Blinded by Beauty? Physical Attractiveness and Candidate Selection in the U.S. House of Representatives*

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Objective. In this article we show that physical attractiveness matters as a heuristic device for uninformed voters but not for politically savvy voters. *Methods.* Drawing on a two-step experiment, we first ask over 100 students to rank the physical attractiveness of candidates to the U.S. House of Representatives. Second, we create a treatment and a control group comprising each of 1,200 research different subjects. We ask the first group to indicate their vote choice by merely looking at the picture of candidates for the 2008 U.S. House of Representatives elections, while the second group has a picture and a detailed description of the political/professional competence of the contenders at their disposal. *Results.* We find that our first group of study subjects representing all those voters who are politically uninformed tend to cast their ballot for the better-looking candidate, whereas the second group, representing politically knowledgeable individuals, choose the more competent candidate. *Conclusion.* Our experimental study provides evidence that uninformed or politically unknowledgeable voters use political appearance as a heuristic device in casing their ballot at elections.

The axiom "what is beautiful is good" applies to many social settings (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972:285). In human interactions, attractive individuals are immediately perceived as being more likeable and friendly (cf. Brewer and Archer, 2007). At the workplace, more attractive individuals gain a pay premium of up to 10 percent and are prone to advance their careers faster than less attractive employees (Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994). In politics, good-looking politicians are more likely to be nominated to executive positions at all levels in comparison to politicians who are perceived as less attractive (Ibrocheva, 2009). In elections, attractive candidates frequently get a vote premium of several percentage points solely based on their looks (Tsafati, Elfassi, and Weismiel-Manor, 2010; Hoegg and Lewis, 2011). But who are the voters for whom the physical appearance of candidates is a primary criterion in their votechoice? While some studies (e.g., Lenz and Lawson, 2011) entertain the possibility that uninformed voters use physical *appearance* as a heuristic device to make their vote choices, there is still some need for a study that empirically tests the relationship between physical *attractiveness* and vote choice in the presence of voters with low and high levels of information.

To investigate whether uninformed individuals use physical attractiveness as an information shortcut more so than informed voters, we perform a two-step experiment. We first ask approximately 100 Canadian coders to rate the physical attractiveness of all contenders in more than 320 electoral contests for the 2008 congressional elections to the

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U.S. House of Representatives. In a second step, we randomly split a different sample of more than 2,400 Canadian students into two groups—a control and an experimental group—and ask them to determine for which of the two contenders they would vote. The first group of students—representing uninformed voters—only see the pictures of the two contenders. The second group—representing informed individuals—sees the pictures of the two contenders and receives a detailed description of the two candidates' level of political experience, their professional qualifications, and their educational background. In the majority of cases, we find that the first group of students picks the more attractive candidates, whereas the second sample overwhelmingly chooses the more competent candidates.

Our article proceeds as follows. In the following section, we shortly review the literature on physical appearance in light of our study. We then justify our case selection and thoroughly explain our research design and methodology. Next, we present and interpret the results from our experimental study. Finally, we summarize the main tenets of our study, discuss some of the limitations of our analysis, and offer possible avenues for future research.

Physical Attractiveness and Election Outcomes

Nearly 30 years of research strongly support the notion that attractive candidates gain a vote premium of several percentage points in elections. Beginning with Efran and Patterson (1974:34), scholars (e.g., Albright et al., 1997; Todorov et al., 2005; Lenz and Lawson 2011) have repeatedly shown that physical attractiveness has a strong influence on candidates' vote prospects. This finding holds across countries and types of election. For example, using the 2004 Australian national election as a case, King and Leigh (2009:591) report that candidates who are perceived as considerably more attractive than their opponents gain a vote premium of several percentage points. Berggren, Jordahl, and Poutvaara (2010) confirm this finding in their study on Finnish municipal elections. Adding another analytical level, Rosar, Klein, and Beckers (2012) indicate that a similar positive influence of physical attractiveness on candidates' share of the vote exists in major elections in the German federal state of North Rhine Westphalia.

The literature (e.g., Rosar, Klein, and Beckers, 2008:73–76) also concurs that physical attractiveness is a rather relative, not absolute, feature. This means that voters judge the physical attractiveness of a candidate in relation to his or her opponent (i.e., the more a candidate outperforms his or her opponent in terms of attractiveness, the more additional votes he or she is likely to receive). To undergird this finding, Banducci et al. (2003, 2008) report in their studies on elections to Community Partnership Boards in the United Kingdom that attractive candidates are not per se more likely to win, but rather are more likely to be victorious when they are paired against a less attractive contender. More precisely, these scholars argue that the odds of winning an election increase by 70 percent when a candidate with the highest attractiveness score is paired against someone with the lowest attractiveness score. Similarly, Praino, Stockemer, and Ratis (2014) argue that physical appearance has a strong influence on the share of the vote received by candidates in U.S. congressional elections.

In addition, other studies (e.g., Albright et al., 1997) have supported the finding that attractiveness matters in elections outside of the Western world. For example, focusing on Brazil and Mexico, Lawson et al. (2010) find that merely based on the physical appearance of the two contenders, subjects are able to predict the election winners for both countries with 68 percent accuracy. The existing recent literature also adds that attractive candidates benefit

disproportionally from television exposure (Lenz and Lawson, 2011) and are less likely to be targeted by negative advertisements from their opponents (Hoegg and Lewis, 2011).

In particular, two studies, by Lenz and Lawson (2011) and Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick (2011), which try to evaluate the context in which physical appearance matters, inform our study. Matching individual-level survey data on vote intentions with physical appearance scores collected by Ballew and Todorov (2007)[1]—Lenz and Lawson (2011) find that uninformed voters disproportionately utilize physical appearance as a low-information heuristic shortcut. More precisely, these two scholars indicate that voters with low levels of political knowledge and high TV exposure tend to disproportionately support candidates based on their physical appearance. The second study by Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick (2011), while maintaining that voters evaluate attractive candidates more favorably than unattractive candidates, argues that, in some cases, voters also tend to "correct" for this physical attractiveness bias. According to these three scholars, this correction applies the more voters possess high amounts of cognitive capacity and the more they come to the conclusion that judging candidates based on their physical appearance is inappropriate. In addition, Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick (2011) report that this correction of physical attractiveness seems to be more likely to occur when the candidate's appearance is negative, less likely when the appearance is positive.

In sum, the recent literature entertains the possibility that the attractiveness of candidates is a low-information heuristic shortcut. The more voters are unknowledgeable about the qualifications and experience of political candidates, as well as the content of political programs, the more this shortcut should apply. While Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick (2011), as well as Lenz and Lawson (2011), make a giant leap in confirming this hypotheses, both studies can be complemented. Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick (2011) use overall candidate evaluation as the dependent variable, rendering it unclear how much differences in physical attractiveness actually matter in an individual race. Lenz and Lawson (2011) employ the Ballew and Todorov (2007) scores, which do not measure physical attractiveness but appearance-driven competence.[2] Consequently, while Lenz and Lawson's (2011) study demonstrates that evaluations of candidates' *competence* play a large role in determining the vote choice of poorly informed voters, there is no definitive explanation in the existing literature of the link between *attractiveness* and low/high levels of information in the decision-making process of voters.

In this article, we are particularly interested in the type of voters who might vote according to the physical appearance of candidates. To theoretically obtain some leverage on this question, we tap into the social psychology literature. Psychologists (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991) have found that human beings judge other human beings in a two-step process. The first step, labeled "system 1 processing," consists of instantaneous and automatic value judgments in an individual's brain, which are mainly linked to an individual's physical appearance (Winston et al., 2002). According to Winkielman et al. (2006), seeing something deemed beautiful automatically creates a reaction over the cheek region of the beholder, which triggers a positive effect. This instant positive effect, in turn, induces the individual to form positive inferences about the social and intellectual competence of his or her counterpart (Eagly et al., 1991:124). However, this instantaneous reaction wanes whenever an individual decides to engage more thoroughly with his or her counterpart. In this case,

[1]The survey data contain information on the voters' intention of vote in the 2006 gubernatorial and Senate elections, a test of their political knowledge, and a measure of TV exposure.

[2]These two concepts—attractiveness and competence—are different and distinct. In fact, studies have shown that while physical attractiveness tends to be determined by individuals through assessments of facial symmetry (cf. Thornhill and Gangestad, 1993; Rhodes et al., 1998), appearance-driven evaluations of social characteristics such as competence occur through judgments based on the valence/trustworthiness and power/dominance dimensions that are distinct from the idea of physical attractiveness (cf. Todorov et al., 2008).

a process called "system 2 processing" sets in. When individuals deliberately decide to acquire additional information about their counterparts, their brain begins to judge them according to traits of character, not looks. In this sense, the theory of system 1 and 2 processing argues that the more individuals share information with other individuals, and the more they get to know their character and qualifications, the less physical appearance should matter in their value judgment of other human beings (Willis and Todorov, 2006).

Applied to voters, this psychological theory would imply that uninformed voters are more likely to choose their candidate based on physical appearance, whereas informed citizens ought to make their vote choice based on the contenders' competence and qualifications (see Johns and Shephard, 2011). The first group, voters who are uninterested in politics, might never make the deliberate decision to acquire information about the candidates and parties, thereby not engaging in system 2 processing. Instead, a version of system 1 processing constantly occurs whenever these citizens are exposed to candidates' faces on billboards, flyers, and television ads. According to this logic, unknowledgeable voters should automatically judge politicians based on their physical appearance. In contrast, voters interested in and informed about politics are likely to make the deliberate decision to acquire information about the contenders, the parties, and the stakes of the election. The theory of system 2 processing indicates that the more they do so, the more physical appearance becomes trivial, and the more the actual competence of politicians matters. Building on these psychological insights we hypothesize that the physical attractiveness of candidates plays an important role in determining the vote choices of uninformed individuals, but not so for politically informed individuals. We test this hypothesis in an experimental setting. The next section introduces our experimental design and explains the methodological procedures we adopt for this study.

Research Design

We engage in a two-step experimental setting to test whether the vote of uninformed citizens is guided by the physical attractiveness of candidates, and whether the vote of informed citizens is based on the contenders' qualifications. We obtain these data by asking approximately 100 Canadian undergraduate students aged between 19 and 24 to rate the physical attractiveness of contenders in the 2008 U.S. House of Representatives races.[3] These students, who are recruited from third- and fourth- year political science courses offered at the University of Ottawa, are each asked to rank the physical attractiveness of 40–50 politicians on a scale from 0 (least attractive) to 10 (most attractive). The only information the students have is the color pictures of the contenders, and the information that they are judging U.S. politicians.[4] In total, we have each candidate ranked by five

[3]Using Canadian subjects to rate the physical attractiveness of U.S. House contenders minimizes possible bias, which a U.S. sample could have triggered. U.S. citizens, knowing the political affiliation of at least some of the contenders, could have used their partisan preferences to rank these candidates. This implies that a committed Democrat would have likely rated a Democratic contender's physical attractiveness more highly than that of a Republican candidate. Vice versa, a Republican supporter could deliberately or even subconsciously favor his or her party's candidate. Having Canadians rate the physical attractiveness of candidates minimizes this danger, since U.S. House politicians normally do not receive much attention outside of the United States. It is also very likely that the Canadian coding reflects beauty ideals in the United States, given that the two countries share a very similar culture, fashion, and lifestyle.

[4]All pictures are high resolution and high quality. Pictures are collected from the official biography of elected members and from the official campaign website of unsuccessful candidates. All pictures show the face of the candidate, who is usually wearing business attire, on a plain background. Because the pictures are all very similar in form and format, it is very unlikely that the quality of the picture influences the students' attractiveness judgment.

TABLE 1

Attractiveness Scores Obtained from Coders by Gender

	Males		Females
Canadian Student Coders			
Mean	4.58		4.31
Cohen's *d*		0.13	
Hedges's *g*		0.13	
Median	5		4
Mode	4		4
St. dev	1.81		2.36
Mechanical Turk Coders			
Mean	6.20		5.73
Cohen's *d*		0.21	
Hedges's *g*		0.21	
Median	6		6
Mode	6		6
St. dev	2.09		2.05

different students. Based on these rankings, we calculate an average attractiveness score for the two main candidates in 324 races—for a total of 648 individual candidates.[5]

Since we concur with the current literature (e.g., Banducci et al., 2008; Rosar, Klein, and Beckers, 2008) that voters use relative judgments of candidates' physical attractiveness rather than their absolute perceived attractiveness, we create an attractiveness differential by subtracting for each race the score of the candidate we list second from the candidate we list first. This attractiveness differential ranks the physical appearance of contenders relative to each other. It accounts for the fact that a score of "5" may represent a larger advantage to an individual running against a candidate with a score of "0" than a score of "10" for someone running against a candidate with a score of "9." Finally, and to have a basis for comparison for our experiment, we condense our attractiveness differential into three categories. We deem an individual as more attractive than his/her opponent if he or she has a score of 0.5 or higher (coded 1), of similar physical appearance in relation to his/her opponent if the person is ranked between 0.5 and –0.5 (coded 0), and as less attractive than his or her opponent if the contender has a score of –0.5 or lower (coded –1).

Despite the fact that physical beauty is a subjective measure (e.g., Eagly et al., 1991), our results indicate strong consistency in students' beauty rankings for candidates. While it can be true that students base their physical appearance scores on how closely each candidate matches an ideal-type appearance, on facial symmetry or anything else (cf. Rhodes et al., 1998; Thornhill and Gangestad, 1993), we find relatively little deviation from the mean for each individual (see the standard deviations in Table 1). This implies that students agree to a large degree about whether an individual is attractive or not. We also find that the rankings of male coders are very similar to those of female coders (see Table 1). The two measures of effect size (i.e., Cohen's *d* and Hedges's *g*) comparing the mean values across genders confirm that the effect is very small (cf. Cohen, 1988; Hedges, 1981).

Due to the fact that the Canadian coders are all students in their early adulthood, there may be some bias in their attractiveness rating. To test the degree to which this is the case,

[5]In the 2008 House elections, 55 out of the 435 races are unopposed. By definition, these 55 candidates do not have any opponent and hence it is impossible to relatively judge the physical attractiveness of contenders. In addition, we eliminate 56 races because we do not get sufficient data on the political experience, competence, and qualifications for 56 nonincumbent candidates, which implies that we cannot measure the political competence and qualifications of these individuals.

we have the same photos ranked by a second type of coders consisting of a more diversified sample. In more detail, we use Mechanical Turk, a commercial website that allows users to hire anonymous individuals to perform simple web-based tasks, and post our total of 648 photos there. The instructions provided for this second pool of subjects are identical to those given to the students. Again, we ask coders to rank politicians on a scale from 0 to 10. We also set up the study so that each candidate is ranked by five different coders. To guarantee the largest possible foreignness with the candidates, we only allow individuals outside of the United States to participate in the study. Similar to our student coders, we also request from our online participants to disclose their age and gender. While this second group is also very homogeneous with regard to gender (see Table 1), it is quite diverse when it comes to the age of participants; the mean age of the Mechanical Turk coders is 34 (e.g., the youngest coder is 20 years, whereas the oldest one is 85).

The attractiveness scores obtained from the two samples are very similar. While overall, the Mechanical Turk coders, regardless of whether they are female or male, on average, rate candidates about 1.5 points higher in absolute terms, their relative judgment is very similar to that of the student coders. In fact, when we compare the two indexes, not only is the majority of candidates assigned to the same category, but the distribution within the three categories across the two samples is also virtually identical. This close match between the two samples gives us confidence that our attractive differential measure captures the relative perceived attractiveness of candidates quite accurately.

After the acquisition of the data on the physical attractiveness of candidates by student coders and the cross-validation with a completely different set of coders, we conduct our "real" experiment in the fall 2012 semester at the Universities of Ottawa and Western Ontario. We deliberately run this main part of our experiment with a completely different set of students for two reasons: (1) we want to exclude the risk that ranking a candidate's physical beauty in a first step might directly influence a student's hypothetical vote choice in a second step, and (2) asking students to conduct both tasks at once might reveal the purpose of the experiment, which might also bias the results.

More than 2,400 students from more than 50 classes in political science and sociology participated in this experiment. In each class that we or our student assistants visit, we randomly divide the subjects into two groups of the same size, one being the experimental group, the other the control group, assigning each participating student to one of the two groups. Students in both the experimental and control groups are asked a very simple question: "Pick the candidate for whom you would vote, if you received this ballot at an election." The only information the students in the experimental group have is the facial picture of the candidates in color on a plain background. The students in the control group receive the same picture of the two contenders, as well as a detailed description of the two contenders' education, political qualifications, and professional background[6] (see the Appendix for an example). We select our participants so that five students in both the experimental and control groups must pick the winner of one or at most two singular races.[7]

[6]We do not reveal the party affiliation of the two candidates to virtually eliminate all possible political bias in the candidates' value judgments. We retrieve the information on candidates' education, political qualifications, and professional background from their official congressional biographies if they are incumbents and from their personal campaign websites if they are challengers.

[7]The experimental group represents uninformed voters, while the control group represents informed voters. This does not mean that the students in the experimental group were less informed about politics or were less politically sophisticated than the students in the control group. In fact, utilizing university students as study subjects allows us to reasonably assume that both random groups contain similar levels of political information and sophistication, the difference being only the lack or presence of information about the candidates running for office beyond their physical appearance.

For our experimental group, which represents the group of uninformed voters, we assume that the students make their vote choice based on the physical appearance of the two candidates. These students only have the picture of the candidate to base their vote choice on; hence they are literally forced to select their preferred candidate based on the looks of the contenders. Having physical attractiveness scores to compare the vote choices with, we calculate how many times the first listed candidate is chosen under three scenarios: (1) he or she has an attractiveness score of 0.5 or higher and is thus perceived as the more attractive candidate, (2) he or she is deemed of roughly equal physical attractiveness in comparison to his/her opponent (i.e., the first listed candidate has an attractiveness score between –0.5 and 0.5), and (3) the person is considered less attractive than his or her opponent (i.e., his or her score is –0.5 or lower). Based on these three dimensions, we hypothesize that, on average, the first listed candidate should receive a significantly higher number of votes when he or she has a positive attractiveness score. In contrast, candidates with a neutral or, to a greater extent, negative score, are expected to receive a lower number of votes.

For our control group, we assume that our study subjects make their vote choices based on the political competence of the two candidates. To calculate the political competence of candidates, we calculate a competence differential in the same way as we calculate our physical attractiveness differential. We code the first listed candidate in each race 1 if we find him or her to be more competent, 0 if the two contenders are of roughly equal political competence, and –1 if the second listed candidate is more competent. To assign these three values we rank candidates on three dimensions: (1) political experience, (2) professional experience, and (3) educational background. We first rank candidates on each dimension using the aforementioned scores –1, 0, and 1. Second, we add up the scores for these three dimensions. Whenever the first candidate has a positive ranking, he or she is deemed as more competent and awarded the score of 1. In case the sum of the three numbers adds up to 0, we deem the two candidates of roughly equal competence and code the race 0. Finally, if the first candidate receives a negative score, we code him or her as less competent and attribute the numerical value of –1.

While ranking candidates in the educational dimension presents little to no challenge, doing so in the political and professional dimensions is slightly trickier. For example, within the political dimension, we must account for the many levels of political engagement. To make sense of this multitude of political offices, we roughly follow the subsequent scheme (listed from least important to most important): school board member, member of a municipal council, executive appointment at the city level, member of a state House, member of a state Senate, mayor of a small town, mayor of a large town, minor executive position at the federal or international level, sitting/former member of the U.S. House, sitting/former member of the U.S. Senate, major executive position at the federal or international level. We use an equally sophisticated scheme to assign values based on the professional background of candidates. For this dimension we count high-end jobs in business and law highest and give additional points if the candidate has a senior position in a professional organization, such as a state bar association. Despite the rather complex coding scheme, we find that in the vast majority of the races (over 70 percent of our cases) it is very clear which of the two contenders is politically and professionally more competent. For the cases that were not clear, we deliberated each case, and if necessary also solicited outside advice.

Analogous to our hypothesis that the experimental group—those individuals who see only the picture of candidates—is likely to vote based on physical attractiveness, we hypothesize that our research subjects in our control group should cast their votes based on the competence of the two candidates. More precisely, we hypothesize that the first listed

TABLE 2

The Vote Distribution in the Experimental Group

	Average # of Votes	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1st listed candidate has a positive attractiveness score	3.12	1.23	0	5
1st listed candidate has a neutral or zero attractiveness score	2.81	1.21	0	5
1st listed candidate has a negative attractiveness score	2.27	1.26	0	5

TABLE 3

One-Way ANOVA of the Vote Distribution in the Experimental Group

	1st listed candidate has a negative attractiveness score	1st listed candidate has a neutral or zero attractiveness score	1st listed candidate has a positive attractiveness score
1st listed candidate has a negative attractiveness score			
1st listed candidate has a neutral or zero attractiveness score	0.539** (0.183)		
1st listed candidate has a positive attractiveness score	0.856*** (0.157)	0.316 (0.256)	

LSD multiple comparison test. Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

candidate should gain the most votes if he or she has a positive competence ranking, fewer votes if the competence score is 0, and even fewer votes if his or her competence ranking is negative. We also expect that, for our control group, physical attractiveness should no longer have any impact. Hence, we presume that the attractiveness differential does not influence the vote choices of our control group subjects.

Results

Out of the first group of students—those subjects who only see the picture of the two contenders—every student, on average, votes 3.1 times for the first candidate if he or she has a positive attractiveness score, 2.8 times for the first listed candidate if the two candidates are of roughly equal attractiveness, and 2.3 times if the first candidate is deemed less attractive (see Table 2). A one-way ANOVA test confirms that the difference in the average vote the first listed candidate receives is statistically different from 0 if he/she is better looking as compared to when he/she is perceived as less attractive (see Table 3). While our experiment confirms that physical attractiveness is a subjective judgment (i.e., not everybody agrees with which candidate is more attractive, and hence does not vote for the candidate who is generally perceived as better-looking), it nevertheless reveals clear

TABLE 4

The Vote Distribution in the Experimental Group

	Average # of Votes	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1st listed candidate is more competent than his or her opponent	3.76	1.28	0	5
1st listed candidate is equally competent than his or her opponent	2.23	1.18	0	5
1st listed candidate is less competent than his or her opponent	1.58	1.37	0	5

tendencies with regard to the relationship between physical attractiveness and the choice of candidates.

In sum, the subjects in the experimental group vote more than 3 out of 5 times for the candidate who is perceived as more attractive by our coders. The odds drop to slightly above two times for the less attractive candidate. If we were to translate this finding into actual election outcomes, our study would predict that those uninformed voters that base their judgment on the physical appearance of candidates agree in their "beauty" judgment to a degree that allows the candidate who is generally perceived as better-looking to gain a vote premium of more than 25 percent. If we were then to hypothesize that a mere 10 percent of the electorate were to use physical appearance as a heuristic device, then the generally more attractive candidate would get a vote premium of 2.5 percentage points, which could be decisive to win an election, especially in a two-party system, such as the United States.

Turning now to the competence dimension, we get an even more striking picture. The most competent candidates receive by far the most votes. Any candidate with a positive competence score obtains more than 3.75 of the total of the 5 votes that the students in the control group attribute in their experimental election. If we deem the two contenders of roughly equal competence, the first listed candidate receives 2.3 out of the 5 votes, and when the first listed candidate is less competent, he or she merely gains 1.6 votes (see Table 4). A one-way ANOVA test indicates that the differences between all three categories are statistically different from zero (see Table 5). The clear differences in the vote share also highlight that individuals generally agree about who is more and who is less competent, and the more competent candidate is generally rewarded with more votes.

Some additional tests further indicate that for our control group the competence judgment of the candidates trumps the attractiveness judgment. For example, if the first listed candidate is more attractive but less competent, he or she only receives 2.3 out of the total of 5 votes. Vice versa, if the first candidate is less attractive but more competent, he or she even obtains 4.1 out of 5 votes. These two additional examples highlight what system 2 processing behavior would predict. If individuals are interested and have knowledge about the candidates, they use this knowledge to make their electoral choices. The physical appearance becomes trivial in this endeavor.

Our experimental design has one caveat. While our experimental setting with Canadian coders allows us to detect that physical attractiveness matters for uninformed voters, but not for informed voters, it does not consider the multiplicity of factors that, in reality, account for somebody's vote choice. Most importantly, it does not control for partisanship, media, and peer influences. However, partisanship, exposure to political news, and political discussions are likely to occur among individuals who are politically interested in and

TABLE 5

One-Way ANOVA of the Vote Distribution in the Control Group

	1st listed candidate is less competent than his or her opponent	1st listed candidate is equally competent as his or her opponent	1st listed candidate is more competent than his or her opponent
1st listed candidate is less competent than his or her opponent			
1st listed candidate is equally competent as his or her opponent	0.754** (0.250)		
1st listed candidate is more competent than his or her opponent	2.18*** (0.273)	1.43*** (0.154)	

LSD multiple comparison test. Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

knowledgeable about politics. In contrast, politically unsophisticated individuals are likely to have no partisan attachment and normally do not engage in political activities or discussions. Hence, it is likely that in the "real" world politically unsophisticated individuals have few heuristic devices, except for physical beauty.

Hence, we maintain that our experiment adequately captures the voting behavior of uninformed individuals. As outsiders of the political process, they have few other possibilities to judge politicians than by their looks. Even more so, according to the predictions of system 1 processing, this judgment of physical appearance should be automatic if voters only see the picture of contenders for a short time. For politically informed citizens, the vote choice should be more complex than described by our simple experiment. In fact, informed citizens should cast their vote according to the qualification of the contenders, their partisan attachment, the program of the contenders, their evaluation of the campaigns, and based on their interactions with others. Future research should determine how these factors interact.

Our finding that uninformed voters, more so than politically sophisticated voters, should recur to physical appearance as a heuristic device when selecting a candidate has far-reaching empirical repercussions. This should apply the more, the more we consider that studies (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Galston, 2001) measuring the political knowledge of Americans have repeatedly shown that U.S. citizens at each educational level know less about politics than comparable individuals 30 years ago. As Dow (2011:382) soberly argues, current U.S. citizens know little about salient political issues, fail to attribute party positions correctly, and lack information about the functioning of their political system (e.g., they fail to correctly recall the distribution of powers between the two Houses of Congress).[8] Given

[8]Using various concrete examples of citizens' lack of political sophistication, survey research over the past 25 years has confirmed this trend. Most striking, a 1986 ABC-Washington Post poll reveals that in 1986 only 14 percent of the polled knew the name of the Soviet leader at the time (i.e., Mikhail Gorbachev). A 1992 report by the Center for the Study of Communication at the University of Massachusetts indicates that only 15 percent of a random sample of Americans knew that the Republican presidential ticket at that time (i.e., George Bush and Dan Quayle) supported the death penalty (see Delli Carpini, 2000). More recently, Luskin and Bullok (2011) have confirmed this lack of basic political knowledge reporting that half of the U.S. population fails to correctly name the length of a senate term (i.e., six years), whereas 40 percent of the sample fails to recall the nomination procedures of Supreme Court Justices.

the widespread lack of political knowledge among large parts of the population in the United States and elsewhere (see Milner, 2002, 2010), physical appearance should play a larger and larger role in elections, if, indeed, uninformed citizens vote according to this heuristic device.

Conclusion

This article adds a new chapter to the literature on physical appearance and voting behavior. Through experimental methods, we have confirmed the predictions derived from system 1 and system 2 processing theory as well as the already well-known idea (cf. Lenz and Lawson, 2011) that the physical appearance of candidates determines the voting behavior of uninformed citizens. In more detail, we have shown that uninformed voters are "blinded by beauty" in the sense that they favor attractive candidates when they possess little information on the competence and qualification of candidates. Conversely, we have also demonstrated in our experimental setting that informed voters use their actual knowledge about candidates to elective office in determining their vote choices, and decide to vote in the overall majority of cases for the candidate who is more qualified.

Our findings are also consistent with the notion of the "correction" of the attractiveness bias by informed voters (cf. Hart, Ottati, and Krumdick, 2011). In fact, our results show that less attractive candidates who are more competent than their opponents receive almost every single vote cast—that is, 4.1 votes out of 5. This is consistent with previous findings, and tentatively confirms that informed voters "correct" their attractiveness bias especially in the presence of unattractive candidates.

Overall, our finding that attractiveness impacts the votechoice of politically uninterested citizens, but not knowledgeable citizens, has several practical implications. First, and probably most importantly, it reveals the potential that physical attractiveness might have in future elections. If the citizenry in the United States and globally becomes even more politically disengaged and disinterested, as current studies suggest is the case, physical attractiveness can potentially become more and more important in elections. Rather cynically, this implies that parties might fare well when they nominate good-looking candidates. Second, our study also offers tentative support for the stipulation (see Banducci et al., 2008, for example) that the physical attractiveness of candidates has a stronger impact the less important the election is. For low-profile local and regional elections (in contrast to high-profile national legislative and presidential elections), fewer citizens spend the time necessary to thoroughly inform themselves about the candidates. Hence, physical appearance should be more important in these low-profile elections.

Despite the fact that we have pushed our understanding of the effect of physical attractiveness on candidates' electoral fortunes forward, the literature on attractiveness and elections is still in its infancy, and there still is a lot of work to be done in order to fully understand the intricacies of the relationship between physical beauty and electoral success. For example, future studies should evaluate whether various age groups and ethnicities judge the appearance of candidates differently or similarly. Furthermore, future research should take into consideration that physical appearance is not the only heuristic device according to which (uninformed) voters choose candidates. For instance, salient research questions could tackle how physical attractiveness interacts with a person's latent political ideology, and also try to discover whether the physical attractiveness of candidates entices nonvoters to actually vote. While we have asked more questions than we have offered answers, we are nevertheless confident that our study pushes forward the intriguing research field of physical appearance and electoral success.

Appendix

Indication of Description Provided to the Students in the Control Group

552  0

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- degree in Business Administration
- worked full time in San Diego as an information technology business analyst
- joined the U.S. Marine Corps
- attended Officer Candidates School at Marine Corps Base Quantico and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant
- served as a field artillery officer in the 1st Marine Division after the 2003 invasion of Iraq and completed a second tour in Fallujah, Iraq
- honorably discharged from active duty but remained in the Marine Corps Reserve
- started a residential development company
- recalled to active duty and deployed to Afghanistan
- honorably discharged from active duty but continues to serve part-time as a Captain in the Marine Corps Reserve

- graduated from University of California, San Diego
- Master's Degree in National Security Affairs
- recognized by the Department of Defense as a specialist in both the Western Hemisphere and Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict
- Navy SEAL
- conducted counter-narcotics operations
- Officer in Charge of the training and readiness of all West Coast SEAL Teams
- liaison to the United States Congress on policy and appropriation issues supporting our nation's Special Operations Forces.

705  0

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- Williams College
- University of Connecticut School of Law
- attorney with the firm of Ruben, Johnson, and Morgan
- intern to U.S. Senator Chris Dodd
- campaign manager for Charlotte Koskoff
- worked for Connecticut State Senate Majority Leader George Jepsen
- elected to the Planning and Zoning Commission in the town of Southington
- elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives
- elected to the State Senate

- small business background
- attended Western Connecticut State University
- mortgage loan officer for Flagstar Bank in Danbury
- elected to the Danbury Common Council
- won election to the Connecticut House of Representatives
- elected to the State Senate

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