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Face Value: Facial Appearance and Assessments of Politicians FREE

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Summary and Keywords

The facial appearance of political candidates provides information to voters that can be vital to the impression-formation process. Traditionally, psychological research in the field of appearance-based politics has concentrated on investigating whether politicians' physical appearance impacts perceptions of them. Recently, the focus has shifted from examining whether facial cues matter for impression formation to determining (1) which facial cues matter for voters' perceptions of politicians and (2) how such visual cues are utilized within the political decision-making process. This shift in research focus has ushered in an appreciation of facial competence and physical attractiveness, and it has been marked by a renewed interest in studying how gender stereotypes impact the influence of politician appearance on perceptions of male and female politicians. In addition, this renewed interest in studying underlying mechanisms in appearance-based politics has spurred on research that includes a broader range of downstream consequences such as evaluations of leadership potential, voting behavior, and even basic political party affiliation categorizations.

Keywords: appearance-based politics, person perception, social perception, political psychology, gender, social vision, gender stereotypes

Introduction

The year 1960 marked the first televised presidential debate in the history of the United States. Richard Nixon squared off against his opponent, John F. Kennedy. Importantly, voters who listened to this debate on the radio felt that Richard Nixon handily won the debate given his more convincing stances on the policy matters that were discussed. However, voters who viewed the televised debate thought that John F. Kennedy won the debate because he looked more confident and presidential; Kennedy won not necessarily because he sounded better but because he looked better (Druckman, 2003). This difference

in perceptions of the candidates based on the medium in which the debate was presented illustrates the potency of visual cues to sway our perceptions of politicians. In fact, much of the post-debate discussion focused on style above and beyond the substance of the debate. While the impact of candidate appearance on candidate perceptions was novel in 1960, now there is a growing body of research that focuses on appearance-based perceptions of political candidates.

In particular, nonverbal cues contained in candidates' body movements and gestures convey important information concerning the viability of political candidates. In one study, participants viewed a few seconds of videos of gubernatorial debates. Based on the nonverbal information contained in these videos alone, participants' judgments of the winners accounted for approximately 20% the vote share these candidates garnered in their elections (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009). Therefore, candidate appearance has the potential to sway voters and in tight races may help decide the victor.

In current election cycles, the news media overwhelms voters with images of political candidates. Candidate images are displayed through televised advertising, online news coverage, social media, and candidate websites (Dimitrova & Bystrom, 2013; Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2009; Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Hoegg & Lewis, 2011; Prior, 2014; Sapiro, Walsh, Strach, & Hennings, 2011). Candidates understand the impact that their image can have on prospective supporters. They often spend large sums of their campaign money on advertising to alter or control their image (Druckman et al., 2009; Sapiro et al., 2011). In many cases, efforts to get out candidates' images represent money that is well spent. Including candidates' photographs on ballots influenced voter turnout and even the outcome of several elections (Banducci, Karp, Thrasher, & Rallings, 2008; Buckley, Collins, & Reidy, 2007; Johns & Shephard, 2011). Despite the prominence of candidate images in political campaigns, only recently has the empirical study of candidate appearance become the focus of scientific literature.

Traditionally, the political psychology literature has focused on conventional factors that influence the candidate impression formation process (i.e., candidate party, ideology, incumbency; Conover & Feldman, 1989; Feldman & Conover, 1983). However, recent research has shown a renewed focus on heuristics or cognitive shortcuts that voters employ when forming impressions of candidates. Candidate characteristics such as gender, race, and age have been shown to predict constituents' voting behavior (McDermott, 1997, 1998; Sigelman & Sigelman, 1982). In addition, research has shown a renewed interest in examining the role of appearance in the perception of candidates. Indeed, several aspects of candidate appearance have been the focus of much research. In particular, perceptions of facial competence, physical attractiveness, and gendered appearance (i.e., masculinity/femininity, babyfacedness, and warmth/dominance) provide

informational shortcuts that voters can use when forming judgments about candidates, evaluating candidates, and deciding which candidate to support in an election.

Political psychologists have sought to determine how and when voters use visual cues to form impressions of politicians. In this review of the literature, background information is provided on some of the innovative insights of appearance-based politics for politician perception. In addition, an analytic view of the status of the field and future research directions for this burgeoning field is presented. This article documents the influence of physical appearance of unfamiliar political candidates and/or politicians on how individuals evaluate their leadership potential, decide whom to vote for in an election, and perceive their political party affiliation.

Judgments of Leadership Potential

When television news media and print media display more favorable images of candidates, they tend to be evaluated more positively. More specifically, political candidates are evaluated more positively when they are portrayed in flattering camera angles (e.g., looking up at a candidate) (Kepplinger, 1982; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987), displayed with a cheerful disposition (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987), and shown engaging in dynamic behavior (e.g., shaking hands and kissing babies; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). Similarly, appearance-based cues are associated with perceptions of politicians' personality traits and leadership ability. For instance, when politicians' photographs were manipulated to appear more flattering, they were evaluated more favorably (Barrett & Barrington, 2005; Rosenberg, Bohan, McCafferty, & Harris, 1986; Rosenberg, Kahn, Tran, & Le, 1991; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987).

Judgments about politicians are often governed by trait inferences or conclusions drawn about politicians' personality characteristics based on their appearance. Voters reliably form impressions of political candidates that are heavily informed by their personality characteristics (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Voters' appearance-based assessments of candidates' personality characteristics are related to their global candidate impressions and are predictive of their voting behavior. From just looking at candidate images, voters formed trait evaluations of candidates (e.g., intelligence, leadership, honesty, caring) that were associated with their favorability ratings of these candidates (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1996, 1997, 1999). That is, even after accounting for traditional factors that influence candidate preference (i.e., ideology, party, policy issues), trait evaluations accounted for a unique portion of the variance in how positively

or negatively voters felt toward candidates. Moreover, trait evaluations made about candidates were significantly associated with voters' candidate preference (Bartels, 2002). Candidates who were evaluated more favorably on trait dimensions were more likely to be supported in their elections.

Importantly, politicians from the two major parties are differentially stereotyped in terms of their personality characteristics. For example, overall Democrats are stereotyped as likable, trustworthy, compassionate, and empathetic; Republicans are stereotyped as dominant, mature, moral, and strong leaders (Hayes, 2005). Not surprisingly, candidates were aided by an appearance that aligned with the characteristics associated with their respective parties. Evaluations of Democratic politicians were more positive when they appeared intelligent, whereas judgments of Republicans were more positive when they appeared competent (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011). Social context and characteristics of voters moderated this effect, however. For example, when Democrat or Republican candidates ran in majority-conservative districts, they fared better when they appeared stereotypically Republican (Olivola et al., 2012). Similarly, Republican voters judged politicians who they perceived to be from their own political party as more likable and trustworthy (Wilson & Rule, 2014). Political psychologists have sought to determine which appearance-based cues can explain these trait evaluation effects. In particular, physical attractiveness, facial similarity, and facial gender-typicality have been studied as possible appearance-based cues that lend themselves to trait evaluations and favorability ratings.

One appearance-based cue that perceivers use to make trait judgments is physical attractiveness. Candidates who perceivers rated as more attractive were subsequently evaluated more positively than their less attractive counterparts (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2015; Budesheim & DePaola, 1994). Furthermore, candidates who were judged to be attractive were also rated as highly competent (Verhulst, Lodge, & Lavine, 2010). This effect persisted even when participants were made aware of the candidates' actual qualifications for their positions (i.e., their expertise on policy issues) (Budesheim & DePaola, 1994). Importantly, several perceiver characteristics moderated this effect. Participants' strength of political party affiliation influenced the extent to which physical attractiveness impacted their evaluations. More specifically, participants who were less knowledgeable about politics and the U.S. political system were more swayed by candidate attractiveness (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011). This implies that a significant portion of the electorate may be prone to attractiveness bias in their trait evaluations of political candidates.

A second appearance-based cue that perceivers use to make trait judgments is facial self-similarity. There is evidence that voters' evaluations of candidates are subject to influence from facial similarity. For example, when unfamiliar politicians' and/or political

candidates' faces were morphed with participants' faces, participants showed a preference for the faces of the politician or political candidate whose face most resembled their own (Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006; Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, & Collins, 2008). Participants rated facial morphs of their own faces and non-political celebrities as more trustworthy as well (Tanner & Maeng, 2012). Moreover, participants reported more positive feelings towards the morphed images that appeared most similar or familiar to them. Again several perceiver characteristics moderated this effect. Participants' gender and strength of political party affiliation influenced the extent to which facial similarity impacted their evaluations. More specifically, men, weak partisans, and independents were more likely than their counterparts to show more positive feelings toward candidates who were manipulated to appear facially similar to them. Women showed the opposite effect; they rated facially similar candidate faces more negatively (Bailenson et al., 2006). Therefore, subtle manipulation of candidate faces to appear more or less similar to voters' faces can impact how they are perceived.

Finally, perceivers use facial gender-typicality in appearance to make trait judgments of politicians and political candidates. Facial gender-typicality refers to the femininity or masculinity of the facial structure of candidates' faces. Facial gender-typicality is often measured with computer software or is provided via subjective perceiver judgments. Gender and partisanship are connected through shared stereotype content and through shared visual cues. First, partisan stereotypes are linked to gender stereotypes. More specifically, feminine characteristics are associated with the Democratic Party, whereas masculine characteristics are associated with the Republican Party (Hayes, 2011; Rahn, 1993; Winter, 2010). Second, the facial cues that denote trait characteristics overlap with facial cues that are associated with the two parties. Visual cues to facial dominance and facial masculinity overlap, as do cues to facial neoteny and facial femininity (Friedman & Zebrowitz, 1992). Recently, research has linked this overlap in stereotype content and visual cues with two central trait dimensions—warmth and competence evaluations (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008) of unfamiliar politicians. In this research paradigm, participants were presented with only the photographs of unfamiliar politicians and were asked to render warmth and competence judgments. Female Democrats who appeared more feminine and female Republicans who appeared less feminine were judged to be more competent than their counterparts. Conversely, male Democrats who appeared less masculine were rated as warmer than their more masculine-appearing counterparts (Carpinella & Johnson, 2013B). Politicians' facial gender-typicality influenced their trait evaluations along counter-stereotypic dimensions. More specifically, men were assumed to be competent, but their gendered appearance impacted perceptions of their warmth. Conversely, women were assumed to be warm, but their gendered appearance impacted judgments of their competence in line with their partisan stereotypes. Importantly, competence judgments were highly predictive of

candidates' electoral success (Funk, 1997). Therefore, these findings suggest that facial gender-typicality may be more consequential for women than for men.

In summary, a large set of traits related to gendered appearances (i.e., femininity/masculinity, babyfacedness, facial maturity, warmth/dominance) have been shown to impact perceivers' judgments of candidates' leadership potential (see Olivola & Todorov, 2010A; Rule et al., 2010; Poutvaara et al., 2009; Spisak et al., 2012; Laustsen & Petersen, 2015). Research findings suggest that physical attractiveness, facial similarity, and facial gender-typicality are appearance-based mechanisms by which visual cues impact voters' perceptions of politicians' leadership ability. These appearance-based cues impact a wide variety of traits and personality dimensions relevant to how politicians will perform in office. In a related manner, appearance-based cues come to bear on support for political candidates and margin of victory in their elections.

Casting a Ballot

As reviewed above, appearance-based cues influence voters' judgments of politicians' trait or personality characteristic evaluations. The related perceptions of candidates' competence and intelligence are subsequently related to candidate support. Research has shown that appearance-based cues are directly implicated in individuals voting behavior and are highly consequential for election outcomes. Individuals reliably decipher unfamiliar political winners from losers from their static photographs (Ahler, Citrin, Dougal, & Lenz, 2015; Carpinella, Hehman, Freeman, & Johnson, 2015; Hall, Goren, Chaiken, & Todorov, 2009; Hehman, Carpinella, Johnson, Leitner, & Freeman, 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A). This effect obtains across multiple countries and cultural contexts (Ahler, Citrin, Dougal, & Lenz, 2015; Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Buckley et al., 2007; Castelli, Carraro, Ghitti, & Pastore, 2009; Laustsen, 2014; Lawson, Lenz, Baker, & Myers, 2010; Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007; Lutz, 2010; Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berggren, 2009; Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2008; Sussman, Petkova, & Todorov, 2013). This effect is more pronounced in low-information elections or elections in which voters have little knowledge about the candidates involved. In low-information elections, voters know very little about the candidates and they are therefore more likely to use candidates' physical appearance to form impressions about them.

Capitalizing on this phenomenon, researchers demonstrated that in these low-information elections, including candidate images on the ballot encouraged voters to rely even more on candidate appearance (Banducci et al., 2008; Buckley et al., 2007; Johns & Shephard,

2011; Leigh & Susilo, 2009). Similarly, voters who watched a lot of television were more likely to base their candidate preference on candidates' personality characteristics (Keeter, 1987) and on candidates' physical appearance (Lenz & Lawson, 2011). Voters do form impressions based on candidate appearance that are directly associated with candidates' electoral success.

Trait evaluations influence vote intentions and predict electoral outcomes (Bishin, Stevens, & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, appearance-based inferences about politicians' personality characteristics (e.g., competence, dominance, sociability) are strongly associated with how candidates fare in an electoral context (Johns & Shephard, 2007; Olivola, Funk, & Todorov, 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A). While the idea that subjective judgments of personality traits are predictive of candidates' electoral success is at odds with theoretical portrayal of voters as rational and deliberate in their voting process, this effect is robust over several cultural contexts and over time. Competence judgments, in particular, are strongly predictive of vote intentions (Hall et al., 2009; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A). More specifically, when participants were shown images of candidate pairs and asked to provide judgments of which candidate appeared more competent or threatening, competence ratings positively predicted electoral success but threat ratings negatively predicted electoral success (Mattes et al., 2010). Moreover, trait evaluations predicted winning candidates' margin of victory in their elections. More specifically, candidates who were perceived to be higher on these key trait dimensions obtained a larger portion of the vote share compared to those who were rated lower on trait dimensions.

Interestingly, however, which traits predict candidate success depends on cultural context. There is some cultural variation as to which traits are most predictive of candidate success. For instance, perceived dominance predicted electoral success in the United States; however, perceived warmth or social competence served as a better predictor of candidate success in Japan and Taiwan (Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2012; Rule et al., 2010). Similarly, facial competence was a stronger predictor of candidates' electoral success in U.S. elections than in Korean elections (Na, Kim, Oh, Choi, & O'Toole, 2015).

Two central research paradigms have been employed to study the effect of appearance-based trait evaluations on candidate support. The first approach that links appearance-based cues to electoral success uses a hypothetical vote choice task in a laboratory setting. In these paradigms, participants are presented with photographs of unfamiliar candidate pairs comprised of the actual winners and runners-up across many elections, and participants are asked to provide a hypothetical vote judgment indicating which candidate they would support in an election. In casting their hypothetical vote, participants are simply asked to make a judgment between two candidate images that are typically standardized in size, color, and presentation. Overwhelmingly, hypothetical

votes favor the winning candidates (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Carpinella et al., 2015; Chiao, Bowman, & Gill, 2008; Hehman et al., 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A; Todorov et al., 2005). Interestingly, similar selections made by children five years old and younger are largely accurate as they are able to decipher winning from losing candidates. More specifically, children were shown photographs of unfamiliar candidate pairs and judged who they would like to be a boat captain. Their judgments were above chance at predicting election results, and their selections were on par with the hypothetical votes of adult study participants (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009). Therefore, the hypothetical vote paradigm demonstrates that perceivers accurately discriminate between winning and losing politicians.

The second approach that links appearance-based cues to electoral success uses trait evaluations based on single or paired candidate images. In this approach, participants are not asked to cast a hypothetical vote, rather they are presented with images and asked to judge how competent a single candidate appears or who appears more competent within candidate image pairs. These trait evaluations are then used to predict candidates' electoral success and margin of victory (Rule & Ambady, 2010B; Todorov, Olivola, Dotsch, & Mende-Siedlecki, 2015). Three personality characteristics have been most consistently used in this research paradigm—candidates' physical attractiveness, facial competence, or facial gender-typicality—the very three that have been applied in other aspects of political judgment. Judgments of these characteristics are made based solely on the appearance of unfamiliar political candidates predict candidates' electoral success and even their margin of victory in their respective elections (Ahler et al., 2015; Armstrong, Green, Jones, & Wright, 2010; Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Hehman et al., 2014; Lawson et al., 2010; Poutvaara et al., 2009; Todorov et al., 2005). Therefore, appearance-based judgments about candidates' personality characteristics provide accurate predictions of voters' behavior. Three aspects of candidate appearance—facial competence, physical attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality—have been tested extensively.

Facial Competence

Appearance-based perceptions of candidates' competence are highly predictive of their electoral success (for a review see Hall et al., 2009; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A). To measure facial competence, researchers presented study participants with image pairs of unfamiliar winning and losing candidates from an actual election and then asked participants to make a judgment concerning which candidate appeared more competent (Todorov et al., 2005). Study participants rating candidate faces were naïve, were not familiar with the candidates, and did not have any prior knowledge about them. Across an

aggregate number of races, candidates who were judged to be more competent were more likely to win their elections and won by a larger vote margin compared to candidates who were judged to be less competent (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2010; Atkinson, Enos, & Hill, 2009; Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A; Todorov et al., 2005). Therefore, higher ratings of facial competence were linked to a greater margin of victory in congressional races (Armstrong et al., 2010). Moreover, in U.S. congressional and gubernatorial elections, judgments of facial competence predicted up to 72% of the variance in the vote share (Ballew & Todorov, 2007). This effect is robust across several levels of government, perceivers of many ages, and over time.

Several race characteristics impact the extent to which facial competence predicts electoral outcomes. For example, the competitiveness of an election has the potential to impact the influence of perceived competence on candidates' electoral success. In primary races, facial competence perceptions predicted which presidential primary candidates would receive either Republican or Democrat Party nominations to run in a general election (Armstrong et al., 2010). In a simulation designed to determine how candidates would fare in an election when their faces reflected average facial competence, researchers demonstrated that facial competence had the potential to decide close elections; however, none of elections they looked at were decided within a margin that could be attributed to facial competence (Atkinson et al., 2009). That is, facial competence is just one of many factors that influence the outcome of elections. However, given that facial competence predicts unique variance in candidates' margin of victory even after statistically controlling for traditional electoral factors such as district competitiveness and partisanship (Atkinson et al., 2009) and other face-based trait inferences (e.g., attractiveness, age, babyfacedness, familiarity; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A), it remains a potent predictor of electoral success.

There is mixed evidence as to whether candidates' facial competence equally predicts electoral success for men and women. The majority of research in this area has focused on examining the role of facial competence in electoral races with two male candidates. Some research has shown that facial competence was more predictive of the electoral success of female candidates compared to male candidates (Olivola & Todorov, 2010A); however, other research has demonstrated that facial competence is a much better predictor of the electoral success of men than women (Chiao et al., 2008; Poutvaara et al., 2009). Importantly, the predictive nature of facial competence may depend on voter gender. For instance, male and female voters evaluated the competence of male candidates in a similar fashion, but they diverged in terms of their perceived competence of female candidates. In fact, female voters rated female candidates as more competent than male voters did (Lewis & Bierly, 1990).

Given these historic discrepancies, more recent research tested whether facial competence predicted the electoral success of both female and male candidates using a large sample of U.S. congressional candidates. Male candidates who appeared more competent based on judgments from their photographs were more likely to win their elections and were more likely to be selected in a hypothetical voting task. However, female candidates' facial competence was not related to their actual electoral success of their selection in the hypothetical vote choice task (Carpinella et al., 2015). This finding differs from past work (Hehman et al., 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A), and therefore additional research is needed to address these divergent findings.

In summary, research on facial competence has demonstrated that the ratings of perceived competence of unfamiliar candidates accurately predicts whether they win or lose their elections as well as their margin of victory. The effect of facial competence persists even when traditional variables such as partisanship and the competitiveness of the election are controlled for statistically. Finally, the evidence remains mixed as to whether facial competence equally predicts the electoral success of male and female candidates.

Physical Attractiveness

Physical attractiveness also confers numerous political benefits, the most consequential of which is greater electoral success. For example, candidates who were perceived to be more attractive were more likely to win their elections and to win by larger vote margins compared to their counterparts who were perceived as less attractive (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; King & Leigh, 2009; Lutz, 2010; Mattes & Milazzo, 2014; Rosar et al., 2008; Rosar & Klein, 2014). This effect was more pronounced for newer candidates or candidates who were challengers, and appearance-based cues did not have as large an impact on the electoral success of incumbent candidates (Leigh & Susilo, 2009).

Interestingly, the physical attractiveness of candidates was also associated with how many voters turned out for an election. For example, in districts in which attractive candidates ran for office, more voters turned out to the polls to cast their ballots relative to constituencies with less attractive candidates (Rosar et al., 2008). This may be because more attractive candidates received more attention from the electorate, which was demonstrated through voters' willingness to support these candidates. This effect was most pronounced when the voting constituencies leaned more conservative or right-wing (Berggren et al., 2015).

There is mixed evidence as to whether candidates' perceived attractiveness equally predicts electoral success for men and women. Some research has shown that its impact

differs for men and women (Sigelman, Thomas, Sigelman, & Ribich, 1986; L. Sigelman, Sigelman, & Fowler, 1987); however, other research has demonstrated a similar impact for female and male candidates (Lutz, 2010). Still other research has shown that the physical attractiveness predicted the success of female candidates more than male candidates (Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; Chiao et al., 2008; Poutvaara et al., 2009). Given the mixed support for the role of physical attractiveness for candidate support, additional research might benefit from exploring whether perceived attractiveness is equally predictive of the electoral success for men and women especially at different levels of office and across different cultural contexts (Fox & Oxley, 2003; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993B; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989).

Another area of debate is the relative importance of facial competence and attractiveness for candidate support (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2010; Johns & Shephard, 2011; Mattes et al., 2010; Praino, Stockemer, & Ratis, 2014). Some research indicates that physical attractiveness is a better predictor of candidates' electoral success compared to facial competence (Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; Lutz, 2010). Verhulst and colleagues (2010) argued that attractiveness judgments occurred earlier in the perceptual process compared to competence judgments and subsequently influenced the relationship between facial competence and electoral success. However, other research shows that facial competence outperforms physical attractiveness in terms of predicting candidates' electoral success (King & Leigh, 2009; Laustsen, 2014; Mattes et al., 2010; Olivola & Todorov, 2010A; Todorov et al., 2005). Olivola and Todorov (2010A) found that facial competence mediated the effect of attractiveness on electoral success and facial competence predicted candidates' electoral success over and above candidates' attractiveness. Recent research sought to resolve these discrepant findings. Laustsen (2014) found that facial competence mediated the effect of attractiveness on electoral success and facial competence predicted candidates' electoral success over and above attractiveness. Therefore, attractiveness may be used as a heuristic to personality inferences such as competence (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). Additional research can help disentangle the relative influence of attractiveness and facial competence.

Several contextual variables such as candidate gender and race competitiveness help to explain the inconsistencies with the relative importance of facial competence and attractiveness for candidate support. For example, attractiveness was more predictive of candidates' electoral success in intra-gender races; however, facial competence proved to be a stronger predictor of electoral success in inter-gender races (Praino et al., 2014). In addition, when elections were highly competitive, physical attractiveness was more predictive of candidates' electoral success; however, when elections were less competitive, facial competence was a stronger predictor of candidates' electoral success (Mattes & Milazzo, 2014). Therefore, despite empirical evidence that more attractive

candidates are perceived as more competent (Verhulst et al., 2010), the effect of attractiveness on electoral success is separate from that of facial competence (Berggren et al., 2010). Both appearance-based trait evaluations remain important for candidates' electoral success.

In summary, candidates who are perceived to be more attractive generally fare better in their elections. They tend on average to be more likely to win their elections and to garner a larger margin of victory compared to their less attractive counterparts. There is mixed evidence as to whether attractiveness trumps facial competence as a predictor of candidates' electoral success. However, it is clear that the predictive nature of attractiveness cues depends on the gender of the candidates in the election and how competitive the election is.

Facial Gender-Typicality

Facial gender-typicality is another aspect of candidate appearance that relates to candidate support. Recent research has linked facial gender-typicality to candidates' electoral success. In a hypothetical vote scenario, participants were asked to indicate for whom they would vote in an election based on the facial appearance of candidates in pairs of actual winners and losers. Among Republicans, female candidates who appeared more feminine and male candidates who appeared less masculine were more likely to be chosen in the hypothetical vote choice task (Carpinella et al., 2015). Among Democrats, less feminine female candidates and more masculine male candidates were more likely to be selected in the hypothetical vote choice task. In particular, a more feminine appearance corresponded with a larger margin of victory for female candidates, but facial gender-typicality did not impact male candidates' margin of victory (Hehman et al., 2014). Interestingly, this effect was most pronounced in conservative constituencies. That is, when female candidates appeared more feminine than their counterparts, they were even more likely to earn votes in conservative states compared to liberal states. Therefore, candidate support was affected by facial gender-typicality in a sample of national-level candidates.

Importantly, the relationship between facial gender-typicality and facial competence differs for men and women. Men were perceived as more competent when they appeared more masculine, indicating a linear relationship between facial gender-typicality and facial competence. However, women were perceived as more competent when they appeared neither too masculine nor too feminine (Olivola & Todorov, 2010A). In other words, having too extreme a feminine or masculine appearance did not benefit female candidates in terms of their competence ratings. The documentation of a non-linear relationship between facial gender-typicality and facial competence for female candidates

suggests that female candidates, especially female Democrats, may not uniformly benefit from a feminine appearance in terms of perceptions of their competence.

In conclusion, facial gender-typicality only predicted the electoral success of Republican politicians—more feminine women and less masculine men were more likely to win their elections (Carpinella et al., 2015; Hehman et al., 2014). Thus, the traditional gender roles advocated by the Republican Party were reflected in the facial cues of winning candidates. Additional research is required to determine why male Republicans benefited from a less masculine appearance.

Political Affiliation at Face Value

By just looking at an unfamiliar politicians' image, perceivers can decipher their political ideology and political party affiliation (Bull & Hawkes, 1982; Carpinella & Johnson, 2013A; Herrmann & Shikano, 2015; Jahoda, 1954; Kassar, 1984; Olivola, Sussman, Tsetsos, Kang, & Todorov, 2012; Olivola & Todorov, 2010B; Roberts, Griffin, McOwan, & Johnston, 2011; Rule & Ambady, 2010A; Samochowiec, Wanke, & Fiedler, 2010). In this research paradigm, participants were presented with photographs of unfamiliar politicians and asked to judge whether each person is a Democrat or Republican or a liberal or conservative. On average, participants reached above chance accuracy at this political party affiliation judgment task. That is, participants determine the political party and/or ideology of unfamiliar politicians just by looking at their images. However, when participants were provided with base-rate information (i.e., what proportion of the images that they view will be Democrat vs. Republican politicians), they were consistently less accurate than they would have been if they ignored appearance-based cues and simply guessed party affiliation in accordance with the base-rate information they were provided (Olivola & Todorov, 2010B). Therefore, appearance-based cues exert a large influence over party affiliation judgments, sometimes lessening judgment accuracy compared to base-rate information.

Upon demonstrating the influence of appearance-based cues on political party affiliation judgments, researchers began to ask exactly how this accuracy was achieved (Olivola & Todorov, 2010B; Wänke, Samochowiec, & Landwehr, 2012). Politicians' appearance conveys meaningful information that perceivers pick up on in order to render their party affiliation judgments. However, it was unclear which appearance-based cues were most informative for these social judgments. Increasingly, researchers have turned to investigate which visual cues compel accurate party affiliation judgments.

One appearance-based cue that perceivers use to render accurate party affiliation judgments is physical attractiveness. Original research by Jahoda (1954) found that perceivers judged more attractive politicians to be members of their own party. However, Bull and Hawkes (1982) found that conservative and liberal perceivers judged attractive politicians to be conservative. Similarly, Berggren, Jordahl, and Poutvaara (2015) found that conservative politicians were judged to be more attractive compared to liberal politicians. More recent research on this topic, however, supports the original findings by Jahoda (1954). More specifically, Herrmann and Shikano (2015) demonstrated that perceivers ascribed their own ideology to more attractive candidates. Physical attractiveness is one appearance-based cue that perceivers successfully utilize to deduce the ideology of unfamiliar politicians. However, more research is necessary to determine whether liberals and conservatives consistently overascribe their ideological viewpoints to unfamiliar politicians.

A second appearance-based cue that perceivers use to render accurate party affiliation judgments is facial gender-typicality or the extent to which a politician appears masculine or feminine. In the United States, the two major parties present different images with regard to gender roles. The Democratic Party is connected with socially liberal policies that aim to diminish gender disparities, whereas the Republican Party is linked with socially conservative policies that tend to bolster gender roles (Winter, 2010) and urge adherence to traditional gender roles (Lye & Waldron, 1997). To test whether the gendered nature of political parties in the United States manifested in politician appearance, a sample of members of Congress was examined. The facial structure of the faces of these politicians was measured to determine whether or not they appeared sex-typical (i.e., feminine woman or masculine man) or sex-atypical (i.e., masculine woman or feminine man). Participants were shown the photographs of unfamiliar members of Congress and made party affiliation judgments. The findings indicated that facial gender-typicality was more consequential for female politicians. More specifically, women who appeared more feminine were more likely to be judged to be Republican, whereas women who appeared less feminine were more likely to be judged to be Democrats (Carpinella & Johnson, 2013A). Therefore, facial gender-typicality is one additional appearance-based cue that perceivers use to make accurate party affiliation judgments. In particular, for female politicians, facial femininity was strongly associated with political conservatism.

Given the identification of attractiveness and facial gender-typicality as important appearance-based cues that facilitate accurate inference of politicians' party affiliation, some researchers sought to determine whether any perceiver characteristics influenced the accuracy of these judgments. For example, despite judging politicians' party affiliations at levels above chance, perceivers were still more likely to overascribe their own political ideology or political party to better-looking candidates or candidates who

were judged to be very competent (Herrmann & Shikano, 2015). Furthermore, perceivers used more relaxed criteria when they judged unfamiliar politicians to be members of the political party opposite from their own (Samochowiec et al., 2010). This tendency was more pronounced for conservative perceivers. Conservatives, therefore, were more reluctant than liberals to render a conservative ideology judgment to unfamiliar candidates and were faster than liberals to overexclude politicians from their in-group by providing a liberal ideology judgment (Wilson & Rule, 2014).

Taken together, this research on party affiliation and ideology judgments of unfamiliar politicians highlights the impact of appearance-based cues for politician perception. Perceivers' accuracy in judging the political party affiliation of unknown politicians is consistently above chance (Olivola & Todorov, 2010B). Politician attractiveness and facial gender-typicality are used in rendering party affiliation judgments. These visual cues shape how we perceive politicians when making basic category judgments, but they have far-reaching implications for shaping our perceptions of politicians' personality traits and leadership ability.

Broader Impacts

Some scholars have questioned the extent to which appearance-based cues can impact the actual success of political candidates. For example, when voters know a lot about a candidate's track record and stances on important policy issues, how much does their appearance really impact whether or not a voter would support this candidate? Indeed, much of the research in this area has purposefully used candidates or politicians who are unfamiliar to study participants. In voting constituencies where voters are highly familiar with the candidates who are running or in local elections where they may be more familiar and they may not be exposed to as much political advertising including candidate images, it stands to reason that appearance-based cues would not have as large of an impact on candidate support. Moreover, knowledge of a candidate's partisan information lessens the impact of candidate appearance on voters' behavior in some contexts (Iyengar & Barisione, 2015; Riggle, Ottati, Wyer, Kuklinski, & Schwarz, 1992). Nevertheless, voters' use of visual cues in forming impressions of political candidates and deciding whom to vote for remains robust across many levels of government and in several cultural contexts. Therefore, appearance-based politics can offer unique insight into the candidate impression formation process, and research has spotlighted contextual moderators of the effect of appearance-based cues on political perception.

Voters' use of appearance-based cues depends on several contextual factors. First, the media coverage of candidates can influence the extent to which appearance-based cues influence candidate perception. Experimental evidence demonstrated that visual cues other than candidate facial structure can impact how voters perceive them. For example, candidate clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry influence voters' perceptions of candidates independently from their facial features (Spezio, Loesch, Gosselin, Mattes, & Alvarez, 2012). Therefore, when voters see images of candidates in their televised advertisements, they may be forming opinions of them based in part on these peripheral cues in addition to the nonverbal information conveyed solely in their face. Furthermore, media coverage of candidates may emphasize certain candidate qualities over others, causing media coverage context to impact the influence of visual cues (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Content analyses have shown that negative news coverage of candidates' appearance led to less favorable candidate evaluations (Hayes, Lawless, & Baitinger, 2014). This can be especially consequential for female candidates, who tend to receive more media coverage focused on their appearance compared to male candidates (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009, 2011; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Heldman & Wade, 2011). Additional research should examine how media coverage of the appearance of female and male candidates may exacerbate voters' reliance on appearance-based cues in their impression-formation process and ultimately in their candidate support.

A second contextual factor that impacts perceptions of politicians and political candidates is the extent to which the election is a high-information or low-information election. Depending on how high profile the election is and how much money has been spent on advertising, voters may have very different exposure to images of candidates. Moreover, voters vary in the extent of their political knowledge/expertise. Low-information voters lack political knowledge/sophistication, whereas high-information voters possess more nuanced knowledge about American politics compared to the average voter. Furthermore, some voters are more strongly attached to their political party compared to other voters who are weaker partisans. Some research shows that high political sophisticates are just as swayed by candidate appearance as low sophisticates (Brusattin, 2012). However, other research finds that low-information and weak partisan voters are more likely to use candidate appearance as a heuristic in their voting process compared to high-information and strong partisan voters (Johns & Shephard, 2007; Lenz & Lawson, 2011; McDermott, 1997; Riggio & Riggio, 2010; Stockemer & Praino, 2015). When high-information voters use appearance-based cues in their judgments, they are more accurate in their candidate selection compared to low-information voters (Lau & Redlawsk, 2011). Thus, candidates can and do tailor their campaign strategies based on the characteristics of their electorate.

A second contextual factor that impacts politician perception is the ideological leaning of the voting constituency. For example, conservative candidates received more votes and enjoyed greater electoral success when they appeared more dominant, whereas liberal candidates had greater electoral success when they appeared less dominant (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015). This effect was particularly pronounced among male candidates. Similarly, the overall climate of the United States affected what type of candidate was supported. In times of war, facial dominance and masculinity were preferred, whereas in times of peace, facial femininity was valued more (Little, 2014; Little et al., 2007; Re, DeBruine, Jones, & Perrett, 2013; Van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). Therefore, voters may prefer different appearance-based cues in their political candidates depending on their own ideological leaning and the current political and cultural climate in the country.

In addition, researchers have begun to examine other sensory-based heuristics that voters use to form impressions of candidates. One cue that has gained prominence in the literature is voice pitch. Among political candidates, a lower-pitched voice was associated with greater electoral success (Klofstad, Anderson, & Peters, 2012). Voter ideology moderated this effect. More specifically, male candidates with lower-pitched voices were preferred more by conservatives than by liberals (Laustsen, Petersen, & Klofstad, 2015). Candidate gender also moderated this effect. A lower-pitched voice was advantageous against male opponents, whereas a higher-pitched voice was associated with greater electoral success against female opponents (Klofstad, 2015). One possible explanation for why lower-pitched voices are preferred is that candidates with lower-pitched voices are perceived to be older and thus more mature. Indeed, candidates with lower-pitched voices were also perceived to be older and more competent; however, the correlation between voice pitch and competence was stronger than voice pitch and age (Klofstad, Anderson, & Nowicki, 2015).

Another appearance-based cue that voters use to form impressions of candidates is height. Some evidence suggests that taller candidates have an electoral advantage. Candidates who were taller than their opponents received a greater percentage of the vote share and were more likely to be reelected (Stulp, Buunk, Verhulst, & Pollet, 2012). Moreover, voters' subjective perceptions of candidates' height changed depending on their electoral success. When voters supported a candidate, they tended to estimate his height to be taller than his opponents (Sorokowski, 2009). Therefore, among male candidates, being taller gave candidates an electoral advantage.

Conclusion

The research described here documents the consequences of appearance-based cues for perceptions of politicians' party affiliation, personality characteristics, and electoral viability. Furthermore, research indicates that a number of appearance-based cues, including facial competence, physical attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality, influence candidates' success. Future research should examine how the focal cues of facial competence, physical attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality become instantiated in the officials that run for and are elected to political office. Nevertheless, appearance-based judgments of politicians have far-reaching implications for their electoral success. Given the potency of these visual cues to impact perceptions of politicians, it would behoove candidates and campaign staff to stress that voters pay attention to the policy issues at hand. In addition, if voters learn more information about the candidates, they will be less likely to base their voting on appearance-based cues.

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