



The right look: Conservative politicians look better and voters reward it[☆]



Niclas Berggren^{a,b}, Henrik Jordahl^{a,c,d}, Panu Poutvaara^{c,d,e,f,*}

^a Research Institute of Industrial Economics (IFN), Box 55665, 102 15 Stockholm, Sweden

^b Department of Institutional, Experimental and Environmental Economics (KIE), University of Economics in Prague, Winston Churchill Square 4, 130 67 Prague 3, Czech Republic

^c CESifo, Germany

^d IZA, Germany

^e Department of Economics, LMU Munich, Schackstraße 4, 80539 Munich, Germany

^f Ifo Institute–Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich, Poschingerstraße 5, 81679 Munich, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 June 2015

Received in revised form 6 December 2016

Accepted 15 December 2016

Available online 21 December 2016

JEL classification:

D72

J45

J70

Keywords:

Beauty

Elections

Political candidates

Appearance

Ideology

Parties

ABSTRACT

Since good-looking politicians win more votes, a beauty advantage for politicians on the left or on the right is bound to have political consequences. We show that politicians on the right look more beautiful in Europe, the United States and Australia. Our explanation is that beautiful people earn more, which makes them less inclined to support redistribution. Our model of within-party competition predicts that voters use beauty as a cue for conservatism when they do not know much about candidates and that politicians on the right benefit more from beauty in low-information elections. Evidence from real and experimental elections confirms both predictions.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

[☆] We thank the co-editor Brian Knight as well as Heléne Berg, Andreas Bernecker, Christian Bjørnskov, Massimo Bordignon, Mikael Elinder, Olle Folke, Silke Friedrich, David Furtunato, Edward Glaeser, Andreas Graefe, Veronica Grembi, Friedrich Heinemann, Juha Ikonen, Daniel Klein, Peter Kurrild-Klitgaard, Erik Lindqvist, Pierre-Guillaume Méon, Mattias Nordin, Christopher Olivola, Elisabeth Palvölgyi, Torsten Persson, Alexander Todorov, Andreas Wagener, two anonymous referees, seminar participants at Aarhus University, Frankfurt School of Finance & Management, George Mason University, Masaryk University, Princeton University, Université Libre de Bruxelles, University of Cambridge, University of Mannheim, and Uppsala University, participants at the EPCS, CESifo Public Economics, IIPF, MPSA, EEA, and PCS conferences for helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version, Andrew Leigh and Alexander Todorov for providing data from Australia and the United States, Andreas Graefe for programming our surveys using MTurk, Eugen Dimant, Malin Olsson Tallås, Max Ostermayer and Thomas Wilhelmsson for excellent research assistance, and the Swedish Research Council (Berggren, grant No. 2103-734), the Torsten Söderberg Foundation (Berggren, grant No. E1/14), the Jan Wallander' and Tom Hedelius' Foundation (Jordahl, grant No. P2012-0130:1) and the Yrjö Jahnsson Foundation (Poutvaara, grant No. 5383) for financial support.

* Corresponding author at: Ifo Institute, Poschingerstraße 5, 81679 Munich, Germany.

E-mail addresses: niclas.berggren@ifn.se (N. Berggren), henrik.jordahl@ifn.se (H. Jordahl), poutvaara@ifo.de (P. Poutvaara).

1. Introduction

It is by now well established that politicians with an appealing appearance win more votes in elections (see, e.g., Todorov et al. 2005; Berggren et al. 2010; Lawson et al. 2010). After a number of studies demonstrating a relationship between appearance and electoral success, the challenge has been to establish causality and to determine what the political consequences are. Some studies have indeed provided evidence for the relationship being causal. Little et al. (2007) found that manipulation of facial photographs of real politicians can predict winners and losers in experimental elections. Lenz and Lawson (2011) showed that the positive relationship between votes and an appealing appearance is most pronounced among voters with low political knowledge who also watch a lot of TV. Such an interaction is exactly what one should expect from an underlying causal relationship. Ahler et al. (forthcoming) carried out a field experiment and found that voters in their treatment group, who received ballots that included photographs, were considerably more likely to vote for a candidate with an appearance advantage.

The political consequences of voters relying on candidates' looks are still largely unknown. If one side of the political spectrum has a beauty

advantage, it can expect greater electoral success and to have political decisions tilted in its favor.¹ We put forward the hypothesis that politicians on the right look better, and that voters on the right value beauty more in a low-information setting.² This is based on the observation that beautiful people earn more (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Scholz and Sicinski, 2015) and that people with higher expected lifetime income are relatively more opposed to redistribution (Fong, 2001; Alesina and Giuliano, 2011). In accordance with this reasoning we show that politicians on the right are more beautiful than politicians on the left in Europe, the United States, and Australia.

The general pattern that politicians on the right look better than politicians on the left implies that beauty can be used as a cue for ideology in low-information elections. We present a theoretical model for within-party competition, which takes place in proportional electoral systems with open lists and in primary elections. In such competition between candidates, beauty is used as such a cue for a conservative ideology in addition to being generally appreciated among voters. In low-information elections, the model predicts that beauty will benefit politicians on the right more than politicians on the left, since the use of beauty as an ideological cue among voters on the right works in tandem with the general appreciation of beauty. In high-information elections, the use of beauty as an ideological cue becomes less relevant and we expect beauty to benefit politicians on the left about as much as politicians on the right. These predictions are supported by experimental and observational evidence.

To analyze the electoral effects of beauty for candidates representing the left and the right, we turn to Finland, which is suitable for our analysis because of its proportional electoral system with multi-member districts, personal votes and within-party competition. Such a system allows us to study whether beauty matters more for candidates on the left or for candidates on the right, since electoral “beauty premia” can be calculated separately for different parties. Plurality-vote systems, in contrast, tend to have two main candidates who compete with each other, and candidates’ vote shares are either highly or perfectly negatively correlated, making it difficult or impossible to investigate whether the effect of candidate appearance differs between the left and the right.³

We study beauty premia in municipal and parliamentary elections. The former can be regarded as low-information and the latter as high-information elections, where voters know little and reasonably much, respectively, about candidates. We show that in municipal elections, a beauty increase of one standard deviation attracts about 20% more votes for the average non-incumbent candidate on the right and about 8% more votes for the average non-incumbent candidate on the left. In the parliamentary election, the corresponding figure is about 14% for non-incumbent candidates on the left and right alike. This makes clear that voters both on the left and on the right respond to beauty in both

types of elections, but that voters on the right are more responsive in a low-information setting.

Experimental election results confirm the observational findings from real elections. When matching candidates of similar age, the same gender and the opposite ideology in a random manner and asking respondents whom they would vote for solely on the basis of facial photographs (i.e., with low information), we find that candidates on the right win more often because they look better on average. Candidates on the right get a higher vote share, both from voters on the right and voters on the left, but with larger success among the former. The average margin of victory of the more beautiful candidate is also larger among voters on the right, indicating that they respond more to beauty. The similar patterns in real and in experimental elections suggest that the results in real elections reflect causal mechanisms. It is hard to see how reverse causality or omitted variable bias related to the election campaigns of candidates could influence voting in experimental elections by respondents from other countries, none of whom recognized any of the candidates.

We proceed as follows. In Section 2, we use data from three continents and establish that politicians on the right look better. We then, in Section 3, present a model of how voters react to beauty in intra-party competition and where we separate elections with low and high information. In Section 4, we show that subjects in an experiment use beauty as a cue for conservatism, as predicted by our model. In Section 5, we use data from Finland and show that when candidates compete against others in the same party, the effect of beauty on votes is about the same for candidates on the right and on the left in high-information elections, but twice as large for candidates on the right in low-information elections. Experimental election results in Section 6 confirm that voters on the right react more strongly to beauty in an election with no information apart from facial photographs of the candidates. Section 7 concludes.

2. The appearance gap between politicians on the left and on the right

2.1. The appearance gap on three continents

In comparing beauty evaluations of politicians representing the left and the right, we make use of our own data from Europe (candidates in Finnish municipal and parliamentary elections; Members of the European Parliament, MEPs),⁴ our own data on U.S. candidates in senatorial and gubernatorial elections, based on photos from Todorov et al. (2005) and Ballew and Todorov (2007), as well as data from Australia (candidates in an election to the House of Representatives), collected by King and Leigh (2009). These data are described in online Appendices A.1 and A.4.

Beauty evaluations of candidates from Finland and the United States as well as of MEPs are based on the following question⁵:

What is your evaluation of the physical appearance or attractiveness of this person compared to the average among people living in your country of residence?

¹ Studies have documented a relationship between appearance and electoral success in Australia (King and Leigh, 2009), Brazil and Mexico (Lawson et al., 2010), Denmark (Laustsen, 2014), Finland (Poutvaara et al., 2009; Berggren et al., 2010), France (Antonakis and Dalgas, 2009), Germany (Rosar et al., 2008), Ireland (Buckley et al., 2007), Japan (Rule et al., 2010), Switzerland (Lutz, 2010), the United Kingdom (Banducci et al., 2008; Mattes and Milazzo, 2014) and the United States (Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007; Atkinson et al., 2009; Benjamin and Shapiro, 2009; Olivola and Todorov, 2010).

² Budge and Robertson (1987, pp. 394–95) differentiate between left and right in terms of “economic-policy conflicts – government regulation of the economy through direct controls or takeover ... as opposed to free enterprise, individual freedom, incentives and economic orthodoxy.”. On the fruitful cross-national usage of left-right terminology, see Bobbio (1996) and Mair (2007).

³ Most of the studies on the relationship between appearance and electoral success focus on between-party competition (see Todorov et al., 2005; Benjamin and Shapiro, 2009) and thus demonstrate that an appearance advantage has the potential to affect the political power balance and policy outcomes. Therefore, to take the U.S. case, our result that Republicans on average look better than Democrats suggests that the Republicans gain extra votes, due to this appearance advantage. Poutvaara et al. (2009), Berggren et al. (2010) and Lutz (2010) estimate beauty premia in within-party competition but do not study electoral benefits for left and right separately.

⁴ MEPs were evaluated by two sets of respondents – see online Appendices A.1 and A.4 for details. The findings reported here are based on replies from American respondents who were recruited through Mechanical Turk (“MTurk”), while we provide findings based on replies from predominantly European respondents in Table B1 in online Appendix B.1. We use the American set as the main one in order to minimize the risk of recognition, and we see the latter as a sensitivity check. Reassuringly, the beauty advantage for the right is very similar (22% compared to 25% here). Each of the 296 American respondents evaluated 99 randomly chosen photographs, and none of them recognized any person. Lastly, with the American respondents we could check whether beauty evaluations of MEPs differed between young and old as well as between low- and high-educated respondents. We report the findings in Tables B2 and B3 in online Appendix B.2. We find that the results cannot really be differentiated: both age groups and both education groups evaluate MEPs on the right as more beautiful than MEPs on the left.

⁵ For our data analysis, the replies were coded from 1 to 5, as indicated.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5101898>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5101898>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)