ORIGINAL PAPER

Choosing the Right Candidate: Observational and Experimental Evidence that Conservatives and Liberals Prefer Powerful and Warm Candidate Personalities, Respectively

Lasse Laustsen[1]

Abstract A comprehensive literature relates voters' electoral decisions to their perceptions of candidates' personalities. Yet the mechanisms through which voters are attracted to certain candidates and not to others remain largely unresolved. To answer this question, this article integrates two recent interdisciplinary insights. First, leader and candidate preferences are found to be strongly dependent on levels of contextual conflict. Second, individual differences in political ideology are shown to be rooted in psychological orientations leading conservatives and liberals to perceive society in fundamentally different ways: Conservatives tend to perceive the social world as dangerous and threatening, whereas liberals to a larger degree see society as a safe place characterized by cooperation. Based on this, it is predicted that conservatives and liberals will also prefer different candidate personalities. Specifically, conservatives are predicted to value candidate power and "strong leadership" more than liberals, whereas liberals are predicted to value candidate warmth more than conservatives. The prediction is supported observationally using the 1984–2008 American National Election Studies and experimentally in two original experiments conducted in the United States and Denmark. Consequences and scope conditions for trait-based voting are discussed.

Keywords Candidate traits · Political ideology · Candidate evaluation · Vote choice · Electoral behavior

✉ Lasse Laustsen
ll@ps.au.dk

[1] Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Bartholins Allé 7, Building 1341, 114, Aarhus, Denmark

Introduction

Who should be granted decision-making authority? What kinds of personalities do voters want as leaders of their country? These questions are at the very heart of modern democratic elections. A comprehensive body of research concludes that candidates' personalities and voters' trait evaluations of candidates play important roles for electoral decisions (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Miller 1976; Kinder et al. 1980; Kinder 1986; Popkin 1994, Funk 1996, 1997, 1999; Hayes 2005, 2009, 2010; Clarke et al. 2004; Bishin et al. 2006). This idea is also prevalent among candidates themselves as recently exemplified by Donald Trump's tweet and appeal to the Republican constituency during the 2016 primary election: "The world is a dangerous place. We need a tough, strong leader" (see for instance Gass 2015).

Despite widespread scholarly attention to candidate personality and trait ratings, little is known about the processes through which voters draw on personality impressions and trait evaluations when making up their minds on Election Day. In this article, I argue that the sparse knowledge in this area is largely due to prior research most often having focused on candidates' personal characteristics along one dimension of general liking or disliking (cf. Funk 1999). Departing from this tendency, I integrate recent insights from leadership research and social psychology to generate the prediction that conservatives and liberals will prefer different kinds of candidate personalities and value different candidate traits. Specifically, because conservatives tend to see the social world as dangerous and threatening they will prefer powerful and strong candidates, while liberals will prefer warm candidates due to their tendency to perceive society as a peaceful and cooperative place (Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Hibbing et al. 2013; Jost et al. 2009).

The prediction is tested and supported using a combination of large scale election surveys—the 1984–2008 American National Election Study—and original survey experiments conducted cross-nationally in Denmark and the United States. Importantly, the ideologically different candidate personality preferences uncovered in the analyses remain robust and significant when taking alternative explanations into account—for instance party affiliation and stereotypic associations of the Democratic and Republican parties with certain candidate traits. That is, the analyses provided in this article support the conclusion that voters *due to differences in ideological orientations and predispositions* hold different candidate personality preferences. This suggests that voters base their candidate choices on trait impressions of candidates in order to align themselves with the candidate best suited for leading given the voters' ideologically guided perceptions of society.

Heterogeneous Candidate Personality Preferences

With the words of Popkin, we can expect voters to be "projecting from a personal assessment of a candidate to an assessment of what kind of leader he was in previous offices or to what kind of president he will be in the future" (Popkin 1994, p. 74). Likewise, political observers often stress the importance of personality for presidential elections and even suggest that "just as they use [personality] to choose

their friends […] so voters use their impressions of a candidate's personality to choose a president" (Quindlen 2000). That is, both political behavior scholars and political commentators assign significant influential power to voters' perceptions of candidates' personalities in explaining electoral outcomes; a claim which is heavily supported in a stream of political behavioral research (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Miller 1976; Kinder et al. 1980; Kinder 1986; Popkin 1994; Funk 1996, 1997, 1999; Hayes 2005, 2009, 2010; Clarke et al. 2004; Bishin et al. 2006). Yet existing work on candidate personality and trait-based voting rarely touches upon the processes through which voters are attracted to certain candidate personalities and not to others. In this light, the above quotes also illustrate that candidate personality and trait assessments are most often thought of and investigated as a one-dimensional construct of general valence towards the candidates; that is, most studies treat candidate personality "as a lump sum that (…) ultimately sum together as an impact on vote choice" (Funk 1999, p. 701; see also Markus 1982; Kinder 1986; and Goren 2002, 2007 for studies taking multidimensional approaches to candidate trait evaluations). This article seeks to meet Funk's (1999) call for the application of a more fine-grained framework when studying candidate traits. In doing so, I take my departure in recent interdisciplinary insights that leader and candidate preferences vary with contextual differences of war and intergroup conflict versus peace and intergroup cooperation.

Contextually Dependent Candidate Personality Preferences

A growing interest in the facial appearance of political candidates and leaders has revealed that masculine, dominant, and powerful faces are preferred in experimental conditions of war and intergroup conflict. Likewise, warm, kind, and feminine faces are seen as better leaders in contextual conditions characterized by peace and intergroup cooperation (Little et al. 2007; Spisak et al. 2012; Laustsen and Petersen 2015, 2016, forthcoming; for candidate preferences dependent on intragroup contexts see Bøggild and Laustsen 2016). A parallel line of work in political science suggests that these contextually dependent preferences for leader personality do not merely exist in relation to subtle preferences for candidate faces. Instead, voters also weight character traits such as "provision of strong leadership" more under conditions of terror compared to good times conditions (Merolla and Zechmeister 2009a, b).[1] Thus, voters regulate their leader preferences and the weight assigned to different traits depending on levels of contextual conflict and the problems currently confronting society.

Ideology and Candidate Personality Preferences

Context dependent candidate and leader preferences are typically explored in experimental studies that assign subjects to clear contextual conditions of war or

---

[1] Whereas the studies cited here all stress how conflict contexts cause homogenous changes in leader preferences across the electorate, recent work on "audience costs" suggests that liberal leaders—because they need to cater to liberal audiences who are more conflict averse and concerned about the use of force—will potentially pay a larger price for conflicts than will conservative leaders (Kertzer and Brutger 2016).

intergroup conflict versus peace and intergroup cooperation. However, clear contextual cues are not necessarily present to guide voters' candidate preferences at all times. Under such circumstances research finds that individuals' attitudes and decisions are instead guided by prior beliefs and predispositions (e.g., Petersen and Aarøe 2013; Peffley et al. 1997). Based on this, I expect that voters' candidate personality preferences will depend on their prior beliefs about the social world when they are not given direct contextual information. A vast number of studies show that such default perceptions of social reality are linked to individual differences in political ideology (for an overview see Hibbing et al. 2014; see also Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Oxley et al. 2008; Jost et al. 2009). The key finding from this literature is that conservatives and liberals are fundamentally different in the way they see the social world: Conservatives view the social world as threatening and as more competitive than liberals, and particularly, they tend to fear out-groups and norm violators much more than their liberal counterparts. In contrast, liberals view society as a safe and secure place characterized by cooperation and altruism (Jost et al. 2009; Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Hibbing et al. 2014). This deep-seated fundamental difference is found to make liberals and conservatives "experience and process different worlds" (Hibbing et al. 2013, p. 114), resulting in different tastes in food, music, and interior design as well as different patterns of nonverbal behavior, physiological reactions to threat-provoking stimuli and preferences for authority (e.g., Carney et al. 2008; Oxley et al. 2008; Hibbing et al. 2013). Finally, a series of studies show that these differences between conservatives and liberals are even rooted in genetics (e.g., Alford et al. 2005).[2]

Based on this broad range of psychological, biological, and behavioral differences between conservatives and liberals, I predict that they will also hold different candidate personality preferences. In parallel to the heterogeneous candidate personality preferences across different contexts, voters will also prefer different candidate personalities and put different weights on specific character traits depending on their ideological predispositions. Specifically, I predict that in order to protect society against external threats and internal norm violators, conservatives will hold stronger preferences for powerful candidate personalities than will liberals. On the other hand, liberals will have stronger preferences for warm candidate personalities than will conservatives.

Alternative Explanations: Party Affiliation, Stereotypes and Policy Inferences

Before the prediction is tested, three alternative explanations about the way voters evaluate candidates' personalities and integrate these evaluations in their electoral decisions are worth mentioning. The first two alternatives are based in party affiliation, while the latter relates to a potential link between trait impressions of candidates and inferences about their policy positions.

---

[2] Related to the literature cited in this paragraph scholars argue that ideology is composed of (at least) two sub-components of economic and social ideology (or economic and social conservatism) (for two recent accounts see for instance Feldman and Johnston 2014, and Carmines and D'Amico 2015). Here I follow the one dimensional understanding of political ideology employed by Hibbing et al. (2013).

First, some scholars remain skeptical about the effect of trait ratings on electoral decisions suggesting that trait ratings first and foremost reflect "a strong tendency for each party's partisans to think highly of their own candidate and less highly of his opponent" (Bartels 2002, p. 5; see also Kilburn 2005). Therefore, trait ratings are more likely to represent reflections of partisanship than to exert decisive effects on vote choice. Importantly, in this article I do not aim to show that trait evaluations outperform key explanatory factors of electoral behavior such as party identification. Instead, I seek to show that voters can be attracted to candidates as a consequence of their perceptions of candidates' personalities and that such a process is likely to be driven by predispositions in political ideology. Therefore, in the analyses I control for respondents' party affiliation to take into account the coloring of candidate evaluations by respondents' partisanship.[3]

Second, recent work on candidate perceptions shows that American voters stereotypically associate Republicans with power and masculinity and Democrats with empathy and femininity (Hayes 2005; Winter 2010; Eriksson and Funcke 2013). In addition, party affiliations are increasingly knitted to ideological divisions between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats (Levendusky 2009). Related to this, Barker et al. (2006) find that Democratic primary voters place greatest emphasis on perceived candidate compassion, whereas Republican primary voters rely on perceived candidate virtue.[4] Together these findings comprise a rival explanation to the ideology prediction outlined above: Voters could possibly be inferring the party of a fictitious candidate based on stereotypic associations of Republicans and Democrats with powerful and warm personalities, respectively. This suggests that ideologically and party-based roots of heterogeneous candidate personality preferences will be strongly entangled. In the analyses, several tests are applied to disentangle the ideology explanation from the partisan stereotype alternative. First, in both the observational and the experimental data it is tested whether participants' ideology or party affiliation constitutes the stronger driver of preferences for powerful and warm candidate personalities, respectively. Additionally, a comparison of similar experiments conducted in Denmark and the United States comprises a second test of the ideology prediction. Due to the larger number of parties in Denmark than in the United States, stereotypic associations between parties and specific character traits do not make the same sense in Denmark as in the United States. Therefore, the Danish experiment tests if ideological differences still cause conservatives and liberals to prefer powerful and warm candidate personalities, respectively, in a setting where stereotypic associations between parties and candidates are less clear and pronounced.

---

[3] Moreover, the experimental studies constitute a direct test of whether subjects are attracted differently to a candidate described as powerful or warm depending on their ideological predispositions. Importantly, in this test the candidate's party affiliation remains unknown to subjects. This eliminates the effects of partisanship on overall candidate evaluation and permits the key test of my prediction: Whether mere personality descriptions of a fictitious candidate as either powerful or warm evoke different reactions among conservatives and liberals.

[4] Barker et al. (2006) build their hypotheses on different value priorities among Democrats and Republicans, respectively. Consequently, their study does not distinguish between whether the heterogeneous candidate personality preferences are driven by ideological predispositions or by processes of partisanship and stereotypes.

Finally, it could be argued that voters might not only infer a candidate's party but also his issue positions from trait impressions (for links between traits, policy positions and party see Kalmoe 2013; Hirsch et al. 2010; and Hayes 2005). A candidate appearing strong and powerful or compassionate and agreeable could evoke very different voter expectations regarding policy positions. Whereas such inferences could possibly happen across a range of policy domains, two domains seem particularly relevant. Based on prior research linking aggressive personality dispositions to support for violent state policies (Kalmoe 2013), a seemingly powerful candidate personality might be expected to hold "hawkish" foreign policy positions. Likewise, a candidate who appears compassionate and warm could be expected to pursue liberal policies protecting vulnerable groups in society (cf. Hirsch et al. 2010). Consequently, voters who share either of these policy positions could exert a preference for the corresponding candidate personality not because of their psychological predispositions but because of inferred issue agreement with the candidate. In the analyses of the observational data, this alternative explanation is taken into account through the use of relevant policy preference questions in the American National Election Studies.

In sum, the combination of observational and experimental data and the described tests are applied to conduct the most thorough possible test of the prediction that differences in political ideology cause heterogeneous preferences for powerful and warm candidate personalities.

Study 1: American National Election Studies

Data

Study 1 uses the 1984–2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) to test if trait assessments of warmth and power carry different weights in global candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions for liberals and conservatives, respectively.[5] Existing studies have already used these data to investigate related yet different research questions. To name a few, Bartels (2002) uses the ANES data to show the impact of party affiliation in coloring candidate evaluations on global as well as on more specific trait evaluations. Hayes (2005) finds that the Democratic and the Republican parties, respectively, hold trait ownerships of certain character traits in the minds of the voters, and he further investigates how candidates might strategically use these trait ownerships to successfully improve their chances of electoral victory. Finally, Goren (2002, 2007) uses the ANES data to explore the existence of partisan biases in perceptions of character weaknesses and how this bias affects overall candidate evaluations. The analyses presented here build on and extend these findings from the cumulative ANES dataset by exploring if liberals and conservatives assign different weights to character traits related to power and

---

[5] The ANES cumulative data file is used for all reported analyses. The 1980 election is not included in the analyses since it did not contain warmth-related trait ratings, and prior to 1980 the ANES did not include any trait rating measures.

warmth, respectively. Warmth and power build on and refer to the different labels used in existing work from the trait evaluation literature about political candidates (e.g. Kinder et al. 1980; Hayes 2005; Goren 2007) or in the psychological literature on social perceptions (e.g. Fiske et al. 2007; Oosterhof and Todorov 2008; Rule et al. 2010). Specifically, warmth captures character traits such as empathy, compassion and agreeableness, whereas power captures characteristics and traits referred to as (strong) leadership, tough-mindedness and dominance.

That is, Study 1 uses the ANES observational data from across three decades of presidential elections to explore if the prediction is supported in contests for the world's most prominent political position when candidates' party affiliations, policy positions, and personal reputations are well-known to voters and when a wide range of voter characteristics are controlled for.

Measures

The ANES includes a whole range of specific character assessments of the candidates, and these trait ratings comprise the primary independent variables of interest in the below analyses. To measure perceptions of candidate warmth, I use respondents' evaluations of how much a candidate "really cares about people like you" (referred to as "empathy"; included 1984–2008) and how "compassionate" (included 1984–1992) a candidate is perceived to be. In the analyses, empathy and compassion are used to form a scale measuring candidate warmth for the 1984–1992 elections while empathy comprises the only trait capturing warmth for the 1996–2008 elections. To measure perceptions of candidate power, I rely on respondents' ratings of candidates' "provision of strong leadership" which is included across all presidential elections from 1984 to 2008. Furthermore, the ANES includes two trait ratings related to candidate competence: Knowledgeable (included 1984–2008), and intelligent (included 1984–1992; 2000–2008). These two traits are used to create a common competence scale (except for 1996 in which only knowledgeable comprises the competence variable), which is used as a control in the presented analyses. Finally, the analyses also control for ratings of candidate moral (included 1984–2008).[6]

All personality trait measures follow the same standard format (original ANES coding in parentheses): "Think about Barack Obama. In your opinion, does the phrase 'he provides strong leadership' describe Barack Obama 'extremely well' (1), 'quite well' (2), 'not too well' (3), or 'not well at all'" (4). Keeping the four categories I recode these variables to 0–1 scales on which "0" and "1" indicate that a respondent perceives a candidate as low and high, respectively, on a given trait. Across the 1984–2008 elections this yield trait measures for perceptions of candidates' strong leadership (mean = 0.555; SD = 0.289), warmth

---

[6] The ANES furthermore includes ratings of candidate decency (included 1984–1988), and inspiration (included 1984–1996). Because the purpose of Study 1 is to investigate interactive relationships between trait ratings of warmth and strong leadership, respectively, with respondents' ideology *across elections,* ratings of decency and inspiration are left out of the analyses to avoid restricting the analyses to a subset of the available election years.

(mean = 0.526; SD = 0.282), competence (mean = 0.671; SD = 0.227), and moral (mean = 0.614; SD = 0.278), respectively.

Respondents' political ideology is measured with a seven-category variable and recoded to a 0–1 scale, where "0" constitutes the most liberal position and "1" the most conservative position (mean = 0.542; SD = 0.238).

The main dependent variables in Study 1 are respondents' global evaluations of the two candidates competing in any given election and their vote choices. For global candidate evaluations, the ANES includes feeling thermometer ratings on 0–100 scales for the two main candidates. Following the coding procedures for the specific trait evaluations above, the feeling thermometer ratings are recoded to 0–1 scales on which "0" reflects the most negative global evaluation, while "1" indicates the most positive global evaluation (mean = 0.563; SD = 0.268). When analyzing vote choice, respondents voting for a candidate are coded "1" while respondents not voting for the candidate are coded "0".[7]

In sum, the 1984–2008 ANES dataset consists of two candidate evaluations per respondent with respect to key independent variables, strong leadership and warmth, and dependent variables, feeling thermometer ratings and vote choices. As a consequence, respondent specific factors—that could potentially bias the estimated interactive relationship between trait evaluations and respondents' political ideology—are controlled for through inclusion of respondent fixed effects in the regression models employed for the main analyses across the 1984–2008 elections. Note that in this analytical framework no main effect of respondents' political ideology is estimated because values on this variable are invariant within the respondent. Importantly, the key interactive relationships between trait ratings (i.e. ratings of power and warmth for each of the two competing candidates) and respondents' ideological positions can still validly be estimated within this framework for predictions of feeling thermometer ratings and vote choice decisions (see Allison (2009) for further details on interactions between a within subject invariant variable and a within subject variant variable). In addition, main analyses include candidate dummies to cancel out candidate-specific and election-specific factors. Finally, main analyses control for respondents' evaluations of candidate competence and moral (cf. above) and to account for partisan-colored candidate evaluations and vote choices the interaction between candidate party and respondents' party identification is controlled for (for more details on the coding procedures in Study 1 see Supplementary Material S.1).[8] Predictions are tested using linear regression when predicting respondents' feeling thermometer ratings,

---

[7] Following Bartels (2002) among others, I exclude respondents who report voting for another candidate than the Republican or the Democrat in the vote-choice analyses. Moreover, only Democratic and Republican candidates are included in the analyses since the ANES does not include trait ratings of other candidates (e.g. Ross Perot in 1992).

[8] Candidates representing the Republican and Democratic parties are coded "0" and "1", respectively. Respondents' party identification is measured using the standard ANES seven category variable (variable "VCF0301" in the cumulative ANES data-file) for party identification, which is recoded to a 0–1 scale with "0" representing "Strong Democrats" and "1" representing "Strong Republicans". As for ideology, the main effect of party affiliation is not estimated as it is respondent invariant and, thus, controlled for through the respondent fixed effects procedure.

while logistic regression is applied for vote choice analyses. All reported *p*-values are from two-sided tests of significance.[9]

Results

Based on the outlined prediction, we should expect the predictive power of strong leadership on feeling thermometer ratings and vote choice to increase with growing levels of respondent conservatism. On the contrary, the predictive power of warmth on feeling thermometer ratings and vote choice should decrease with respondent conservatism (increase with liberalism). Thus, in the context of Study 1, the key test of the prediction is whether the two-way interactions between respondents' ideology and strong leadership and warmth, respectively, are statistically significant.

Do liberals and conservatives assign different weights to warmth and power, respectively, in global candidate evaluations? Yes. Predicting feelings towards the candidates from trait ratings of strong leadership and warmth and their separate interactions with ideology reveals that both interactions are statistically significant (strong leadership and ideology: b = 0.230, $p < 0.001$; warmth and ideology: b = −0.250, $p < 0.001$) (see Model A in Table 1).

To investigate the relationships more in-depth, panel a in Fig. 1 shows the marginal effects of strong leadership (the black line) and warmth (the grey line) across the ideological spectrum when predicting feeling thermometer ratings of the candidates:

Panel a in Fig. 1 shows that significant and positive effects of both strong leadership and warmth are found all across the ideological spectrum. More importantly, the figure also shows that the effect of strong leadership on feeling thermometer ratings increase when moving closer to the conservative end of the ideology scale. On the contrary, the predictive power of warmth is strongest among the most liberal respondents and decreases with growing conservatism. In short, these results support the prediction and show that when conservative voters evaluate two competing presidential candidates, provision of strong leadership is more important than for liberal voters. On the contrary, liberals value warmth more than conservatives. In terms of relative effect sizes, Panel a in Fig. 1 shows that warmth has generally stronger predictive power than strong leadership but that the two traits are more equally weighted among the more conservative voters.

Do liberals and conservatives assign different weights to warmth and power, respectively, in vote choice decisions? Yes. Predicting respondents' vote choices from trait ratings of strong leadership and warmth and their separate interactions with respondent ideology again reveals two significant interactions (strong leadership and ideology: b = 2.726, odds ratio = 15.267, $p = 0.002$; warmth and ideology: b = −2.619, odds ratio = 0.073, $p = 0.009$) (see Model B in Table 1). Panel b in Fig. 1 presents marginal effects of strong leadership (the black line) and warmth (the grey line) on vote choice across respondents' ideology.[10] Panel a and b

---

[10] Figure 1b is based on average marginal effects in which the respective effects of strong leadership and warmth on vote choice are estimated across the ideological spectrum using the observed values on control variables (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013).

Table 1 American national election study 1984–2008—respondent fixed effects (Study 1)

	Model A DV: feelings (OLS)	Model B DV: vote choice (logit)
Strong lead	0.119*** (0.019)	0.755 (0.522)
Strong lead*ideology	0.230*** (0.031)	2.726** (0.898)
Warmth	0.494*** (0.019)	4.590*** (0.600)
Warmth*ideology	−0.250** (0.031)	−2.619** (0.998)
Competence	0.121*** (0.011)	1.142*** (0.280)
Moral	0.149*** (0.009)	1.599*** (0.224)
Candidate party		
Democrat	0.138*** (0.010)	2.181*** (0.219)
Cand. party X resp. party ID		
Democrat X resp. party ID	−0.344*** (0.010)	−4.201*** (0.203)
Cand. party X election year		
Democrat X 1984	−0.009 (0.010)	−0.949*** (0.235)
Democrat X 1988	−0.050*** (0.011)	−0.693** (0.236)
Democrat X 1992	0.040*** (0.010)	0.392 (0.244)
Democrat X 1996	0.085*** (0.011)	0.635* (0.256)
Democrat X 2000	0.006 (0.013)	−0.322 (0.282)
Democrat X 2004	0.009 (0.012)	−0.190 (0.284)
Constant	0.071*** (0.007)	–
N (Observations/respondents)	15,504/8231	9,872/4936

Full models for predictions of *feeling thermometer ratings* (Model A) and *vote choice* (Model B) from respondents' perceptions of candidates' strong leadership and warmth, and the interactions between strong leadership and warmth, respectively, with respondents' political ideology. Unstandardized regressions coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

Note: Trait ratings and feeling thermometer ratings are measured on 0–1 scales with "0" and "1" indicating most negative and positive rating, respectively. For vote choice "0" indicates not having voted for a candidate, and "1" indicates voting for the candidate. Ideology is measured on a 0–1 scale with "0" and "1" being most liberal and conservative positions, respectively. Models are based on respondent fixed effect estimation. Note that for Model A $N_{observations}$ does not equal two times $N_{respondents}$ because some respondents only rated one candidate. However, regression coefficients remain the same when respondents only rating one candidate are excluded. [†] $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All p-values are reported for two-sided tests of significance

show very similar patterns across the ideological spectrum for both candidate traits: Strong leadership becomes significantly more important to respondents' vote choice moving towards the more conservative respondents. On the contrary, warmth becomes less important moving from the most liberal to the most conservative respondents. That is, the prediction finds support in the aggregate when analyzing all available data on evaluations of American presidential candidates from 1984 to 2008 in the ANES: Strong leadership increases and warmth decreases in predictive power with growing respondent conservatism when predicting feeling thermometer ratings and vote choices. In addition, both panels in Fig. 1 show that warmth generally exerts a stronger effect on candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions than strong leadership (the grey line is positioned above the black line), but that the
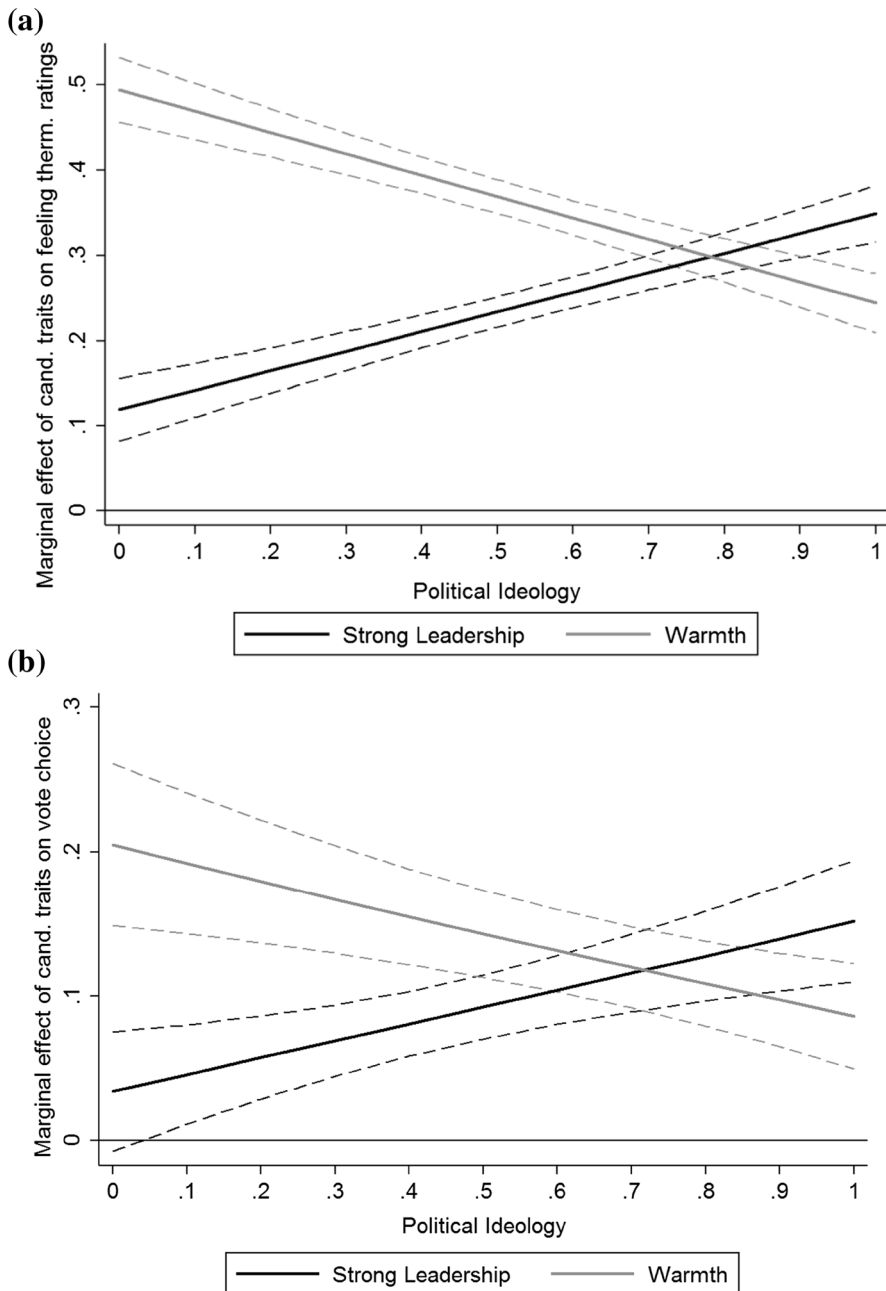
(a)

(b)

Fig. 1 Marginal effects of strong leadership and warmth, respectively, across respondent political ideology, ANES 1984–2008 (Study 1). **a** Illustrates marginal effects of strong leadership and warmth across respondents' political ideology for predictions of feeling thermometer ratings, while **b** shows the similar analysis when predicting vote choice. *Dashed lines* are 95% confidence intervals

two traits are assigned more equal weights among the more conservative respondents.

Are these results robust to alternative specifications? Yes. Substantially identical results are reached across four different alternative specifications. First, it is tested if the interactions between strong leadership and warmth, respective, with ideology hold when the competing hypothesis about partisan stereotypes in trait inferences is taken into account. That is, three-way interactions between candidate party, respondents' party identification and ratings of strong leadership and warmth, respectively, are added to the models. However, results remain unchanged with two significant interactions for predictions of feeling thermometer ratings (strong leadership and ideology: b = 0.237, $p < 0.001$; warmth and ideology: b = −0.241, $p < 0.001$) and vote choice (strong leadership and ideology: b = 3.009, odds ratio = 20.272, $p = 0.002$; warmth and ideology: b = −3.198, odds ratio = 0.041, $p = 0.002$) (Supplementary Material S.2 presents full models).

Second, the alternative explanation based on possible policy inferences from trait impressions about the candidates is taken into account. Specifically, to take into consideration that candidates who appear as strong leaders might be expected to hold "hawkish" foreign policy attitudes and that this inference drives the larger weight assigned to strong leadership evaluations among conservatives, three different questions about respondents' foreign policy attitudes were selected: "Defense spending" (included 1984–2008), "use of US military force" (included 1992–1996), and "US cooperation with the USSR" (included 1984–1988). Likewise, liberals' stronger preference for warmth in candidates might be driven by the inference that warm candidates hold more compassionate policies towards vulnerable groups in society. For this reason the following three items were selected: "Government help to minority groups/blacks", "equal roles for women and men", and "government spending on services" (all included 1984–2008). To test the alternative explanation (based on inferred policy positions from trait impressions) interactions between respondents' policy positions and trait evaluations of strong leadership and warmth, respectively, are added to the model. If the alternative explanation is correct, the key interactions between respondent ideology and strong leadership and warmth, respectively, should diminish in these models. This is not the case. Generally neither the substantial size nor the statistical significance of the two key interactions is reduced when any of the rival interactions are added to the model (see Supplementary Materials S.1 for coding procedures and S.3 for full models).

Third, it is tested if the interactions between strong leadership and warmth, respectively, with ideology hold when also adding to the model interactions between trait ratings of moral and competence, respectively, with ideology. Again, the two key interactions are found to survive in the alternative model when predicting both feeling thermometer ratings (strong leadership and ideology: b = 0.216, $p < 0.001$; warmth and ideology: b = −0.283, $p < 0.001$) and vote choice (strong leadership and ideology: b = 2.650, odds ratio = 14.149, $p = 0.005$; warmth and ideology: b = −2.863, odds ratio = 0.057, $p = 0.006$) (see Supplementary Material S.4 for full models).[11]

---

[11] Interestingly, trait impressions of moral also interact positively with respondent ideology for predictions of feelings and vote choice. That is, the more conservative the respondent the larger the

Finally, main conclusions also hold when the model is estimated based on difference scores in respondents' trait ratings of two competing candidates instead of the respondent fixed effects procedure applied in Table 1. In this alternative specification, ratings of the Republican candidate are subtracted from ratings of the Democratic candidate. This difference score is used to predict the difference in feeling thermometer ratings and vote choice while also adding a battery of different control variables.[12] Based on these analyses two significant interactions are found when predicting feeling thermometer ratings (strong leadership and ideology: b = 0.131, $p < 0.001$; warmth and ideology: b = −0.085, $p = 0.015$). However, only the interaction between strong leadership and ideology is significant when predicting vote choice (strong leadership and ideology: b = 1.902, odds ratio = 6.699, $p = 0.062$; warmth and ideology: b = −0.177, odds ratio = 0.838, $p = 0.886$) (see Supplementary Material S.5 for full models). That is, this alternative specification indicates that the interaction between strong leadership and ideology might be slightly more robust than the interaction between warmth and ideology.

In sum, the prediction is supported across four alternative specifications that, in turn, take account of rival explanations based in partisan stereotypes and possible policy inferences from trait ratings, add other interactions between respondents' ideology and trait ratings to the analyses, and specify the model based on differences in trait ratings of competing candidates (instead of the respondent fixed effects procedure applied in the main analyses). However, all of these analyses are based on aggregate data from 1984 to 2008, which could potentially mask important year-to-year differences such as specific candidates' character weaknesses in any election in particular (cf. Goren 2002, 2007). Below, I explore the persistence of the interactive relationships between trait ratings of power and warmth, respectively, with respondent ideology in candidate-specific analyses across elections.

Do liberals and conservatives assign different weights to warmth and power, respectively, within elections from 1984 to 2008? Yes, but most clearly for power. To test the prediction based on the most disaggregated data available, candidate-specific analyses for each of the fourteen presidential candidates running 1984–2008 were conducted. Consequently, I depart from the respondent fixed effects specification applied in the above analyses. Instead, predictions of feeling thermometer ratings and vote choice are tested using OLS regression and logistic

---

Footnote 11 continued

weight assigned to ratings of candidates' moral (for specific tests see Supplementary Material S.4). Different explanations for this finding could be given. In line with the perspective promoted in this article, conservatives might find it more important for their leaders to be morally right based in psychological needs (for order; cf. Jost et al. 2009). Another explanation would build on trait ownerships (cf. Hayes (2005) and stress that the political right (conservatives and Republicans alike) hold trait ownership of moral. For this article, the main conclusion remains that interactions between strong leadership and warmth, respectively, with ideology still hold under this alternative specification, and—as a consequence—it is left for future work to explore the interaction between ratings of candidate moral and respondent ideology further.

[12] Specifically, difference score models control for trait ratings of competence and moral, respondents' gender, age, party identification, income, race and religiosity (for detailed coding procedures see Supplementary Material S.1).

regression, respectively, with the following control variables: Trait ratings of competence and moral, respondents' gender, age, party identification, income, race and religiosity (for detailed coding procedures see Supplementary Material S.1). In parallel to the aggregate results, the weight assigned to strong leadership generally increases with respondent conservatism. For predictions of feeling thermometer ratings the interaction between strong leadership and ideology is positive in eleven out of fourteen candidate-separate analyses with four being significant. For predictions of vote choice, ten analyses yield positive interactions between strong leadership and ideology with three being significant. Importantly, none of the negative interactions (running counter to the prediction) are significant for predictions of feeling thermometers or vote choice. Results are slightly less consistent for warmth. Only in eight of the fourteen candidate-specific analyses does the effect of warmth decrease with respondent conservatism for predictions of feelings. Four of these interactions are significant, but the pattern also reveals one positive and significant interaction between warmth and ideology (Clinton in 1996), which runs counter to the prediction. For predictions of vote choice, eight analyses reveal negative interactions with only one of these being significant (all positive interactions are insignificant) (see Supplementary Material S.6 for full models and illustrations across candidates and elections). In short, these candidate-specific analyses illuminate that the interaction between strong leadership evaluations and respondent ideology is more persistently supported than the interaction between warmth and ideology.

Discussion

The analyses of the 1984–2008 ANES data support the prediction that voters *depending on their ideological predispositions* assign different weights to ratings of candidate power and warmth in their global candidate evaluations and vote choices. Power increases in importance with respondent conservatism while warmth in contrast decreases. Robustness tests show that these results are consistently reached across four alternative specifications. Finally, candidate-specific analyses reveal that the prediction was generally more consistently supported for power (strong leadership) than for warmth, which suggests power to be a stronger ideological divider than warmth.

Study 1 is based entirely on observational data. To provide further and more direct causal support for the claim that ideologically different voters prefer different candidate personalities, Study 2 tests the prediction experimentally and adds support for it in several ways. First, the key finding—that liberals and conservatives prefer different candidate personalities—is tested experimentally by assigning subjects randomly to read about either a powerful and dominant or a warm and agreeable fictitious candidate. In this way, Study 2 explores if conservatives' and liberals' immediate and spontaneous impressions of a given candidate described as warm or powerful parallels the results from Study 1. Second, Study 2 is conducted in the United States as well as in Denmark in order to explore the universality of the suggested heterogeneous candidate personality preferences for liberals and conservatives. Moreover, the comparison between the Danish and the American version of

Study 2 also relates to testing if subjects' ideological predispositions drive candidate personality preferences over-and-above what can be accounted for by party affiliation and stereotypic associations of Republican and Democratic candidates with certain character traits in the American society. Besides being culturally different in many respects, Denmark departs from the United States with a range of parties on both ideological wings and—as a consequence—less clear stereotypic associations between specific parties and certain character traits.[13] Unlike the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States, no single Danish party is stereotypically associated with masculinity/femininity or holds ownerships of certain personality traits. Therefore, if ideology plays parallel roles for candidate personality preferences in the United States and Denmark, it will suggest that heterogeneous preferences for candidate warmth and power stems (at least partially) from different ideological predispositions among the voters.

Study 2: Cross-National Experiment

In Study 2, subjects were randomly assigned to read one of two descriptions of a fictitious male candidate. The descriptions varied whether warm or powerful personality attributes about the candidate were emphasized. No party label or policy positions were present in the descriptions since the very idea of Study 2 is to investigate subjects' candidate personality preferences in the absence of other types of information.

Materials and Measures

In Study 2, subjects were instructed to read a text about a fictitious politician—in the US version, Congressman Thomas Johnson, and in the Danish version, Member of Parliament Christian Mortensen. Importantly, subjects were randomly assigned to read a description that highlighted personality attributes linked to either power ("0") or warmth ("1"). The powerful personality description emphasized characteristics such as dominance, intransigence, taking control of negotiations, uncompromisingly sticking to policy positions, and being a person that others fear offending. The warm personality description highlighted characteristics such as agreeableness, cooperativeness, willingness to do compromises, empathy, and being a person that others comfortably contacts (see Supplementary Material S.7 for the full descriptions).[14] In this way, the experimental conditions operationalize the key

---

[13] Besides, Denmark and the United States also differ with respect to more general culture and institutional set-up of potential relevance to political preferences and behavior. The United States embodies federalism, presidentialism, first-past-the-post elections, and a two-party system. Denmark embodies corporatism, parlamentarism, proportional elections, and a multi-party system. These differences also extend into broader culture with the United States being markedly more individualistic and Denmark more collectivistic (Nelson and Shavitt 2002).

[14] The construct validity of these personality descriptions were tested in relation to the applied personality traits used in Study 1. With respect to warmth, the two candidate personality descriptions were rated on "friendliness," "agreeableness," and "if the candidate cares about you"—traits linked closely to the warmth dimension and with the latter trait also included in the ANES data—and these

components of candidate character—power and warmth—by simultaneously manipulating different core aspects based on the fictitious candidate's private as well as professional behaviors that unavoidably go together.[15]

After reading about the fictitious politician, subjects rated him on relevant personality traits as a manipulation check before stating their general feelings towards Thomas Johnson/Christian Mortensen on a 0–100 feeling thermometer. In the American version of Study 2, subjects also indicated their likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson from 0 to 100. In the analyses, all measures are recoded to 0–1 scales with "1" indicating the most positive evaluation of the fictitious candidate.

The US version of Study 2 was designed as a web-survey experiment distributed among a representative sample (with regards to gender, age and geographic region) of the American population with respondents recruited and paid by the YouGov survey agency (conducted May 2013). Subjects first answered a set of background questions before they were assigned to one of the two experimental conditions and no other experiments were built into the survey. Altogether, 408 subjects (212 females) completed the survey in which subjects' ideological self-placement were measured among the background questions using the same seven-category scale as in Study 1. In the analyses, this variable is recoded to a 0–1 scale such that "0" and "1" constitute the most liberal and conservatives positions, respectively (mean = 0.548; SD = 0.303). The US version of Study 2 also measured subjects' party affiliation using the same variable as in Study 1.[16]

The Danish version of Study 2 was designed as a paper-and-pencil style survey experiment built into a freshman survey distributed among undergraduate political science students at a major Danish research university (conducted September 2012). The participants did not receive any kind of compensation. Students first answered a comprehensive set of background questions including self-reported ideology before they were assigned to one of the experimental conditions about the fictitious candidate. Altogether, 263 (132 females) subjects completed the survey. Due to different connotations of the terms "liberal" and "conservative" in the Danish

---

Footnote 14 continued

ratings correlate positively and significantly: Danish sample: $r_{agreeableness,friendliness} = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{agreeableness,care} = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{care,friendliness} = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$. US sample: $r_{agreeableness,friendliness} = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{agreeableness,care} = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{care,friendliness} = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$. With respect to power, the two candidate personality descriptions were rated on "dominance," "competitiveness," and "strong leadership"—traits linked closely to the power dimension and with the latter trait also included in the ANES data—and these ratings correlate positively and significantly: Danish sample: $r_{dominance,competitiveness} = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{dominance,strong\ leadership} = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{strong\ leadership,competitiveness} = 0.15$, $p = 0.016$; US sample: $r_{dominance,competitiveness} = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{dominance,strong\ leadership} = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$; $r_{strong\ leadership,competitiveness} = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$.

[15] This study is the first to experimentally investigate ideological differences in preferences for candidate power and warmth for which reason several related aspects of power and warmth were simultaneously manipulated. Future studies might potentially look into whether different sub-aspects or sub-indicators of power and warmth constitute the primary drivers of the results.

[16] Party affiliation was measured using the standard ANES seven category measure, which was subsequently recoded to a 0–1 scale with "0" and "1" representing "Strong Democrats" and "Strong Republicans", respectively. Moreover, due to inclusion of a "don't know" option for the feeling thermometer rating and not for "likelihood to vote for Thomas Johnson", the feeling thermometer analysis is based on 340 subjects, while the analysis of "likelihood voting for" involves all 408 subjects.

compared to the American context, the Danish version of Study 2 implements the standard scale for measuring voters' ideological self-placements in most European election studies (cf. van der Eijk et al. 2005); that is, it asks subjects to position themselves on a scale from "0" (most leftwing) to "10" (most rightwing). In the following, this measure is recoded to the same 0–1 scale format with "1" reflecting the most conservative position (mean = 0.487; SD = 0.232).

The prediction is tested using OLS regression, and all reported p-values are from two-sided tests of significance.

Results

A manipulation check of the two descriptions of Thomas Johnson/Christian Mortensen shows that the manipulation of perceived personality worked as intended: The warm description is perceived as more agreeable (a key characteristic related to the warmth dimension) than the powerful description (US sample: t = 12.56, $p < 0.001$; Danish sample: t = 21.91, $p < 0.001$), and the powerful description is seen as more dominant (a key characteristic related to the power dimension) than the warm description (US sample: t = 10.60, $p < 0.001$; Danish sample: t = 21.74, $p < 0.001$) (see Supplementary Material S.8 for more details about the manipulation check).

For the prediction to be supported in the experimental context of Study 2, evaluations of Thomas Johnson/Christian Mortensen should vary as a function of subjects' ideological predispositions: When the fictitious candidate is described as powerful, subjects' evaluations should become more positive with growing conservatism. On the contrary, evaluations of the fictitious candidate should become less positive with growing conservatism when he is described as a warm person. That is, the key test of the prediction in Study 2 is whether a two-way interaction between description of candidate personality and subjects' political ideology is significant when predicting global evaluations of the candidate.

Do conservatives evaluate a powerful candidate more positively than liberals, and do liberals evaluate a warm candidate more positively than conservatives? Yes. In the American sample, a significant interaction between personality description and subjects' ideology is found when predicting subjects' overall feelings towards Thomas Johnson (b = −0.382, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, this result replicates when predicting subjects' likelihood to vote for Thomas Johnson (b = −0.376, $p < 0.001$). Almost identical results are found for the Danish sample with a significant interaction between personality description and subjects' ideology (b = −0.216, $p = 0.007$). Table 2 presents full regression models with American results in Model A and B and Danish results in Model C.

To ease in-depth interpretations of these results, Fig. 2 illustrates the marginal effect of ideology on evaluations of Thomas Johnson/Christian Mortensen for the powerful and the warm personality description, respectively. That is, grey bars in Fig. 2 are unstandardized regression coefficients when predicting evaluations of a given candidate description by subjects' political ideology.

Panel a in Fig. 2 shows the results for the American subjects when predicting feeling thermometer ratings. Political ideology positively predicts feelings towards

Table 2 Experiments United States and Denmark—(Study 2)

	Model A DV: overall feelings (United States)	Model B DV: likelihood voting for (United States)	Model C DV: overall feelings (Denmark)
Description			
Warm	0.373*** (0.044)	0.348*** (0.046)	0.256*** (0.043)
Ideology	0.262*** (0.053)	0.244*** (0.057)	0.133* (0.056)
Description*ideology			
Warm*ideology	−0.382*** (0.071)	−0.376*** (0.073)	−0.216** (0.079)
Constant	0.417*** (0.033)	0.395*** (0.033)	0.564*** (0.031)
N	340	408	258
R²	0.209	0.145	0.228

Full models for predictions from the American (Model A and B) and the Danish (Model C) versions of Study 2. Models report unstandardized coefficients from OLS regressions with standard errors in parentheses

Note: Overall feelings towards Christian Mortensen/Thomas Johnson and likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson are measured on 0-1 scales with "1" indicating most positive feelings and strongest likelihood. For Description the powerful personality description constitutes the reference category (coded "0"). Political Ideology is measured on 0-1 scale with "1" being most conservative

[†] $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. All *p*-values are reported for two-sided tests of significance

the powerful description of Thomas Johnson ($b = 0.262$, $p < 0.001$), while it negatively predicts feelings towards the warm personality description ($b = -0.120$, $p = 0.011$). That is, the more conservative the subject the more positive the evaluation of the powerful candidate description *and* the more negative the evaluation of the warm candidate description. This pattern replicates for predictions of the likelihood to vote for Thomas Johnson as depicted in panel b. The more conservative the subject the more likely he/she is to vote for the powerful personality description ($b = 0.244$, $p < 0.001$), whereas conservatism negatively predicts the likelihood to vote for the warm personality description ($b = -0.133$, $p = 0.010$). The results from the Danish sample—shown in panel c—are almost identical to the American pattern: Subject conservatism positively predicts feelings towards the powerful description of Christian Mortensen ($b = 0.133$, $p = 0.019$). Likewise, conservatism is negatively related—although not reaching conventional levels of statistical significance—to feeling thermometer ratings of the warm description ($b = -0.084$, $p = 0.137$).

In short, these results replicate the pattern from Study 1: Conservative subjects like a powerful candidate personality more than liberals, whereas liberals like a warm candidate personality more than conservatives. As for the candidate-specific analyses in Study 1, the ideological division with respect to candidate personality preferences is larger for the powerful than for the warm candidate personality. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in Fig. 2 with the bars (the regression coefficients) for the relationship between ideology and the powerful candidate description being almost twice as large—in terms of absolute value—than the size of the relationship

between ideology and the warm candidate description. In the conclusion I return to this interesting pattern.

Importantly, the main result—that candidate preferences vary as a function of subject ideology—is found in both the American and the Danish context. The replication of the American results in Denmark is important because party stereotypes are less pronounced in Denmark than in the American society. This suggests that preferences for powerful and warm candidate personalities are (at least partly) driven by deep-seated ideological differences among subjects. This interpretation is further supported when controlling for the rival interaction between the assigned personality description and subjects' party affiliation in the US version of Study 2 which replicates the key interaction between personality description and subject ideology (feeling thermometer ratings: b $= -0.463$, $p < 0.001$; likelihood voting for: b $= -0.460$, $p < 0.001$) (see Supplementary Material S.9 for full models).

Discussion

Based on the analyses presented so far, ideological differences among the subjects are found to cause differences in evaluations of a fictitious candidate described as either powerful or warm. Moreover, the results from both Study 1 and 2 support this conclusion even when different rival explanations are taken into account. In the theory section I built on recent research in political psychology to predict that deep-seated psychological differences between liberals and conservatives cause them to prefer different candidate personalities and traits. The analyses presented above have not provided a direct test of this proposed mechanism grounded in psychological differences. However, the American version of Study 2 permits such a test as it also measured subjects' authoritarianism—a psychological construct known to be closely linked to conservatism (Feldman 2013) and, importantly for the mechanism I am proposing, is theorized and shown to be causally prior to subjects' ideological positions. Consequently, authoritarianism is found to constitute one of the fundamental drivers of a conservative ideology (Duckitt and Sibley 2010).[17] If my proposed mechanism is correct, we should see that the ideological difference in subjects' evaluations of the powerful and warm candidate descriptions in Study 2 is driven by authoritarianism.

Specifically, the American version of Study 2 measured authoritarianism based on four questions about "child rearing values" answered by the subjects before they were assigned to the treatment (see e.g. Feldman and Stenner 1997) (see Supplementary Material S.10 for wordings of the items). The questions comprise

---

[17] In their study Duckitt and Sibley (2010) show that political ideology stems from two different paths linking conservatism to two different types of fundamental world views. One world view is characterized by perceiving the social world as dangerous and threatening and relates to conservatism through authoritarianism. The other path relates conservatism to a fundamental perception of society as a competitive jungle with the concept of social dominance orientation (SDO) constituting the intermediate link between world view and conservatism. Since only authoritarianism was included in the American version of Study 2, only authoritarianism can be investigated in the current analyses. However, future research should try to link preferences for candidate personalities to SDO as well as to direct measures of the two different world views.
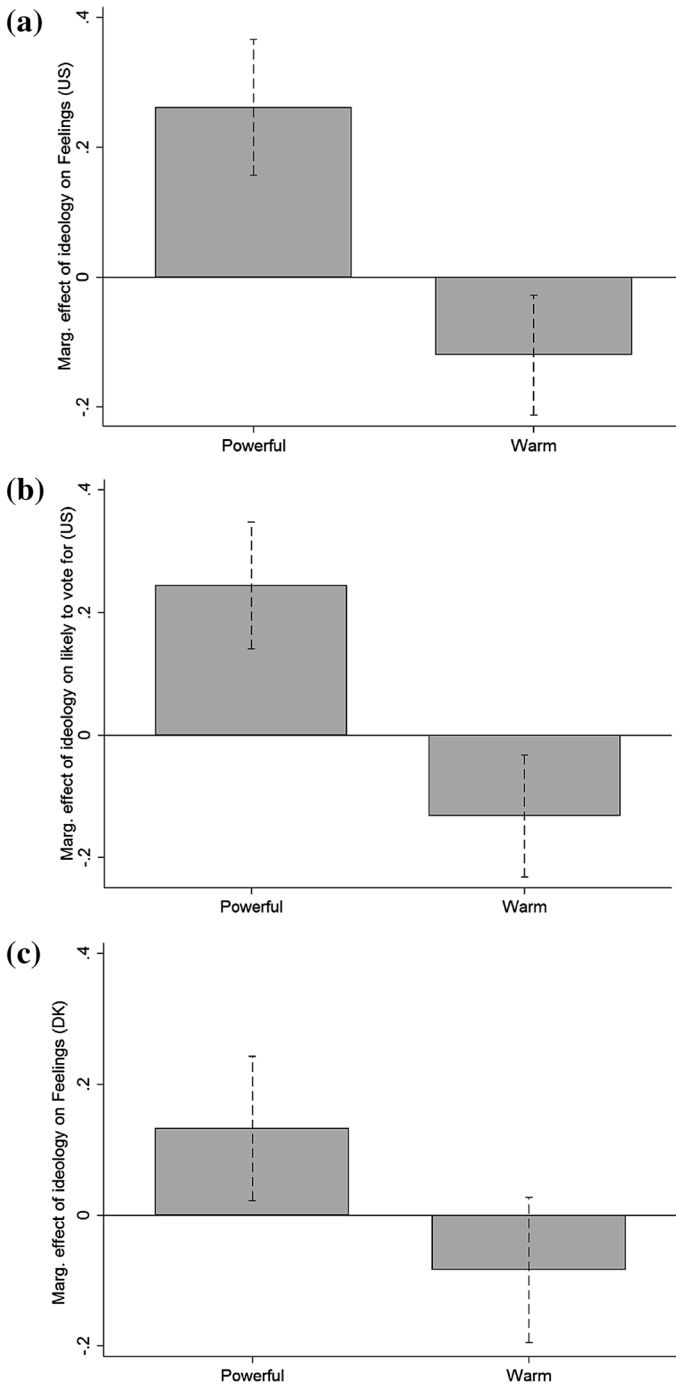
◀**Fig. 2** Marginal effect of subjects' political ideology (0–1 scale) on evaluations of the powerful and the warm personality description, respectively. American and Danish experiment (Study 2). *Panels* show the marginal effect of subjects' political ideology on **a** feeling thermometer ratings, US; **b** likelihood voting, US; **c** feeling thermometer ratings, Denmark. *Bars* are unstandardized reg. coefficients; *dashed lines* are 95% confidence intervals. *Note*: Respondents were randomly assigned to either the powerful or the warm personality description

a fairly reliable authoritarianism scale from "0" (least authoritarian) to "1" (most authoritarian) ($\alpha = 0.673$; mean $= 0.527$; SD $= 0.203$). As expected authoritarianism correlated positively with ideology (r $= 0.310$, $p < 0.001$) suggesting that ideology and authoritarianism constitute related yet distinct constructs. Next, it was tested if authoritarianism interacted with the assigned candidate personality description following the same pattern as ideology, which turned out to be the case (feeling therm.: b $= -0.287$, $p = 0.008$; likelihood voting for: b $= -0.289$, $p = 0.010$). Specifically, authoritarianism related positively to evaluations of the powerful description and negatively to evaluations of the warm description. This is consistent with the theorized mechanism that subjects' candidate personality preferences are affected by ideology because ideology (among other things) taps deeper-seated psychological differences in authoritarianism. Finally, to provide a direct test of this mechanism, structural equation modeling was employed to test the significance of a path from authoritarianism *through* ideology on evaluations of the powerful and the warm descriptions of Thomas Johnson, respectively. These analyses strongly support the prediction: For the powerful description a positive and significant indirect path from authoritarianism *through* ideology on candidate evaluation was found (feeling therm.: b $= 0.081$, $p = 0.014$; likelihood voting for: b $= 0.087$, $p = 0.004$). In contrast, for the warm description a negative and significant indirect path from authoritarianism *through* ideology was found (feeling therm.: b $= -0.060$, $p = 0.030$; likelihood voting for: b $= -0.061$, $p = 0.053$) (see Supplementary Material S.10 for full models and path diagrams).

In short, based on experimental data Study 2 supports the conclusions from Study 1. Powerful candidate personalities are more positively evaluated among conservatives, while warm candidate personalities are liked more among liberal voters. However, ideology is found to be a stronger predictor of evaluations of the powerful than of the warm candidate description suggesting that candidate power is a stronger ideological divider than candidate warmth. Finally, the American version of Study 2 provides evidence for the theorized mechanism with liberals' and conservatives' different candidate preferences being driven by psychological differences in authoritarianism.

Conclusion

Extensive research links candidate personalities to electoral decisions and speculate about the ways through which voters draw on impressions of candidates' personalities when making up their minds on Election Day (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Kinder 1986; Popkin 1994, Funk 1999; Hayes 2005). Likewise, political

pundits, commentators as well as lay-people often think of candidates' personal characteristics and attributes as important and potentially decisive factors for electoral success (see e.g. Quindlen 2000). However, scholarly work about the mechanisms through which voters' perceptions of candidates' personalities affect vote choices remain sparse, most often treating candidate personality as a one-dimensional phenomenon about general liking or disliking (cf. Funk 1999). This article has addressed this shortcoming by integrating two distinct literatures. The first literature shows that leader preferences are highly sensitive to levels of contextual conflict with more powerful and dominant leaders being preferred in times of war (Merolla and Zechmeister 2009a; Little et al. 2007; Spisak et al. 2012; Laustsen and Petersen 2015, 2016, forthcoming). The second literature finds that conservatives and liberals hold very different perceptions of the social world with conservatives focusing more on societal threat, conflict and insecurity (e.g. Hibbing et al. 2013; Duckitt and Sibley 2010; Jost et al. 2009). Based on these insights, it was predicted that conservatives would hold stronger preferences for powerful candidate personalities than liberals; and liberals would hold stronger preferences for warm candidate personalities than conservatives.

The prediction was supported across observational and experimental data from two different countries characterized by very different political systems. First, based on the 1984–2008 ANES data, conservatives were found to weight candidate power and provision of strong leadership in global candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions more than liberals. In contrast, liberals (although less robust in candidate-specific analyses) assigned greater weights to warmth than did conservatives. Second, these ideological differences replicated experimentally with conservative and liberal American and Danish subjects holding similarly different candidate trait preferences.

Interestingly, both the observational and experimental results found power to be a more robust and stronger ideological divider than warmth. That is, conservatives and liberals vary almost twice as much in their evaluations of the powerful candidate personality than they do when evaluating the warm candidate personality (see bar sizes in Fig. 2). This asymmetry was not predicted and, thus, any explanations remain speculative. However, one might explain the asymmetry by drawing on research on social perceptions in general (i.e. of non-candidates) in which warmth evaluations are found to be primary, more fundamental and to take place before evaluations of power (and competence, see Fiske et al. 2007). Based on this, the smaller and less robust ideological difference in preferences for candidate warmth might be caused by perceptions on this trait being more fundamental and—consequently—more equally important for voters regardless of their ideological leanings. However, it is left for future research to investigate the mechanism behind this asymmetric ideology difference in preferences for power and warmth.

Throughout the paper I have argued that differences in candidate personality preferences are driven by voters' political ideology. Alternative explanations depart in party cue effects and stereotypic associations of parties with certain candidate traits, or that voters might infer a candidate's policy positions based on trait perceptions (Bartels 2002; Hayes 2005; Goren 2007; Kalmoe 2013). Across the presented analyses the ideology-oriented explanation promoted here is robustly

supported even when these alternatives are taken into consideration. Importantly, across these analyses the main purpose is not to prove the alternative explanations wrong. Rather, I have aimed at showing how deep-seated ideological differences among the voters relate to heterogeneous preferences for candidate power and warmth *even when taking well-established explanations such as party stereotypes into account*. Different parts of the results relate to this. First, the key interactions between political ideology and candidate traits replicate across observational and experimental data. Second, the key interactions remain statistically significant when controlling for the alternative explanations. Third, the interactive relationship between candidate personality and subject ideology replicates in very different countries. Finally, in support of the proposed mechanism authoritarianism was found to drive preferences for candidate power and warmth *through* ideology in the American version of Study 2. In short, this empirical evidence supports the notion that liberals and conservatives do in fact prefer different candidate personalities and that this (at least to some degree) is caused by deep-seated psychological differences.

The distinction between the ideology and the party-stereotyping bases for the heterogeneous candidate personality preferences might seem trivial, but it holds important consequences for the way one interprets candidate evaluations and their potential for affecting electoral outcomes. The party-stereotyping perspective holds that voters evaluate certain candidates more positively than others because of shared partisanship and, consequently, stresses group identification as the main driver of both candidate evaluations and vote choices (e.g., Bartels 2002). Consequently, this perspective downplays the role possibly played by trait perceptions in explaining electoral behavior since such perceptions are first and foremost colored by partisanship. The ideology perspective, offers a substantially different take on trait perceptions since voters are theorized to *also* evaluate political candidates by drawing on their psychological predispositions. These predispositions cause voters to opt for the candidate that they see as best suited for solving salient problems facing society which during the 2016 primaries was exemplified with the Trump campaign's attempt to link American citizens' perceptions of the world as dangerous to the needs for a strong leader (see introduction and Gass 2015). Recent analyses further suggest that authoritarians were the most likely supporters of Trump in the 2016 primaries (e.g. MacWilliams 2016), which also corresponds with the perspective on candidate evaluations offered in this paper. However, primary and national elections are two very different contests with partisanship playing a much clearer role in the latter. Based on this logic, one might still expect that ideologically guided trait preferences will have the largest impact in primaries, local non-partisan elections or in times characterized by less partisan disagreement than the current situation in the American society (cf. Levendusky 2009). In any case, based on recent interdisciplinary insights about political ideology this article offers a novel interpretation of voters' trait perceptions of candidates and future research should consider how and when this perspective relative to partisan stereotyping can be expected to exert greatest influence.

In sum, this article offers an ideology-oriented perspective on candidate evaluations suggesting that voters draw on specific candidate traits depending on

their ideological predispositions. Importantly, this process affects candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions over-and-above what a party-stereotype perspective accounts for. However, one should *not* conclude that partisanship does not affect candidate evaluations. Rather, one should conclude that along with well-established effects of party identification and party stereotypes, liberals and conservatives weight specific trait impressions of power and warmth differently in their global candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions.

References

Alford, J., Funk, C., & Hibbing, J. (2005). Are political orientations genetically transmitted? *American Political Science Review, 99*(2), 153–167.

Allison, P. D. (2009). *Fixed effects regression models*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc.

Barker, D. C., Lawrence, A. B., & Tavits, M. (2006). Partisanship and the dynamics of "candidate centered politics" in American presidential nominations. *Electoral Studies, 25*(3), 599–610.

Bartels, L. (2002). The impact of candidate traits in American presidential elections. In A. King (Ed.), *Leaders' personalities and the outcomes of democratic elections* (pp. 44–69). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bishin, B., Stevens, D., & Wilson, C. (2006). Character counts? Honesty and fairness in election 2000. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 70*(2), 235–248.

Bøggild, T., & Laustsen, L. (2016). An intra-group perspective on leader preferences: Different risks of exploitation shape preferences for leader facial dominance. *The Leadership Quarterly*. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.09.003.

Campbell, A., Converse, P., Miller, W., & Stokes, D. (1960). *The American voter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carmines, E., & D'Amico, N. (2015). The new look in political ideology research. *Annual Review of Political Science, 18,* 205–216.

Carney, D. R., Jost, J. T., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008). The secret life of liberals and conservatives: Personality profiles, interaction styles, and the things they leave behind. *Political Psychology, 29*(6), 807–840.

Clarke, H., Sanders, D., Stewart, M., & Whiteley, P. (2004). *Political choice in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duckitt, J., & Sibley, C. (2010). Personality, ideology, prejudice, and politics: A dual-process motivational model. *Journal of Personality, 78,* 1861–1894.

Eriksson, K., & Funcke, A. (2013). A below-average effect with respect to American political stereotypes on warmth and competence. *Political Psychology, 36*(3), 341–350.

Feldman, S. (2013). Political ideology. In H. Leonie, D. O. Sears, & J. S. Levy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 591–626). New York: Oxford University Press.

Feldman, S., & Johnston, C. (2014). Understanding the determinants of political ideology: Implications of structural complexity. *Political Psychology, 35*(3), 337–358.

Feldman, S., & Stenner, K. (1997). Perceived threat and authoritarianism. *Political Psychology, 18*(4), 741–770.

Fiske, S., Cuddy, A., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11*(2), 77–83.

Funk, C. (1996). The impact of scandal on candidate evaluations: An experimental test of the role of candidate traits. *Political Behavior, 18,* 1–24.

Funk, C. (1997). Implications of political expertise in candidate trait evaluation. *Political Research Quarterly, 50*(3), 675–697.

Funk, C. (1999). Bringing the candidate into models of candidate evaluation. *Journal of Politics, 61,* 700–720.

Gass, N. (2015, October 14). Trump goes on the attack against Bernie. *Politico*. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from http://www.politico.com/story/2015/10/donald-trump-attack-bernie-sanders-214792.

Goren, P. (2002). Character weakness, partisan bias, and presidential evaluation. *American Journal of Political Science, 46*(3), 627–641.

Goren, P. (2007). Character weakness, partisan bias, and presidential evaluation: Modifications and extensions. *Political Behavior, 29*(3), 305–325.

Hanmer, M., & Kalkan, K. (2013). Behind the curve: Clarifying the best approach to calculating predicted probabilities and marginal effects from limited dependent variable models. *American Journal of Political Science, 57*(1), 263–277.

Hayes, D. (2005). Candidate quality through a partisan lens: A theory of trait ownership. *American Journal of Political Science, 49*(4), 908–923.

Hayes, D. (2009). Has television personalized voting behavior? *Political Behavior, 31,* 231–260.

Hayes, D. (2010). Trait voting in U.S. senate elections. *American Politics Research, 38*(6), 1102–1129.

Hibbing, J., Smith, K., & Alford, J. (2013). *Predisposed*. New York: Routledge.

Hibbing, J., Smith, K., & Alford, J. (2014). Differences in negativity bias underlie variations in political ideology. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 37*(3), 297–307.

Hirsch, J., DeYoung, C., Xiaowen, X., & Peterson, J. (2010). Compassionate liberals and polite conservatives: Associations of agreeableness with political ideology and moral values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*(5), 655–664.

Jost, J., Federico, C., & Napier, J. (2009). Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60,* 307–333.

Kalmoe, N. (2013). From fistfights to firefights: Trait aggression and support for state violence. *Political Behavior, 35,* 311–330.

Kertzer, J., & Brutger, R. (2016). Decomposing audience costs: Bringing the audience back into audience cost theory. *American Journal of Political Science, 60*(1), 234–249.

Kilburn, H. (2005). Does the candidate really matter? *American Politics Research, 33*(3), 335–356.

Kinder, D. (1986). Presidential character revisited. In R. Lau & D. Sears (Eds.), *Political cognition* (pp. 233–255). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kinder, D., Peters, M., Abelson, R., & Fiske, S. (1980). Presidential prototypes. *Political Behavior, 2,* 315–337.

Laustsen, L., & Petersen, M. (2015). Does a competent leader make a good friend? Conflict, ideology and the psychologies of friendship and followership. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 36,* 286–293.

Laustsen, L., & Petersen, M. (2016). Winning faces vary by ideology: How nonverbal source cues influence election and communication success in politics. *Political Communication, 33*(2), 188–211.

Laustsen, L. & Petersen, M. B. (Forthcoming). Perceived conflict and leader dominance: Individual and contextual factors behind preferences for dominant leaders. *Political Psychology*.

Levendusky, M. (2009). *The partisan sort: How liberals became democrats and conservatives became republicans*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Little, A., Burriss, R., Jones, B., & Craig Roberts, S. (2007). Facial appearance affects voting decisions. *Evolution and Human Behavior, 28,* 18–27.

MacWilliams, M. (2016, January 17). The one weird trait that predicts whether you're a Trump supporter. *Politico*. Retrieved October 17, 2016, from http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-2016-authoritarian-213533.

Markus, G. (1982). Political attitudes during an election year: A report on the 1980 NES panel study. *American Political Science Review, 76*(3), 538–560.

Merolla, J., & Zechmeister, E. (2009a). Terrorist threat, leadership, and the vote: Evidence from three experiments. *Political Behavior, 31,* 575–601.

Merolla, J., & Zechmeister, E. (2009b). *Democracy at risk: How terrorist threats affect the public*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Miller, A., & Miller, W. (1976). Ideology in the 1972 election: Myth or reality-a rejoinder. *American Political Science Review, 70*(3), 832–849.

Nelson, M., & Shavitt, S. (2002). Horizontal and vertical individualism and achievement values: A multimethod examination of Denmark and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 33*(5), 439–458.

Oosterhof, N., & Todorov, A. (2008). The functional basis of face evaluation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 105*(32), 11087–11092.

Oxley, D., Smith, K., Alford, J., Hibbing, M., Miller, J., Scalora, M., et al. (2008). Political attitudes vary with physiological traits. *Science, 321,* 1667–1670.

Peffley, M., Hurwitz, J., & Sniderman, P. (1997). Racial stereotypes and whites' political views of blacks in the context of welfare and crime. *American Journal of Political Science, 41*(1), 30–60.

Petersen, M., & Aarøe, L. (2013). Politics in the mind's eye: Imagination as a link between social and political cognition. *American Political Science Review, 107*(2), 275–293.

Popkin, S. (1994). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion effects in presidential campaigns* (2nd ed.). Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Quindlen, A. (2000, August 14). It's the cult of personality. *Newsweek*. Retrieved March 9, 2016, from http://www.newsweek.com/its-cult-personality-159127.

Rule, N. O., Ambady, N., Adams, R. B., Jr., Ozono, H., Nakashima, S., Yoshikawa, S., et al. (2010). Polling the face: Prediction and consensus across cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*(1), 1–15.

Spisak, B., Homan, A., Grabo, A., & van Vugt, M. (2012). Facing the situation: Testing a biosocial contingency model of leadership in intergroup relations using masculine and feminine faces. *The Leadership Quarterly, 23,* 273–280.

van der Eijk, C., Schmitt, H., & Binder, T. (2005). Left-right orientations and party choice. In J. Thomassen (Ed.), *The European voter: A comparative study of modern democracies* (pp. 167–191). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winter, N. (2010). Masculine republicans and feminine democrats: Gender and American's explicit and implicit images of the political parties. *Political Behavior, 32,* 587–618.