.