

Pinning One's Hopes on a Flag? The Effect of Patriotic Symbols in Positive and Negative Candidate Assessments

Olga Chyzh and Kyle Mattes

5/2/2012

This paper aims at establishing a clearer connection between the use of national symbols, voters' reflexive judgments of political candidates, and election results. We presented research participants with briefly shown images of unfamiliar political candidates who ran against each other in real elections, varying which of the two candidates was wearing a flag lapel pin. We asked participants to make trait judgments based solely on viewing the photographs. We found that competence, threat, simulated vote, and patriotism judgments in the laboratory correlated to real world election outcomes. We also found that adding a flag lapel pin to a losing candidate's picture made the candidate actually look more threatening. Furthermore, candidates with the lapel pin appeared more competent and more electable whenever the lapel pin made them seem more patriotic. Our findings show that it may be difficult for otherwise undesirable candidates to change voters' first impressions of them by juxtaposing their images with patriotic symbols.

Several recent studies have linked real-world election results with the reflexive “first-impression” judgments of research participants in the laboratory. Participants’ judgments of competence, based on seeing unlabeled head shots of unfamiliar candidates, are nevertheless able to predict the real election winner (Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007; Antoniak and Dalgas, 2009; Atkinson, Enos, and Hill, 2009; Lawson et al., 2010). Similarly, candidates chosen by research participants as more physically threatening are significantly more likely to have been election losers (Spezio et al. 2008, 2011; Mattes et al., 2010). Participants’ exposure to the candidates’ pictures does not need to be prolonged—election winners can be predicted from participants’ trait judgments even with as little as 33 milliseconds of exposure time.

The importance of first impressions underscores why, in the big business of political campaigning, strategists and advisors attempt to tightly control published photographs and videos of their candidates. Seemingly small details about candidates’ images may have a major impact on the political discourse surrounding an election—and on the election outcome itself. In October 2007, Barack Obama was criticized for failing to wear a flag lapel pin. He initially argued that this omission was purposeful to show his commitment to being—not just appearing—patriotic. However, Obama eventually conceded to wearing the lapel pin in all public appearances (Malcolm, 2008).¹

¹ Popkin (1994) has explained how voters can obtain meaningful information from seemingly trivial aspects of a campaign. Popkin’s theory suggests that in the 2008 election, the lapel pin became a heuristic for “true patriotism” (Associated Press, 2007); a candidate unable to recognize the need for wearing the flag pin reveals himself as out of touch with voters.

Todorov et al. (2005) and subsequent studies imply that reflexive judgments about candidates have long-lasting effects. However, political consultants are unlikely to concede an election simply because their candidate initially appears less competent and/or more threatening than the opponent. As the Obama example shows, campaign advisors are more than willing to tweak their candidates' images when they deem it necessary. But, to what extent can these images be altered to evoke competence or to mitigate threat?

In this article, we test predictions about how minor changes in candidates' appearance could potentially affect voters' judgments of candidate competence and personal threat. We do this by adding US flag lapel pins to the candidates' pictures, and then evaluating research participants' reflexive judgments between pairs of candidates when one candidate is wearing a flag lapel pin and the other is not. We argue that this small, and reasonably subtle, addition will affect research participants' trait judgments, though the direction of the effect will depend upon (1) the nature of the judgment, and (2) the relative qualities of the two candidates. We test whether candidates with lapel pins are judged as more patriotic, more competent, less threatening, and more likely to receive votes.

Using modified pictures from the original Todorov et al. (2005) dataset, we find that the effects of the lapel pin are nuanced. Candidates are judged as more competent and more electable when their pictures include a flag lapel pin, provided that the lapel pin also makes them look more patriotic. However, we also find that adding a lapel pin to losing candidates actually makes those candidates appear even more threatening. The latter is important because it highlights a difference between a positive assessment (competence) and a negative assessment (personal threat), showing that the latter may be more difficult to for candidates to

overcome. Our finding supports the theory of Spezio et al. (2008) that voters are influenced by negative emotions elicited by a candidate's mere appearance and "are neither easily fooled by fleetingly attractive faces nor by smiles that hide threat." Our work has broad implications for the study of political campaigns, as we underscore the difficulty faced by candidates who either evoke negative emotions or fail to evoke positive assessments from voters.

"Thin-Slice" Decisions

Literature on political psychology has demonstrated that many important decisions are often made based on very little information (Redlawsk, 2002; Ambady and Rosenthal, 1992, 1993; Olson and Marshuetz, 2005). The research from political science is consistent with other social and behavioral science research, which finds that rapid evaluations of faces influence social decisions (e.g., Blair, Judd, and Chapleau, 2004; Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Hassin and Trope, 2000; Montepare and Zebrowitz, 1998; Mueller and Mazur, 1996; Zebrowitz et al., 1996). Moreover, such "snap" judgments about strangers have generally been found quite accurate—for example in predicting teacher evaluations (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1992) and in predicting election outcomes (Todorov et al., 2005)—and they have been proven difficult to change (Redlawsk, 2002). In other words, scholarly research has uncovered ample evidence buttressing the folk wisdom about the longevity and importance of first impressions.²

² The explanations behind these effects, on the other hand, have been rather inconclusive. Evolutionary psychologists link human abilities to form quick decisions to evolved self-preservation mechanisms similar, for example, to the instinct of pulling your hand away from the hot oven even before your mind processes that the oven is hot. According to this view, human instinctive "gut" reactions are dictated by predisposition evolved as a

Here we expand on the growing literature which shows not only that people are able to form coherent opinions of political candidates by looking at their pictures for a fraction of a second, but also that these opinions, when gathered in laboratory experiments, have been rather accurate predictors of real world election outcomes. Specifically, in US Congress and gubernatorial elections, candidates judged more competent turn out to win elections up to 70% of the time (Todorov et al., 2005; Ballew and Todorov, 2007). Other studies find similar effects for attractiveness ratings (Berggren et al. 2010; Lutz 2010), and Verhulst et al. (2010) theorize that beauty has a halo effect on trait evaluations such as competence. Atkinson, Enos, and Hill (2009) find that for candidates running in more competitive districts, a “more competent” candidate face increases the probability of getting votes of independent voters by almost four points. Remarkably, Antoniak and Dalgas (2009) were able to predict the outcomes of French parliament elections using the competence judgments of Swiss children. Other research has concluded that from looking at candidates’ photographs, individuals make reliable judgments of candidates’ character and fitness for public office that match observed qualities such as competence, integrity, and leadership ability (Rosenberg et al., 1986; Spisak, Grabo, and Van Vugt 2011; Van Vugt, 2010; Van Vugt, Hogan, and Kaiser, 2008).

result of age-long history. Just like the fight or flight instinct that is activated in the face of danger, humans have an innate predisposition to quickly recognize predators who may make take advantage of them (Tooby and Cosmides, 1990; Said et al., 2009). This explanation finds some support in the recent neuroscientific research that shows, for example, a differential neural response in the brain’s amygdala to happy and fearful faces (Morris et al. 1996).

There is growing evidence that negative first impressions—specifically, physical threat—can be used in a similar manner to predict election outcomes. In Mattes et al. (2010) participants were asked to judge a measure of personal threat, “Which candidate is more likely to act in a physically threatening manner toward you?” They found that the candidates judged as more threatening were significantly more likely to have lost their respective elections, and that 65% of the real election outcomes could be predicted from research participants’ threat decisions. Spezio et al. (2008) studied research participants performing the same judgment task inside an fMRI scanner. They found that when making threat judgments, looking at the actual losers in the real election correlated with activity in the insula and ventral anterior cingulate cortex, structures known to be involved in processing negative emotions. And when participants instead cast hypothetical votes, activation in the insula and anterior cingulate again correlated with losing in the real world elections.

If voters’ first impressions are so important, we would expect the manipulation of candidates’ images to be a key strategy of many political campaigns (Schlesinger et al. 1994), especially now that modern technology has facilitated image manipulation and dissemination. A wealth of research demonstrates a connection between a candidate’s visual image and voter evaluation (Rosenberg et al. 1986, 1991; Rosenberg and McCafferty, 1987; Ambady and Rosenthal, 1992, 1993; Atkinson, Enos, and Hill 2009; Lenz and Lawson 2011). Moreover, certain specific facial features, clothing styles, and jewelry tend to elicit particular positive and negative character evaluations (Rosenberg, et al., 1991). Rosenberg and McCafferty (1987) show that the same candidate can be presented in different ways to solicit a wide range of character ratings.

Are voters always susceptible to these image manipulations? Little et al. (2007) showed how the effects may be contextual. They manipulated the shape of a male face to resemble either the face of George W. Bush or John Kerry, finding that the Bush-like face was seen as more masculine and dominant, and was favored by participants in a hypothetical war context. The Kerry-like face was seen as more attractive, forgiving, and intelligent, and was favored in times of peace.

Todorov et al. (2005) and similar studies, however, suggest that it may be quite difficult to alter voters' decisions in real-world elections just by manipulating candidate images. After all, the photographs from these studies were almost always provided by the candidates themselves, who already had ample opportunity to level the playing field via image manipulation. Nevertheless, the candidates judged by research participants as more competent and less threatening consistently tended to be election winners.

More importantly, those studies also provide us with a new way of testing the extent to which candidates can alter their images to affect voter decisions. Since we know that candidates judged as less competent and more threatening are more likely to be election losers, here we attempt to alter their photographs to affect research participants' judgments about these two traits. If this is possible, that same manipulation would plausibly improve the voters' first impressions of those candidates.

For this paper, we altered the candidate images by placing a US flag pin on each candidate's lapel, a relatively simple image manipulation that would be possible for any

candidate.³ Today in the US, flag lapel pins are worn not just by politicians, but also sports commentators and news anchors. And, as demonstrated by the infamous lapel pin episode during the 2008 US presidential primaries, the use of national symbols does not go unnoticed by the media and constituents.

We used the US flag specifically because one of the common—and effective—methods of image manipulation is to portray political candidates alongside salient national symbols. National symbols have been shown to have significant psychological effects ranging from enhanced national identification to promotion of group unity (Butz 2009; Butz, Plant, and Doerr 2007; Kaufman 2001; Hassin et al. 2007). Furthermore, exposure to the US flag has been shown to activate research participants' nationalism (Kemmelmeier and Winter, 2008), egalitarian concepts, and hostility towards Arabs and Muslims (Butz, Plant, and Doerr 2007).⁴ Another recent study has shown that a single exposure to an American flag shifts voters towards supporting Republican candidates (Carter et al., 2011). In a non-US setting, subliminal exposure to one's own national flag has been found to influence political attitudes, intentions, and decisions on issues such as Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Jewish settlers in the West Bank in

³ Spezio (2011) recently showed the importance in general of the non-facial portion of candidate images. They cut the candidates' faces out of images used in previous studies (e.g., Todorov et al., 2005) and asked research participants to evaluate the candidates. Based on these non-facial cues only, participants, though unaware of the actual election outcomes, *still* tended to evaluate the winners as more competent and less threatening.

⁴ Butz et al. (2007) ask participants to complete a primed lexical decision task, in which they had to identify strings of letters as words or nonwords after a subliminal exposure to an American or an Italian flag. Some words included in the task were related to the concepts of equality and dominance, while others were unrelated positively valenced words (e.g., delicious). The logic of the experiment was that research participants primed by the flag will be able to identify words related to egalitarianism more quickly. The results of the study lend support to the argument that exposure to a national flag activates egalitarian attitudes. In Kemmelmeier and Winter (2008), participants were administered two sets of questions measuring nationalism (defined as the sense of national superiority) and patriotism (defined as the love for one's country) in the presence or absence of the US flag. The results of the study showed that the flag presence increases nationalism, but not patriotism.

Israeli research participants (Hassin, et. al, 2007). We preferred the flag lapel pin because of its relevance in recent US politics, and because it would be less overt than a large background flag, which might have taken too much attention away from the candidates themselves.

In the study, we used two different treatments: one in which the winning candidate wore the flag lapel pin, and the other in which the loser wore the pin, and looked at how the flag affected election predictions and candidate judgments. Our first hypothesis was that despite the lapel pins, competence and threat judgments would still predict real election results, hence replicating the findings of Todorov et al. (2005) and Spezio et al. (2008). This is not to say that the lapel pins would have no effect, but instead that the presence of the lapel pins would not cause our participants' judgments to devolve into random chance. Our second hypothesis was that the voting judgments from both treatments combined would also replicate those of Todorov et al. (2005), who found that while at first, laboratory vote correlated with real vote, it no longer did after they controlled for competence judgments. Their result implies that both simulated and real votes were anchored on inferences of competence. Our third hypothesis was rather straightforward: we expected that people would be more likely to choose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic. Fourth, we only expected patriotism judgments to correlate with election winners when the winning candidate was wearing the pin.

As for the interaction between the lapel pins and candidate trait judgments, while most studies agree on the ability of national symbols to elicit an emotive response, the specific nature of this response is not always clear. For its effect in our experiment, we considered three competing theories. On one hand, the affective response of the lapel pin might be limited to patriotism judgments, and thus it would not affect the other judgments. On the

other hand, simply because so many candidates use the flag lapel pin, we could expect that the pins would also make candidates look more competent, more electable, and less threatening. Though, we expected a third possibility—that the interactions would be more nuanced, such that winning candidates with lapel pins would not be evaluated in the same way as losers with lapel pins. It is not a given that the use of national symbols by political actors will always elicit a positive reaction among the voters. Some studies have shown that the perception of national symbols depends upon context (Butz, 2007; Butz et al., 2007; Davies et al., 2008; Kimmelmeier and Winter, 2008), and in some cases, national symbols can be associated with negative traits such as aggression (Ferguson and Hassin, 2007).⁵ Hence, our next hypotheses were based on the general concept that the flag lapel pins would be most effective when presented contextually with reflexive judgments already evoked by the candidate comparisons. Thus, we expected that the effect of the US flag pin would be stronger when worn by “better” candidates, potentially defined as either as real election winners or candidates chosen as more patriotic. Similarly, we expected that the US flag pin would make “worse” candidates appear even *more* threatening than without the lapel pin. Work by Weisbuch-Remington et al. (2005) who studied threat judgments and religious symbols, supports the latter hypothesis. They found that Christians responded as if threatened when presented with otherwise positive Christian symbols that were placed in a threatening context.

⁵ The importance of context is not limited to national symbols. Candidates should always consider the plausibility of their image manipulations; for instance, photographs of Michael Dukakis in an army tank did not make him appear tougher.

Finally, we were concerned about the possibility that our results would be affected if patriotic research participants were more likely to notice (and choose) candidates with the flag lapel pins, and so measured participants' patriotism and nationalism in the study to use as a control. We expected that the magnitude of the reflexive responses to the flag pin would be muted for participants who were less patriotic or nationalistic.

Data and Methods

Stimuli. Stimuli were images of real political candidates who ran in US congressional or gubernatorial elections in 2002, 2004, or 2006, paired according to actual electoral races. We specifically chose candidates that were not well-known, so that our participants would have no prior attitudes toward the candidates. A total of 64 images were used (Fig. 1L). These included all sixty of the images (thirty pairs of candidates) used in Study 2 of Spezio et al. (2008) and in Mattes et al. (2010), which themselves were a subset of those used in Todorov et al. (2005).⁶ All images were selected so that both images in a candidate pair: (a) were frontal facing; (b) were of the same gender and ethnicity; (c) were smiling; and (d) had clear, approximately

⁶ To ensure that our sample of pictures was representative of the entire set of candidate pairs, we referenced the data recorded by Todorov et al. (2005) to compare their results from their analysis for our set of pictures with those for their entire original dataset. Both our subset of pairs and the entire dataset had the same competence-to-winning correlation (59%). However, the elections involving our pairs were slightly more competitive than in the complete dataset; the winners' mean victory margin was by 27% of the vote, as compared to the overall average victory margin of 33%.

central presentation of faces that were of approximately the same size.⁷ The dataset excluded races with well-known candidates (e.g., Hillary Clinton, Rahm Emanuel). All 32 elections pitted a Democrat against a Republican, and the winners were evenly split between the parties, with each party winning 16 of the elections.

These images were then modified to create an additional set of stimuli, consisting of 64 candidate images otherwise identical to the original 64 images. The modification, pasting a US flag lapel pin to the candidate's collar (Fig. 1R), was done using Adobe Photoshop. All of our images were cropped to 104 x 147 pixels and were displayed for 75 milliseconds on a 20-inch 16:9-aspect LCD monitor centered against a grey background, inside a fixation rectangle with a black border of 15-pixel width.

[Figure 1 about here]

Procedure. Stimuli were presented on an LCD monitor in a computer laboratory using DirectRT software. The research participants in our study were first given instruction screens that explained the task and stressed the importance of taking sufficient time to make accurate decisions. Participants were asked to make four binary judgments about the candidate images—for three traits (competence, threat, and patriotism) and for which candidate they would be more likely to vote. On one trait at a time, research participants were asked to judge all 32 image pairs; the order of the 32 pairs and the order of the two pictures comprising each pair were counterbalanced among participants. Every subject

⁷ The facial presentation conditions are especially important and limited the number of available candidate image pairs. Diverted gazes activate the amygdala—an area of the brain associated with threat assessments—more strongly than direct gazes (Straube et al. 2009). For a literature review regarding the difficulty of comparing a 3/4-view face with a frontal face, see Burke et al. (2007).

participated in four blocks asking the participant to make a specific judgment about all of the candidate pairs.⁸

We followed the TED protocol (Kim et al. 2007) which shows the candidate pictures one at a time rather than contemporaneously, thus forcing an encoding of the face into working memory for the comparison. In this experiment, the two images in a pair of candidates were shown sequentially for 75 ms each, one alternating with the other with an inter-image interval of one second, until the participant pressed the appropriate key to indicate which of the two images better displayed the trait being judged.

We conducted two experimental treatments; in each, one of the two candidate images was modified to display a US flag lapel pin on that candidate's collar. We designate the treatments as "winning candidate with lapel pin" (WP) and "losing candidate with lapel pin" (LP). Each subject participated in both treatments; sixteen of the pairs shown to each subject had the winning candidate with a lapel pin, and the other sixteen had the losing candidate with a lapel pin.

At the conclusion of the experiment, research participants were asked if they could identify any of the candidates shown; if participant reported familiarity with one of the candidates in the image set, we excluded those particular trials from the analysis. They were also asked their party affiliation (Democrat, Republican, or Independent) and to place their ideology on a five-point (liberal to conservative) scale. Finally, they were asked about their

⁸ The judgments were worded as choices about which of the two candidates "appears more competent to hold political office", "appears more likely to act in a physically threatening manner toward you", "appears more patriotic", and "you would be more likely to vote for". The competence, threat, and voting blocks were counterbalanced. We asked for patriotism judgments last because we were concerned that asking about patriotism earlier would draw undue attention on the flag pin and complicate the subsequent data.

patriotic and nationalistic attitudes with a series of questions that have been used previously to measure these concepts (Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989, pp. 264–5).⁹

Participants. All procedures were carried out at [reference removed] University in September and October 2010. Participants (N = 80) were paid undergraduates attending the University [reference removed] (45 female, 35 male, age (M ± SD): 20 ± 1 years). A plurality self-identified as Democrats (49%), and more as independents (36%) than Republicans (15%). All participants were US citizens.

Trait Judgments

To confirm that participants made meaningful judgments, we checked correlations between candidate choices (Table 1). As expected, judgments typically thought of as positive (competence, patriotism, vote choice) were positively correlated, with the strongest relationships being between competence and laboratory vote (0.21 for the WP treatment, and 0.22 for the LP treatment). Patriotism correlated positively with the two other positive judgments, so if there were any concern that our research participants were young and therefore viewed patriotism negatively, there is scant evidence here to support that view. Also, all three judgments on positive traits were negatively correlated with judgments on the

⁹ We used all of the statements in Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) that loaded onto either the patriotism factor (e.g., “When I see the American flag flying, I feel great”) or the nationalism factor (e.g. “Generally, the more influence America has on other nations, the better they are”) in their study. Each subject rated their agreement toward the statement on a 5-point scale. We then recoded the responses so that ‘5’ indicated strong patriotic or nationalistic attitudes, and calculated participants’ individual averages on each dimension. The median patriotism score for our participants was 3.75, while the median nationalism score was 2.5.

negative trait (threat), with the strongest relationship being between laboratory vote and threat: -0.22 (WP) and -0.22 (LP). However, as the correlations were not overly strong, we take this to mean that the participants were making distinct judgments for each trait.

[Table 1 about here]

The patriotism judgments allow us to confirm that the research participants saw, and reacted to, the lapel pins. Since the US flag is a symbol for patriotism, our hypothesis was that, despite the brief exposure time (75ms), candidates with lapel pins would be more often chosen as more patriotic. In our study, 59.5% of participants judged the candidate wearing the lapel pin as more patriotic, which was significantly more likely than chance ($p < 0.001$). We take this as confirmation of our hypothesis that the lapel pins would be noticed and therefore would affect participants' patriotism judgments.

We investigated whether these judgments from faces made in the laboratory have any direct relationship to the corresponding Congressional elections in which the politicians in fact participated. For each image pair, we conducted logit regressions with the real election winner (of the two candidates in the pair) coded as the dependent variable. The four independent variables designated, for each image pair, the candidate chosen by that participant for each of the four judgments (laboratory vote, competent, patriotic, and threatening). Because we used relatively few candidate pairs, for the analysis we use individual participants' choices, which yields a total $N = 2640$ observations for each judgment.

[Table 2 about here]

The results are presented in Table 2; standard errors are in parentheses and have been corrected for clustering of individual responses. Positive coefficients mean that the candidates

chosen are more likely to be actual election winners. Similarly, negative coefficients mean that the candidates chosen are more likely to be real election losers. All four judgments in Model (1) are significant with $p < .01$, meaning that all four laboratory judgments were significant predictors of real-world election outcomes. This confirmed our hypotheses that competence judgments would predict election winners, while threat would predict election losers. However, laboratory vote choice unexpectedly remained correlated with real election outcomes after controlling for competence judgments. It is also worth mentioning that patriotism judgments predicted election outcomes—to our knowledge this had not been tested in previous research.

We next investigated the interaction between the lapel pins and the four judgments. We report, in Table 3, the percentage of research participants who chose the real election winner when making each trait judgment. We had 1365 judgments per trait for our WP treatment and 1276 for our LP treatment. Participants' party identification did not significantly affect the likelihood of choosing the winning candidate for any of the trait judgments. The "Overall" column shows the same results as the above regression—that competence, vote, and patriotism judgments were significant predictors for election winners, as was threat for election losers. The rightmost column of Table 3 shows results from a study (Spezio et al. 2008) in which the same candidate image pairs (sans lapel pins) that we used. Their results (55% for competence, 43% for threat) were remarkably similar to ours (59% and 43%), though comparing across studies shows that competence judgments were more accurate with the lapel pins than without (55% , $\chi^2(1)=9.01$, $p < 0.01$ for WP $\chi^2(1)=6.34$, $p=0.01$ for LP). So, putting lapel

pins on the losing candidate made the winner look just as competent; from this, we conclude that the lapel pins didn't help the losing candidates much, if at all.

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 shows a difference between threat judgments in the WP and LP treatments. One of our hypotheses was that adding a lapel pin would actually make a relatively threatening candidate appear *more* threatening, and the data here support this. For the threat judgment, winners were chosen as more threatening 46% of the time when wearing a lapel pin, but only 42% of the time with the opponent wearing a lapel pin. This difference between treatments was significantly different from chance ($\chi^2(1)=3.02, p=0.08$). Participants also selected the winning candidate as more patriotic significantly more often in the WP treatment (64% of 1276 trials) than the LP treatment ($\chi^2(1)=24.16, p<0.001$). But, there was little difference between treatments for competence and vote choice.

To further examine this, we conducted four logit regressions, using each of the judgments as dependent variable. The independent variables were the other three judgments and the treatment (i.e., which candidate had the lapel pin). These results are shown in Table 4. The four models, 2(a-d) use competence, threat, vote choice, and patriotism, respectively, as the independent variables. We focus on the coefficients for the dummy variable for the WP treatment, which are shown in the first row of the table. The table confirms that switching the lapel pin from the winner to the loser affected two of the four judgments.

[Table 4 about here]

While Model (2b) confirms that losing candidates with the lapel pin were considered more threatening than without, column (2a) and (2c) indicate no difference between

treatments for competence and vote choice. However, we caution that this result should not indicate a lack of interaction; rather, it just fails to capture the more complex relationship between the lapel pins and subject judgments. The lapel pins did not affect every candidate equally.

To better understand this interaction between the lapel pins and participants' judgments, we next look at a specific subset of the data—research participants that chose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic, regardless of whether that candidate was an election winner. This is an important distinction because one basic effect of the flag lapel pin is to make a candidate look more patriotic; hence participants choosing the lapel wearer as most patriotic are among the most likely to have been affected by the pin. Table 5 shows the difference between treatments for this subset. Since patriotism judgments were used to create the distinction, they are not included separately in the table.

[Table 5 about here]

The competence and vote choice results are striking. When the winner had the lapel pin, if a subject chose that candidate as more patriotic, the subject chose the same candidate (i.e., the real election winner) as more competent 65% of the time. In comparison, when the losing candidate had the lapel pin, if a subject chose that candidate as more patriotic, the subject chose that candidate as more competent only 52% of the time. The difference between the two treatments was highly significant ($\chi^2=38.7$, $p<0.001$). This partially confirms our hypothesis that the lapel pins made the winning candidates appear more competent relative to the opponent, because the actual result is more nuanced: the lapel pin made winning

candidates appear more competent provided that it also made that candidate appear more patriotic.

The results from vote choice are just as pronounced. When the lapel pin made a winning candidate look more patriotic, he/she received the participants' vote an impressive 67% of the time, as compared to 56% for a losing candidate. The difference between the two treatments was highly significant ($\chi^2=75.1$, $p<0.001$), and shows that lapel pins can affect vote choice, especially if worn by otherwise favorable candidates.

We also ran a logit regression to verify that the large differences for competence and vote choices were both significant. The results are shown in Table 6. Just as with Table 4, we use each trait judgment as a dependent variable, and focus on the coefficient for the WP treatment. This confirms that the difference between treatments was significant for both competent and vote choice judgments. We also find no significant effect for the threat judgment, so while it still holds that the lapel pins made losing candidates look more threatening, this effect did not depend on whether the flags made a candidate appear more patriotic.

[Table 6 about here]

Patriotism and Nationalism

We created scores for the patriotism and nationalism of each research participant, both of which were averages of that subject's responses (on a 1-to-5 scale) to statements asked on the survey. Higher scores indicate stronger agreement with the statements, and hence stronger patriotism or nationalism. The two scores were highly correlated (0.59 coefficient).

Patriotism scores ranged from 1.58 to 5.00 with a mean of 3.60 and median of 3.66.

Nationalism scores were lower, ranging from 1.13 to 4.63, with a mean of 2.45 and a median of 2.5. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the distribution of scores. Self-identified Republicans had higher mean patriotism and nationalism scores (4.37 and 3.12, respectively) than both Democrats (3.42 and 2.38) and independents (3.43 and 2.28).¹⁰

[Figure 2 and Figure 3 about here]

However, we found no evidence to support our hypothesis that the participants would *a priori* patriotism and nationalism would affect the frequency in which they chose candidates wearing the US flag pins. This was mainly because the lapel pin was an effective symbol regardless; participants with very low patriotism and nationalism scores were just as willing as other people to choose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic. Table 7 below shows the lack of correlation between research participants' patriotism/nationalism and their other judgments. The positive correlation between the patriotism trait judgment and the other positive traits shows that regardless of their self-reported levels of patriotism and nationalism, participants were not adverse to the positive nature of patriotic symbolism.

[Table 7 about here]

¹⁰ Based upon previous research (reference removed), and that all of the candidates were unknown to the research participants, we did not expect party identification to affect participants' judgments. Nevertheless, we tested for a difference in these judgments by party identification and found no significant differences for the trait judgments. And, though self-identified Republicans were more likely to choose the candidate with the lapel pin (59%) than were Democrats (55%) or independents (53%), these differences were not statistically significant.

To confirm this, we divided the research participants into two groups based upon their patriotism or nationalism scores, and tested for a difference in likelihood of choosing the candidate with the lapel pin. The less nationalistic group of participants chose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic 56% of the time. Interestingly, the more nationalistic participants were *less* likely (52%) to choose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic ($X^2=4.69$, $p=0.03$). We further explored this trend by looking at the quartiles for nationalism scores. Our two notable findings are shown in Table 8.

[Table 8 about here]

The least nationalistic quartile of research participants differed from their counterparts in two regards. First, they were significantly more likely to choose the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic (59%) than any other quartile ($X^2(3)=14.71$, $p<0.01$). Second, unlike the rest of the participants, they were not able to use personal threat judgments to distinguish election losers from election winners ($X^2(3)=12.62$, $p=0.06$). They chose the real election winner as more threatening just as often as they chose the loser, while the other quartiles chose the election winner as more threatening only 42% of the time. The latter comports with Oxley et al. (2008), which showed that more conservative people had stronger reactions to threatening stimuli.

We ran the same analysis with patriotism scores, but the differences between subject groups were not as pronounced. While the less patriotic half of research participants were more likely to choose the candidate with the flag pin as more patriotic (56%) than the more patriotic group (53%), this difference was not significant ($X^2=2.62$, $p=0.11$). For all of the other

trait judgments, there were no significant differences between the nationalist or between the patriotic subject groups.

Discussion

Despite the common use of national symbols in political campaigning, empirical work has not often examined the possible link between exposure to national symbols and electoral outcomes. This knowledge gap is somewhat unsurprising, as national symbols have subtle unconscious effects that are generally the focus of researchers because they are so difficult to detect. In fact, recent empirical work has hinted at a number of unconscious effects of national symbols (e. g., Butz et al, 2007; Butz et al, 2009; Ferguson & Hassin, 2007; Hassin et al., 2007). Among these effects are implicit national identification, orientation toward group unity, and activation of concepts associated with one's nation. In this paper, we combine these insights with the line of research beginning with Todorov et al. (2005) that links visual first impressions of unknown candidates (in the laboratory) to real electoral outcomes. In so doing, we offer a potential new direction for studies assessing the political effect of manipulations involving national symbols.

We show by adding US flag lapel pins to candidates' images that the effect of patriotic symbols is contextual, providing further evidence supporting the general theory of Butz (2009) that image manipulations of national symbols matter in context. Candidates wearing a pin were judged as more competent with the flag lapel pin than without, an effect that was quite large provided that the lapel pin positively affected the patriotism judgment. We found a similar effect with simulated vote choice, which indicates that it is, in fact, possible for a

candidate to gain votes by wearing a lapel pin. A smaller but nonetheless significant effect occurred with threat judgments; when the lapel pins were placed on losing candidates, it actually made them appear even more threatening than their opponents. Finally, respondents' *a priori* patriotism and nationalism in general did not correlate with reactions to the flag lapel pin. We still believe that such a connection exists, but that such a correlation would be a result of conscious processing rather than of thin-slice judgments.

The contextual effect of symbols has important ramifications for candidates' campaign strategies. For instance, candidates facing opponents who look physically threatening should try to be seen alongside the opponent, who cannot just smile or wear patriotic symbols to overcome the relative sense of threat that s/he evokes. Instead, candidates must consider the traits that they unconsciously convey and prefer images and symbols that enhance rather than contrast with those traits. Future studies will help us pin down the mechanisms by which these contextual differences occur. One possibility we also suggest pursuing, though we could not test it with our short (75-ms) exposure times, is determining whether on a conscious level the more the voter perceives himself as being manipulated, the more threatening the candidate becomes.

Finally, we have found evidence of a connection between patriotism judgments and election results; research participants chose the real election winner as more patriotic, even when the losers had the lapel pins. Furthermore, not only did participants often agree on which candidate looked more patriotic, but their patriotism judgments were distinct from the other trait judgments, introducing the possibility that patriotism could be useful in understanding participants' reflexive judgments as in Todorov et al. (2005). More generally, our

results show that the analysis of patriotism judgments is a promising new direction for understanding voter responses to candidate appearance.

Works Cited

- Ambady, N., and R. Rosenthal. 1993. "Half a minute: Predicting teacher evaluations from thin slices of nonverbal behavior and physical attractiveness." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 64: 431–431.
- Ambady, N., and R. Rosenthal. 1992. "Thin slices of expressive behavior as predictors of interpersonal consequences: A meta-analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 111(2): 256–274.
- Antoniakis, J., and O. Dalgas. 2009. "Predicting Election Outcomes: Child's Play!" *Science*, 323(5918), 1183.
- Associated Press. 2007. "Obama Stops Wearing American flag Pin: Presidential Candidate Says He Will Show Patriotism by Expressing His Ideas." *MSNBC*. Available at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21138728/>.
- Atkinson, M. D, R. D Enos, and S. J Hill. 2009. "Candidate Faces and Election Outcomes: Is the Face–Vote Correlation Caused by Candidate Selection?." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 4(3): 229–249.
- Ballew, C. C., and A. Todorov. 2007. "Predicting political elections from rapid and unreflective face judgments." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 104(46), 17948–17953.
- Berggren, N., Jordahl, H. and Poutvaara, P. 2010. "The Looks of a Winner: Beauty and Electoral Success." *Journal of Public Economics* 94: 8-15.
- Blair, I. V., C. M. Judd, and K. M. Chapleau. 2004. "The influence of Afrocentric facial features in criminal sentencing." *Psychological Science* 15: 674–679.
- Burke, D. et al. (2007). Are face representations viewpoint dependent? A stereo advantage for generalising across different views of faces. *Vision Research*, doi:10.1016/j.visres.2007.04.018.
- Butz, D. A. 2009. "National Symbols as Agents of Psychological and Social Change." *Political Psychology* 30(5): 779-804.
- Butz, D. A., E. A Plant, and C. E Doerr. 2007. "Liberty and justice for all? Implications of exposure to the US flag for intergroup relations." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33(3): 396.
- Carter, T. J., Ferguson, M. J., and Hassin, R. R. 2011. "A single Exposure to the American Flag Shifts Support toward Republicanism up to Eight Months Later." *Psychological Science* 22(8): 1011-1018.

- Davies, P. G., Steele, C. M., & Markus, H. R. 2008. "A nation challenged: The impact of foreign threat on America's tolerance for diversity." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95: 308–318.
- Ferguson, M. J., & Hassin, R. R. 2007. "On the automatic association between America and aggression for news watchers." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33: 1632–1647.
- Hamermesh, D., and J. Biddle. 1994. "Beauty and the labor market." *The American Economic Review* 84: 1174–1194.
- Hassin, R. R et al. 2007. "Subliminal exposure to national flags affects political thought and behavior." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104(50): 19757.
- Hassin, R., and Y. Trope. 2000. "Facing faces: Studies on the cognitive aspects of physiognomy." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78: 837–852.
- Kaufman, S. J. 2001. *Modern hatreds*. Cornell University Press.
- Kimmelmeier, M., and D. G Winter. 2008. "Sowing patriotism, but reaping nationalism? Consequences of exposure to the American flag." *Political Psychology* 29(6): 859–879.
- Kim, H. et al. 2007. "Temporal isolation of neural processes underlying face preference decisions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104(46): 18253.
- Lawson, C., Lenz, G., Baker, A., and M. Myers. 2010. "Looking Like a Winner: Candidate Appearance and Electoral Success in New Democracies." *World Politics*, 62(4).
- Lenz, G., and Lawson, C. 2011. "Looking the Part: Television Leads Less Informed Citizens to Vote Based on Candidates' Appearance" *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 574–589.
- Little et al. 2007. "Facial Appearance Affects Voting Decisions." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 28: 18-27.
- Lutz, G. 2010. "The Electoral Success of Beauties and Beasts." *Swiss Political Science Review* 16: 457-480.
- Malcolm, A. 2008. "Breaking News: Obama Caves! Flag Pin Returns to His Coat Lapel." *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/04/obamaflagpinlap.html> [Accessed December 28, 2009].

- Mattes, K., Spezio, M., Kim, H., Todorov, A., Adolphs, R., & Alvarez, R. M. 2010. "Predicting Election Outcomes from Positive and Negative Trait Assessments of Candidate Images." *Political Psychology*.
- Montepare, J. M., and L. A. Zebrowitz. 1998. "Person perception comes of age: The salience and significance of age in social judgments." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 30: 93–161.
- Morris, J. S. et al. 1996. "A differential neural response in the human amygdala to fearful and happy facial expressions." *Nature* 383: 812–815.
- Mueller, U., and A. Mazur. 1996. "Facial dominance of West Point cadets as a predictor of later military rank." *Social Forces* 74: 823–850.
- Olson, I. R., and C. Marshuetz. 2005. "Facial attractiveness is appraised in a glance." *Emotion* 5: 498–502.
- Oxley, D. R., Smith, K. B., Alford, J.R., Hibbing, M.V., Miller, J.L., Scalora, M., and P.K. Hatemi. 2008. "Political Attitudes Vary with Physiological Traits," *Science* 321: 1667-1670.
- Popkin, S. 1994. *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Redlawsk, D. P. 2002. "Hot Cognition or Cool Consideration? Testing the Effects of Motivated Reasoning on Political Decision Making." *The Journal of Politics* 64(04): 1021–1044.
- Rosenberg, S. W. et al. 1986. "The Image and the Vote: The Effect of Candidate Presentation on Voter Preference." *American Journal of Political Science* 30(1): 108-127.
- Rosenberg, S. W. et al. 1991. "Creating a Political Image: Shaping Appearance and Manipulating the Vote." *Political Behavior* 13(4): 345-367.
- Rosenberg, S. W., and Patrick M. McCafferty. 1987. "The Image and the Vote: Manipulating Voters' Preferences." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51(1): 31-47.
- Said, C. P, N. Sebe, and A. Todorov. 2009. "Structural resemblance to emotional expressions predicts evaluation of emotionally neutral faces." *Emotion* 9(2): 260–264.
- Schul, Y., Mayo, R., and E. Burnstein. 2004. "Encoding Under Trust and Distrust: The Spontaneous Activation of Incongruent Cognitions." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 86(5): 668–679.
- Spezio, M.L., Loesch, L., Gosselin, F., Mattes, K., and R.M. Alvarez. 2011. "Thin-slice Decisions Do Not Need Faces to be Predictive of Election Outcomes." *Political Psychology*,

forthcoming 2012.

- Spezio, M. L., Rangel, A., Alvarez, R. M., O'Doherty, J. P., Mattes, K., Todorov, A., et al. 2008. "A neural basis for the effect of candidate appearance on election outcomes." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 3(4): 344-352.
- Spisak, B. R., Homan, A. C., Grabo, A., & Van Vugt, M. 2011. "Facing the Situation: Testing a Biosocial Contingency Model of Leadership in Intergroup Relations Using Masculine and Feminine Faces." *The Leadership Quarterly*: forthcoming
- Straube, Thomas, Bernd Langhor, Stephanie Schmidt, Hans-Joachim Mentzel, and Wolfgang H.R. Miltner. "Increased amygdala activation to averted versus direct gaze in humans is independent of valence of facial expression." *Neuroimage* 49(3): 2680-2686.
- Todorov, A., Mandisodza, A. N., Goren, A., and Hall, C. C. 2005. "Inferences of competence from faces predict election outcomes." *Science* 308(5728): 1623.
- Tooby, J., and L. Cosmides. 1990. "The past explains the present: Emotional adaptations and the structure of ancestral environments." *Ethology and Sociobiology* 11(4-5): 375-424.
- Van Vugt, M. 2010. *Selected: Why some people lead, why others follows, and why it matters*. London: Profile Books.
- Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. 2008. "Leadership, Followership, and Evolution - Some Lessons from the Past." *American Psychologist* 63(3): 182-196.
- Verhulst, B., Lodge, M., and Lavine, H. 2010. "The Attractiveness Halo: Why Some Candidates are Perceived More Favorably than Others." *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 34: 111-117.
- Weisbuch-Remington, M., Mendes, W. B., Seery, M. D., & Blascovich, J. 2005. "The non-conscious influence of religious symbols in motivated performance situations." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31: 1203-1216.
- Zebrowitz, L. A., L. Voinescu, and M. A. Collins. 1996. "'Wide-eyed' and 'crooked-faced': Determinants of perceived and real honesty across the life span." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 22: 1258-1269.

Tables and Figures



Figure 1: Original candidate image (left) and modified image with lapel pin (right)

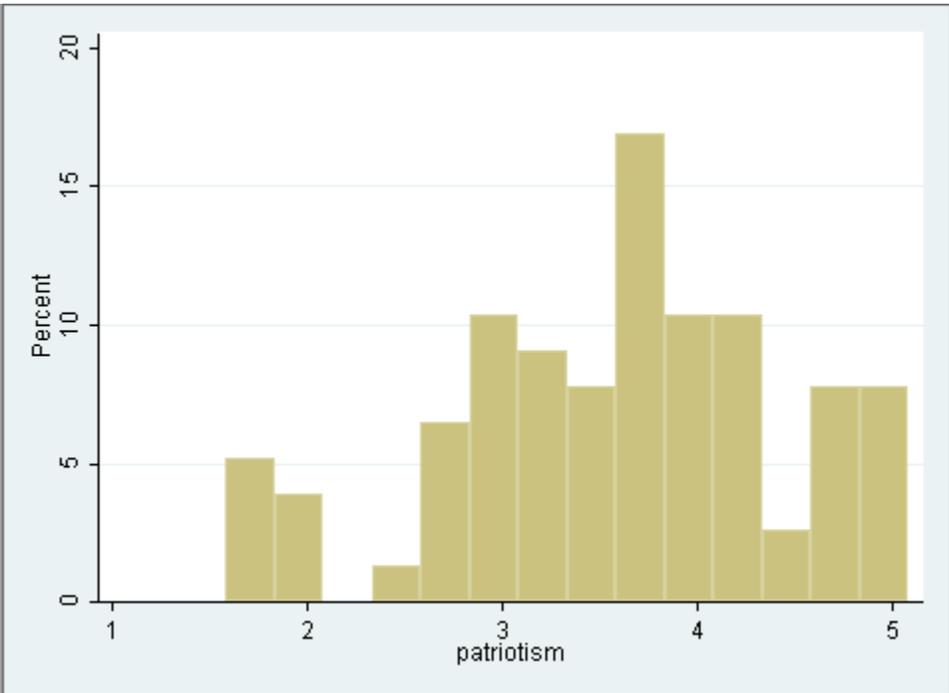


Figure 2: Histogram of research participants' patriotism scores

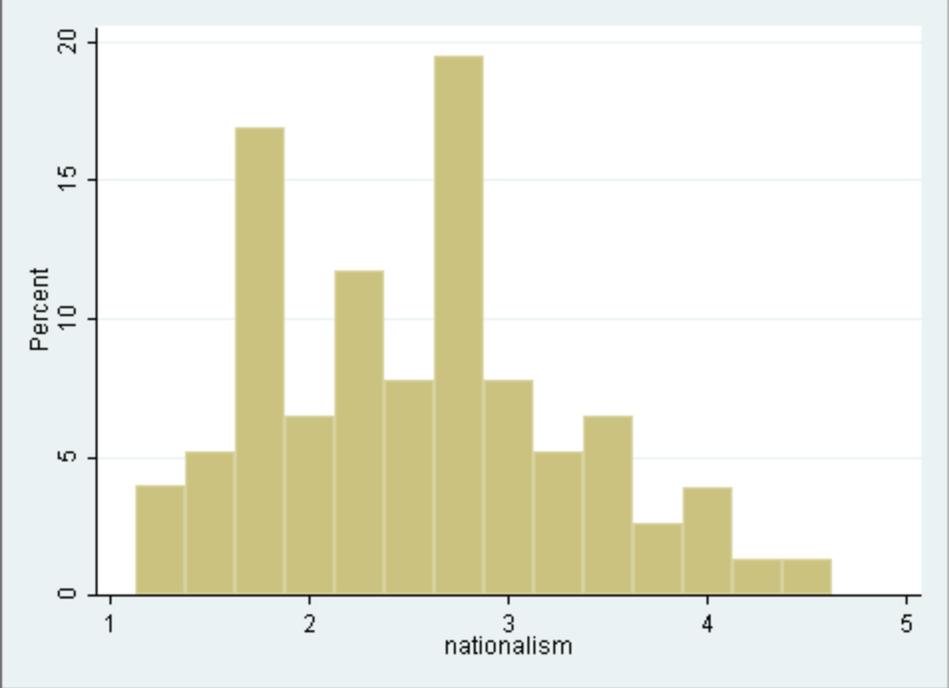


Figure 3: Histogram of research participants' nationalism scores

Table 1: Correlation between trait judgments

Traits	Winner With Lapel Pin	Loser With Lapel Pin
Positive–Positive		
Competence–Lab Vote	0.37***	0.37***
Competence–Patriotism	0.21***	0.22***
Lab Vote–Patriotism	0.25***	0.28***
Positive–Negative		
Competence–Threat	-0.14***	-0.19***
Patriotism–Threat	-0.08**	-0.10***
Lab Vote–Threat	-0.22***	-0.22***

Note: Numbers in cells represent Pearson’s correlation coefficients, *: p<0.10; **: p<0.05; ***:p <0.01 with Bonferroni correction.

Table 2: Logit Regression Predicting Election Outcomes

	Model (1)
Competent	0.47*** (0.10)
Threatening	-0.29*** (0.09)
Lab Vote	0.32*** (0.09)
Patriotic	0.58*** (0.09)
Constant	-0.47*** (0.08)
Observations	2640
Pseudo R ²	0.05
χ^2	118.30 p<0.001

Robust standard errors, adjusted for individual choice clustering, are in parentheses.

*: p<0.10; **: p<0.05; ***: p <0.01

Table 3: Percentage of trials choosing election winners

Judgment	This Study (2011)				Spezio et al. (2008)
	<i>Loser w/ pin</i>	<i>Winner w/pin</i>	χ^2 test	<i>Combined</i>	
Competence	59%***	59%***	$p=0.65$	59%***	55%*
Patriotism	55%***	64%***	$p<0.001$	59%***	n/a
Threat	42%***	46%***	$p=0.08^*$	43%***	43%*
Vote (in lab)	58%***	59%***	$p=0.87$	59%***	n/a
N	1365	1276	n/a	2641	450

*: $p<0.10$, **: $p<0.05$, ***: $p<0.01$. All columns other than the χ^2 column use a binomial test against choosing candidates with a 50% probability.

Table 4: Logit regression predicting trait judgments

	Model (2a) Competent	Model (2b) Threat	Model (2c) Lab Vote	Model (2d) Patriotic
Winner w/ lapel treatment	-0.08 (0.10)	0.15* (0.08)	-0.34 (0.11)	0.43*** (0.14)
Competent	n/a	-0.35*** (0.08)	1.32*** (0.13)	0.49*** (0.10)
Threatening	-0.35*** (0.09)	n/a	-0.70*** (0.12)	-0.7 (0.12)
Lab Vote	1.32*** (0.13)	-0.70*** (0.12)	n/a	0.85*** (0.15)
Patriotic	0.49*** (0.10)	-0.07 (0.12)	0.85*** (0.14)	n/a
Constant	-0.46*** (0.11)	0.34*** (0.11)	-0.56*** (0.11)	-0.55*** (0.13)
Observations	2640	2640	2640	2640
Pseudo R ²	0.11	0.04	0.14	0.06
χ ²	174.89 p<0.001	56.81 p<0.001	184.38 p<0.001	82.36 p<0.001

Robust standard errors, adjusted for individual choice clustering, are in parentheses.

*: p<0.10; **: p<0.05; ***: p<0.01

Table 5: Frequency of selecting the winning candidate, among research participants selecting the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic

Judgment	Winner With Lapel Pin	Loser With Lapel Pin	X² test p-value
Competence	65%	48%	< 0.001
Threat	44%	47%	0.176
Laboratory Vote	67%	44%	< 0.001

Table 6: Logit regression predicting trait judgments, among research participants selecting the candidate with the lapel pin as more patriotic

	Model (3a) Competent	Model (3b) Threat	Model (3c) Lab Vote
Winner w/ lapel treatment	0.41*** (0.13)	0.07 (0.14)	0.82*** (0.15)
Competent	n/a	-0.30** (0.13)	1.38*** (0.15)
Threatening	-0.30** (0.13)	n/a	-0.74*** (0.15)
Lab Vote	1.38*** (0.15)	-0.74*** (0.15)	n/a
Constant	-0.53*** (0.13)	0.35*** (0.13)	-0.61*** (0.15)
Observations	1436	1436	1436
Pseudo R ²	0.10	0.04	0.14
χ^2	127.83 p<0.001	35.29 p=0.033	130.09 p<0.001

Robust standard errors, adjusted for individual choice clustering, are in parentheses.

*: p<0.10; **: p<0.05; ***:p <0.01

Table 7: Correlations between patriotism/nationalism scores and trait judgments

Judgment	Patriotism Score	Nationalism Score
Competence	0.00	0.01
Threat	0.01	-0.02
Patriotism	0.02	0.02
Lab Vote	0.03	0.02

Note: Numbers in cells represent Pearson's correlation coefficients, * $p < 0.05$ with Bonferroni correction.

Table 8: Patriotism and threat judgments, by research participants' nationalism

Nationalism	Nationalism Score (mean)	Chose Candidate with Label as More Patriotic	Chose Election Winner as More Threatening
Lowest 25%	1.55	59%	50%
25%–50%	2.23	53%	41%
50%–75%	2.76	55%	44%
Highest 25%	3.60	49%	42%