

## ARTICLE

# The Right Faces for Right-Wing and Left-Wing Politicians

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### Abstract

Researchers of the baby-face stereotype maintain that having a more adult-looking face contributes to success in the political arena. However, this hypothesis has not been confirmed in previous research. This study suggests that more mature faces will be beneficial only for left-wing politicians whose public perception suffers from the appearance of a lack of dominance. Furthermore, with regard to only left-wing politicians, we also hypothesized that the maturity of their faces would indirectly lead to greater intentions to vote for them and acceptance of their attitudes. An experiment conducted in the context of municipal elections in Israel confirms these hypotheses.

During Israel's 2015 national election, the Labor party, headed by Yitzhak Herzog, faced a close race against the right-wing Likud party and its leader and incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Fearing that Herzog's boyish looks might cost Labor the elections, his campaign team photoshopped his poster image to give him some gravitas (Cheslow, 2015). Altering his head's height to width ratio to make him look less baby-faced did not win him the election, but the fact that he approved these visual modifications is telling.

In today's society in which we are surrounded by visual images presented by many media channels, it is not surprising that the looks of political candidates have a major impact on election outcomes. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated the impact of the attractiveness and look of dominance of

politicians' faces on their chances of being elected (e.g., Olivola & Todorov, 2010). Research to date has generally focused on the main effect of various facial characteristics on electoral outcomes, yet, in this study, we argue that the political ideology of the candidates interacts with the maturity of their faces in influencing public opinion regarding the candidates' ability and the public's voting intentions.

### The Debate About the Antecedents of Public Opinion

There has been a long-standing controversy among political scientists regarding the political competence of citizens. In the first decades of the twentieth century the public was regarded as relatively ignorant about political matters (Price, 1992), however, more optimistic views arose over time (Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000). According to one of these views, although the public lacks political knowledge, their opinion as a whole is rational because they cancel out each other's errors (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Another approach claims that citizens base their opinions on cognitive shortcuts called heuristics that do not demand much political knowledge and lead to mostly reliable political opinions (Popkin, 1994; Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock, 1991).

However, some challenge this last approach, claiming that these heuristics often lead to irrational and distorted opinions (Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000). Although these claims may be true, we must also consider that following Rosenberg and McCafferty (1987), many of the studies of the impact of heuristics on voting provided subjects with little or no context to rely on, thus possibly artificially augmenting their effects (e.g., Lev-On & Waismel-Manor, 2016). The current research demonstrates how citizens can combine rational and relevant information regarding the leaders' political attitudes, together with heuristic and irrational factors about the politicians' appearance, in forming their political opinions and decisions. By doing so, it provides a more realistic exploration of heuristics and voting.

### The Importance of Looks for Politicians

Abundant research conducted mainly in recent years has documented the importance of politicians' looks for their perception and electoral success (e.g., Brusattin, 2011). In a seminal study, Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005) showed their participants pictures of real candidates for 1 s. They demonstrated that perceptions about their competence arising simply from this brief view of their faces significantly predicted election outcomes. Using a different methodology, Armstrong, Green, Jones, and Wright (2010) obtained similar results.

Another line of research demonstrated the importance of physical attractiveness for politicians. More attractive politicians are perceived as better leaders (e.g., Rosar, Klein & Beckers, 2008) and receive more television coverage (Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). Besides attractiveness, researchers have also tried to determine whether the baby-face stereotype affects election outcomes.

### The Baby-Face Stereotype

Some adults have faces that resemble those of babies. These faces include features such as large foreheads and lips, tiny noses, and chubby cheeks. Abundant research has documented that people across cultures tend to react to these individuals similarly to the way they react to real babies (Zebrowitz, 1997). In other words, people tend to view baby-faced individuals as warm, sincere, naïve, and caring, whereas they view mature-faced individuals as dominant, tough, competent, and cold (e.g., Berry & McArthur, 1985, 1986; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2005).

As they are perceived differently, people expect baby-faced and mature-faced individuals to behave differently. Baby-faced individuals are expected to obey the law, not to harm others intentionally (Berry & Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1988) and to behave in a friendly manner (Berry & Landry, 1997). Based on their perceived traits, baby-faced individuals tend to be favored for jobs that involve taking care of others, such as teachers in nursery schools. Mature-faced individuals, on the other hand, are favored for jobs that require intelligence and leadership such as executives (Zebrowitz, Tenenbaum & Goldstein, 1991).

### The Impact of a Baby-Face in the Political Arena

Given that those with mature faces are perceived as stronger and more dominant than those with baby faces, it is not surprising that researchers have expected the former to be more successful in the political domain (e.g., Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2008). Indeed, previous research has documented that political candidates with baby faces are perceived as less competent (Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berggren, 2009) and that the perceived competence of a politician's face affects actual voting outcomes (Todorov et al., 2005). Interestingly, however, the actual baby-faceness was not a significant predictor of electoral success (Olivola & Todorov, 2010). When it did correlate with electoral success, for male candidates only, the correlation was positive, meaning the baby-faceness helped those male politicians be elected (Poutvaara et al., 2009). Olivola and Todorov (2010) attempted to explain this finding by the greater approachability attributed to individuals with baby faces. The fact that the significant correlation emerged only for male candidates might suggest that

they are generally perceived as less approachable than women and, thus, benefit from a look that signals approachability.

Livingston and Pearce (2009) reported a related finding demonstrating that baby-faceness is correlated with more success in upper managerial positions for Black male chief executive officers. They explained that the baby-faceness attenuates the stereotypical perceptions of Blacks as intimidating. Similarly, in a recent research, Maoz (2012) found that Jewish Israelis perceived a Palestinian politician proposing a peace agreement more positively when he had a baby face. The participants tended to view this leader as more trustworthy than a politician with a mature face, leading to increased support for his suggested peace proposal. We could speculate that the politician's baby face mitigated the general lack of trust of the leaders of the opponent group. Thus, we could conclude that baby-faceness benefits leaders whose perception, based on specific characteristics they possess such as gender, race, or nationality, hinders their electoral success and contradicts that of the baby-face stereotype.

Based on this logic, we might also suggest that possessing mature facial features should have electoral benefits, especially for politicians who espouse policies that contrast with the attributes associated with mature traits, and this perception hinders their electoral success. We propose that this is the case with left-wing politicians. Recent research has demonstrated that left-wing politicians are perceived as less dominant than right-wing politicians (Rule & Ambady, 2010; Samochowiec, Wänke, & Fiedler, 2010). Another line of research showed that dominance is one of the most important traits predicting a politician's electoral success (e.g., Chiao, Bowman & Gill, 2008), especially in times of war (Little, Burriss, Jones & Roberts, 2007). In other words, a politician advocating left-wing attitudes might be perceived as lacking the trait of dominance, a characteristic that is particularly important for politicians in times of war. This issue is particularly consequential in Israel, which has been in a constant state of conflict since its establishment. In Israel, in which concern about security issues has been paramount among most of its population since its establishment (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010), dominance in leaders should be greatly appreciated, especially with regard to left-wing leaders who are generally viewed as less dominant. Indeed, a study by Ellis, Nadler, and Rabin (1997) found that both right-wing and left-wing respondents in Israel viewed the ideal leader as characterized by dominance and that both perceived the right-wing political leaders who were examined in the study as more dominant. Thus, in this context, left-wing politicians might benefit from a mature-looking face that can compensate for their lack of perceived dominance.

Thus, we hypothesized that, in a context where personal or national security is a major concern, left-wing candidates would benefit from having a

mature-looking face rather than a baby face. As right-wing attitudes are already associated with dominance (e.g., [Samochowiec et al., 2010](#)), the structure of the politician's face might be less consequential for those who take a right-wing position on the issues. Therefore, we posited that:

*H1: There will be an interactive effect of the structure of the politician's face and the political ideology of the politician, on his or her evaluation as being a good political leader. Left-wing politicians will be evaluated as better leaders when they have a mature-looking face rather than a baby face. There will be no such difference with regard to right-wing politicians.*

We reasoned that perceiving political candidates as good political leaders, as reflected in their perceived traits, would lead to agreement with their positions and the intention to vote for them ([Bartels, 2002](#); [Kilburn, 2005](#); [Prysb, 2008](#)). Thus, we expected that for left-wing politicians, their facial features would also promote agreement with their positions and the intention to vote for them through the mediation of their perceived leadership ability. We predicted that:

*H2: People will prefer to vote for a left-wing politician who has a mature-looking face than for a left-wing politician who has a baby face. This effect will be mediated by the evaluation of the politician as a good political leader.*

*H3: People will report more left-wing attitudes after being exposed to a left-wing politician who has a mature-looking face than for a left-wing politician who has a baby face. This effect will be mediated by the evaluation of the politician as a good political leader.*

## The Context of the Current Research

We tested these hypotheses in the context of the attitudes of Jewish Israelis toward the Bedouin minority in the Negev region in Israel. The most important issue in Israeli politics revolves around the Israeli-Arab conflict and focuses on the territories that were conquered by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 ([Arian & Shamir, 2008](#)). The right-wing ideology stresses the importance of keeping and defending Israeli's territories, and the left-wing ideology is inclined to negotiation and compromise with the aim of achieving peace, even if it means relinquishing part of the land ([Arian & Shamir, 2008](#)).

A poll conducted among Israelis determined that an anti-compromise ideology was associated with a zero-sum perception of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in which either the in-group or the out-group won and the belief that the Palestinians despise the Israelis and would demolish Israel if they could. The compromise ideology, on the other hand, was related to feelings of sympathy with the Palestinians ([Maoz & McCauley, 2005](#)).

These differences were also demonstrated in intergroup contact studies (Maoz, 2003). In her study, Maoz (2003) confirmed that doves and hawks in Israel differed in their attitudes toward an encounter with Palestinians both before and after this encounter, with left-wing participants expressing much more positive attitudes (Maoz, 2003).

The issue of the territories defines left-wing and right-wing political attitudes in Israel (Rahat, Hazan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2016) and overrides and sometimes overlaps with other divisions in society including class, religion, and ethnicity (Arian & Shamir, 2008). Support for territorial compromises is attributed to the political left, or doves, whereas preserving control over these territories is attributed to the political right, or hawks (Maoz & McCauley, 2005). Public opinion studies conducted over the years demonstrate that attitudes Israelis hold regarding security and the issue of the territories are the best predictors of their self-categorization as favoring a left-wing or right-wing political ideology (e.g., Shamir, Dvir-Gvirsman & Ventura, 2016; Ventura & Shamir, 1991). Importantly, these studies also demonstrate that the importance of the security issue for the division between the two ideologies has intensified over the years (Shamir et al., 2016).

This cleavage is also relevant to Israeli attitudes toward the Bedouin minority. The Bedouin are seminomadic Arab tribes who base their living on agriculture. This population of ~200,000 people lives in both recognized towns and villages, and settlements that are unrecognized by the state of Israel. Jewish Israelis tend to view the Bedouin as primitive, nomadic people whose culture awaits civilization (Hall, 2014; Shamir, 1996), and often as “trespassers ‘gnawing away at the country’s land reserves,’ who have to be prevented and punished” (Hall, 2014, p. 149).

## Method

### Participants

Participants were Israeli university student volunteers who received no compensation for their cooperation. Of the 174 participants, 72 were male, 98 were female, and 4 did not report their gender. Their ages ranged from 18 to 57 years, with a mean age of 26.26 years ( $SD = 6.05$ ). These participants were randomly allocated to the various experimental conditions.

### Design

We used a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects design with the following independent variables: the political candidate’s facial features (baby face or mature face) and the candidate’s political attitudes (left wing or right wing). The dependent

variables were leadership traits, voting intentions, and attitudes regarding the Bedouin issue.<sup>1</sup>

## Material and Measures

We devised a questionnaire that included the stimulus on the first page and the questions measuring the dependent variables and demographics on the following pages.

**The stimulus.** The participants were presented with a fake local newspaper article about a town meeting with a mayoral candidate in Ashalim, a small village in the Negev in the south of Israel. The candidate's name was Tal Segev, whose name in Hebrew can be masculine or feminine. In addition, the article included a photo of the candidate, a man or a woman in their early thirties. Each gender had two versions manipulated by computer graphics software to include facial features that were baby faced or more mature looking.<sup>2,3</sup>

The newspaper article reported on various issues (constant across the candidates) and the candidate's declared opinion regarding the "Bedouin issue" from either a left-wing or right-wing perspective. The opinions were categorized as left-wing or right-wing based on the main factors that define this dichotomy in Israel. As stated above, left-wing and right-wing ideologies in Israel are defined almost exclusively by attitudes about Israel's territories

<sup>1</sup>We also measured social and physical attraction and expected future actions of the candidate. As these constructs are not directly relevant to the hypotheses of the current research, we do not report them here.

<sup>2</sup>The manipulation of the facial features was conducted using the morphing software Psychomorph. The baby face and mature face versions, the two extremes of the dominance trait dimension (Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008), were created from high-resolution photos of unknown, non-Israeli male and female images. We loaded and changed the target photo  $\pm 40\%$  along a dominance trait dimension (for more information about the morphing software see Tiddeman, Stirrat, & Perrett, 2005; for the morphing procedure, see Laustsen & Petersen, 2015). We do not have copyright permission to print the original and morphed images. They can be provided individually on request.

<sup>3</sup>We conducted a pilot test to examine the facial stimuli. Forty-six participants from the main study's same pool of students, who did not take part in the main study, volunteered to participate in the pilot. Twenty-two of them were male, 23 were female, and 1 did not report his or her gender. Their ages ranged from 18 to 71 years, with a mean age of 26.00 years ( $SD = 8.27$ ). They were presented with the four photographs that were used in the main study and had to indicate the degree to which each of them was mature-faced or baby-faced on a 1–7 scale. We created indices for the mature faces and the baby faces. Each of the indices was calculated from the average grading of the male and female pictures. Indeed, the baby-faced pictures were perceived as significantly more babyish ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) than their mature-faced versions ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 130.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.74$ . We also examined whether the faces differed in their attractiveness and other traits that are part of the baby-face stereotype. These traits were also measured on a 1–7 scale with higher numbers indicating higher evaluations of the trait. With regard to perceived attractiveness, there was no significant difference between the baby faces ( $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) and the mature faces ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 1.74$ ,  $p > .1$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$ , although the picture of the baby-faced female was perceived as slightly more attractive than its mature-faced version. Moreover, in line with the baby-face stereotype, the people with baby faces were perceived as nicer ( $M = 4.73$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than the mature-looking people ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 32.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.42$ . They were also perceived as warmer ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) than the mature-faced people ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 22.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.33$ , and as less capable ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) than the mature-faced people ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 23.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.34$ .

(Arian & Shamir, 2008). The right-wing ideology stresses the significance of maintaining and protecting Israeli's territories, even from its own citizens, who happen to be Arab, while the left-wing ideology favors a more peaceful approach of negotiation and compromise with these nomadic tribes who settled in the Negev decades before the establishment of the state of Israel. Thus, in the left-wing condition, the candidate commented:

“Did you ever ask yourself why in recent decades our close relationship with the Bedouin population has deteriorated? The answer is simple: Despite the fact that over the decades they were loyal to the Israeli state and fought beside us in the military, serving as trackers in the best army units, the Israeli state has abandoned them. They have the worst schools in the country. The regional planning committees do not allow them to build new houses even in their own settlements. If I were elected, I would work with the education and housing ministers and the Bedouin leadership to solve this problem. Good schools and adequate housing in their villages mean safer homes for us. But this is not only in our best interest—this is the right thing to do.”

In the right-wing condition, the political candidate commented:

“The illegal spreading of the Bedouin is a time bomb for Israel. They are taking over our lands and have no respect for the law. Because of their high birth rate, in a few years they will become the majority in the Negev region. How will life be in Ashalim then? These are not the Bedouin who served in the military with my father a few decades ago. They do not care whether the Negev remains part of Israel or becomes part of the Palestinian state. If I were elected, I would work with the minister of defense, the minister of internal defense and with any other authority who would agree to work with me to solve this problem. There is a common saying that good fences make good neighbors. This is the solution to the Bedouin's expanding control and the right thing to do.”

The participants were randomly assigned to the eight versions of the newspaper article that resulted from the combination of the candidate's facial type, gender, and political attitudes.<sup>4</sup> After reading the newspaper article, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire including measures of their voting intentions, perceptions of the candidates' leadership traits, the participants' opinions about the Bedouin issue, and their demographic details including their political ideology.

**Voting intentions.** This scale included the following three items: (1) If you were a resident of Ashalim, would you vote for Tal Segev? (2) Would you advise others to vote for Tal Segev? and (3) Do you think that Tal Segev is a worthy candidate to be the head of the municipality? Participants answered on a 7-point Likert scale with higher values indicating greater support for Tal's

<sup>4</sup>The participants were randomly assigned to the various conditions. Thus, the distribution of looking at targets who were the same gender or the opposite gender was even, and the correlation between the targets' gender and the participants' gender was not significant ( $p > .1$ ).



candidacy. An index of voting intentions was calculated based on the mean of these three items ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

**Leadership traits.** The participants were asked to evaluate the degree to which they thought that various traits, commonly used to describe politicians, accurately described Tal Segev. The traits included clever, honest/decent, has leadership quality, nice, shares my values, responsible, cares about people like me, and has executive ability (Kinder, 1986). Participants answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "to a very large extent" to "not at all," with higher values indicating a more positive evaluation. An index of leadership traits was calculated based on the mean of these items ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

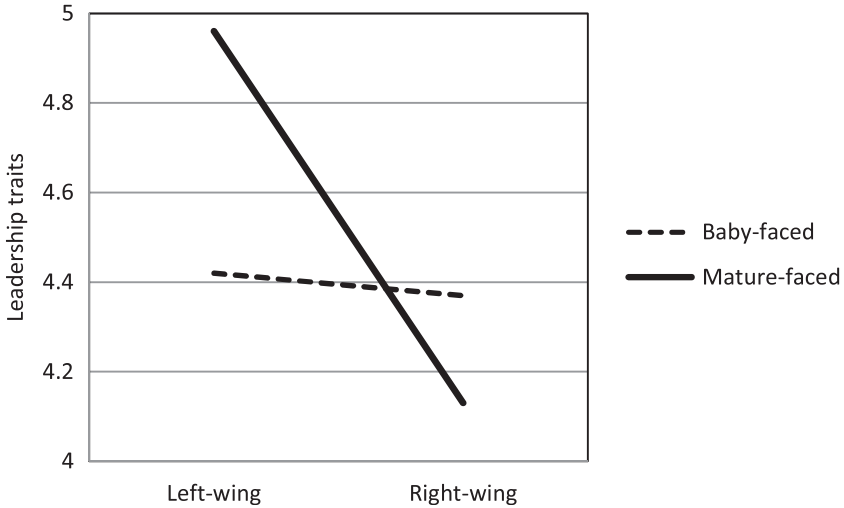
**The participants' attitudes regarding the Bedouin issue.** This scale included six statements to which the participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These items included: (1) the Bedouin are a danger to the safety of the state (R), (2) the state of Israel has to allocate more resources to help the Bedouin population in the Negev, (3) the discrimination against the Bedouin should be stopped, (4) a fence should be built that will prevent the spreading of the Bedouin to other regions (R), (5) the Bedouin are Israeli citizens and, thus, are entitled to receive resources from the state just like any other citizen, and (6) if we do not deal with the issue of the Negev lands, in a few years, the Jews will be a minority in the Negev (R). An index was created based on the mean of these items ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

**Political ideology.** We measured this construct with a question asking the participants to indicate their political ideology on a continuum ranging from 1 (*extreme left*) to 7 (*extreme right*). The mean of this construct was ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ).

## Results

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted, with facial features (baby face or mature face) and the candidate's political attitudes (left wing or right wing) as the independent variables, leadership traits as the dependent variable, and the participants' political ideology as a covariate. As H1 predicted, the analysis revealed an interactive effect of facial features and the candidate's political attitudes,  $F(1, 164) = 5.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$  (see Figure 1). To understand the nature of the interaction, we examined the simple main effects of facial features separately for the conditions of the candidate holding left-wing or right-wing attitudes. As H1 posited, when the candidate was left-wing, he or she was perceived as having greater leadership traits when having a mature face ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) than when having a baby face ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ),  $F(1, 169) = 5.25$ ,  $p < .01$ . When the candidate was right-wing, there

Figure 1  
*The impact of facial features and the candidate’s political attitudes on his or her leadership traits*



was no difference between those having a mature face ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.24$ ) and those having a baby face ( $M = 4.37, SD = 1.04$ ),  $F(1, 169) = 1.06, p > .1$ . When we entered the candidate’s gender into the analysis, it did not have a main or interactive effect with the two independent variables on leadership traits,  $p > .05$ . Furthermore, when using the political ideology of the participants as another independent variable (left and right wing based on a media split), it did not have a main or interactive effect with the candidate’s facial features or with the two independent variables together on leadership qualities,  $p > .05$ .

To test H2, we conducted a mediation analysis using PROCESS, an SPSS macro designed by Hayes (2013). The analysis was conducted only for the left-wing candidate. It used 1,000 bootstraps and included facial features as the independent variable, intentions to vote as the dependent variable, leadership traits as the mediator, and the participants’ political ideology as a covariate. As H2 predicted, the facial features indirectly affected the intention to vote through the mediation of leadership traits ( $b = 0.41, SE = 0.20, p < .05$ ). In other words, the participants indicated that they were more likely to vote for the candidate when the left-wing candidate had a mature face than when he or she had a baby face, through the mediation of leadership traits. The direct effect of the facial features on intentions to vote was not significant ( $b = -0.01, SE = 0.26, p > .05$ ).

To assess the veracity of H<sub>3</sub>, we conducted a second mediation analysis for the left-wing candidate. This mediation model used 1,000 bootstraps and included facial features as the independent variable, opinions regarding the Bedouin issue as the dependent variable, leadership traits as the mediator, and the political ideology of the participants as a covariate. The facial features indirectly affected attitudes through the mediation of leadership traits ( $b = 0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In other words, the participants who were exposed to the left-wing candidate reported more left-wing attitudes toward the Bedouin when the candidate had a mature face than when he or she had a baby face, through the mediation of leadership traits. Unexpectedly, the direct effect of the facial features on the attitudes when controlling for leadership traits was also significant, but in the reverse condition ( $b = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

The current research joins previous studies that demonstrated the effect of people's faces on perceptions about them. However, previous research focused primarily on the main effects of physical characteristics, such as differing perceptions of attractive versus unattractive people or baby-faced versus mature-faced people (e.g., Zebrowitz, 1997). According to these studies, political candidates with baby faces are perceived as less competent (Poutvaara et al., 2009), and the perceived competence of a politician's face affects actual voting outcomes (Todorov et al., 2005).

In contrast to this research, the current study documented an interactive effect according to which the maturity of the candidate's face affected perceptions differently, depending on the political attitudes of the targeted person. Keating (2002) raised the idea that the effect of people's facial cues on perceptions of them depends on the social context, but to date, this notion has not yet been supported with much empirical evidence. In Keating, Randall, and Kendricks (1999) study, a slight photoshop manipulation that made former American presidents look more or less mature influenced perceptions about them with regard to their honesty, powerfulness, warmth, and attractiveness. Interestingly, the same manipulation did not influence the perception of the three presidents in the same way. For example, making Bill Clinton's face look more babyish increased his perceived attractiveness, but the same manipulation did not influence the attractiveness of John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan. Although this study documented a differing effect of the maturity of the face for different political leaders, it did not relate it to their political ideology.

However, we did establish a preference for left-wing political leaders who possess a mature-looking face. This result seemingly contradicts a recent study

documenting that left-wing politicians are stereotypically perceived as having less dominant faces than right-wing politicians and that those politicians who resemble the stereotype of their ideology have a greater chance of being elected (Samochowiec et al., 2010). It seems that in our study, the general preference for stereotype-consistent leaders was overridden by the importance of dominance in leaders in a conflict situation (e.g., Little et al., 2007). Given that our research was conducted in Israel, which is under constant threat, left-wing politicians, who are perceived as less dominant (e.g., Rule & Ambady, 2010), benefited electorally in this study from more mature-looking faces. It remains to be seen whether different results would be obtained in more peaceful countries, where cooperation and consensus building are the political tradition. Future research might also examine the perception of the same political leaders by the citizens of their own countries and by citizens of a country with which they are in conflict. As mentioned above, in her recent study, Maoz (2012) found that Jewish Israelis perceived a Palestinian politician proposing a peace agreement more positively when he had a baby face. If we combine her work with ours, it seems that mature-faced Israeli and Palestinian politicians will have an easier task “selling” a peace accord that requires concessions to their own people, but these very politicians will also have a more difficult time convincing the other side.

As expected, the maturity of the face of the left-wing leader led to perceptions of his or her as having leadership traits, which, in turn, affected both intentions to vote for that candidate and attitudes toward his or her policies. The attitudes were more left-wing when watching the mature-faced left-wing candidate. Unexpectedly, however, when controlling for perceived leadership traits, the direct effect of facial maturity had the reverse effect on attitudes. In other words, those participants who were exposed to the left-wing candidate with the baby face reported more left-wing attitudes than those who were exposed to the left-wing candidate with a mature face (when controlling for leadership traits). This finding might be explained by the baby-face stereotype that includes the warmth and empathy that is congruent with left-wing attitudes. Thus, it seems that there are two contrary processes occurring simultaneously. The baby face of the left-wing candidate is probably making his or her left-wing attitudes more authentic and, thus, convincing. On the other hand, the same baby-face features harm the perceived leadership traits of the candidate, making him or her less influential.

Interestingly, we did not find that the candidate’s gender had any effect. This finding is particularly surprising because there are studies documenting the effect of a target’s gender on perceived competence as a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Sczesny and Kühnen (2004) provide a possible explanation for this lack of effect. These authors suggested and demonstrated that people have a metacognition about their tendency to bias their perception because of the

gender of the target person. They do not have this awareness, however, with regard to how the person's looks bias their perception. Thus, people correct for their biased perception resulting from gender when they have the cognitive ability to do so, but they do not correct their bias with regard to the impact of the target's looks on the impression they form about him or her.

As with the case with gender, the political ideology of the participants also did not have a main or interactive effect with the facial features of the candidate on perceptions about leadership traits. This finding seemingly contradicts two recent studies that document the importance of political ideology in the preference for a politician's face. The first study (Olivola, Sussman, Tsetsos, Kang & Todorov, 2012) established that conservative voters prefer candidates who look stereotypically Republican. Similarly, the second study (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015) showed that right-wing participants express a preference for a dominant face in a political candidate, whereas left-wing participants prefer candidates with a nondominant face. These authors explain this preference partly as a result of right-wing people having a perception of society that is more conflict-focused. Perhaps, in Israel, the conflict situation is so extreme that it also colors the perceptions of left-wing individuals, making them also look for dominance in the face of their leaders. Still, given the relatively small size of the sample, we must be cautious in claiming that there are no interactive effects with gender and political ideology. Future research with more participants who hold different political ideologies would be able to examine more appropriately whether, indeed, there are no effects of gender and political ideology in this context.

Finally, those who study heuristics in the context of elections often provide their experimental subjects little policy information (e.g., Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987). The current study demonstrates that heuristics and rational voting are not mutually exclusive and should not be studied as such. Voters in our study made use of relevant policy information, together with heuristic cues, in forming their political opinions and decisions.

Having detailed the contributions of the current study, we must also note its limitations. First, although we manipulated the maturity of the faces of our stimuli, we did not examine which trait associated with the baby-face stereotype is responsible for the effects. Although we reasoned that the perceived dominance associated with more mature faces is responsible for the effect, it is also possible that it is the result of the greater perceived competence or coldness attributed to more mature faces. Future research might measure the various components of the baby-face stereotype and examine which of them is responsible for the effect. Second, the sample used in this study was not randomly selected from the general Israeli population, so our participants do not necessarily represent Israeli voters. We also used only two stimuli (a man and a woman), and focused on one specific political context. Furthermore, the

study was conducted in Israel, a country that has been in a constant state of conflict since its establishment. Indeed, the hypotheses regarding the preference for a mature-faced left-wing candidate are related to this particular context. Moreover, the Israeli left-wing and right-wing political attitudes are almost exclusively related to security and peace matters (Arian & Shamir, 2008). This situation is different from other countries such as the United States in which social and economic issues dominate the division between the two political stances. Future research might examine whether there is an interaction between the ideology of a candidate and his or her looks on electoral success when the ideology focuses on issues other than national security and even in cases in which only the political party to which the candidate belongs is mentioned. This line of research might also integrate experimental procedures similar to the one used in the current study with correlative data from real elections. Thus, although our research contributes theoretically by suggesting that political attitudes and facial features might have an interactive impact on perceptions about political candidates, the effects might vary in other political contexts and for different populations. Hence, more research in different contexts and with other methods is needed to further substantiate our findings.

Aside from the theoretical contribution to the field of political impression formation, our findings have practical implications as well. In an era in which the facial images of politicians are often manipulated to make them more attractive in the eyes of potential voters (Maoz, 2012), the current study hints at more effective ways of performing this manipulation. A politician who wants to be elected should consider creating a presentation of his or her image that is not only attractive, but also takes into consideration his or her ideological platform.

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