

INTERACTIVE EFFECTS

POLITICS OF THE FACE: THE ROLE OF SEX-TYPICALITY IN TRAIT ASSESSMENTS OF POLITICIANS

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The authors tested the association between gendered facial cues and trait evaluations of warmth and competence for members of the 111th U.S. House of Representatives. The authors related perceived competence/warmth to objective measurements of politicians' facial sex-typicality. Among female politicians, facial femininity was associated with higher competence ratings for Democrats/Liberals, but with lower competence ratings for Republicans/Conservatives. Judgments of female politicians' warmth did not vary with facial femininity. Among male politicians, facial masculinity was associated with lower warmth ratings for Liberals but had no effect for Conservatives. Judgments of male politicians' competence did not vary with facial masculinity. Thus, facial cues affected perceptions on the dimension that ran counter to gender stereotypes—competence for women, warmth for men. These findings suggest that appearance-based cues interact with partisan stereotypes to bias perceptions of politicians. Implications for electoral politics are discussed.

The advent of televised political advertisements has brought with it an era in which the physical appearance of politicians is heavily scrutinized by constituents. Today, physical appearance is recognized to be so crucial for electoral success that candidates routinely spend thousands of dollars to employ stylists and image consultants (Gabriel, 2011). There is some indication that these expenditures are a necessary component of modern politics insofar as the relationship between appearance and voter choice is well established. From appearance alone, perceiv-

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ers evaluate politicians' traits such as competence, warmth, and leadership skill (Johns & Shepard, 2007; Olivola & Todorov, 2010). Such trait assessments predict voters' preferences (Fridkin & Kenney, 2009) and, especially among uninformed or nonpartisan constituents, they predict actual vote choice (Johns & Shepard, 2007; Lenz & Lawson, 2011).

In spite of these observations, little is known about the precise cues that compel the consequential perceptions of politicians that may ultimately influence vote choice. There is some indication, however, that these impressions may be functionally tethered to gendered cues that have been shown to vary systematically as a function of political ideology. We tested the possibility that systematic variations in gendered facial cues relate to perceptions of politicians' competence and warmth. We focused our efforts only on successfully elected politicians to characterize the specific characteristics that are associated with political success in an ecologically valid population, members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

THE GENDERED NATURE OF POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

We predicted that perceptions of politicians' competence and warmth would vary as a function of both gendered cues and political party. This prediction was informed by previous research showing that (a) perceivers form meaningful impressions of politicians based solely on facial cues, (b) politicians exhibit systematic differences in gendered facial appearance, and (c) factors that relate to electoral success (i.e., perceptions of competence and warmth) are themselves highly gendered (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001).

Observers form stable and reliable impressions of politicians based solely on facial cues. For example, observers are adept not only at labeling Democrats/Liberals and Republicans/Conservatives (Rule & Ambady, 2010; Samochowiec, Wänke, & Fiedler, 2010), but also at distinguishing between political winners and losers (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). Such judgments appear to be based on perceptions of competence that are informed by visual cues (Olivola & Todorov, 2010). Moreover, such appearance-based trait inferences predict electoral outcomes (Rule et al., 2010).

Some of the accuracy that perceivers achieve in judgments that are informed exclusively by minimal facial cues appears to be related to systematic differences in politicians' gendered facial characteristics. Carpinella and Johnson (2013), for example, assessed differences in the gender-typicality of congressional representatives' face shape. They found that congresswomen were objectively more feminine than congressmen were masculine, but that the extremity of this effect varied by political ideology. The faces of conservative women, in particular, were more gender-typical than any other group. Importantly, these differences in gendered appearance affected observers' judgments of the politicians' political party affiliation. Participants were more likely to provide Republican categorizations for feminine women, a tendency that mirrored the observed differences between female Republicans' and Democrats' facial characteristics, thereby promoting accuracy. Therefore, the facial sex-typicality of politicians influences judgments of political party affiliation even when this information is not explicitly provided to observers.

Importantly, some of the early impressions that relate to electoral success, namely, perceptions of competence and warmth, are also highly gendered in nature.

Competence, for example, is regarded as a desirable and agentic characteristic (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). Overall, men are presumed to be competent but to lack warmth; women are presumed to be warm but to lack competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). These stereotyped perceptions also guide judgments of politicians. One simulated election study found that although perceptions of competence were strongly associated with hypothetical votes for both men and women, men were perceived as more competent than women, on average, a finding that is consistent with gender stereotypes (Chiao, Bowman, & Gill, 2008). Interestingly, however, men who appeared approachable, but women who appeared attractive, received an electoral advantage. This suggests that although political evaluations might stem in part from normative expectations about the characteristics stereotypically associated with men and women, they might also favor well-rounded candidates who also exhibit counternormative characteristics. This possibility is bolstered by research indicating that political evaluations are more heavily influenced by perceptions of a counterstereotypical characteristic. In one study, for example, male political candidates were evaluated more favorably as perceived warmth increased; female candidates were evaluated more favorably as perceived competence increased (Johns & Shepard, 2007). Thus, evaluative judgments of politicians appear to fluctuate in response to counternormative traits (i.e., warmth for men, competence for women).

Collectively, these findings suggest that the observed differences in politicians' gendered appearance may also be tethered to evaluative judgments. The extant literature suggests a few distinct possibilities. Based on existing gender stereotypes for warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002), one straightforward prediction is that gendered facial cues will relate directly to evaluations such that masculine cues will convey competence and feminine cues will convey warmth for both male and female politicians. This basic pattern may differ, however, for men and women, such that gendered cues relate to a counternormative dimension. If correct, this implies that, on average, gendered cues may influence perceptions of women's competence, but men's warmth. Finally, given baseline partisan differences in the extremity of gendered cues across political party, these patterns may be moderated by political ideology, revealing important constraints and boundary conditions on these basic patterns.

We tested these possibilities in a sample of politicians who were successfully elected to the 111th U.S. House of Representatives. We reasoned that analyzing the relationship between gendered cues and political ideology would provide insight into how these cues afford a meaningful foundation for electoral success, insofar as elected politicians exemplify characteristics that are valued by their respective constituencies.

METHOD

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, and all measures in this study.

PARTICIPANTS

Eighty Internet users (25 men, 55 women; 31 Democrats, 29 Independents, 16 Republicans, 4 unreported) received 50 cents in exchange for participating in an online study, offered through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and administered by Qualtrics.

MATERIALS

Stimuli included photographs of 68 of the 434 members of the 111th United States House of Representatives (17 each female Democrats, male Democrats, female Republicans, and male Republicans).¹ Photographs were downloaded from each politician's website, coded for sex (female/male) and political party (Democrat/Republican), and standardized for size (450 by 450 pixels). Each politician's face was measured for the degree of gender-typical face shape (masculine cues in men; feminine cues in women) using the procedures described in Carpinella and Johnson (2013).² These measures were coded such that positive values denoted sex-typical characteristics (i.e., masculine men and feminine women); negative values denoted sex-atypical characteristics (i.e., feminine men and masculine women). Importantly, the sex-typicality of the randomly selected politicians from each of the four categories did not differ from the overall sex-typicality of their respective categories.³

Finally, each congressperson's political ideology (i.e., the degree of conservatism or liberalism) was quantified using DW-NOMINATE scores (hereafter, NOMINATE), providing a continuous and sensitive index of political ideology based on the nature and frequency of roll call votes (Poole & Rosenthal, 1991).

PROCEDURE

Participants judged the warmth and competence of the congressional photographs. Judgments were rendered using 9-point scales anchored by "extremely cold" and "extremely warm" and by "extremely incompetent" and "extremely competent."

1. Note that only 17 female Republicans served in the 111th U.S. House of Representatives. Therefore, photos for this group included all members.

2. Photographs were imported individually into FaceGen Modeler using the Photo Fit Tool (Blanz & Vetter, 1999), and the sex-typicality of each face was measured using the Gender Morph tool. The degree of sex-typicality for each face was then quantified based on anthropometric parameters of the human population (Blanz & Vetter, 2003). Values for facial sex-typicality theoretically ranged from -40 (highly male-typed) to +40 (highly female-typed) and were then converted to a common scale for men and women, indicating their sex-typicality.

3. We conducted a series of one-sample *t* tests to compare the sex-typicality of each randomly selected subset of politicians to their overall group means. The facial sex-typicality of the selected subsample of female Democrats did not significantly differ from the overall group mean in sex-typicality, $t(16) = 1.163$, $p = .262$. Also, the facial sex-typicality of the selected subsample of male Democrats and male Republicans did not significantly differ reliably from their overall group means, $t(16) = -2.056$, $p = .056$, and $t(16) = .502$, $p = .623$, respectively. Thus, these images were representative of the larger population from which they were drawn.

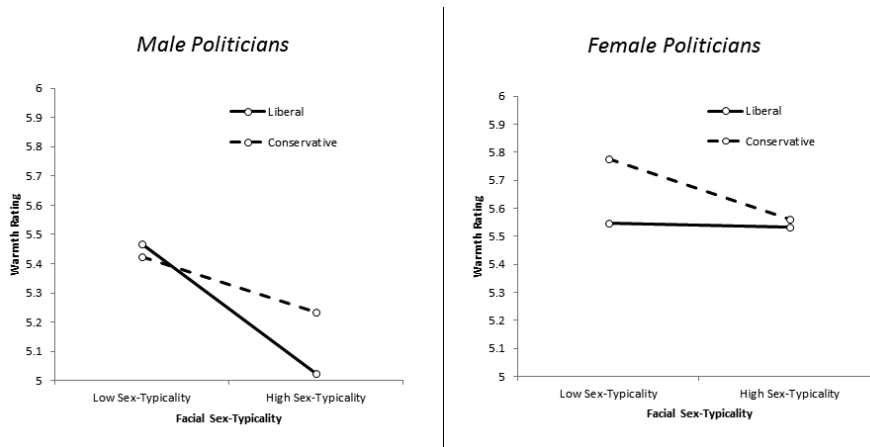


FIGURE 1. Warmth ratings as a function of Politician NOMINATE score, Politician Sex, and Facial Sex-Typicality for (a) evaluations of male politicians and (b) evaluations of female politicians. Estimates were calculated at 1 SD above and below 0, thus indicating sex-typed and cross sex-typed facial appearances.

The order of warmth and competence measures was counterbalanced across participants. Following the judgment trials, participants reported their political party affiliation (Democrat, Republican, or Independent) and sex. The images were not labeled with the politician's party, and participants were not asked to identify the political party or ideology of any of the politicians whose images were included. If participants reported recognizing a politician, their evaluations were excluded from the analyses.

RESULTS

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

We obtained regression estimates using generalized estimating equations to accurately model our within-subject design in which multiple judgments were nested under participant (Fitzmaurice, Laird, & Ware, 2004). Politician Sex and Political Party were effect coded (Female = $-.5$, Male = $.5$; Democrat = $-.5$, Republican = $.5$), and facial gender typicality was centered at 0 (indicating neither gender typical nor atypical). NOMINATE scores contain a natural centered value of 0 (indicating neither conservative nor liberal voting record). We report unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and Wald Z values for each parameter. We initially included participants' self-reported political party affiliation, age, and sex as factors in each analysis. These perceiver characteristics did not reach significance alone or in combination with other variables, so they will receive no further mention.

PERCEIVED WARMTH

We first tested the possibility that perceived warmth would vary as a function of a politician's sex, gendered appearance, and political ideology by regressing Perceived Warmth onto Politician Sex, Facial Sex-Typicality, NOMINATE Score,

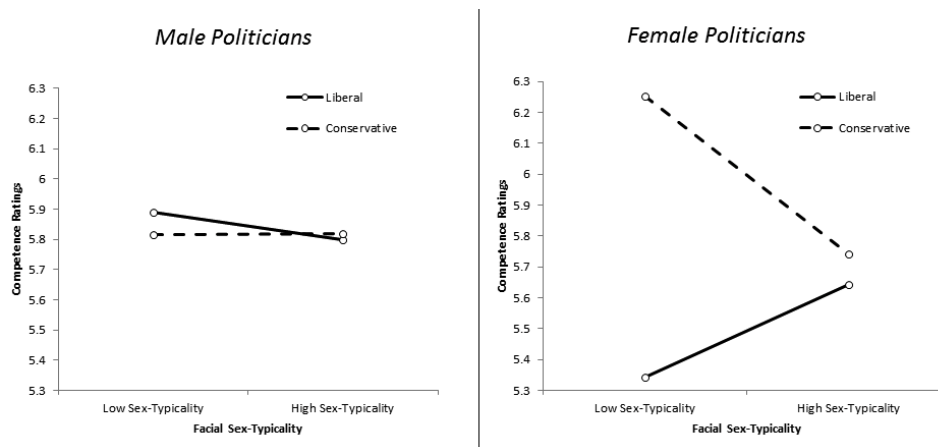


FIGURE 2. Competence ratings as a function of Politician NOMINATE Score, Politician Sex, and Facial Sex-Typicality for (a) evaluations of male politicians and (b) evaluations of female politicians. Estimates were calculated at 1 SD above and below 0, thus indicating Conservative and Liberal politicians.

and all interactions. Overall, participants judged male politicians as significantly less warm than female politicians, $B = -.2839$, $SE = .0762$, $z = -3.72$, $p = .0002$; sex-typical politicians as significantly less warm than their atypical counterparts, $B = -.0138$, $SE = .0031$, $z = -4.41$, $p < .0001$; and Conservatives as slightly but not significantly more warm than Liberals, $B = .084$, $SE = .0484$, $z = 1.74$, $p = .0827$.

More importantly, the three-way interaction was significant, $B = .0243$, $SE = .0093$, $z = 2.61$, $p = .0089$ (see Figure 1). To decompose this interaction, we conducted tests of simple slopes separately for male and female politicians. Among female politicians, the Sex-Typicality by NOMINATE score interaction was not significant, simple $B = -.0108$, $SE = .0077$, $z = -1.39$, $p = .1641$. However, among male politicians, the interaction was significant, simple interaction $B = .0135$, $SE = .0060$, $z = 2.27$, $p = .0231$. Participants' judgments of male Conservatives did not vary significantly by Sex-Typicality, ($EMs = 5.48$ and 5.23 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = -.0099$, $SE = .0062$, $z = -1.61$, $p = .1076$. However, participants judged male Liberals who appeared less sex-typical (i.e., more feminine) as significantly warmer than their more sex-typical counterparts, ($EMs = 5.50$ and 5.14 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = -.0261$, $SE = .0060$, $z = -4.35$, $p < .0001$.

In an analogous analysis that included Politician Party instead of NOMINATE score, the three-way interaction was only marginally significant, $B = .0186$, $SE = .0108$, $z = 1.72$, $p = .0846$. We therefore did not decompose this analysis further.

PERCEIVED COMPETENCE

Next we tested our prediction that perceptions of competence would vary as a function of a politician's sex, gendered appearance, and political ideology. To test this prediction, we regressed Perceived Competence onto NOMINATE Score, Politician Sex, and Facial Sex-Typicality and all interactions. Overall, participants judged male politicians as only slightly, but not significantly, more competent than

female politicians, $B = .0501$, $SE = .0736$, $z = .68$, $p = .496$; sex-typical politicians as slightly less competent than their atypical counterparts, $B = -.0062$, $SE = .0027$, $z = -2.28$, $p = .0229$; and Conservatives as more competent than Liberals, $B = .2011$, $SE = .0475$, $z = 4.23$, $p < .0001$.

More importantly, the three way interaction was significant, $B = .0490$, $SE = .0092$, $z = 5.32$, $p < .0001$ (see Figure 2). To decompose this interaction, we conducted tests of simple slopes separately for male and female politicians. Among female politicians, the interaction between facial sex-typicality and NOMINATE score was significant, simple $B = -.0440$, $SE = .0078$, $z = -5.65$, $p < .0001$. Participants judged female Conservatives who appeared less sex-typical (i.e., less feminine) as significantly more competent, ($EMs = 6.25$ and 5.74 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = -.0436$, $SE = .0081$, $z = -5.39$, $p < .0001$, but judged female Liberals who appeared more sex-typical as more competent, ($EMs = 5.34$ and 5.64 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = .0090$, $SE = .0038$, $z = 2.37$, $p = .0178$. Among male politicians, the interaction was not significant, simple $B = .0051$, $SE = .0068$, $z = .75$, $p = .4552$.

These results were replicated using Politician Party in place of NOMINATE Score. Again, participants judged male politicians as only slightly, but not significantly, more competent than female politicians, $B = .07$, $SE = .07$, $z = .94$, $p = .34$; sex-typical politicians as slightly less competent than their atypical counterparts, $B = -.0055$, $SE = .0028$, $z = -2.00$, $p = .0459$; and Republicans as more competent than Democrats, $B = .1894$, $SE = .0501$, $z = 3.78$, $p = .0002$.

As before, the predicted three-way interaction was significant, $B = .0457$, $SE = .0111$, $z = 4.13$, $p < .0001$. Among female politicians, the interaction between Sex-Typicality and Politician Party was significant, simple $B = -.0446$, $SE = .0088$, $z = -5.06$, $p < .0001$. This occurred because participants judged female Republicans who appeared *less* sex-typical (i.e., more masculine) as more competent ($EMs = 6.23$ and 5.73 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = -.0317$, $SE = .0070$, $z = -4.55$, $p < .0001$, but judged female Democrats who appeared *more* sex-typical (i.e., more feminine) as more competent, ($EMs = 5.43$ and 5.64 , estimated at 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively), $B = .0129$, $SE = .0042$, $z = 3.05$, $p = .0023$. Among male politicians, the interaction between Sex-Typicality and Politician Party was not significant, simple $B = .0010$, $SE = .0078$, $z = .13$, $p = .8934$.

Thus, female politicians' competence was evaluated based on their sex-typicality. When Democrats/Liberals appeared more feminine, they were rated as more competent; when Republicans/Conservatives appeared more masculine, they were rated as more competent. Evaluations of male politicians' competence did not vary by sex-typicality.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We found that the facial sex-typicality of politicians influenced trait evaluations. Among male politicians, Liberals were rated as warmer when they appeared less masculine. An analogous effect was not obtained for male Conservatives. Among female politicians, Liberals were rated as more competent when they appeared more feminine, but Conservatives were rated more competent when they appeared less feminine. Collectively, these results highlight the nuanced manner by

which facial sex-typicality differently informs trait evaluations, and it reveals patterns that are typical of successfully elected politicians.

Overall, gendered facial cues exerted the greatest influence on judgments that were stereotypically counternormative for a politician's sex. Specifically, the perceived competence of women and the perceived warmth of men were most tightly coupled to gendered cues. This finding extends past research by demonstrating that the tendency for trait judgments to be compelled by stereotype-inconsistent characteristics also occurs for visual appearance cues. Thus, as others have found (Chiao et al., 2008), these findings suggest that politicians may benefit by exhibiting counternormative characteristics.

The finding that perceptions of men's warmth and women's competence were further moderated by political ideology/party could have occurred for at least two reasons. First, it may have occurred due to baseline differences in the extremity of sex-typed facial cues. For instance, the tendency for Republican/conservative women to be highly sex-typical may backfire insofar as femininity is not associated with competence. Indeed, we observed that among this group, women were deemed more competent when they were less sex-typical. The opposite was true for Democrat/liberal women, again possibly reflecting a sensitivity to the, on average, lower sex-typicality. Alternately, it is possible that our observers spontaneously inferred each politician's political affiliation/political ideology from facial appearance. If correct, perceivers may have used this inference as a foundation to judge each politician's "fit" with existing political stereotypes and based their judgments of warmth and competence on those expectations. Although the current data cannot differentiate between these two possibilities, we favor the group norms alternative for its parsimony.

Our strategy to focus exclusively on successfully elected politicians was deliberate. This approach affords the opportunity to infer which characteristics are typical in U.S. legislators and thus provides insights into the characteristics that the constituencies that put them into office deemed desirable. Because a majority of the population casts their votes along party lines (Miller & Shanks, 1996), these findings can also be used to derive testable predictions about the characteristics that may differentially compel votes from liberal and conservative voters, although doing so would require further study. However, this methodological decision is not without costs. For example, we did not directly manipulate targets' political party affiliation, and this makes it impossible for us to specify directional causality. Additionally, because participants did not explicitly identify the political party of each target, it is impossible for us to determine whether participants may have used implicit party categorizations as a foundation for their evaluations. Thus, our methods leave some questions as to the causal relations underlying these effects. Additional research is necessary to determine how accuracy in party affiliation judgments may interact with facial sex-typicality to causally influence trait evaluations.

Nevertheless, these results provide an important next step toward understanding how visual cues influence perceptions of politicians' warmth and competence, and they have practical implications for understanding voting behavior. The tendency for voters to use appearance-based heuristics to evaluate political candidates is common among uninformed voters and nonpartisan voters (Lenz & Lawson, 2011), yet it also extends to other groups as well (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). When reliance on appearance occurs, voters may be susceptible to biases that stem

from superficial aspects of appearance. Precisely what characteristics compel or constrain such biases remains an important question for future research.

Finally, we contend that these results shed light on the existing gender imbalances in politics. Currently, women hold only 17.7% of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics, 2013). Such a daunting asymmetry may discourage women from seeking elected office. Some evidence suggests that this reluctance breaks along gender-stereotyped lines. Specifically, women are more likely to run for offices consistent with their stereotypic strengths (Fox & Oxley, 2003). If the perceived competence of female Republicans is undermined by their femininity, they may be reluctant to seek office at all. If correct, such barriers may require concerted recruitment efforts to increase representation among this segment of candidate hopefuls.

CONCLUSION

Appearance-based cues influence perceivers' impressions of politicians, especially with regard to their leadership capabilities. This study is the first of its kind to show that gender and partisan stereotypes are activated from politician appearance alone, and that they intersect to bias perceptions of politicians' warmth and competence. This notion has implications for political campaigns in which politician appearance may influence electoral success.

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