

Predicting Elections: Child's Play



In a paper published in *Science*, Antonakis and Dalgas (2009) show that judgment of political candidates faces are reliable predictors of election outcomes. What is interesting in this study is that the judgments made by little children (from 5-13 years old) were as good as those made by adults!

Inspired by the study of Todorov and colleagues (Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005), Antonakis and Dalgas first showed 684 university students 57 pairs of faces from the 2002 French parliamentary election (Study 1). Political candidates were unknown to the students (which is not surprising given that the election had taken place five years before the experiment in another country). Each student rated one pair of faces on competence. Controlling for fixed-effects of pairs of faces Antonakis and Dalgas found that the probability of predicting an election result correctly based on the competence ratings was 0.72. These results suggest that voters were inordinately anchored on facial appearances and that they did not ponder additional information on the candidates sufficiently.

Having established that the “face effect” worked well with the French parliamentarians, they used these results as a baseline on which to compare the children. They then used a game played by little children ($n = 684$, mean age 10.31) and older individuals ($n = 160$, mean age = 30.49) regarding Odysseus’s trip from Troy to Ithaca (Study 2). At the end of the game, players chose who they would want as the captain of the boat. Remarkably the probability of a child correctly picking the election winner based on choice of captain was 0.71. This accuracy was no different when including the older participants; prediction accuracy was unrelated to age. Antonakis and Dalgas then used the mean predicted probabilities (at the election pair level) of the children (Study 2) and the adult (Study 1) data and again found that age was unrelated to prediction accuracy. These results suggest that adults and children infer competence from faces in the same way. Note that the study with the children was conducted in May 2008 and interestingly, the children correctly predicted the Obama-Clinton as well as the Obama-McCain outcome!

Below is an example of a pair of faces. Who would you chose as the captain of your boat?

**Imagine that you will now sail from Troy to Ithaca.
Who would you choose as the captain of your boat?
Circle your choice:**



The person on the left



The person on the right

To find out if you correctly picked the winner, download the paper freely from here:
<http://www.hec.unil.ch/jantonakis/recent%20publications.htm>

References

Antonakis, J., & Dalgas, O. (2009). Predicting Elections: Child's Play! *Science*, 323(5918), 1183.

Todorov, A., Mandisodza, A. N., Goren, A., & Hall, C. C. (2005). Inferences of competence from faces predict election outcomes. *Science*, 308(5728), 1623-1626.

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