Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?

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[1]

Abstract

Elections involving women candidates in the United States can offer unsettling examples of voter gender stereotypes, but research on women candidates provides little in the way of available data that allows us to link stereotypes to voter decision-making. This project reports results from a 2010 survey designed to examine gender stereotypes, candidate evaluations, and voting behavior in U.S. House elections with women candidates running against men. In general, stereotypes are not a central part of candidate evaluations or voting decisions, but the political party of the woman candidate can shape their role in candidate evaluations and vote choice.

The presidential election of 2008 was thought to be a breakthrough moment for women candidates in the United States. Senator Hillary Clinton, the first woman candidate with a real chance of winning a major party's nomination for president, won 18 million votes before losing the nomination to then-Senator Barack Obama. Governor Sarah Palin became the first woman on a Republican party ticket when Senator John McCain chose her as his vice-presidential running mate. Each woman campaigned around the country as a highly visible symbol of how far American women have come in political life. And yet, at the same time, each woman served as a symbol of the somewhat unsettled nature of public thinking about the role of women in politics. Whether it was a heckler calling on Clinton to "Iron my shirt" or a public debate about whether a mother of young children had the time to be vice president, the 2008 campaign was marked by both positive and negative debates about the ability of women to serve in high level office. Any excitement generated by these historic candidacies was tempered by discussions of whether Clinton was too abrasive and not sufficiently warm to be president and whether Palin was smart enough, too pretty, or too encumbered by motherhood to be one heartbeat away.

While highlighting the travails of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin as examples of the challenges women candidates face in combating stereotypes may seem obvious because of their high profile and visibility, subsequent elections continue to offer evidence that women candidates are sometimes viewed through the lens of gender stereotypes. In 2010, Kelly Ayotte, the Attorney General of New Hampshire and a candidate for an open U.S. Senate seat, had to respond to concerns that being elected to the Senate would leave her with little time to be a good mother to her two young children. In running for governor of her state, Oklahoma Lt. Governor Jari Askins was asked whether, as a single, childless woman, she had enough life experience to understand the concerns of the average Oklahoma family.

Clearly, a good part of the debate about the qualifications of women like Clinton, Palin, and Askins was rooted in gender stereotypes about the appropriate role for women in public life. Campaign observers, strategists, and candidates point to these gendered conversations as support for the visceral belief that stereotypes matter to the success or failure of women candidates. Indeed, one of the major pillars in the story of the status of women candidates for elected office in the United States is that voters rely on gender stereotypes to evaluate these women and their suitability for office. As political scientists have examined several aspects of the realities of women's underrepresentation in political life, findings on the presence and direction of gender stereotypes have been a reliable starting point for understanding the context in which women are perceived.

A long line of research has documented that the American public often relies on stereotyped thinking about women and men in political life (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Burrell 2008; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Kahn 1996; Koch 1997; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). This work often suggests that public reliance on stereotyped attitudes hurts women candidates at the polls as voters draw on negative assumptions about women's traits and abilities. Yet, at the same time, it is difficult to empirically demonstrate the impact of stereotypes. Indeed, recent work demonstrates that overt bias against women candidates is fading, women who run for office win at the same rate as similarly situated men, and that the small number of women candidates explains women's underrepresentation (Fox 2010; Lawless and Fox 2010; Seltzer, Newman, and Voorhees 1994). This would suggest that women's levels of representation are not necessarily the result of public antipathy toward their candidacies.

This reality leaves us with questions about how to make sense of two strands of research. We can clearly document the existence of political gender stereotypes on one hand and can

examine election results that point to women's success on the other. But what we are less well equipped to do is bridge the gap and illustrate how voters who hold stereotypes end up evaluating and choosing (or failing to choose) women candidates - specifically, how, when, even whether, they employ gender stereotypes in their voting decisions when faced with women candidates. This reality leaves us with an incomplete understanding of the power and place of gendered attitudes and gender stereotypes, creating a situation in which we have something of a void in our knowledge about the relationship between voters and women candidates.

This project contributes to knowledge of the ways in which voters evaluate women candidates for office by examining the role and influence of political gender stereotypes in the context of voter decision-making in real world elections involving women candidates. The argument made here is that the influence of political gender stereotypes must be considered alongside more central political and contextual variables such as political party, incumbency, and campaign context to gain a fuller understanding of the way people evaluate and choose women candidates. To support this contention, and to expand the methodological approaches to the study of gender stereotypes and women candidates, this project reports results from an innovative two-wave panel survey intentionally designed to examine gender stereotypes and conducted with a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults during the 2010 midterm elections.

The Prominence of Political Gender Stereotypes

A significant body of work suggests that voters ascribe to women candidates certain stereotyped policy competencies and personality characteristics. In terms of gender-linked personality traits, women candidates and officeholders are generally viewed as more compassionate, expressive, honest and better able to deal with constituents than men. Men are

viewed as more competent, decisive, stronger leaders, and possessing a greater ability to handle a crisis (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Burrell 2008; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Kahn 1996; King and Matland 2003; Lawless 2004; Leeper 1991; Paul and Smith 2008; Sapiro 1981/82). Assumptions about women candidates and officeholders generally conform to stereotyped thinking about issue positions as well. Women are assumed to be more interested in, and more effective at dealing with, issues such as child care, poverty, education, health care, womens' 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 and Andersen 1993; Brown, Heighberger, and Shocket 1993; Dolan 2010; Koch 1997; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989).

Perhaps the most important aspect of stereotypes of women candidates is that ideas about the abilities and competencies of female and male candidates may serve as a basis for voters to choose or reject a particular candidate. Much of the literature on stereotypes and candidate sex raises concerns that the presence of gender stereotypes could mean that people would fail to see women candidates as having the right set of skills or policy interests to be viable leaders (Fox and Smith 1998; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Lawless 2004). Indeed, a role for gender stereotypes in vote choice is suggested by Sanbonmatsu's (2002) work on what she calls a "baseline gender preference." Her evidence 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. However, results of previous work suggest that there is not clear evidence as to whether stereotypes will consistently hurt or help women candidates. For example, Lawless (2004) suggests that since September 11th women candidates may face more scrutiny from voters whose primary issue concerns involve terrorism and military issues.

Rethinking the Role of Stereotypes

Based on past work, it is clear that many voters begin their evaluations of candidates by noting their sex and making some set of stereotyped assumptions based on that information. However, one thing about which we still know relatively little is the process by which stereotypes might influence people's candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions when faced with women candidates. This is, in part, because much of the past work on gender stereotypes and women candidates has been based on experiments or hypothetical survey situations (Adams 1975; Brown, Heigberger, and Shocket 1993; Eckstrand and Eckert 1981; Fox and Smith 1998; Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a and 1993b; King and Matland 2003; Lawless 2004; Leeper 1991; McDermott 1998; Rosenthal 1995; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sapiro 1981/82). While valuable for isolating and examining the impact of candidate sex on voter attitudes, these data do not give us insight into how, whether, and when people employ their gender stereotypes in actual elections.

The challenge for researchers is to move beyond the abstract and examine whether and how voters use gender stereotypes when they are evaluating and choosing among women and men candidates in actual elections. In doing so, we can make stereotypes part of a more complete model of attitudinal and behavioral reactions to women candidates and weigh the impact of stereotypes against competing political influences such as political party, incumbency, and other contextual factors. Indeed, recent research points to the necessity of testing experimental findings in real election situations. In their efforts to determine which voters were most likely to support black women candidates for office, Philpot and Walton (2007) conducted an experiment in which they found that black women respondents were overwhelmingly more likely to do so than were other respondents. Yet, in their analysis of voting for black women

candidates for the U.S. House, they found that any advantage or disadvantage among voters based on candidate race completely disappeared when they controlled for key political variables like party, incumbency, and candidate characteristics. This suggests that testing experimental findings in real-world settings can provide deeper understanding of how political and social influences play out in more complex environments.

While an assumption that stereotypes shape people's reactions to women candidates has intuitive appeal and examples from campaigns can reinforce those notions, there are reasons to suggest that stereotypes may not have as much of an impact "on the ground" as we might suspect. First, we have to acknowledge that gender stereotypes may be changing. As women have moved out of the private sphere and into the public over the past 30-40 years, academic work suggests an easing of stereotypes and an increase in egalitarian attitudes toward women candidates (Burrell 2008; Dolan 2010; Eagly and Carli 2007; Fridkin and Kenney 2009). A recent study by Pew (2008) demonstrates that the public evaluates women as being superior to men on several trait dimensions associated with leadership and supports the idea that women and men are equally capable of being good political leaders. This change has happened alongside the steady, if slow, increase in the number of women candidates for office in the United States, a trend that may have helped normalize the presence of women candidates in the minds of many voters (CAWP 2012).

A second reason to suspect that gender stereotypes may have a more limited impact in the real world than experimental findings suggest has to do with the central importance of other political cues, namely political party and incumbency. In the context of elections, voters know more about candidates than simply their sex, and a significant body of research points out the importance of party and incumbency in shaping candidate evaluations and vote choice (Conover

and Feldman 1989; Downs 1957; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Popkin 1993; Rahn 1993). In the push and pull among these forces and voters' attitudes toward candidate characteristics, recent work suggests that party and incumbency continue to exert a stronger influence than do gender cues (Dolan 2010; Hayes 2011, 2005; Huddy and Capelos 2002; Philpot and Walton 2007). This dominance of party cues as an information tool only makes sense in an age of increasing party polarization in politics as a whole (Bartels 2000; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2006; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006; Murakami 2009).

As a result of changing social attitudes, the presence of increasing numbers of women candidates, increasing use of partisan cues among the public, and limitations with previous investigations, we are long overdue for an examination of the public's reaction to women candidates that integrates both gender stereotypes and traditional political forces and considers them side-by-side. In doing so, this project examines whether gender stereotypes have an impact on two reactions to women and men candidates; the evaluations voters make about the abilities of the two candidates in their elections, and their vote choice. Survey data are employed to test the proposition, derived from previous research, that gender stereotypes influence the ways in which voters evaluate women candidates and chose whether or not to vote for them. As Figure 1 suggests, gender stereotypes can influence the fortunes of women candidates in two ways. First, stereotypes can have a direct impact on the evaluations people make about candidates or on their vote choice decisions. Second, stereotypes can have a indirect influence on vote choice through an impact on evaluations. Each of these possible paths of influence will be examined here.

Data and Methods

The data for this research come from a survey project that is one of the first large-scale examinations of public opinion specifically designed to examine gender attitudes, gender

stereotypes, and women candidates conducted during an election and asking respondents about actual candidates. Current knowledge has been hampered by existing sources of survey data, most of which either ask respondents a limited number of questions about general gender issues (such as the ANES or GSS) or are focused on candidates in a particular race, but not on gender issues (such as media surveys). What is needed to test hypotheses about the impact of gender stereotypes on the fortunes of women candidates are data that measure people's stereotypes **and** their attitudes and behaviors towards specific women and men candidates who they evaluate in the context of an actual election. The main goal of this project, then, was to gather the data necessary to provide a more complete test of questions about the impact of gendered attitudes on the fortunes of women candidates.

During September and October/November of 2010, a two-wave panel survey of 3150 U.S. adults, funded by the National Science Foundation, was conducted in an online environment by Knowledge Networks.[1] The nationally representative sample was drawn from 29 states and was stratified to include people who experienced either mixed-sex or single-sex races for statewide office and the U.S. House and Senate. A series of questions in the first wave of the survey were designed to probe respondent attitudes about the place of women in American politics, their abstract gender stereotypes, and a host of other attitudinal, behavioral, and political measures. The second wave of the survey was designed to gather respondent reactions and behaviors toward the specific candidates they experienced in their elections. This analysis focuses on findings from respondents who experienced elections for the U.S. House in which a woman ran against a man. These respondents experienced 91 House races (64 women Democrats and 27 women Republicans) in the 29 states in the sample.

The elections of 2010 provide a particularly good opportunity to investigate the impact of gender stereotypes on the fortunes of women candidates in that the number and variety of women candidates in that year allows for more diversity among women candidates than in the past - a record number of women ran for governor and U.S. Senate, a near-record number ran for the U.S. House, and a fairly large group of Republican women candidates (approximately 40 percent of women candidates for Congress) provided more party diversity among women candidates than is usually the case in US elections (Center for American Women and Politics 2012).

Measures of Abstract Stereotypes and Specific Evaluations

Two primary goals of this project are to examine whether and when gender stereotypes have a significant impact on evaluations of, and voting for, women candidates and how stereotypes operate in comparison to other sources of political information about specific candidates, such as political party, incumbency, and electoral competition. This approach requires measures that tap the abstract gender stereotypes that have long been a part of the literature as well as measures that get at more specific, real world evaluations of individual candidates. Drawing on many of the trait and issue competence items used in the experimental literature on political gender stereotypes (Burrell 2008; Fridkin, Kenny, and Woodall 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Koch 1997; Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2002), I created measures of what I call *abstract gender stereotypes* and *specific candidate evaluations.* In the first wave of the survey, respondents were asked whether they thought "women or men who run for political office" were more likely to possess a particular trait or were better able to handle a particular policy area. The traits and issue areas included are those that have been identified by the literature as male or female in their stereotypic orientation (Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall

2008; Gordon and Miller 2005; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). Male policy stereotypes measured here are crime, the economy, national security, immigration, and the deficit. Female policy stereotypes are education, child care, health care, and abortion. Stereotypical male trait measures include intelligence, decisiveness, leadership, and experience. Female trait questions tap beliefs about candidate's honesty, compassion, ability to build consensus, and ability to change government (See online appendix for all measures and coding).

The second wave of the survey was designed to elicit respondent evaluations of the traits and policy abilities of the individual candidates in the House race in which they voted. Using the same trait and policy items described above, this set of questions asked respondents to say whether they thought that *one of the candidates in their race for House* was more likely to possess a particular trait or was better able to deal with a particular policy area than the other candidate.[2]

The two waves of the survey provide a unique set of measures regarding people's ideas about the stereotypic traits and issue abilities of political actors. In the first wave, respondents were asked about their trait and issue assessments of abstract women and men politicians. These abstract items represent what the literature generally treats as people's political gender stereotypes about politicians. In the second wave, respondents are asked to evaluate the specific candidates in their U.S. House race along the same trait and issue ability dimensions. These two sets of measures – *abstract gender stereotypes* and *specific candidate evaluations* – can then be used to test the proposition advanced by the literature that people's abstract gender stereotypes have an impact on their attitudes and behaviors toward specific women candidates.

Dependent Variables

Here, I analyze two dependent variables that measure respondent attitudes and behaviors regarding women and men House candidates in 2010. The first set of dependent variables is drawn from the series of questions in the second wave of the survey that ask respondents to evaluate the specific candidates in their race for U.S. House on the trait and policy items described earlier. The individual items for policy and traits are combined to create variables that measure how respondents evaluate their candidates on possessing male and female traits and ability to handle male and female policy areas[3]. This results in four variables – female policy, male policy, female traits and male traits. These variables are coded to reflect whether respondents thought the woman or the man was more likely to possess a particular trait or policy competence or whether there was no difference between the two.

The other dependent variables measure vote choice in the mixed-sex House elections in which respondents took part. These variables are coded to reflect whether the respondent voted for the woman candidate or her male opponent. This measure of vote choice, along with the candidate-specific policy and trait evaluation measures, provides appropriate real-world dependent variables from which we can evaluate the power of gender stereotypes.

Independent Variables

Given that the goal of this analysis is to examine the impact of political gender stereotypes on actual evaluations of women candidates, the primary independent variables of interest here are the measures of abstract trait and policy stereotypes that were asked in the first wave of the survey. If people's abstract gender stereotypes are important to shaping their specific political attitudes and behaviors, these measures should be related to specific candidate evaluations and vote choice when individuals choose between a woman and a man candidate. Included here are four variables, one each for measuring the perceived policy competence of

women and men on male and female issues and one each for measuring people's beliefs about whether women and men possess typical male and female personality traits. These variables are coded in the expected stereotypic direction. For example, for the variable measuring beliefs about the competence of women and men to handle traditional male policy areas, higher values indicate that respondents see men as better at these issues than women.

There are several other independent variables employed here. Primary here are two measures of party identification – one coded to measure whether the respondent shares the same party as the woman candidate and the other to measure whether the respondent is an Independent. Respondents who identify with the party of the man candidate are in the excluded category. Other variables measure traditional contextual factors thought to exert an impact on evaluations and vote choice – the incumbency status of the woman candidate, the competitiveness of the race, the percentage of total campaign spending that was spent by the woman candidate, whether the election was for an open seat, and how closely the respondent followed the House race in his/her district.

Analysis

Fully accounting for the potential impact of gender stereotypes on candidate evaluations and vote choice requires an acknowledgment that while we assume a direct impact of abstract stereotypes on specific candidate evaluations, stereotypes could influence vote choice directly or indirectly through an impact on evaluations. For this reason, the analysis proceeds as follows. First, abstract stereotypes are used to predict the specific evaluations respondents make of the two candidates in their congressional races. This lets us see whether there is a direct role for stereotypes in shaping candidate evaluations vis a vis other central political variables. In a second step, abstract stereotypes are used to predict vote choice alongside the political variables

of interest. Finally, to account for the possibility that the impact of stereotypes on vote choice is mediated by candidate evaluations, vote choice is estimated a second time as a function of abstract stereotypes, specific candidate evaluations, and the political variables (Malhotra and Krosnick 2007). Also, because recent research has shown that women Democrats and Republicans face differing challenges when voters employ both party and gender stereotypes in their evaluations and vote decisions (King and Matland 2003; Koch 2002; Winter 2010; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009), this analysis is presented separately for women Democrats who ran against Republican men and women Republicans who ran against Democratic men.

Abstract Gender Stereotypes and Specific Candidate Evaluations

The first step in the analysis examines the impact of abstract gender stereotypes on the evaluations respondents make about the policy competence and trait characteristics of the specific candidates in their House race. The dependent variables in this analysis are the four indices that sum people's evaluations of their candidates on the individual female and male policies and female and male traits. These evaluations are modeled as a function of respondent gender stereotypes about policies and traits as well as the primary political variables at play in elections.

Taking evaluations of women Democratic House candidates first, Table 1 demonstrates that stereotypes exhibit almost no impact at all on evaluations of the policy abilities and traits of women candidates. Across the four dependent variables, the only significant relationship between an abstract stereotype and a specific candidate evaluation involves attitudes about male policy competence. In this analysis, respondents who hold traditional stereotypes about men's superiority in handling male issues are less likely to evaluate the actual woman candidate in their House race as the better of the two candidates to handle these issues. At the same time,

respondents who do not hold traditional stereotypes about male policy competence are the ones who evaluate the woman candidate in their race higher on these issues than her male opponent. Beyond this, respondents do not appear to be employing stereotypes in their evaluations of individual candidates. So despite the concerns raised by previous experimental research that attitudes about women's traditional limitations and strengths will work to detriment of women candidates, this first analysis of attitudes toward specific candidates provides very limited support for that concern.

While this finding fails to support the notion that abstract gender stereotypes can shape attitudes toward specific women candidates, the larger point of this analysis is to place stereotypes alongside other important political influences. Indeed, the analysis here speaks to the central importance of political party to these candidate evaluations. On each of the four dependent variables, the strongest influence on evaluations, by far, is whether the respondent shared the political party of the woman candidate. Given what we know about the impact of party on attitudes and behavior, this is not surprising. When people approach the task of evaluating candidates in an election, their party is among the most important cues. Partisans are clearly disposed to evaluate their party's candidate positively. This finding contrasting the power of stereotypes with the impact of party suggests that stereotypes may not be as problematic for women candidates as some have suggested, at least not among fellow partisans.

In looking at evaluations of Republican women House candidates (Table 2), we see a similar pattern to that of evaluations of Democratic women. First, the most important thing to note is the complete absence of an impact for abstract gender stereotypes in respondent evaluations of Republican women House candidates. These women appear to gain no benefit or suffer any consequence from stereotyped thinking on the part of voters. However, as with

Democratic women, a shared political party is the most significant influence on respondent likelihood of evaluating the Republican woman candidate higher than her male opponent. Interestingly, Republican women candidates also attracted more positive evaluations from Independent voters and those most interested in the House race in their district, and incumbent Republican women House members clearly received more positive evaluations than did their male opponents. This finding, which seems in keeping with the general tenor of the 2010 elections, indicates the importance of traditional political variables and campaign context to the fate of individual candidates.

Vote Choice

While examining the impact of abstract gender stereotypes on candidate evaluations is an important first step, determining whether stereotypes influence vote choice decisions is perhaps the most important test of their influence. Indeed, much of the previous research on the impact of stereotypes assumes that people will employ these attitudes when deciding whether to support a woman candidate, often with negative consequences for that woman.

As suggested earlier, gender stereotypes can influence vote choice decisions directly or indirectly through their influence on candidate evaluations. To test both of these possibilities, Table 3 presents the results of two separate analyses of the determinants of vote choice in mixed-sex House races. The first examines a direct effect for stereotypes on vote choice and includes the four measures of abstract stereotypes (female and male policy and trait) and the political context variables. The second model considers the possibility of mediation and tests the impact of abstract stereotypes and specific candidate evaluations side by side, along with the political variables. The analysis is run separately for Democratic and Republican women candidates.

Turning to an analysis of the potential for a direct impact of gender stereotypes on vote choice in races involving Democratic women House candidates (Column 1), we see that none of the respondent stereotypes have an impact on vote choice. Put another way, people's abstract gender stereotypes about whether women or men are better at handling policy areas like education or foreign affairs or which sex is able to provide greater leadership or compassion are *not* related to their vote choice when they choose between women and men candidates in their local House election. Instead, there is one primary and dominant influence on people's vote choice here – political party. People who share the same party as the woman are more likely to vote for her than the male candidate of the other party. And, of course, the same is true for the men candidates – party identifiers vote for them more often than the woman candidate of the opposing party.

Column 2 examines the impact of stereotypes alongside the variables measuring the specific candidate evaluations. Here the analysis indicates that the important attitudes are those that people form toward specific candidates, not abstract stereotypes about women and men in general. Again we see that none of the abstract stereotypes are related to choosing a Democratic woman House candidate, but instead that the candidate evaluations are important. Not surprisingly, respondents who saw the woman candidate as better than her male opponent at handling both female and male policy issues were more likely to vote for her over her male opponent. The same is true for people who saw the woman candidate exhibiting traditional male traits. Evaluations of female traits are not significantly related to vote choice, suggesting that voters may place a lower value on these considerations when choosing for whom to vote. As with the analysis in Column 1, we see that political party remains the most important influence on vote choice for Democratic women. The lack of an impact for stereotypes on vote choice

demonstrated here, along with the absence of an impact of stereotypes on Democratic candidate evaluations (Table 1), also reveal that there is no influence for stereotypes that is being mediated through an impact on candidate evaluations.[4]

In turning to the analysis of vote choice for races with Republican women, the model in Column 3 appears to indicate that, at first glance, abstract gender stereotypes can influence people's decision making. Here we see that people who hold traditional stereotypes about women's superiority in handling female issues like education and health care are less likely to vote for the Republican woman candidate in their House race. It is likely that this finding is being driven, at least in part, by party stereotypes. While women are often seen as better at female issues than are men, Republicans are not usually identified with strength in these policy areas. So it may be the case that respondents are seeing these women as Republicans first and are assuming that they don't have the same competence on these issues as their Democratic male opponent. The other significant impact for stereotypes surrounds female traits, with people who see women as more likely than men to be compassionate consensus builders being more likely to vote for the Republican woman.

However, the more complete test of the impact of stereotypes offered in Column 4 suggests again that specific evaluations of individual candidates are more important to voter decision-making than are abstract stereotypes. Once we include the measures of specific candidate evaluations, the impact of stereotypes disappears completely. Instead, what matters to people's choice of Republican women candidates is policy. As with Democratic women candidates, respondents who evaluated the Republican woman as better on female policy areas were more likely to vote for the woman than her male opponent. Trait evaluations are not significant to voters here. And, as with Democratic women candidates, a shared party identity is

the most important influence in choosing the woman Republican candidate. As with the analysis for Democratic candidates, there is also no evidence that stereotypes are indirectly influencing vote choice through candidate evaluations.[5]

Discussion

In examining the analysis presented here, a couple of important patterns emerge. First, with one exception, there is no evidence that the abstract gender stereotypes about women's and men's abilities and characteristics that people hold have any impact on the evaluations they make about specific real-world political candidates for the U.S. House. In the one instance of a significant relationship (out of a potential 32), we see that people who stereotype women as less capable on economic and foreign issues are likely to evaluate their specific Democratic woman candidate lower than her male opponent on these issues. Given that we find this relationship for Democratic women candidates and not Republican women, we can probably assume that party stereotypes are at work here as well. But the data in Tables 1 and 2 make it safe to conclude that people are not bringing their abstract stereotypes to bear when they examine specific candidates.

A second pattern that is revealed here is that abstract stereotypes also do not shape people's vote choice in any meaningful way. Instead, these data indicate that specific candidate evaluations are the more important influence on vote choice. Voters appear to be seeing individuals, not abstractions, in making their vote decisions.

Finally, it is important to note that when we consider stereotypes as one potential influence among several more traditional political variables, we see that in every analysis, political party, and to a lesser extent, incumbency are the most important considerations. In short, people support the candidate of their political party, whether that candidate is female or male and regardless of abstract gender stereotypes. To more clearly illustrate this point, Figure 2

presents the impact of political party on the probability of voting for a woman House candidate, taking into account the impact of stereotypes and candidate evaluations. This graph presents the coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from the four equations in Table 3 to demonstrate that people who share a woman candidate's party identification are much more likely to vote for her than are those of the other party.

Conclusion

The goal of this project is to begin to examine an underlying assumption of much of the work on gender stereotypes - that since people hold clear gender stereotypes about the political traits and competencies of women and men, these stereotypes must somehow be relevant to the fortunes of women candidates for office. While this kind of assumption has intuitive appeal, there has been little empirical support for it from actual elections. The data employed here provide no evidence of any direct, consistent, or substantial impact for gender stereotypes on evaluations of, or voting for, women candidates. There are a few isolated instances in which abstract attitudes are related to candidate evaluations and vote choice, but key here is the additional role of political party. In each of these three instances, the impact of stereotypes suggests an influence for party stereotypes more than gender stereotypes.

Beyond the interplay between political party and stereotypes in shaping evaluations of women candidates, these data provide little evidence that people take any traditional gender stereotypes they may hold and translate them directly into a decision to vote for or against a woman candidate. Beyond this, there is confirmation that the same political influences that shape elections in general – first and foremost, political party and, to a more limited degree, incumbency - work in the same way when women candidates are present. These findings combine to suggest that our understanding of the ways in which voters evaluate women

candidates is strengthened when we move beyond a singular focus on candidate sex to consider a fuller range of important political influences.

This research suggests some broader implications that can guide future work. For example, these data demonstrate that we should move with caution when we assume that experimental findings can be easily extrapolated to the real world. Instead, we should look for ways to conduct empirical tests of such findings where and when possible. We should also continue to evaluate the ways in which elections are governed by predictable political forces, even when women candidates are present. Given the increasing number of women candidates who run for a wide range of offices, we should acknowledge that women's uniqueness as candidates may be on the wane. And as public opinion data suggests that stereotypes of women and men may be easing, we should consider whether women candidates have successfully neutralized the impact of stereotypes through their decisions and actions.

Still, despite the analysis presented here, we should acknowledge the significant work still to be done in understanding the impact of gendered attitudes on the prospects for women candidates. We also need to examine the determinants of evaluations and vote choice for male candidates. We error when we assume that gender stereotypes are exclusively the concern of women candidates. Research that takes seriously the implications of gender politics for male candidates will provide a more complete picture of how all candidates navigate these complex considerations. Beyond this, we need to continue to seek data that allow us to broaden our understanding of election dynamics in the face of increasing numbers of women candidates. The data presented here represent an intentional and generalizable attempt to explore multiple facets of attitudes towards women in politics and women candidates in the context of real world elections. The elections of 2010 provided a good opportunity to begin this investigation, but

understanding what might be the impact of a particular mix of candidates and campaigns in a given election year and what might be related to more longstanding ways of thinking about women and men candidates will require us to collect more data in subsequent election cycles.

While it is clear that the analysis presented here suggests a need for more nuanced thinking about the potential power of abstract gender stereotypes in American politics, nothing about this project seeks to make the claim that gender no longer matters to the fate of women candidates. Gender stereotypes may exert an influence on other stages of the electoral process, perhaps when women make choices about how to campaign or even when they decide whether to run at all. If there is one argument to be made, it is that the dynamics facing women candidates have changed over the past thirty years or so. Women candidates for office no longer face overt hostility and monumental structural challenges to claiming a successful role in political life. As a result, we must continue to redefine our research agendas, broadening and deepening our examination of the role of gender in our political system and seeking appropriate data that allow us to construct a fully developed portrait of the fate of women candidates in the real world.

Figure 1

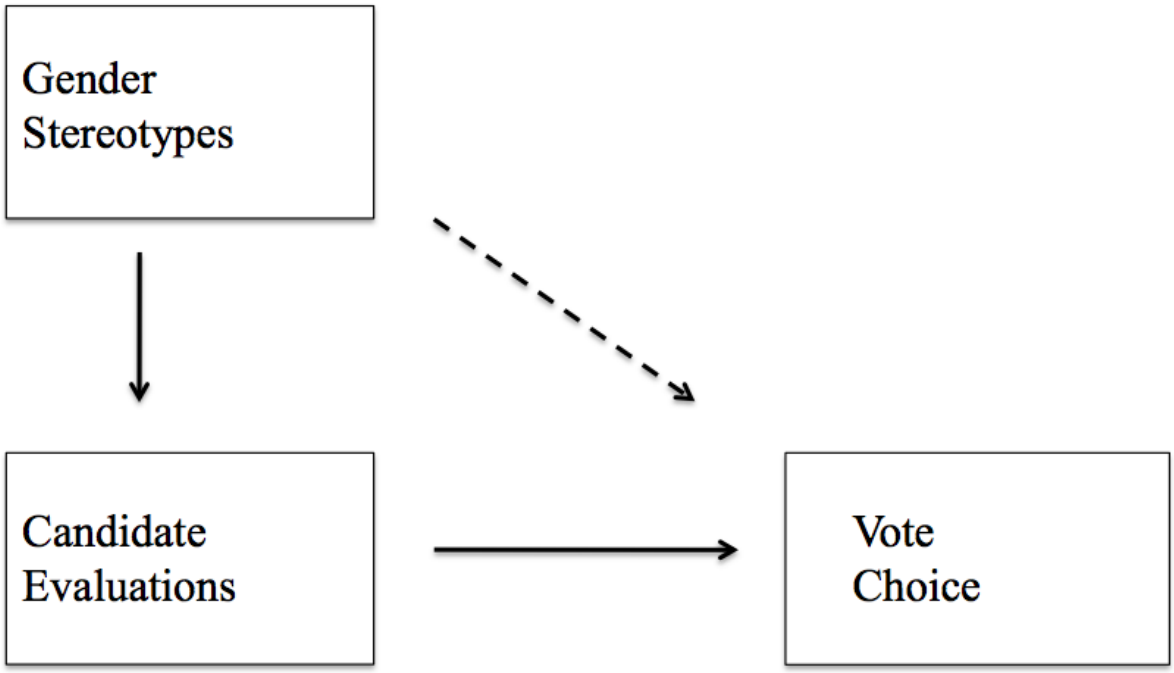

Figure 2

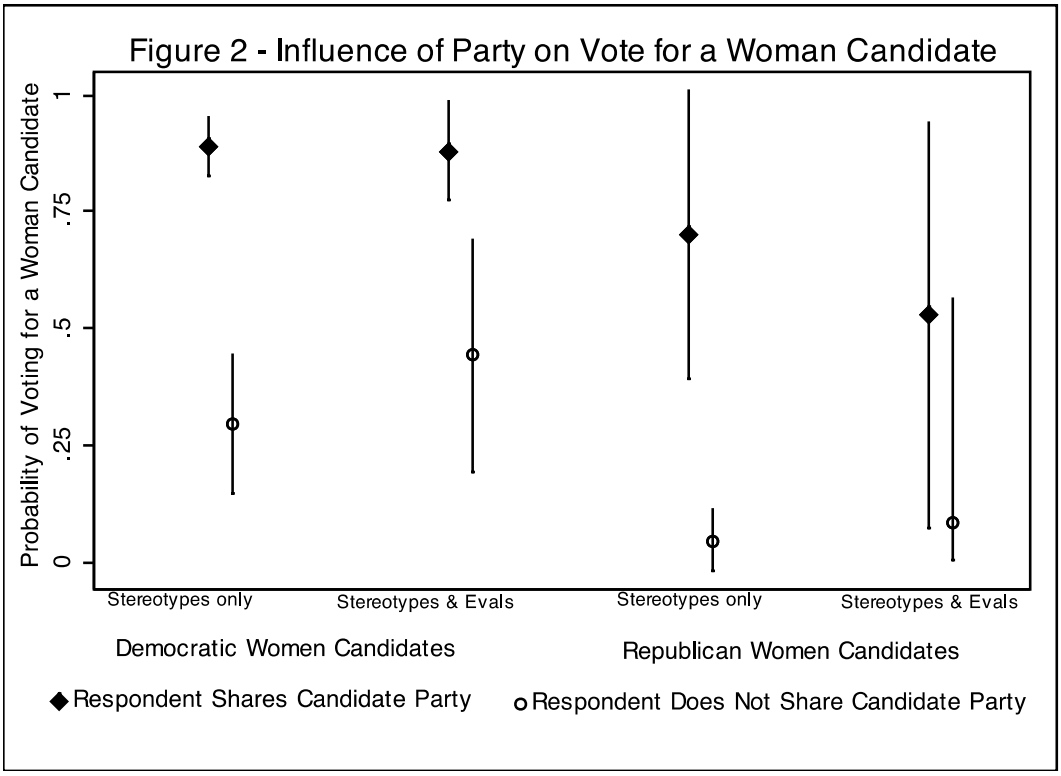
Figure 2 - Influence of Party on Vote for a Woman Candidate
Probability of Voting for a Woman Candidate
0
.25
.5
.75
1
Stereotypes only
Stereotypes & Evals
Stereotypes only
Stereotypes & Evals
Democratic Women Candidates
Republican Women Candidates
Respondent Shares Candidate Party
Respondent Does Not Share Candidate Party

Table 1: Policy and Trait Evaluations of Democratic Women in Mixed-Sex House Races

	Evaluation of Female Policy	Evaluation of Male Policy	Evaluation of Female Traits	Evaluation of Male Traits
Female policy stereotypes	0.095	-0.037	-0.022	-0.112
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Male policy stereotypes	-0.144	-0.258*	0.003	-0.018
	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Female trait stereotypes	-0.119	0.033	0.030	0.105
	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Male trait stereotypes	-0.091	-0.082	-0.169	-0.187
	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Same Party	2.695***	3.484***	2.353***	2.290***
	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.25)	(0.25)
Independent	0.290	0.345	-0.396	-0.530
	(0.58)	(0.70)	(0.62)	(0.57)
Woman incumbent	0.568	1.087	0.644	0.905
	(0.50)	(0.61)	(0.50)	(0.51)
Open seat	-0.143	0.478	0.070	0.260
	(0.45)	(0.52)	(0.42)	(0.44)
Percent of spending by woman	0.750	0.549	0.675	0.958
	(0.61)	(0.77)	(0.61)	(0.66)
Competitive race	-0.307	-0.093	-0.036	-0.051
	(0.30)	(0.38)	(0.30)	(0.32)
Interest in House race	-0.079	-0.009	-0.002	0.010
	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Constant	4.635***	4.215**	4.910***	4.439***
	(1.18)	(1.58)	(1.23)	(1.29)
Adj.R^2	.36	.36	.32	.34
N	516	512	513	515

$*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001$, two-tailed test of significance.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
Note: This table contains OLS regressions for policy and trait evaluations.

Table 2: Policy and Trait Evaluations of Republican Women in Mixed-Sex House Races

	Evaluation of Female Policy	Evaluation of Male Policy	Evaluation of Female Traits	Evaluation of Male Traits
Female policy stereotypes	-0.095	-0.192	-0.105	-0.031
	(0.14)	(0.18)	(0.14)	(0.15)
Male policy stereotypes	0.126	0.162	0.101	0.049
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.12)
Female trait stereotypes	0.158	0.072	0.034	-0.055
	(0.18)	(0.23)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Male trait stereotypes	0.181	-0.240	-0.124	-0.120
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Same Party	3.385***	4.427***	2.873***	2.377***
	(0.34)	(0.39)	(0.33)	(0.33)
Independent	4.859***	5.597***	3.086***	3.176***
	(0.75)	(1.32)	(0.66)	(0.65)
Woman incumbent	2.614**	2.489**	1.813*	2.279**
	(0.84)	(0.92)	(0.83)	(0.87)
Open seat	-0.449	0.918	0.693	0.651
	(1.27)	(0.51)	(0.56)	(0.51)
Percent of spending by woman	-2.723*	-2.373	-1.448	-0.754
	(1.18)	(1.42)	(1.18)	(1.23)
Competitive race	0.123	-0.349	-0.109	-0.063
	(0.38)	(0.47)	(0.38)	(0.40)
Interest in House race	0.376*	0.349	0.403*	0.360*
	(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Constant	7.970***	8.291***	6.435***	5.683**
	(2.02)	(2.24)	(1.73)	(1.74)
Adj.R^2	.42	.46	.37	.34
N	228	226	227	221

$*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001$, two-tailed test of significance.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
Note: This table contains OLS regressions for policy and trait evaluations.

Table 3: Vote Choice in Mixed-Sex House Races

	House Dem. Women	House Dem. Women	House Rep. Women	House Rep. Women
Stereotypes				
Female policy	-0.051	0.125	-0.535**	-0.468
	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.28)
Male policy	0.026	0.096	0.153	-0.141
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.29)
Female trait	0.287	0.205	0.623**	0.563
	(0.16)	(0.35)	(0.21)	(0.42)
Male trait	-0.188	-0.269	0.397	0.451
	(0.14)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.33)
Evaluations				
Female policy	-	0.362*	-	0.813**
	-	(0.17)	-	(0.30)
Male policy	-	0.497**	-	0.537
	-	(0.18)	-	(0.30)
Female trait	-	0.382	-	0.013
	-	(0.34)	-	(0.43)
Male trait	-	0.717*	-	0.230
	-	(0.33)	-	(0.48)
Same Party	2.966***	2.233***	3.939***	2.528**
	(0.35)	(0.47)	(0.52)	(0.96)
Independent	-0.295	1.318	-	-
	(1.21)	(1.18)	-	-
Woman incumbent	0.742	1.451	2.335	1.400
	(0.63)	(0.96)	(1.29)	(1.83)
Open seat	-0.028	0.383	1.712	3.453*
	(0.51)	(0.87)	(0.93)	(1.63)
Percent of spending by woman	1.430	0.182	-1.729	-1.252
	(0.81)	(1.16)	(1.86)	(3.55)
Competitive race	-0.321	-0.581	0.578	0.397
	(0.39)	(0.58)	(0.70)	(1.05)
Interest in House race	-0.038	0.252	0.563*	-0.020
	(0.19)	(0.35)	(0.25)	(0.38)
Constant	-5.569**	-23.076***	0.414	-14.160*
	(2.15)	(6.23)	(2.27)	(6.57)
Pseudo R^2	.40	.73	.49	.74
N	469	438	214	197

$*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001$, two-tailed test of significance.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
Note: This table contains logistic regression for candidate vote choice. Independent respondents are excluded for races with Republican women due to the small number of independent identifiers.

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Endnotes

[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 service 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] Readers will note that there was a month between the first and second waves of the survey. In addition, only about one-third of the questions on the first wave dealt with gender issues or women candidates and the order of questions was randomized. These steps were taken to ensure that respondents were not excessively primed to think about gender issues between waves of the survey. This approach was deemed preferable to measuring both abstract gender stereotypes and specific candidate evaluations in the same wave of the survey.

[3] 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).

[4] There is no evidence in this analysis that stereotypes are having an indirect impact on vote choice through candidate evaluations. This is confirmed by both the lack of impact for stereotypes on candidate evaluations (Tables 1 and 2) and also through the tests of mediation

conducted on the results of the analysis in Table 3. For mediation to be present, a stereotype would demonstrate an effect on vote choice in the Column 1 and then a diminished impact in the model in Column 2. Since stereotypes are not related to vote choice in either model of voting for a Democratic woman candidate, no tests for mediation were necessary.

[5] The only instance where a test of mediation was necessary involved the female policy stereotypes and evaluations in Columns 3 and 4 (Table 3). Sobel tests (stat=-.67, p.51) indicate that mediation was not taking place.