

Better-looking politicians get more media coverage

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The better a politician's looks, the higher the frequency of television news coverage, shows a new study carried out at the University of Haifa's Department of Communication, published in the *International Journal of Press/Politics*. "Earlier studies have shown that people generally tend to prefer the company of people who are physically attractive and even value them as more worthy people. Our study reveals that journalists probably behave just like the rest," the researchers noted.

The study, carried out by Dr. Yariv Tsfati, Dana Markowitz Elfassi and Dr. Israel Waismel-Manor and based on a thesis written by Ms. Markowitz Elfassi, explored the association between the physical appearance of [politicians](#) and news coverage on Israeli television channels 1, 2 and 10. The researchers surveyed the coverage of all members of the 16th Israeli Knesset on these channels. In parallel they had the appearance of each member of Knesset -based on their official website photos - rated by Dutch students who were not familiar with the personalities, so as to avoid political bias or any sort of partiality. In order to examine whether the [physical attractiveness](#) has actual bearing on coverage and that it does not result from other differences between those who are more attractive and less attractive, additional control variables were inspected, such as age, sector, political tenure and political centrality.

After controlling for these other factors, it was found that the more attractive politicians are covered in the television news more than the less attractive politicians, physical appearance having more influence on

the amount of coverage for women than men. Even though female politicians got the highest rankings for their looks, however, the overall television news reporting on them was significantly less than that of men. Young members of Knesset got higher marks for appearance, but their [media coverage](#) was lower.

"Seeing as there are those politicians who enjoy and seek out media coverage more than others, we wanted to examine whether motivation and effort to achieve media exposure are the factors that actually determine the amount of coverage. But this study has revealed that these are not mediating factors for [physical appearance](#), and attractiveness has an effect regardless," the researchers noted.

What other factors affect media coverage? Political tenure and seniority both have positive influence on coverage. Army rank also has quite some weight, probably due to the prominence of security matters on Israel's media agenda. The more senior the politicians were in the Army prior to entering the political arena, the more coverage they get in the present.

"Nowadays, publicists and campaigners, as well as politicians themselves, are aware of the importance of media skills. Our study demonstrates how being attentive to outward appearance must be included in these skills, seeing as it can increase the politician's exposure through the media," the researchers concluded.

Provided by University of Haifa

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