Facial Politics: Political judgment based on looks

Michaela Wänke

Jakub Samochowiec

University of Basel, Switzerland

&

Jan Landwehr

University of St.Gallen, Switzerland

Looks are important. First impressions usually have to rely on looks alone and even when more information is available it may not completely override the expectations created by appearances. In particularly when impressions are formed via the media, as is almost always the case for politicians, looks may be of crucial importance. Often perceivers have not much more information on political candidates or politicians than photos and short film clips (e.g. Bucy & Grabe, 2007). In an ideal world, voters should inform themselves about the political opinions of politicians through debates, newspaper articles, past political activities et cetera. Although some voters may do this, studies suggest that many voters rely on more simple cues, for example party membership (Bartels, 2000) or looks. The first part of the present chapter will give an overview of the role of looks for electoral success. Although the thought that looks decide elections may be unsettling relying on looks in social judgment is not entirely irrational. Growing evidence suggests that inferences based on looks only are not necessarily incorrect. We will turn to that aspect in the second part and discuss evidence that even political ideology can be detected from looks.

THE ROLE OF LOOKS IN PERSON PERCEPTION

„We look at a person and immediately a certain impression of his character forms itself in us. A glance, a few spoken words are sufficient to tell us a story about a highly complex matter. We know that such impressions form with remarkable rapidity and with great ease. Subsequent observations may enrich or upset our view, but we can no more prevent its rapid growth than we can avoid perceiving a given visual object or hearing a melody". (Asch, 1948, p. 258)

This notion that looks alone can provide insight into a person's mind and personality has persisted for a long time and in many cultures such as ancient Greece, Rome, and China (McNeill, 1998). Building on the notion of personality inferences by looks alone, the

pseudoscience of physiognomy was widely accepted in the 19th century (Shookman, 1993). Cesare Lombroso, an advocate of physiognomy who provided "scientific" testimony at multiple criminal trials, promoted the view that criminals possess certain physiognomic characteristics, such as fleshy full lips or ears of unusual size (Lombroso, 1876/2006). He went even further and assigned different looks for different types of criminals.

Although frowned upon as diagnostic tool nowadays, in everyday life people do judge others according to their looks. Scientific studies in person perception have shown that people form quick impressions of others based on facial appearance (e.g. Berry & McArthur, 1986; Hassin & Trope, 2000; Zaidel, Aarde, & Baig, 2005; Bar, Neta, & Linz, 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006; for a review see Todorov in press). What is perhaps more relevant than the fact that people ascribe particular characteristics to specific facial features are the social consequences of such inferences. For example, numerous studies on the beauty bias attest that attractiveness does not only attract friends and partners but apparently also money and success (e.g. Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994) and may even determine jury verdicts and sentences (e.g. Zebrowitz & McDonald, 1991). Beyond mere attractiveness the perception of specific traits has also been shown to influence careers. For example, facial dominance was related to cadet's rank at the military academy and to promotions in their late career (Mazur, Mazur, & Keating, 1984; Mueller & Mazur, 1996).

The role of looks in political elections

Analyses have also found that electoral success is related to candidates' attractiveness in Germany (Rosar, Klein & Beckers, 2008), Australia (Martin, 1987; Leigh & Susilo, 2009), Finland (Berggren, Johrdahl & Poutvaara, 2010), Switzerland (Lutz, 2010), and the UK (Banducci, Karp, Thrasher & Rallings, 2008). Although perhaps not surprising the thought that in well-established democracies people's vote is only skin-deep may nevertheless be upsetting. But do voters really consider attractiveness a qualification for political office?

Alternatively, attractiveness, which is directly observable, may be used as a cue for more relevant but less directly observable qualities (Verhuist et al., 2010; riggio et al., 2010). Meta-Analyses have shown, for example, that attractive people are thought to be more competent, better adjusted and to have better social skills (Langlois et al., 2000). Supporting the view that attractiveness is of relevance in elections because it is used as a proxy for other characteristics the influence of attractiveness became insignificant when other characteristics were also included (Banducci et al., 2008) such as "trustworthiness", "shares the respondent's concerns", "leadership", "qualification", "competence", and "experience". Unfortunately, the authors do not further break down which qualities are inferred from attractiveness and which qualities relate to electoral success. However, based on the notion that competence is viewed as a key quality in politicians (Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980; Gosling, Rentfrow, Swan , 2003) there is evidence that perceived competence plays a crucial role. Todorov and colleagues (Todorov, Mandisozda, Goren & Hall, 2005) analyzed races for the US house of representatives and the US senate. Altogether their study comprised of 600 races between only 2 candidates. Participants saw photos of pairs of candidates and selected whom they thought to be more competent. All candidates were unfamiliar to the participants. Their competence judgments based on photos alone predicted around 70% of the actual election outcomes. Similar results were obtained for other US elections (Armstrong, Green, Jones & Wright, 2010) and even when exposure time was limited to only 100 ms (Bellew & Todorov, 2007). Perceived trustworthiness did not predict the election outcome nor did other factors such as age or likeability. That perceived competence is important was also demonstrated for elections in Finland (2009) France (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009), or Italy (Castelli, Carraro, Ghitti & Pastore, 2009).

Note however, that it is not quite clear what competence means. In some studies the competence rating seemed related to intelligence and leadership (Todorov e tal. 2005) or a composite of these (Antina…). Given the political context of the studies one might assume

that participants when asked to rate competence understood the question as whether the person would be a good politician. Studies in Brazil and Mexico that actually used such a wording also found it to predict election outcomes (Lawson, Lenz, Baker & Myers, 2010). Thus, apparently people in various political cultures vote for those who look like good politicians. However, the perceived quality may not be specific to politics. When Swiss children were shown pairs of photos from candidates for the French Parliamentary election and asked who of the two should be captain of the boat the children's verdicts also predicted who had won the race and they did not differ from adults' ratings of competence (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009),). These results suggest that there may be a look of leadership that is driving electoral success. Perhaps the most impressive study in this regard artificially computed faces of winners and losers. Little and colleagues (2007) created a visual vector by computing the difference between the real faces of winner and loser in a election. They then took a composite of 10 faces and changed it towards the direction of the winner (+30%) or looser (-30%). Mock elections between these composites showed high agreement with the actual election outcome. Apparently, winners got the winning look.

But what specific traits or even facial features make up that look? What is it that makes a politician appear more competent and thus more eligible? Work of face perception ($) suggests that the two basic dimensions in facial person perception are trustworthiness and dominance. The correlation with leadership in the Todorov et al data set suggests that perceived dominance was an aspect in perceived competence whereas perceived honesty and trustworthiness did not seem to be related to competence. However, in other data sets perceived competence was related to both dominance and trustworthiness (Rule et al., 2010). It should be noted that competence in a politician is a much more malleable construct than trustworthiness, intelligence, or dominance. Competence may depend very much on the task. The same is true, of course, for what makes a good politician. Interestingly, whereas for American subjects perceived competence was related with facial maturity (Rule et al., 2010;

Oliviola & Todorov, 2010) and perceived dominance (Rule et al., 2010) for Japanese subjects competence correlated with perceived trustworthiness and likeability (Rule et al., 2010). Accordingly, these authors also found that only perceived power but not perceived warmth predicted US election. In contrast, perceived warmth but not perceived power predicted Japanese elections. Likewise, mock elections also revealed differences when voting for a leader in peace time or in war. Dominant looks were more successful in presumed war times than in peace times (Little et al., 2007).

The studies reported so far share a grave methodological problem. In each case the faces differed on many dimensions simply because different persons (or composites) were depicted. We cannot really tell whether more powerful or competent looking politician was elected because of the more powerful or competent looks or because any other detail in his appearance. Although, of course, the large data set in some studies undermines an alternative account, more systematic studies are needed. In two studies we (Landwehr, Wänke & Herrmann, 2010) looked at the perception of political eligibility at a more molecular level. We were interested in which physical features make a politician voted for. In a first study, we presented faces and asked participants to rate these faces on whether they would vote for the person. In addition participants rated trustworthiness and social dominance. All photos had been standardized and varied along twelve objective and measurable dimensions such as face length, face width, distance from lowest point to lower lip (chin length), distance from lower lip to upper lip (mouth length), mouth width, distance between the eyes etc. All measures within the face were standardized on the total length and width respectively. Of these twelve measures only three related to voting: mouth-width, brow-height and eye-height. Jointly all three features explained over 40% of the variance in the dependent variable. Importantly, further analyses revealed that this was not dependent on gender of the depicted face. The interesting question, however, was whether these objective features could also be traced back to inferences of trustworthiness and dominance. Indeed, we found that all three facial features

not only significantly correlated with trustworthiness while all other facial determinants did not, trustworthiness also mediated the impact of these features. In order to cross-validate these findings we experimentally manipulated faces along these three features and found support for the importance of two of these features. Independent of gender candidates with larger eyes and wider mouths were more likely to be voted for. Again, this effect was mediated by trustworthiness. As mentioned above these results, however, may not be universal. Switzerland enjoys a political and social climate that may render trustworthiness more relevant than dominance (see Little et al., 2007).

Taken together there is abundant evidence inside and outside the lab that looks matter. People do use appearance cues to infer traits and characteristics. This in turn affects their behaviour towards those targets. While we should assume that political races are determined by political issues looks play a crucial role. What makes this observation so up-setting is not only the strong sentiment that looks are not a qualifying criteria. Perhaps even more disturbing is the fact that modern technology allows to alter images and to project desired images at least in media depictions. In the study by Landwehr et al. a simple morphing programme did the trick. Other tools are much more sophisticated. For example Walker & Vetter (2008) developed a phascinating programme that very subtly alters photos of real faces to look more trustworthy, masculine, or extravert to name just a few dimensions. In this regard looks actually do deceive. But is that also true of unaltered pictures? To what extent do the inferences drawn from photos alone reflect reality?

ACCURACY IN PERSON PERCEPTION WITH MINIMAL INFORMATION

Despite its ubiquity in everyday life the use of facial features as a diagnostic tool has become scientifically unpopular. Methodological critiques marked the beginning of a rethinking (Cronbach, 1955; Gage & Cronbach, 1955). Later a focus on shortcomings and biases in human judgment (Gilovich, 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Nisbett & Ross, 1980) and

the respective influences on person perception (e.g Asch; Jones & Harris, 1967) led to the common impression that accuracy in human judgment is generally poor (Funder, 1987; Lopes, 1991). As fruitful as it was the focus on errors and biases did not give us the whole picture of person perception, however. After all the avoidance of error is not quite the same thing as the achievement of accuracy, and explanations of how errors arise shed relatively little light on how correct judgments are ever made (Funder 1995). Or as James noted (1897/1915) the shunning of error needs to be complemented by a more positively oriented search for truth. One might actually wonder whether the same processes that produce bias under some conditions did not evolve in the first place because they by and large are quite useful tools for accurate judgment. Some studies found that actually accuracy is reduced when reducing biases. Eliminating the "halo effect," for example, led to lower accuracy in real-world settings (Bernardin & Pence, 1980; Block & Funder, 1986; Borman, 1975). Often lab stimuli are deliberately constructed in such a way that people's natural tendencies would lead to errors. For example, people in positive mood tend to rely on their stereotypes whereas people in bad mood are more likely to use a bottom-up apporach (Bless). A normative perspective that accuracy requires systematic data-processing would therefore predict higher accuracy under bad mood. In contrast, Ambady and Gray (2002) demonstrated that when using real targets with objective criteria, accuracy actually was reduced when participants were in a bad mood. Moreover, the authors demonstrated that the reduction in accuracy was exactly due to a more deliberative information-processing style, which was obviously not helpful when making judgments about real people based on short videos. This research also suggests that people may be able to infer person attributes even from scarce information. Indeed, after a long period of silence, accuracy research experienced a renaissance in the 1990s.

Based on short observations of behavioral episodes, often referred to as "thin slices", perceivers can identify personality traits (Berry, 1991; Borkenau & Liebler, 1992; Carney,

Colvin, & Hall, 2007; Funder, 1980), intelligence (Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Murphy, Hall & Colvin, 2003; Reynolds & Gifford, 2001), sexual orientation (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999), performance (Babad, Avni-Babad, & Rosenthal, 2003) and social relations (Bernieri, Gillis, Davis, & Grahe, 1996; Costanzo & Archer, 1989; Kenny, Bond, Mohr, & Horn, 1996; for a review, see Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Funder, 1994; Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997).

There is also evidence that perceivers can form rather accurate impressions when only stills, mostly faces, rather than behavioral episodes are presented. Apparently, people are able to diagnose power and warmth (Berry, 1990; 1991) which is a comforting finding given the role of perceived power and warmth for electoral success discussed above (Rule et al., 2010). There is also evidence that honesty (Bond, Berry, & Omar, 1994; Zebrowitz, Voinescu, & Collins, 1996), extraversion, emotional stability and openness to experience (Penton-Voak, Pound, Little, & Perrett, 2006) sexual orientation (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Rule & Ambady, 2008), social class (Lassell & Parshall, 1961), and even male testosterone levels (Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004) can be inferred from facial photos.

These findings are only surprising in the context of a perhaps morally motivated sentiment that external appearances are completely unrelated to internal dispositions. The adage that "one shouldn't judge a book by its cover" or that "looks may deceive" reflect this cultural belief. In contrast, based on Gibson's (1979) theorizing, Zebrowitz and Collins (1997) proposed several ways in which psychological traits and configurations of physical attributes can systematically relate. First, it is possible that both physical and psychological qualities are influenced by the same factors (the common cause effect). These may be biological, genetic, or environmental factors. Rosenberg and Kagan (1987), for example, found that the genes that produce blue versus brown eyes may also influence behavior because the hormone responsible for eye color (alpha-melanocyte stimulating hormone) also influences arousal level and emotional reactivity. Alternatively, physical attributes may be caused by

psychological factors (the Dorian Gray effect). People who have a tense and irritable temperament may use different facial muscles in a way that leads to different jaw development than that of people who are more easygoing (Kreiborg, Jensen, Moller, & Bjork, 1978; Moller, 1966). According to the theory of emotional afference (Waynbaum, 1906; 1907a; 1907b), emotional processes produce vascular changes, which are partly regulated by facial musculature. Therefore a repeated experience of certain emotions leads to the habitual use of certain facial muscles, which, over a longer period of time, can permanently shape the looks of our faces, representing a direct effect of psychological on physical attributes (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). Likewise long-married couples increased in facial similarity presumably because of empathic mimicry of emotions over a long time (Zajonc, Adelmann, Murphy, & Niedenthal, 1987). As a further option the environment may mediate the influence of psychological attributes on physical ones. People with certain dispositions may seek particular environments that influence their looks in a specific way. Zebrowitz and Collins (1997) gave the example of hostile or aggressive people who may choose activities such as boxing, which in turn influences their looks in a specific way. Finally, physical aspects can influence psychological attributes (the self-fulfilling prophecy effect). People with a certain look might experience environments according to their looks, which in turn influences their psychological attributes. On the one hand, people may actively seek environments that suit their looks (attractive people may seek the presence of large crowds) and therefore develop certain personality attributes due to that environment. On the other hand, people may evoke certain reactions from their social environment that depend on their looks and consequently develop different personalities (Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997).

But if we accept the notion that dispositions may leak into faces we may also expect social perceivers to have become sensitive to detecting at least socially relevant characteristics. From an evolutionary perspective, the accurate assessment of other human beings' attributes, and the identification of friends and foes, can be conceived as an adaptive

prediction skill that is most relevant to the long-term fitness of individuals and the survival of the species. Without doubt, accurate person perception is highly adaptive for social interaction and for the individual's personal goal attainment (for reviews see Schaller, 2008; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2006). So it is perhaps less surprising that people became sensitive to the most obvious and immediate cue, the human face.

Can one tell political attitudes by looks alone?

Political positioning is primarily based upon attitudes, beliefs and opinions, which reside inside a person's head. To believe that perceivers can infer political attitudes from people's looks is contingent on two premises: first one has to assume that political attitudes transfer into people's looks (Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000; Brunswick, 1956; Funder, 1995; Zebrowitz & Collins, 1997). Above we outlined several processes by which dispositions may become facially engraved. The link may also be indirect. To the extent that political attitudes are linked to other personality attributes that have already been shown to be detectable, it does not seem so far-fetched to expect that in turn political inferences are accurate too. For example, openness to experience, a quality that has been shown to be detectable from pictures (Penton-Voak, Pound, Little, & Perrett, 2006), is negatively correlated with a more right-wing ideology (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008) and social dominance orientation (SDO), which may be detectable (Yeagley, Morling & Nelson, 2007), is positively correlated with a right-wing ideology (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). There is also reason to assume that dominance and high-status behaviour, which is associated with SDO, can be caused by male testosterone (Josephs et al., 2006; McIntyre et al., 2007), which has been shown to be detectable for men (Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004).

Second one would have to assume that perceivers are sensitive to the respective cues and interpret them accurately (Brunswik, 1956). While accurate person perception is undoubtedly highly functional as we argued above one might ask what are the specific

functions served by the accurate efficient detection of political positions? We would argue that detecting political attitudes goes beyond the advantages of diagnosing specific attributes. Distinguishing between political opponents and friends may be conceived as a special case of a more general adaptive skill, namely, to discriminate similar others from dissimilar ones. Detecting and discriminating opponents, enemies, out-group members and carriers of different genes from co-operators, friends, in-group members, and relatives may be at the heart of the evolution of person perception skills. For their personal well-being, people tend to flock to those who are similar, who share their attitudes and core values (Byrne, 1971). They trust those who do and distrust those who do not.

Political attitudes in particular seem to be quite distinguishing. There is plenty of evidence that ideological differences go beyond the political domain and, as Tomkins (1963) proposed, pervade all aspects of life. Political and ideological differences are indication of personality differences and thinking styles. For example, conservatism (right-wing ideology) is positively related to uncertainty, rigidity (Jost et al, 2003; Block & Block), and being power oriented (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and negatively related to attributional complexity (Altemeyer, 1998; Wänke & Wyer, 1996). Conservatives seem more concerned with people's behavior whereas liberals focus on people's attitudes (Wänke & Wyer, 1996). Compared with conservatives, non-conservative people show a higher preference for abstract paintings (Wilson, Ausman, & Mathews, 1973), complex poems (Gillies & Campbell, 1985) and unfamiliar music (Glasgow & Cartier, 1985). Liberals and conservatives even differ in how they decorate their personal surroundings (Carney et al., 2008). Given these findings it seems safe to assume that liberals and conservatives constitute represent quite different subcultures of people. As a consequence of such pervasive differences people may have experienced many opportunities to learn who is likely to share their views, life-styles, and behaviors, and who is not. As a consequence, they have acquired an over-learned sensitivity to these differences.

Previous research has shown that there is at least some consensus in judging political attitudes (Buckley & Roach, 1974) and party membership (Bull & Hawkes, 1982), which leads us to a definition of accuracy. In the absence of an objective criterion, many person perception studies would refer to inter-rater consensus as a substitute for accuracy proper (Kenny, Albright, Malloy, & Kashy, 1994; Willis & Todorov, 2006). However, while consensus is a necessary precondition of accuracy, the reverse inference is not necessarily justified. Raters may agree but still be wrong. A more objective external criterion would thus provide stronger evidence for accuracy, such as targets' self reports, reports by peers or close others (proxy reports), or – as the strongest criterion – manifest behaviors corresponding to the attitude.

Recent studies in the US (Oliviola & Todorov, 2010b; Rule & Ambady, 2010) and a much earlier study in the UK (Jahoda, 1954) showed evidence that the membership in one of two political parties (e.g. Democrats and Republicans in the USA) can be discriminated above chance. [1] Note however that judgments of party membership may involve many other superficial cues that may be associated with the party image (age, clothing, specific symbols, e.g.) but unrelated to personal political dispositions. Therefore, guessing parties and inferring attitudinal dispositions may be qualitatively different tasks, relying on completely different cues and calling for different validity criteria. We found, however, similar results when participants indicated whether a presented politician was either left or right (Samochowiec, Wänke & Fiedler, 2010). Going beyond the previous studies with only two parties our targets came from five different parties covering the whole spectrum in the German parliament. Interestingly, these *German* politicians could rather accurately be categorized as left or right by *Swiss* students. Apparently ideology may look alike across borders. Another point to note of this study was that accuracy from stills was not lower than accuracy from video clips. Thus, very thin slices were enough to detect political attitude.

Yet, we have to concede that although party membership is an objective external criterion it is at best a proxy for an individual's political ideology, which requires a deeper diagnostic inference. Members within one party may vary substantially and there may also be an overlap in political attitudes between different parties. In other studies we therefore employed a more solid criterion, namely the target politicians' real voting behavior. Political scientists of the University of Zurich had categorized and published the votes of each member of the Swiss parliament within nine topics: "societal liberalism", "opening towards outside", "social redistribution", "protection of the environment", "restriction of immigration", "strong police and military", "saving and tax reduction", "economic liberalism" and "education" (http://www.sotomo.geo.unizh.ch/spider/). A factor analysis of the voting yielded a single component, which accounted for 69% of the variance and correlated almost perfectly with the left-to-right measure developed by other methods (Hermann, 2006). In addition to the individual voting score we also obtained **p**ortrait photos of the parliament members from the Parliament website. In pilot studies we had excluded politicians that were known too well. In addition, in all studies participants also indicated whether they knew a politician and if so the data were excluded. The photos were uniform in background and in portrait style. All 82 politicians wore normal business attire and all male politicians, with two exceptions, wore a tie.

Relative Judgments

The first test of the whether perceivers are able to detect politicians' political attitudes from their faces involved relative judgments. Participants were exposed to randomly paired pictures of politicians and asked to decide which of the two politicians was the more conservative one. In different experimental conditions, the portrait pairs were either shown for a brief period of 7 seconds or for a very brief period of only 1.5 seconds.

Method. Participants were 76 undergraduate students (55 women) of the University of Basel, Switzerland. They participated for course credit. On a computer screen, participants were presented with pairs of the politicians and asked "Which of the two politicians is more right-wing?". They had to press the "A" key if the politician on the left side on the screen was politically more right-wing than the politician on the right side of the screen and the "L" key if the politician presented on the right side was also politically more right wing.

Each participant was shown two sets of 41 pairs. The presentation time of the first set of pairs was 1.5 seconds for each pair and 7 seconds for the second set of pairs for half of the participants, and vice versa for the other half. In both sets the pairs were composed by randomly picking two pictures out of the pool of 82 politicians. After the presentation of each pair the photos were replaced by a black shadow of a person's head; the same mask was used for all photos. The letter A appeared below the left mask, the letter L below the right mask. Participants then pressed one of the two keys to choose the more conservative politician. They could also abstain from a decision by pressing the spacebar if they could not tell who was more right-wing or press the "B" key if one of the politicians seemed in any way familiar to them.

Results and Discussion. Overall accuracy was defined as the number of correct choices minus the number of incorrect choices. Positive values (maximum 41) therefore represent accuracy, negative values (maximum – 41) reflect systematically incorrect choices. A value of zero would represent chance accuracy.

 A 2 x 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) with presentation time (7 vs. 1.5) as a repeated-measures factor and order of presentation time as a between-participant factor showed that accuracy was unaffected by both the presentation time, $F(1,74) < 1$; and the order manipulation, $F(1,74) < 1$. The interaction was also negligible, $F(1,74) < 1$. Thus, correct identification of political attitudes can occur rather fast.

However, a similar ANOVA for the number of non-responses showed that participants more often renounced from decisions in the 7-second condition (M=4.2, SD = 6.24) than in the 1.5-seconds condition (M=3.1, SD=5.45), $F(1,74) = 4.73$, $p < .05$, prep=.93; eta2 = .06. Apparently, uncertainty increased with prolonged thinking time. This finding is in contrast to finding of Willis & Todorov (2006) who found more confidence after longer exposure time.

For further analyses, the data were collapsed over order conditions. The overall accuracy scores were significantly above zero across both presentation times together $M = 5.95$, $SD = 6.04$, $t(75) = 8.58$, $p < .0001$, prep =.99 d=.96, as well as for both presentation times separately (for the 1.5 seconds presentation time $M = 5.75$, $SD = 7.41$, $t(75) = 6.76$, $p < .0001$, prep =.99 d=.78; for 7 seconds presentation time $M = 6.14$, $SD = 7.13$; $t(75) = 7.5$, $p < .0001$, prep =.99, d=.86.

Sixty of 76 participants were significantly above chance level in their overall accuracy, only 7 were significantly below chance level. Out of 82 total judgements, on average 43.27 were correct, 31.38 were incorrect, 6.67 were not answered. In 0.67 cases participants indicated to be familiar with one or both politicians.

The pairs of politicians differed in the distance the two politicians had to one another on the political attitude dimension. These distances were split into 5 intervals by dividing the factor from the principal components analysis by 5, resulting in the intervals 0-.2; .21-.4; .41-.6; 61-.8 and 81-1. Since there were too few pairs with a distance of .81 or higher (1.36 on the average for every participant), this group was excluded from analysis. Accuracy levels were calculated separately for each distance-group and presentation time by subtracting all the incorrect answers from the correct answers and dividing that number by the number of pairs the participant was presented with that distance and presentation time (since pairs were compiled randomly, every participant had a different number of pairs that had for example the distance 0-.2). A 2 (presentation time) x 4 (distance) repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for distance F(3,225) = 18.03, p <

.0001, prep = .99, showing more accurate ratings with increased distance. Both the presentation time main effect, as well as the interaction, were non significant $F(3,225) < 1$. For short presentation times (1.5 seconds), accuracy values were $M = .04$, $SD = .28$ (for 0-.2), $M = .14$, $SD = .31$ (for .21-.4), $M = .2$, $SD = .37$ (for .41-6) and $M = .26$, $SD = .4$ (for 6.1-8). For long presentation times (7 seconds), accuracy values were $M = .03$, $SD = .25$ (for 0-.2), $M = .1$, $SD = .33$ (for .21-4), $M = .25$, $SD = .42$ (for 4.1-6) and $M = .32$, $SD = .4$ (for 6.1-8).

Absolute Judgments

Altogether, these results support the prediction that political ideology can be inferred well above chance from looks only and that this can be done in an astonishingly short period of time. This conclusion holds for the vast majority of individual judges. One may argue, however, that a direct-comparison format, which leaves only one bit of information to be inferred, may have greatly facilitated the task. Judges may have a much harder time to make absolute inferences about the political identity of individual, separately presented politicians. In other studies (Samochowiec et al. 2010) we therefore presented the politicians individually and tested whether absolute attitudes can be inferred at similar accuracy levels as relative attitudes.

Using the same material participants rated the politicians on a 7-point scale (left – right). Again accuracy was well above chance level. The average ratings for each politician correlated with actual voting behavior $r = .45$, $p < .0001$. Again, supporting our previous finding of some cultural universality even German participants were above chance in rating Swiss politicians. Most notably our findings go well beyond previous results of accurate party identification. Not only do we find the correlation across the whole spectrum. Our rather fine-grained criterion also allowed analyses within the left and the right group separately which

revealed that raters were able to do more than just a dichotomous left-right decision. The correlations held within each group. Likewise, analyses at participant level were also significant for Swiss and non-Swiss participants alike.

In addition to overall accuracy this study (Samochowiec et al., 2010, Study 2) tested a further hypothesis fundamental for the notion of accuracy in person perception. As elaborated above it has been argued that the ability to quickly identify others correctly provides an evolutionary or individual advantage (Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2006; Schaller, 2008). This may not only pertain to specific attributes but also to judging similarity or closeness. But as several authors (Nesse, 2005; Schaller, 2008) have proposed, some errors are more costly than others. Trusting someone who will potentially harm us is a more severe error than distrusting a harmless person. Mistaking an out-group member for an in-group member can be more disadvantageous than the reverse. Thus, identity detection may be more sensitive to avoiding erroneous inclusion (false negative errors) than to erroneous exclusion. In other words, it should be functional to widen the boundaries of the out-group and to develop a response bias toward more out-group than in-group identifications when guessing under uncertainty. Indeed the data support this assumption. Overall right-wing politicians were identified with greater accuracy than left-wing politicians. However, the difference in accuracy between left- and right-wing politicians depended on the political attitude of the participant. The more left-wing a participant was, the more accurate were judgments of right-wing politicians relative to judgments of left-wing politicians. In other words accuracy was higher when politicians and raters came from the opposite sides of the political spectrum. A signal detection analysis revealed that this was indeed due to a stricter criterion for in-group categorization as compared to out-group categorization. This result is well in line with findings that prejudiced people are biased to classifying many people as belonging to the prejudiced group (Allport & Kramer, 1946; Castano, Yzerbyt, Bourgiugnon, & Seron, 2002; Elliott & Wittenberg, 1955; Quanty, Keats, & Harkins, 1975).

What drives the perception of political attitudes?

Of course many hypotheses which concrete cues drive these effects may come up. However, except for gender, for which we corrected in all studies none of the obvious such as age or styling proved significant. One study (Samochowiec et al., Study 3) explicitly tested the impact of styling and found no support for this assumption. However going back to the original assumption that political ideology corresponds to personal traits and in particular that right-wing ideology is related to social dominance (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), indeed perceived dominance seems to account for part of the phenomenon (see also Rule & Ambady, 2010), but not all.

So what?

Apparently political attitudes manifest in faces and people can read these differences. That people can identify political attitudes beyond merely left and right but to a rather precise degree may come as a surprise. But it is only surprising in a culture that believes that internal mental concepts and external appearance are entirely unrelated and independent of each other. Given that it is adaptive to detect socially relevant dispositions and traits it seems plausible that humans developed detection skills for such traits and dispositions. What is however perhaps astonishing is that political attitudes fall into this category of detectables. After all, what makes political attitudes so relevant? We suggest that people are attuned to identifying political attitudes because political ideologies mark important group distinctions. People who differ on the political spectrum are also likely to differ in their tastes, cognitive styles, and personality. Therefore political ideology functions as an in-group/out-group marker. The finding of an in-group over-exclusion tendency also corroborates the relevance of political attitudes as a group-defining feature.

The question remains whether being correctly identified by one's looks is relevant for a politician. On the one hand one might assume that conservative or liberal looks become completely irrelevant once party membership is known. On the other hand one may argue that political statements are perceived as more authentic and credible if the politician has the matching look. Although we have not directly tested this, some data support this latter assumption. The "readability" of a politician, that is the accuracy with this politician was identified, significantly predicted his or her re-election success (Samochowiec et al., 2010). Those candidates whose political voting in the past matched their looks had a higher chance to be re-elected into the Swiss parliament. Looking like what you are seems to be an asset in politics.