

Elected in 1000 milliseconds

Facial features and electoral success

Introduction: The starting point of my presentation was, my observation that in many cases, people rapidly take conclusions about other people's personality characteristics solely from their appearances or from their facial appearances, without knowing them. I was curious, how can this fact affect our career, as leaders in further on, therefore I began to read about this topic.

The main aim of my presentation is to show; Contrary to the notion, that people use deliberate, rational strategies when deciding whom to vote for (for ex. In a case of a major political elections) people use shallow-decisions, such as impressions about competences based solely on facial appearance of candidates.

The structure of Presentation:

The presentation has 3 parts, in order to prove the hypothesis, that "The facial appearance of the candidates may influence the voting decisions in the electoral process "

1.1. Theoretical Arguments (based on Neurology)

1.2. Biological & evolution theoretical background

1.3. Psychological research (Northwestern University 2006)

1.1.The decision making process is a very complicated cognitive process

Generally our final decision is influenced by many simple cognitive mechanisms, such as stereotyping, judgements, impressions, when the decision-making process involves other people as well.

The flood of information about political candidates coming from newspapers, radio, television or from the internet, also means that voters are inundated with facts, rumors, interviews, pictures. Sometimes the given informations are also contradictory and the voters don't even know, wich information should they trust.

Therefore our brain takes mental shortcuts, focusing for the most part in this process only on the facial appearances of the candidates in order to arrive at our final decisions.

So, the facial appearances may affect the whole electoral process, influencing what voters think about the candidates, regardless of their policy and good arguments.

This part has shown, that the leadership choice has this theoretical basis. Leadership has also a biological basis.

1.2. Regarding to several researches, the two main traits, which are likely to be valued in potential leaders are the: dominance and the attractiveness

1. It is proved that the attractiveness is associated with many positive personality attributions. Attractiveness of faces is based on emotional expressions, signaling whether the person should be approached or avoided

Voters perceive attractive female politicians as good at leadership positions, because they unconsciously associate the attractiveness with superior abilities, such as intelligence, talent, kindness and honesty

2. The second major aspect of facial traits associated with leadership is facial dominance.

The evolution theoretical explanation of this fact, can be that, many primate societies were characterized by strict hierarchies, in which physical strength was the main determinant.

This fact highly correlate with the political gender gap. Generally, gender affects how people perceive and evaluate facial appearance. The cultural stereotypes about the social roles for men and women, can impact the kinds of facial features-, which signal attractiveness, competence, dominance and approachability in male and female faces.

According to social role theory, men are expected by society to be strong and assertive whereas women are expected to be nurturing and sensitive .

Consistent with this theory, male faces are considered more attractive and dominant if they consist of mature facial features (e.g., thick eyebrows, square face, large chins-all-) that are typically associated with physical strength and assertiveness.

By contrast, female faces are considered more attractive and affiliative when they consist of immature or 'baby-faced' facial features (e.g., thin eyebrows, round face, small chins), which are considered congruent with the social conception of women as less physically strong and assertive but instead more nurturing and sensitive relative to men.

So, societal expectations about ideal social roles for men and women can influence whom people find as attractive, dominant and approachable based solely-on their facial appearance.

1.3. One of the researches of Northwestern University Chichago underlines the theory. The method of the research was, that after showing for the participants a face of a political candidate for one second, they had to decide how competent, dominant, approachable and attractive the face seems like on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much).

The result was, that voters perceived the faces of male politicians as more competent and dominant relative to female politicians, whereas female politicians were perceived as more attractive and approachable relative to male politicians

Resuming, on the one hand, gender affect the types of facial judgments, on the other hand, that one factor underlying this political gender gap is the impression, that male politicians seem like as more competent than female politicians.

However, this explanation is unlikely for two reasons:

1. Firstly, because many researches indicate that male and female leaders do not differ in effectiveness or competence across a range of leadership roles, only their ways of thinking are different

2. Secondly, because the empirical work examining, that the effectiveness of governments led by women has shown that female politicians outperform male politicians in several ways: For instance/ex. female politicians in India are less likely to be corrupt and more likely to provide public goods in a more fair way, than their male counterparts

Given the evidence showing that men and women do not differ in leadership effectiveness, voters perception, that male politicians are more competent than female politicians, are more likely driven by cultural stereotypes and not of an accurate assessments of who is actually competent

While the current findings demonstrate that the facial traits and the gender biases in facial inferences affect voting behavior, voters may pay more attention to reduce their gender stereotypes and intuitions.

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