Issue Saliency and Gender Stereotypes: Support for Women as Presidents in Times of War and Terrorism*

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Objective. This article examines how issue saliency affects the public's perceptions of whether a man or a woman would make a better president when considering the most important problem facing the nation. *Method.* The study uses telephone survey data of adults in the United States collected by the Annenberg Public Policy Center in September 2003. Multinominial logistic regression models were conducted to parse out the effects of issue saliency on presidential gender preference while taking demographic characteristics and party identification into account. *Results.* People who said that terrorism, homeland security, and/or U.S. involvement in Iraq was the most important problem facing the nation were more likely to say that a man would do a better job handling the issue as president. *Conclusion.* This study finds that issue saliency affects presidential gender preference above and beyond demographic and party identification variables.

During the 1984 election when Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro appeared on "Meet the Press," she was asked: "[D]o you think that in any way the Soviets might be tempted to try to take advantage of you simply because you are a woman?" (Jamieson, 1995:107) and "Are you strong enough to push the button?" (Braden, 1996:110). The questions reflected both the security concerns of the 1980s and the stereotype that men are better at protecting the nation than are women. In this study, we examine how such underlying stereotypes in conjunction with current events may affect attitudes about women in the presidency.

Top-line poll results demonstrate that there has been an immense change in attitudes about women in the presidency over the last 70 years. In fact, the percentage of people saying they support a woman president has roughly kept pace with the year. When respondents were asked in 1937 if they

would support a woman who ran for president (if she were qualified in every other respect) just 33 percent said they would (Gallup, 1937). In 1996, 91 percent of the public said they would vote for a woman for president (if her party nominated her) (General Social Survey, 1996). Despite the appearance of a linear trend toward greater acceptance of women presidential candidates, a closer analysis shows a more complex picture. Attitudes about women in leadership are not simply linear and progressive. They are affected by current events, extant stereotypes, and perceptions of women's and men's strengths.

Using National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) data collected between December 14, 1999 and January 27, 2000, a recent study on attitudes about gender and the presidency revealed comparable levels of support for believing that a woman or a man would do a better job as president in handling the national problem considered most important by the respondent (Kenski and Falk, 2004:65). One-quarter of respondents (25.6 percent) said that a male president would do a better job, one-quarter of respondents (25.3 percent) said that a female president would do a better job, and nearly half of respondents (49.1 percent) either said that gender would not make a difference in handling the most important national issue or that they did not know whether a male or a female would do a better job. At that time, "[t]he top five most important issues were: crime and justice (20.7%), values and morality (15.8%), economic inequality (10.7%), politics and government (9.6%), and health care (5.4%)." Defense and foreign affairs did not make the top five concerns as only 4.5 percent of respondents named them.[1]

Since that study was conducted, the public's concern about foreign policy and military security has been heightened due to the events of September 11, 2001 and the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Given that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon occurred on U.S. soil, Americans' attitudes toward politics and U.S. involvement in foreign affairs have changed significantly. The salience of foreign affairs in the American psyche combined with the reality that Americans can be targeted inside U.S. borders suggests that prior assumptions about attitudes toward women as candidates should be revisited. In the current study, we examine changes in support for a female versus male president using national data collected in September 2003. Results show that issue saliency affects presidential gender preference above and beyond demographic and party identification variables. Citing terrorism, homeland security, and/or U.S. involvement in Iraq as the most important problem facing the nation is significantly associated with being more likely to say that a male president would do a better job handling the national issue most important to the respondent.

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[1]We calculated this percentage using the same segment of NAES data as the Kenski and Falk (2004) study. See Romer et al. (2004) for a copy of the 2000 NAES data.

Literature Review

A wide variety of demographic and political characteristics have been shown to affect attitudes about women in office. Among the variables demonstrated to predict attitudes about women candidates, sex has been the best documented (Sigelman and Sigelman, 1982; Engel, 1984; Spohn and Gillespie, 1987; Brown, 1994; Paolino, 1995; Dolan, 1996; Plutzer and Zipp, 1996; Dolan, 1997a, 1997b; Deloitte & Touche, 2000; Dolan, 2004). Other variables that predict support for women candidates generally, and the presidency specifically, include greater support among the more educated (Welch and Sigelman, 1982; Huddy, 1994; Dolan, 1996), the younger, (Welch and Sigelman, 1982; Brown, 1994; McDermott, 1998), and those who attend church less frequently (Welch and Sigelman, 1982). Nonwhites appear to prefer women in government more so than do whites (Brown, 1994; Dolan, 1996).

Whether and how party affiliation affects attitudes about women is less clear, with some studies showing party identification to be significant (McDermott, 1998; Deloitte & Touche, 2000), and others finding no such effect (Welch and Sigelman, 1982; Dolan, 1997a). Ideology has also been found to affect attitudes about women in office, with liberals being more supportive (McDermott, 1998). In addition, several authors have noted that attitudes about legislators and attitudes about governors may differ, with people being less supportive of women as top executives (Tolleson-Rinehart and Stanley, 1994; Kahn, 1996).

Many have argued that stereotypes affect how people regard women leaders (e.g., Tolleson-Rinehart and Stanley, 1994; Jamieson, 1995; Norris, 1997; Wilson, 2004). The Deloitte & Touche (2000) survey found a greater percentage of the public had more confidence in men's ability to handle the issues they identified as the most important. ''On the top rated issue of law and order, a slim plurality of Americans (42%) believes that a man would do a better job as president than a woman . . . only 14% expect that a female president would do a better job'' (Deloitte & Touche, 2000:27). Though terrorism and war were not among the top agenda items when the survey was done in 2000, men were favored on foreign policy, with 45 percent of the public expressing a preference for a man and only 15 percent preferring a woman (Deloitte & Touche, 2000).

Women, by contrast, were favored on issues judged as less critical. Respondents said ''a woman would do a better job than a man would when it comes to social issues such as education, poverty and homelessness'' (Deloitte & Touche, 2000:27). Other studies have yielded similar results (Rosenwasser and Dean, 1989; Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Brown et al., 1993; Brown, 1994; Matland, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Iyengar et al., 1997; McDermott, 1998). However, based on her analysis of real-world elections, Dolan (2004) cautioned that issues have much less effect on voting for women than do party identification and incumbency.

An experiment by Gordon and Miller (2003:150) showed a slightly different outcome than most that deal with issue competencies. They found that "candidates received similar evaluations on their competence to deal with most issues . . . They were seen as equally able to handle the economy and jobs, education, health care, Social Security, and the environment . . . international affairs in general or terrorism." However, even this study found "subjects had a difficult time imagining a woman as commander in chief of the military" (Gordon and Miller, 2003:150). Other studies have shown women could be seen as competent in domains considered traditionally masculine (Leeper, 1991).

One reason that men may be preferred over women when it comes to national security is that many people believe that women are more liberal than men. Several studies document that especially under low-information voting conditions, voters stereotype women as more liberal (e.g., McDermott, 1997; Koch, 2000). Women may also be perceived as lacking qualities such as leadership and decisiveness that may be considered of utmost importance when dealing with issues of national security. For example, research psychologist Sandra Bem (1987) found that when subjects were asked to choose which adjectives they thought were more desirable in men, the traits included: leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, makes decisions easily, willing to take a stand, dominant, and forceful. Other studies show that in contrast women are believed to be more warm, compassionate, and ethical (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Kahn, 1996). Sanbonmatsu (2003:587) found that believing that men were more emotionally suited to politics was positively related to believing that men would also do better at handling stereotypically male domains such as crime and foreign affairs. The author concluded that "voter stereotypes about the issue competency of male and female candidates may be more enduring than stereotypes about political positions. . . . issue competency stereotypes are a product of long-standing stereotypes of the typical man and woman in society" (see also Huddy, 1994).

Hence we can say that stereotypes affect attitudes about leadership in many ways. Stereotypes about traits (e.g., women are more compassionate), stereotypes about political ideology (e.g., women are more liberal), and stereotypes about emotional strength (e.g., women are weaker) may all contribute to the attitude that women would not perform as well as men in handling issues of terrorism and security.

Coverage of current events may affect assessments of women running for office. Agenda-setting theory suggests that the media affect what issues the public identifies as important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Priming theory goes farther, predicting that those issues that receive more coverage will have a greater effect on the criteria by which people judge their elected officials. In other words, if terrorism is frequently mentioned in the news, then a greater proportion of the variance in respondents' attitudes about a candidate or incumbent will be comprised of

their attitudes about terrorism. Such theories lead Kahn (1996:2) to conclude that "[w]hen the salient issues and traits of the campaign complement a woman candidate's stereotypical strength, women will receive an advantage from stereotypes. In contrast, when the important campaign themes correspond to a woman's perceived weaknesses, people's stereotypes will hinder her bid for office."

In the current study, we examine how concerns over terrorism, homeland security, and/or U.S. involvement in Iraq affect presidential gender preference when considering the national issue most important to the respondent. We suspected that gender stereotypes being what they are, male presidents would be preferred over female candidates in larger percentages in the post-September 11 era than prior to it. We also hypothesized that selecting terrorism, homeland security, or U.S. involvement in Iraq as the most important problem facing the nation would be highly predictive of desiring a male president above and beyond demographic and party identification variables. In addition, we also assumed that those respondents who believed that going to war with "Iraq was worth it" would be more inclined to contend that a male president would do a better job handling the most important problem facing the nation even after controlling for demographic and party identification variables.

Methods

A telephone survey of adults in the United States was conducted September 3–10, 2003 and commissioned by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The sample contained 702 cases. To more accurately reflect the composition of the population, the data were weighted by gender, age, race, education, and region of country.[2] Respondents were asked a series questions about political issues and impressions, party identification, and demographic characteristics. The cooperation rate was 54.8 percent.

Independent Variable

Five demographic variables and three political variables were taken into consideration. The demographic variables included sex, age, race, ethnicity, and education. Females composed 52.4 percent of the weighted sample. The

[2]The unweighted sample was composed of 55.3 percent women. The average age was 47.49 years (Mdn = 47, $SD = 16.08$). Of respondents, 81.5 percent described themselves as white, 10.1 percent said black, 8.4 percent gave some other racial identification, and 7.1 percent identified themselves as Hispanic. By region, 19.8 percent of respondents came from the northeast, 23.5 percent came from the midwest, 35.8 percent of respondents came from the south, and 20.9 percent came from the west.

average age of respondent was 45.21 years (Mdn = 43, SD = 17.24). When asked about their racial identification, 78.5 percent of respondents said that they were white, 11.2 percent said that they were African American, and 10.4 percent named some other type of racial identification. A dummy variable was created to compare blacks (1) to nonblacks (0). On ethnicity, 11.3 percent of respondents in this sample described themselves as Hispanic (1 = Hispanic, 0 = non-Hispanic).

To assess educational levels, respondents were asked what grade level of education they had last completed in school. The responses were placed into one of nine categories (e.g., technical or vocational school after high school, four-year college degree, etc.). We assigned a years-of-schooling value to each category. For example, those who said that they received a high school diploma or equivalent were assigned a value of 12. The mean education level was 13.44 years of education (Mdn = 14, SD = 2.46).

Respondents were asked about their party identification with the following question: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent or something else?" Of respondents, 30.1 percent said that they were Republicans, 34.0 percent said they were Democrats, 23.7 percent said they were Independents, 4.1 percent named some other party, 3.8 percent said they voted for the person, and 4.2 percent did not know. Republicans and Democrats were asked a follow-up question about whether they considered themselves a "strong" or "not a very strong" party member. All other respondents were asked whether they leaned toward the Republican or Democratic parties. These responses were recoded into a seven-point scale where 1 = strong Republican, 2 = weak Republican, 3 = lean Republican, 4 = did not lean toward or identify with major parties, 5 = lean Democrat, 6 = weak Democrat, and 7 = strong Democrat.

Respondents were also asked what they felt was the most important problem (MIP) facing the country today. Their responses were coded into several categories. We looked at responses dealing with terrorism, homeland security, and U.S. involvement in Iraq (1 = said terrorism, homeland security, and/or the war in Iraq was the MIP, 0 = named some other issue) and economy (1 = said the economy, taxes, and/or unemployment was the MIP, 0 = named some other issue). While 28.2 percent named terrorism, homeland security, and/or the war in Iraq as the most important problem facing the nation, 34.1 percent said that the economy was the MIP. These issues were the top concerns of survey participants. Although foreign policy is a domain in which gender stereotypes would give men the edge, it is no longer clear that the economy is a topic in which men dominate perceptions of competency. The three next most important issues trailed far behind terrorism and the economy: lack of religion, faith, moral values, and/or family values (6.8 percent), politicians and government (6.7 percent), and crime, violence, and/or drugs (4.5 percent).

A random half of survey participants were also asked about their feelings toward U.S. involvement in Iraq with the question: "All in all, do you think the situation in Iraq was worth going to war over, or not?" Of respondents, 60.3 percent said that going to war was worth it; 39.7 percent said it was not. It should be noted that due to the fact that only a random half of respondents received this question, analyses using this question have reduced sample sizes.

Dependent Variable

This study focuses on responses to a question about which gender would do a better job as president. Survey participants were asked: "Thinking about the national issue that is most important to you, all other things being equal, would a male or a female president do a better job handling that issue?" This question was asked immediately after the most important problem question. Of respondents, 30.6 percent said that a male president would do a better job, 15.4 percent said that a female president would do a better job, and over half of respondents (54.0 percent) either said they did not know whether a male or female would do a better job or said that gender would not make a difference in handling the national issue most important to the respondent.

Analytical Procedures

To determine bivariate associations between the dependent and independent variables, cross-tabulations were conducted. Because independent variables may share variation in their associations with the dependent variable under consideration, a multivariate model was needed to assess the unique contribution each independent variable made on presidential gender preference in handling the national issue most important to the survey participant. Multivariate analyses were conducted with multinomial logistic regression models, which allow for dependent variables that contain more than two nominal categories.

Results

Cross-tabulations between presidential gender preference and the independent variables under consideration revealed several significant associations (shown in Tables 1 and 2). As shown in Table 1, women were slightly more likely than men to say that a woman would do a better job as president, as we expected. Counter to our expectations, they were also more likely to say that a man would do a better job. Men, however, were 9.0

TABLE 1

Presidential Gender Preference by Demographic Variables
(Row Percentages Given)

Male or Female President Better at Handling Most Important Problem			
	Male	Female	No Diff./DK	Total
Gender				
Male	28.6%	12.7%	58.7%	332
Female	32.5%	17.8%	49.7%	366
	Chi-square = 6.443, df = 2, p = 0.040			
Age				
18–34	33.0%	14.9%	52.1%	215
35–50	27.0%	17.8%	55.2%	241
51–64	29.9%	14.2%	55.9%	127
65 plus	34.8%	11.6%	53.6%	112
	Chi-square = 4.564, df = 6, p = 0.601			
Race				
White	30.7%	12.2%	57.0%	547
African American	23.4%	28.6%	48.1%	77
Other	37.0%	26.0%	37.0%	73
	Chi-square = 25.093, df = 4, $p < 0.001$			
Ethnicity				
Hispanic	40.5%	16.5%	43.0%	79
Not Hispanic	29.2%	15.3%	55.4%	619
	Chi-square = 4.955, df = 2, p = 0.084			
Education				
High school diploma or less	33.3%	16.8%	49.8%	333
Voc. school, some college, associates degree	33.2%	13.7%	53.2%	190
Four-year college degree or graduate school	22.7%	14.8%	62.5%	176
	Chi-square = 9.066, df = 4, p = 0.059			

percent more likely than women to say that neither gender would be better or that they did not know.[3]

Counter to our assumptions, age was not significantly associated with presidential gender preference. Consistent with previous research (Brown, 1994; Dolan, 1996, 1997a), African Americans were 16.4 percent more likely than whites to state that a female president would do a better job.

[3]We investigated the role that sex of interviewer played in eliciting a different set of responses from men than from women. Male respondents were more likely to tell male interviewers than female interviewers that a female president would do a better job. Female respondents, however, were more likely to tell male interviewers than female interviewers that a male president would do a better job. Although the sex-of-interviewer effects are interesting, we have opted not to include sex of interviewer in our multivariate models because the variable did not change the impact of the primary variables in our study: most important problem and Iraq being worth it.

TABLE 2

Presidential Gender Preference by Political Attitude Variables
(Row Percentages Given)

Male or Female President Better at Handling Most Important Problem			
	Male	Female	No Diff./DK	Total
Party Identification				
Republican	48.3%	6.2%	45.5%	209
Democrat	22.2%	22.6%	55.1%	234
Independent	22.0%	16.5%	61.6%	164
Other	27.6%	24.1%	48.3%	29
Vote for the person	33.3%	7.4%	59.3%	27
Don't know	20.7%	13.8%	65.5%	29
	Chi-square = 59.796, df = 10, *p* < 0.001			
MIP: Economy				
Yes	25.1%	15.2%	59.7%	231
No	33.6%	15.2%	51.1%	446
	Chi-square = 5.691, df = 2, *p* = 0.058			
MIP: Terrorism/Iraq/Homeland Sec.				
Yes	42.3%	12.7%	45.0%	189
No	26.2%	16.2%	57.6%	488
	Chi-square = 16.589, df = 2, *p* < 0.001			
Iraq Worth It				
Yes	38.6%	8.5%	52.9%	189
No	17.6%	24.0%	58.4%	125
	Chi-square = 23.798, df = 2, *p* < 0.001			

Whites were 8.9 percent more likely than African Americans to contend that gender made no difference and were 7.3 percent more likely than African Americans to contend that a male president would do a better job. Ethnicity was marginally associated with presidential gender preference as Hispanics were 11.3 percent more likely than non-Hispanics to state that a man would do a better job as president in handling the most important problem.

Education also had a marginally significant relationship with the dependent variable. Although the differences between educational groups were minimal when it came to preferring a female president, those respondents who reported having a four-year college degree or more were 12.7 percent more inclined to contend that neither gender would be better as president in handling the most important national issue when compared to those respondents with a high school degree or less. Those with a high school education or less were 10.6 percent more inclined to prefer a male president than those with a four-year college degree or more.

Independents were more likely than Democrats and Republicans to say that gender of the president did not make a difference when it came to handling the most important problem facing the nation, as demonstrated in Table 2. Democrats were 16.4 percent more likely than Republicans and

TABLE 3

Multinomial Logistic Regression Models Predicting Presidential Gender Preference

	Model 1						Model 2						Model 3					
	Male (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)			Female (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)			Male (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)			Female (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)			Male (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)			Female (1) Versus No Difference/Don't Know (0)		
	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)	B (SE)	Wald	Exp(B)
Constant	1.260* (0.608)	4.292		−0.456 (0.769)	0.352		0.922 (0.634)	2.117		−0.038 (0.792)	0.002		−0.159 (1.057)	0.023		0.980 (1.266)	0.600	
Female	0.300# (0.181)	2.729	1.349	0.407# (0.233)	3.054	1.502	0.259 (0.186)	1.940	1.296	0.461# (0.240)	3.680	1.585	0.381 (0.282)	1.823	1.463	0.624# (0.368)	2.884	1.867
Age	0.000 (0.005)	0.007	1.000	−0.011 (0.007)	2.383	0.989	0.000 (0.005)	0.001	1.000	−0.012 (0.007)	2.686	0.988	−0.011 (0.009)	1.414	0.989	−0.033** (0.013)	6.944	0.967
Black	0.302 (0.325)	0.859	1.352	0.527# (0.319)	2.731	1.693	0.255 (0.327)	0.609	1.291	0.485 (0.323)	2.247	1.624	0.649 (0.523)	1.537	1.913	0.627 (0.533)	1.383	1.873
Hispanic	0.830** (0.280)	8.790	2.294	0.202 (0.367)	0.303	1.224	0.912*** (0.285)	10.231	2.488	−0.157 (0.407)	0.148	0.855	1.142** (0.429)	7.096	3.132	0.092 (0.618)	0.022	1.097
Education	−0.087* (0.038)	5.332	0.916	−0.108* (0.047)	5.246	0.897	−0.080* (0.039)	4.260	0.923	−0.128** (0.049)	6.977	0.880	−0.030 (0.060)	0.242	0.971	−0.120 (0.075)	2.552	0.887
Party ID (1 to 7)	−0.254*** (0.045)	31.794	0.775	0.174** (0.061)	8.026	1.189	−0.230*** (0.046)	24.903	0.795	0.176** (0.064)	7.594	1.192	−0.119 (0.076)	2.486	0.888	0.084 (0.100)	0.705	1.088
MIP: Economy							−0.039 (0.225)	0.030	0.962	−0.205 (0.268)	0.586	0.815	−0.095 (0.350)	0.074	0.909	0.668 (0.421)	2.521	1.950
MIP: Terrorism/ homeland security/Iraq							0.631** (0.224)	7.956	1.879	−0.226 (0.306)	0.544	0.798	0.418 (0.331)	1.594	1.519	0.334 (0.469)	0.507	1.397
Iraq worth it (1 = yes, 0 = no)													0.572# (0.333)	2.949	1.771	−0.764* (0.386)	3.924	0.466
N	688						668						303					
Percent classified correctly	57.1						57.8						57.6					
Cox & Snell R^2	0.117						0.132						0.165					
Nagelkerke R^2	0.136						0.154						0.193					

#$p \leq 0.10$; *$p \leq 0.05$; **$p \leq 0.01$; ***$p \leq 0.001$.

6.1 percent more likely than Independents to say that a female president would do a better job. Republicans were 26.1 percent more likely than Democrats and 26.3 percent more likely than Independents to favor a male president in handling the MIP. These associations were significant at the 0.001 level as demonstrated by the chi-square test.

Looking at the responses to the most important problem questions, we compared individuals who said that terrorism, homeland security, and/or Iraq was the most important problem to those who gave some other response. Although 42.3 percent of respondents who said that terrorism, homeland security, and/or Iraq was the most important problem contended that a man would do a better job as president, 26.2 percent of respondents who gave some other MIP response also said that a man would do a better job—a difference of 16.1 percent. A two-sample proportion comparison revealed that these differences were significant at the 0.001 level. We also compared the responses of those who said that the economy was the most important problem to those who did not, but the results were only marginally significant. Although 25.1 percent of respondents who selected the economy as the most important problem said that a man would do a better job as president, 33.6 percent of those selecting another issue also gave the same presidential gender preference. The "economy" versus "some other issue" groups were not different when it came to the stating that a woman would do a better job.

We compared presidential gender preference by support for U.S. involvement in Iraq. Among those who felt that going to Iraq was worth it, 38.6 percent said a man would do a better job as president while only 8.5 percent said that a woman president would do better. Among those who said that going to Iraq was not worth it, however, only 17.6 percent said that a male president would do a better job and 24.0 percent said that a female would do a better job. Two-sample proportion comparisons showed that these differences were highly significant with $p < 0.001$.

To investigate the contributions that each of these independent variables made when taking the other variables into account, we performed multinomial logistic regressions. Our first model included five demographic variables and party identification. Our second model added two dummy variables created from the most important problem responses on terrorism/homeland security/Iraq and economy. Our third model included whether respondents thought that U.S. involvement in Iraq was worth it.

In the first two models, gender, ethnicity, and education were significant predictors of presidential gender preference. When taking other factors into consideration, male respondents were more likely than female respondents to say that gender of the president made no difference. Even when controlling for other considerations, Hispanics were more likely to prefer a male president over saying that gender did not make a difference. Hispanics had higher odds of 2.29 in the first model and 2.49 in the second. Education was a significant predictor of presidential gender preference. The less education

that a respondent reported, the more he or she was likely to favor a male president or a female president over stating that gender did not make a difference. In the first model, for example, each one-year increase in education was associated with an 8.4 percent decrease in the odds that the respondent selected a male president over no difference and with a 10.3 percent decrease in the odds that the respondent selected a female president over no difference.

The party identification scale was significantly associated with presidential gender preference in the first two models. When it came to preferring a male president over stating that gender did not make a difference in handling the most important national issue, the negative coefficients suggest that those respondents who lean toward the Republican side are more inclined to prefer a man as president. When it came to preferring a female president over saying that gender did not make a difference, those leaning toward the Democratic side were more inclined to prefer a female president, as demonstrated by the positive party identification coefficients. In our first model, a one-unit increase in the party identification scale was associated with a 22.5 percent decrease in the odds of stating a male president preference over no difference and with an 18.9 percent increase in the odds of stating a female president preference over no difference.

Even when controlling for demographic characteristics and party identification, the responses to the most important problem question made significant contributions to the model. As shown in Model 2, respondents who said that terrorism, homeland security, and/or Iraq was the MIP were more likely to prefer a male president over stating that gender did not make a difference. In fact, citing these issues as the MIP was associated with an 87.9 percent increase in the odds of preferring a male president over saying that gender made no difference. Naming the economy as the most important problem, however, was not significant in the multivariate models.

To further test the effects of Iraq on presidential gender preference, we added beliefs about U.S. involvement in Iraq being "worth it" to the model, which was significant. Those respondents who contended that Iraq was worth it were more inclined to prefer a male president to saying that gender did not make a difference. Those respondents who said that Iraq was *not* worth it were more inclined to prefer a female president over saying gender did not make a difference, even when taking demographics, party identification, and most important problem responses into consideration.

Discussion

Although 25.3 percent of respondents in December 1999/January 2000 said that a woman president would do a better job in handling the issue believed most important by respondents (Kenski and Falk, 2004), this percentage decreased to 15.4 percent by September 2003. During that time,

terrorism, homeland security, and U.S. involvement in Iraq became major concerns to the U.S. public. In December 1999/January 2000, only 4.5 percent of respondents named defense and foreign affairs as the most important problem facing the nation. In September 2003, 28.2 percent cited terrorism, homeland security, and U.S. involvement in Iraq as the MIP. The drop in acceptance of a woman as president of the United States demonstrates the way current events and stereotypes interact to create a changing environment for women seeking to achieve high political office. That said, it is important to note that the literature suggests that women may be able to overcome such challenges by changing their messages to meet the demands of a post-September 11 era (Barbara Lee Family Foundation, 2002; The White House Project, n.d.).

These results provide evidence of the priming theory as articulated by Iyengar and Kinder (1987). They predicted that as the quantity of news coverage of a particular issue increased, people would increase the weight by which they evaluated presidential candidates using that issue. Though in this study we were not asking about specific candidates, we believe that as the war and terrorism increasingly dominated the news, people were more likely to weigh war and terrorism in their evaluations of presidential performance, not only of real candidates but of hypothetical candidates as well. Since women tend be perceived as less able to handle foreign policy issues, as people put greater weight on these topics, they were less likely to say that a woman would perform as well as a man as president in handling the national issue most important to them.

These results are substantially in line with those found by Lawless (2004). Though Lawless did not present her findings in the context of priming, she did find a substantial drop in support for a woman as president in the post-September 11 era. Her results suggest that stereotypes drive these attitudes. As people were more likely to prefer men at handling war, they became less willing to vote for a woman for president. Similarly, as they tended to stereotype more about masculine traits, they became unsure if they would vote for a woman.

Alternatively, it is also possible that in considering whether a man or a woman would do a better job of handling important issues, respondents had specific men in mind when answering a question about men in general. That is, in 2000 respondents may have considered whether then-President Bill Clinton would do a good job, and in 2003 they may have been thinking about President George W. Bush. Such thinking may account for some of the change in percentage of people saying they prefer a man to a woman. However, we think that this hypothesis is unlikely to have had as significant a change on attitudes as did the change in political climate in which war and terrorism moved from a peripheral to a central issue facing the nation.

In this study, we demonstrated that gender, ethnicity, education, and party identification were significantly associated with believing that one gender over the other would do a better job as president. More importantly,

this study makes a contribution to the literature on women and the presidency by demonstrating that issue saliency affects one's likelihood of believing that one gender would do a better than the other as president in handling the most important issue facing the nation. We have shown that respondents who named terrorism, homeland security, and/or U.S. involvement in Iraq as the most important problem facing the nation were less inclined to believe that a woman president would do a better job, even when controlling for demographic and party identification variables. At the multivariate level, naming the economy as the MIP was not significantly associated with presidential gender preference.

Men were more likely than women to say gender does not matter when it comes to the presidency. Although at first this seemed counterintuitive, since we would have assumed that women have more egalitarian attitudes, it later occurred to us that such an attitude might make sense. If one believes that gender does not matter, it may also follow that it does not matter that men always hold the presidency—a position that may be more common among men than women. In contrast, women may feel it is important that women have been denied the presidency. If it is important that there have been no women presidents, then it follows that gender does matter. Such reasoning may explain why men are more likely than women to say gender does not matter.

We also considered that the sex of interviewer might have affected how men and women responded to the question of which gender would do a better job as president (see footnote 3). Even when looking within sex of interviewer, men were more inclined to report that gender did not make a difference than were women. Interviewers' sex did not affect the significance of the most important variables in this study (MIP and Iraq being worth it).

Education was also a significant predictor of presidential gender preference in our multivariate models. The more education a person had, the more likely he or she was to say that gender of the president did not make a difference in handling the most important problem. The fact that the more educated are more likely to reject sex roles is as expected. Education has been an area in which women have made great strides. As of 1997, there were more women enrolled in college than men and more women who received degrees than men (Gender Center, n.d.). These respondents should have been more likely to have met and been exposed to women in leadership positions.

The finding that Republicans are more likely to say they favor a man in the White House may be a result of stereotypes as well. The hypothetical situation used in this questionnaire should mirror the conditions of low-information voting. As Koch (2000:426) noted, "citizen's generalizations that women candidates are more liberal than male candidates was in fact true. However, the analysis suggests the utilization of gender stereotypes to infer candidates' ideological orientation/position leads citizens to perceive female candidates as being more liberal than they are." To the extent that

Republicans tend to be more conservative than Democrats, it is perhaps not surprising that under our hypothetical (low-information) situation, Republicans were more likely to prefer a male president and Democrats were more likely to prefer a female one.

The perception among Latinos that men make better presidents than women is more perplexing. These results may stem in part from more traditional sex roles. The 2002 National Survey of Latinos did find that even while the majority of Hispanics disagreed with the statement that "the husband should have the final say in family matters," more Latinos agreed with the statement than did whites (36 percent vs. 26 percent) and Spanish-dominant speakers agreed 43 percent of the time (Brodie et al., 2002).

As with all studies, some limitations to the data must be noted. The survey data used in this study is a single cross-section, which restricts the interpretation that we can make about the causal direction of the independent variables on the dependent variable in our analyses. Nevertheless, when it comes to the demographic variables, it is unlikely that the dependent variable has impacted the independent variables in the study, making many of our causal inferences quite plausible. In addition, these types of survey questions may be subject to a social desirability bias (see Sapiro, 1981). However, our dependent variable, which asked about women in the context of the respondent's most important issue, may alleviate some of this because those biased against women or men may feel that their attitudes are more acceptable in the context of a specific problem than in attitudes about presidents in general.

In addition, this analysis is based on a hypothetical question about a nonspecific woman candidate. Our results are therefore restricted to basic perceptions rather than real-life choices between competing candidates. Given this limitation, our findings suggest that it may be more difficult for a woman to win the presidency in the post-September 11 era, especially while terrorism and war continue to dominate the news. That said, other studies have noted that the electoral context and issues tend to fluctuate from year to year and that issue positions are less important than party identification and incumbency (Dolan, 2004). Future research should consider the extent to which the findings would change if people were presented with the choice of a real woman rather than a hypothetical one. It could be the case that when voters are presented with real choices, party identification and personal candidate traits override gender stereotypes.

Taken as a whole, the results of this study indicate that personal experiences (education), demographic status (gender and culture), and political leaning (party identification) work with each other and current events to create attitudes about women in the presidency. Undergirding these elements are stereotypes that mold our reasoning about women's capabilities and issues stances. Not answered by these data is why there is such a persistent belief that women are less equipped to protect the nation from

terrorism or lead in times of war. It should give us pause that beliefs about terrorism and homeland security as the most important problem facing the nation and beliefs about Iraq being worth it significantly affect perceptions about gender and presidential competency even when taking demographics and party identification into account.

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