Research Note

Party Politics

Party elites and beauty biases: Candidate attractiveness and list placement

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Abstract

To what extent does physical attractiveness affect the placement of candidates on party lists in proportional representation systems? Studies show that good-looking politicians fare better electorally than their less attractive peers. Research suggests that this is because voters use physical appearance as a heuristic. In proportional list systems, however, who wins office is conditional on where party leaders place them on the party list. In this paper, we argue that physically attractive candidates fare better in proportional list systems than their less attractive co-partisans because party elites place them in preferable list positions. Drawing on data from Ecuador's 2019 municipal elections, where ballots featured photos of candidates, we show that physically attractive candidates are placed higher on party lists and therefore have an electoral advantage. Our finding suggests that physical attractiveness can be an important determinant of electoral success even when voters do not cast preference votes.

Keywords

elections, list placement, attractiveness, political parties, ecuador

Introduction

Looks matter in the political arena. In industrialized democracies like Finland, Germany, and the United States, physically attractive politicians consistently receive more votes than their less attractive peers (Atkinson et al., 2009; Berggren et al., 2010; Jäckle et al., 2020; Jäckle and Metz, 2017; Praino et al., 2014). The same is true in developing democracies. In Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico, good-looking politicians outperform their competitors (Carrión-Yaguana and Carroll, 2023; Lawson et al., 2010; Lawson and Lenz, 2007). Social psychology provides a convincing explanation for why attractive politicians do well electorally - voters ascribe them desirable personality qualities, like honesty, competence, and intelligence (Dion et al., 1972; Eagly et al., 1991). If "what is beautiful is good," it is no surprise that voters prefer attractive candidates.

Virtually all research on candidate appearance focuses on voter attitudes and behavior. Nonetheless, voters are not the only reason that good-looking candidates may fare better than their less attractive competitors. Party elites' behavior may also explain why attractive politicians are more successful. Party gatekeepers influence who runs for elected office via recruitment activities and shape their chances of victory via their control over scarce resources (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). Research indicates that party leaders favor certain types of candidates over others, such as men and members of certain ethnoracial groups (Dancygier, 2014; Janusz and Campos, 2021; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Wylie, 2018). It is plausible that party elites also favor attractive politicians. No research to date, however, investigates if party leaders have "beauty biases."

In this article, we examine the impact of candidate appearance on the political behavior of party elites in party list proportional representation systems (list PR systems). In list PR systems, party leaders rank candidates on the lists presented to voters. Although party leaders are presumed to

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rank candidates strategically, research shows that they discriminate against certain kinds of candidates (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Hazan and Rahat, 2010). We contend that party leaders are likely to favor physically attractive candidates by placing them in higher, more secure list positions for one of three reasons. The first reason is that party leaders assume attractive candidates are more qualified and capable than less attractive candidates. The second is that party leaders believe voters prefer good-looking candidates. A third and final reason party elites rank attractive candidates higher on party lists is that those candidates successfully persuading them to do so. Considering that party elites have substantial information about candidates' backgrounds and characteristics, we argue that the second or third explanation is most likely.

We examine the relationship between politician attractiveness and list placement in Ecuador, a democracy where physical attractiveness is a strong predictor of electoral success (Carrión-Yaguana and Carroll, 2023). Drawing on data from municipal elections in Quito, Ecuador's capital, we show that physical attractiveness is associated with party list placement. Party leaders place more physically attractive candidates in higher list positions than their less attractive peers. This result holds even when we control for theoretically important candidate attributes, such as political experience, education, and gender. Importantly, we do not find the impact of beauty on list placement is gendered. Attractive women are not favored over good-looking men nor are unattractive women penalized more than unattractive men.

Our findings contribute to the literature on appearance and electoral success by identifying and evaluating an alternative explanation for why physically attractive politicians seem to outperform their peers. In contrast to prior scholarship, which connects candidate appearance to voting heuristics and vote choice, we focus on elite behavior. Before any voters cast their ballot, party leaders play an important role in shaping candidate fields and electoral outcomes. Our findings suggest that party leaders in list PR systems increase the chances that good-looking candidates win public office by placing them in prominent list positions.

Physical attractiveness and electoral success

Physical attractiveness affects various aspects of social life. Beginning in infancy, a beautiful baby is more likely to be labeled a "good baby" than a less attractive infant as well as considered to be smarter and more likable (Stephan and Langlois, 1984). In adolescence, attractiveness is also associated with positive attributes. Physically attractive children are regarded by their peers as more popular than their less attractive children and more likely to be described by teachers as academically bright, confident, and having leadership potential (Dion and Berscheid, 1974; Rich, 1975). When it comes to adults, what is beautiful is also recognized as good. Physically attractive adults are deemed as having desirable personality traits (Dion et al., 1972). They are perceived as more honest, intelligent, kind, and competent, attributes that are favored in the dating pool, job market, and politics (Beller et al., 1994; Egebark et al., 2021; Judge et al., 2009; Zebrowitz et al., 2002). The relationship between physical attractiveness and trait evaluation long documented by social psychologists is the foundation for research on beauty in politics.

The political benefits of beauty are attributable to halo effects. Just as people assume physically attractive individuals possess more positive personality traits than less attractive individuals, voters ascribe positive characteristics and traits to attractive politicians (Banducci et al., 2008; Berscheid and Walster, 1974; Lawson et al., 2010; Olivola and Todorov, 2010; Verhulst et al., 2010). Oliviola and Todorov (2010), for example, show that assessments of candidate competence, a trait voters value in political leaders, are strongly associated with perceptions of physical attractiveness. Evidence suggests that voters prefer attractive politicians over their less attractive competitors universally (Banducci et al., 2008; Berggren et al., 2010; Jäckle et al., 2020; Mattes and Milazzo, 2014). Physical appearance is so important that voters provided images of politicians in other countries can predict their success with remarkable accuracy (Lawson et al., 2010). Research on heuristics, however, suggests that the electoral benefits of being attractive are likely to depend on the electoral context and voter attributes.

The electoral importance of physical appearance depends on the political environment (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lev-On and Waismel-Manor, 2016; Wigginton and Stockemer, 2021). When voters possess limited information on candidates or, in some instances too much information, they are inclined to use voting shortcuts (Cunow et al., 2021). The heuristics commonly employed include party affiliation, ideology, endorsements, viability, and appearance. Lau and Redlawsk (2001) indicate that appearance is among the most important because it contains tremendous information about politicians and can trigger emotions. Physical appearance is also important because it is ubiquitous. Campaign ads not only feature candidate images, but in several countries, photographs of political candidates are also on the ballots provided to voters.

The impact of candidate attractiveness on voter behavior is also contingent on voter attributes. Considerable research shows partisanship is an important determinant of vote choice (Campbell, 1980; Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; Schaffner and Streb, 2002). As a result, strong partisans are less likely than weak partisans and independents to use candidate appearance as a voting heuristic (Ahler et al.,

2017). When information on candidate partisanship, though, is unavailable or uninformative, such as in primary elections, both strong and weak partisans are likely to vote based on physical appearance (Ahler et al., 2017). Voters who are politically uninformed or apathetic are also inclined to draw inferences based on candidate appearance and vote based on looks (King and Leigh, 2009; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Lenz and Lawson, 2011; Mattes and Milazzo, 2014). King and Leigh (2009) find suggestive evidence that candidate attractiveness matters more in elections where voters are apathetic.

Considering that voters ultimately determine who wins and who loses, it makes sense to study how candidate attributes affect their perceptions and behavior. Nonetheless, they are not the only political actors whose preferences matter. Long before election day, party elites influence who stands for office via their recruitment activities (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Siavelis and Morgenstern, 2008). They also shape the chances that party nominees win via their distribution of resources (Jacobson, 1985; Janusz et al., 2022; Snyder, 1989). There is reason to suspect that party leaders consider the physical attractiveness of candidates when deciding who to support.

List PR systems, party elites, and beauty biases

Research on candidate attractiveness focuses primarily on vote choice. The electoral system, however, shapes the nature of those choices. In list PR systems, voters are presented with lists of candidates. In closed list systems, voters choose between those lists, and seats won by the party are allocated to candidates according to their position on the list. In open list and free list systems, on the other hand, voters can disturb the lists and seats are awarded to candidates based on how many preference votes they receive. While the choices afforded to voters differ across list PR systems, candidates placed higher on party lists have a stronger chance of winning elected office than those placed lower (Blom-Hansen et al., 2016, 2021; Marcinkiewicz and Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo and Polga-Hecimovich, 2020).

Party officials' control over the placement of candidates on party lists gives them substantial power. Research suggests that party officials use their discretion over the order of party lists to maximize the electoral prospects of their preferred candidates. Party elites typically place incumbents and those with political experience in higher positions than political novices (Meserve et al., 2020; Put et al., 2021). They also routinely position highly educated candidates and those with prestigious occupations toward the top (West, 2020). Although party leaders favor certain types of candidates for strategic reasons, a growing body of evidence suggests they discriminate against others. Women, for example, are often placed lower on party lists than men (Cheng and Tavits, 2011; Lühiste, 2015; Lühiste and Kenny, 2016).[1] The same is true for members of marginalized ethnoracial groups (Dancygier et al., 2015; Htun, 2016; Janusz et al., 2023; Van der Zwan et al., 2019).

While no research to date explores how candidate attractiveness affects list placement, there are three reasons to expect that party elites will favor physically attractive politicians. The first of these is due to stereotypes. Party leaders, like voters, are likely to draw inferences about candidate personality traits and qualities based on their physical appearance. Party elites may assume that whoever is good-looking would make a good politician and thus be inclined to place them in prominent list positions. This explanation, however, has one notable shortcoming, party leaders do not need to rely on heuristics to determine who is a strong candidate. They typically have better information about candidates' traits and attributes than physical appearance alone provides. It is not uncommon for party leaders to know about a candidate's personal life, educational attainment, career, and political experience. With this information, they can better judge the candidate's intelligence, competency, honesty, and chances of winning. Moreover, they are more likely to use this information than voters if it is accessible because they are politically sophisticated and their livelihoods depend on how well their political party does. In sum, there is reason to doubt that party leaders support attractive politicians because they assume good-looking politicians have qualities that make them strong electoral contenders.

A second explanation for why party leaders favor attractive candidates over others is also related to inferences. It is voter inferences, however, as opposed to their own. Party leaders are likely to be aware that voters favor physically attractive candidates. Considerable research shows that voters assume attractive politicians have positive traits and qualities. Rather than trying to educate voters that a physically unattractive candidate is qualified and would be an excellent politician, party elites may decide it is better to put forward an attractive candidate whom voters will assume is good.

A third reason party elites may place attractive candidates higher on party lists is that the candidates persuade them to do so. If politicians believe that "what is beautiful is good," attractive politicians may see themselves are entitled to privileges and seek them. Consistent with this explanation, research in psychology shows that self-perceived attractiveness is predictive of self-inferred status and positively associated with self-interested behavioral tendencies (Holtzman and Strube, 2010; O'Connor and Gladstone, 2018; Shinada and Yamagishi, 2014; Teng et al., 2022). In addition to seeking electoral advantages, attractive politicians may also have stronger social skills than their peers and thus be successful in attaining them. Studies reveal attractive individuals have better communication skills and

are more persuasive (Chaiken, 1979; Goldman and Lewis, 1977; Judge et al., 2002, 2003; Mobius and Rosenblat, 2006).

- **Hypothesis 1**: Party elites will place attractive politicians in higher, more advantageous list positions than their less attractive copartisans.

While party elites can be expected to place more attractive candidates in higher, more electable positions, the impact of physical attractiveness on list placement may be gendered. Some scholars contend that being attractive is an advantage for men but a liability for women (Sigelman et al., 1986). King and Leigh (2009) posit that women benefit less from being attractive because of gender-based trait stereotypes. Evidence, however, is mixed (Firpo et al., 2021; King and Leigh, 2009; Poutvaara et al., 2006; Rosar et al., 2008; Schubert and Curran, 2001). While party elites may consider the interaction between gender and attractiveness when assembling party lists, there is reason to suspect they do not. This is, once again, because of heuristics. If party leaders place an attractive woman or man at the top of their list, voters likely infer that the candidate is competent and qualified to hold office.

- **Hypothesis 2**: The relationship between candidate gender and attractiveness is unlikely to affect list position.

We expect party leaders to favor attractive candidates in closed list, open list, and free list systems. As a result, our hypotheses could be tested in several countries. We choose to test them in Ecuador, a developing democracy where the impact of candidate appearance on electoral success has received limited attention. Ecuador's large number of political parties, the design of its ballot, and the characteristics of its electorate make it a valuable case to examine.

Ecuadorian elections

Ecuador constitutes a valuable case to assess the impact of attractiveness on list placement for several reasons. The first of these is its fragmented party system. Ecuador has a plethora of political parties. In its 2021 National Assembly elections over 80 political parties put forward a candidate slate. The number of parties that compete at the local level is smaller, but still regularly exceeds 20. Ecuador's large number of parties makes it an ideal case to study intraparty variation. The more parties, the more opportunity there is to assess how candidate attractiveness affects party list position.

Ecuador's ballot directly ties candidate list position and physical attractiveness. As shown in Figure 1, Ecuadorian ballots include each candidate's name, ballot position, and photos of the candidates themselves. Compared to countries without ballot photos, in Ecuador party list position and physical appearance are thus directly tied. Since candidate appearance is likely to be top of mind for voters, party elites can also be expected to consider it when determining the order in which candidates appear. Practically, the inclusion of candidate images on the ballot is also useful. Ballot photos are standard and candidates are likely to submit the most flattering image of themselves. As a result, variation in attractiveness is unlikely to be attributable to the style or quality of the image.

Finally, the characteristics of the Ecuadorian electorate make it a context in which ballot order is likely to matter. The level of political sophistication in Ecuador is low. Most voters have limited interest in elections and weak partisan attachments. According to the 2019 Americas Barometer survey, more than half of Ecuadorian voters (68.3%) have little or no interest in politics, and more report disliking a political party than identifying with one. Despite their disinterest and apathy, voters in Ecuador turn out regularly because voting is compulsory.

In Ecuador's "free list" proportional system, voters can cast preference votes for multiple candidates across different lists up to the number of representatives in the district or cast their ballot for a party list. Mustillo and Polga-Hecimovich (2020) note that because of the information demands and the cognitive complexity of casting preference votes, voters use shortcuts and often vote for the party list. The order in which candidates appear on the party list has no formal consequences on the allocation of seats. The rank-ordering by votes determines which candidates are elected. Nonetheless, due to the challenges voters face, candidates at the top of the list enjoy an advantage, and list position has a strong impact on electoral success (Carrión-Yaguana and Carroll, 2023; Mustillo and Polga-Hecimovich, 2020). If party elites place more attractive candidates high on party lists, they are therefore more likely to win.

Data and analysis

To test whether candidate attractiveness affects list position, we use data from city council elections held in the Metropolitan District of Quito in 2019. That year, 23 different political parties fielded candidate lists across Quito's four electoral districts. Information on those candidates, including their list position, electoral experience, gender, and age was obtained from the Ecuadorian National Electoral Council (CNE). We further enrich data from the CNE by merging data from the Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (SENESCYT), which records the academic qualifications of all Ecuadorian citizens and permanent residents. In total, our dataset includes information on 456 candidates.

To obtain a measure of the physical attractiveness of the municipal candidates, we draw on data collected by

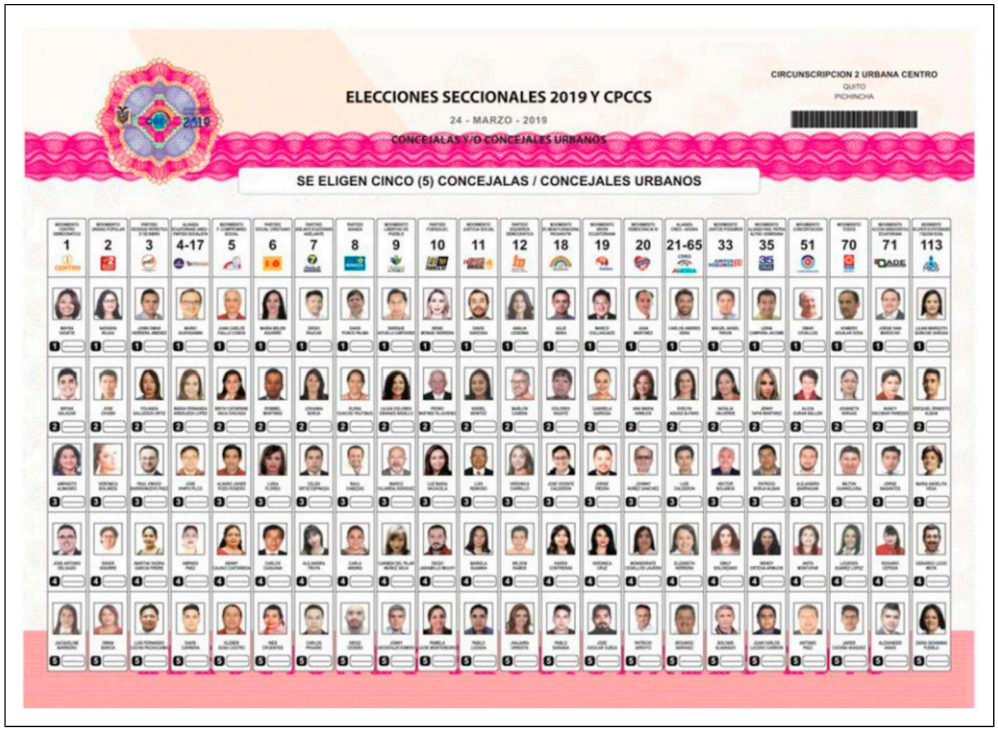

Figure 1. An example of an Ecuadorian City Council Ballot.

Carrión-Yaguna and Carroll (2023). They recruited students at a large Ecuadorian university to evaluate candidate photos using a web-based survey. In the survey, respondents were shown photographs of candidates and asked to rate their attractiveness on a scale of 1 to five, with 5 being very handsome or beautiful and 1 being very unattractive.[2] Each respondent rated the attractiveness of up to 20 candidates and each candidate was rated by at least 30 respondents. An attractiveness score for each candidate is obtained by averaging respondent assessments.

To examine the impact of attractiveness on candidates' ballot positions, we employ an ordered probit model, adjusting for various candidate attributes including gender, age, education level, incumbency status, and district representation.[3] Additionally, we account for the popularity of each candidate's party, quantified as the percentage of the party's votes relative to the total votes in the electoral district. A comprehensive description of all the variables utilized in this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Results

In Table 2, we present the results of a set of ordered probit models.[4] Model 1 provides support for our first hypothesis. We find that a candidate's attractiveness significantly increases their likelihood of securing a top ballot position. To clarify the substantive effect of candidate attractiveness on list position, we plot the marginal effects in Figure 2. The marginal effects indicate that a one-point increase in attractiveness corresponds to a 22-percentage-point increase in the probability of being placed in the first position, a 9-percentage-point increase for the second position, and a 1-percentage-point increase for the third position. Conversely, it reduces the likelihood of placement in the fourth and fifth positions by 7 and 25 percentage points, respectively. To illustrate the substantive impact, consider an increase in attractiveness from "very unattractive" (score of 1) to "attractive" (score of 3). Under this change, the probability of securing the top ballot position rises from 6% to 52%. Given that ballot position is a critical determinant of electoral success, these findings underscore the practical importance of a candidate's appearance in shaping their electoral prospects.

Attractiveness may have a differential impact on the placement of men and women. Some research suggests that being attractive is an advantage for men but a liability for women (Sigelman et al., 1986). In Model 2, we interact the *Candidate Attractiveness* and *Woman* variables. While both variables are statistically significant independently in Model 1, the woman variable ceases to be statistically significant in Model 2. Moreover, the interaction does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. In other words, women are not differentially penalized by party leaders for being unattractive nor rewarded for being beautiful. Figure 3 shows the marginal effect of attractiveness on ballot position for women and men.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Variable name	Type	Description	Mean	Min	Max
Candidate list position	Categorical	Candidate's position in the list	3.09	1	5
Candidate attractiveness	Continuous	Candidate's attractiveness score	1.92	2.23	4.00
Woman candidate	Binary	1 if candidate is female	0.47	0	1
Age	Categorical	1 = younger than 30	0.16	0	1
		2 = 30-39	0.19	0	1
		3 = 40 to 49	0.30	0	1
		4 = 50 to 60	0.12	0	1
		5 = Older than 60	0.24	0	1
Bachelor's degree	Binary	1 if candidate has a bachelor's degree	0.02	0	1
Incumbent	Binary	1 if candidate is an incumbent	0.02	0	1
Party vote share	Continuous	Party's percentage of votes in the district	4.60	0.58	27.78
District	Categorical	1 = rural district	0.28	0	1
		2 = north district	0.24	0	1
		3 = central district	0.24	0	1
		4 = south district	0.24	0	1

Table 2. Ordered probit results: List position.

	(1)	(2)
Candidate attractiveness	−0.786*** (0.141)	−1.077*** (0.236)
Woman candidate	0.307*** (0.115)	−0.439 (0.494)
Age 30-40	−0.688*** (0.178)	−0.670*** (0.178)
Age 40-50	−0.905*** (0.177)	−0.923*** (0.177)
Age 50-60	−0.715*** (0.191)	−0.732*** (0.192)
Age 60 and above	−1.028*** (0.216)	−1.042*** (0.217)
Bachelor's degree	0.519 (0.416)	0.485 (0.416)
Incumbent	−2.199*** (0.607)	−2.199*** (0.610)
Party vote share	0.007 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)
Woman × candidate attractiveness		0.407 (0.262)
District = 2	−0.062 (0.146)	−0.024 (0.148)
District = 3	−0.279** (0.141)	−0.280** (0.142)
District = 4	−0.183 (0.143)	−0.158 (0.144)
Cut 1	−3.128*** (0.349)	−3.616*** (0.472)
Cut 2	−2.495*** (0.343)	−2.981*** (0.467)
Cut 3	−1.966*** (0.338)	−2.451*** (0.463)
Cut 4	−1.386*** (0.334)	−1.869*** (0.459)
Pseudo R2	0.050	0.052
Log likelihood	−694.87	−693.66
Observations	456	456

Standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01.

Across models, the control variables largely perform as expected. The coefficients on the incumbency and age variables are each statistically significant. This indicates that incumbents are placed in more advantageous list positions and that candidates over the age of 30 are placed in preferable list positions than those in their twenties. The education variable, in contrast to the incumbency and age variables, is not statistically significant.

Evidence that party elites place attractive candidates higher on party list positions raises an important question - is the well-documented relationship between candidate attractiveness and electoral success attributable to the placement of attractive candidates in advantageous positions or voters' preference for attractive candidates? Carrión-Yaguna and Carroll (2023), whose data we employ in this study, report that candidate attractiveness has a positive effect on electoral performance, particularly when

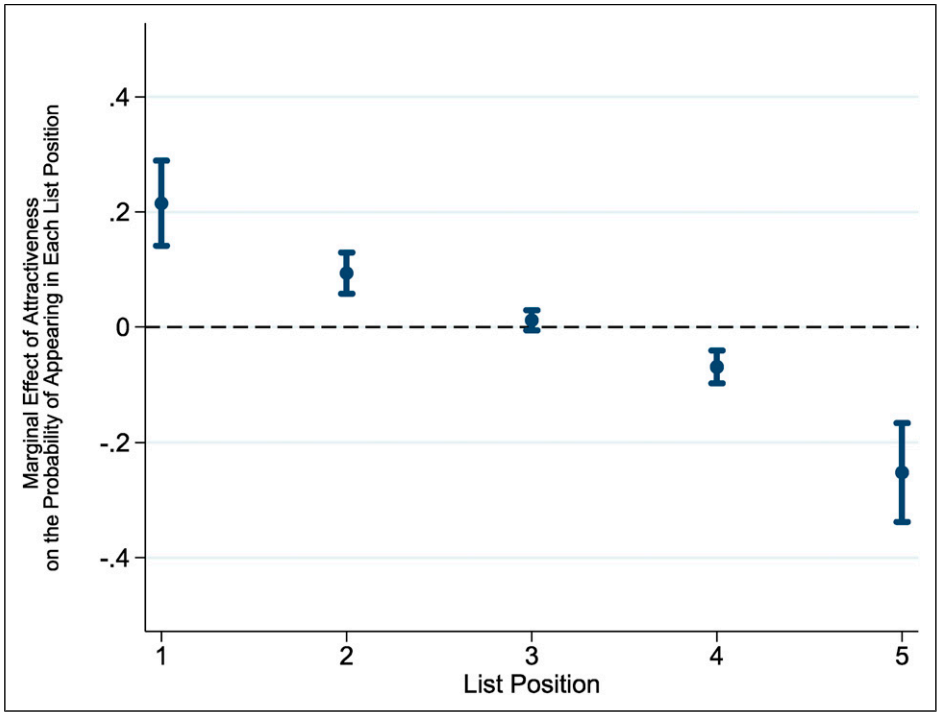

Figure 2. Marginal Effect of Attractiveness on Candidate's List Position. *Note*: Each circle shows the marginal effect of a one-unit increase in attractiveness in the likelihood of a candidate being assigned to each of the five possible positions.

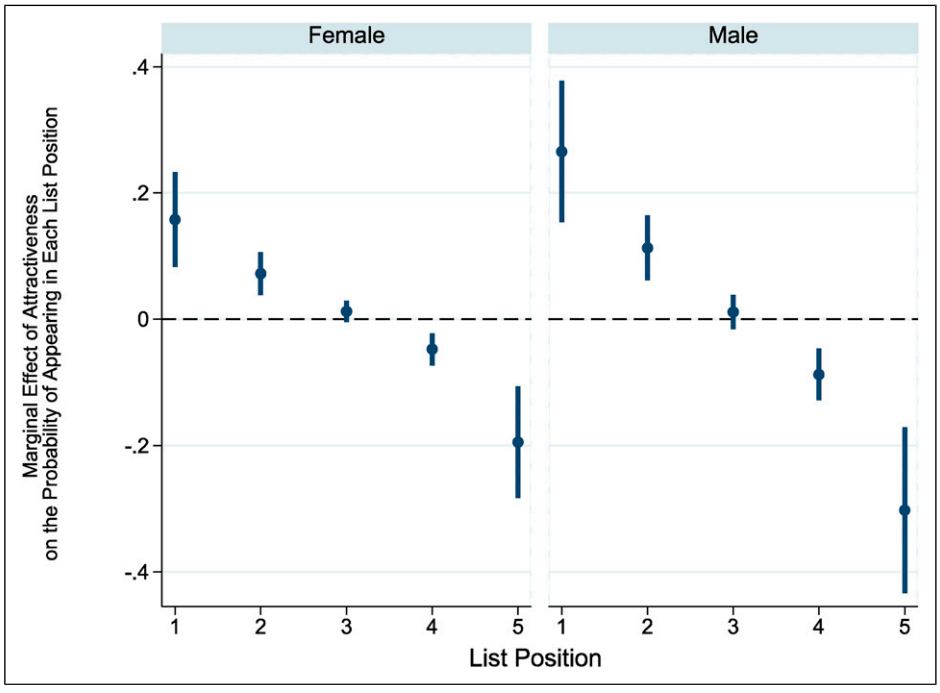

Figure 3. Marginal Effect of Attractiveness on Candidate's List Position by Gender. *Note*: Each circle shows the marginal effect of a one-unit increase in attractiveness in the likelihood of a candidate being assigned to each of the five possible positions.

Table 3. Regression results: Candidate vote-share.

	(1)	(2)
Candidate list position	−1.991*** (0.093)	−0.876** (0.345)
Candidate attractiveness	1.688*** (0.350)	3.279*** (0.587)
Candidate list position × candidate attractiveness		−0.598*** (0.179)
Woman candidate	0.430 (0.287)	0.510* (0.284)
Age 30-40	−0.236 (0.438)	−0.466 (0.439)
Age 40-50	−0.243 (0.439)	−0.444 (0.438)
Age 50-60	−0.439 (0.470)	−0.697 (0.471)
Age 60 and above	−1.000* (0.537)	−1.158** (0.533)
Bachelor's degree	2.405** (1.022)	2.552** (1.011)
District = 2	2.486*** (0.359)	2.494*** (0.355)
District = 3	2.782*** (0.349)	2.761*** (0.345)
District = 4	2.650*** (0.352)	2.688*** (0.348)
Incumbent	0.503 (0.973)	0.210 (0.966)
Party vote share	−0.014 (0.024)	−0.014 (0.023)
Constant	20.241*** (0.964)	17.365*** (1.282)
R2	0.644	0.653
Observations	456	456

Standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01.

candidates appear in the upper-left quadrant of the ballot. Since their analysis focuses primarily on spatial positioning on ballots as opposed to list position, however, we conduct further analyses. In Table 3, we present the results of an OLS regression model where the dependent variable is the candidate's vote share within their list. We control for theoretically important determinants of electoral performance, including the candidate's list position and attractiveness. The results indicate that both candidate list position and candidate attractiveness are significant determinants of vote share. Candidate list position has a larger impact on vote share than attractiveness in Model 1. In Model 2, we interact the candidate list position and attractiveness variables. The effect of candidate list position is reduced but remains significant. The results suggest that more attractive candidates receive a premium for being placed higher on party lists.

Conclusion

Research shows that good-looking candidates fare better in elections than their less attractive candidates. While prior studies explore how candidate appearance affects vote choice, voters are not the only political actors who may be blinded by beauty. In this research note, we argue that party leaders are likely to place good-looking candidates in higher, more electable list positions. We test this hypothesis in Ecuador, where party elites possess discretion over the order in which candidates appear on the ballot.

Using data from Quito's 2019 city council elections, we find that good-looking candidates are consistently placed in higher, more advantageous positions on party lists. We also show that the impact of attractiveness on list position does not vary based on candidate gender. Party elites do not reward good-looking women more than men nor do they penalize unattractive women more than unattractive men. These findings suggest that attractive candidates have an electoral advantage before any votes are cast. As a result, those who ultimately attain power are likely to be better-looking than those who are defeated. Importantly, our findings indicate party elite behavior contributes but does not fully explain why attractive candidates are more electorally successful than their less attractive peers. We find that list placement and attractiveness on vote share are each statistically significant determinants of vote share.

Party elites may rank attractive candidates higher than their less attractive counterparts for three potential reasons. We do not believe that party elites rank good-looking individuals higher because they use physical attractiveness as a heuristic. Party elites are unlikely to need to use shortcuts because they have considerable information about candidates' characteristics. Rather, we argue that party leaders favor attractive candidates because they expect voters to use candidate attractiveness as a heuristic or because attractive candidates persuade them to do so. The available data do not provide the means to determine why elites favor attractive candidates. Qualitative interviews, however, could be employed to learn about their decision-making.

While we focus on the impact of candidate attractiveness on list placement, physical appearance may affect electoral success in other ways. Party leaders recruit and encourage potential candidates. If party leaders have "beauty biases," they may fail to encourage and perhaps even discourage unattractive political aspirants from entering electoral politics. Since party leaders are unlikely to possess complete information about potential candidates, the physical appearance of prospective candidates is likely to influence whether they are perceived as having electoral potential. In other words, beauty may affect not just who wins but who is even given the opportunity to get on the ballot.

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Notes

1. But also see Shair-Rosenfield (2012).
2. See Carrión-Yaguna and Carroll (2023) for additional detail.
3. It is important to highlight that due to population size, three out of four districts feature lists comprising five candidates each. Only one district, which has a larger population, presents lists that include six candidates. To ensure uniformity and avoid having only a few candidates in the sixth position, these individuals have been categorized under the fifth position instead.
4. In the Appendix, we show that our results are robust to other model specifications.

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Appendix

Party elites and beauty biases

A robustness checks. In Table A.1 we present the results of a set of ordered probit results similar to those found in the manuscript that include party fixed effects. The inclusion of party-fixed effects does not substantively change the results or conclusions about the impact of candidate attractiveness on list position.

In Tables A.2 and A.3, we present models in which the dependent variable is the first position on the party list. Research shows that candidates placed in the first position on party lists have an electoral advantage. In the models presented in Table A.2, the education variable drops out because it is perfectly collinear with the dependent variable.

In Table A.4, we present the results of standardized regression models in which the dependent variable is candidate vote share and theoretically important candidate attributes like list position and attractiveness are included.

Table A.1. Ordered probit list position results with party fixed-effects.

	(1)	(2)
Candidate attractiveness	−0.819*** (0.144)	−1.110*** (0.241)
Woman candidate	0.384*** (0.115)	−0.355 (0.499)
Age 30-40	−0.635*** (0.175)	−0.619*** (0.176)
Age 40-50	−0.899*** (0.177)	−0.918*** (0.178)
Age 50-60	−0.673*** (0.193)	−0.687*** (0.194)
Age 60 and above	−1.071*** (0.219)	−1.084*** (0.219)
Bachelor's degree	0.380 (0.402)	0.351 (0.403)
Incumbent	−2.388*** (0.617)	−2.377*** (0.617)
Party vote share	−0.179 (0.202)	−0.190 (0.203)
Woman candidate × candidate attractiveness		0.361 (0.267)
District = 2	−0.222 (0.143)	−0.187 (0.145)
District = 3	−0.463*** (0.142)	−0.469*** (0.142)
District = 4	−0.350** (0.141)	−0.325** (0.142)
Cut 1	−4.081*** (0.952)	−4.645*** (1.024)
Cut 2	−3.443*** (0.949)	−4.005*** (1.020)
Cut 3	−2.911*** (0.947)	−3.471*** (1.018)
Cut 4	−2.329** (0.945)	−2.887*** (1.016)
Cut 5	−1.261 (0.945)	−1.816* (1.015)
Party fixed-effects	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R2	0.056	0.057
Log likelihood	−741.25	−740.09
Observations	456	456

Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$,**$p < .05$,***$p < .01$.

Table A.2. Logit results - first position.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate attractiveness	1.768*** (0.379)	1.497*** (0.509)	1.941*** (0.400)	1.692*** (0.535)
Woman candidate	−1.817*** (0.355)	−2.828** (1.360)	−1.912*** (0.366)	−2.825** (1.388)
30-40	1.210** (0.542)	1.283** (0.555)	1.223** (0.560)	1.284** (0.571)
40-50	1.794*** (0.558)	1.817*** (0.567)	1.925*** (0.584)	1.949*** (0.592)
50-60	1.541** (0.602)	1.557** (0.610)	1.623** (0.637)	1.645** (0.645)
60 and above	1.929*** (0.637)	1.953*** (0.646)	2.180*** (0.671)	2.205*** (0.679)
Incumbent	3.738*** (1.149)	3.781*** (1.156)	4.257*** (1.215)	4.308*** (1.225)
Party vote share	−0.022 (0.027)	−0.022 (0.027)	0.889 (0.860)	0.879 (0.864)
Woman candidate × candidate attractivenes		0.496 (0.639)		0.451 (0.656)
District = 2	−0.153 (0.383)	−0.093 (0.390)	−0.117 (0.388)	−0.064 (0.395)
District = 3	0.266 (0.373)	0.270 (0.374)	0.390 (0.383)	0.390 (0.384)
District = 4	0.119 (0.373)	0.161 (0.377)	0.173 (0.380)	0.210 (0.384)
Constant	−5.617*** (1.010)	−5.206*** (1.132)	−10.176** (4.077)	−9.734** (4.145)
Party fixed-effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
Pseudo R2	0.144	0.146	0.157	0.158
Log likelihood	−188.89	−185.59	−186.16	−185.93
Observations	449	449	449	449

Standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .10,**p < .05,***p < .01.

Table A.3. Linear probability model results - first position.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate attractiveness	0.217*** (0.047)	0.253*** (0.077)	0.234*** (0.050)	0.273*** (0.081)
Woman candidate	−0.219*** (0.040)	−0.124 (0.166)	−0.226*** (0.041)	−0.121 (0.174)
Age 30 or younger	0.128** (0.060)	0.125** (0.060)	0.124** (0.062)	0.121* (0.063)
Age 40-50	0.185*** (0.059)	0.187*** (0.060)	0.193*** (0.063)	0.195*** (0.063)
Age 50-60	0.154** (0.065)	0.156** (0.065)	0.158** (0.069)	0.159** (0.069)
Age 60 and above	0.208*** (0.073)	0.209*** (0.073)	0.233*** (0.078)	0.234*** (0.078)
Bachelor's degree	−0.189 (0.142)	−0.185 (0.143)	−0.200 (0.147)	−0.195 (0.148)
Incumbent	0.652*** (0.134)	0.650*** (0.134)	0.709*** (0.141)	0.708*** (0.141)
Party vote share	−0.002 (0.003)	−0.002 (0.003)	0.082 (0.070)	0.084 (0.070)
Woman candidate × candidate attractiveness		−0.051 (0.087)		−0.057 (0.091)
District = 2	−0.020 (0.050)	−0.025 (0.051)	−0.020 (0.051)	−0.025 (0.052)
District = 3	0.030 (0.048)	0.031 (0.049)	0.042 (0.051)	0.043 (0.051)
District = 4	0.009 (0.049)	0.005 (0.049)	0.011 (0.050)	0.008 (0.051)
Constant	−0.265** (0.112)	−0.325** (0.151)	−0.676** (0.325)	−0.753** (0.349)
Party fixed-effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.142	0.143	0.151	0.152
Observations	449	449	449	449

Standard errors in parentheses.
*p < .10,**p < .05,***p < .01.

Table A.4. Regression results: Candidate vote-share (standardized betas).

	(1)	(2)
Candidate list position	−0.658*** (0.093)	−0.290** (0.345)
Candidate attractiveness	0.189*** (0.350)	0.367*** (0.587)
Candidate list position × candidate attractiveness		−0.403*** (0.179)
Woman candidate	0.049 (0.287)	0.058* (0.284)
Age 30-40	−0.021 (0.438)	−0.042 (0.439)
Age 40-50	−0.026 (0.439)	−0.047 (0.438)
Age 50-60	−0.042 (0.470)	−0.067 (0.471)
Age 60 and above	−0.075* (0.537)	−0.086** (0.533)
Bachelor's degree	0.068** (1.022)	0.072** (1.011)
Incumbent	0.015 (0.973)	0.006 (0.966)
Party vote shar	−0.017 (0.024)	−0.017 (0.023)
District = 2	0.244*** (0.359)	0.244*** (0.355)
District = 3	0.273*** (0.349)	0.271*** (0.345)
District = 4	0.260*** (0.352)	0.263*** (0.348)
Party fixed-effects	No	No
R2	0.634	0.653
Observations	456	456

Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .10$,**$p < .05$,***$p < .01$.