

The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Voting for Women Candidates by Level and Type of Office

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Women candidates for elective office are assumed to have to navigate a world in which their sex is obvious and consequential. Despite the contemporary increase in the number of women who run, it is indeed the case that they still stand out in comparison to men. Whether the focus is on their qualifications, their family life, or their “cackle,” women candidates draw attention for their uniqueness. In drawing attention from voters, the media, and scholars, the attention is often on whether public attitudes about women and their suitability for public office will make a difference in an election.

Primary among these attitudes are gender stereotypes — people’s beliefs about the appropriate roles for women and men. Whether it is a debate about Christine Quinn being tough enough to be mayor of New York City or whether Illinois attorney general Lisa Madigan could be a good mother and a good governor at the same time, gender stereotypes have been at the forefront of societal discussions about women for as long as women have been running for office (Kantor and Taylor 2013; McKinney, Spielman, and Korecki 2012). While we might like to assume that these debates are receding from public discussions of

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women candidates and officeholders, the election cycle of 2014 saw Texas gubernatorial candidate Wendy Davis characterized as “Abortion Barbie,” Senate Intelligence Committee chair Dianne Feinstein called “too emotional” in her handling of the committee’s investigation into the Central Intelligence Agency’s use of enhanced interrogation techniques, and South Carolina governor Nikki Haley referred to as a “whore” by her Democratic opponent (Hamby 2014; Henderson 2014; Milligan 2014). These attitudes have also garnered significant attention from scholars of gender politics, who have done a meticulous job of documenting and cataloging the stereotyped ways in which people think about women candidates. Indeed, contemporary evidence about the presence of political gender stereotypes comes to us from both popular and academic discussions.

At the same time, while we know that gender stereotypes are often present in the minds of voters, we know less about whether, when, and how they shape the fortunes of women candidates. Gone (largely) are the days when overt discrimination and voter hostility kept women from winning elections, replaced instead with evidence that stereotypes still exist but may not limit women’s success in the same way they did historically. Christine Quinn and Wendy Davis lost their elections for reasons having more to do with policy issues, partisanship, and campaign tactics than the fact that they are women, and sexist assumptions about Lisa Madigan and Nikki Haley did not keep them from being elected to office. In addition, much of our attention has been focused on whether and how stereotypes might affect a woman running for president, which has limited our consideration of the offices for which women regularly run and win. This leaves us with important gaps in our knowledge. To more fully understand the current environment facing women candidates, we need to know more about whether and when voters actually employ the gender stereotypes they may hold and whether stereotypes are relevant to women candidates where they actually run: for different levels and types of offices beyond the presidency.

This project seeks to address these gaps by examining the influence of political gender stereotypes in the context of voter decision making in real-world elections involving women candidates. Doing so will allow us to determine whether stereotypes and their impact are related to the levels and types of offices women seek. To support these considerations, 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.

POLITICAL GENDER STEREOTYPES

Scholarly research provides extensive documentation of the policy and trait stereotypes people hold when they think about women and men candidates for office. These stereotypes tend to follow traditional feminine and masculine images, with people seeing women candidates as more consensus oriented, compassionate, and honest than men and more focused on relationships with constituents. Men, on the other hand, are seen as more intelligent and competent than women, and they are thought to be stronger leaders and perform better in a crisis (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Burrell 2008; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Kahn 1996; King and Matland 2003; Lawless 2004; Leeper 1991; Paul and Smith 2008; Sapiro 1981/82). Stereotypes extend to assumptions about the policy interests and abilities of women and men in predictable ways, with men being seen as better suited for handling the military, economic issues, trade, and agriculture and women thought to be more competent at education, health care, children and family issues, and poverty than men (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Brown, Heighberger, and Shocket 1993; Koch 1999; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). From an ideological perspective, women of both parties are thought to be more liberal than their male party counterparts (Koch 2000, 2002; McDermott 1997).

Past literature also suggests that stereotypes can shape vote choice and influence whether voters will choose or reject women candidates (Fox and Smith 1998; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b). For example, Lawless (2004) finds that concerns about women's competence to handle terrorism could dampen support for the idea of a woman president. Sanbonmatsu (2002) finds that many voters have a basic preference for candidates of one sex or the other and that these preferences are determined, in part, by gender stereotypes. Koch (2002) finds that stereotypes about the perceived liberalism of women candidates, particularly Democratic women, can pull them further away from the average voter, which, he suggests, can result in these candidates losing votes. While some work finds that women's supposed strengths, such as greater personal honesty or an outsider status that makes them appear to be more ethical than men, can lead voters toward women candidates

(Dolan 1998; McDermott 1997), most studies suggest that stereotypes have more negative consequences for women than benefits (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Fox and Smith 1998).

STEREOTYPES AND LEVELS/TYPES OF OFFICES

Beyond the extensive literature on the presence of stereotypes is the question of whether stereotyped thinking about women's fitness for elective office is related to the office they seek. Because political gender stereotypes relate to whether voters see women as possessing the "right" skills and abilities to hold public office, it follows that these expectations could differ across offices with different levels and types of responsibility. In fact, previous research on support for women candidates suggests that the levels and types of offices women seek interact with stereotypes to shape women's opportunities. There is a significant literature that focuses on the presidency, finding that voters value male personality traits and policy expertise for this office (Adams 1975; Kinder 1986; Mueller 1986; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988).

This same literature finds that public preferences for male characteristics are strongest when considering the presidency and become less limiting as lower-level offices are considered. For example, public desires for strong leaders or those with experience dealing with foreign policy may work against women seeking the presidency, but they may be of much less importance when a woman seeks local office (Adams 1975; Burrell 2008; Dolan 1997). Indeed, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a) find clear evidence that voters expect male traits and policy expertise from candidates for national office but that there are diminished concerns about these qualities when people consider local office. Female traits and abilities are only valued in candidates for local-level office, which is consistent with other work that focuses on level of office (Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler 1987).

Another dimension on which gender stereotypes can have an impact involves the types of offices women seek. Executive offices such as president, governor, or mayor are more clearly stereotyped with regard to their responsibilities and clearly place officeholders in a position of single authority compared with legislative office or many judicial positions (Fox and Oxley 2003). As a result, candidates running for an executive office might be advantaged by exhibiting stereotypical male traits such as decisiveness and leadership, whereas female traits such as

consensus building might be advantages when running for a legislative office. Findings from past research on the impact of stereotypes on women running for different types of offices supports these expectations. Adams (1975) finds that hypothetical women candidates were penalized for not having the appropriate characteristics when they ran for executive office (president, governor, mayor) more often than when they ran for legislative office (Congress, town council). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a) find that voters expect male characteristics from candidates for executive office more so than legislative candidates and expect female expertise from legislative candidates as opposed to executive office candidates. Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler (1987) find greater support for a female state supreme court candidate who displayed more female than male characteristics.

REMAINING QUESTIONS

The conclusion that voters filter their evaluations of women candidates through the lens of the offices they seek makes intuitive sense. If gender stereotypes focus on whether women and men have the “right” mix of policy competence and personal traits, what is seen as appropriate and valued may change across offices. However, before we accept this conclusion, we need to acknowledge two realities of the existing work on the link between stereotypes and level/type of office. First, this literature is small and fairly dated. There are only a handful of works, and almost none since Huddy and Terkildsen’s (1993b) seminal article, that address the impact of stereotypes across different offices. Instead, most contemporary work on the impact of gender stereotypes focuses on real or hypothetical women candidates running for one type or level of office, most often the presidency or Congress (Dolan 2014; Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall 2009; Hayes 2011; Koch 2002; Lawless 2004; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002). While these works provide great insight into the influence of gender stereotypes on women candidates, they do not allow us to examine whether the impact of stereotypes differs across the range of offices women seek.

The second limitation of past work on level/type of office is that it has largely relied on hypothetical candidates in experiments or public opinion surveys (Adams 1975; Dolan 1997; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Mueller 1986; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler 1987). Much of this experimental research

presents subjects with the speech or campaign biography of a fictional candidate and asks them to offer their assessments of the candidate. Survey-based work usually asks respondents about their attitudes toward a hypothetical “woman” candidate proposed to be seeking some office. While these approaches have their own value, they lack generalizability and offer us little understanding of how people employ stereotypes and evaluate actual candidates in real-world elections. The isolation of candidate sex results in a host of important variables, such as the impact of level/type of office, political party, and incumbency, remaining unexamined, which could lead to results that appear to give candidate sex outsize importance in voter decision making (Conover and Feldman 1989; Downs 1957; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Popkin 1993; Rahn 1993). This leaves us with a conventional wisdom about the impact of gender stereotypes that is not well suited to predicting what will happen in the more complex world of actual elections.

With these limitations in mind, the challenge for researchers is to move beyond the hypothetical and examine whether and when voters use gender stereotypes when they are choosing among women and men candidates in actual elections. In doing so, the current research extends our earlier work on the impact of gender stereotypes on voting for women candidates, which finds a relatively limited influence for stereotypes, particularly vis-à-vis other important political influences such as partisanship and incumbency (Dolan 2014). However, this earlier work only examined elections for the U.S. House of Representatives, which leaves us with questions about whether gender stereotypes have a different influence when women run for different types of offices. One limitation in conducting this analysis is that so much of the previous research on stereotypes across different offices has been conducted with experiments and hypothetical candidates, which leaves us without clear theoretical expectations or clear support from the data. As a result, we are left to follow the logical assumptions about stereotypes mattering more as the level or type of office increases or becomes more prestigious.

First, we test the hypothesis that the *level of office* should be related to voter use of gender stereotypes. Here we expect that male policy and trait stereotypes will be positively related to vote choice for candidates as the level of office they seek increases and that female policy and stereotype traits will be more likely to be positively related to voting for lower-level offices. In this project, our definition of level of office is more truncated than is ideal, as we include U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor. For our purposes, House races, which focus on local constituencies and are

lower-visibility elections than those for Senate or governor, become our “lower-level” races; these are compared with the dynamics in Senate and governor elections. Second, we test the hypothesis that the *type of office* a woman seeks should drive stereotype use, with male policy and trait stereotypes being positively related to vote choice in races for executive office and female policy and trait stereotypes being positively related to voting for legislative office. This leads to a comparison of House and Senate elections with races for governor.

Having framed these hypotheses, we must keep in mind that all offices for which candidates run have a “level” and a “type” at the same time, which can create situations in which expectations may conflict. For example, we could hypothesize that voters are more likely to employ male policy and trait stereotypes when voting for a national-level office such as the U.S. Senate (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). At the same time, the U.S. Senate is a legislative office, which could lead to the competing hypothesis that voters are more likely to employ female trait and policy stereotypes for this office compared with an executive position, which is thought of as more “male” (Fox and Oxley 2003). As a result, we must be open to exploring the results of this examination of these three offices for which women regularly run and win — U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor — and determining whether they conform to expectations or lead us to rethink our assumptions.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this article 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. To accomplish this, a two-wave panel survey of 3,150 U.S. adults was conducted during the midterm elections of 2010. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the surveys were conducted in an online environment by Knowledge Networks during September and October/November of 2010.¹ The nationally representative sample was

1. The panel survey was administered by Knowledge Networks through its KnowledgePanel. Relying on a sampling frame that includes 97% of U.S. households, Knowledge Networks uses address-based probability sampling techniques to draw samples that are representative of the U.S. population. The firm provides, at no charge, laptops and free monthly Internet service to all sample respondents who do not already have these services, thereby overcoming the potential problem of samples biased against individuals without access to the Internet.

drawn from 29 states and was stratified to include people who experienced either mixed-sex or single-sex races for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor. A series of questions in the first wave of the survey were designed to probe respondents' 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 respondents' reactions and behaviors toward the specific candidates they experienced in their elections. This article focuses on findings for respondents who experienced 91 House races, 11 Senate races, and 5 races for governor in the 29 states in the sample.

As a result of the intentional panel design, we have survey responses from the same respondents at two different points in the campaign cycle, fully two months apart, on a wide range of attitudes and behaviors.² This design allows us to measure the abstract gender stereotypes respondents may hold separately from the specific candidate evaluations they make, thereby greatly reducing the possibility that responses to the abstract stereotype measures colored behaviors toward particular candidates. It also allows us to examine a wide range of traditional influences on vote choice, providing the most comprehensive understanding of how voters evaluate women candidates and whether they choose to vote for them.

Measuring gender stereotypes and reactions to women candidates can be a challenging task because of concerns that people will hide their true feelings behind socially acceptable responses of egalitarianism. To minimize this possibility, we draw on current research on surveying sensitive topics that demonstrates that offering more anonymity leads to more truthful responses (Schaeffer and Presser 2003; Tourangeau and Smith 1996). The data for this survey were collected in a Web-TV environment, with respondents answering questions alone in their own homes. This allows respondents the greatest level of anonymity by eliminating interaction with an interviewer. Recent research comparing Internet surveys with other methods of collecting survey data clearly demonstrates lower levels of socially desirable answers from people who were surveyed

2. The survey completion rate, a key metric for probability Web surveys from the KnowledgePanel, is 68% (Callegaro and DiSogra 2011). The respondent retention rate between Wave 1 and Wave 2 was 87%. Table A1 presents data on respondent characteristics on key variables to demonstrate that there are no significant differences among respondents in the two waves.

using this format (Dennis and Li 2007; Heerwegh 2009; Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008).

The elections of 2010 provide a particularly good opportunity to investigate the impact of gender stereotypes on the fortunes of women candidates. First, there was no presidential election to overwhelm voters and compete for their attention. Second, 2010 offers researchers the first election cycle in which to examine gender stereotypes after the historic candidacies of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin. In addition, a record number of women candidates ran for statewide and congressional office that year, and this group of women allowed for more partisan diversity among women candidates than is often the case in U.S. elections, with approximately 40% of the women candidates for Congress and governor running as Republicans (CAWP 2012). Finally, the midterm elections in 2010 were more competitive than many in recent memory, particularly for Congress (Cook 2010).

The survey for this project asked respondents for their vote choice in races for U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and governor. These data give us a way to examine the different influence of stereotypes based on the level and type of office being sought by women candidates. With regard to the level of office, we will examine the impact of stereotypes on vote choice decisions for House races and compare them to races for Senate and governor. This will allow us to compare the influence of gender stereotypes on vote choice decisions in legislative and executive offices.

VARIABLES

Measures of Gender Stereotypes

In measuring stereotypes, we draw on many of the trait and issue competence items used in previous literature on political gender stereotypes (Burrell 2008; Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Koch 1999; Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2002). 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 better able to handle a particular policy area. The traits and issue areas included are among 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.³ 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 a candidate's honesty, compassion, ability to build consensus, and ability to change government. The individual policies and traits are combined into the four measures of female and male policies and traits.⁴ (See the online appendix for all measures employed and their coding.)

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis measures whether the respondent voted for the woman or the man candidate in the House, Senate, or governor elections in which he or she took part. To test our hypotheses about the impact of level and type of office, we conduct the analysis separately for House, Senate, and governor races. Also, because political party is central to vote choice and to how women candidates are evaluated, we run the vote choice analysis separately for Democratic women who run against Republican men and Republican women who run against Democratic men (Koch 2000, 2002; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009).

Independent Variables

Given that the goal of this analysis is to examine the impact of political gender stereotypes on voting for women candidates who run for different kinds of offices, there are several independent variables of interest. First are the four measures of the male and female policy and trait stereotypes described earlier. If, as much of the literature suggests, people value different traits and abilities of candidates based on the office they pursue, gender stereotypes should be significantly related to vote choice, and their impact should vary across the three offices examined here. Beyond this, we must account for other relevant influences on vote choice. Because we know that partisans are overwhelmingly likely to vote for the candidate of their own party, we include a variable that measures the

3. Because not all governors have a role in national security and border and immigration issues, respondents were not asked about these issues in evaluating candidates for governor.

4. Alpha scores for the four indices are as follows: female policies = .76, male policies = .83, female traits = .78, male traits = .74.

correspondence in party identification between the respondent and the candidate of interest. Also included is a variable that accounts for independent identifiers. Beyond political party, we include variables that measure the incumbency status of the woman candidate and the percentage of total campaign spending by the woman in the mixed-sex races.

ANALYSIS

Stereotypes

The first step in the analysis is to briefly consider the stereotypes respondents possess and examine whether there are patterns in who holds them. [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) present the frequencies for the stereotype measures. In general, these data are in line with recent research that suggests that stereotyped impressions of women and men are easing ([Burrell 2008](#); [Dolan 2010](#); [Eagly and Carli 2007](#); [Fridkin and Kenney 2009](#); [Lawless 2004](#)). With regard to policy competence ([Table 1](#)), there are only two issues on which a majority see women or men as better than the other sex at handling the issue: child care and abortion. Not surprisingly, women are seen as better able to handle both of these issues than men. On each of the other issues, the modal response is “no difference,” with anywhere from 55% of respondents (national security) to 75% of respondents (economy, deficit) saying that they see no difference in women’s and men’s ability to handle these issues. For the issues on which the modal response is no difference between women and men, the next most likely response on each issue is in the expected stereotyped direction.

The same general pattern is true when we examine stereotypes about traits ([Table 2](#)). For each of the eight traits examined, large majorities see no difference between women and men. For most of the issues, those who hold stereotypes hold them in the expected direction — women as more compassionate, men as more decisive — with two exceptions. Women and men are essentially seen as equally likely to be able to build consensus, and women are seen as more intelligent than men. While these findings of similar evaluation of women and men may appear to fly in the face of the traditional literature on stereotypes, they are consistent with the most recent examinations of candidate trait evaluations, both from survey and experimental data ([Brooks 2013](#); [Pew Research Center 2008](#)).

Table 1. Abstract policy stereotypes, all respondents

	<i>Man</i>	<i>No difference</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>N</i>
Female policies				
Abortion	4.08	45.75	50.17	3,059
Child care	1.56	38.50	59.94	3,063
Education	4.77	68.37	26.86	3,064
Health care	5.14	70.05	24.81	3,055
Male policies				
Crime	32.87	62.18	4.95	3,056
Deficit	15.25	76.27	8.48	3,062
Economy	18.21	73.75	8.04	3,051
Immigration	19.86	74.30	5.83	3,051
National security	42.06	56.02	1.92	3,061

Table 2. Abstract trait stereotypes, all respondents

	<i>Man</i>	<i>No difference</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>N</i>
Female traits				
Change government	11.63	76.27	12.10	3,050
Compassion	2.50	51.13	46.36	3,058
Consensus building	13.08	75.44	11.48	3,052
Honest	2.50	79.31	18.19	3,059
Male traits				
Decisive	19.86	72.89	7.25	3,050
Experience	27.06	70.69	2.25	3,046
Intelligent	3.48	88.79	7.74	3,055
Leadership	22.52	72.39	5.09	3,054

Having examined the distribution of political gender stereotypes about women and men, it may be helpful to more fully understand the sources of these stereotypes among voters. To that end, Table 3 presents an analysis of the determinants of gender stereotypes with a focus on demographic and political characteristics of the respondents. The first thing to notice is that stereotype beliefs appear to be a function of respondent sex and political beliefs. Women and men are significantly different in their stereotype perspectives, with women being more likely than men to see women as better at female policies and more likely to possess female traits (which is the expected stereotype direction) but less likely to see men as better at male policies and likely to possess male traits. Men hold the opposite positions, which results in women and men seeing candidates of their own sex as “superior” on each of the four

Table 3. Stereotype predictors

	<i>Female policy Stereotypes</i>	<i>Male policy Stereotypes</i>	<i>Female trait Stereotypes</i>	<i>Male trait Stereotypes</i>
Education	-0.002 (0.01)	-0.038 (0.02)	-0.011 (0.01)	0.035 (0.02)
Age	0.004 (0.00)	0.001 (0.00)	0.004* (0.00)	0.003 (0.00)
Woman	0.464* (0.10)	-0.370* (0.07)	0.237* (0.07)	-0.308* (0.05)
Party ID	0.053* (0.02)	-0.112* (0.03)	0.032 (0.02)	-0.085* (0.02)
Ideology	-0.056 (0.03)	0.095* (0.04)	-0.004 (0.02)	-0.016 (0.03)
White	-0.052 (0.09)	0.029 (0.11)	0.055 (0.08)	-0.062 (0.07)
State vote	-0.000 (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	0.004 (0.00)	-0.001 (0.00)
Constant	9.102* (0.25)	11.564* (0.50)	8.212* (0.15)	8.666* (0.35)
Adjusted R ²	.04	.05	.02	.04
N	2,605	2,580	2,596	2,578

Note: Ordinary least squares regression for respondent stereotypes.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed test of significance. Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

dimensions. Beyond respondent sex, the other demographic characteristics do not appear to influence stereotype holding at all. There are no differences in stereotypes among respondents of different racial groups, education levels, or age groups, with the exception that older people are more likely to see women candidates as more likely to possess female traits.

When we look at respondent party identification and ideology, we see some significant influences. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to hold the expected stereotype that women are better at female policy areas, while Republicans are more likely to hold the expected male stereotypes about both male policy and traits. Conservative respondents are also more likely to hold the expected stereotype that men are better suited to handle male policy areas. One final political variable acknowledges that because stereotypes are shaped, in part, by political and ideological influences, we might expect stereotype holding to be related to where a respondent lives. Stereotypes might be more prevalent among people who live in more conservative states or areas of the country. To examine this, we include a variable that measures the two-party national vote in 2004 and 2008 for each state represented by races

in the dataset. Interestingly, this variable is not significantly related to any of the stereotype measures, which suggests that the pattern of stereotype use among respondents is not different across states.

U.S. House

To test our hypotheses, we begin by examining whether gender stereotypes are related to voting for women candidates, and then we compare these findings across the different offices to see whether the impact of stereotypes differs across offices. [Table 4](#) presents a series of models that analyze voting for women who run for each of the three offices analyzed. There are two models for each office: one of the determinants of vote choice when a Democratic woman runs against a Republican man and the second in which a Republican woman runs against a Democratic man. Taking House races with Democratic women candidates first (column 1), we see that none of the four measures of policy and trait stereotypes is significantly related to vote choice in these races. This suggests that people are not employing their gender stereotypes in choosing between these women and men candidates, a finding that runs counter to the notion that gender stereotypes matter most in relatively low-visibility elections such as the U.S. House (McDermott [1997](#), [1998](#)).

However, we see a different influence for stereotypes in races with Republican women candidates. The model in column 2 suggests the first evidence that female stereotypes can work to hurt women candidates, as we find that voters who hold expected stereotypes about women's superiority on female policy issues are actually less likely to vote for Republican women. Instead, these voters are more likely to vote for the Democratic male opponent. Beyond this, we also see a positive relationship between female trait stereotypes and voting for women candidates, with voters who see women as more likely to be compassionate and consensus oriented being more likely to vote for the Republican woman.

U.S. Senate

If the level of office candidates seek dictates stereotype use, we could expect to see different patterns in vote choice for women candidates for the U.S. Senate. While House races are relatively low-visibility races with more local

Table 4. Vote for woman candidate: Mixed-sex House, Senate, and governor races

	<i>House</i>		<i>Senate</i>		<i>Governor</i>	
	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>
Female policy stereotypes	−0.043 (0.11)	−0.487* (0.23)	0.346* (0.11)	−0.244 (0.19)	0.426* (0.17)	−0.092 (0.09)
Male policy stereotypes	0.019 (0.11)	0.125 (0.11)	−0.347* (0.11)	0.288 (0.18)	−0.186 (0.22)	0.04 (0.17)
Female trait stereotypes	0.287 (0.16)	0.640* (0.28)	0.258* (0.13)	0.642* (0.29)	−0.454 (0.25)	0.351* (0.14)
Male trait stereotypes	−0.179 (0.11)	0.409 (0.23)	0.159 (0.15)	0.050 (0.24)	−0.12 (0.24)	0.02 (0.15)
Share party	3.002* (0.36)	3.869* (0.59)	3.784* (0.33)	3.414* (0.60)	3.471* (0.47)	2.743* (0.31)
Independent	−0.189 (1.20)	— —	— —	— —	— —	1.640 (1.00)
Woman incumbent	0.761 (0.51)	1.241 (0.77)	−1.159 (0.75)	— —	— —	−0.365 (0.61)
Percent spent by woman	1.384 (0.76)	−0.285 (1.20)	4.741* (1.61)	−1.14 (1.67)	— —	−4.400** (1.65)
Constant	−3.280 (1.96)	−8.077* (3.15)	−6.606* (1.89)	−7.862* (3.30)	0.570 (3.21)	−0.919 (2.30)

Continued

Table 4. Continued

	<i>House</i>		<i>Senate</i>		<i>Governor</i>	
	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>	<i>Democratic woman</i>	<i>Republican woman</i>
Pseudo R^2	.40	.46	.47	.52	.39	.30
N	469	219	589	134	220	508

Notes: Independents omitted due to perfect prediction in analyzing Republican women candidates in the House, both sets of candidates in the Senate, and Democratic women candidates in governor's races. No Republican women candidates for Senate were incumbents.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed test of significance. Clustered standard errors are in parentheses for House races. Standard errors in parentheses for Senate and governor races. Spending is excluded in analyzing Democratic women gubernatorial candidates because only two races (Florida and Wyoming) featured a Democratic woman running against a Republican man.

constituencies, Senate races are more highly visible statewide affairs. However, if the type of office (legislative versus executive) is what matters, we should see fairly similar dynamics in the House and Senate races. Columns 3 and 4 in [Table 4](#) suggest stronger support for the level/visibility hypothesis. In the model estimating voting for Democratic Senate women candidates (column 3), we see that three stereotypes shape vote decisions. Voters who hold traditional stereotypes about women's policy strengths and personality traits are significantly more likely to vote for the Democratic woman and less likely to vote for her Republican male opponent. At the same time, we see that people who hold the expected stereotype about male policy competence are less likely to vote for the woman candidate and more likely to choose the man. In examining Republican women Senate candidates running against Democratic men (column 4), we see that only one stereotype matters — female trait stereotypes — with voters who hold traditional stereotypes of women as more honest, compassionate, and consensus oriented being more likely to vote for the Republican woman than her male Democratic opponent.

Governor

If previous literature on the importance of type of office is correct, we should see male policy and trait stereotypes having an impact in elections for an executive office like governor. In examining races for governor in 2010 (columns 5 and 6), we find no evidence that voters are particularly focused on male issues or traits when choosing candidates. Neither male traits nor policy stereotypes are related to voting for any candidate for governor, woman or man. Instead, we see the impact of two female stereotypes. In races in which a Democratic woman candidate runs against a Republican man (column 5), female policy stereotypes have a significant impact on vote choice, with voters who see women as particularly well qualified to deal with female policy areas (education, health care, child care, abortion) being more likely to vote for the woman candidate and those who do not hold these stereotypes being more likely to choose her male opponent. For Republican women candidates for governor (column 6), the important dynamic appears to revolve around female trait stereotypes, with voters who hold traditional stereotypes about women being more likely to choose the Republican woman over her opponent.

COMPARISONS ACROSS LEVEL AND TYPE OF OFFICE

If the previous research employing experimental and hypothetical designs that finds public evaluations of women candidates being shaped by the office they seek is accurate, we would expect to see different patterns in the power of gender stereotypes to influence voting for women candidates. However, as [Table 4](#) demonstrates, there are very few clear or consistent patterns in the way that voters employ stereotypes in the presence of women candidates and few relationships that conform to expectations. First, while gender stereotypes are not a strong or consistent influence on vote choice in these races with women candidates, we can say that voters in these races are a bit more likely to employ stereotypes in their evaluations of women running for Congress (6 of 16 coefficients reach significance) than they do for governor (2 of 8 coefficients reach significance), which is in line with previous research (Dolan 1997; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). However, we do not see evidence of support for the expectation that people would employ *male* policy and trait stereotypes to evaluate women candidates for these offices more often than for other offices. While we do see one instance of a male stereotype being related to vote choice — the negative impact of male policy stereotypes on voting for Democratic women Senate candidates — female policy and trait stereotypes are much more likely to be related to voting for women for the House and Senate. This is the same pattern that we see in terms of voting for governor, with female policy and trait stereotypes appearing to be more relevant than male stereotypes. From these comparisons, it is hard to see voters relying on different criteria to evaluate women for offices of different levels of visibility.

The same is true when we think about executive versus legislative positions. Executive elections such as those for governor should be the races where we see people relying on male policy and trait stereotypes (Adams 1975; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). Instead, these stereotypes are not related to voting for any women candidate for governor. Perhaps most striking here is the complete lack of relationship between male trait stereotypes and executive office. The early works in the field suggested that voters display clear preferences for male personality traits in the candidates they choose for higher-level and executive office (Adams 1975; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler 1987), but this analysis from real-world elections suggests a disconnect between what people might say they value in abstract situations and what they actually employ in making real voting decisions.

There is one other interesting observation to note from these findings. For each office examined, the relationship of gender stereotypes to vote choice for women candidates is different for Democratic and Republican women. In House races, none of the stereotypes is significantly related to vote choice for Democratic women candidates. For Republican women, traditional female policy stereotypes pull voters away from them and toward their Democratic male opponents, while female trait stereotypes result in their receiving a boost in support from some voters. For Senate races, the dynamic shifts, with stereotypes being more closely related to vote choice for Democratic women candidates than for Republican women. Voters employ their female policy and trait stereotypes along with their male policy stereotypes when faced with a Democratic woman Senate candidate, but they only rely on their female trait stereotypes when considering Republican women for this office. Finally, voting for Democratic women candidates for governor is higher among voters who hold traditional female policy stereotypes. For Republican women running for governor, female trait stereotypes are the important influence. The finding that stereotypes have a different relationship to vote choice decisions involving women candidates of different parties is in keeping with research that finds that party and candidate sex often interact in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of voters (Koch 2000, 2002; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009).

DISCUSSION

In examining the literature on the impact of gender stereotypes on support for women candidates, it becomes clear that current knowledge is incomplete. The research presented here is an attempt to address gaps in our knowledge by examining whether and when people employ gender stereotypes differently when faced with women candidates running for a range of offices. In all, the evidence for a differential influence of stereotypes is limited. While previous work suggested an important influence of male policy and trait stereotypes for high-level and executive offices, we see almost no evidence for that here. When stereotypes are part of the vote choice decision, voters are more likely to employ female stereotypes than male stereotypes, regardless of the offices women seek. Stereotypes do not appear to consistently influence vote choice in elections in which women candidates run against men. Instead, political context — the party of the woman candidate and the office for which she

runs — appears to be most important. Beyond this, we see that stereotypes are not a central influence on vote choice in any of these races and are largely dwarfed by traditional political influences. Indeed, in each of the models estimating vote choice, sharing the political party of the woman candidate is far and away the most significant influence on voting for the woman.

One other implication of this research is to point out the gap between research findings built on experiments and hypothetical situations and those based on studying real candidates running in actual elections. Past work has warned of the importance of male policy and trait stereotypes to candidates who want to pursue high-level and/or executive office, but the evidence presented here suggests this is much less of a concern for women than has been assumed. This finding is consistent with other recent examinations of the role of gender stereotypes in real-world elections, which tend to conclude that stereotypes are at least a neutral, and sometimes a positive, influence on the fortunes of women candidates (Dolan 2014; Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Lawless and Hayes 2013).

At the same time, we need to acknowledge that this analysis focuses only on individual-level voting decisions. Evidence of a somewhat limited role for gender stereotypes on these important decisions should not be construed to suggest that stereotypes no longer matter to the fate of women candidates. Instead, this work should be seen as a call for fresh examinations of real-world elections and the potential influence of stereotypes on different facets of political life, whether it be on the campaign decisions women make, media coverage of their candidacies, or public reactions and vote choice decisions. It is clear that women candidates for office no longer face overt hostility and monumental structural challenges to claiming a successful role in political life, but gender can and does still exert an influence on American elections. Refining our research agendas and broadening our sources of data will equip us to continue to construct a fully developed portrait of the fate of women candidates in the real world, no matter the office they seek.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X16000246>

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