Facial Appearance and Dominance in Leadership

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Introduction

Does leader's facial appearance influence our decision to vote? You might think that there are many other factors that influence our political behavior except how a leader looks like. In fact, it has been proven that we have a tendency to judge who can be a good leader based on how candidates appearance. This chapter will discuss political psychology behind selecting leaders based on their facial appearance.

A tremendous number of research has shown that facial appearance play a significant role in selecting leaders (e.g. Todorov et al., 2005). In empirical studies, people are asked to choose one of the given pictures of faces, which reflect several traits and attributes such as dominance, competence, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Those studies show that people have a tendency to choose dominant looking leaders in times of crisis and war. It is open to discussion why dominant looking leaders are selected in our age when there is no conflict or war.

This chapter will speculate on psychological reasons behind this choice. The chapter will focus on individual differences and context that contributes one's choice of a dominant looking leader. It intends to make an overview of literature by analyzing individual's selection of dominant looking leaders with respect to theories in social psychology, evolutionary psychology and political psychology.

This paper has five main sections. In the section one, I will provide traditional and modern psychological perspectives. In the section two, I will discuss individual and context related factors that influence choice of dominant leaders. In the section three, I will give emphasis on theories used to analyze facial appearance and leadership. In the section four, I will provide overview of existing literature with the focus on empirical studies. In the section five, I will discuss the issue of selecting dominant

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leaders in the light of existing literature and put forward future policies. In the last section, I am going to have a concluding statement.

Traditional and Modern Approaches in Psychology

Two main psychological trends, which are psychoanalysis and cognition, allow us to understand human behavior in political context. This section provides a very brief overview of these perspectives.

The traditional approach in psychology has been very much influenced by Freudian approach of psychology. Freudian approach (1961) suggests that people pass through three stages in their life. The Id—with pleasure seeking and instinct gratification—drives us, the Ego takes the role of moral conscious and the Superego acts as a mediator between Id and Ego. As the person grow up, suppression takes place because more motives appear in the unconsciousness. Although it is possible to identify conscious, unconscious continues to influence our lives. Similar to other contexts in everyday life, understanding a human behavior in politics requires analyzing the unconscious behaviors.

The answer for why people support for a dominant leader can be found in unconscious motives. Considering the Freudian perspective, selection of a dominant leader is not considered as rationality. At a deeper level of this selection, the unconscious motives might play an important role. For instance, those kinds of leaders constantly refer to threats as they aware that increasing threat increases support that they gain from society. To better explain the relationship between followers and leaders, unconscious motives needs to be analyzed.

In contrast to classical approach, modern cognitive approach is interested in explicit and implicit processes. As Daniel Kahneman (2011) mention in *Thinking Fast and Slow*, we develop certain cognitive strategies to help us survive better. System 1 is fast, which is intuitive and automatic processes that we are not aware of it. System 2 is slow and effortful, which we actually aware of them. Using System 1 leads us to make quick judgments about people. If we are in political arena, we use facial cues to judge candidate's capabilities. Our judgment can also influence our voting behavior.

Both perspectives are influential in terms of understanding human behavior and motives. Rest of the chapter will mention about the theoretical knowledge and empirical studies which are driven by Freudian or cognitive approach.

Contextual and Individual Factors

This section aims to provide an overview of contextual and individual factors that influence follower's psychology while selecting dominant looking leaders. We have seen that dominant politicians like Donald Trump in the US, Vladimir Putin in

Russia and Silvia Berlusconi in Italy won majority of the votes (Laustsen & Petersen, 2017). Although it is attributed to our evolutionary past, a trend for selecting dominant looking leader still exists today. The main concern is to understand why people support dominant looking leader when there is no crisis.

In order to understand this phenomenon more, one needs to know more about leadership and its relation with context. Scholars suggest that not only political and psychological atmosphere but also cultural context influence selection of a dominant looking leader (e.g.: Popper, 2012). Popper (2012) argues that leadership is a subject that needs to be analyzed with a perspective, which involves context in which followers and leaders interact. As Popper (2012) states this matter in his book *Fact and Fantasy about Leadership*:

> Universal characteristics that often serves as a psychological explanation for the attraction to leaders who are perceived as strong and giving a sense of security, particularly in crisis situations, is the craving for security. But beyond this, the psychology of followers in respect to choice of leaders and compliance with leaders in quiet times when there is no urgent sense of existential crisis is culturally biased (p. 4).

From a social psychological perspective, the answer for this question could be found in history where there was a desperate war like Second World War that gave a dominant or authoritarian person a chance to rise to the power. Influenced by the real historical events, the studies of famous social psychologists—Muzaffer Sheriff's Autokinetic Effect study, Stanley Milgram's electric shock experiment, Solomon Asch's experiment on conformity, Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment—display that how social and personal factors increase conformity and obedience to authority.

Apart from the sole influence of context, certain individual related factors might trigger the emergence of dominant leaders. In the Springboard Model of Dictatorship, Moghaddam (2013) discusses how leader's personality interacts with context. Although this model is mostly concerned with the rise of the dictators, it is a useful model to understand any kind of toxic or dark side of leadership.

In the Springboard Model, Moghaddam (2013) suggests an alternative way than traditional approach, which only focuses on personality of the leader. The Springboard Model argues that through contractual factors, a springboard comes into place, then, the potential dictator spring to power. As Moghaddam (2013) states that "context creates the springboard, and the availability of the potential dictator who takes advantage of the situation to spring to power completes the shift to or continues the dictatorship" (p. 53). There are personality factors that might influence this situation and potential dictators exist in all societies. As long as the springboard is there, the potential dictator gets the advantage. This situation is mostly seen in the case of male dominance while there are very few female dictators.

Moghaddam (2013) suggests that in order to understand dictatorship, it is crucial to analyze the elements of the springboard (Moghaddam, 2013). The elements that create an atmosphere for springboard are high level of perceived internal and external threat, uncertainty in the direction of political change, collective insecurity and relative deprivation, the fear of moral decline population.

1. There is a high level of perceived threat both at the domestic and international level. The role of potential dictator is so crucial in this respect. A potential dictator might speculate about a threat in her/his speeches. The speculation can be about a real threat coming from an enemy or fiction. The following is an example of one of Hitler's speeches that might be an example of how the enemy image was created in the society:

   The struggle for world domination will be fought entirely between us, between Germans and Jews. All else is facade and illusion. Behind England stands Israel, and behind France, and behind the United States. Even when we have driven the Jew out of Germany, he remains our world enemy (Rauschning, 2010, p. 234).

   In this kind of atmosphere, people may fear, get anxious and feel the need for strong leader that can defend society against potential enemy. It is actually perception of a fear that people feel that they are under threat.

2. The second element of the Springboard Model is the fear of decline. Being a most powerful among all the countries in the world can be a very important for some countries. The potential dictator can also speculate about the position of a country in the international arena. For instance, Donald Trump, in his election campaign, has frequently used the slogan of "Make America great again".

3. The third one is about the moral decline. For the countries, which put great emphasis on moral values, potential dictators can target moral values such as religion.

4. The last one is manipulating population. People search for a dictator when they feel collective helplessness. A potential dictator benefits from the psychological situation in the society by decreasing trust. George Orwell's 1984 is a great dystopia which explains how a person can be a fearful while living in a society and even question about what he/she knows as a right or wrong (Orwell et al., 1989). Overall, insecurity, low trust, collective helplessness, moral revival is the main elements of Springboard that potential dictator use it for his/her advantage.

The authoritarian personality also plays an important role in rising dictators through springboard. The dictators share common personality characteristics. Those who are known as dominant leaders are usually high in narcissism. In addition, they show the attributes of Machiavellianism, considering the world as a threat. Those leaders have illusions of control, which makes them believe that they can establish control over all events. The egocentrism is also common part of the dictator's personality as they put emphasis on only themselves. Using their personality, they increase conformity and obedience in the society.

Theories in Facial Appearance and Leadership

This section will discuss some theories in the field of psychology that explain the selection of leadership based on facial appearance.

Evolutionary-Psychology Approach

Evolutionary-contingency hypothesis assumes that leadership and followership exist in order to tackle with coordination problems among social animals (van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). In the past, people were faced with a number of challenges such as finding food to eat, searching for a place to stay, fighting with enemies, managing intra and inter group conflicts. Evolutionary psychologists believe that leadership emerged to solve these kinds of coordination challenges. Leadership and followership interaction has been seen in all kind of animals such as bees, ants and birds (van Vugt et al., 2008).

Evolutionary psychology approach argues that evolution created an assessment mechanism for followers. As van Vugt and Grabo (2015) states that this mechanism allows followers "to assess situations in terms of the need for leadership, compare individuals in terms of leadership qualities for different group challenges, encourage these individuals to take the lead, and monitor their effectiveness" (p. 485). In one of their studies, van Vugt and Grabo analyzed why and when people infer specific leadership attributes from diverse facial characteristics (van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). They hypothesized that although facial cues are connected to ancestral human environments, they still influence individual's attributions of leadership today.

The followers' psychological mechanism is constituted by environmental cues, leadership cues and different characteristics of followers (Van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). Evolutionary psychology approach argues that selection of leadership is related with, to what extent leaders can bridge the gap between the need of followers and environmental demands. In this respect, facial cues provide clues about the physical and psychological character of the people. Some studies found that age, gender and ethnicity are the common facial cues while judging faces to infer leadership (van Vugt & Grabo, 2015; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2015). Other secondary facial cues adapted by people are facial symmetry, baby-facedness, height to width ratio (Re et al., 2013; van Vugt & Grabo, 2015).

Implicit Leadership Theories

Implicit leadership beliefs play an important role when observable cues are limited, especially the signals expressing one's leadership ability. When there are limited cues that are used to judge leader's attributes, people can apply for leader prototypes. In the case of facial expressions, considering that perception of leader's trait will lead to behavior when it is observed, facial expressions can also be evaluated as leadership attributions (Trichas & Schyns, 2012). In this respect, nonverbal behaviors become associated with believing other's leadership ability. This shapes the leader-to-be's nonverbal behaviors to influence followers by giving messages of

certain attributes such as charisma or power. As stated by Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, and Blascovich (1996),

> Implicit leadership theories (ILTs) are everyday theories that individuals hold about leaders in general (or ideal leaders). They are mental representations of leaders and influence how an individual acts toward leaders or as leaders based on these cognitive representations. These cognitive representations are similar to stereotypes, in that they are stored in memory and will be activated when the person meets an individual whose characteristics and behavior matches their implicit representations of a "leader" (p. 7).

This kind of stereotype can influence leader behavior in a way that a person tries to fulfill the expectations of cognitively structured leadership role. Therefore, ILTs actually shape the expectations of followers about leader's qualities and behaviors. People evaluate the leaders based on the ILTs that they created based on previous experience. One research has found that the leaders who act parallel to the expectations of follower's ILTs get more support (Gray & Densten, 2007).

Face Perception and Leadership

This section provides an overview of the literature on facial appearance and leadership. There are number of nonverbal communication tools such us posture, facial expression, eye movements, hand movements, gestures that influence follower's psychology while choosing leaders. The recent studies propose that facial appearance is one of the most important factors that influence people's selection of a leader. This chapter provides an overview of face perception first and then; focus on facial dominance in leadership.

Face Perception

Face represents a number of information about a person such as identity, emotion and attractiveness (Adolphs & Tusche, 2017). Using the information that we derive from someone's face in less than 100 ms, we can make social judgments about whether that person can be trusted or not (Todorov, Olivola, Dotsch, & Mende-Siedlecki, 2015). We can make social judgments about a face based on a several factors, for example, whether someone looks like us or similar to someone genetically close to us (Adolphs & Tusche, 2017). According to Ward and Bernier (2013),

> Face perception refers to ability to rapidly recognize and understand information from faces. The ability to perceive faces and to use that information to guide and direct behavior plays a critical role in interpreting and forming representations from the social world and in the acquisition and understanding of reciprocal social interaction. (p. 1215)

How does our brain respond to social judgments based on a face? The recent neuroscience studies suggest that a full representation of a face requires a work interaction

between neural parts of a brain (Haxby, Hoffman, & Gobbini, 2000). These parts allow brain to process different aspects of a face such as mouth, eyes, noise and their location in the face. Some regions in the brain like Fusiform Face Area (FFA) are identified with the static, physiognomic appearance of a face while the some other parts like Superior Temporal Sulcus (STS) correspond to the changes in the face such as emotions and identity (Haxby et al., 2000).

The neuroscience studies show that there are number of parts in the brain which allows us to combine full representation of a face (Adolphs & Tusche, 2017). If a person has a bias in one of these regions, this may lead to influence of facial cue on social behavior. For instance, if a person has a positive bias in physically attractive person, then, reward-related regions of a brain like orbitofrontal cortex are activated (Adolphs & Tusche, 2017). Other parts of a brain, dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, amygdala and insula are also activated when people make other social judgments such as trustworthiness based on a person's face (Adolphs & Tusche, 2017; Bzdok et al., 2012). In addition, some studies such as Todorov et al. (2015) manipulates features of a face such as a noise on computer-generated faces to understand which part of a face is mostly related to the social judgment.

It is possible to identify which part of the brain is activated when a person make a judgment based on another person's face. However, some questions still remain. The existing research shows that although people can truly judge a person's facial characteristics like attractiveness based on facial symmetry, those judgments may not be valid all the time. In response to this critique, Adolphs and Tusche (2017) suggest that traditional and modern approaches should be used together and mediating mechanisms between face perception and pro-social behavior should be identified.

Facial Appearance and Leadership

This part analyzes the facial characteristics that influence people's decision to select a leader. How does an organization decide which candidate has suitable traits for a job? When selecting leader for a specific position, candidate's traits or characteristics are one of the most influential factors.

The existing studies on facial appearance and leadership mainly focus on two topics. Facial appearance matters considerably for leader selection and leader effectiveness (Antonakis & Eubanks, 2017; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). In both leadership emergence and effectiveness, observers use facial cues to make inferences about a target's character, traits, attributes and competencies (Todorov et al., 2015; van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). According to Antonakis and Eubanks (2017), "when observers are distant from a leader, they do not have specific information about the leader's ability or trustworthiness; consequently, in such frugal information environment, observers will use any information, including looks, to make inferences about a leader's characteristics" (p. 270).

The studies in this area concerns who is going to be selected as a leader based on a given faces in a certain kind of context. Other part of research analyzes the relationship between facial appearance and leadership success. Those studies analyze whether leader's facial characteristics will predict company's success or election results.

The existing research reveals that public image of politicians influence the election results. The effective use of social media creates an atmosphere where individual attribution of politicians influence voters perception of a leader (Little, Burriss, Jones, & Roberts, 2007). It is shown that using an image of politicians, people predict the future election results. Todorov et al. (2005) analyzed the influence of image on voting decisions and found a significant relationship between individual's ratings of competence and the results of actual US congressional elections. Another research figured out that when a political leaders' facial characteristic is changed to a more positive look, people's support for them increases. For instance, when Bill Clinton's facial look was transformed to a more baby-face looking in the picture, evaluators found him more honest, compassionate and attractive (Huddy, Sears, & Levy, 2013).

Similar to Todorov et al. (2005), Little et al. (2007) also analyzed the relationship between facial appearance and voting decisions. This study has used actual images of politicians from losing and winning parties in four different countries: Australia (John Howard vs. Mark Latham, John Howard vs. Kim Beazley), New Zealand (Helen Clark vs. Jenny Shipley), the UK (Tony Blair vs. William Hague, Tony Blair vs. John Major) and the US (George Bush vs. John Kerry, George Bush vs. Al Gore). Creating a hypothetical election, participants were asked to select among the candidates. Participants' selection truly predicted winner and loser in the actual election results. In order to tackle with familiarity effect, the children are also used in in the study of predicting electoral results based on face judgments studies. To illustrate, Antonakis and Dalgas (2009) showed that Swiss children predicted the real election results in the US, which compares faces of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Therefore, this study suggested that experiential learning that allows people to predict the real election results (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009).

Leaders with a Dominant Facial Appearance

A large part of the studies focus on leader's physical characteristics including physical strength, body movements and facial characteristics. Some of these studies show that people give more importance to strong leadership when there is a terrorist attack happened recently (Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009). And, many other studies show that people prefer leaders with certain facial cues such as dominant and masculine faces with lower-pitched voices in the times of war and intergroup conflict more than the times of peace and cooperation (see Hall, Goren, Chaiken, & Todorov, 2009; Laustsen & Petersen, 2015; Little et al., 2007; Little & Roberts, 2012; Little, Roberts, Jones, & DeBruine, 2012; Spisak, Dekker, Krüger, & van Vugt, 2012;

Spisak, Homan, Grabo, & van Vugt, 2012; Tigue, Borak, O'Connor, Schandl, & Feinberg, 2012). From an evolutionary psychologist's perspective, leadership tasks in history—defense against the enemy, solving conflict—created an understanding that a better leader should be aggressive and physically strong (Van Vugt & Grabo, 2015).

Laustsen and Petersen (2015) conducted a study, which analyze increased preferences for facial dominance in leaders. They conducted two studies using Danish university students. They expected to find that "increased preferences for facial dominance in leaders reflect increased needs for enforced coordinated action when one's group is seen to face threats from other coordinated groups rather than random natural events" (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015, p. 286). To test this claim, they conducted a scenario-based experiment, which use game metaphor. In the experiment, first, participants are told to imagine themselves on a ship, which travels from Old World to New World in eighteenth century. Then, participants are randomly assigned to two groups, which are "game against people" and "game against nature". Both groups receive additional information about the voyage. The people in the game against people condition learn that the voyage is at risk due to the pirate attack and participants should be ready for the fight. On the other hand, the people in the game against nature condition are told that the voyage is at risk due to the bad weather and people should be ready to cooperate with each other.

After that, participants in each group receive two pairs of face pictures. Then, while the first group is asked to choose a captain, who indicates a leader, the second group is asked to choose a cabin mate, who represents a friend. The study uses the faces that are generated by Alexandar Todorov at Social Perception Lab in Princeton University. For each condition, the faces represent two different personal traits, which are dominance and competence. In addition to the information taken from the participants as the choice, participants' ideological view is collected based on conservative or liberal dichotomy. This study is important because it empirically showed that "preferences for dominant-looking leaders are a function of contextual primes of group-based threats rather than nature-based threats and political ideology" (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015, p. 286). The study's result also indicates that conservative people prefer a dominant leader more than liberals. Moreover, the dominant leader selection is significant only for "choice of a captain", not for a friend. In other words, we look for a dominant leader in the times of crisis, but we prefer competent friends.

Laustsen and Petersen (2017) conducted a second study where they analyzed selection of a dominant leader using a real time example based on online interviews with Ukrainian and Polish subjects in the Crimea crisis in 2014. In this study, they figured out that followers in the cooperation group do not change their preference for non-dominant looking leader compared to the control group. Similar to previous study, they found that preferences for dominant leaders increase in intergroup conflict. In addition, dominant leaders are preferred in crisis not for protection but for the intuition of aggressive responses or overpowering other groups (Laustsen & Petersen, 2017).

People with dominant face characteristics are judged more frequently as a leader (van Vugt & Grabo, 2015). What are the characteristics of a dominant face? Results from earlier studies show that lowered eyebrows and a non-smiling mouth were perceived as signs of dominance (Keating, 1985). Building on similar findings, Todorov et al. (2015) also suggest that people with a masculine face-squared face shape, strong jawline, thin eyes and lips, pronounced eyebrows-are considered as a dominant.

There is an ample research, which displays that people infer leadership domain from facial appearance. People can identify the military, business or sports leaders based on the faces (Olivola, Eubanks, & Lovelace, 2014). In addition, people judge the military leaders as more dominant than politicians and businessman (Mazur, Mazur, & Keating, 1984). The recent studies also show that political ideology plays an important role (Laustsen & Petersen, 2015, 2017). For instance, comparing to liberals, conservatives prefer dominant looking leaders more. Unsurprisingly, this is valid for both leadership style and physical appearance (Barker, Lawrence, & Tavits, 2006; Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2013; Laustsen & Petersen, 2015, 2017).

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The goal of this chapter was to provide an overview of psychological mechanisms that influence people's choice of selecting dominant leaders. To do so, the main-stream psychological approaches were discussed at the beginning. Following that contextual and individual factors, which influence one selection of a leader, were explained. Later, the chapter explained how evolutionary contingency hypothesis and implicit leadership theories affect individual's selection of a dominant leader. The main emphasis was given to the role of individual's facial appearance in leadership emergence. Overall, this chapter suggests that leader's facial look as well as the suitability of the environment influence followers (or follower-to-be) choice of dominant leaders.

Based on the overview of the literature on selection of dominant leaders, I can argue that choosing a dominant looking leader in the times of cooperation stem from the interaction between followers and leaders in a specific context. Some of the contextual factors mentioned in this chapter mostly about understanding the rise of dictators. Although dominant people may not be always dictators, they have a potential to rise as a dictator. From an evolutionary perspective, a context of war or conflict will make more possible of this rise. In the times of crisis, people are not aware of the reality and highly afraid of massive killings and terrorist attacks.

Although facial appearance studies in psychology made a great effort to understand the factors that allow dominant people to become a leader, some methodological limitations exists in empirical studies. Firstly, majority of the studies analyzing leaders facial appearance use face images which look like a male person. Would people select a female with dominant look for leadership position? This question can be tested more deeply.

Secondly, evolutionary perspective suggests that people select dominant leaders in the times of conflict. In these studies, the construct of the term 'conflict' is mostly defined as 'an attack from one party to another'. The reasons of conflicts can vary and it might influence when a dominant leader is preferred. Would people choose a dominant looking leader in ethnic based or resource-based conflicts?

Thirdly, most of the studies have been conducted adapting static face images. Although it could be beneficial for controlling the influence of other factors, using dynamic stimulus can be another alternative that is more ecologically valid. Current technologies such as virtual reality can be also very useful for manipulating dynamic stimulus.

Before completing the chapter, the main take away messages are provided below. This can be helpful for both theoreticians and practitioners whose goal is to eliminate the rise of destructive leaders in organizations and politics.

- *The disciplines of politics and psychology should act together to understand the rise of dominant leaders.*
- *People use facial cues while voting for dominant looking leaders.*
- *Conflict and war trigger selection of dominant leaders.*
- *Leaders with a dominant personality are more likely to become a dictator in the crisis.*

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