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Beautiful Politicians

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I. INTRODUCTION

Better understanding voting behavior is a major challenge in political economy and political science. Do voters respond largely to economic outcomes, as the voter rationality literature has suggested? Do voters use information shortcuts, relying on cues garnered from the physical appearance of a candidate? Or is voting characterized by political ignorance, with electors responding to factors that are clearly irrelevant to candidate quality? How much can a 'thin slice' of information – a photo of a candidate – predict about his or her electoral success?

To put these theories to the test, we estimate the relationship between a candidate's physical beauty and his or her electoral success. Our analysis uses data on the voteshare of major party candidates in the 2004 Australian federal election (the advantages of analyzing Australia are discussed below). We observe a strong relationship between our raters' estimate of the attractiveness of a particular political candidate, and the share of the vote received by that candidate in the 2004 election. This effect is both statistically and economically significant. On average, we find that a one standard deviation increase in a candidate's beauty (equivalent to moving from the 50th to the 84th percentile of the beauty distribution) is associated with a 1 ½ – 2 percentage point increase in a candidate's share of the vote. The effect is even larger for particular groups, such as male challengers.

Our research is related to three distinct literatures. The first is a literature that has demonstrated systematic deviations from the voter rationality model. Ebeid and Rodden (2006) and Wolfers (2007) found that governors are more

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likely to be re-elected when the US economy booms, a pattern also seen in Australian state elections (Leigh and McLeish 2009). Leigh (2009) noted that heads of state are more likely to be re-elected when the world economy booms. Achen and Bartels (2004) observed that governments are less likely to be re-elected when elections are accompanied by droughts, flu epidemics, or shark attacks. Brennan and Lomasky (1993) argued that since the probability of a voter casting the decisive ballot is extremely small, we should expect most voting to be expressive (i.e. a symbolic act, undertaken for its own sake) rather than instrumental (i.e. aimed at bringing about particular outcomes). (See also Jones and Hudson 2000; Opp 2001; Brennan 2001.)

The second set of studies to which this paper relates are those in psychology documenting the phenomenon of 'thin-slicing', under which '[a] great deal of information is communicated even in fleeting glimpses of expressive behavior' (Ambady and Rosenthal 1992, p. 256). For voters, casting a ballot based on the attractiveness of the candidate may be akin to 'thin-slicing'. In their review of the literature, Ambady and Rosenthal have shown that viewers watching short video clips (with or without sound) can accurately predict such outcomes as whether a person is lying, whether a patient is depressed, and whether a teacher is effective. Benjamin and Shapiro (2009) have demonstrated that independent raters are able to accurately predict the winner of US gubernatorial elections from watching a short video clip of the contestants.

The third literature consists of other studies looking at the 'beauty effect'. Following the work of Hamermesh and Biddle (1994) on the Canadian and US labor markets, a series of papers have shown that more attractive people earn higher wages. This is true within professions such as US attorneys (Biddle and Hamermesh 1998) and US advertising executives (Pfann et al. 2000), and across labor markets as diverse as Australia (Borland and Leigh 2009), Britain (Harper 2000), and China (Hamermesh, Meng and Zhan 2002). Similarly, Tao (2008) showed that female college graduates in Taiwan who are satisfied with their looks tended to earn higher wages. Mocan and Tekin (2009) also present evidence that less attractive people are more likely to commit crime. Among economists, Torgler, Antić and Dulleck (2008) found that happiness researchers are perceived to be happier than superstar economists.

In Australia, Britain, and the US, the marginal effect of beauty appears to be stronger for men than for women. Some evidence exists on elections and beauty, with researchers finding a positive effect of beauty in elections to become an officer of the American Economic Association (Hamermesh 2006) or a member of a British community board (Banducci et al. 2003). In national elections, more beautiful candidates have been found to do better in elections to the national parliaments of Finland (Berggren, Jordahl and Poutvaara 2006) and Germany (Klein and Rosar 2005). In the US, candidates whose faces were judged to be more competent won more votes in actual elections (Todorov et al.

2005). While Senator John McCain may have described Washington DC as 'Hollywood for ugly people', the evidence from each of these studies suggests that a pleasing physical appearance is positively correlated with electoral performance.

Analyzing Australian elections has two major advantages over previous studies of beauty and voting behavior. First, since voting is compulsory in Australia, we are able to estimate the effect of attractiveness on voting across the adult population. Second, Australian voters arriving at a polling place are almost invariably handed a 'How-to-Vote' card for each of the major parties.[1] Since these cards feature the same photo of the candidate that we use in our empirical analysis, we can be sure that our measure of beauty matches that of the voter.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II outlines our data and rating procedure. Section III presents our main results. Section IV presents a series of robustness checks. Section V tests whether beauty effects vary systematically across electorates, and the final section concludes.

II. INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND AND BEAUTY RATINGS

There are three major political parties in Australian politics. The main left-wing party is the Australian Labor Party, and the two right-wing parties are the city-based Liberal Party of Australia, and the rural National Party. The two right-wing parties operate in coalition with one another, which means that each agrees not to run candidates against a sitting member of the other party. Elections to the House of Representatives (on which we focus) are conducted by preferential voting, also known as automatic runoff. Voting in Australian federal elections is compulsory, and the fine for failing to vote is A$20 (approximately the median hourly wage).

When Australian voters arrive at a polling place to vote in a federal election, they are typically met at the entrance by representatives of the major political parties, and handed a How-to-Vote card. These cards contain instructions on

[1]Although the major political parties do not keep records on whether their workers cover all booths in Australia, conversations with party officials suggest that close to 100 percent of voters are offered a How-to-Vote card by each of the major parties. Other evidence comes from a major website on Australian politics (http://australianpolitics.com), which reports that: 'how-to-vote cards tend to work for the major parties … All parties know that it is important to have polling booths staffed on election day so that every voter receives a copy of the how-to-vote card … the ALP and the Liberal Party will have members and supporters working in 2-hour shifts handing out cards'. Electoral legislation also assists parties in cases where distribution of How-to-Vote cards would otherwise be difficult. In the case of electors in hospitals and remote areas, the Commonwealth *Electoral Act 1918* (s226 and s227) permits parties to supply their How-to-Vote cards to the leader of the mobile polling team, who then distributes them to voters on the parties' behalf.

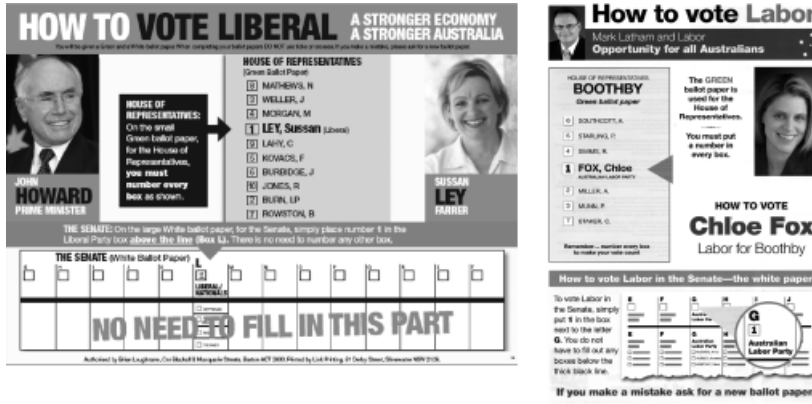

Figure 1

Sample How-to-Vote Cards used in the 2004 Australian Election

how to vote for a particular party, and invariably include photos of the party leader and that party's candidate in the election. Two sample How-to-Vote cards are shown in Figure 1.

We focus on elections to the federal House of Representatives that were held on October 9, 2004. Our electoral measure is the share of valid first-preference votes received by a particular candidate. We ignore minor party candidates since we were unable to gather a comprehensive selection of photos, and because it would not be reasonable to assume that minor party candidates handed out How-to-Vote cards at all polling places.

Our sample of candidates consists of 286 major party candidates for which we were able to obtain photographs.[2] These photos were then compiled into a 21-page PDF document, which began with the following instructions:

> 'Please score the physical attractiveness of each candidate on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) by typing your rating in the box beside each candidate. Please try to maintain an average beauty rating of 5. There are 286 candidates.'

In general, the beauty literature has used a relatively small number of raters. Across studies, the modal number of raters is one per person (Hamermesh

[2]In practice, we were not able to obtain a full set of How-to-Vote cards for major party candidates in the Australian election, since printing and distributing these cards was the responsibility of state party branches, whose archives are of variable quality. Our photos were therefore obtained from archived versions of party websites, maintained by the National Library of Australia's Pandora project (http://pandora.nla.gov.au/). For the subsample of state party branches for which we were able to obtain How-to-Vote cards, we cross-checked photos against those kept on the party websites, and found that in almost all instances, candidates used the same photos on the website and How-to-Vote card.

and Biddle 1994; Harper 2000; Hamermesh, Meng and Zhan 2002; Mocan and Tekin 2009; Borland and Leigh 2009), though several studies have used four raters to rate each person (Biddle and Hamermesh 1998; Pfann et al. 2000; Hamermesh 2006), and some have used even more (an average of 25 in Banducci et al. 2003; an average of 9 in Berggren, Jordahl and Poutvaara 2006; 23 in Klein and Rosar 2005; and 40 in Todorov et al. 2005). However, as well as having a sufficiently high number of raters, it is also important to ensure that the raters are representative of the general population (e.g. Klein and Rosar use 23 raters, but all are students in the same university class). In practice, there is a tradeoff between obtaining a large number of raters, and selecting raters who are representative of the population. We therefore opted to use four primary raters to assess each photograph (a common number in the literature), and to ensure a reasonable diversity in the age and gender of the four raters.[3]

Our main set of raters were chosen to be representative of the Australian electorate, at least on the dimensions of age and sex. Since the 25th and 75th percentiles of the age distribution of the Australian electorate are 32 and 57, we selected our raters to be a 29 year-old man, a 32 year-old woman, a 57 year-old man, and a 57 year-old woman.[4] Of our original raters, all are of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic ancestry except the 32 year-old woman, who is of Palestinian-Iraqi ancestry, though she was born in Australia.

As a robustness check, we also asked 10 US residents to rate the photos.[5] This was done to account for the possibility that some of our Australian raters might have been unable to objectively rate the beauty of well-known politicians. Our US raters were all asked to inform us if they recognized any of the politicians in the sample. None reported knowing any of the Australian politicians.

Our raters were told that the process would probably take them approximately one hour (13 seconds per photograph). Most reported that the rating process took somewhat less time than this. The Australian raters were given a $20 book voucher to compensate them for their time. The pairwise correlation patterns between the four Australian raters are uniformly high, ranging from 0.50 to 0.56. This suggests that – at least when it comes to assessing Australian

[3]Our decision on how to rate beauty followed the advice of Dan Hamermesh, who has published more extensively than anyone else on the relationship between beauty and wages.

[4]An original 32 year-old male rater showed an apparent bias against certain famous politicians in his ratings (e.g. he gave the Prime Minister, Treasurer, Foreign Minister, and two former Opposition Leaders the lowest possible beauty rating), so we asked a new rater (the 29 year-old male) to re-rate the photos, and substituted his ratings for those of the original rater.

[5]One of the US raters was a 59 year-old Pennsylvania resident, while the other 9 US raters were students at the University of Michigan, aged in their 20s. The university students were each paid US$20 to compensate them for their time.

politicians – beauty is not 'in the eye of the beholder'.[6] To the extent that there are any systematic patterns, it appears that the two male raters and the two female raters are most similar to one another.

Raters were asked to maintain a mean of 5 in their ratings. The actual means for the four Australian raters were 5.6 (32 year-old female), 4.3 (29 year-old male), 4.3 (57 year-old female), and 4.9 (57 year-old male). To take account of these differences, the scores of each individual rater are normed to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of unity. For our main specifications, the ratings of the four Australian raters are then summed. This sum is in turn re-normed to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of unity. For the purposes of a robustness check (section IV), we combined the ratings of the 10 US raters in the same manner. The correlation between the mean Australian raters' score and the mean US raters' score was 0.765.

Table 1 presents summary statistics for the beauty ratings (Panel A) and voteshare (Panel B). On average, our raters thought that female candidates were more attractive than male candidates, that challengers were more attractive than incumbents, and that Liberal Party candidates were more attractive than Labor Party or National Party candidates. For ease of interpretation, we express the means of our beauty ratings both as a normed variable, and as a percentile rank. For example, the average female candidate was at the 70th percentile of the beauty distribution, while the average male candidate was at the 43rd percentile of the beauty distribution.

Summary statistics in Panel B show that the average candidate received 41.8 percent of the first-preference vote, with men receiving very slightly more votes than women, and incumbents receiving more votes than challengers. In our sample, the voteshare of National Party candidates was highest, followed by Liberal Party candidates, and then Labor Party candidates.

III. MAIN RESULTS

To test the relationship, we regress the voteshare received by each candidate on their beauty rating, controlling for candidate gender and incumbency. Since the voteshares of the two major party candidates in any particular electorate are negatively correlated with one another, standard errors are clustered at the electorate level (there are 150 electorates in the sample).

Table 2 shows the results from this regression. As the beauty ratings are expressed in standard deviations, the coefficient represents the effect of a one standard deviation increase in attractiveness. Assuming that the beauty ratings

[6]This is a common finding in the literature on cross-cultural beauty ratings. For a survey, see Langlois et al. (2000).

Table 1

Summary Statistics for Political Candidates

	Mean	Percentile Equivalent	SD	N
Panel A: Beauty Rating (in Standard Deviations)				
Full sample	0	50	1	286
Men	− 0.182	43	0.901	212
Women	0.523	70	1.085	74
Challengers	0.143	56	1.035	159
Incumbents	− 0.179	43	0.927	127
Labor Party	− 0.151	44	0.995	149
Liberal Party	0.180	57	0.984	131
National Party	− 0.178	43	0.957	6
Panel B: Voteshare (First-Preference Votes)				
Full sample	0.418	–	0.112	286
Men	0.419	–	0.114	212
Women	0.415	–	0.106	74
Challengers	0.343	–	0.083	159
Incumbents	0.512	–	0.061	127
Labor Party	0.379	–	0.106	149
Liberal Party	0.460	–	0.103	131
National Party	0.501	–	0.052	6

Note: Beauty rating is the mean beauty rating of the four Australian raters, normed to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of unity. Percentile equivalent converts the mean for a particular subgroup to the relevant percentile on the normal distribution.

Table 2

Are Attractive Candidates More Likely to Win?
Dependent Variable: Voteshare

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Beauty rating	0.022***	0.014***	0.019***	0.018***	0.022***
	[0.005]	[0.004]	[0.006]	[0.005]	[0.007]
Incumbent	0.176***	0.170***	0.170***	0.171***	0.170***
	[0.010]	[0.009]	[0.009]	[0.009]	[0.009]
Female	− 0.024**	− 0.013	− 0.012	− 0.01	− 0.009
	[0.010]	[0.009]	[0.009]	[0.010]	[0.010]
Beauty∗Incumbent			− 0.011		− 0.011
			[0.008]		[0.008]
Beauty∗Female				− 0.011	− 0.011
				[0.009]	[0.009]
Party FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	286	286	286	286	286
R-squared	0.6	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.68

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered at the electorate level, in brackets.
***,**, and *denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

are normally distributed, a one standard deviation increase in beauty would be equivalent to moving from the 31st percentile of the beauty distribution to the 69th percentile of the distribution; or alternatively from the median to the 84th percentile.

In the first column, we omit party fixed effects, and find that a one standard deviation increase in beauty is associated with a 2.2 percentage point increase in voteshare. In the second column, we add party fixed effects (effectively assuming that none of the difference in voteshare between parties is due to differences in the beauty of their candidates), and find that the beauty coefficient falls to 1.4 percentage points. The remaining columns interact candidate gender/incumbency status with the beauty coefficient. We find that the beauty effect is smaller for incumbents and for female candidates, though the interaction terms are not statistically significant at conventional levels.

Our estimated beauty effects can be compared with the other two countries where the relationship between beauty and voteshare has been tested.[7] The specification with party fixed effects (Table 2, column 4) implies that in Australian national elections, a one standard deviation increase in beauty is associated with a 0.7 percentage point increase in voteshare for female candidates, and a 1.8 percentage point increase for male candidates. In Finnish national elections, Berggren, Jordahl and Poutvaara (2006) found that a one standard deviation increase in beauty implies an increase of 2.5–2.8 percentage points in the voteshare of female candidates and 1.5–2.1 percentage points for male candidates. In German national elections, Klein and Rosar (2005) found that a one standard deviation increase in beauty was associated with a 1.5 percentage point increase in voteshare for female candidates and 0.6 percentage points for male candidates. Yet while the magnitude of the effects is quite similar across the three countries, the difference in Australia is that the marginal effect of beauty is smaller for male candidates than for female candidates. We return to this issue in the conclusion.

Is the relationship between beauty and voteshare driven more by a premium for attractive candidates or a penalty for unattractive candidates? To test this, we divide the 286 candidates into three categories of approximately equal size: below-average beauty, average beauty, and above-average beauty, and regress voteshare on indicator variables for below-average and above-average beauty. Although the magnitude of the 'below-average' coefficient is larger than the 'above-average' coefficient, the standard errors are sufficiently large that an F-test cannot reject the hypothesis that the two coefficients are opposite-signed and equal in magnitude (see King and Leigh 2009 for details).

IV. ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

To test the stability of the main results in the previous section, we conduct a series of robustness checks. The first is to re-specify the key independent variable as the difference in beauty between the major party candidates running

[7]The analysis of US Congressional elections by Todorov et al. (2005) is not directly comparable with our results.

in a particular electorate. The results from this specification are similar to those in the primary specification (see King and Leigh 2009).

Our next concern was that using Australian raters to assess the beauty of Australian politicians might create an endogeneity problem. If our raters gave a higher or lower beauty rating to well-known politicians, this might induce bias in our estimates.[8] We employ two approaches to address this issue. One is to simply omit the most famous candidates from our sample. In the first column of Table 3, we omit those who we regard as the eight best-known Australian politicians from our sample. We find no evidence that this omission makes any difference to our estimate – the marginal effect of a one standard deviation increase in beauty is 1.4 percentage points, precisely the same as the corresponding estimate for the full sample (Table 2, column 2).

Another approach is to use beauty raters who cannot distinguish between successful and unsuccessful Australian politicians. As outlined above, we asked 10 US residents to rate the beauty of all the candidates, and found a very high correlation (0.765) between the average of their ratings and the average of the Australian raters. In the second column of Table 3, we use the mean US rating in place of the Australian raters' assessment and find that a one standard deviation increase in beauty leads to a 1.1 percentage point increase in voteshare. An alternative approach is to instrument the Australian raters' beauty ratings with the US raters' score. The results of this specification are shown in the third column, and indicate that a one standard deviation increase in beauty leads to a 1.5 percentage point increase in voteshare.

Another possibility is that what we observe as beauty is actually a function of the ethnicity or age of the candidates. Since the majority of Australian voters, and three out of four of our Australian beauty raters, are of Anglo ancestry, we might worry that we are capturing some form of bias against non-Anglo candidates. To test this, we exclude 23 candidates who do not appear to be of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic ancestry.[9] The results of this specification are close to those in the primary specification. Similarly, controlling for a quadratic in age makes little difference to the results (see King and Leigh 2009).

V. PRODUCTIVITY OR DISCRIMINATION?

An open question in the literature on the economics of beauty is the extent to which returns to beauty – in this case the increased probability of election – reflect

[8]Another possibility is that successful politicians are more likely to 'primp' for their photos in subsequent elections. With only one measure of each politician's attractiveness, we are unable to adjust our estimates to take account of this.

[9]Coding of candidates' age and ethnicity was based purely on candidates' photos, since public information on age and ethnicity is only available for members of parliament (i.e. those who received a large share of the vote).

Table 3

Are Beauty Ratings Endogenous?
Dependent Variable: Voteshare

	[1]	[2]	[3]
	Exclude Famous Candidates	Use US raters (reduced form)	Use US raters (IV)
Beauty Rating	0.014***		0.015***
	[0.004]		[0.005]
US Beauty rating		0.011***	
		[0.004]	
Incumbent	0.169***	0.168***	0.171***
	[0.009]	[0.008]	[0.009]
Female	− 0.011	− 0.005	− 0.014
	[0.009]	[0.008]	[0.009]
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	278	286	286
R-squared	0.67	0.67	0.68
F-test on excluded instrument			444.95
			[P=0.000]

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered at the electorate level, in brackets.
***,**, and *denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. Famous candidates are defined as Latham, Crean, Beazley, Abbott, Howard, Downer, Costello, and Nelson.

productivity or discrimination.[10] This is a particular issue in the case of politicians, whose job involves significant personal interaction. To the extent that voters believe that more attractive individuals are better able to persuade other legislators of their viewpoint, manage public meetings, and convey their ideas through the media, they may form the view that beautiful politicians are more effective. Alternatively, it may be the case that the success of better-looking politicians reflects nothing more than taste-based discrimination on the part of voters.

To separate these two effects, we use data from previous Australian Election Surveys (AESs) to form measures of the share of apathetic voters in each electorate. Since a typical AES contains only about 12 respondents per electorate, we pool the 1996, 1998, and 2001 surveys to obtain a larger sample.[11] As a proxy for voter apathy, we use three questions:

- 'Would you say you cared a good deal which party won the federal election or that you did not care very much which party won?' (Cared a good deal/ Did not care very much/ Did not care at all)

[10]For an attempt to disentangle the productivity and discrimination hypotheses, see Mobius and Rosenblat (2006).

[11]For the two electorates that were created in the 2003 redistribution (Bonner and Gorton), the apathetic voter variable takes the mean of the main electorates covering that area in the 2001 election. Thus Bonner is the average of the electorates of Bowman and Griffith, while Gorton is the average of Burke, Calwell, and Maribyrnong.

Apathetic respondents are those who chose 'Did not care at all'.
Electorate mean: 4.8 percent (SD=3.8 percent)

- 'Generally speaking, how much interest do you usually have in what's going on in politics?' (A good deal/ Some/ Not much/ None)
  Apathetic respondents are those who chose 'None'.
  Electorate mean: 4.0 percent (SD=3.3 percent)
- 'And how much interest would you say you took in the election campaign overall?' (A good deal/ Some/ Not much/ None at all)
  Apathetic respondents are those who chose 'None at all'.
  Electorate mean: 4.8 percent (SD=3.8 percent)

Combining the three surveys gives an average of 37 respondents per electorate. The electorate-level means and standard deviations for each question are listed above. Across electorates, the means for the three questions are highly correlated, with bivariate correlations around 0.5.

We use each question to divide the electorates into two halves. 'Apathetic electorates' are defined as those in which a greater than average share of voters are apathetic. 'Engaged electorates' are those in which a smaller than average share of voters are apathetic. We assume that voters in engaged electorates are more concerned with choosing the best candidate than are voters in apathetic electorates. Thus if voters primarily respond to beauty because of productivity, then voters in engaged electorates should be more responsive to beauty than voters in apathetic electorates. Conversely, if voters primarily respond to beauty because of discrimination, voters in apathetic electorates should be more responsive to beauty than voters in engaged electorates.

The first two columns of Table 4 show the results of these regressions. Using any of the three measures of voter apathy, we find a larger response to beauty in apathetic electorates than in engaged electorates. In apathetic electorates, the effect of a one standard deviation increase in beauty on voteshare ranges from 1.6 to 2.4 percentage points. In engaged electorates, the effect of a one standard deviation increase in beauty on voteshare is between 0.9 and 1.4 percentage points. However, the difference between the two sets of electorates is only statistically significant in Panel B (where voter apathy is proxied by the share of respondents who have no interest in politics).

In the third column of Table 4, the apathetic voters variable is normed to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of unity, and interacted with a candidate's beauty. For all three voter apathy proxies, the coefficient on the interaction term is positive (suggesting that a one standard deviation increase in the share of apathetic voters raises the returns to beauty by 0.1 to 0.6 percentage points). However, the interaction coefficient is only statistically significant in Panel B, and then only at the 10 percent level. Overall, the evidence points towards the hypothesis that the rewards to beautiful political candidates reflect

Table 4

Returns to Beauty and Voter Apathy
Dependent Variable: Voteshare

	[1]	[2]	[3]
Sample:	Apathetic electorates	Engaged electorates	All
Panel A: Apathy Proxied by Share Who Do Not Care Who Wins			
Beauty rating	0.016**	0.013**	0.014***
	[0.006]	[0.006]	[0.004]
Incumbent	0.188***	0.152***	0.170***
	[0.015]	[0.011]	[0.009]
Female	− 0.015	− 0.009	− 0.013
	[0.016]	[0.010]	[0.009]
Beauty rating * Share of apathetic voters			0.001
			[0.004]
Share of apathetic voters			− 0.002
			[0.003]
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	129	157	286
R-squared	0.65	0.72	0.68
Panel B: Apathy Proxied by Share Who Are Not Interested in Politics			
Beauty rating	0.024***	0.009*	0.014***
	[0.007]	[0.005]	[0.004]
Incumbent	0.177***	0.167***	0.171***
	[0.015]	[0.012]	[0.009]
Female	0.001	− 0.022**	− 0.012
	[0.017]	[0.011]	[0.009]
Beauty rating * Share of apathetic voters			0.006*
			[0.004]
Share of apathetic voters			0.001
			[0.002]
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	120	166	286
R-squared	0.65	0.71	0.68
Panel C: Apathy Proxied by Share Who Have No Interest in the Election			
Beauty rating	0.017***	0.014**	0.015***
	[0.006]	[0.005]	[0.004]
Incumbent	0.159***	0.175***	0.171***
	[0.013]	[0.013]	[0.009]
Female	0.006	− 0.031***	− 0.013
	[0.014]	[0.011]	[0.009]
Beauty rating * Share of apathetic voters			0.005
			[0.004]
Share of apathetic voters			0.005*
			[0.003]
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	131	155	286
R-squared	0.64	0.71	0.68

Note: Robust standard errors, clustered at the electorate level, in brackets.
***,**, and *denote statistical significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively. For columns 1 and 2, electorates are split into two halves. 'Apathetic electorates' are defined as those in which a greater than average share of voters are apathetic. 'Engaged electorates' are those in which a smaller than average share of voters are apathetic. In column 3, the share of apathetic voters is normed to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of unity.

discrimination rather than productivity, but it is more suggestive than conclusive.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Using data from the 2004 Australian election, we test whether more attractive candidates are more successful. We find a strong positive relationship between our raters' assessment of beauty and candidates' share of the vote. Holding constant gender, incumbency, and party fixed effects, a one standard deviation increase in a candidate's beauty is associated with a 1.4 percentage point increase in voteshare.

This effect is not only statistically significant; it is also politically salient. In the four Australian federal elections held between 1996 and 2004, one in ten races was decided by a margin of less than 1.4 percentage points.[12] This suggests that one in ten races could have been decided differently if a major party candidate of median beauty had been replaced by a candidate at the 84th percentile.

We find that the effects of beauty on voteshare are not uniform. The impact of beauty appears to be larger for male candidates and for challengers. However, we cannot reject the hypothesis that the relationship between beauty and voteshare is linear. Our results are robust to using the beauty gap between candidates in place of absolute beauty ratings, to dropping well-known politicians, to using US raters in place of our Australian raters, to excluding candidates of non-Anglo appearance, and to controlling for age.

Given that the media and popular culture devote more attention to feminine beauty than masculine beauty, our finding that the marginal effect of beauty is larger for male candidates than for female candidates may seem surprising. In our view, the most likely explanation is that female beauty carries some negative connotations, such as lower intelligence (the 'dumb blonde syndrome'). In their meta-analysis of the psychology literature on beauty and intellect, Jackson, Hunter and Hodge (1995) find that physical attractiveness has a stronger effect on perceptions of males' intellectual competence than females' intellectual competence.[13] Holahan and Stephan (1981, pp. 873–874) attribute this to a societal stereotype 'that defines high levels of beauty and competence as incompatible traits for women'.

Our finding that beauty matters more for challengers than incumbents is consistent with a model in which attractiveness is used as a substitute for other

[12]Using two-party preferred data for the 1996, 1998, 2001, and 2004 elections, we found that 58 of the 595 races were decided by a margin of less than 1.4 percentage points.

[13]For example, Holahan and Stephan (1981) found that when male subjects were asked to evaluate a well-written essay written by a woman, they gave it a lower rating if the purported author was more attractive.

sources of information about a candidate's competence. At one extreme, if voters have never heard of a candidate before they arrive at the polling place, the candidate's beauty may provide the strongest signal of competence. At the other extreme, voters in the electorate of Prime Minister John Howard most likely had a good knowledge of Howard as a politician, making it largely irrelevant that his physical beauty rating was in the bottom 5 percent of all candidates. Consistent with theories of thin-slicing and information shortcuts, beauty will have a smaller impact on voting behavior if constituents already possess substantial information about a candidate.

Lastly, we present some suggestive evidence on the question of whether the effect of beauty represents productivity or discrimination. In electorates where a higher share of voters say that they do not care who wins, that they are not interested in politics, and that they are not interested in the election, the marginal effect of beauty is larger. On the assumption that apathetic voters are more likely to discriminate, and engaged voters are more likely to base their decision upon productive characteristics, this suggests that the effect of beauty on voteshare is more likely to reflect discrimination than returns to productivity.

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SUMMARY

Are beautiful politicians more likely to be elected? To test this, we use evidence from Australia, a country in which voting is compulsory, and in which voters are given 'How-to-Vote' cards, depicting photos of the major party candidates, as they arrive to vote. Using raters chosen to be representative of the electorate, we assess the beauty of political candidates from major political parties, and then estimate the effect of beauty on voteshare for candidates in the 2004 federal election. Beautiful candidates are indeed more likely to be elected, with a one standard deviation increase in beauty associated with a 1 ½ – 2 percentage point increase in voteshare. Our results are robust to several specification checks: adding party fixed effects, dropping well-known politicians, using non-Australian beauty raters, omitting candidates of non-Anglo appearance, controlling for age, and analyzing the 'beauty gap' between candidates running in the same electorate. The marginal effect of beauty is larger for male candidates than for female candidates, and appears to be approximately linear. Consistent with the theory that returns to beauty reflect discrimination, we find suggestive evidence that beauty matters more in electorates with a higher share of apathetic voters.

