IZA DP No. 5513

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February 2011

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ABSTRACT

The Right Look:
Conservative Politicians Look Better and Their Voters Reward It[*]

Previous research has established that good-looking political candidates win more votes. We extend this line of research by examining differences between parties on the left and on the right of the political spectrum. Our study combines data on personal votes in real elections with a web survey in which 2,513 non-Finnish respondents evaluated the facial appearance of 1,357 Finnish political candidates. We find that political candidates on the right are better looking in both municipal and parliamentary elections and that they have a larger beauty premium in municipal, but not in parliamentary, elections. As municipal candidates are relatively unknown, the beauty-premium gap indicates that voters – especially those to the right – use beauty as a cue for candidate ideology or quality in the municipal elections.

JEL Classification: D72, J45, J70

Keywords: beauty, elections, political candidates, appearance, ideology, parties

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1. Introduction

The facial appearance of political candidates and their electoral success are related: better-looking candidates win more votes (Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007; Antonakis and Dalgas, 2009; Benjamin and Shapiro, 2009; Poutvaara et al., 2009; King and Leigh, 2009; Berggren et al., 2010; Rule at al., 2010; Lawson et al., 2010; Olivola and Todorov, 2010). While this has been established as a general relationship, none of the studies look at differences in beauty or in beauty premia between political candidates from the left and from the right. A beauty gap between the main parties could give candidates from one side an edge in elections, suggesting a possible link from candidate appearance to policy outcomes. A related question is whether voters on the left and on the right are equally sensitive to the looks of candidates. If not, the parties whose voters are more responsive to appearance might be expected to select and attract better-looking candidates. Since voters who are less responsive to candidate appearance could be more responsive to policy, a vote maximizing party might be expected to gear its policy platform towards this group of voters, e.g., by targeted redistribution.[1]

We make use of a rich dataset of Finnish political candidates from different parties. The candidates were evaluated, through a web survey, by a large number of respondents from other countries on traits such as beauty and competence, and we relate those evaluations to the votes each candidate received in parliamentary and municipal elections. Given that Todorov et al. (2005), Ballew and Todorov (2007) and Antonakis and Dalgas (2009) have found that inferences of competence predict electoral success, we include photograph-based competence evaluations in our investigation, both separately and together with

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[1] On the importance of physical appearance for how people are perceived and treated outside of politics, see, e.g., Hamermesh and Biddle (1994), Langlois et al. (2000), Rule and Ambady (2008) and Todorov et al. (2011). On the evolutionary origins of an appreciation of beauty, see the original contribution by Darwin (1871) and recent evidence in Grammer et al. (2003). On the correlation between beauty and intelligence, see Kanazawa (2011). There are also some experimental studies that link facial appearance to participants' own behavior and treatment of others: see Mulford et al. (1998), Solnick and Schweitzer (1999), Mobius and Rosenblat (2006), Wilson and Eckel (2006), and Andreoni and Petrie (2008).

beauty.

We focus our analysis on the National Coalition Party on the right and on the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance on the left. In Finland, as in most democracies, there is a clear left-right pattern in politics, with one or several parties on each side.[2] Finland's proportional electoral system with personal votes enables us to estimate electoral beauty premia from within-party competition. This allows us to isolate the effect of beauty from other vote motives, like ideology, and to handle other empirical problems related to the selection and quality of candidates.

In the 2003 Finnish National Election Study, most voters reported having been influenced by the political opinions and the party of the candidates when making their choice. But several other factors were also influential, including the experience, education, gender, fame and age of the candidates. Notably, more than one third of the voters were influenced by the presence and style of the candidates and more than one fifth by their election campaigns and advertisements. Table A.1 in the Appendix presents these numbers separately for right and left voters. For our purposes, it is eye-catching that voters who are politically to the right state that they were more influenced by education, presence and style, as well as by campaigns and advertisements, whereas voters to the left say that they were more influenced by the gender of the candidates.

We establish two main results. First, we find that candidates on the right look better than candidates on the left. Second, we find a greater effect of good looks, in terms of more votes, for candidates on the right. The difference in appearance is found both in parliamentary and in municipal elections, whereas the difference in the electoral effects of appearance is only found in municipal elections. Based on the fact that municipal candidates are relatively unknown, we discuss possible explanations for this pattern.

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[2] Budge and Robertson (1987: 394–395) differentiate between left and right in terms of "economic-policy conflicts – government regulation of the economy through direct controls or takeover … as opposed to free enterprise, individual freedom, incentives and economic orthodoxy." On the usage and relevance of this terminology in modern politics, see Klingemann (1995), Bobbio (1996) and – for the Nordic countries – Grendstad (2003). Although politically relevant, left-right terminology involves simplification (Mair, 2007), and the exact meaning of the terms differ somewhat between political cultures (Zechmeister, 2006).

2. Method

2.1. Survey and Data

The basis for this study is a web survey based on photographs of Finnish political candidates with respondents from outside of Finland to ensure that the candidates were not recognized. Our data collection method comprised recruitment of students by colleagues at lectures at several universities as well as recruitment via newspaper and magazine articles and blogs. Each respondent was shown four photographs (two of each gender), one at a time, randomly chosen from the database of photographs, and was asked to evaluate each photograph, e.g., in terms of attractiveness and competence.[3] There was no time limit for looking at the photographs. To exemplify, one question was:

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

For our data analysis, the replies were coded from 1 to 5, as indicated above, but the numbers did not appear in the survey.[4] In this paper we study candidates from one party to the right, the National

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[3] Respondents could choose to evaluate further rounds of four photos and also, if so, choose to only look at photos of candidates of one particular gender.

[4] All of the results in the paper are qualitatively unaffected (but rescaled) if we use the share of respondents who replied that a political candidate was "Above average" or "Very handsome or beautiful" rather than relying on the 1–5 scale as our measure of beauty (and of competence).

Coalition Party, and from two parties to the left, the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance.

2.2. Photographs

From a database containing 1,929 photographs of Finnish political candidates, we study photographs of candidates from the parties that can be classified to the political right or to the political left: the National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance. We only include evaluations by respondents who evaluated at least four photographs, and only photographs with at least three evaluations. This gives us 1,357 photographs in total, with an average of nine respondents per photograph. The photographs can be divided into 684 of women and 673 of men; 575 from the 2003 parliamentary election and 782 from the 2004 municipal elections; and 1,170 of non-incumbents and 187 of incumbents.[5] The photos only showed the faces of the candidates. No information was given about any candidate. Respondents were asked to report if they recognized any of the candidates. None of the respondents recognized a single candidate by name.

The photographs used were displayed by the political parties on their campaign posters as well as in newspaper ads. Most voters can be expected to have seen most candidate photographs. There are two potential problems related to the use of candidate photographs. The first one is reverse causality – it could be that successful politicians have access to better photographers and stylists. The second one is omitted variables, if some politicians both dress in a certain way and do other unobserved things, like visit large numbers of voters, which help them getting elected. However, we expect both problems to be smaller when using official candidate photos. One problem we avoid is that more successful or better financed candidates hire better photographers. Likewise, a "bad hair day" would produce measurement error for a candidate if photos from the press were used, whereas with official candidate photos, one expects an

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[5] By *incumbent* is meant a political candidate who served in the office in question, or as members of the national or the European parliaments, at the time of the election.

unflattering picture exposed in numerous posters to be detrimental for electoral success. In any case, Hamermesh et al. (2002) find that clothes and makeup only affect perceptions of a person's beauty marginally. Finally, there are no indications that some parties spend more or less on having photographs taken of their candidates, or that the quality of the candidate photos differs between parties.

2.3. Respondents

We had 2,513 respondents. This number greatly exceeds the number of respondents in comparable studies on the role of facial appearance in politics. In the pioneering study by Todorov et al. (2005), only 34 out of 843 respondents evaluated beauty. King and Leigh (2009) used 5 respondents. The majority of our respondents were from Sweden or the United States, but we also had significant participation from France, Germany and Denmark. As reported in Berggren et al. (2010), we find that respondents in different Western countries make similar evaluations. Lawson et al. (2010) generalize this finding to more dissimilar countries by demonstrating that evaluations by subjects living in the United States and India predict actual election outcomes in Mexico and Brazil quite accurately. Likewise, Rule et al. (2010) report that American and Japanese participants made similar inferences of traits from the faces of both U.S. and Japanese political candidates, and their evaluations predicted election outcomes between cultures.

2.4. Electoral System

Finland has a proportional electoral system in both municipal and parliamentary elections. Each voter has to vote for one candidate on a party list. Unlike in some other countries, it is not possible to vote for a list without picking a candidate. The seats are allocated to different parties based on their vote shares, using the d'Hondt seat-allocation rule. Candidates from a given party are elected in the order of their personal votes in their district. Elections are held every four years.

Each municipality forms one district in municipal elections. The number of elected municipal

councilors depends on the population of the municipality, reaching a maximum of 85 in Helsinki. Each party is allowed to present one and a half as many candidates on its list as the number of seats in the municipal council.

At the national level, Finland has a one-chamber legislature with 200 members. The country is divided into 14 electoral districts that elect 199 MPs and an autonomous region (Åland) electing one MP. We study the 14 mainland districts. The number of candidates that a party can present equals the number of representatives elected from the district, if this is 14 or more. In small districts with less than 14 seats, a party can present 14 candidates.

In the 2003 parliamentary election, turnout was 70%. Female candidates received 43% of all votes and won 75 of the 200 seats in parliament (Nurmi and Nurmi, 2004).[6] In the 2004 municipal elections, turnout was 59%.

2.5. *Voter Information about Municipal and Parliamentary Candidates*

Electoral competition works quite differently at the municipal and at the national level. To win a seat in parliament, a candidate normally has to first win a seat in the municipal council.[7] Politics is more competitive at the national level.

Municipal elections can be characterized as low-information elections – defined by Buckley et al. (2007, 176) as "elections which do not involve significant constitutional office and do not attract large scale media coverage" – as only a few candidates (especially among non-incumbents) are "career politicians" who are politicians by occupation or have a history of active campaigning and public visibility. Advertising is mainly restricted to posters and newspaper ads; hardly any candidates run individual campaigns in television or radio.

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[6] Raunio (2005) presents more facts about the Finnish political system.

[7] Likewise in the next stage, a candidate who wants to win a seat in the European Parliament normally has to win a seat in the national parliament first.

In contrast, the parliamentary election can be characterized as one of high information. Many parliamentary candidates have previously held seats at the municipal level and have a political history that voters are aware of. Candidates who spend large amounts of money on campaigning are mainly observed in the parliamentary election. Parliamentary candidates are a more select group that is, for several reasons, more visible to the public.

Table A.2 in the Appendix lists the share of different occupations for the candidates in our sample, as reported on electoral lists, in the municipal and in the parliamentary elections. The striking difference between the elections is that one of eight parliamentary candidates but only one of 42 municipal candidates was working as a "political leader". In most cases this means serving as MP. At the municipal level, only 15% of the incumbents are working as "political leaders" (including as MPs).

3. Beauty and Electoral Success in Low-Information Elections

In this Section we compare evaluations of left and right municipal candidates and investigate how the evaluations are related to electoral success in municipal elections. As the total amount of easily available information about the candidates is much smaller in municipal than in parliamentary elections, the looks of candidates could be relatively more important to voters in the former elections. We present corresponding results for parliamentary candidates in Section 4.

3.1. *Trait Evaluations*

We begin by reporting the average trait evaluations of the municipal candidates. Table 1 reveals that right candidates are seen as more good-looking than left candidates, and are to a lesser extent also seen as more competent. Female candidates (both right and left) receive higher beauty evaluations than male candidates, whereas competence evaluations are more equal for females and males. Incumbents are generally evaluated as better looking and more competent than non-incumbents.[8] The correlation coefficient between beauty and competence is 0.39.[9]

Before moving on to the electoral effects of good looks we have to address a potential problem relating to the validity of the trait evaluations. Since it is likely that right and left candidates chose to present themselves in a somewhat different fashion (e.g., with regard to haircut, clothing, glasses, jewelry), there is a risk that the evaluations reflect the political orientation of the respondents. In particular, our use of foreign respondents could be problematic if, for instance, U.S. respondents are more conservative on average and therefore evaluate right political candidates as relatively better looking. We address this issue from three angles. First, we divide the respondents according to their view on taxes and redistribution to investigate if the evaluation differences are driven by the political orientation of the respondents. Second, we compare the evaluations of respondents from Sweden and respondents from the United States. Third, we test if political candidates who wear a tie (for men) or a blouse and/or a suit (for women) are given different evaluations than those who do not.

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[8] The trait differences in Table 1 cannot be explained by age differences between left and right candidates. The mean age of left and right candidates differ by less than one year. Male candidates are four years older than female candidates and incumbents are seven years older than non-incumbents, on average.

[9] The correlation coefficient is 0.40 among male and 0.42 among female candidates, and 0.38 among right and 0.37 among left candidates.

TABLE 1. Average trait evaluations, municipal elections (standard deviations in parentheses).

	Beauty	Competence	Number of candidates
Right candidates	2.89 (0.71)	3.32 (0.41)	263
p-value of difference	0.000	0.001	
Left candidates	2.59 (0.61)	3.20 (0.45)	518
Right female candidates	3.08 (0.79)	3.34 (0.37)	140
p-value of difference	0.000	0.000	
Left female candidates	2.63 (0.67)	3.17 (0.41)	240
Right male candidates	2.68 (0.53)	3.30 (0.45)	123
p-value of difference	0.045	0.247	
Left male candidates	2.56 (0.60)	3.24 (0.49)	278
Right female incumbents	3.05 (0.76)	3.34 (0.34)	22
p-value of difference	0.190	0.831	
Left female incumbents	2.78 (0.63)	3.36 (0.47)	26
Right male incumbents	2.77 (0.51)	3.48 (0.28)	25
p-value of difference	0.055	0.640	
Left male incumbents	2.50 (0.52)	3.43 (0.48)	24
Right female non-incumbents	3.08 (0.80)	3.34 (0.38)	118
p-value of difference	0.000	0.000	
Left female non-incumbents	2.61 (0.67)	3.14 (0.39)	214
Right male non-incumbents	2.65 (0.54)	3.26 (0.47)	98
p-value of difference	0.184	0.582	
Left male non-incumbents	2.56 (0.55)	3.23 (0.78)	254
All municipal candidates	2.69 (0.66)	3.25 (0.44)	781

Notes: Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. An incumbent is a political candidate who served in the office in question, or as a member of the national or the European parliaments, at the time of the election. One observation is the average evaluation of one candidate. P-values from a t-test of equal means are reported between each pair of average evaluations of right and left candidates.

As reported in Table A.3 in the Appendix, the beauty differences between right and left candidates remain both for right and for left respondents (as classified by whether they agree or disagree with the suggestion "to increase taxes on those with high incomes in your country, and distribute the money to those with low incomes."). For male candidates the beauty difference is, however, not statistically significant when evaluated by left respondents. The differences in competence also remain in Table A.3, but are smaller and in some cases statistically insignificant. Table A.4 in the Appendix reveals that right candidates are perceived as more beautiful and competent both by respondents from Sweden and from the United Sates (although for male candidates the differences are not statistically significant among respondents from Sweden). Table A.5 demonstrates that what candidates wear only seems to affect how competent they are perceived to be. For beauty the difference is statistically insignificant throughout the Table. We also note that it does not seem to be the case that respondents to the right react differently to

male candidates wearing a tie or female candidates wearing a blouse and/or a suit than respondents to the left do. We conclude that the higher beauty and competence evaluations of right candidates do not just reflect the political opinions of the respondents. While the competence evaluations are, to some extent, related to what the candidates wear, the relationship does not differ between respondents to the left and to the right.

3.2. *Electoral Success*

We now turn to regression analysis to investigate the relationship between the trait evaluations and electoral success. We focus on non-incumbent candidates, as Berggren et al. (2010) showed that appearance does not matter as much for incumbents.[10] Appearance and other pieces of information may be more important for less well-known candidates, and an incumbency dummy may not fully capture such differences.[11] We make use of list fixed effects in our regressions, to capture how beautiful and competent a candidate is perceived to be in relation to the other candidates on the same list. We compare the electoral success of candidates from the National Coalition Party on the right, and from the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance on the left.[12]

Our dependent variable, *Relative success*, is defined in the following way for candidate *i* on list *j*:

$$Relative\ success_{i,j} = (p_i / v_j) * 100 \tag{1}$$

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[10] We are able to study non-incumbents separately as Finland has a proportional electoral system with personal votes determining the order in which candidates are elected, resulting in within-party competition. A plurality-vote system, like that of the United States, typically features competition between an incumbent and a challenger from another party.

[11] Caughey and Sekhon (2010) demonstrate the difficulty of estimating the incumbency advantage.

[12] The pooling of candidates from the Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance is supported by statistical tests; there is no specification in which we can reject (at the 5% significance level) that the beauty coefficients are equal for candidates from these two parties.

where p_i is candidate i's number of personal votes and v_j is the number of all votes for candidates on list j divided by the number of candidates on list j. As explanatory variables, we use the two trait variables *Beauty* and *Competence*. The trait variables are standardized: each mean assessment is divided by the standard deviation of all the mean assessments of that trait so that the trait variables all have a standard deviation of one. The beauty and competence variables are interacted with a dummy variable for right candidates (i.e., candidates who belong to the National Coalition Party). We also include a dummy variable for male candidates, both by itself and interacted with Right.[13] Table 2 contains the regression results that allow us to compare the beauty and competence coefficients of right and left candidates. Since our identification comes from the interaction of the two trait variables Beauty and Competence with the dummy variable Right, we include the interaction of all unreported dummy variables with Right in most specifications, but we do not report estimates for the full set of interaction terms in the Table. The unreported dummies are *Young*, which denotes an age under 30, and *Old,* which denotes an age over 60, together with dummies for education and occupation.

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[13] No definitive gender differences with regard to beauty premia could be established by Berggren et al. (2010); however, other studies indicate that gender sometimes does matter for reactions to beauty. For example, Dreber et al. (2010) find that male chess players choose significantly riskier strategies when playing against an attractive female opponent, although this does not improve their performance.

TABLE 2. Relative success in the municipal elections, non-incumbents.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Beauty	15.40***	15.91***	14.95**				8.62**	8.32*	8.49
	(4.33)	(4.62)	(5.15)				(3.49)	(3.62)	(5.27)
Beauty×Right	15.59*	18.64**	15.24**				22.60**	27.86***	25.35***
	(7.94)	(5.67)	(6.20)				(7.67)	(4.85)	(6.34))
Competence				18.94***	18.77***	16.70**	14.75**	15.28**	12.99*
				(5.28)	(5.41)	(5.85)	(5.16)	(5.09)	(6.29)
Competence×Right				-9.05	-8.56	-14.84	-18.87**	-20.18**	-24.36**
				(9.17)	(9.38)	(8.06)	(8.04)	(8.32)	(8.12)
Male dummy	-20.66	-33.84	-34.41*	-28.25*	-36.15*	-36.43**	-22.42	-35.85*	-36.09**
	(16.32)	(19.31)	(15.51)	(14.87)	(18.27)	(14.69)	(16.01)	(18.56)	(14.93)
Male dummy×Right		42.79	32.66		22.84	11.08		45.08	34.89
		(24.86)	(23.23)		(28.47)	(28.38)		(24.44)	(23.52)
Age dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education and occupation dummies	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Unreported dummies interacted with Right	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
List fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of candidates	682	682	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
R-squared	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.14

Notes: The dependent variable is Relative success. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. The education dummies are Comprehensive school or less (at most 10 years of schooling); Upper-secondary education (corresponds to 12 years of schooling); Vocational education (10–12 years of schooling); and University education (those who have completed their education and obtained degrees). Upper-secondary education usually serves as preparation for university-level education, and many of the candidates with upper-secondary education listed as highest education have started, but not completed, university studies. Vocational education includes, e.g., basic nurses, nurses, commercial school graduates, clerks, and artisans. The occupational dummies are political leader, party worker, management, researcher, teacher, upper white collar, medical doctor, nurse, lower white collar, worker, entrepreneur, artist, student, and not employed. Robust standard errors clustered at the list level in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Table 2 contains nine specifications that vary in three dimensions: whether we include Beauty and/or Competence, whether we control for education and occupation, and whether we interact the variables with unreported coefficients (age, education and occupation) with Right. The Table shows that in the municipal elections, the beauty coefficient of right candidates is between two and four times as large as that of left candidates (the total beauty coefficient of right candidates is obtained by adding the coefficients for Beauty and Beauty×Right). The difference between the competence coefficients of right and left candidates is generally smaller, although perceived competence only seems to matter for left

candidates.

Neither the beauty nor the competence coefficients are much affected by including dummies for education and occupation. However, both the beauty and the competence coefficients are somewhat sensitive to including the other trait in the regression. When we include beauty and competence simultaneously in columns 7–9, the beauty coefficient falls for left and rises for right candidates (compared with columns 1–3). The competence coefficient is reduced (compared with columns 4–6), but only marginally so for left candidates. The competence coefficient of left and that of right candidates are however only statistically different from zero at the 10% significance level when including the education and occupation controls and interacting all variables with Right (in column 9).

Beauty and competence display different relationships with electoral success for right and left candidates. The large beauty estimates (primarily for right candidates) obtained when controlling for competence, education and occupation, as well as a full set of interaction terms (column 9), suggest that beauty is related to electoral success by itself and not just as a sign of competence. The relationship between competence and electoral success is estimated with less precision and the negative coefficients for right candidates imply a weaker relationship over the full sample of left and right candidates.

The estimates also suggest that female left candidates do better than male left candidates. For right candidates there is, however, no visible gender difference. In accordance with McDermott (1997), our interpretation is that voters use gender as a cue in low-information elections. Since women are typically seen as kinder and more compassionate than men, they are stereotyped as caring more about social welfare issues, which could make them preferable to men on a left party list with relatively unknown candidates.

Finally, Table A.6 in the Appendix reports results for specifications that include both incumbents and non-incumbents. We note that the incumbency coefficient generally exceeds that of beauty by an order of magnitude. The estimated coefficients suggest that there is a positive relationship between beauty and electoral success, but we cannot reject that the relationship is the same for right and left candidates. The competence coefficients are small and statistically insignificant, both for left and right candidates.

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4. Beauty and Electoral Success in High-Information Elections

In this Section, we turn to politics at the national level. Compared with municipal elections, voters have considerably more information about the candidates in parliamentary elections.

4.1. Trait Evaluations

Table 3 shows that right candidates are judged to be better looking than left candidates also in the parliamentary election. Right parliamentary candidates are also generally seen as more competent than left candidates.[14] The correlation coefficient between beauty and competence is 0.36.[15] Compared with the municipal candidates in Table 2, the parliamentary candidates look slightly better and more competent.

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[14] The trait differences in Table 3 cannot be explained by age differences between left and right candidates. As in Table 1, the mean age of left and right candidates differ by less than one year.

[15] The correlation coefficient is 0.33 among male and 0.45 among female candidates, and 0.28 among right and 0.37 among left candidates.

TABLE 3. Average trait evaluations, parliamentary elections (standard deviations in parentheses).

	Beauty	Competence	Number of candidates
Right candidates	2.93 (0.62)	3.55 (0.45)	202
p-value of difference	0.000	0.000	
Left candidates	2.70 (0.67)	3.31 (0.51)	373
Right female candidates	3.06 (0.67)	3.52 (0.40)	108
p-value of difference	0.000	0.000	
Left female candidates	2.82 (0.74)	3.29 (0.46)	195
Right male candidates	2.78 (0.51)	3.58 (0.49)	94
p-value of difference	0.002	0.000	
Left male candidates	2.56 (0.56)	3.34 (0.55)	178
Right female incumbents	3.54 (0.52)	3.87 (0.36)	16
p-value of difference	0.001	0.001	
Left female incumbents	2.93 (0.53)	3.45 (0.36)	25
Right male incumbents	2.92 (0.57)	3.64 (0.44)	21
p-value of difference	0.012	0.214	
Left male incumbents	2.52 (0.49)	3.45 (0.55)	28
Right female non-incumbents	2.98 (0.66)	3.45 (0.38)	92
p-value of difference	0.070	0.001	
Left female non-incumbents	2.81 (0.76)	3.27 (0.76)	170
Right male non-incumbents	2.73 (0.49)	3.56 (0.50)	73
p-value of difference	0.035	0.001	
Left male non-incumbents	2.57 (0.57)	3.31 (0.55)	150
All parliamentary candidates	2.78 (0.66)	3.39 (0.50)	575

Notes: Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. An incumbent is a political candidate who served in the office in question, or as a member of the European parliament, at the time of the election. One observation is the average evaluation of one candidate. P-values from a t-test of equal means are reported between each pair of average evaluations of right and left candidates.

4.2. Electoral Success

As shown in Table 4, the differences between right and left candidates that were evident in the municipal elections seem to be absent in the parliamentary election. There is a beauty premium for both left and right candidates such that a beauty increase of one standard deviation attracts about 20% more votes for the average non-incumbent candidate. Competence displays a weaker relationship with electoral success, which is statistically significant for left candidates in columns 4–6. However, this relationship is weakened substantially and becomes statistically insignificant both for left and right candidates when beauty is included in the regression (in columns 7–9).

TABLE 4. Relative success in the parliamentary elections, non-incumbents.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Beauty	24.47***	23.90***	21.82***				20.82***	19.95***	18.03***
	(5.90)	(5.86)	(6.05)				(6.01)	(5.89)	(6.19)
Beauty×Right	-2.26	-0.54	0.66				-0.20	2.35	2.49
	(9.75)	(9.20)	(8.86)				(10.92)	(10.70)	(8.97)
Competence				16.54***	16.85***	15.72***	9.11	9.70*	9.09*
				(5.11)	(5.18)	(4.89)	(4.83)	(4.84)	(4.66)
Competence×Right				-7.50	-7.50	-3.51	-3.80	-5.83	-1.68
				(10.49)	(10.49)	(9.55)	(11.33)	(11.43)	(9.04)
Male dummy	13.50	11.89	9.93	4.36	3.40	0.81	11.67*	9.92	7.67
	(6.99)	(8.10)	(9.18)	(7.39)	(8.77)	(9.60)	(6.87)	(8.47)	(9.56)
Male dummy×Right		5.33	10.01		3.83	8.09		6.12	9.62
		(15.75)	(17.26)		(16.07)	(17.02)		(14.50)	(16.79)
Age dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education and occupation dummies	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Unreported dummies interacted with Right	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
List fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of candidates	485	485	485	485	485	485	485	485	485
R-squared	0.06	0.06	0.18	0.02	0.01	0.15	0.06	0.06	0.18

Notes: The dependent variable is Relative success. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. The education dummies are Comprehensive school or less (at most 10 years of schooling); Upper-secondary education (corresponds to 12 years of schooling); Vocational education (10–12 years of schooling); and University education (those who have completed their education and obtained degrees). Upper-secondary education usually serves as preparation for university-level education, and many of the candidates with upper-secondary education listed as highest education have started, but not completed, university studies. Vocational education includes, e.g., basic nurses, nurses, commercial school graduates, clerks, and artisans. The occupational dummies are political leader, party worker, management, researcher, teacher, upper white collar, medical doctor, nurse, lower white collar, worker, entrepreneur, artist, student, and not employed. Robust standard errors clustered at the list level in parentheses. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Similarly, the estimated gender differences in the parliamentary election (Table 4) are quite small when compared with the municipal elections (Table 2). The male dummy is positive, but small and statistically insignificant, both for left and right candidates. Thus, candidate appearance and gender follow the same pattern of having noticeably larger differences between left and right candidates in the municipal elections. The reason, in our interpretation, is that voters have access to much more information about the candidates in parliamentary elections. Table A.6 presents results when incumbents are included. As with municipal elections, an incumbency dummy trumps other explanatory variables by an order of magnitude.

Yet, both beauty and competence evaluations maintain their statistical significance.

5. Interpretation

We have established that right candidates look better than left candidates and that there is larger beauty premium for right candidates in municipal, but not in parliamentary, elections. We now turn to discussing possible interpretations of these findings.

Why do candidates on the right look better than candidates on the left? One potential explanation is that better-looking candidates sort into the party where beauty is more productive electorally. While our results are consistent with this explanation, our data are not suited for testing it. Hamermesh and Biddle (1994) report weak evidence that beautiful people sort into occupations where their looks are productive. This form of selection could be at hand even though jobs are not as easily substitutable on the political labor market and even if people choose parties purely in accordance with their ideological conviction. All it requires is that people who have found conservatism appealing or have joined a right party are more likely to run for office if they look good (since they figure that their appearance will help them).

A second possible explanation is a general relationship between looks and political opinions. A simple economic explanation could be that beautiful people earn more money on the labor market (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994) and are therefore – for selfish reasons – more inclined to oppose redistribution and support parties to the right. A more general psychological explanation could be that good-looking people are more likely to perceive the world as a just place (since they are treated better than others) – and are therefore inclined to embrace conservative opinions. An empirical analysis by Price at al. (2011) supports a link between indicators of attractiveness and measures of attitudes towards egalitarianism (typically associated with the left). For example, they find that greater self-reported attractiveness is negatively related to a preference for egalitarianism.

Why might beauty premia differ across the political spectrum? Our preferred explanation is that voters use beauty as an informational cue when evaluating candidates. If right voters expect better-looking

candidates to be closer to them ideologically, then the beauty premium should be higher on the right. On the basis of the Price et al. (2001) findings, one possibility is that beauty serves as an indication of non-egalitarianism, a political stance typically associated with sympathizers of the political right. It could also be that voters on the right, compared to voters on the left, consider beauty a stronger indication of candidate quality. Both of these explanations clarify why the partisan difference is present only at the municipal level.[16] How so? At that level, voters have less certain information about candidates' true degree of non-egalitarianism or quality, which is why they rely on thin slices of information to assess candidates. Hence, voters do not know much about challengers but are easily able to observe how they look. Thus voters tend to give a large weight to facial appearance when comparing challengers in the municipal elections. In the parliamentary election an additional piece of information becomes available about most challengers: their behavior in municipal office. With this information available voters reduce the weight given to facial appearance. Given the information about the municipal performance of parliamentary candidates, superficial expectations about beautiful politicians should no longer be that effective in parliamentary elections, pushing the beauty premia of left and right candidates towards equalization.[17] In contrast, if the explanation were based on expressive voting (e.g., right-wing voters identifying with or cheering for "the beautiful winners") there would be no reason for the difference in beauty premia to appear in municipal elections only.

Could religion provide another reason for beauty being a more relevant cue for right voters? Since attractive people are perceived as more religious (Crandall et al., 2007; Naumann et al., 2009), conservative voters who care about religiosity may be more inclined to vote for good-looking candidates.

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[16] Note that McDermott's (1997) findings on the electoral effects of gender in low-information elections corresponds to the interpretation that voters use beauty as a cue for ideology (rather than for candidate quality).

[17] Furthermore, right candidates are better-looking than left candidates in municipal elections, as can be seen in Table 1. As most candidates for parliamentary elections are picked among those who have experience from municipal politics, we should expect the right candidates to look better than the left candidates in parliamentary elections already for the reason that the set from which the former are selected has better looks.

We are able to investigate this explanation by using voting data from a hypothetical election. The respondents in our study were asked to vote for one of four candidates (the ones they had just evaluated).[18] Table 5 reports separately for religious and non-religious respondents the fraction of candidates who were selected in the hypothetical election who were also picked as the best looking one. The differences are minor and not statistically significant, whether looking at mixed-gender or same-gender hypothetical elections. Religious voters are, however, considerably more likely to vote for a male candidate.

TABLE 5.   Religious voting in a hypothetical election.

	Share of hypothetically elected candidates who were selected as best looking	Share of hypothetically elected candidates who were men	Share of elected candidates who were selected as best looking in same-gender hypothetical elections
Religious voters	44.2%	48.8%	49.0%
Non-religious voters	44.9%	40.9%	47.7%

Note: Religious voters stated that they "would only vote for a politician who believes in God" or that they "would rather vote for a politician who believes in God".

Finally, we cannot rule out the possibility that voters of candidates on the right differ on a neurocognitive level from voters of candidates on the left. There are several studies that point to neurocognitive foundations of political orientations and that connect them to basic psychological dispositions.[19] Jost et al. (2003) perform a meta-analysis and find that psychological variables, such as death anxiety, intolerance of ambiguity, lack of openness to experiencing new things, need for order and fear of threat, predict a conservative political orientation. More recent studies showing relationships between personality or physiology and political orientation include Block and Block (2006), Westen et al. (2006), Amodio et al. (2007), Oxley et al. (2008), Chiao et al. (2009), Schreiber et al. (2009), Zamboni et

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[18] The instruction read: "Sometimes people have to vote in an election with only a little information. Let us assume that you would have to either vote for one of these persons as a member of Parliament [non-US respondents]/the House of Representatives [US respondents], or abstain from voting. Which would be your choice?". (The response alternatives also included "Prefer not to answer".)

[19] The general approach of this research field is outlined in Fowler and Shreiber (2008).

al. (2009) and Vigil (2010).[20] While this literature does not clarify any mechanism for a link from neurocognitive or psychological differences between left and right sympathizers to different weights awarded to different aspects of physical appearance, such as beauty, it does suggest the possibility of such a mechanism.

6. Concluding Discussion

Our results indicate that political candidates from the right look better than political candidates from the left and that good looks are more important for candidates on the right in the municipal, but not in the parliamentary, elections. Our interpretation of this gap in the beauty premium for left and right candidates at the local level is that voters, in a setting with low information, use beauty as a cue for candidate ideology or quality. For instance, beautiful candidates seem less egalitarian. In the parliamentary elections, voters have access to more information, not least since most parliamentary candidates have been politicians at the municipal level, which reduces the weight of beauty as a cue and pushes the beauty premia of left and right candidates toward equalization.

Our findings contribute to a better understanding of the way politics *de facto* works. Not least, they point at a possible link from the way candidates look to policy outcomes: if voters reward beauty, the candidates with the best looks and their parties are at an advantage, and their political programs are more likely to be implemented. Differential beauty premia could give one side in politics an electoral advantage and the importance of such an advantage could depend on political institutions. As Lawson et al. (2010) point out, the role of appearance differs between electoral systems: some give more leeway for individual candidates rather than parties. This may in turn affect how important looks become in elections and, with differential electoral effects of beauty, whether one side of the political spectrum is favored relative to the

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[20] Alford et al. (2005) show that the underlying basis of political attitudes and ideology may be genetic; cf. Fowler et al. (2008), Hatemi et al. (2009) and Settle et al. (2009).

other. A broad interpretation of our findings is that the increased importance of television over the last decades, may have increased the electoral chances of the political right. In fact, Lenz and Lawson (2011) demonstrate that television leads less informed citizens to vote based on candidates' appearance.

Another possible consequence of our findings for low-information elections is that both left and right politicians will be more eager to please voters who are less willing to trade off policy against the benefits of good-looking politicians. This is in line with models in which parties target redistribution toward groups that are most responsive – see, e.g., Lindbeck and Weibull (1987) and Dixit and Londregan (1996). By the same reasoning, voters who care about the looks of candidates will find it more difficult to keep political rents at bay. Thus our findings also suggest that policy platforms could be geared towards the preferences of left voters and that right politicians might be able to capture bigger rents when in office.

The two consequences just described indicate that the differences in beauty premia could have an ambiguous effect on policy outcomes. On the one hand, beauty favors right candidates, in terms of getting elected, but on the other hand, political platforms will be geared to left voters to the extent that they care less about the looks of politicians.

Finally, our findings can be related to the different use of emotional tactics by political parties. For example, Westen (2007) suggests that whereas Republican strategists have understood that emotions decide election outcomes, Democrat strategists have clung to a dispassionate view of the mind, making them focus on rational argumentation, to their detriment. If we connect this point to our results, it could be that the Finnish National Coalition Party, whether consciously or unconsciously, has made use of candidates with a stronger emotional appeal. Clearly, there is scope for more research in this area. Pinpointing how the appearance of candidates on the left and on the right of the political spectrum influences the democratic process should be seen as an ongoing research program.

Appendix

TABLE A.1. Factors that influenced voters in choosing parliamentary candidates.

Influence	Share of right voters being significantly or somewhat influenced	Share of left voters being significantly or somewhat influenced
Candidate's gender	32%	38%
Candidate's age	28%	31%
Candidate's educational background	56%	31%
Candidate's previous experience in politics	62%	63%
Candidate's presence and style	39%	34%
Candidate's fame	37%	33%
Candidate's views and comments	87%	80%
Candidate represents the party supported by the voter	85%	73%
Candidate's election campaign and advertisements	25%	21%
Recommendations of a friend, aquintance or relative	10%	9%
Comments and support of a non-governmental organization	16%	5%

Notes: Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the

Left Alliance. The numbers presented in the Table and in the paper refer to voters for these three parties.

Source: Karvonen and Paloheimo (2003).

TABLE A.2. Occupational data for municipal and parliamentary candidates, %.

Occupation	Municipal Election	Parliamentary Election
Political leader	2.4	12.9
Party worker	2.3	2.2
Management	6.3	5.5
Researcher	3.9	3.6
Teacher	7.2	10.0
Upper white collar	10.7	9.8
Medical doctor	1.3	3.4
Nurse	4.7	5.0
Lower white collar	12.3	11.0
Worker	16.8	14.1
Entrepreneur	6.0	5.1
Artist	2.2	2.0
Student	8.8	5.4
Not employed	2.8	1.5
Not listed	12.2	8.5

Notes: The occupation data is reported on electoral lists and have been classified by us according to the classification of Statistics Finland (2001), though we have merged certain occupational categories with a small number of candidates and listed party workers as a group of their own.

TABLE A.3. Average trait evaluations according to respondent ideology (standard deviations in parentheses).

Candidates	Respondents	Beauty	Competence	Number of candidates
Right	Right	2.96 (0.70)	3.40 (0.54)	244
p-value of difference		0.0000	0.0012	
Left	Right	2.65 (0.72)	3.25 (0.60)	459
Right	Left	2.85 (0.75)	3.45 (0.53)	169
p-value of difference		0.0014	0.0043	
Left	Left	2.62 (0.73)	3.29 (0.63)	343
Right female	Right	3.07 (0.80)	3.33 (0.49)	133
p-value of difference		0.0000	0.0532	
Left female	Right	2.70 (0.80)	3.21 (0.58)	233
Right female	Left	3.08 (0.83)	3.42 (0.52)	89
p-value of difference		0.0067	0.0805	
Left female	Left	2.77 (0.78)	3.29 (0.58)	159
Right male	Right	2.84 (0.55)	3.49 (0.59)	111
p-value of difference		0.0007	0.0055	
Left male	Right	2.60 (0.63)	3.29 (0.61)	226
Right male	Left	2.59 (0.55)	3.49 (0.54)	80
p-value of difference		0.3093	0.0212	
Left male	Left	2.50 (0.66)	3.29 (0.68)	184

Notes: The Table contains candidates both from the municipal and the parliamentary elections. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. One observation is the average evaluation of one candidate. Right respondents "strongly disagree" or "somewhat disagree" with the suggestion "to increase taxes on those with high incomes in your country, and distribute the money to those with low incomes". Left respondents "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" with the same suggestion. P-values from a t-test of equal means are reported between each pair of average evaluations for right and left candidates.

TABLE A.4. Average trait evaluations according to respondent country (standard deviations in parentheses).

Candidates	Respondents' country	Beauty	Competence	Number of candidates
Right	Sweden	2.85 (0.75)	3.45 (0.53)	137
p-value of difference		0.0003	0.0094	
Left	Sweden	2.56 (0.76)	3.27 (0.68)	261
Right	United States	2.94 (0.78)	3.40 (0.56)	170
p-value of difference		0.0000	0.0095	
Left	United States	2.62 (0.78)	3.25 (0.65)	328
Right female	Sweden	3.14 (0.77)	3.54 (0.51)	68
p-value of difference		0.0000	0.0007	
Left female	Sweden	2.65 (0.79)	3.23 (0.64)	124
Right female	United States	3.03 (0.87)	3.35 (0.50)	98
p-value of difference		0.0006	0.0697	
Left female	United States	2.65 (0.85)	3.23 (0.55)	165
Right male	Sweden	2.56 (0.61)	3.35 (0.54)	69
p-value of difference		0.4033	0.6503	
Left male	Sweden	2.48 (0.73)	3.31 (0.71)	137
Right male	United States	2.82 (0.62)	3.46 (0.63)	72
p-value of difference		0.0168	0.0476	
Left male	United States	2.59 (0.69)	3.27 (0.73)	163

Notes: The Table contains candidates both from the municipal and the parliamentary elections. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. One observation is the average evaluation of one candidate. P-values from a t-test of equal means are reported between each pair of average evaluations for right and left candidates.

TABLE A.5. Average trait evaluations according to candidate attire (standard deviations in parentheses).

Respondents	Candidates	Tie or blouse and/or suite	Beauty	Competence	Number of candidates
All	All	Yes	2.75 (0.67)	3.41 (0.46)	823
p-value of difference			0.1751	0.0000	
All	All	No	2.70 (0.64)	3.16 (0.45)	534
Right	All	Yes	2.77 (0.75)	3.42 (0.59)	424
p-value of difference			0.4661	0.0000	
Right	All	No	2.73 (0.70)	3.13 (0.52)	279
Left	All	Yes	2.70 (0.74)	3.44 (0.60)	316
p-value of difference			0.9118	0.0000	
Left	All	No	2.69 (0.75)	3.18 (0.57)	196
Right	Female	Yes	2.83 (0.85)	3.35 (0.57)	225
p-value of difference			0.9937	0.0001	
Right	Female	No	2.83 (0.76)	3.11 (0.50)	141
Right	Male	Yes	2.71 (0.61)	3.50 (0.61)	199
p-value of difference			0.2565	0.0000	
Right	Male	No	2.63 (0.62)	3.15 (0.54)	138
Left	Female	Yes	2.84 (0.79)	3.36 (0.60)	169
p-value of difference			0.3409	0.2848	
Left	Female	No	2.95 (0.84)	3.28 (0.45)	79
Left	Male	Yes	2.54 (0.64)	3.54 (0.59)	147
p-value of difference			0.8420	0.0000	
Left	Male	No	2.52 (0.62)	3.12 (0.64)	117

Notes: The Table contains candidates both from the municipal and the parliamentary elections. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. One observation is the average evaluation of one candidate. P-values from a t-test of equal means are reported between each pair of average evaluations for candidates who wear a tie (for men) or blouse and/or suite (for women) and candidates who do not.

TABLE A.6.   Relative success in the municipal and parliamentary elections, incumbents and non-incumbents.

	(1) Municipal election	(2) Municipal Election	(3) Parliamentary election	(4) Parliamentary election
Beauty	17.07**	7.49	16.95***	15.68**
	(6.55)	(6.82)	(5.67)	(5.98)
Beauty×Right	3.03	5.31	-8.32	-8.98
	(6.59)	(7.19)	(9.78)	(7.91)
Competence	-2.03	1.97	11.48***	12.55**
	(10.64)	(7.37)	(3.38)	(4.12)
Competence×Right	-0.64	-10.18	-14.30	-14.03*
	(11.93)	(8.51)	(9.46)	(7.78)
Incumbent	466.59***	309.95***	224.63***	72.60***
	(100.75)	(89.99)	(38.69)	(23.13)
Incumbent×Right	-207.24*	-119.37	-69.27	-62.77**
	(111.18)	(99.91)	(51.01)	(25.65)
Male dummy	-25.35*	-29.82**	-7.83	-7.85
	(13.20)	(9.00)	(9.66)	(12.05)
Male dummy×Right	27.79*	21.95**	24.90*	31.85*
	(13.44)	(9.20)	(13.30)	(16.95)
Age dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education and occupation dummies	No	Yes	No	Yes
Unreported variables interacted with Right	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
List fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of candidates	779	779	575	575
R-squared	0.41	0.59	0.23	0.28

Notes: The dependent variable is Relative success. Right candidates belong to the National Coalition Party. Left candidates belong to the Social Democratic Party or to the Left Alliance. Robust standard errors clustered at the list level in parentheses. The estimated models include list fixed effects. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

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