Choosing the right candidate:

How context and political ideology affect candidate personality preferences.

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Abstract:
A comprehensive literature shows that candidates’ personalities play an important role for democratic outcomes. Yet, it remains unclear why voters care about candidates’ personalities. In this manuscript I present and test a theory of problem sensitive candidate personality preferences. This theory suggests that both contextual conditions and voters’ political ideology affect candidate choice through perception and prioritization of problems that require leadership. These predictions are supported in an experimental study conducted in Denmark and the US and from real world election data from the American National Election Studies 1980-2008. Specifically the findings suggest that candidates with dominant personalities are preferred in times of between-group conflict, while candidates with agreeable personalities are perceived as more competent in dealing with problems related to cooperation within one’s own society. Furthermore, when no clear contextual cue is present, rightwing and leftwing individuals are shown to prefer dominant and agreeable candidates, respectively. One key implication from these findings is that candidate personality traits need to be separated and not treated as one all-embracing personality measure as is often done in past research.
Introduction

Candidates play a central role in modern democratic elections. When voting for the presidency voters vote for a specific person, when asked to think about politics in general most voters think of certain prominent politicians, and even in electoral contests where voters can choose either to vote for a party or a specific candidate approximately half of the valid votes are cast for a candidate (cf., Statistics Denmark, 2012: p.53).

One important facet of candidates is their personalities, which in a wide range of studies has been shown to relate to electoral results (e.g., Hayes, 2009; Miller and Shanks, 1996). However, existing scientific knowledge of the psychological underpinnings of the electoral effect of candidate personality remains sparse. Mostly, personality is treated as a one-dimensional package of personal aspects about a certain candidate that can either be liked or disliked. This tendency to treat candidate personality as a lump-sum seems rather simplistic when one thinks of key insights from the fields of social psychology and political behavior. For one thing, contextual cues are found to strongly affect subjects’ leader choices (Little et al., Spisak et al., 2012a; Spisak et al., 2012b). Secondly, political ideology plays an essential role for voters’ attitudes and decisions. Despite these well-established findings regarding context and ideology most studies do not treat candidate personality as a multi dimensional construct. Rather, on the contrary, most studies of candidate personality focus on competence and analyze candidate competence as if it does not vary under different contextual circumstances or as if all voters understand candidate competence in the same way.

Here I propose a problem sensitive theory of candidate personality preferences. Specifically, I hypothesize that voters depending on their prioritization of different problems will prefer different candidate personalities. Moreover, I theorize that voters’ problem prioritization will be influenced by both contextual information and ideological predispositions. These basic assumptions give rise
to the context prediction and the political ideology prediction. Across experiments conducted in Denmark and the US, the former is supported since subjects – independently of their ideological leanings – perceive agreeable candidate personalities as more competent in contexts calling for a leader to facilitate cooperation than when conflict is present and a protective leader is needed. On the other hand dominant candidate personalities are seen as significantly better at dealing with conflict than cooperation (in Denmark). In parallel both experimental and observational data from the American National Election Studies 1980-2008 show that leftwing more than rightwing individuals prefer agreeable candidate personalities. Rightwing individuals on the other hand have a stronger preference for dominant candidate personalities than their leftwing counterparts.

In sum, the results suggest that preferences for candidate personalities vary systematically with contextually related problems and differences in ideological predispositions. That is, the findings stress the importance of going beyond the one-dimensional valence model of candidate personality, but also that the applied problem sensitive approach to candidate personality might constitute a fruitful way for future research to illuminate the more nuanced electoral effects of candidate personality.

**Theory**

Analyzing the American Presidential Elections 1952-64, Donald E. Stokes concludes that “The fluctuations of electoral attitudes over these elections have to a remarkable degree focused on the candidates themselves” (Stokes, 1966: p.27). This conclusion has since then been repeated in multiple ways stressing that (1) candidates’ personality matter to democratic elections and (2) the most prominent personality traits affecting electoral outcomes are candidates’ perceived competence, integrity and leadership (e.g., Funk, 1996, 1999; Kinder, 1986; Lau, 1986; Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989; Pancer, Brown, & Barr, 1999; Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida, & Rahn, 1990).
Furthermore, the role of candidate personality in referendums and in relation to news media’s election coverage has recently been investigated (Clarke et al., 2013; Hayes, 2009; Stevens and Karp, 2012).

**Multi-dimensional candidate personalities**

Although numerous studies stress the importance of candidate personality, only a minority of the existing work distinguish between different traits. Instead personality traits are treated “as a lump sum that (...) ultimately sum together as an impact on vote choice” (Funk, 1999: p.701) and generally little attention towards possible cross-election or cross-candidate differences is present (Funk, 1999).

So far only a handful of studies have tried to meet this demand for a more nuanced approach to candidate personality. Funk herself shows how different personality traits have qualitatively different effects on overall evaluations of candidates, and that effects of personality traits on feeling thermometer ratings of candidates differ across candidates and election years. Other studies apply the Big Five personality framework to candidates and find that voters tend to evaluate politicians on only two different personality dimensions (Caprara, Barbaranelli and Zimbardo, 1997; 2002; Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004)¹, and that candidates and voters within a given ideological wing are congruent with respect to personality structure (Caprara, et al., 2003; Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004).² Finally, Hayes investigates the role of candidate personality from a more strategic point of departure and show how Republican presidential candidates own the personality traits of Strong Leadership and Moral, while their liberal counterparts own Empathy and Compassion (Hayes, 2005). Together these studies speak in favor of a more fine-grained analytical framework when

¹ Specifically, Caprara and Zimbardo (1997) find that agreeableness and conscientiousness constitute one dimension (sometimes with emotional stability), and that openness to experience and extraversion constitute another dimension of politicians’ personalities.

² This resonates with later findings showing conservative voters to be more conscientious than liberal voters who on the other hand score higher on Openness to Experience (Carney et al., 2008; Gerber et al., 2010; Mondak and Halperin, 2008).
studying candidate personalities in relation to elections. Below I present a theory of problem sensitive candidate preferences that unites (1) the multidimensional structure of candidate personality, (2) the surrounding electoral context, and (3) voters’ ideological predispositions.

This theory has an evolutionary psychological point of departure and builds on cross-disciplinary insights on human behavior and leader preferences in order to theorize about candidate personality preferences in a way that is compatible with well-established knowledge from relevant and related fields of research.

**A problem sensitive psychological system of adaptive followership**

Over human evolutionary history leaders have most likely been important for successfully navigating and solving problems related to group living (e.g. Van Vugt 2006; Van Vugt and Ahuja 2010). Living within groups, our ancestors faced problems such as public goods provisioning, norm enforcement and war which all call for coordinated collective behaviour facilitated by leaders. That is, selection pressures for coping with leaders and some degree of societal hierarchy have most certainly shaped the minds of our ancestors. This is also apparent from research demonstrating that humans in general are highly attentive towards leaders’ exploitative behaviour and nepotism which potentially hinder and decrease collective and individual welfare (Boehm 2000; Alford and Hibbing 2004; Smith et al. 2007).

Choosing the right leader has in many ways been of major importance to individual survival and long-term fitness. By implication, I suggest that a handful of related selection pressures were also present in our evolutionary past, which affected the design of our psychological machinery related to leader choice. More specifically, I propose the existence of a problem sensitive psychology of followership, i.e., a collection of psychological mechanisms motivating support for leaders who would have been efficient in solving problems at the group level in ancestral
environments. This psychology is relevant to modern democratic elections since we should expect its activation when modern citizens choose between contemporary political candidates, and very important, it should be problem sensitive in the way that evaluations of political candidates’ leadership competence are based on perceptions and prioritization of the most salient problems facing the group.

For this psychological system of followership to be efficient, psychological mechanisms that are highly attentive towards cues that over human evolutionary history have correlated with the leader’s ability to solve group level problems should be selected for. Scholars studying human behaviour across a wide range of fields agree that these problems on a very general level can be separated into two types of supra problems: (1) Between group conflict, and (2) within group cooperation (Spisak, Homan et al. 2012; Spisak, Dekker et al. 2012; Bowles, 2009; Cosmides and Tooby, 1992). Success in between group conflict over territory and mates have conferred significant fitness advantages to any individual (Bowles 2009; Lopez, McDermott and Petersen 2011; Wrangham and Peterson 1997). The same is true in relation to within group coordination such as for example buffering against failed foraging (Kaplan and Gurven 2005; Cosmides and Tooby 1992), acquiring food in times of injury and sickness (Sugiyama 2003) and producing collective goods such as shelter.

Dividing ancestral problems of group living into different categories is of major importance, since different leader traits most likely have indicated which individual most effectively could orchestrate the group action and serve as leader in relation to each of the two supra problems. Furthermore, one very likely cue to problem specific leadership competence is personality. For example in cooperation-oriented economic games, perceptions of other players’ personalities are shown to affect behaviour and cooperation (Stirrat and Perrett 2010; Hibbing & Alford, 2004). On the contrary, dominant individuals are found to be better at resisting exploitation in negations
(Brandstätter and Königstein 2001).

Basically, modern-day politics is also about solving problems at the level of the collective, and if an evolved system of adaptive followership has evolved it should be activated when modern voting mirrors our ancestors’ choice of leader (cf. Petersen, 2012). Moreover, we should expect these effects of candidate personality to be problem sensitive with different personalities preferred under different circumstances and by voters with different problem priorities. Ancestrally, events such as droughts, floods and changes in availability of large-game meat might have changed both the necessity of cooperation within groups as well as conflict between groups. Nowadays, times of war or large-scale terrorist attacks can be expected to create shifts in general perceptions and priorities of the problems facing societies. This gives rise to the context prediction: All individuals should enhance their preference for dominant leadership in times of pronounced between-group conflict. Vice versa, all individuals should up-prioritize agreeable leadership and behaviour when facing a marked need for within-group cooperation. That is, individuals should evaluate dominant and agreeable candidate personalities differently under varying contextual cues. Specifically dominant candidates should be perceived as more competent under pronounced risk of conflict with other groups than when cooperation within one’s own group is needed. On the contrary an agreeable candidate should be perceived as more competent at dealing with within-group cooperation than between-group conflict.

However, clear contextual cues are not constantly present. Instead the social reality is most often interpretable in multiple ways. In relation to political behavior and psychology political ideology has been shown to constitute one very important variable variable when explaining differences in perceived social reality. Moreover, research increasingly demonstrates that differences in political ideology are linked to genetic heritability, different brain structures, physiological reactions and fundamental approach of the social world (Oxley et al. 2008; Jost,
Federico and Napier 2009; Alford et al. 2005; Hatemi et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2011; Schreiber et al., 2013; Kanai et al, 2011). In close relation to the theorized problem sensitivity of candidate personality preferences, social psychologists have shown how individuals with different ideological positions hold fundamentally different world views. Rightwing individuals view the social world as threatening and as more competitive than leftwing individuals and, particularly, they tend to fear out groups and norm violators much more than their leftwing counterparts. In contrast, individuals on the ideological left view society as a safe and secure place characterized by cooperation and altruism (Duckitt and Sibley, 2010). These deep dispositional differences between rightwing and leftwing individuals therefore in turn influence how the problems confronting society are prioritized and next, which personality traits are favoured for leaders and political candidates. Specifically, this leads to the political ideology prediction: Rightwing voters will prefer dominant candidate personalities more and put a greater premium on dominant leadership and behaviour than leftwing voters, who on the other hand will prefer agreeable candidate personalities and put a greater premium on cooperative behaviour.

In sum, I suggest that modern choices of political candidates are guided by a problem-sensitive psychology of followership. Both contextual information and ideological differences feed into this machinery through individuals’ problem perception and prioritization. This should create candidate personality preferences that vary systematically with general contextual differences, and when such information is present differences in political ideology should cause voters to evaluate candidates differently and to focus on different personality traits. Both predictions are tested experimentally in Study 1. In continuation, Study 2 tests the political ideology prediction on observational data from the American National Election Studies 1980-2008 to investigate whether the potential experimental effects can travel to the real world.
Study 1: Experiment

Design and methods

In Study 1 subjects are randomly assigned to read about a fictitious male candidate who is described as having either a dominant or an agreeable personality. No party label was present in the descriptions since the very idea of Study 1 is to investigate the pure role of candidate personality under 1) clear contextual circumstances (the context prediction) and under 2) situations where no clear contextual cue is present for which reason subjects are expected to rely on their ideological predispositions in their candidate evaluation (political ideology prediction).

Study 1 was conducted in Denmark and the US to test the universality of the context prediction and the political ideology prediction. Denmark has a multiparty and a proportional representative electoral system where parties nominate a long list of candidates from which voters choose their preferred candidate. The US, on the other hand, is dominated by only two parties and uses an electoral system with single-member legislative districts. With regards to these parameters – that potentially influence the role of candidate personalities in relation to electoral results – Denmark and the US constitute a Most Different Systems comparison. Uniform patterns in liberals’ and conservatives’ candidate personality preferences across countries would therefore strongly support the predictions and even suggest such patterns to be reflecting an evolved psychological system of followership.

Procedure

The Danish version of Study 1 was designed as a paper and pencil style survey experiment distributed among undergraduate political science students at a major European research university. Altogether 263 subjects completed the survey. The sample is evenly distributed in relation to subject sex (132 females) and political ideology (mean = 0.487 on a 0-1 scale; std. dev. = 0.232). The US version of Study 1 was designed as a web-survey experiment distributed among a
representative sample of the American population, and the respondents were recruited by the YouGov survey agency. Altogether 408 respondents completed the survey.

As an introduction subjects answered a handful of questions reflecting their political attitudes and their ideological position on a 0 (most left-wing) to 10 (most right-wing) scale. Next, the subjects were presented to a text about a fictitious Danish member of parliament, Christian Mortensen, (in the Danish version) or a fictitious American congressman, Thomas Johnson, (in the US version). Subjects were randomly assigned to read a description of the fictitious candidate as either (1) a dominant and intransigent person highlighting characteristics such as taking control of negotiations, uncompromisingly sticking to the party’s policy position and being a person that others fear offending, or (2) as an agreeable person willing to do compromises highlighting characteristics such as being cooperative, empathetic and a person that others are comfortable talking to (see Appendix 1 for the full descriptions). After reading the randomly assigned description, subjects rated the fictitious candidate on relevant personality traits as a manipulation check. Next they stated their general feelings towards Christian Mortensen/Thomas Johnson on a 0-100 feeling thermometer, and in the US version subjects further indicated their likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson. These measures will be used as dependent variables when testing the ideology prediction.

Finally, subjects rated Christian Mortensen’s/Thomas Johnson’s competence in relation to both a between-group conflict scenario and a within-group cooperation scenario. To make the scenarios realistic they differed between the Danish and the US versions (see Appendix 1 for full wordings for the contextual scenarios). Specifically, all subjects read two texts (one at a time) that presented one of the two scenarios. After reading each scenario, subjects rated the candidate’s competence in relation to that specific scenario. That is, the experimental condition is still the
assigned candidate personality description (dominant vs. agreeable) but these context specific competence evaluations will be used as dependent variables when testing the context prediction.

Results

In the below analyses all continuous measures are recoded to 0-1 scales with 1 indicating most competent evaluation, warmest feelings towards the candidate and most conservative ideological position.

As a preliminary but necessary first step, a manipulation check of whether the two descriptions of Christian Mortensen and Thomas Johnson, respectively, evoke different personality perceptions was conducted. T-tests show that the dominant description is perceived as more dominant than the agreeable (Danish sample: t = 21.736, p < 0.000; US sample: t = 10.602, p < 0.000), and that agreeable description is perceived as more agreeable than the dominant description (Danish sample: t = -21.911, p < 0.000; US sample: t = -12.556, p < 0.000) (see Appendix 3 and 4 for an extended manipulation check). That is, the manipulation of perceived personality seems to have worked in accordance with the intention.

Context prediction

The most straight forward implication of the theory of problem specific candidate preferences is that a certain candidate (personality) is not perceived as equally competent under different contexts. Specifically, the context prediction expects that candidates with dominant personalities are perceived as more competent under between-group conflict scenarios than under within-group coordination scenarios. On the contrary candidates with agreeable personalities should be perceived more competent under within-group coordination scenarios than under between-group conflict scenarios. Below, the context prediction is tested comparing the subjects’ competence evaluation of
the fictitious candidate under a clear conflict and cooperation scenario, respectively. That is competence evaluations are compared within the experimental treatment (candidate personality).

Among the Danish subjects, the dominant personality description of Christian Mortensen is perceived to be significantly more competent under the between-group conflict scenario than under the within-group cooperation scenario \((t = 8.237, p < 0.000)\). The exact opposite is found for the agreeable personality description with significantly larger competence evaluations in the within-group cooperation scenario than in the between-group conflict scenario \((t = -6.761, p < 0.000)\). The results are less clear among the American subjects. Here the dominant description personality description of Thomas Johnson is actually seen as more competent in the cooperation scenario than in the conflict \((t = -2.510, p = 0.013)\). However, very much in line with the context prediction the agreeable personality description is also seen as more competent in the cooperation than in the conflict scenario and this difference is substantially larger (more than twice the size) than the difference in competence evaluations found for the dominant Thomas Johnson \((t = -6.921, p < 0.000)\). These results are illustrated in Figure 1.

‘Figure 1 about here’

In sum, evaluations of candidate competence in Study 1 differ as the context, under which they are evaluated, vary. Moreover, three out for tests strongly support the context prediction. Both in Denmark and in the US an agreeable candidate personality is rated more competent when cooperation is needed than when conflict with another group is imminent. Vice versa, in Denmark a dominant candidate personality is rated as significantly more competent in times of conflict than when cooperation is needed. This result does not replicate among the American subjects, who tend to perceive the dominant Thomas Johnson as slightly more competent in the cooperation scenario compared to the conflict scenario. However, this latter finding is the substantially smallest as well
as the least significant difference in competence evaluations for a given personality across contexts. Therefore, even though this runs counter to the context prediction the most pronounced pattern across the Danish and the American version of Study 1 is that strong and significant differences in competence evaluations of candidate personalities exist across contexts – and that the three largest differences are in line with the context prediction.\(^3\) As a robustness analysis the tests described above were replicated within subjects on each ideological wing, which give rise to identical conclusion\(^4\) (see Appendix 4 for detailed tests with regards to subject ideology).

These results link candidate personality to the two supra problems that have faced humans over their history: Between group conflict and within group coordination. Moreover, the findings show that subjects’ candidate personality preferences do indeed depend on the context. In the longer run these results, therefore, call for a more context and problem oriented approach when analyzing the electoral consequences of candidate personality. However, these findings also give rise to one essential question: How does candidate personality affect voters’ perceptions and evaluations when no clear contextual information is present? This is exactly what the remainder of this analysis seeks to answer.

**Political ideology prediction**

Based on the problem sensitive theory of candidate personality preferences, the political ideology prediction hypothesizes that subjects in the absence of clear contextual information will rely on

\(^3\) The more pronounced context sensitivity in competence evaluations among Danish than among American subjects is of course important and should trigger some attention. However, the difference could be due to i) large-scale differences between the Danish and the American society like deeper polarization; ii) differences between the contextual scenarios applied in the Danish and the US versions of Study 1; iii) the fact that the Danish sample consists of student subjects while the American sample is representative. Hence, one can at best speculate about the reason for the cross country difference in context sensitivity and it will for this reason be saved for future research to explore the question more thoroughly.

\(^4\) Danish subjects – on both ideological wings – evaluate the dominant candidate personality as more competent under the conflict scenario than under the cooperation scenario and vice versa for the agreeable candidate personality. The latter is also found among US subjects on both ideological wings, while the dominant candidate personality is still perceived to be slightly more competent in the conflict scenario than in the cooperation scenario (only significant among the leftwing US subjects)
their ideological predispositions in their evaluations of candidates. Specifically, leftwing and rightwing individuals have been shown to differ in their fundamental world views and perception of the social world. In turn, this should produce different prioritizations of social problems of either the between-group conflict type or the within-group cooperation type, which finally should lead to different candidate personality preferences.

In the experimental context of Study 1 this implies, that subjects’ feelings towards the two descriptions of Christian Mortensen or Thomas Johnson should vary with their political ideology as measured with left-right self-placement. On the one hand, when the fictitious candidate is described as a dominant and intransigent person, we should expect that feelings towards him will become warmer moving towards the conservative end of the ideological spectrum. On the other hand, when Christian Mortensen or Thomas Johnson is described as an agreeable person willing to do compromises, we should expect that subjects’ feelings towards the candidate will cool down moving towards the same conservative end of the ideological scale (or become warmer as we move towards the most liberal subjects). That is, the main test of the political ideology prediction in Study 1 is whether a two-way interaction between description of the candidate’s personality and subjects’ political ideology is significant when predicting overall feelings towards the candidate. Below, the dominant personality description constitutes the baseline category for the experimental stimulus.

Among the Danish subjects the political ideology prediction is supported with a strongly significant interaction between personality description and subjects’ ideology (F (1, 254) = 7.42, p = 0.007 (two-tailed)). Almost identical results are found for the US sample when predicting overall feelings towards Thomas Johnson (F (1, 334) = 14.42, p < 0.000). Furthermore, the American subjects were asked to indicate their likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson, and also this measure is used as dependent variable a significant interaction between personality description and subjects’
ideology is found (F (1, 402) = 13.95, p < 0.000)\(^5\) (see Appendix 5 for the full analyses). To test the robustness of this interactive relationship between perceived candidate personality and subjects’ political ideology alternative moderators were included in the American version of Study 1: Subjects’ party affiliation, ideology (liberal vs. conservative) and authoritarianism. Using each of these alternative measures as moderator gives results substantially similar to what was presented above using subjects’ left-right self-placement\(^6\) (see Appendix 6 for the full tests).

In order to investigate these interactive relationships in a more nuanced way Figure 2 shows the marginal effect of ideology on the dependent measures (overall feelings in panel a) and b), and likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson in panel c)).

‘Figure 2 about here’

Overall Figure 2 supports the political ideology prediction. Panel a) shows the results for the Danish subjects and in line with the prediction subjects’ ideology positively predicts their overall feelings towards the dominant personality description (b = 0.133, p = 0.033 (two-tailed)). That is, the more rightwing the subject the warmer the feelings towards the dominantly described Christian Mortensen. The mirror image is found for the agreeable description of Christian Mortensen since subjects’ ideology negatively predicts feelings towards the agreeable version of Christian Mortensen (b = -0.084, p = 0.096 (two-tailed)).\(^7\) In other words, more rightwing tend to have colder feelings towards the agreeable Christian Mortensen. Finally, it is worth noticing that the predictive

\(^5\) The reported statistics are based on a model also controlling for subject age and sex, since the US sample is representative. However, the same results are found when not controlling for subjects’ age and sex (overall feelings: F (1, 336) = 14.07, p < 0.000; likelihood of voting for: F (1, 404) = 13.41, p < 0.000).

\(^6\) Furthermore, subjects’ left-right self-placement and authoritarianism are found to interact with the personality description simultaneously and independently. That is, conservatism (or being right-wing) as well as authoritarianism tend to increase subjects’ preferences for a dominant candidate personality. This could suggest that preferences for certain candidate personalities are linked to (at least) two different individual level differences.

\(^7\) The reported regression coefficients of ideology are based on separate OLS regressions predicting overall feelings from ideology within each experimental condition.
power of ideology is stronger with regards to feelings towards the dominant candidate personality than towards the agreeable candidate personality.

Panel b) and c) in Figure 2 show the results for the US study. These are strikingly identical to the Danish results. Panel b) shows that subjects’ ideology positively predicts overall feelings towards Thomas Johnson among the subjects who were assigned to the dominant candidate description (b = 0.204, p = 0.001). On the contrary it negatively predicts overall feelings towards the agreeable description of Thomas Johnson (b = -0.083, p = 0.076). That is, the more rightwing the subjects the warmer feelings towards the dominant candidate description and colder feelings towards the agreeable candidate personality (and vice versa the more leftwing the subjects). A similar pattern is found when predicting likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson with ideology: ideology positively and significantly predicts likelihood of voting for the dominant Thomas Johnson (b = 0.216, p < 0.001), while ideology negatively but insignificant predicts likelihood of voting for the agreeable Thomas Johnson (b = -0.069, p = 0.204). Like among the Danish subjects, ideology is found to relate stronger top perceptions of the dominant than towards the agreeable candidate personality.

**Study 2: American National Election Studies**

To test the robustness of the experimental results in the world of real politics, Study 2 tests the political ideology prediction on the contest for the American Presidency using the American National Election Study 1980-2008. In this way, Study 2 potentially expands the scope of the theory by testing it on the choice between the most prominent politicians whose party affiliation, policy positions etc. are well-known to voters.
Data

The American National Election Study, ANES, includes a whole range of different personality trait measures for the presidential candidates. Two of the applied personality trait measures stand out as the better approximations of a dominant and an agreeable candidate personality, respectively. Specifically, respondents’ perception of candidates’ “provision of strong leadership” (strong leadership) will be used as proxy for dominance, whereas respondents’ perception of how “compassionate” a candidate is (compassion) will serve as proxy for agreeableness. Strong leadership is measured across all presidential elections from 1980 to 2008, whereas compassion was only included in the 1984, 1988 and the 1992 elections.

Concrete measures and design

In real elections voters face the choice of different candidates. Therefore, voters’ relative perceptions of candidates’ personality traits are calculated in order to approximate the psychological process of the individual voter. All the personality trait measures follow the same standard format (my coding is exemplified in parentheses): “Think about Barack Obama. In your opinion, does the phrase ‘he provides strong leadership’ describe Barack Obama “extremely well” (4), “quite well” (3), “not too well” (2), or “not well at all” (1). I use these questions to calculate subjects’ relative scores of strong leadership and compassion for two competing candidates as the difference between the Democratic candidate and the Republican candidate. Finally, these relative scores are recoded to scales from -1 (most favorable for the Republican candidate) to +1 (most favorable for the Democratic candidate) where 0 indicate that the candidates are rated equally with respect to the

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8 For example the latest available data from the 2008 presidential election includes the following traits: a candidates’ provision of strong leadership, if he really cares about people like you, knowledge, intelligence, honesty, optimism and moral.
given trait. Respondents’ political ideology is measured with seven categories and recoded to a 0-1 scale (0 constitute the most leftwing and 1 the most rightwing position)\(^9\).

As dependent variables respondents’ feelings towards the candidates and respondents’ actual vote choice are used. With regards to the former, the ANES surveys include feeling thermometer ratings on 0-100 scales of the two main candidates. Again, the relative score (feelings) is measured as the difference between the respondents’ feelings towards the Democratic candidate and the Republican candidate, respectively, and recoded to a -1 to +1 scale (-1 being most favorable for the Republican and +1 most favorable for the Democrat)\(^10\). Vote choice is coded 0 for voting Republican and 1 for voting for the Democrats. Finally, respondents’ age (years of age), sex and party affiliation are controlled for (for more details on coding procedures see Appendix 8)\(^12\).

**Results**

A preliminary overview of the presidential candidates’ relative scores \( (\text{score}_{\text{democrat}} - \text{score}_{\text{republican}}) \) on strong leadership, compassion and feelings shows that republicans are generally perceived as stronger leaders \( (t = -8.973, p < 0.001) \), and that democrats are perceived as more compassionate \( (t = 16.994, p < 0.001) \). However, no significant difference is found with respect to overall feelings \( (t = -0.534, p = 0.594) \). This pattern only changes slightly the analysis is conducted for each election separately: Republican presidential candidates are seen as significantly stronger leaders than their democratic opponents with Clinton (1992) and Obama (2008) as the only exceptions. Likewise the

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\(^9\) Specifically, the relative score is calculated as "\( \text{Score}_{\text{Democrat}} - \text{Score}_{\text{Republican}} \)" creating a seven-point scale, which is divided by 3 to fit the -1 to +1 scale-format.

\(^10\) Originally this Liberal/Conservative self-placement scale constitutes the categories: “Extremely liberal”, “Liberal”, “Slightly liberal”, “Moderate; middle of the road”, “slightly conservative”, “conservative”, and “extremely conservative”.

\(^11\) The feeling thermometer ratings of each candidate is measured on 0-100 scales, where 100 means very favorable and warm feelings towards a given candidate and 0 means very unfavorable and cold feelings towards the candidate. The relative feelings measure is calculated as "\( \text{Score}_{\text{democrat}} - \text{Score}_{\text{republican}} \)" creating a -100 to +100 scale, which is divided by 100 to fit the -1 to +1 scale-format.

\(^12\) Party affiliation is measured with five categories: “Strong Democrats”, “Weak/Leaning Democrats”, “Independents”, “Weak/Leaning Republicans”, and “Strong Republicans”. Furthermore, Appendix 9 replicates main findings without any control variables as well as with an extended battery of control variables following Hayes (2005).
presidential candidate from the Democrats is seen as significantly more compassionate in 1984, 1988 and 1992. Finally, the relative feelings towards the candidates generally favor the winner of a given election (see Appendix 8 for more details).\textsuperscript{13}

Altogether the measures of strong leadership, compassion and feelings follow reasonable expectations and election results, and therefore, \textit{the political ideology prediction} will be tested using the available measures from the 1980-2008 ANES. Since bigger values of strong leadership, compassion and the dependent measures feelings and vote choice all indicate relatively more favorable ratings for the Democratic candidates, positive relationships between the relative personality evaluations and the dependent variables are expected for leftwing as well as for rightwing respondents. However, the strength of the relationships between the two personality traits and the dependent variables should vary across the ideological spectrum if voters differ in their candidate personality preferences depending on their ideological position. More specifically, we should expect that as respondents become more rightwing, (1) the relationship between strong leadership and evaluations of candidates (feelings and vote choice) should increase; and (2) the relationship between compassion and feelings should decrease. That is, the primary test of the \textit{political ideology prediction} in Study 2 is whether two-way interactions between political ideology and strong leadership and compassion, respectively, are statistically significant and theoretically meaningful while also controlling for respondents’ sex, age and party affiliation (reported p-values are two-tailed). The cumulative ANES data from 1984, 1988 and 1992 (that include measures of both strong leadership and compassion) is used to test the \textit{political ideology prediction}. OLS regressions are used when predicting feelings towards the candidates while logit regressions are applied when predicting vote choice.

\textsuperscript{13}These results by and large replicate Hayes’ (2005) findings of Republican and Democratic trait ownership of strong leadership and compassion, respectively.
Predicting feelings towards the candidates, both the interaction between strong leadership and political ideology \( (F(1, 4.042) = 9.97, p = 0.002) \) and the interaction between compassion and ideology \( (F(1, 4.042) = 7.09, p = 0.008) \) are found to be statistically significant. Next, respondents’ vote choice is predicted from a similar model, and again a significant interaction between strong leadership and ideology is found \( (\chi^2(1) = 4.92, p = 0.027) \). On the contrary the interaction between compassion and ideology turns out to be insignificant \( (\chi^2(1) = 0.11, p = 0.741) \). In order to more thoroughly investigate and illustrate how the effects of strong leadership and compassion vary with political ideology, Figure 3 shows the marginal effects of strong leadership and compassion across the ideological spectrum with respect to feelings towards the candidates (panel a) and vote choice (panel b).

‘Figure 3 about here’

Significant and positive effects of both strong leadership and compassion on feelings are found for all values of political ideology. More interestingly and strongly in line with the political ideology prediction, the effect of strong leadership on feelings rises when moving closer to the rightwing end of the ideology scale (black line). Mirroring this, the predictive power of compassion on feelings is strongest among the most leftwing respondents and decrease when moving towards the ideological right (grey line). That is, when rightwing voters evaluate their relative feelings towards two competing presidential candidates, provision of strong leadership is more important than when leftwing voters evaluate the two candidates. On the contrary, compassion is a more important personality trait for leftwing voters compared to rightwing voters. Panel b) shows that this pattern is only partly found when predicting vote choice. Moving towards the rightwing end of the ideological spectrum the effect of strong leadership does indeed grow, but no decreasing effect
of compassion is present. In sum, while both strong leadership and compassion interacts with ideology as expected when predicting feelings, the interaction between strong leadership and ideology turns out to be more robust as it replicates even when predicting voters’ actual behavior and vote choice. This parallel the finding in Study 1 that candidate dominance is a stronger ideological divider than candidate agreeableness.

**Robustness tests**

The robustness of these results are tested in three separate sets of tests. First, I replicate the above analysis for strong leadership and utilize that data is available for all election years from 1980 to 2008. Both when predicting feelings (F( 1, 8.679) = 19.49, p < 0.001) and vote choice (chi²( 1) = 4.87, p = 0.027) strong leadership significantly interacts with ideology. That is, across the available data from American presidential elections 1980-2008 perceptions of candidates’ provision of strong leadership increases in predictive power on the relative evaluations of candidates when moving towards the rightwing end of the ideological scale (see Appendix 9 for summary figures).

Second, the above analyses for the 1984, 1988 and 1992 elections were replicated for each separate election. Both when predicting feelings and vote choice the interaction between strong leadership and ideology is significant out three presidential elections. On the contrary, the interaction between compassion and ideology only points in the expected direction for the 1984 election and it is only significant when predicting feelings towards the candidates. Furthermore, a model that only includes the strong leadership and ideology interaction was specified for each election from 1980 to 2008. Across elections the general trend is that strong leadership increases in predictive power on relative candidate evaluations moving from the most leftwing to the most rightwing respondents. The statistical significance for this trend is however stronger when predicting feelings towards the candidates than vote choice (see Appendix 9 for summary figures).
Finally, all the models described above were specified without any control variables as well as with an extended battery of control variables following the procedure applied by Hayes (2005). These alternative specifications all yield similar findings as the ones shown and discussed above. That is, across elections there is pretty strong and robust tendency for strong leadership to increase in predictive power on relative evaluations of two competing candidates when moving from left to right across the ideological spectrum. On the other hand there is also a tendency for compassion to influence relative evaluations of candidates more among the leftwing than among the rightwing respondents. Importantly, however, this latter trend is only found when predicting feelings towards the candidates (and not vote choice), it is less robust across elections and based on less data than the interaction between strong leadership and ideology.

Discussion and conclusion

Two conclusions stand out from these results. First and foremost contextual information and political ideology have been shown to affect evaluations of candidates in line with the proposed problem sensitive theory of followership. Specifically, a dominant candidate personality evokes more positive feelings and is liked more among rightwing than among leftwing subjects. Likewise a dominant candidate personality is perceived as significantly and substantially more competent in dealing with problems related to between group conflict than to within group coordination in Denmark (whereas no substantial difference is found among US subjects). On the contrary, an agreeable candidate personality appeals more to leftwing subjects and breeds more positive feelings in the leftwing than in the rightwing camp. Likewise, an agreeable candidate personality is seen as more competent when within group cooperation is needed than under group conflict.

Second, among both the Danish and the American subjects ideology turns out to relate stronger to perceptions of the dominant than the agreeable candidate personality, and in the ANES
data the interaction between strong leadership and ideology is substantially stronger and more robust than the interaction between compassion and ideology. That is, across countries, using experimental as well as observational data, and applying different dependent measures in the experiment a dominant candidate personality is found to be a stronger ideological divider than an agreeable candidate personality. One possible explanation for this finding is that dominance is related to more aspects of leadership than agreeableness. For instance a series of studies find that humans are extremely aware of leaders’ motivation and their potential exploitative behavior (Hibbing & Alford, 2004; Smith et al., 2007). Based on these findings one could imagine that leaders with dominant personalities will also take advantage of leader privileges at the expense of their fellow group members to a greater extent than leaders with less dominant personalities. If so, leftwing voters have two reasons for not favoring a dominant candidate personality: He is not suited to take care of the problems they see as more important and with him greater risks of exploitative leader behavior follow. With regards to agreeable candidates no other reasons than problem prioritization should count against rightwing voters’ evaluations of these candidates, which possibly explains the smaller ideological divide in personality preferences with regards to agreeableness than to dominance. In sum, while leftwing voters have at least two reasons to punish and avoid dominant candidates, rightwing voters can only base their preference against agreeable candidates on problem prioritization. However, for now these thoughts remain speculations and it will be saved for future research to explore the reasons for the stronger ideological division by dominant candidate personalities compared to agreeable candidate personalities.

Importantly, the results presented above replicate across a series of robustness analyses. First of all, similar results are found from the experimental and the observational data. Specifically, voters with different ideological positions are found to prefer different candidate personalities. Second, this ideology finding remains significant and substantially important – especially for
dominance/strong leadership – when subjects’ likelihood of voting for the fictitious candidate (Study 1) or respondents’ vote choice (Study 2) are used as dependent variables instead of overall feelings towards the candidates. Third, similar results are found when alternative measures for political ideology are used in Study 1. Finally, Study 1 gives rise to similar overall patterns of candidate personality preferences when it is conducted in Denmark and the US even though these countries and the used samples are very different. Not only do Denmark and USA qualify as Most Different Systems within the group of modern democratic countries, the samples are also very different with regards to age composition and political interest (Danish under graduate students versus representative US citizens). Taken cumulatively, these results therefore support the existence of a universal psychological system of followership that for modern humans among other things regulates candidate preferences.

The findings presented here raise methodological questions related to future research on candidate personality as well as questions about interpretation. On the methodological matter, the findings strongly echo Funk and underscore the need for a finer grained analytic framework for studying the role of candidate personality in democratic. One such framework could be the problem oriented approach applied here. However, in order to investigate these ideas properly both experiments and election surveys need to include more problem-sensitive personality traits than the “leader general items” (cf., knowledge, intelligence and competence) that are most often included today.

With respect to interpretation, this paper has theorized and analyzed candidate personality from an evolutionary perspective. While the results are not inapplicable with other theories and interpretations, I think the theory presented here is the more sound interpretation for several reasons. First, the evolutionarily based theory suggests why personality should matter to followers in general and therefore also to modern day voters. Specifically, it hypothesizes how and why
candidate personality, voter ideology and the situational context should be linked, which has not been done before. While the results might be explainable from other theoretical positions, these other theories, however, did not lead to the predictions.

Second, existing research does not fully ignore why candidate personality should matter to modern democratic elections. One prominent theory predicts that voters tend to prefer candidates that with respect to personality are similar to themselves, and this prediction is strongly supported across a series of studies (cf., Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004). However, this theory cannot explain that competence evaluations of a given candidate changes with the context as shown in Study 1. While this finding certainly do not prove Caprara & Zimbardo’s similarity theory wrong, it does highlight that candidate personality is relevant to democratic elections for other reasons than similarity. And one of these reasons could be the existence of a problem sensitive psychological system of followership.

Finally, the theoretical framework presented here builds on recent findings in related literatures. A series of findings show how humans seem to be equipped with problem sensitive leadership preferences and find that subjects prefer dominant and masculine looking leaders in times of between group conflict, and more feminine and agreeable looking leaders when within group cooperation is needed (Spisak et al., 2012a; Spisak et al., 2012b; Little et al, 2007;). Here, I have combined this result with other recent insights from social psychology that shows how individuals on the two ideological wings perceive the social reality completely different and have different problem prioritizations. In addition, archeological and anthropological evidence further suggest that leadership over human evolutionary history has been problem specific rather than of a general nature (e.g., Boehm, 1999; van Vugt & Ahuja, 2010). Altogether, the predictions and results presented here build on cross-disciplinary insights on human nature and behavior in order to meet the scientific goals of compatibility and integration across related research areas (Tooby &
Cosmides, 1992), and to form a theory of candidate personality preferences that is consistent with established knowledge from related fields investigating human leadership.

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Figures

Figure 1: Contextual competence evaluations of Christian Mortensen/Thomas Johnson. Bars are average ratings of competence (0-1 scale, 1 highest possible value) in relation to Conflict and Cooperation scenarios, respectively. Panel a) shows ratings of Danish subjects while panel b) shows ratings of American subjects.
Figure 2: Marginal effects of ideology on evaluation of Christian Mortensen/Thomas Johnson. Panels show a) result for the Danish sample on feelings; b) result for the US sample on feelings; c) result for the US sample on likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson.
Marginal effect of ideology on likelihood of voting for Thomas Johnson

Dominant Agreeable

vhselv_likelihoodvoting vhselv_like_lower/vhselv_like_upper

Note: Respondents were randomly assigned to either the agreeable or the dominant personality description. P-values are for two-tailed tests.
Figure 3: Marginal effects of Strong Leadership and Compassion on feelings towards the candidates (panel a) and vote choice (panel b) across respondents’ political ideology. Cumulative data for ANES 1984, 1988 and 1992. Graphs based on models also controlling for respondents’ sex, age and party affiliation (5 categories).

Note: Dashed lines are 90 percent confidence intervals
Appendix

Choosing the right candidate:

How context and political ideology affect candidate personality preferences.
Appendix 1: Full texts used as experimental stimuli and contextual scenarios

Personality descriptions:

Below are first English versions of the two vignettes describing the fictitious Danish politician Christian Mortensen. The vignettes were originally written in Danish since all respondents were Danes. Afterwards, the vignettes used for the American subjects are shown.

Vignettes used for the Danish subjects

Agreeable description

Christian Mortensen is known as a hard-working and result-oriented Member of Parliament. All the way through his political career he has initiated legislative proposals and seen these through in the work within the standing committees of the Danish Parliament, Folketinget.

Among his political allies Christian Mortensen is known as an empathetic negotiator who sensibly controls the game of politics and manages to reach agreements and enter cooperations. Likewise, among his political opponents he is known as a person who never steamrolls others during neither negotiations nor committee work. Recently, Christian Mortensen has even turned into a prominent figure within his party group that almost everybody comfortably contact.

Dominant description

Christian Mortensen is known as a hard-working and result-oriented Member of Parliament. All the way through his political career he has initiated legislative proposals and seen these through in the work within the standing committees of the Danish Parliament, Folketinget.

Among his political allies Christian Mortensen is known as a tough negotiator who immovably sticks to the policy of his party to create political results. Likewise, among his political opponents he is known as a tough guy who will take control of negotiations and committee work. Recently,
Christian Mortensen has even turned into a prominent figure within his party group that nobody wants to offend.

**Vignettes used for the American subjects**

**Agreeable description**

Thomas Johnson is known as a hard-working and result-oriented Congressman. All the way through his political career he has initiated legislative proposals and seen these through in his work within the standing committees of the House of Representatives.

Among his political allies Thomas Johnson is known as an empathetic negotiator who sensibly controls the game of politics and manages to reach agreements and form coalitions. Likewise, among his political opponents he is known as a person who never steamrolls others during neither negotiations nor committee work. Recently, Thomas Johnson has even turned into a prominent figure whom almost everybody comfortably contacts.

**Dominant description**

Thomas Johnson is known as a hard-working and result-oriented Congressman. All the way through his political career he has initiated legislative proposals and seen these through in his work within the standing committees of the House of Representatives.

Among his political allies Thomas Johnson is known as a tough negotiator who immovably sticks to his own political principles to create political results. Likewise, among his political opponents he is known as a tough guy who will take firm control of negotiations and committee work. Recently, Thomas Johnson has even turned into a prominent figure whom nobody wants to offend.

**Contextual scenarios:**

**Scenarios used in the Danish version**
Between-group conflict problem: Russia Conflict Scenario

Imagine that the dispute between Denmark and Russia about the rich deposits of oil and other nature resources in the Greenlandic part of the Arctic Ocean intensifies. Russia lead by President Vladimir Putin insists that all resources shall be assigned to Russia because of its bigger size. How competent do you think Christian Mortensen will be in terms of securing Danish/Greenlandic ownership of the natural resources in the Greenlandic underground? 0 indicates that Christian Mortensen is not at all competent, while 10 indicates that he is very competent.

Within-group cooperation problem: Financial Crisis Cooperation Scenario

Imagine that the economic crisis in Denmark intensifies and that a heavy recession sets in. It will therefore be important that all citizens pull together and contribute to putting Denmark back on track. How competent do you think Christian Mortensen will be in terms of facilitating cooperation among the Danes and contributing to pulling Denmark out of the crisis? 0 indicates that Christian Mortensen is not at all competent, while 10 indicates that he is very competent.

Scenarios used in the US version

Between-group conflict problem: NATO vs. Russia Conflict Scenario

Imagine that due to the recent placement of so-called “preventive” NATO missiles in Turkey, the relationship between the United States and Russia cools down. Russia and President Vladimir Putin express deep dissatisfaction and state that they will boycott any trade relationships with the United States as well as initiate the installation of long-range missiles in both Cuba and the Eastern parts of their own territory. How competent do you think Thomas Johnson will be in terms of securing the
interests of the United States? 0 indicates that Thomas Johnson is not at all competent, while 10 indicates that he is very competent.

**Within-group cooperation problem: Hurricane Cooperation Scenario**

Imagine that a destructive hurricane has hit large parts of the US. Danger is now over, but the catastrophe has caused major damage and many families have lost their homes. A large number of voluntary and charity organizations are ready to help and reconstruct the areas hit by the hurricane. How competent do you think Thomas Johnson is for coordinating the reconstruction process and the efforts of the organizations? 0 indicates that Thomas Johnson is not at all competent, while 10 indicates that he is very competent.
Appendix 2: Manipulation check of experimental treatment (personality description) in study 1.

Bars indicate the average ratings on 0-1 scales of dominance and agreeableness (1 is maximum value), respectively. Panels to the left show ratings from the Danish sample and panels to the right show ratings from the US sample. Within these panels bars to the left indicate ratings for the dominant personality description, while bars to the right indicate ratings for the agreeable personality description.

Note: error bars span 0.95 confidence intervals.
Appendix 3: Extended manipulation check of the two personality descriptions.

Danish sample
Averaged perceptions on 0-1 scales (1 indicate highest possible score) of the fictitious candidate, Christian Mortensen, from experimentally assigned personality description. T-tests (two-sided) with corresponding p-values for the perceptional differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dominant description (N=136)</th>
<th>Agreeable description (N=130)</th>
<th>t-test and p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreeable</td>
<td>0.310</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>-21.74 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Leader</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>2.74 (P = 0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares About Other People</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>-11.42 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>21.91 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>0.428</td>
<td>0.722</td>
<td>-13.53 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.616</td>
<td>6.82 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>-4.67 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

US sample
Averaged perceptions on 0-1 scales (1 indicate highest possible score) of the fictitious candidate, Thomas Johnson, from experimentally assigned personality description. T-tests (two-sided) with corresponding p-values for the perceptional differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dominant description (N=203)</th>
<th>Agreeable description (N=205)</th>
<th>t-test and p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreeable</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>-12.56 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Leader</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>-0.95 (P = 0.343)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares About Other People</td>
<td>0.602</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td>-8.12 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>10.60 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td>-10.31 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.675</td>
<td>7.56 (P &lt; 0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>-3.68 (P &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Contextual competence evaluations of Christian Mortensen/Thomas Johnson by subjects ideology.

Bars are average ratings of competence (0-1 scale, 1 most competent) in relation to Conflict and Cooperation scenarios, respectively. The two upper rows show results from the Danish sample, and the four lower rows show the results from the American sample. The left panel column shows competence ratings among leftwing subjects, while the right panel column shows competence ratings among rightwing subjects. Within each panel bars on the left-hand side indicate competence in the conflict context, while bars on the right-hand side indicate competence in the cooperation context.

Note: P-values are two-tailed tests of mean differences.
Appendix 5: Full models for Experimental studies

Effects of described personality, political ideology and their interaction on evaluations of the fictitious candidate. Model I and II show effects for the Danish sample, while Model III, IV and V show effects for the American sample. The dependent measure is overall feelings towards the fictitious candidate, except for Model V where likelihood of voting for the fictitious candidate is used. OLS-regression with standard errors in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Danish sample</th>
<th>US sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>0.145***</td>
<td>0.256***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Ideology</td>
<td>0.133*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description*Pol.</td>
<td>-0.216**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth year</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.631***</td>
<td>0.564***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                  | 261           | 258       | 340       | 340       | 408       |
| R² adjusted        | 0.182         | 0.217     | 0.137     | 0.167     | 0.116     |

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 dominant version constitutes the baseline category. 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 of hypotheses
Appendix 6: Details on the robustness tests provided for the American sample in study 1

To test the robustness of the interactive relationship between perceived candidate personality and subjects’ Political Ideology, Study 2 included a handful of alternative moderators. These are subjects’ party affiliation (seven point scale recoded to “Strong Democrat” (0) and “Strong Republican” (1)), an alternative ideology measure (seven point scale recoded to “Extremely liberal” (0) and “Extremely conservative” (1)) and an authoritarianism scale (“least authoritarian” (0) to “most authoritarian” (1))\(^\text{14}\). First, left-right self-placement (the operationalization of Political Ideology in the above analyses) correlates very strongly and positively with both party affiliation ($r = 0.588$) and the alternative ideology measure ($r = 0.755$). However, the correlation between left-right self-placement and authoritarianism is not as strong ($r = 0.226$). This suggests that left-right self-placement, the alternative ideology measure and party affiliation all measure the same underlying construct, whereas authoritarianism could reflect something different. Second, analyses that include one of the three alternative moderators instead of left-right self-placement yield results that parallel the ones shown in Figure 2 with regards to overall feelings towards Thomas Johnson (party affiliation: $F(1, 336) = 8.47$, $p = 0.004$; alternative ideology measure: $F(1, 336) = 28.92$, $p < 0.000$; authoritarianism: $F(1, 333) = 10.88$, $p = 0.001$). Third, when including the original interaction between description and left-right self-placement ($F(1, 334) = 5.85$, $p = 0.016$) and the interaction between description and party affiliation ($F(1, 334) = 0.83$, $p = 0.364$) only the former is significant. When including the original interaction between description and left-right self-placement ($F(1, 334) = 0.73$, $P = 0.392$) as well as the interaction between description and the alternative ideology measure only the latter is significant ($F(1, 334) = 15.20$, $p < 0.001$). This makes sense since left-right self-placement, party affiliation and the alternative ideology measure are all very strongly correlated. However, when the interaction between Description and

\(^{14}\) Authoritarianism is measured using the same four items as in the American National Election Studies.
authoritarianism (F (1, 331) = 7.00, p = 0.009) is added to a model already including the interaction between Description and left-right self-placement (F (1, 331) = 10.46, p = 0.001) both interactions are found to be simultaneously significant. A potential implication of this latter result could be that Description, left-right self-placement, and authoritarianism altogether constitute a three-way interaction, which is however found not to be the case (F (1, 329) = 0.01, p = 0.925).

Together these robustness tests give rise to two important conclusions. First, the interaction between candidate personality description and subject ideology is found using four different measures of ideology. Second, the simultaneous interaction between candidate personality description and left-right self-placement and authoritarianism, respectively, could suggest that two different individual level factors – ideology and authoritarianism respectively – influence candidate personality preferences.

Likewise, both interactions are significant when Description*alternative ideology measure (F (1, 331) = 24.36, p < 0.000) and Description*authoritarianism (F (1, 331) = 4.31, p = 0.039) are simultaneously included.
Appendix 7: Coding procedure for variables in the ANES analyses:

Below all the variable names refer to the cumulative ANES data file (anes_cdf).

Strong leadership

Scale with four categories for the Republicans’ and the Democrats’ candidate, respectively. In the analyses the difference between the score for the Democrat and the score for the Republican is used. Variables are: VCF0356 (Democrats) and VCF0368 (Republicans).

Compassion

Scale with four categories for the Republicans’ and the Democrats’ candidate, respectively. In the analyses the difference between the score for the Democrat and the score for the Republican is used. Variables are: VCF0351 (Democrats) and VCF0363 (Republicans).

Ideology

Seven point scale used as continuous measure based on the variable: VCF0803

Feelings towards candidates

0-100 point scales for the Republicans’ and the Democrats’ candidate, respectively. In the analyses the difference between the score for the Democrat and the score for the Republican is used. Variables are: VCF0424 (Democrats) and VCF0426 (Republicans).

Respondent sex:

Dichotomous measure based on variable: VCF0104 (0 = female; 1 = male)
Respondents’ Age:
Used as continuous measure based on variables: VCF0101 (min. age = 17, max. age = 99)

Party affiliation
Seven point scale collapsed into five categories: VCF0301 (the five categories are: 0 = “Strong Democrats”, 1 = “Weak/Leaning Democrats”, 2 = “Independents”, 3 = “Weak/Leaning Republicans”, and 4 = “Strong Republicans”).

Income:
Respondents’ income coded into percentiles. Used as continuous measure based on variable: VCF0114 (0 = “0-16 percent”; 1 = “17-33 percent”; 2 = “34-67 percent”; 3 = “68-95 percent”; 4 = “96-100 percent”).

Education:
Respondents’ education coded into four categories based on variable: VCF0110 (0 = “Grade school or less”; 1 = “High school”; 2 = “Some college”; 3 = “College or advanced degree”).

Race:
Categorical variable measuring whether the respondent is white or non-white: VCF0106 (0 = “non-white”; 1 = “white”).

Govt. jobs: Government’s role in creating jobs and securing standard of living.
Used as continuous measure based on variable: VCF0809 (1-7 scale (7 = Government should let each person get ahead on own)).
Help Blacks: Government’s role in improving the social and economic position of blacks

Used as continuous measure based on variable: VCF0830 (1-7 scale (7 = blacks should help themselves)).

Defense spending:

Used as continuous measure based on variables: VCF0843 (1-7 scale (7 = Government should increase defense spending)).

Church attendance:

Categorical variable measuring how often respondents go to church based on variable: VCF0130 (coding: 0 = “never”; 1 = “few times a year”; 2 = “once or twice a month”; 3 = “almost every week”; 4 = “every week”).
Appendix 8: Relative perceptions of competing presidential candidates 1980-2008 with regards to strong leadership, compassion and overall feelings.
Traits measured as relative scores from -1 (most favorable for the Republican) to +1 (most favorable for the Democrat) and 0 indicating that candidates are rated equally. Significance tests are t-tests (two-sided) with standard error in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong leadership</th>
<th>Compassion</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>-0.149***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Carter vs. Reagan)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>-0.154***</td>
<td>0.098***</td>
<td>-0.036***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mondale vs. Reagan)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.058***</td>
<td>-0.038***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Dukakis vs. Bush)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0.026**</td>
<td>0.087***</td>
<td>0.039***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Clinton vs. Bush)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.072***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Clinton vs. Dole)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>-0.033**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gore vs. Bush)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-0.100***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kerry vs. Bush)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.114***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.152***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Obama vs. McCain)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across elections</td>
<td>-0.037***</td>
<td>0.082***</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Democrat vs. Republican)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. All p-values are reported for two-sided of hypotheses.
Note: N varies between election years and across items: 1980 N(strong leadership; feelings) = 1.409; 1.521. 1984 N(strong leadership; compassion; feelings) = 1.941; 1.906; 2.171. 1988 N(strong leadership; compassion; feelings) = 1.753; 1.716; 1.941. 1992 N(strong leadership; compassion; feelings) = 2.167; 2.204; 2.411. 1996 N(strong leadership; feelings) = 1.620; 1.678. 2000 N(strong leadership; feelings) = 1.619; 1.747. 2004 N(strong leadership; feelings) = 1.128; 1.191. 2008 N(strong leadership; feelings) = 1.083; 2.271.
Appendix 9: Robustness analyses for interactions between personality traits and political ideology. ANES cumulative dataset.
Columns to the left show models predicting feelings towards the candidates, and models to the right models that predict vote choice.

**Panel a**) marginal effect of strong leadership across all presidential elections from 1980 to 2008 (controlling for respondents age, sex and party affiliation). **Panel b**) plots the interaction coefficients between strong leadership and ideology (black dots) and compassion and ideology (white squares) for each of the elections 1984, 1988 and 1992. **Panel c**) plots the interaction coefficients between strong leadership and ideology (black dots) across 1980-2008 elections.

**Dependent variable: Feeling**

**Dependent variable: Vote choice**

Note: In all three panels dashed lines are 0.90 confidence intervals.