

Beautiful politicians win more votes: study

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Beautiful politicians win more votes, according to Australian National University research released today that asked an independent group of ‘beauty raters’ to assess the looks of 286 major party candidates who ran in the 2004 federal election.

The study, conducted by ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh and University of South Australia student Amy King, found that voters tend to opt for the better-looking candidate.

“Compared to the average-looking political candidate, a candidate at the 84th percentile of the beauty distribution, as judged by our independent raters, receives an extra 1½ to 2 per cent of the vote. In some seats, this is the difference between winning and losing,” Dr Leigh said.

The researchers used ‘how-to-vote’ photographs, which were rated by four independent raters chosen to be representative of the electorate. “There was strong agreement across our raters as to who were the most beautiful candidates. When it comes to assessing politicians, beauty is not in the eye of the beholder,” Ms King said.

The researchers performed a series of robustness checks, and found little evidence that confounding factors such as age, race or political party were driving the results.

Ms King and Dr Leigh also analysed the effect of beauty separately for male and female candidates, and for incumbents and challengers.

“For both male and female candidates, it helps to be better-looking. But we find some evidence that beauty benefits male candidates more than female candidates. This may be because female beauty carries negative connotations in the minds of some voters,” said Dr Leigh.

“Beauty matters more for challengers than for incumbents. This suggests that looks affect first impressions. Once voters come to know a politician, their physical appearance does not matter as much.

“Washington DC has been described as ‘Hollywood for ugly people’. But our results show that Australian voters are systematically choosing more handsome candidates to represent them in Canberra.”

According to the raters, the ten most attractive major party candidates in the 2004 election were, in descending order: Nicole Campbell (ALP, Bennelong), Adam Giles (LP, Fraser), Victoria Brooks (ALP, Riverina), Andrew Laming (LP, Bowman), Julie Bishop (LP, Curtin), Kate Ellis (ALP, Adelaide), Sarah McMahon (LP, Reid), Michael Keenan (LP, Stirling), Pat Farmer (LP, Macarthur), and Sussan Ley (LP, Farrer).

A copy of the paper, Beautiful Politicians, is available at:
econrsss.anu.edu.au/~aleigh/

Source: Australian National University

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