



# Charisma at First Sight: Warmth and/or Competence?

Avner Caspi, Ronit Bogler, Eran Chajut

Department of Education and Psychology, Open University of Israel

## Background

Warmth and competence are two core dimensions of people social perception. Warm people are perceived as friendly, helpful, and cooperative, whereas competent people are perceived as intelligent, skilled, and efficient. Ideally, charismatic people are expected to be perceived as both warm and competent (Tskhay, et al., 2018), but the relationship of these perceived characteristics with the way we perceive political leaders' charisma is less obvious. Political leaders may be perceived as competent – having power or being smart, and warm – being likeable or attractive (Kinder, et al., 1980; Lee & Fiske, 2008), but occasionally they can be perceived as competent but not warm or vice versa. Political leaders' traits are perceived via different media (Lord & Maher, 2002), which may influence the way they are evaluated. In two experiments we tested how minimal information (names or short presentations) influenced the way participants evaluated political leaders' charisma, warmth and competence. So far, some researchers examined perceived warmth and/or competence of leaders (e.g., Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Sussman et al., 2013) while others tested perceived charisma (e.g., Tskhay, et al., 2017). As far as we know, no research has taken into consideration both. The present study main tenet was to search for the relations between perceived charisma, warmth and competence, in conditions when very minimal information about the leaders is given.

## Method

In experiment 1, 40 participants were given names of US and British political leaders', and evaluated their warmth, competence and charisma.

In experiment 2, 67 participants viewed 20 seconds clips of unfamiliar leaders giving a parliament speech and rated the leaders' charisma.

Charisma was measured using 3 items ("Displays a sense of power and confidence", "Acts in ways that builds respect", "Has a strong sense of purpose", average alpha = .75)

Warmth was measured by 3 items (likability, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, average alpha = .77)

Competence was measured using 2 items (competence and dominance, average alpha = .78)

## Experiment 1

	Trump	Obama	Bush	Clinton	May	Cameron	Brown	Blair
% Identification	95	97	77	90	45	51	15	47
Competent - Charisma	.745	.715	.870	.827	.869	.820	.836	.652
Warmth - Charisma	.652	.781	.806	.781	.849	.750	.794	.801
Warmth - Competent	.706	.746	.780	.727	.721	.668	.828	.779



## Experiment 2

	Edi Rama (Albania)	Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh)	Tshering Tobgay (Bhutan)	Kersti Kaljulaid (Estonia)	Alexis Tsipras (Greece)	Andrzej Duda (Poland)
% Identification	0	6	3	2	13	3
Competent - Charisma	.533	.450	.082	.373	.223	.194
Warmth - Charisma	.194	.045	.263	.227	.228	.100
Warmth - Competent	.394	.237	.515	.473	.259	.579



## Results

When forming an impression based on leaders' names (Exp. 1), irrespective of the participants' level of familiarity with the leader, the more the leader was perceived as charismatic, the more he or she was evaluated as both warm and competent. However, when impression was based on viewing unfamiliar leaders in action (Exp. 2), perception of charisma was distinctively associated with either competence or warmth, but never with both.

## Conclusions

The results of the current study suggest that acquiring more information about a leader refines the impression of the leader's traits, thus emphasizes the leader's prominent characteristics as either warm or competent.

## References

Benjamin, D. J., & Shapiro, J. M. (2009). Thin-slice forecasts of gubernatorial elections. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 91, 523-536; Kinder, D. R., Peters, M. D., Abelson, R. P., & Fiske, S. T. (1980). Presidential prototypes. *Political Behavior*, 2(4), 315-337. Lee, T. L., & Fiske, S. T. (2008). Social cognitive perspectives on leadership. In C. L. Hoyt, G. R. Goethals & D. R. Forsyth (Eds.) *Leadership at the crossroads*, Vol. 1, (pp. 101-115). Prague: Lord, R. G., & Maher, K. J. (2002). *Leadership and information processing: Linking perceptions and performance*. Routledge. Sussman, A. B., Petkova, K., & Todorov, A. (2013). Competence ratings in US predict presidential election outcomes in Bulgaria. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(4), 771-775; Tskhay, K. O., Zhu, R., & Rule, N. O. (2017). Perceptions of charisma from thin slices of behavior predict leadership prototypicality judgments. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(4), 555-562; Tskhay, K. O., Zhu, R., Zou, C., & Rule, N. O. (2018). Charisma in everyday life: Conceptualization and validation of the General Charisma Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 114(1), 131-152.