

# Study says best-looking politicians lean right, best-looking scholars lean left

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According to research by Berggren, Jordahl and Poutvaara, in elections run in Australia, the European Union, Finland and the United States, right-leaning politicians are generally more attractive than left-leaning politicians. The current study by Professor Jan-Erik Lönngqvist shows that this applies specifically to politicians and does not mean that right-leaning people on the whole are more attractive.

In order to investigate whether right-leaning people are more attractive generally speaking, Lönngqvist examined right-leaning scholars to see if they, too, were more attractive than their left-leaning counterparts. Politicians and academics are comparable in many aspects such as age, level of education, [social status](#) and a place in the public eye.

"When it comes to a career in academia, however, looks do not appear to be of any great importance."

## left-leaning scholars more attractive

The results of the study show that left-leaning scholars are perceived as more attractive than their right-leaning colleagues. Right-leaning scholars are often better groomed, however. The results indicate that looks matter a great deal in politics, and that especially politicians on the right benefit from being physically attractive.

"The fact that left-leaning scholars are perceived as better-looking is no cause for alarm," Lönngqvist says. "What is worrying, however, is the high degree of importance attached to looks in political elections."

The primary reason that politicians on the right look better than politicians on the left could be that good looks have, within right-leaning parties, more of an influence on the processes through which electoral candidates are selected and on the electoral

success of the candidates.

"The results of my study are in concordance with other studies that show that the effect of attractive looks is twice as large for politicians on the right compared to their counterparts on the left," says Lönngqvist.

On the whole, [physical attractiveness](#) has a positive effect on a person's success and is associated with positive qualities. Attractive people earn more money, are treated better, achieve a higher social status and are happier. But the better informed the constituents, the lesser the effect of looks on election results.

"One possible reason for the greater influence of looks on right-wing constituents could be that they are less informed. Previous research has also shown that conservative voters have a more concrete, perhaps less sophisticated way of thinking," Lönngqvist says.

Lönngqvist wishes voters would become more aware of the extent to which looks subconsciously influence voting behaviour. Voting advice applications are a good aid to help voters decide whom to vote for.

## Four hundred scholars assessed

For the purpose of the study, the hundred most recent authors for each of four highbrow American magazines were selected, 400 scholars in total. The magazines *Claremont Review of Books* and *First Things* were identified as right-leaning, and the *New York Review of Books* and *The Humanist magazine* were identified as left-leaning. These magazines were identified by many sources as belonging to the most prominent and influential ideologically toned intellectual magazines.

Based on the magazine they had published in, half of the scholars were identified as right-leaning and

the other half as left-leaning. The best possible portrait pictures of each scholar were obtained. Based on the portrait photographs, research assistants were then given the task of rating each scholar on three items: physical attractiveness, placement on the continuum right-left and placement on the continuum conservative-liberal. Physically attractive scholars were more likely to appear in left-leaning journals.

Right-leaning scholars were also perceived to have conservative values, while scholars perceived as left-leaning were also considered liberal.

The study "Just because you look good, doesn't mean you're right" was published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Provided by University of Helsinki

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