

It Takes a Survey: Understanding Gender Stereotypes, Abstract Attitudes, and Voting for Women Candidates

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Abstract

A significant body of previous research demonstrates that the public holds stereotyped views about the abilities and personal traits of women and men who run for office. However, because much of this work is based on experimental designs or hypothetical candidates, we have relatively little information about whether and how gender stereotypes matter in real election situations. In an effort to determine whether people draw on stereotypes in evaluating women in political life, we use data from a survey of people who experienced races for the U.S. House in 2010 in which women candidates ran against men. We analyze two sets of dependent variables—(a) abstract attitudes about women and men as candidates and officeholders and (b) vote choice in the actual House elections. In line with previous experimental work, we find that gender stereotypes are important to people's abstract evaluations of candidates and election situations. However, we find little evidence that gender stereotypes matter to the same degree in shaping vote choice decisions involving actual candidates.

Keywords

gender stereotypes, women candidates, gendered attitudes

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That women are significantly underrepresented in elective office in the United States is an undisputed fact (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP, 2013]). While there are several potential explanations for this reality that focus on gender differences in political ambition, the dearth of women candidates, and the continuing power of institutional structures and political parties (Fox, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2006), questions about public attitudes toward women candidates and officeholders remain an important part of the puzzle. Central here is a body of work that examines the presence of political gender stereotypes in the public mind and raises questions about the impact of these stereotypes on people's evaluations of women in the political system.

Research dating back to the 1970s demonstrates that people hold clear gender stereotypes about women and men in the political system. The bulk of this work has cautioned that the public can often be negative in evaluating women candidates on policy and trait dimensions. Yet, the small number of women candidates and officeholders serving during these years meant that scholars were limited in their ability to directly examine voter reactions to these women. As a result, much of the work on gender stereotypes has been conducted using experiments and hypothetical surveys. Until recently, the scholarly community had no appropriate data from which to examine public reaction to actual women candidates. However, as the number of women candidates and officeholders has grown steadily since the 1990s, a small body of research has begun to shift focus away from experiments and hypotheticals toward new sources of data that allow for a consideration of the way real voters evaluate actual women candidates who stand for election (Dolan, 2004; King & Matland, 2003). One consequence of this newer research is, of course, a deeper understanding of the real election situations that women face when they run. Another equally important consequence has been that we now have ways by which we can test the findings of experimental and hypothetical work to see whether voter gender stereotypes are a barrier to women's election. The project reported here seeks to contribute to this newer stream of work by examining whether and how actual voters use gender stereotypes when they are faced with women candidates running against men. In doing so, we provide an empirical test of the findings of earlier works on the impact of these stereotypes by using data from a two-wave panel survey conducted with a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults who voted in U.S. House races in which a woman ran against a man in 2010.

The Importance of Political Gender Stereotypes

Recent election cycles in the United States provide anecdotal evidence that the American public often approaches women in political life from a

gendered perspective. Whether it involved discussions of Hillary Clinton's lack of perceived warmth or Sarah Palin's looks in 2008, questions about Kelly Ayotte's young children in 2010, or a focus on Michele Bachmann's bright clothing in a sea of men wearing gray suits, it is clear that women candidates are still often viewed through a lens that is shaped by their sex.

Indeed, scholars have produced an impressive body of research that confirms that voters look at women candidates and women officeholders from a gendered perspective, ascribing certain stereotyped issue position competencies and personality characteristics to them. Women candidates and officeholders are generally viewed as more compassionate and honest than men, warmer and more expressive, and better able to deal with constituents such as citizens groups than men. Men are viewed as more competent, decisive, stronger leaders, and possessing a greater ability to handle a crisis (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Burrell, 2008; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Kahn, 1996; King & Matland, 2003; Lawless, 2004; Leeper, 1991; Paul & Smith, 2008; Sapiro, 1981/1982). Trait stereotypes are relevant because several studies have found that people evaluate the stereotyped masculine traits (experience, leadership) as more important in politics than the feminine traits (honesty, compassion), particularly as the level of elected office being considered rises from the local to the national level (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a; Lawless, 2004; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989).

People also stereotype women and men in terms of policy interest and competence. Women are assumed to be more interested in, and more effective in dealing with, issues such as childcare, poverty, education, health care, women's issues and the environment than are men, while men are thought to be more competent at dealing with economic development, military, trade, taxes, and agriculture (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Brown, Heighberger, & Shocket, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Koch, 1997; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). Beyond policy, several studies find that women are perceived as more liberal than men and that they are often perceived as more liberal than they actually are, based on objective measures of ideology (Koch, 2002, 2000; McDermott, 1997).

This literature also suggests that stereotypes can shape whether voters will choose or reject women candidates. Rosenthal's (1995) findings support the notion that people often favor candidates of one sex or the other based on their assumptions about what those candidates are like or what they will do in office. Sanbonmatsu's (2002) work on baseline gender preferences suggests that many people have an underlying preference to be represented by a woman or a man and that this predisposition is determined, in part, by gender stereotypes. This preference can combine with issue position preferences to move voters toward or away from a woman or man candidate. Koch (2002)

finds that the perceived liberalism of women candidates, particularly Democratic women, can pull them farther away from the average voter, which can result in these candidates losing votes.

Existing Data and Remaining Questions

The significant body of work on political gender stereotypes clearly suggests that voters begin their evaluations of candidates by noting their sex and making some set of stereotyped assumptions based on that information. It is also clear that these stereotyped evaluations are thought to hold the potential to influence people's willingness to vote for particular candidates. The cumulative weight of this research has been to suggest that gender stereotypes are an important piece of the public's evaluation of women candidates and that they have the potential to be more harmful than not to women's chances of election.

However, many of these studies share common data limitations. In part, because of the small number of women candidates and officeholders, research that examined gender stereotypes evolved with a reliance on experiments or hypothetical survey situations (Adams, 1975; Brooks, 2011; Brown et al., 1993; Eckstrand & Eckert, 1981; Fox & Smith, 1998; Fridkin, Kenney, & Woodall, 2009; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b, 1993a; King & Matland, 2003; Lawless, 2004; Leeper, 1991; McDermott, 1998; Rosenthal, 1995; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Sapiro, 1981/1982). The experimental literature has certainly provided a significant basis for understanding how candidate sex can influence people's thinking about women candidates. Experiments provide the important ability to isolate candidate gender and track its impact. At the same time, experiments are limited in the number of variables that can be considered and can only suggest to researchers what we might observe in the rich and complex environment of real world elections. While candidates in experiments can be made equivalent except for their sex, this is not true in the real world where candidates are the sum total of many different factors—their political party, incumbency status, their prior experience, the office they seek. Moreover, nonexperimental studies, usually mass-based surveys, rarely focus on actual elections, instead relying on hypothetical candidates and generic election match-ups (Brown et al., 1993; Dolan, 2010, 1997; Lawless, 2004; McDermott, 1998; Sanbonmatsu, 2002), leaving us to infer from these findings about how attitudes toward hypothetical candidates might work to shape attitudes about specific candidates.

The Importance of Information

Research that assumes an important role for gender stereotypes in the evaluation of women candidates is often derived from the theory that stereotypes

are a useful cognitive tool when people have limited information about people or objects in their world. Indeed, political scientists have examined the ways in which voters use cognitive heuristics in political decision making and have found these to be valuable shortcuts for the average person (Conover & Feldman, 1989; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Rahn, 1993). If people use stereotypes in the absence of information, it is not surprising that experiments and hypotheticals that restrict information to a focus on candidate sex can provide evidence of subjects' reliance on this sort of category-based processing. This artificiality in terms of information is the primary limitation of this experimental work. Indeed, examining real-world elections is required because elections and campaigns provide exactly the kind of additional information we might expect to blunt the impact of stereotypes on decision making (Fiske, 1998). The complexity of the electoral environment offers voters exposure to important informational cues beyond a candidate's sex, allowing voters to engage candidates as individuals, not merely as members of a group, which should result in less reliance on stereotypes. Primary among these additional cues are traditional political influences on vote choice such as political party, incumbency, and election context.

Therefore, while a significant body of research points to the importance of gender stereotypes in evaluating women candidates, methodological considerations require us to ask whether the findings of these works accurately portray the decisions real voters make. This requires empirical tests of these findings in more information-rich and realistic settings. Two recent studies demonstrate the use of this approach and reveal the gaps that can exist between experimental findings and the reality of elections. In an experimental examination of voter support for black women candidates, Philpot and Walton (2007) find that black women are much more likely to support these women candidates than are white women or men of any race. Yet, when they conduct an analysis of the vote support for black women candidates for the U.S. House in the 1990s and control for traditional influences on vote choice such as political party and incumbency, they find no significant relationship between sex and race and voting for black women. Highton (2004) tests the notion advanced by experimental research that white voters fail to support African American candidates for Congress by examining exit poll data in the 1990s. He finds very little evidence that white voters reject African American candidates. Key in both of these studies, of course, is the consideration of important election-specific political variables that aren't often included in experimental or hypothetical designs.

As the number of women who run for office has steadily increased since the early 1990s, researchers have had at their disposal greater opportunities to expand their consideration of the impact of gender stereotypes on elections by focusing on real-world elections (CAWP, 2013). While the

American National Election Studies (ANES) were not designed to examine issues of gender in elections, scholars such as Dolan (2004) and Koch (2002, 2000) have used these data to examine voter evaluations of women candidates for Congress. Both find somewhat mixed evidence of a role for stereotypes in evaluating these women. Fridkin and Kenney (2009) investigate whether and how gender stereotypes influence voter evaluations of incumbent U.S. Senators in 2006. Drawing on CCES data that asks voters to evaluate their senators along trait and issue dimensions, they find that women senators gained benefits from positive gender stereotypes (e.g., women are more honest than men), but male senators did not. This finding is interesting in light of the previous literature that often assumes that stereotypes will be negative for women candidates (Lawless, 2004). Other recent research has examined the interaction of party and gender stereotypes. Hayes (2011) finds that party stereotypes can work to limit the influence of gender stereotypes among respondents evaluating U.S. Senate candidates in 2006. Using ANES data, Winter (2010) explores how Americans have engaged gender stereotypes to develop gendered images of the two major political parties, resulting in what he describes as “masculine Republicans” and “feminine Democrats.”

Asking New Questions

While each of these articles is an important consideration of the role of political gender stereotypes in the real world and offers an improvement over the limitations of experimentation, none of them address what may be the most important political consideration, which is vote choice. If gender stereotypes are thought to be potentially damaging to women candidates, it is because of the concern that using stereotypes could result in voters failing to cast their votes for women. Past research has clearly demonstrated the presence of gender stereotypes in the public mind and has made assumptions about the impact that those stereotypes might have on the fortunes of women candidates. And yet, to date, we have no direct evidence of whether and how political gender stereotypes act to shape vote choice among people faced with a woman candidate running against a man. The project outlined here seeks to contribute to our understanding of political gender stereotypes in several important ways. First, it illustrates the importance of empirically testing the findings of experimental and hypothetical designs by demonstrating the gap between the impact of gender stereotypes on abstract attitudes and in real-world decision making. Second, it examines the impact of voter gender stereotypes on the key political variable of interest to candidates: vote choice in actual elections involving women and men candidates. Finally, it uses one of the first broad-based

surveys intentionally designed to examine gendered attitudes and their impact on women candidates in real elections in the United States.

Hypotheses

Based on previous work on the impact of stereotypes on support for women candidates, this project tests two expectations. The key difference between experimental hypothetical designs and real-world elections is the isolation of candidate sex and the absence of other important political variables in the former. Examining real election situations allows us to consider the impact of gender stereotypes alongside traditional political influences such as political party, incumbency, and competitiveness. In this project, we are able to do two things. First, our data allow us to examine the impact of political gender stereotypes on abstract attitudes about women in the political system and on vote choice. Examining abstract attitudes allows us to mimic the circumstances in experiments and hypothetical designs. Here, we hypothesize that gender stereotypes will be less likely to shape support for women candidates in real elections than in abstract electoral situations. Second, our data allow us to examine gender stereotypes in concert with other variables that are important in elections. Given the power of these traditional forces, we hypothesize that gender stereotypes will have a limited impact on vote-choice decisions when they are considered alongside a host of important political variables.

Data and Method

This paper draws on data that examines the impact of political gender stereotypes on vote choice in mixed-sex House races during the 2010 elections. During September and October/November of 2010, a two-wave panel survey of a representative sample of U.S. adults, funded by the National Science Foundation, was conducted in an online environment by Knowledge Networks.¹ The sample was drawn from 29 states and was stratified to include people who experienced either mixed-sex or single-sex races for statewide and federal offices. The first wave of the survey asked respondents a series of questions about gender stereotypes and support for women and men candidates in the abstract, while the second wave asked them for their vote choice between the specific women and men candidates in their races. These respondents experienced 91 mixed-sex House races (64 women Democrats and 27 women Republicans) in which a woman ran against a man across the 29 states in the sample (see the online appendix for a table of CDs represented in the sample of respondents).

Dependent Variables

Much of the existing work on stereotypes of women candidates relies on evaluations of hypothetical candidates and abstract electoral situations. To demonstrate the gap that can exist in findings drawn from abstract election situations and the real world and to test whether voters who hold stereotypes actually use them in real elections, we use measures that tap abstract support for women candidates and actual vote choice in House elections in which a woman ran against a man. There are two measures of abstract support for women in political life. The first asks respondents whether they have a baseline gender preference for candidates of one sex or another. The question is as follows: "If two equally qualified candidates of your party were running for office, one a man and the other a woman, do you think you would be inclined to vote for the man or the woman?" The second item asks respondents to identify the percentage of women and men officeholders in the respondent's ideal government: "In your opinion, in the best government the U.S. could have, what percent of elected officials would be men and what percent would be women?" This variable is recoded to reflect people's desire to see majority male government or their desire for parity/majority female government. The variable measuring support for actual women candidates represents vote choice in the House election in which respondents took part. This variable is coded to reflect whether the respondent voted for the woman or her male opponent for the House (see the online appendix for all measures and codes used in this analysis).

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables measure respondent political gender stereotypes, examining both policy and trait stereotypes. Drawing on many of the trait and issue competence items used in the experimental literature on political gender stereotypes (Burrell, 2008; Fridkin et al., 2009; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Koch, 1997; Lawless, 2004; Sanbonmatsu, 2002), the measures of policy and trait stereotypes include issues and characteristics that are considered male and female. The policy questions asked respondents whether they saw women or men as better able to handle different issues area or whether they saw no difference between the two. The male policy stereotypes measured here are crime, the economy, national security, immigration, and the deficit. Female policy stereotypes are education, childcare, health care, and abortion. The trait questions asked people whether women or men were more likely to possess a series of qualities or whether there was no difference between them. Stereotypical male trait measures include intelligence,

decisiveness, leadership, and experience. Female trait questions tap beliefs about honesty, compassion, ability to build consensus, and ability to change government. The individual stereotypes for policy and traits for each sex are combined to create variables that measure male policy stereotypes, female policy stereotypes, male trait stereotypes, and female trait stereotypes.²

Two other sets of independent variables are used here. The first is a series of variables that measure respondent characteristics. These include education, sex, age, race, and party identification. Party identification is treated in two ways. In the analysis of the abstract attitudes about women in politics, party identification is a 7-point scale with 1 = *strong Republican* and 7 = *strong Democrat*. In the analysis of vote choice, two party measures are included to reflect whether the respondent shares the party of the woman candidate (1) or not (0) or is an independent. The second set of variables measures important contextual realities of the elections and includes measures of race type (open seat), the incumbency status of the woman candidate, the competitiveness of the race, and campaign spending. For obvious reasons, this last set of variables is only included in the analysis of vote choice in House races.

In an attempt to determine the findings of experimental and hypothetical work on gender stereotypes at work in real elections, the analysis begins with a model that estimates respondent baseline gender preference and desire for parity of women and men in office as a function of the four measures of trait and policy stereotypes and the variables measuring demographic characteristics of the respondents. The next step in the analysis examines vote choice, modeling this variable as a function of the four stereotypes, respondent characteristics, and the race context variables. Because recent research suggests that political party can be important to how women candidates are evaluated (Hayes, 2011; King & Matland, 2003; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009), the analysis is conducted for all races involving a woman candidate who ran against a man and then separately for races in which a Democratic woman ran against a Republican man and for those in which a Republican woman ran against a Democratic man.

Analysis

The first step in the analysis is to test the hypothesis that gender stereotypes will be significantly related to abstract attitudes about women in political life. This analysis mimics the reliance on experimental isolation of gender or hypothetical references to women candidates that we often see in research on gender stereotypes. Here, we use the variables that ask respondents whether they have a baseline gender preference for candidates of one sex or another

Table 1. Attitudes Toward Women in Government.

	Baseline gender preference	Gender parity in government
Stereotypes		
Female policy	0.309** (0.09)	0.216* (0.10)
Male policy	-0.566*** (0.10)	-0.437*** (0.08)
Female trait	0.134 (0.12)	0.050 (0.13)
Male trait	-0.411*** (0.12)	-0.378*** (0.11)
Respondent characteristics		
Education	0.120 (0.06)	0.054 (0.06)
Woman	1.595*** (0.22)	0.120 (0.23)
Party ID	0.070 (0.06)	0.123* (0.06)
White	-0.686* (0.29)	-0.160 (0.26)
Age	0.009 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)
Constant	3.264* (1.61)	5.232*** (1.48)
Pseudo R ²	.28	.17
N	707	738

Note. This table contains logistic regressions for a baseline preference for women and preferring gender parity or a majority woman government. The analysis is restricted to respondents in mixed-sex House races. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 2-tailed test of significance.

and what percent of their ideal government would be composed of women and men as dependent variables. Table 1 reports the models that estimate each abstract dependent variable as a function of the four gender stereotypes and a series of respondent demographics.

As Table 1 clearly indicates, political gender stereotypes are strongly related to respondent abstract attitudes about women in elections. Three of the stereotypes—female policy, male policy, and male traits—are significantly related to each of the dependent variables. People who hold stereotyped attitudes about women's traditional areas of policy strength are significantly more likely to say that they would prefer a woman candidate when she runs against a man. Those who hold traditional stereotypes about male policy competence and male traits are less likely to say they would prefer a woman candidate. The same is true for people's ideas about the ideal gender balance in government. People who see women as better at handling stereotyped female policy issues are more likely to want parity or female-dominated government. People who hold male policy and trait stereotypes are more likely to report a desire for male-dominated government. Another thing to note here is the rather limited impact of political party on these

abstract attitudes. Party identification is not related to a baseline gender preference for women or men candidates at all. This finding is no doubt related to the question wording, which asks respondents whether they would have a preference between a man or woman candidate if both were of *their party*, thereby taking party ID out of consideration.³ In the question on support for greater gender parity in government, which has no party prompt, party ID is significant in the model, with Democrats more likely to support parity.

For ease of interpretation, Figure 1 provides another look at these findings, offering an illustration of the impact that moving from a counterstereotypic view to a stereotypic view has on the probability that a respondent will prefer a woman candidate or desire more gender balance in government. In the graph on baseline gender preference, the positive impact of holding female policy stereotypes on preferring a woman candidate is clear, but it is also clearly outweighed by the negative impact of male policy and trait stereotypes. The same is true for gender parity. People who hold female policy stereotypes are more likely to want more women in government, but the negative impact of male policy and trait stereotypes is still stronger. This analysis suggests that political gender stereotypes are important to people's attitudes about women candidates and women in government. Each of these findings is in the expected direction based on the stereotype and is consistent with previous work on the impact of stereotypes. Taken together, they illustrate the concerns that arise from earlier works as researchers suggest that women candidates can be hurt by the negative gender stereotypes that people hold.

However, this project argues that abstract examinations of attitudes toward women candidates are incomplete because they exclude all the traditional forces that generally influence vote choice in elections. If experimental and hypothetical work suggests that stereotypes are important to women candidates, it is at least reasonable for us to ask whether those stereotypes are still important when they are considered alongside other important political forces such as party identification and incumbency. To that end, Table 2 presents an analysis of vote choice in House races in which women ran against men. There are three models presented here. The first analyzes all the 91 House races together with vote for the woman candidate as the dependent variable. The second column presents the analysis of races in which a Democratic woman ran against a Republican man, and the third column presents vote choice for a Republican woman running against a Democratic man.

Looking at Column 1 first, we see that political gender stereotypes appear to have very little relationship to actual vote choice when respondents are faced with real candidates. Here, we see that three of the four measures of

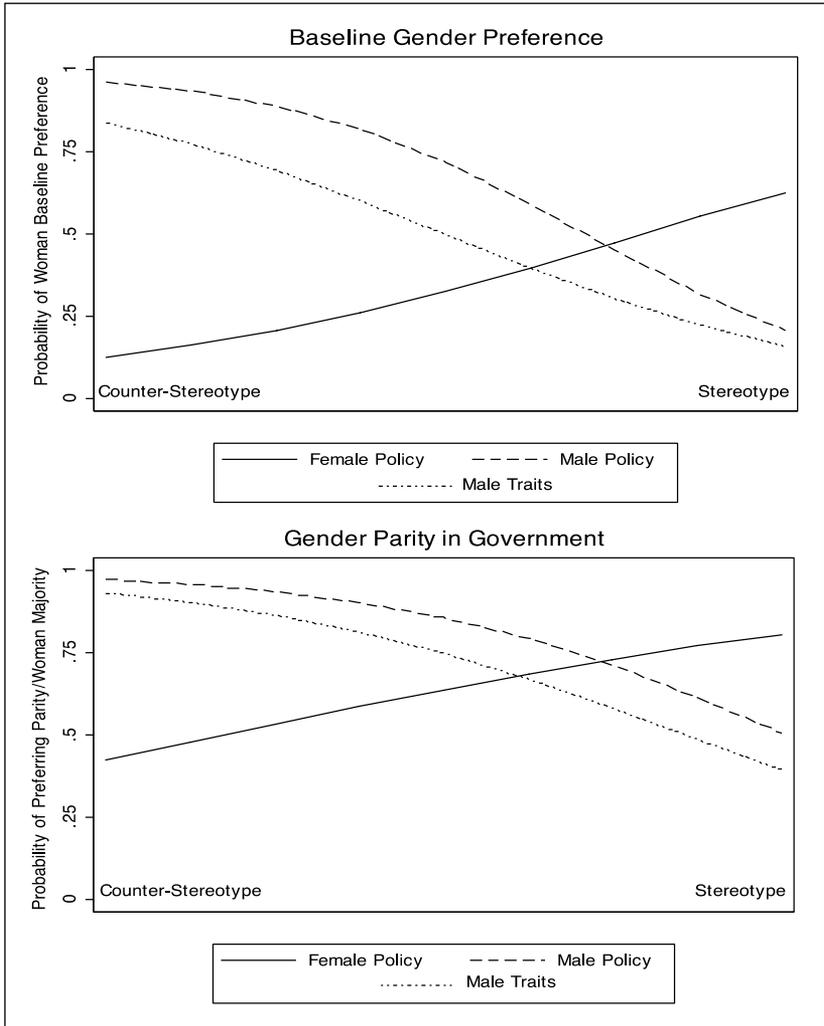


Figure 1. Baseline gender preference for women and support for parity in office.

stereotypes are not significant in the model. Female traits appear to have a relationship to vote choice, with those who hold traditional stereotypes about women's attributes being more likely to vote for the woman candidate. It is interesting to note here that female trait stereotypes were the only ones not significantly related to abstract attitudes and are the only ones related

Table 2. Vote for Woman Candidate, Mixed-Sex House Races.

	Woman candidate	Democratic woman candidate	Republican woman candidate
Stereotypes			
Female policy	-0.139 (0.10)	-0.012 (0.11)	-0.596* (0.24)
Male policy	0.024 (0.08)	0.019 (0.09)	0.095 (0.14)
Female trait	0.324** (0.12)	0.292 (0.15)	0.657* (0.26)
Male trait	0.004 (0.13)	-0.218 (0.12)	0.408 (0.21)
Respondent characteristics			
Education	0.093 (0.07)	0.232** (0.08)	-0.290* (0.14)
Woman	0.301 (0.24)	0.540 (0.30)	0.151 (0.51)
Share party affiliation	3.320*** (0.31)	2.930*** (0.37)	3.905*** (0.54)
Independent	1.310 (1.08)	0.282 (1.11)	—
White	-0.047 (0.37)	-0.723 (0.51)	1.827* (0.71)
Age	0.008 (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	0.025 (0.01)
District characteristics			
Woman incumbent	0.859 (0.64)	1.040 (0.77)	2.143 (1.26)
Open seat	0.103 (0.39)	0.122 (0.53)	0.756 (0.89)
Competitive race	-0.073 (0.32)	-0.231 (0.44)	0.322 (0.68)
Percent of spending by woman	0.924 (0.78)	1.046 (0.90)	-2.374 (1.95)
Constant	-5.708** (1.86)	-5.431* (2.28)	-6.219* (3.12)
Pseudo R ²	.41	.43	.53
N	688	469	219

Note. This table contains logistic regressions for vote choice in mixed-sex House races. Clustered standard errors are used in the woman candidate and Democratic woman candidate models. However, there are too few districts with Republican women candidates to calculate reliable standard errors using clustering. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 2-tailed test of significance.

to voting for women candidates in this first analysis. This may signal that people think about abstract situations through a different lens than they use when making vote choice decisions. At the same time, we should also note the strong and significant impact of political party on choosing to vote for a woman House candidate. Here, we see that people who share the party of the woman candidate are overwhelmingly likely to support the woman candidate, and respondents who don't share her party are not. Party is the strongest influence in the model, which is not surprising given what we know about the traditional influences on vote choice. However, it is evidence that these traditional influences operate as expected in the presence of women candidates.⁴

At first glance, female trait stereotypes seem to help shape vote choice in races where women run against men. However, the analysis in Columns 2 and 3 suggest that this is not a general influence. Indeed, when we look at support for women candidates based on the party of the woman, we again see evidence of the centrality of party. Column 2 demonstrates that stereotypes are not related at all to voting for Democratic women when they run against Republican men. The impact of female trait stereotypes seen in the analysis of all mixed-sex races disappears when we look at women Democrats. Here, again, we see that sharing the woman's party is the most important influence on that vote choice. However, Column 3, which examines vote choice for Republican women running against Democratic men, reminds us that, in the real world, women candidates are not all perceived in the same way. The political party of the woman candidate clearly matters to public decision making, as we see that two of the stereotype measures are significantly related to vote choice for Republican women. Here, we see that people who hold stereotypes about women's traditional strength in female policy areas are actually less likely to vote for Republican women for the House. It is clear that these women candidates are not being seen as holding the stereotyped strength that we ascribe to "women." This finding is most likely explained by the influence of political party stereotypes, because Republicans in general are not stereotyped to be strong on female issues. This would support Hayes' work (2011) that finds that party stereotypes can be more influential than gender stereotypes. The other significant stereotype relationship here involves traits. People who hold traditional stereotypes about female traits are more likely to vote for Republican women. It would appear that these women gained some advantage by being seen to possess female traits such as compassion and honesty. As the analysis in Table 2 suggests, the positive benefit that these women receive from being seen to possess female traits can work to balance out the support they lose from being seen as less competent on female policy issues. Yet, despite the role for stereotypes here, it is important to note that political party is still the most important influence on vote choice for Republican women, with people sharing their party being more likely to vote for them than other partisans. Figure 2 presents the relative impact of these stereotypes and party on vote choice for Republican women. Here, we see the clear superiority of party to predict support for these women. The top panel in the figure demonstrates that Democratic and Independent respondents are much less likely to vote for Republican women candidates regardless of their stereotyped attitudes. It is only when these respondents hold counterstereotypic evaluations on female policy (men as superior on these issues) and

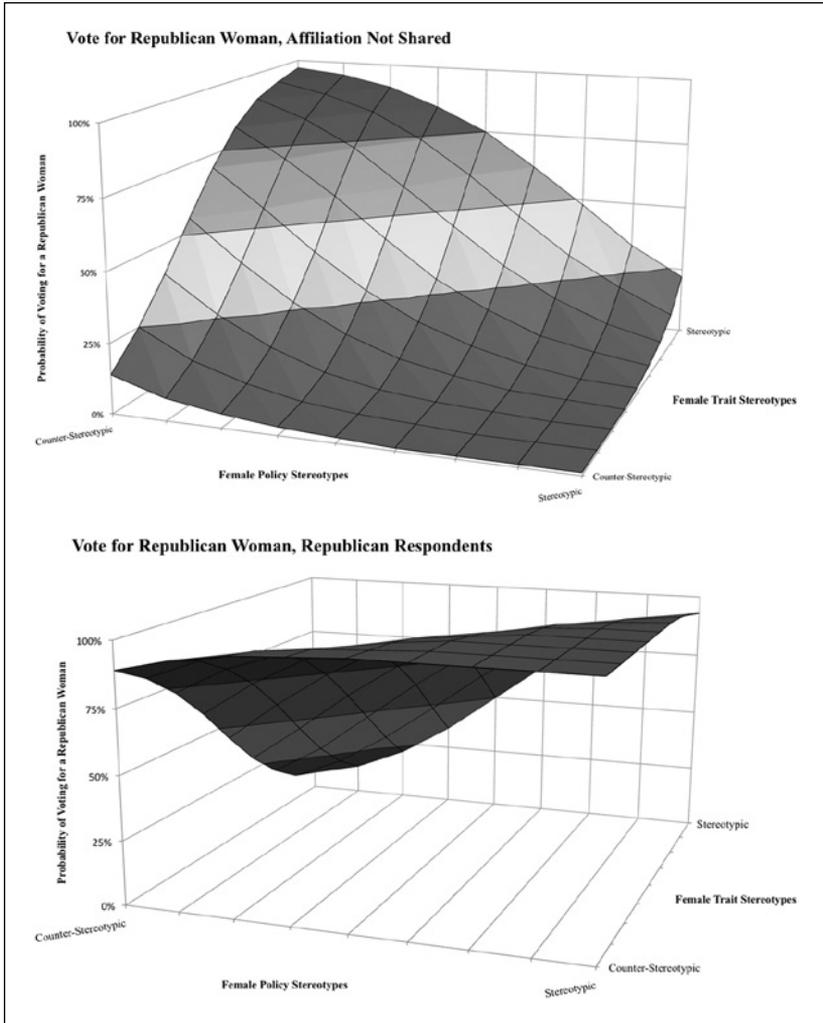


Figure 2. Vote choice for Republican women in mixed-sex House race.
 Note. All variables not represented in the figure are held at the mean value.

stereotypic attitudes on female traits (women more likely to possess) that they begin to consider voting for Republican women. Contrast this to the bottom panel in which the likelihood of Republican voters choosing a Republican woman is high, again, regardless of stereotypes.

One additional thing to take away from the analysis presented in Table 2 is that the finding that stereotypes matter differently based on the party of the woman candidate is in line with several studies that demonstrate the different experiences of Republican women candidates. This research, whether from experiments, surveys, or analysis of actual elections, clearly indicates that Republican women are differently situated in American politics from Democratic women and Republican men. In general, Republican women candidates for Congress since 1990 have drawn fewer votes and done less well in primaries than Democratic women candidates (King & Matland 2003; Lawless & Pearson, 2008). They are also evaluated as less conservative with regard to ideology and issue position than Republican men by Republican party identifiers (King & Matland, 2003; Koch, 2002; Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009). In fact, some research suggests that Republican women candidates are actually more appealing to Democratic and Independent voters than they are to Republican voters and that they tend to emerge as candidates in congressional districts that lean more Democratic than Republican (King & Matland, 2003; Ondercin & Welch, 2009). We agree with Koch (2002, 2000) that this is partly explained by the conflicting information that Republican women send to voters who must reconcile party and gender stereotypes that pull in different directions when evaluating these women. While Koch (2000) does suggest that Republican women being perceived as more moderate by voters can be of some benefit to them, on balance, this research suggests that we should more carefully consider the impact of party on the experiences of women candidates.

Taken together, the analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2 provides evidence for both of the hypotheses advanced. In line with the results of previous research, we demonstrate that several political gender stereotypes are significantly related to abstract or hypothetical attitudes that people have about women candidates and leaders. Indeed, this should not be surprising. People who are asked about their potential support for a “woman” or a “man” running for office don’t have much context beyond candidate sex on which to draw and may well resort to using stereotyped attitudes in making these sorts of evaluations. However, we know that the real world of politics doesn’t exist in a vacuum, but instead provides context that people can use to think about candidates. The analysis of House races in 2010 suggests that when these same respondents evaluate candidates in actual elections, they don’t treat those candidates as abstractions but instead draw on traditional political criteria in making vote-choice decisions. This is also the case when people make distinctions among women candidates by reacting to Democratic and Republican women differently. Using the respondents’ own gender stereotypes in different situations—abstract attitudes and actual

vote choices—confirms that people do use different decision-making criteria across different circumstances.

Conclusion

A significant body of research has pointed to evidence that political gender stereotypes exist in the minds of voters, but we have had less evidence that these stereotypes matter amid the competing influences in an actual election environment. The analysis presented here confirms that stereotypes are related to abstract attitudes about women in political life but cautions us before we assume that these relationships exist in the same way in the real world. Indeed, the analysis of vote choice in House elections in 2010 supports the hypothesis that gender stereotypes are not major forces but instead are, like many things, context-bound and episodic, appearing as significant in some races but not others. In addition, when stereotypes do have an impact, they are still not likely to override the importance of traditional political variables such as party. This would suggest that women candidates have less to fear from voter-gender stereotypes than more.

One result of this analysis should be that we expand our attempts to test the findings of previous research on the growing number of elections that include women candidates so that we can move away from the abstract whenever possible. Another area that bears more attention, based on these findings and other recent research, is the relationship between party and gender stereotypes. Stereotypes were not significantly related to voting for women Democratic candidates for the House in 2010 but played a role in races involving women Republicans. Given that party stereotypes are consistent with gender stereotypes for Democratic women and are inconsistent with gender stereotypes for Republican women, it may be the case that the impact of stereotypes is conditioned in important ways by the party of the woman candidate. Clearly, we need to continue investigating this important interaction.

We also need to continue to study the potential impact of gender stereotypes on other aspects of elections involving women candidates. Nothing in this project should be interpreted to suggest that gender stereotypes have no impact on elections, only that they do not appear to have an impact on vote choice. But there are other places where they might matter. Recent research by Lawless and Fox (2010) finds that women evaluate their potential as political candidates and the challenges of the political climate differently than men. If women are less likely to stand as candidates, we should examine whether stereotyped attitudes are a part of that equation. In addition, we should continue to examine the impact of campaigns and the media on the

fortunes of women candidates. Lawless and Hayes (2013) argue that media treatments of women candidates are becoming less stereotyped, and work by Bystrom, Banwart, Kaïd, and Robertson (2004) suggests that women can make efforts through their campaigns to neutralize the impact of negative stereotypes. Future research should expand our examinations of these real candidates and real electoral situations so that we have the clearest picture possible of the challenges and opportunities facing women candidates.

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Notes

1. The panel survey was administered by Knowledge Networks (KN) through their KnowledgePanel. Relying on a sampling frame that includes the entire U.S. telephone population, Knowledge Networks uses random digit dialing and probability sampling techniques to draw samples that are representative of the U.S. population. They provide, at no charge, laptops and free monthly Internet services to all sample respondents who don't already have these services, thereby overcoming the potential problem of samples biased against individuals without access to the Internet.
2. Male traits—intelligent, decisive, experienced, strong leadership (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$); female traits—honest, compassionate, able to build consensus, ability to change government (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$); male policy—crime, economy, national security, immigration, the deficit (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$); female policy—education, health care, child care, abortion (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$).
3. The question wording for each measure is as follows: Baseline gender preference—"If two equally qualified candidates of your party were running for office, one a man and the other a woman, do you think you would be more inclined to vote for the man or the woman?" Gender parity in government—"In your opinion, in the best government the U.S. could have, what percent of elected officials would be men and what percent would be women?"
4. We also ran the analysis in Table 2 with the measures of baseline gender preference and desire for gender parity in office as independent variables. Neither measure is significantly related to voting for women House candidates and does not alter the findings presented here. In addition, readers may note the absence of an influence of incumbency here. Alternate analysis indicates that this is because

of the collinearity between incumbency and candidate spending.

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