Visual Political Communication: The Impact of Facial Cues from Social Constituencies to Personal Pocketbooks

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Abstract

Voters often use visual cues such as facial appearance when forming impressions of political candidates. Originally, psychological research on appearance-based politics focused on understanding whether or not these facial cues were consequential for political judgments. As this sub-field of study has expanded, the focus has shifted to understanding how and what facial cues voters utilize in their decision-making. From this perspective, inferences about political candidates are characterized by a number of interrelated appearance-based cues such as facial competence, physical attractiveness, and ingrained gender stereotypes that manifest in politicians' appearance. Importantly, this expanded research focus now includes a broader range of evaluative judgments that are influenced by candidates' facial appearance. Here, we provide an overview of the research on the use of appearance-based cues in political decision-making including initial information gathered about candidates, the evaluation of candidates' potential to be effective leaders, and the decision of whether or not to support candidates in an election.

In 1960, the first televised presidential debate demonstrated the power of visual cues to sway political judgments. Listeners of the radio broadcast of the debate thought that Richard Nixon won the debate as he spoke more confidently and persuasively about the issues. However, viewers of the televised debate believed that John F. Kennedy appeared more confident and presidential. Much of the post-debate rhetoric focused as much on style as it did on substance. The consensus was that Kennedy won, not because he debated better but because he looked better (Druckman, 2003). While the notion that appearance can overwhelm politician perception may have been surprising in 1960, such impacts are now widely recognized.

In today's era of news consumption, voters are increasingly inundated with images of political candidates. Voters see visuals of candidates from televised advertising, 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). The increasing amount of campaign spending dedicated to televised advertising and developing a campaign's online presence suggests that candidates understand the importance of controlling their visual image (Druckman et al., 2009; Sapiro et al., 2011). Indeed, such efforts are not without consequence. Including candidates' images on ballots impacts voter turnout and electoral outcomes (Banducci, Karp, Thrasher, & Rallings, 2008; Buckley, Collins, & Reidy, 2007; Johns & Shephard, 2011). Candidate visuals can trigger emotions and convey personality characteristics that in turn influence how favorably we evaluate candidates (Marcus, 1988). Despite the dominance of visuals in campaign communication, the empirical study of the consequences of candidates' visual appearance has only recently gained prominence in the scientific literature.

A growing body of research suggests that in addition to traditional factors (i.e., political party, ideology, incumbency; Conover & Feldman, 1989; Feldman & Conover, 1983), candidate appearance serves as a heuristic or cognitive shortcut by which voters form impressions of candidates (Lau & Redlawsk, 2011; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Voters may not be highly informed about the political process or may be unfamiliar with candidates running for political office. Nevertheless, they are able to make social judgments about candidates based on superficial cues such as their physical appearance with remarkable cognitive efficiency. For example, perceptions of facial competence, physical attractiveness, and facial gender typicality (i.e., masculinity/femininity) provide heuristic information that voters utilize when forming judgments about candidates, evaluating candidates, and deciding which candidate to support in an election. Previous reviews of the literature on appearance-based social inferences and electoral success have shown that evaluations of candidates' personality characteristics accurately predicted their electoral success. Facial competence, in particular, is a robust predictor of election outcomes (Hall, Goren, Chaiken, & Todorov, 2009; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a).

Psychologists, political scientists, and mass communication scholars have asked how and when observers use visual cues to evaluate politicians along multiple dimensions. Here, we describe some of the exciting insights from appearance-based politics research for candidate impression formation and candidates' electoral success. We summarize research findings that characterize appearance-based politics as consequential when individuals are gathering information about candidates, evaluating the potential of candidates to be effective leaders, and deciding whom to vote for in an electoral contest. We end by highlighting important new steps in this nascent field.

Political Party Affiliation at Face Value

From a mere glimpse of a politician's photograph, perceivers can discern their political party affiliation and ideology (Bull & Hawkes, 1982; Carpinella & Johnson, 2013a; Herrmann & Shikano, 2015; Jahoda, 1954; Kawar, 1984; Olivola, Sussman, Tsetsos, Kang, & Todorov, 2012; Olivola & Todorov, 2010b; Roberts, Griffin, McOwan, & Johnston, 2011; Rule & Ambady, 2010a; Samochowiec, Wanke, & Fiedler, 2010). Participants in these studies viewed the faces of unfamiliar elected politicians, unfamiliar non–politicians, or political candidates and judged them to be either Democrat/liberal/left–wing or Republican/conservative/right–wing. Across many trials, participants were above chance levels at determining the political allegiances of those depicted. Therefore, a politician's facial appearance compels meaningful information for social judgments. Initially, the means by which these judgments achieve accuracy was understudied (Olivola & Todorov, 2010b; Wänke & Landwehr, 2012); however, the visual cues that inform these social judgments are increasingly well documented.

One of the visual cues that perceivers use to infer unfamiliar politicians' political party affiliation is candidate attractiveness. Jahoda (1954) and Bull and Hawkes (1982) investigated the relationship between facial attractiveness and inferences about the political party affiliation of British Members of Parliament. Jahoda (1954) found that perceivers tended to think that better-looking candidates were from their own party, but Bull and Hawkes (1982) found that regardless of perceivers' political leanings, they consistently believed that more attractive candidates were more ideologically conservative. Berggren, Jordahl, and Poutvaara (2015) also found that conservative politicians were consistently rated as more attractive. However, recent research by Hermann and Shikano (2015) found that perceivers tended to over ascribe their own ideological viewpoints to better-looking candidates, thereby supporting the original findings by Jahoda (1954). Attractiveness is one appearance-based cue that perceivers use to infer the political party affiliation of unfamiliar politicians; however, more research is warranted to further disentangle these findings.

In addition to the utilization of candidates' attractiveness, candidates' gender influences perceivers' judgments of candidates' political party affiliation. When asked to provide a judgment of which of the two rival candidates in U.S. political elections was the Democrat (versus Republican), study participants relied on candidates' gender as a heuristic for their political party affiliation (Olivola et al., 2012). More specifically, when perceivers were shown images of two rival candidates in a mixed-gender election (one female candidate and one male candidate), they were more likely to render a Democrat judgment for the female candidate. Given that in the U.S. female politicians are significantly more likely to identify as Democrats, it comes as no surprise that gender is used as a heuristic for inferring candidates' party affiliation, especially for female candidates.

Another visual cue that perceivers use to infer politicians' political party is facial gender-typicality (i.e., masculinity/femininity). Research from our lab sought to further explore which visual cues compelled accuracy in judgments of political party affiliation. Our investigation stemmed from observations that the two major U.S. political parties extol dramatically different ideals about gender roles (Lye & Waldron, 1997). Specifically, Republicans endorse traditional gender roles and advocate for femininity among women, Democrats advocate for more progressive gender roles with less gender rigidity. We tested whether party judgments were driven by the gendered appearance of politicians. Using a sample of national-level politicians, we presented participants with photographs of unfamiliar politicians and asked them to categorize their political party (i.e., Democrat or Republican). Among female politicians, those who appeared more feminine were more likely to be accurately categorized as Republicans; those who appeared less feminine were more likely to be accurately categorized as Democrats (Carpinella & Johnson, 2013a). Thus, the facial gender-typicality of female politicians compelled accuracy in party affiliation judgments with facial femininity relating to political conservatism.

In addition to these general observations, perceiver ideology moderates the effect of appearance-based characteristics on judgments of politicians' ideology. For instance, perceivers used more liberal criteria when rendering ideology judgments for out-group than for in-group members (Samochowiec et al., 2010). Conservative perceivers, in particular, demonstrated a more pronounced tendency to categorize more unfamiliar politicians as liberals or out-group members (Wilson & Rule, 2014). Conservatives appeared reluctant to ascribe an in-group identity to unfamiliar candidates and therefore erred on the side of over-excluding candidates from their in-group.

Collectively, these findings showcase how appearance-based cues influence impressions of politicians. While these impacts are undeniably important, their relation to judgments of political candidates' leadership skills is likely to be more consequential in electoral contests.

Judgments of Leadership Potential

Visual cues can also be exploited to shape perceptions of political candidates' characteristics. In non-experimental work, broadcast media television news coverage and print media (i.e., newspaper coverage of candidates) have been content coded to understand how visual framing affects candidate perception. Generally, more favorable-appearing images led to more positive candidate evaluations. The visual information portrayed in television coverage of political candidates, for example, affected public opinion and favorability ratings of candidates. Specific factors that elicit more favorable evaluations include camera angles looking up at a candidate (Kepplinger, 1982; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991; Rosenbergnd & McCafferty, 1987), portrayals of a candidate's cheerful disposition (Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987), and depictions of dynamic behavior (e.g., shaking hands and kissing babies; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). Similar effects have been observed when a candidates' appearance was strategically manipulated. When a

candidates' image was altered to appear more or less visually favorable (i.e., judged by perceivers to be a more or less flattering photograph), evaluations of the candidate's trait characteristics and overall evaluative preferences of observers changed concomitantly (Barrett & Barrington, 2005; Rosenberg, Bohan, Mccafferty, & Harris, 1986; Rosenberg, Kahn, Tran, & Le, 1991; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987).

In addition to the direct impacts of visible cues, judgments of candidates are also driven by visually mediated inferences about politicians' personality characteristics. Indeed, perceived personality traits reliably inform impressions of political candidates (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1997, 1999), and such inferences occur from a mere glimpse of a photograph. Perceived traits (e.g., intelligence, leadership, honesty, caring, experience) informed voter' candidate impressions and evaluations (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Funk, 1997, 1999). For example, higher ratings of candidates' intelligence, leadership, and honesty predicted more favorable evaluations of candidates even when statistically controlling for influential political factors such as ideology, party, and candidate issues (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Importantly, these consequential trait impressions are informed by visual cues such as facial similarity, attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality.

Observers also exploit idiosyncratic physical characteristics when forming impressions of politicians. For example, facial similarity impacts voters' evaluations of political candidates. When participants' faces were morphed with unfamiliar congressional candidates or familiar presidential candidates, participants preferred the candidate whose face had been morphed with their own face (Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006; Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, & Collins, 2008). Among unfamiliar candidates, self-similar images elicited more positive affect, relative to images that were not self-similar. This tendency was most pronounced for weak partisans, independents, and male observers. For example, men judged a candidate more favorably when the candidate's face had been morphed with their own face; however, women rated the candidate face morphed with their own more negatively (Bailenson et al., 2006). It is possible that this gender difference between male and female perceivers was due to the male candidates appearing more feminine when their faces were morphed with those of the female perceivers.

Recent research indicates that familiarity may play a larger role in trait evaluations than facial similarity. In order to determine whether facial similarity or familiarity drove the evaluation effects, Tanner and Maeng (2012) morphed unfamiliar stock photographs with images of famous people (e.g., Tiger Woods and George Bush). Even though participants were not consciously able to report that the morphed images they viewed contained photographs of famous people, they rated these faces as more trustworthy compared to facial morphs of two unfamiliar people. This conceptual replication of Bailenson et al. (2009) outside of a political context suggests that familiarity rather than facial similarity drives trait evaluations.

Physical attractiveness also predicts candidate evaluations (Verhulst, Lodge, & Lavine, 2010). In a series of studies in which perceivers were asked to judge the attractiveness of candidates, candidates who were rated as more attractive were evaluated more favorably than their less attractive counterparts (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2015; Budesheim & DePaola, 1994). Interestingly, the impact of attractiveness on candidate favorability ratings remained robust, even when candidates' actual personality characteristics were described explicitly (Budesheim & DePaola, 1994). The impact of candidate attractiveness on broader evaluations was most pronounced among participants who showed lower levels of political sophistication/expertise or who were distracted during the evaluation task (Hart, Ottati, & Krumdick, 2011), implying that a large portion of the electorate might be influenced by a candidate's physical attractiveness.

Gendered information also informs candidate trait judgments. Women are stereotyped to be nurturing and compassionate; men are stereotyped to be assertive and aggressive (Alexander &

Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a). When activated, gender stereotypes impact leadership evaluations (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Leeper, 1991) and ultimately undermine support for female political candidates (Brown, Heighberger, Shocket, 1993; Dolan, 2010; Kahn, 1992; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that visible gender cues impact consequential impressions in a similar fashion. Facial cues that denote dominance overlap with facial masculinity, and facial cues that denote neoteny overlap with facial femininity (Friedman & Zebrowitz, 1992). These overlaps are prone to impact candidate impressions, broadly, and recent research has begun to test the mechanisms by which these effects emerge (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Interestingly, appearance-based trait assessments are often heavily influenced by partisan stereotypes (Rahn, 1993), which are themselves gendered in nature. Gender and partisan stereotypes overlap such that feminine characteristics are associated with the Democratic Party and masculine characteristics are associated with the Republican Party (Hayes, 2011; Winter, 2010). These gendered partisan stereotypes were borne out in our own research that probed perceptions of elected Congressional Representatives.

Based on naïve judgments of politicians' photographs, feminine-appearing female Democrats and masculine-appearing female Republicans were judged as more competent compared to their counterparts. Conversely, less masculine-appearing male Democrats were rated as warmer than their more masculine-appearing counterparts (Carpinella & Johnson, 2013b). These findings indicate that while male candidates were presumed to be competent, facial gender-typicality influenced perceptions of their warmth. Conversely, while female candidates were presumed to be warm, facial gender-typicality shaped perceptions of their competence. Thus, gendered facial cues impacted judgments of politicians along a counter-stereotypic dimension. It is worth noting that judgments of competence tend to have a stronger impact on evaluations than judgments of warmth (Funk, 1997). This asymmetry implies that gendered cues and the impressions that they elicit may be more consequential for female candidates than for male candidates.

Other characteristics that are politically stereotyped can also be inferred from visual cues. Republicans are stereotyped as dominant, mature, and strong leaders, while Democrats are stereotyped as likeable, trustworthy, and compassionate (Hayes, 2005). These stereotypes are reflected in judgments of politicians' photographs, although the political leaning of perceivers moderates this effect. More specifically, conservatives judged unfamiliar politicians as more likeable and trustworthy when their faces appeared more stereotypically Republican than when they appeared stereotypically Democrat (Wilson & Rule, 2014). Candidates benefitted from an appearance that was in line with the traits associated with their respective parties; that is, Republicans benefited from appearing competent but Democrats benefitted from appeared intelligent (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, if candidates from either party ran in heavily conservative districts, it behooved them to appear stereotypically Republican because conservative voters preferred candidates who appeared stereotypically Republican (Olivola et al., 2012).

Together, these findings highlight how visual cues to candidate and politician appearance influence impressions and evaluations of them. Politicians' facial similarity, attractiveness, and gender-typicality impact how favorably voters perceive them across a range of personality characteristics and leadership trait dimensions. Finally, visual cues impact how candidates actually perform in elections.

Casting a Ballot

We have established that visible cues in the face impact observers' judgments of politicians, ranging from categorizations (e.g., political party) to broader impressions of traits that are valued among politicians (e.g., competence). For these judgments to be consequential in society, they

must not only impact impressions measured by surveys but also voting behaviors enacted in electoral decisions. Research on this point is clear: visual cues predict election outcomes.

Nonverbal cues convey important information about candidates' viability in an electoral contest. Based on a few seconds of exposure to candidates' nonverbal behavior in videos of gubernatorial debates, participants' judgments of the "winner" accounted for 20 percent the vote share in the actual election (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009). Often, even a static image is sufficient to accurately infer electoral outcomes. For example, in low-information elections where candidates were relatively unfamiliar to voters, they were more likely to use candidates' physical appearance to form impressions of candidates. This effect was especially pronounced in low-information elections in which candidate images were included on the ballot (Banducci et al., 2008; Buckley et al., 2007; Johns & Shephard, 2011; Leigh & Susilo, 2009). Moreover, less informed voters who reported watching a lot of television were more likely to rely on candidates' appearance when deciding who to vote for in an election (Lenz & Lawson, 2011). Thus, observers can (and do) form appearance-based impressions that are strongly tethered to electoral success.

Indeed, perceivers have demonstrated a remarkable ability to distinguish political winners from losers based solely on facial photographs of political candidates (Ahler, Citrin, Dougal, & Lenz, 2015; Carpinella, Hehman, Freeman, & Johnson, 2015; Hall et al., 2009; Hehman, Carpinella, Johnson, Leitner, & Freeman, 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). This relationship appears to be widespread, predicting electoral outcomes across many countries with varying political contexts (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Buckley et al., 2007; Castelli, Carraro, Ghitti, & Pastore, 2009; Lawson, Lenz, Baker, & Myers, 2010; Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007; Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berggren, 2009; Sussman, Petkova, & Todorov, 2013).

Given that the impression formation process is driven by personality traits and characteristics, it may not be surprising that trait evaluations are subsequently consequential for candidate support. Appearance-based inferences about politicians' personality traits and leadership abilities including perceived competence, dominance, sociability, and warmth predicted candidates' electoral success (Bishin, Stevens, & Wilson, 2006; Funk, 1997; Johns & Shephard, 2007; Olivola, Funk, & Todorov, 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). These relations also explained observed differences in vote shares for previous election contests.

The relation of these trait evaluations to electoral success varies cross-culturally. Whereas perceived dominance and power predicted electoral success among U.S. political candidates, perceived warmth predicted electoral success in Japan (Rule et al., 2010). Additional research has documented cross-cultural differences in the predictive nature of social inferences and their influence on candidates' electoral success. More specifically, competence judgments were less accurate at predicting electoral outcomes in Korean elections compared to American elections; whereas, social competence or one's ability to navigate interpersonal interactions was a stronger predictor of electoral outcomes in Taiwanese elections compared to American elections (Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2012; Na, Kim, Oh, Choi, & O'Toole, 2015).

The evaluative judgments that are tethered to visual cues have downstream consequences for voters' decisions. Broadly, appearance-based trait inferences were shown to drive vote intentions (Hall et al., 2009; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Trait assessments based on candidate images also predicted election outcomes. When participants were presented with pairs of candidate images and asked to judge which person appeared more competent or threatening, competence ratings were positively associated with electoral success, but threat ratings were negatively associated with electoral success (Mattes et al., 2010). Similarly, perceptions of social dominance predicted electoral success via facial competence; however, when competence was controlled for, candidates who were seen as high on social dominance were more likely to lose their

elections (Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2014). While the notion that subjective perceptions of candidates' personality characteristics can predict election outcomes may be at odds with idealized notions of a discerning and deliberative electorate, it is a robust effect that has been replicated across countries and elected positions and is an effect that holds over time.

Similarly, other judgments made for politicians' photographs provide sufficient information for observers to predict electoral outcomes. Two distinct paradigms demonstrate this effect. The first approach linking visually mediated judgments and electoral success utilizes a hypothetical vote choice task, which is generally conducted in a laboratory setting. Participants are presented with photographs of unfamiliar candidate pairs – the actual winners and runner-ups from electoral contests – and are asked for whom they would vote in an election. When provided with winner and loser candidate images pairs, participants cast their hypothetical vote. Overwhelmingly, these "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). Choices made by children as young as five years old accurately discriminate political winners from losers. Children indicated which candidate from pairs of images they would trust to be a boat captain. These choices were reliably above chance at predicting election results retrospectively (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009). Therefore, even devoid of an explicitly political context, young children accurately select political winners. Thus, in studies in which respondents cast hypothetical ballots, naïve observers accurately identify winning politicians.

The second approach to linking visually mediated judgments and electoral success utilizes ratings of personality characteristics of single or paired candidate photographs. These trait ratings are then used to statistically predict the candidates' electoral success and margin of victory (Rule & Ambady, 2010b; Todorov, Olivola, Dotsch, & Mende-Siedlecki, 2015). Research using this approach to study appearance-based politics and electoral success has focused primarily on three main characteristics: facial competence, candidate attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality. Ratings of these characteristics based solely on the candidate's appearance and without regard for any additional information regarding candidates' credentials predicted a substantial share of the variance in electoral outcomes (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). Thus, quick judgments made about candidates' characteristics provide accurate predictions of actual constituents' voting behavior. Three aspects of candidate appearance – facial competence, perceived attractiveness, and facial gender-typicality – have been tested extensively.

Facial competence

A robust literature has now shown that judgments of candidates' competence based solely on their facial appearance are the strongest and most accurate predictor of their electoral success (for a review, see Hall et al., 2009; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). To measure facial competence, research participants were presented the photographs of two unfamiliar politicians – the winner and runner up from an election – and then asked to provide a judgment of who appears relatively more competent (Todorov et al., 2005). Politicians whose faces were identified to be more competent achieved more favorable electoral outcomes in their actual elections.

Higher ratings of facial competence are associated with a greater chance of victory in an election and a higher percentage of the vote share gained. Within paired images of actual winning and losing candidates, those who were judged to appear more competent were more likely to win their elections (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2010; Atkinson, Enos, & Hill, 2009; Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a; Todorov et al., 2005). In addition,

observers' judgments of facial competence predicted candidates' the margin of victory in Congressional races (Armstrong et al., 2010). More specifically, in U.S. gubernatorial and congressional elections, judgments of facial competence predicted up to 72% of the variance in electoral vote share (Ballew & Todorov, 2007).

These effects are widespread. Facial competence ratings predicted which U.S. presidential primary candidates would receive either Republican or Democrat Party nominations to run in a general election (Armstrong et al., 2010). This effect was most pronounced in highly competitive races; in these races, the out-party, or the party that was not in office, was more likely to back candidates who appeared more facially competent. By simulating how challengers would have fared in an electoral contest had their face appeared of average facial competence, the estimated effects showed that facial competence had the potential to swing close electoral races (with estimates of up to four percentage points); however, none of the examined elections were decided on the basis of facial competence (Atkinson et al., 2009). Therefore, facial appearance is just one of many factors which impact the candidate impression formation process and ultimately election outcomes. Finally, facial competence predicted the outcomes in general elections even after controlling for other important electoral factors (e.g., district competitiveness and partisanship; Atkinson et al., 2009) and other face-based trait inferences (e.g., attractiveness, age, babyfacedness, familiarity; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Therefore, the influence of facial competence on candidates' electoral success is robust to other traditional factors that are known to influence the outcomes of elections.

Given that the majority of elections around the world involve male versus male races, research on facial competence has focused on electoral races with candidates of the same gender, namely, male versus male races. The evidence is mixed, however, as to whether competence judgments predict the electoral success for both female and male candidates. Some researchers found that facial competence was actually more predictive for the electoral successes of women than men (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). However, others found that facial competence only predicted electoral success for male politicians (Chiao et al., 2008; Poutvaara et al., 2009). Furthermore, some researchers found gender differences among voters. When evaluating male candidates, men and women evaluated them as equally competent; however, women rated female candidates higher on facial competence than men did (Lewis & Bierly, 1990). Moreover, facial competence assessments made by male voters, but not female voters, predicted candidates' electoral success (Chiao et al., 2008).

Based on the mixed support for facial competence impacting the electoral success of female candidates, we tested whether facial competence predicted the electoral success of both men and women in a larger sample of congressional candidates. Among male candidates, those who appeared more competent where more likely to win their elections and were more likely to be chosen in a hypothetical voting task. Among female candidates, in contrast, facial competence was unrelated to their electoral success (Carpinella et al., 2015). These findings do diverge from some past work (Hehman et al., 2014; Olivola & Todorov, 2010a), and more research is necessary to explain these divergent findings.

Attractiveness bonus

Physical attractiveness also confers numerous political benefits, the most consequential of which is greater electoral success. Physical attractiveness predicted electoral success across multiple cultural contexts. In studies probing candidate attractiveness and electoral success, attractive candidates were more likely to win their elections and to win by greater margins compared to their less attractive counterparts (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; King & Leigh, 2009; Lutz, 2010; Mattes & Milazzo, 2014; Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2008; Rosar & Klein,

2014). Attractiveness had a larger impact on the vote share garnered by challengers but less of an impact on the margin of victory for incumbent candidates (Leigh & Susilo, 2009). Candidate attractiveness was also related to voter turnout. Constituencies with more attractive candidates competing were more likely to have higher voter turnout relative to other districts in their region (Rosar et al., 2008). Furthermore, the attractive candidate advantage was moderated by situational factors. For instance, the effect was more pronounced among conservative constituencies (Berggren et al., 2015).

The evidence is mixed as to whether attractiveness judgments predict the electoral success for both female and male candidates. Some researchers found that attractiveness did not directly impact support for female candidates (C. K. Sigelman, Thomas, Sigelman, & Ribich, 1986; L. Sigelman, Sigelman, & Fowler, 1987), whereas other researchers have demonstrated that candidate attractiveness predicted candidate support equally for male and female candidates (Lutz, 2010) or that the effect was even stronger for female candidates than it was for male candidates (Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; Chiao et al., 2008; Poutvaara et al., 2009). Therefore, additional research needs to be done to examine whether candidate attractiveness informs candidate electoral success for men and women.

There is also some debate about the relative impact of facial competence and attractiveness on candidates' electoral success. Facial competence and attractiveness do appear to be related concepts, and these social inferences may be based on a similar set of facial cues. Faces that were modified to appear highly competent were rated as more attractive than faces that appeared lower in facial competence (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Highly attractive candidates were also judged to be more competent compared to less attractive candidates (Verhulst et al., 2010). Several studies have examined the relative contribution of attractiveness and facial competence, although many find that both matter for candidates' electoral success (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2010; Johns & Shephard, 2011; Mattes et al., 2010; Praino, Stockemer, & Ratis, 2014). Some researchers showed that attractiveness outperformed facial competence in predicting electoral outcomes (Berggren et al., 2010, 2015; Lutz, 2010); however, other researchers demonstrated that facial competence better predicted electoral success (King & Leigh, 2009; Laustsen, 2014; Todorov et al., 2005), or that candidates who looked attractive but also appeared incompetent lost votes (Mattes et al., 2010).

On this issue of the relative impact of facial competence and attractiveness on candidates' electoral success, Olivola and Todorov (2010a) argued that facial competence mediated the effect of attractiveness of candidates' electoral success and that facial competence explained candidates' electoral success over and above the effect of attractiveness. However, Verhulst and colleagues (2010) argued that assessments of candidates' attractiveness occurred earlier in the perceptual process than competence evaluations and therefore compelled the association between facial competence and electoral success. More specifically, candidates that were judged to be highly attractive were in turn evaluated as more competent, which increased their likelihood of electoral success. Recent research has further sought to disentangle this effect with an experimental test of the direct and indirect effects of facial competence and attractiveness on electoral success. Laustsen (2014) found that facial competence mediated the effect of candidates' attractiveness on their electoral success and that facial competence predicted candidates' electoral success over and above what can be accounted for by attractiveness. Taken together, this research suggests that attractiveness may be used as a heuristic in and of itself to infer personality characteristics such as competence (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). An experimental test, which holds attractiveness constant while experimentally manipulating facial competence, would provide a stronger test of this hypothesis.

Several contextual factors may explain the differential impact of candidate attractiveness and facial competence. For example, attractiveness mattered more for intra-gender races, but facial

competence was a better predictor of electoral success in inter–gender races (Praino et al., 2014). In addition, district competitiveness also moderated the impact of attractiveness and facial competence on electoral success. More specifically, in Great Britain, attractiveness predicted electoral success when elections were close, but facial competence predicted electoral success in less competitive races (Mattes & Milazzo, 2014). Additional research is necessary to further investigate how social context may moderate the relative importance of facial competence and attractiveness on election outcomes.

Facial gender-typicality

Recently, facial gender–typicality has emerged as an additional factor that predicts candidates' electoral success. In one hypothetical voting task, for example, naïve participants identified which candidate they would support in an election from pairs of photographs depicting congressional winners and losers (Carpinella et al., 2015). Among Republicans, female candidates who appeared more feminine and male candidates who appeared less masculine were more likely to be selected in the vote choice task. Among Democrats, less feminine female candidates and more masculine male candidates were more likely to receive a hypothetical vote. Therefore, candidate support was influenced by facial gender–typicality in a sample of national–level candidates.

In other research, when the faces of female candidates from congressional and gubernatorial races contained gender-atypical cues (i.e., masculine cues for women or feminine cues for men), this adversely impacted their electoral success (Hehman et al., 2014). In particular, a more feminine appearance predicted an increased likelihood of votes for female candidates. Gendered facial cues did not impact male candidates' margin of victory. Furthermore, this effect was most pronounced in conservative constituencies. That is, when women's facial cues were more feminine, they were even more likely to earn votes in conservative states compared to liberal states. Therefore, facial gender–typicality most strongly predicted the electoral success of Republican politicians, with more feminine women being more likely to win their respective elections (Carpinella et al., 2015; Hehman et al., 2014). This mandate reflects the traditional gender roles advocated by the Republican Party.

Overall, the relationship between facial gender-typicality and facial competence differs for men and women. Among male candidates, when their faces were manipulated to appear more facially competent, they were also judged to be more masculine (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). This suggests a clear linear relationship between facial competence and facial masculinity for male candidates. However, for female candidates, the relationship is non-linear and therefore more complicated. More specifically, female candidates who appeared neither too masculine nor too feminine were judged to be the most competent-looking, whereas female candidates who looked highly masculine or highly feminine were perceived as relatively less competent (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Therefore, conveying additional feminine characteristics may hurt the electoral prospects of already feminine-looking female candidates (especially female Democrats), but may benefit relatively masculine-looking female candidates.

The association between facial gender-typicality and facial competence may also vary across different levels of office. Local and state-level offices are stereotyped to be more feminine compared to national offices and therefore the gender stereotypes of the level of office may impact the extent to which gender-typical candidates are preferred in the electoral process (Fox & Oxley, 2003; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). The relationship between facial gender-typicality and facial competence is complicated for female candidates and it warrants additional study.

Broader Impacts

Skeptics about the real-world effects of candidates' facial appearance have voiced concerns over how much appearance really matters in actual electoral contests. Such concerns are exacerbated in contexts where constituents are highly familiar with the political candidates and among demographics that are characterized by a high degree of political sophistication regarding candidates' prior experience, policy stances, and partisan leanings. In some contexts, appearance-based cues were shown to exert less influence on candidate evaluations and support when partisan information was made known to study participants (Iyengar & Barisione, 2015; Riggle, Ottati, Wyer, Kuklinski, & Schwarz, 1992). Yet in other contexts, appearance-based cues exerted influence on election outcome even when partisan information was available. For example, facial competence predicted electoral outcomes, over and above the effect of information about candidates' party affiliation (Olivola & Todorov, 2010a). Even in elections where candidate partisan identification was included on the voting ballots, candidates who ran in right-leaning districts benefited from appearing stereotypically Republican (Olivola et al., 2012). Voters' use of visual cues in their decision-making process remains robust, suggesting that appearance-based politics enjoys a rightful place alongside partisan politics in psychological and political science research. Indeed, such investigations have begun to illuminate the very circumstances in which appearance might show a particularly strong impact.

Voters' use of visual cues depends on a number of contextual factors. First, media coverage of political candidates can emphasize their appearance, thereby impacting how much sway visual cues have on candidate evaluations. Second, greater candidate familiarity can dampen the influence of appearance-based cues on electoral outcomes. Finally, social-contextual factors such as constituents' ideology or the overarching political climate can moderate which appearance-based cues are more central to candidates' electoral success.

Given the large body of experimental evidence which suggests that candidate appearance impacts voters' candidate evaluations, recent research has examined whether media coverage of candidate appearance influences candidate evaluations. Media coverage of candidates may emphasize certain characteristics over others, causing media context to be another contributing factor to the potency of visual cues (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Peripheral cues such as candidate clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry have an impact on the impressions that voters' form about candidates' use of nonverbal cues other than facial features (Spezio, Loesch, Gosselin, Mattes, & Alvarez, 2012). Importantly, negative news coverage regarding candidates' physical appearance resulted in less favorable candidate evaluations (Hayes, Lawless, & Baitinger, 2014). In some cases, women candidates received more media coverage focused on their appearance and personality characteristics overall (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009, 2011; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Heldman & Wade, 2011). Moreover, voters' levels of media exposure combined with their political sophistication can influence the extent to which appearance-based cues impact their candidate evaluations. For instance, less informed voters who reported greater television exposure were swayed more by the appearance of candidates in their decisions concerning whom to support in elections (Lenz & Lawson, 2011). More research is necessary to parse out how these differences in media coverage may impact candidate support in the long-term.

The majority of empirical studies on appearance-based politics have focused their study on unfamiliar politicians or political candidates. However, political campaigns vary in their competitiveness and in voters' awareness of information about candidates. Low-information voters or voters who lack political knowledge/sophistication and weaker identified partisans were more

likely to use candidate appearance as a heuristic in their voting process compared to highly involved and knowledgeable voters (Johns & Shephard, 2007; Lenz & Lawson, 2011; McDermott, 1997; Riggio & Riggio, 2010; Stockemer & Praino, 2015). However, when political experts use heuristics such as candidate appearance, they are more accurate in their candidate selection judgments compared to those who are less informed about politics (Lau & Redlawsk, 2011). Therefore, candidates may want to consider their image in areas where these types of voters are present. Additional research should investigate under what contexts weak and strong partisans use appearance-based cues.

The ideological-leaning of a constituency influenced the impact of visual cues on candidates' electoral success (Olivola et al., 2012). More specifically, regardless of candidates' actual partisan identification, if they ran in right-leaning districts, they garnered more votes if they appeared stereotypically Republican. In addition, dominant-appearing candidates were more likely to win their elections with conservative voters; however, liberal voters were more likely to support a candidate with a non-dominant appearance (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015). Finally, the facial cues that predicted candidate support varied depending on whether the electoral context was described as a time of war or a time of peace. More specifically, facial masculinity was valued in leaders during a time of war, while facial femininity was seen as more desirable during a time of peace (Little et al., 2007; Little, 2014; Re, DeBruine, Jones, & Perrett, 2013).

There remains much to examine about the role of context in appearance-based politics. First, research should examine how these facial cues to competence, dominance, or facial gender-typicality become instantiated in the officials that run for and are elected to political office. Are people who appear more competent, for instance, more likely to run for office, or are political parties more likely to nominate individuals who look the part? Second, additional research should be conducted to investigate the role of social context in moderating the effect of these facial cues on consequential political outcomes. More specifically, when does facial competence matter most – in times of economic hardship, at the national level of politics, or for men more than women? Looking at the contextual factors such as the political climate, the level of government, and candidate gender will help to specify the boundary conditions for the impact of politician appearance on political decision-making.

Conclusion

In summary, people are sensitive to appearance-based cues in political candidates and elected officials. Subjective assessments of candidates' personality characteristics significantly predict electoral outcomes. Judgments of attractiveness, competence, and gender-typicality are associated with whether or not a candidate wins his or her election and the percent of the vote share that he or she garners. While this notion may dispute conventional thinking that voters are rational and calculating in their voting decisions, the impact of appearance-based cues on candidates' electoral success is robust. Furthermore, low-information voters are most prone to utilize candidate appearance as a heuristic.

Knowing the power of candidate appearance on swaying voters' perceptions of candidates, in some cases, it may be beneficial for campaign staff to emphasize that voters make a conscious effort to pay attention to candidates' policies and past performance. If voters become well acquainted with candidates, they will be less likely to base their voting decisions on superficial cues such as candidate appearance. However, if a candidate appears more competent than their rival, this confers an electoral benefit and campaign staff members are actually better off not alerting voters to their candidate's appearance-based advantage.

Short Biographies

Colleen M. Carpinella, PhD, studies how we as perceivers make sense of visual information in our interpersonal interactions. She studies nonverbal communication, namely, the production and perception of visual cues in the context of person perception. Previously, she was a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Associate at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Dr Carpinella received her master's (2010) and doctorate (2014) in Social Psychology from the University of California, Los Angeles. She completed a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Public Policy at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York (2009). Her research has been published in some of psychology's top journals including the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* and *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

Kerri L. Johnson, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Departments of Communication Studies and Psychology at UCLA. Broadly construed, her research tests how observers exploit cues in the face and body to form impressions of others. In her most recent work, she has discovered how the perception of one social category can be irrevocably influenced by either the factors that originate within the perceiver (e.g., existing stereotypes) or the factors that originate within the target of perception (e.g., other social category memberships). Situated in the emergent field of Social Vision, Kerri's research sheds light on the processes of social perception that at times promote accuracy in judgments but at other times exhibit meaningful and consequential biases. This work appears in interdisciplinary outlets including Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA, Proceedings of the Royal Society, B, *The Journal of Experimental Psychology: General,* Psychological Science, and many others.

Note

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