



Registered report

Interpersonal accuracy in a political context is moderated by the extremity of one's political attitudes[☆]Igor Ivanov^{a,*}, Dominique Muller^b, Florian Delmas^b, Michaela Wänke^a^a University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany^b Univ. Grenoble Alpes, Univ. Savoie Mont Blanc, LIP/PC2S, Grenoble, France

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ABSTRACT

The political orientation of others can be perceived above chance level from looks alone. However, the effect is usually small and there is considerable interpersonal variance. We propose that the ability to accurately perceive others' political orientation is highest for those who hold more extreme political views themselves, as compared to people with more moderate views. This is because more extreme persons have a higher need to establish clear group boundaries and distinguish between political allies and adversaries. In six studies we investigate the proposed relationship, using participants from three different countries and two different sets of politicians as targets. In line with our hypothesis, attitude extremity was associated with higher accuracy. The robustness of our findings is supported by a small-scale meta-analysis over our studies. An alternative account that attitude strength in general – of which attitude extremity is a sub-facet – would lead to higher accuracy was not supported. Implications and suggestions for future research on interpersonal accuracy are discussed.

Accurately perceiving others is an important social skill (Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, 2009). Being able to recognize whom we can trust or who may harm us, whom to approach and whom to avoid, or who is friend and who is foe is undoubtedly of advantage in social interactions. Thus, it is not that surprising that inferences from brief exposures to persons' looks are often more accurate than would be expected by chance alone (Alaei & Rule, 2016; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Hall et al., 2009; Tskhay & Rule, 2013). Above chance accuracy has been shown in a variety of socially relevant domains, such as inferences about affective states (Carney, Colvin, & Hall, 2007), personality traits (Borkenau & Liebler, 1993; Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009; Vogt & Randall Colvin, 2003), intelligence (Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002), and—importantly—group memberships (Tskhay & Rule, 2013): Sexual orientation of gay vs. straight men was correctly identified from portrait pictures (Rule & Ambady, 2008) and similar results were obtained even for a highly complex social category like religious affiliation (Rule, Garrett, & Ambady, 2010). Additionally and pertinent to the current paper, there is substantial evidence that a person's political orientation can be perceived from facial portraits. Studies from various countries, using different targets and approaches, consistently found above chance

accuracy (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Carpinella & Johnson, 2013; Jahoda, 1954; Olivola, Sussman, Tsetsos, Kang, & Todorov, 2012; Rule & Ambady, 2010; Samochowiec, Wänke, & Fiedler, 2010; for a review see Wänke, 2015).

Although remarkably robust, the effect is usually rather small (Tskhay & Rule, 2013; Wänke, 2015). Moreover, and presumably a reason for the small effect size, there is considerable inter-individual variance in detecting political attitudes accurately: A re-analysis of data from Samochowiec et al. (2010, Study 2) shows that only 53.3% of the participants in the study perceived the political orientation of Swiss politicians significantly above chance level.¹

Against this backdrop, we look at inter-individual differences in accurately identifying others' political orientation. We argue that recognizing whether another person holds similar or opposing political views would be more of an issue for those who themselves hold more extreme views. For those on the extremes in-group/out-group boundaries would be clearer and presumably more important compared to moderates who can find ideological common ground with people from both sides. As a consequence, accuracy in detecting political orientation should be higher for those with more extreme political attitudes as compared to moderates.

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¹ This percentage was calculated by determining the lowest correlation which would be deemed significant, with $p < .05$ (given 39 degrees of freedom in the study). This value is $r = 0.309$. In other words, 53.3% of the participants had a value above $r > 0.309$.

1. Inter-individual differences in accurate person perception

When it comes to the organization of our social environment, attitudes allow for the categorization of others into good/bad or friendly/hostile (Katz, 1960; Maio, Olson, & Cheung, 2012; Vogel & Wänke, 2016), especially when little information about a target is available (Fazio & Williams, 1986; Stern, West, Jost, & Rule, 2013). We generally like those with similar attitudes and dislike those with opposing attitudes (Byrne, 1971; Chen & Kenrick, 2002; Rosenbaum, 1986). In this regard, political attitudes are a prime example that people show intolerance towards diverging opinions and distance themselves from the “other” political camp independent of whether they are left or right-oriented (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014; Chambers, Schlenker, & Collisson, 2013). Given the actual (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) and perceived (Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers, & Judd, 2015) high polarization and rising partisanship in politics, political attitudes and their underlying beliefs seem to represent a meaningful dimension along which people categorize themselves and others (Koch, Imhoff, Dotsch, Unkelbach, & Alves, 2016). If so, one may also expect that people acquired the skills to identify cues that distinguish between the political camps. They do so by paying attention to characteristics defining out-group members and thereby acquire knowledge about distinguishing cues that facilitate accurate categorization (Lindzey & Rogolsky, 1950). This has been termed the “Vigilance-Hypothesis” (Castano, Yzerbyt, Bourguignon, & Seron, 2002). Indeed, accurate perception can be learned: Familiarity with homosexuals increased accuracy, when assessing a target’s sexual orientation (Brambilla, Riva, & Rule, 2013). Likewise, receiving training led to increased accuracy in deception detection and the accurate assessment of emotional states (Blanch-Hartigan, Andrzejewski, & Hill, 2012).

Importantly, one could also expect higher vigilance the more relevant the distinction between the in- and out-group is for somebody. Indeed, higher accuracy was found for those highly identified with their in-group or those who wanted to distance themselves from out-group members (Blascovich, Wyer, Swart, & Kibler, 1997; Dorfman, Keeve, & Saslow, 1971). Overall, categorizations are more precise, when the task has higher self-relevance for the judge: Heterosexual women were more accurate in differentiating between heterosexual and homosexual men, when they were interested in engaging romantically with a stranger (Rule, Rosen, Slepian, & Ambady, 2011). People, for whom trustworthiness was very important, showed higher precision when distinguishing between cheaters and cooperators in a prisoner’s dilemma game (Shoda & McConnell, 2013). Recently, Bjornsottir, Alaei, and Rule (2017) argued that making correct personality judgments and categorizations in their social environment is more relevant for low social class individuals, because they need to rely more on their social environment for support than their high social class counterparts. Accordingly, they found that those lower in subjective socio-economic status had higher interpersonal accuracy in general and, relevant to this research, also when it came to the identification of the political orientation of fellow college students.

In the political arena it is certainly self-relevant to know who the political enemy is, but also on whom one might rely as a political ally. People with high attitude extremity are more likely to see those from the other side of the political spectrum as a threat (Crawford, 2014; Crawford & Pilanski, 2014). Hence, it becomes more important to be accurate when categorizing both in- and out-group members. As for moderates, they should feel less threatened, because they can identify with views from both sides of the political spectrum. Accordingly, the need to recognize dissenting views from faces should be less pronounced.

So far, some studies have already looked at the role of perceivers’ political orientation in relation to accuracy and did not find differences in accuracy between left- and right-wing participants (Rule & Ambady, 2010; Samochowiec et al., 2010). This may suggest that people on both sides have equally strong reasons to be able to distinguish between

Table 1
Studies overview.

#	N	Participants	Targets	No. of targets
1a	399	German and Swiss online sample	Swiss Politicians	82
1b	77	French university students	Swiss Politicians	82
2	75	French university students	French Politicians	268
3	153	German online sample	French Politicians	268
4a	118	German online sample	French Politicians	267
4b	105	German university students	French Politicians	268

Note. N = final number of participants included in the analysis; no. of targets = number of Politicians used as targets in the respective study overall. The number of politicians presented to any one participant varied, since in some studies targets were divided into several blocks in order to reduce strain on the raters. The number of ratings provided by participants is given in the study descriptions; Study 1a is a reanalysis of data published by Samochowiec et al. (2010, Study 2).

those who share their political views and those who do not. Additionally, several studies also reported a response bias: Perceivers were more likely to categorize targets as out-group members than in-group members (Samochowiec et al., 2010; Wilson & Rule, 2014). This so called in-group over-exclusion effect (Leyens & Yzerbyt, 1992) was stronger for perceivers with more extreme political attitudes, suggesting that it is highly relevant for them to distance themselves from the out-group. Assuming higher relevance for people with more extreme political attitudes in conjunction with findings showing more accuracy as a result of higher relevance, we propose an advantage of attitude extremity (no matter whether left- or right-wing) over moderate attitudes when it comes to the correct identification of others’ political attitudes.

2. Methodological approach

The first four studies had a similar procedure; therefore, we will summarize the methodology first (see also Table 1). A more detailed account of the experimental setup is provided in the according sections. We report all studies, which were conducted as part of this research project, as well as all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in these studies. No additional data were collected once data analysis was started.

In order to test our hypothesis, we first re-analyzed a previously published dataset (Samochowiec et al., 2010). We then conducted three conceptually similar studies (Studies 1b, 2 & 3). The four studies used two different sets of politicians as targets, a Swiss (Studies 1a & 1b) and a French (Studies 2 & 3) sample. Ratings were given by participants from Switzerland (Study 1a), Germany (Studies 1a & 3) and France (Studies 1b & 2). Studies 1a, 1b, and 2 examined attitude extremity as a moderator for the accuracy in identifying the political orientation of others. In addition, Study 3 also introduced interest in politics, or in other words expertise, as an alternative moderator. Two additional studies (Studies 4a & 4b) were carried out with German participants and French politicians as targets in order to explore an alternative explanation for the obtained results. Namely, since attitude extremity is a facet of attitude strength, it could be that our results are better explained by this broader concept. In all six studies, participants had to identify the political orientation of politicians from a portrait alone. The politicians were always presented one at a time and in a randomized order. When participants indicated that they recognized the politician the corresponding trial was excluded from analysis. Political attitudes of the participants were measured using self-report items.

We did not perform a formal a priori power analyses. Since we test a novel predictor it is not clear which effect size should have been expected. Nonetheless, using the software program GPower (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) we calculated the sample size that would have been required in order to detect a small-to-medium effect

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