The right look
Conservative politicians look better
and voters reward it

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Effects of being beautiful

- Judged more positively
- Treated better by others
- Better self-perception
- Exhibit more positive behaviors and traits

Sources:  
Eagly et al. (1991); Langlois et al. (2000)
In experiments, beautiful people are believed to:

- play more cooperatively in the public goods game
- be trusted more in the trust game
- given higher offers in the ultimatum game (but more is also expected from them)
- paid more at same productivity (due to higher confidence, erroneous judgment by “employers” and better social skills)
### Beauty in the labor market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looks</th>
<th>Earnings adjusted for other determinants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above average</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The beauty difference in earnings is comparable to the effect of:
- 1.5 years of schooling
- 5 years of labor market experience
- working in a unionized workplace

*Source: Hamermesh (2011)*
“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”

• Yes, but there is still much agreement:
  “The meta-analyses showed that, both within and across cultures, people agreed about who is and is not attractive.” —Langlois et al. (2000)

Farah Diba, former Empress of Iran
What about beauty in politics?

Petr Adam

Anna Putnová
Positive effects on electoral success

- 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 at al., 2010)
- Switzerland (Lutz, 2010)
- UK (Banducci et al., 2008; Mattes and Milazzo, 2014)
- USA (Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007; Atkinson et al., 2009; Benjamin and Shapiro, 2009; Olivola and Todorov, 2010)
Indications of a causal relationship

• Manipulation of facial photographs of real politicians can predict winners and losers in experimental elections (Little et al., 2007).

• The positive relationship between beauty and votes is most pronounced among voters with low political knowledge who also watch a lot of TV (Lenz and Lawson, 2011).

• Voters who received ballots that included photographs were more likely to vote for a beautiful candidate, and the effect was stronger for voters who do not know much about politics (Ahler et al., 2015).
Our study of Finland

Institutional facts about Finland

• Proportional electoral system with multi-member districts.
• Each party has a list of candidates in each district; each voter must choose one candidate on one list.
• Enables studies on within-party competition.
• Parliamentary and municipal elections.
Our Internet survey

- 1,929 photos (52 percent male candidates and 48 female)
- 2,772 non-Finnish respondents
- Most respondents from the United States (859), Sweden (850), France (261) and Germany (220)
- 66 percent men and 34 women
- 46 percent students
Internet survey: Photos used by Finnish parties evaluated by foreign respondents

The Beauty Study

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?

- Very unattractive 1
- Below average 2
- Average 3
- Above average 4
- Very handsome or beautiful 5
- Cannot say / Prefer not to answer

What is your evaluation of the competence of this person compared to the average among people living in your country of residence? (By competence we mean a person's ability to make informed choices.)

- Very incompetent 1
- Below average 2
- Average 3
- Above average 4
- Very competent 5
- Cannot say / Prefer not to answer
Empirical specification

• Dependent variable:
  – Relative success (personal votes / average votes)

• Traits:
  – Beauty
  – Competence
  – Trustworthiness

• Controls
  – Male dummy
  – Young (age < 30)
  – Old (age > 60)

• List fixed effects
• Focus on non-incumbents
Our results

- National election: +1 beauty ⇒ +20% votes
- Municipal election: +1 beauty ⇒ +17% votes
- There is a beauty premium in politics as well!

The bars show the average vote gain from increasing each visual assessment by one standard deviation.
New paper: Differences between left and right?

• Beauty levels and beauty premia could differ between left and right politicians.

• Studied for the first time by us in ”The right look: Conservative politicians look better and voters reward it”.

• Important to analyze, since a beauty advantage could favor one side in politics.
One side has a beauty advantage

• We look at:
  – Finnish candidates in municipal and parliamentary elections
  – MEPs
  – U.S. candidates in Senate and gubernatorial elections
  – Australian candidates in House of Representatives elections

• The right has a beauty advantage in all cases!
• Our findings cannot be explained by candidate ethnicity, age, style or clothing, or by the ideology of respondents.
The beauty advantage in figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Beauty advantage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia, House of Representatives</td>
<td>32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union, European Parliament</td>
<td>22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland, municipal and parliamentary</td>
<td>41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US, Senate and Gubernatorial</td>
<td>14**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P<0.1, ** P<0.05, *** P<0.01

“Beauty advantage” is defined as the difference between the average beauty rating of politicians on the right and the left, expressed as a percentage share of the standard deviation of all politicians’ beauty ratings.
What can explain the beauty advantage of the right? (1)

- Beautiful people earn more money and therefore more inclined to oppose redistribution and to support and represent parties to the right.
- Good-looking people are more likely to perceive the world as a just place, since they are treated better than others, achieve higher status and are happier; and a frequent reason to support the left is a perception of the world as unfair.
- Greater self-reported attractiveness is negatively related to a preference for egalitarianism.
What can explain the beauty advantage of the right? (2)

- Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health we find that conservatism and beauty are positively correlated among men.
- It could also be that politicians on the right look better since beauty is rewarded more among voters on the right than among voters on the left, which attracts more good-looking politicians.
- Next: Do voters on the right reward beauty more?
Theory (1)

- Politicians differ in their ideology and beauty.
- Citizens differ in their ideology and in how informed they are:
  - Informed citizens observe politicians’ ideology.
  - Uninformed citizens observe only politician’s beauty in low-information elections, and politicians’ beauty and ideology in high-information elections.
- Assumption: Beauty = cue for conservatism in low-information elections.
Theory (2)

- *Proposition*: The beauty premium is largest among uninformed voters on the right, smallest among uninformed voters on the left and intermediate among informed voters.
Do voters use beauty as a cue for conservatism? (1)

- Indirect indication: politicians on the right are more beautiful.
- Direct indication: two experiments.
- Experiment 1: Respondent were shown photos of MEPs or U.S. Senatorial or gubernatorial candidates (without being told who they were).
  - First, voters correctly inferred, on average, that politicians to the right were more to the right than politicians to the left.
  - Second, we regressed beauty (assessed by other respondents) on inferred ideology, controlling for age and gender of the politicians, and found a positive and significant relationship for both the EU and the US.
Do voters use beauty as a cue for conservatism? (2)

- Experiment 2: Respondents were shown photos of Finnish candidates (without being told who they were) and asked to classify them as left or right; we then checked beauty assessments (by others).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates on the right inferred as right</th>
<th>Beauty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p-value of difference</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates on the right inferred as left</td>
<td>2.82 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates on the left inferred as right</td>
<td>2.67 (.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value of difference</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates on the left inferred as left</td>
<td>2.58 (.96)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is beauty more beneficial for the right in elections?

• Our theory predicts that it is – in low-information elections, where beauty serves as a cue for conservatism.

• In high-information elections, there is no need for a cue, since the ideology of candidates is clear. Hence, beauty should be as beneficial for candidates on the left and on the right.

• Two empirical tests:
  – From real elections in Finland (low- and high-information)
  – From an experimental election (low-information)
Empirical test from real Finnish elections

Dependent variable: Relative success (personal votes / average votes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Municipal election</th>
<th>Parliamentary election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>16.00** (4.82)</td>
<td>20.98*** (5.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty x Right</td>
<td>15.00** (5.86)</td>
<td>2.54 (9.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male dummy</td>
<td>-31.96 (17.73)</td>
<td>13.96* (7.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male dummy x Right</td>
<td>34.97 (25.53)</td>
<td>3.84 (15.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and education dummies (x Right)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P<0.1. ** P<0.05, *** P<0.01
Calculation of electoral effects

- Using the estimates of the table 4, we have calculated the number of elected politicians who would not have been elected had there been no beauty differences within their electoral lists.
- For municipal elections: 2 out of 65 politicians on the left (3.1%) and 9 out of 58 politicians on the right (15.5%).
- For parliamentary elections: 2 out of 64 politicians on the left (3.1%) and for the right 3 out of 39 politicians (7.7%).
Experimental election

• Foreign respondents were shown 100 pairs of randomly selected photos of Finnish candidates, one from the right and one from the left, of similar age, the same gender and from the same type of election.

• Advantages:
  – Low-information setting by design.
  – Can see if candidates from one side win more often; whether this can be linked to better looks; and whether voter-respondents from one side are more responsive to beauty in their voting choices.
  – Results cannot be driven by omitted variables such as candidate effort or monetary resources.
Experimental results (1)

- Candidates on the right looked better in 61 of the 100 matched pairs; average beauty 2.91 vs 2.61.
- The candidates on the right are more successful in this experimental election, independently of the respondents’ own ideology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent category:</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average vote share of candidate on the right</td>
<td>0.66***</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of races won by candidate on the right</td>
<td>0.72***</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A first indication that respondents on the right react more strongly to beauty differences.
Experimental results (2)

• We then test whether respondents on the right react more strongly to beauty differences, by showing the probability of voting for the candidate that happened to be placed first (candidate A, the other being candidate B) as a function of the beauty difference, whether the respondent is on the right and their interaction.
## Experimental results (3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Column (1)</th>
<th>Column (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote for candidate A</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty gap between candidate A and B</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right respondent × Beauty gap</td>
<td>0.06***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right respondent</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dependent variable: dummy=1 if voting for candidate A.
- Column (1): All respondents are more likely to vote for candidate A the larger A’s beauty advantage is.
- Column (2): Voters on the right respond more to beauty than voters on the left.
- The superior performance of candidates on the right can be linked to their beauty advantage, especially among respondents on the right.
Conclusions

- Candidates on the right are more beautiful in Europe, the United States and Australia.
- This can be explained by beautiful people earning more, opposing redistribution and seeing the world as just; and by a higher beauty premium on the right.
- Since beauty contributes to electoral success, this can tilt electoral outcomes and politics to the right.
- In addition to voters preferring beauty in general, they use beauty as a cue for conservatism in low-information elections.
- This results in a higher beauty premium for the political right in such elections.
Why is this important?

• It gives us deeper insights about how political processes (and indeed human beings) work.
• Not everything in politics is about facts or values: people also matter. Not least their beauty.
• This enables us to ask: Is this a good or bad thing?
  – Good: Cues may be good approximations of quality.
  – Bad: May disfavor the ugly and systematically favor one political side.
• Institutional implications:
  – Electoral system: proportional vs. majoritarian.
  – List system: candidate vs. party choice.