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# Causal Attributions in a French Electoral Context

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## Introduction

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

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

Further, political analysts often invoke both personal and situational reasons to explain the outcomes of elections. That is, candidates are said to win or lose, sometimes because of personal characteristics or actions, at other times because of situational factors outside their control. Burger & Pavelich 1994 – they show more internal than explanation for both winner and loser

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

## Main Objective

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

⇒ **H1**: The success of the preferred candidate is expected to be awarded to internal explanations (i.e., relative to the candidate him/herself) while failure should be awarded to external explanations;

⇒ **H2**: The attribution of success is expected to be related to a lower score in Personal Control and Locus of Causality as well as a higher score in Stability and External control while failure attribution should show the reversed patterns.

## Methods

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

## Procedure.

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

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

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

The *main cause* you mentioned is something...

1. That reflects an aspect of yourself	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	reflects an aspect of the situation
2. Manageable by you	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	not manageable by you
3. Permanent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	temporary
4. You can regulate	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	you cannot regulate
5. Over which others have control	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	over which others have no control
6. Onside of you	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	outside of you
7. Stable over time	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	variable over time
8. Under the power of other people	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	not under the power of other people
9. Something about you	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	something about others
10. Over which you have power	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	over which you have no power
11. Unchangeable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	changeable
12. Other people can regulate	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	other people cannot regulate

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

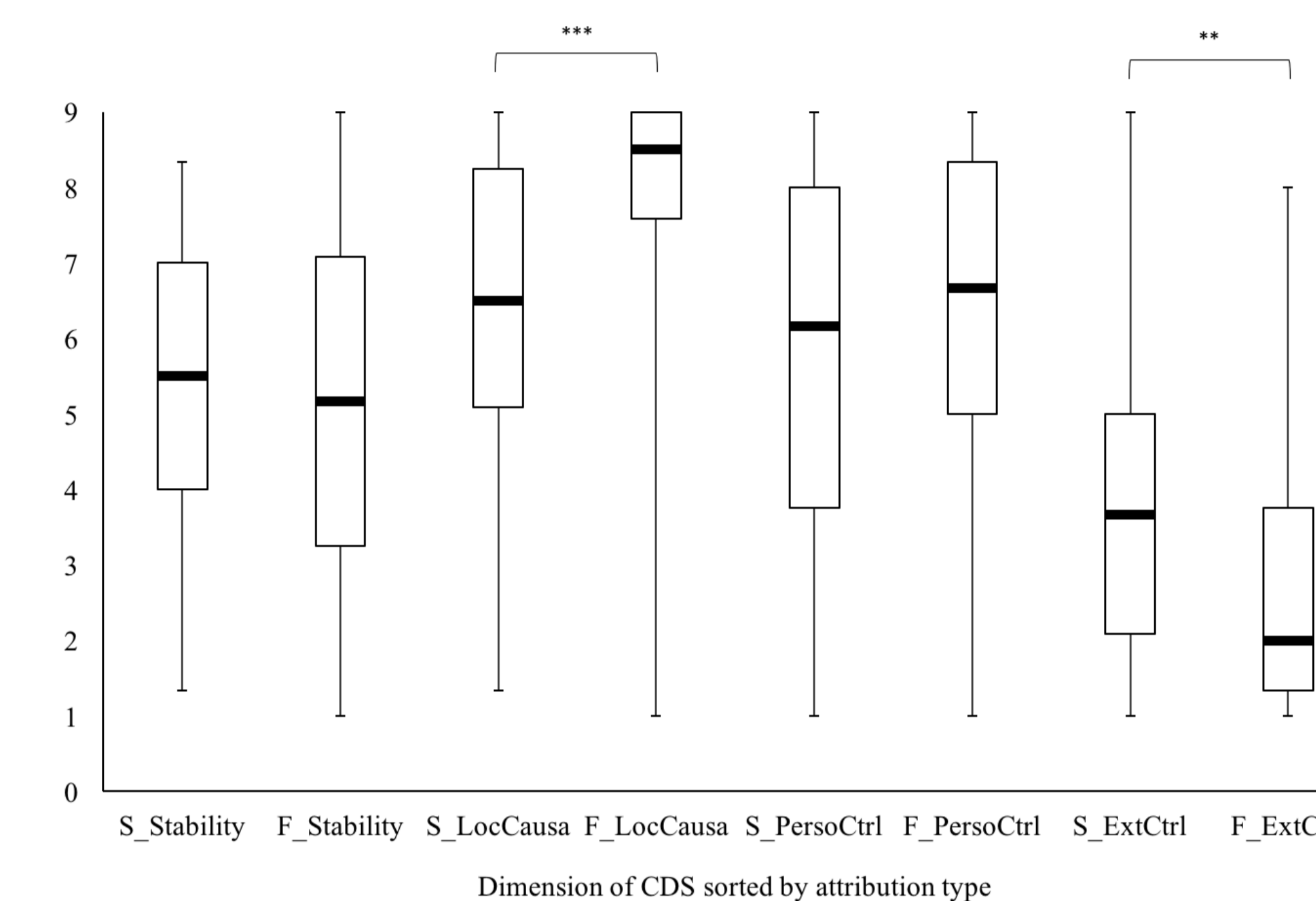
## Results

⇒ **H1** Causal attribution type (failure *vs* success) and given explanation (internal *vs* external):

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

⇒ **H2** According to the CDS II, half of our expectation were validated:

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



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

## Conclusions

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

As unexpected:

- even though people who voted for candidate who did not pass the first round considered the score as a failure, surprisingly voters of J.-L. Mélenchon were obviously split into two groups. In fact, slightly more that the half considers the score as a success, and should have rated the score itself instead which was higher that medias’ expectation, instead of the success/failure in being selected for the second round.
- The administration of the Causal Dimension Scale II did not show any differences for both Stability and Personal Control dimensions, which could respectively be explained by ...

## References

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## COMPANION STUDY

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