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Elizabeth Sharrow, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Dara Z Strolovitch, *Princeton University*

Michael T Heaney, *University of Michigan*

Seth E Masket, *University of Denver*

Joanne M Miller, *University of Minnesota*

elizabeth_sharrow/1/

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Gender Attitudes, Gendered Partisanship: Feminism and Support for Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton among Party Activists

Elizabeth A. Sharrow^a, Dara Z. Strolovitch^b, Michael T. Heaney^c, Seth E. Masket^d, and Joanne M. Miller^e

^aUniversity of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts; ^bPrinceton University, Princeton, New Jersey; ^cUniversity of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan; ^dUniversity of Denver, Denver, Colorado; ^eUniversity of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Activists in the Democratic and Republican parties have distinct concerns about women's place in American politics and society. These views lead them to evaluate female candidates through different ideological lenses that are conditioned, in part, on their divergent attitudes about gender. We explore the implications of these diverging lenses through an examination of the 2008 candidacies of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, using data from an original survey of Democratic and Republican National Convention delegates. We find that delegate sex did not affect their evaluations but that evaluations were influenced by the interaction of partisanship and attitudes about women's roles.

KEYWORDS

Hillary Clinton; Sarah Palin; 2008 election; women; gender; partisan polarization; feminism; presidential nominations; nominating conventions; party delegates

As the 2016 US presidential candidate nomination cycle unfolded, the gendered implications of the 2008 campaign seemed increasingly relevant. It was in 2008 that both American political parties had, for the first time, seriously considered women for national executive office in the same year. As Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) prepared to concede her nomination bid that year—foreclosing the possibility that a woman would finally be nominated for president by a major party—Governor Sarah Palin (AK) was chosen as the first Republican female vice presidential candidate. Although neither Clinton nor Palin was successful in their attempt, that each one was a serious contender constituted a significant departure from any previous American election (Carroll and Dittmar 2010).

The enduring implications of this new direction were evident in the prominent roles played by women such as Representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and Governor Nikki Haley (R-SC) in the 2012 Republican Party nomination contest. They were also evident in the early and widespread assumption among political observers that Clinton would be

CONTACT Elizabeth A. Sharrow sharrow@polsci.umass.edu University of Massachusetts Amherst, Two Hundred Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003, USA.

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a top contender for the Democratic Party's 2016 presidential nomination and in their speculation about whether other women (e.g., Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren) would throw their hats into that party's ring. The candidacies of Clinton and Palin therefore provide an unprecedented lens through which to understand the ongoing and still unfolding relationships among sex, gender, and partisanship in American presidential primaries, nominating conventions, and elections.

This article examines some of the ways in which these factors influenced the politics of the 2008 Republican and Democratic National Conventions. Using evidence from a unique and original survey of party convention delegates that we fielded in 2008 in Denver, Colorado (where the Democratic Party convened), and St. Paul, Minnesota (where the Republican Party convened), we ask three questions.¹ First, to what extent do sex, sex-based mobilization, and feminist attitudes predict national party delegates' feelings about female candidates, in this case Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin? Second, are delegates' attitudes about these issues moderated by party in ways that influence their feelings about female candidates and women in public office? Finally, what can understanding these issues illuminate about the roles of sex and gender in contemporary party politics?

To answer these questions, we focus on delegates' responses to survey questions that allow us to assess the relationship among their opinions about sex-based discrimination, Democratic delegates' feelings about Clinton, and Republican delegates' feelings about Palin. We show that party activists' support for each candidate is conditioned, in part, on distinct and diverging ideas about the ways in which gender matters in contemporary American politics and society. We argue that these differences are themselves revealing of broader trends in partisan polarization, such as the divergence of the two parties on social issues and increasingly conservative positions among Republicans when it comes to the role of the government in reducing gender inequality. But they are also revealing about the ongoing and developing tensions between these positions and the changing roles of women in politics and the labor force.

We begin by reviewing scholarship about the evolving relationship between gender and party politics, focusing in particular on the implications of this relationship for the candidacies of Senator Clinton and Governor Palin in 2008. Next, we outline the methods that we used to collect data about delegates at the 2008 Democratic and Republican National Conventions. We then describe the three hypotheses and models that we use to examine the interactive effects of political party and gender on delegates' evaluations of Palin and Clinton, after which we present the results of our data analyses. We conclude by considering the implications of our findings for understanding the evolving role of gender as a critical category of political analysis within and beyond the 2008 election.

Sex, gender, and American political parties

From debates about the passage of the 19th Amendment, to shifting positions on prohibition, abortion, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), to attempts to woo “moms” (both “soccer” and “security”), American political parties have long grappled with issues of sex and gender (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000). The ways in which the Democrats and Republicans have incorporated women and “women’s issues” into their respective parties and platforms, however, have been uneven and circuitous, converging at some points and diverging at others. Although in recent decades it has been the Democratic Party that has been most closely associated with female voters and with many feminist issues, the Republican Party was an early leader on women’s rights, having led the charge to add the ERA to the Constitution in 1940. The Democratic Party—which had typically supported social welfare and other prototypically gendered issues—followed suit in 1944. By 1980, however, the Republican Party reversed its position and withdrew its support for the Amendment, while the Democrats provided financial support to candidates who backed it (Wolbrecht 2000). As such, while the two major parties were once all but indistinguishable when it came to issues such as the ERA, equal pay, and abortion, by 1984 they “had so diverged” over women’s rights that the National Organization for Women (NOW) “abandoned its traditional nonpartisanship and endorsed the Democratic ticket” (Wolbrecht 2000, 3).

The divergence between the two parties over gender issues has become even more pronounced since the 1980s, and the implications of this divergence have been amplified by their intersections and overlap with two other significant trends. First, American women’s educational attainment and labor force participation have both grown dramatically since the 1970s, leading to sea changes in their social, political, and economic roles as well. Second, during this same period, the two major American political parties have become increasingly polarized (Adams 1997; Hacker and Pierson 2010; Layman 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008; Rohde 1991). As the Republican Party became much more conservative and the Democratic Party somewhat more liberal (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008), their positions on issues of sex and gender have become polarized as well. In keeping with their comparatively progressive positions in areas such as race, labor, and the economy, Democrats have taken what are typically considered the more “feminist” positions on issues such as reproductive rights, social welfare and redistributive policies, and opportunities for women in education, the labor force, and other areas (Wolbrecht 2000). The Republican Party, in contrast, has become increasingly likely to support policies associated with—and that often reinforce—traditional gender roles for women as mothers (Rymph 2006). As scholars such as Christina Wolbrecht (2000), Michele Swers (2002), Kira Sanbonmatsu (2002),

and Kathryn Pearson (2012) have shown, sex and gender issues are key to understanding contemporary American party politics and polarization.

Even in the context of this long history of gendered partisan politics, the 2008 presidential election season stood out for the extent to which issues of sex and gender were at the fore. Hillary Clinton's strong showing in the early Democratic primaries opened a floodgate of speculation about whether and how a female candidate would alter the dynamics of the nomination process and prompted widespread assumptions that she would attract women's votes. On the other side of the partisan divide (and after Clinton had conceded the nomination to Barack Obama), many political analysts attributed Senator John McCain's (R-AZ) selection of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate to a calculation that her presence on the Republican ticket might attract the votes of women who were disappointed that they would not have the chance to cast their ballots for a female presidential candidate (Kiely and Wolf 2008; Seelye 2008). Throughout the 2008 nomination cycle, both parties hoped that a woman candidate for executive office might attract women voters compelled by the possibility of a female President or Vice President.

Indeed, prompted by research showing that women of all races vote at higher rates than men (Center for American Women and Politics 2014) and that their votes can swing elections (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, and Lin 2004; Carroll 1988; Dolan 1998), both parties have struggled mightily to appeal to female voters for decades. As part of these efforts, each party has tried to frame its positions on issues such as pay equity, abortion, and workplace discrimination as the best ones "for women," deploying female members as spokespeople and advocates for their particular conceptions of women's interests (Dodson 2006; Swers 2002).² These efforts are embedded in longstanding histories of women mobilizing "as" women in ways that are both pro- and antifeminist and both liberal and conservative (Goss and Heaney 2010; Klatch 2001). While Clinton has embraced recognizably liberal feminist positions in her bid for the Democratic nomination, Palin's nomination by the Republican Party has followed a more conservative version of gender politics, one that Rebecca Klatch (2001) characterizes as a "traditionalist" response to the mobilization of Clinton-style feminism.³ In so doing, Palin's candidacy represented what Ronnee Schreiber (2008) argues is a distinctly conservative and antifeminist version of women's identity and gender consciousness, one that challenges "the claims that [feminist] groups like NOW are the ones who know what women want" (13).⁴ So even though, as a conservative Republican, Sarah Palin's positions on policy issues such as reproductive rights are not ones typically associated with those of the feminist movement (Rymph 2011; Schreiber 2012), her emergence as a candidate revived a national conversation about the meanings of gender for contemporary politics. It was in this context that activists in

both parties were freshly considering the role of gender in the 2008 presidential campaign.

Hillary Clinton's and Sarah Palin's convention speeches in 2008 were emblematic of the contemporary political salience of gender (Carroll and Dittmar 2010; Clinton 2008; Palin 2008). In her 2008 concession speech, for example, Clinton thanked "all of those women in their 80s and their 90s, born before women could vote, who cast their votes for our campaign... Although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it" (Clinton 2008). Palin echoed these sentiments at a rally in Dayton, Ohio, later that summer, saying, "It was rightly noted in Denver this week that Hillary left 18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling in America. But it turns out the women of America aren't finished yet, and we can shatter that glass ceiling once and for all" (Palin 2008).

Although Clinton and Palin advanced distinct and largely opposing political agendas, political observers took it as given that their candidacies were linked by gender (Castañeda Rossmann 2010; Gervais and Hillard 2011; Meeks 2013). Evidence that Clinton's sex played a role in the nomination battle is well documented, as she confronted misogynist coverage that focused disproportionately on her appearance, the tone of her voice, and her husband's past infidelity (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Romaniuk 2014; Uscinski and Goren 2010; Vandegrift and Czopp 2011; but see also Brooks 2013 and Hayes, Lawless, and Baitinger 2014).⁵ Palin, too, struggled to be perceived as a legitimate candidate: coverage of her campaign was disproportionately negative, for example, and much of it objectified her by focusing on nonsubstantive topics such as her looks and self-presentation (Heflick and Goldenberg 2010; Heldman and Wade 2011; Miller and Peake 2013).

Although scholars have shown that both gender and party were salient within each woman's campaign, little scholarship, has investigated delegates' positions on the gendered topics brought to the fore by the candidacies of Palin and Clinton *within* each partisan context. We also know very little about how delegates evaluated the candidates themselves. These elites are critical to the evolution of the party because they help to mobilize resources, frames issues, and select candidates for local, state, and national electoral contests. Scholars have debated the extent to which Palin's presence on the Republican ticket bolstered or hindered McCain's prospects, and have found that gender played at least some role in vote choice for a portion of voters during the general election (Burmila and Ryan 2013; Kenski 2010; Knuckey 2011). Our data provide a unique opportunity to investigate whether gendered attitudes affected not only voters' but also party elites' evaluations of these candidates, and if so, to explore whether these evaluations affected delegates' support for particular candidates.

Hypotheses

With the foregoing context and histories framing our expectations, we test three sets of hypotheses about the effects of sex, sex-based mobilization, gender attitudes, and partisanship on evaluations of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin by convention delegates in 2008. First, to explore the implications of these developments for the evaluation of female candidates, we test the *conditional effects of gender hypothesis*. This hypothesis brings the gendered histories of each party that we described above into conversation with work showing that, at the individual level, the Republican Party has become increasingly attractive to people who embrace gender traditionalism (Klatch 1988; Luker 1985; Mansbridge 1986; Schreiber 2008) while the Democratic Party has come to appeal more to those who embrace feminist (or at least liberal feminist) issues and goals (Costain 1991; Freeman 1986; Pearson 2012; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009; Wolbrecht 2002).⁶ We hypothesize that delegates' views about gender had different effects among Democrats and Republicans, with Republican delegates' support for Palin enhanced by their beliefs in traditional gender roles and Democrats' support for Clinton augmented by their liberal and feminist beliefs about gender. We therefore test the possibility that, rather than simply supporting or not supporting Palin or Clinton because they are women (a possibility we explore in an alternative hypothesis), Republicans evaluated Palin more positively to the extent that they held more typically conservative views on gender while Democrats evaluated Clinton more positively to the extent that they held stronger liberal feminist views on gender.

We contrast this focal hypothesis with two alternatives. First, on the basis of previous research demonstrating a gender gap in approval for female candidates (Brians 2005; Dolan 1998, 2004), we posit the baseline *direct effects of sex hypothesis*, which holds simply that women who were delegates to each convention evaluated the female candidate at each one more positively than did men. That is, female delegates to the Democratic National Convention (DNC) more positively evaluated Hillary Clinton than did their male counterparts, and female delegates to the Republican National Convention (RNC) more positively evaluated Sarah Palin than did their male counterparts at that convention. The gender gap in support for female candidates on the part of women is, as Leonie Huddy and Tony Carey (2009) note, only "modestly sized and variable" (83). However, given the widespread speculation that Clinton and Palin's candidacies were, in part, driven by women's in-group attachments and identifications, it is important to consider whether female partisans supported female candidates at higher rates than their male counterparts (Simon and Hoyt 2008).

While the first alternative hypothesis examines the role of delegate sex in support for female candidates, research also suggests that involvement in women's issues and organizations on the part of delegates—both male and

female—might also affect their support for female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000). To examine this possibility, we test the *sex-based mobilization hypothesis*, which holds that delegates who had mobilized politically on the basis of gender issues evaluated Clinton and Palin more positively than did delegates who had not mobilized politically on such issues.

Data collection

We surveyed hundreds of delegates at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions during the summer of 2008 to determine whether and how convention delegates' sexes, their ties to women's organizations, and their attitudes about women and gender influence their evaluation of executive level female candidates. To our knowledge, ours was the only academic survey to focus on delegates' opinions at both 2008 party conventions. This article, along with two others using these data (Heaney et al. 2014; Masket, Heaney, and Strolovitch 2014), provide unique insights into party elites' perspectives on this distinctly gendered moment in American party politics. Moreover, rather than asking delegates about their retrospective attitudes after the conventions were over, our study was conducted in real time, ensuring that their preferences were not influenced by factors that became relevant later in the campaign (e.g., Palin's public statements on feminism, including her infamous interview with Katie Couric in late September 2008 [Couric 2008]).

To conduct the surveys, we hired a team of 20 surveyors at each convention. Surveyors were systematically distributed in a representative manner throughout the events and meeting spaces of the conventions, including hotel lobbies, delegation breakfasts, caucus meetings, receptions, and the convention halls. Surveyors approached individuals wearing convention-credential name badges and invited them to participate in a 15-minute survey. The surveys were 6 pages in length with a total of 47 questions each.

We obtained responses from 546 delegates, alternates, and superdelegates at the DNC and 407 delegates and alternates at the RNC. Of the delegates approached by our survey team, 72 percent of those at the DNC and 70 percent of those at the RNC, agreed to participate in the survey. We analyze surveys only of those delegates who were pledged to a specific candidate and who reported the identity of that candidate, leaving us with a sample of 462 pledged delegates at the DNC and 276 pledged delegates at the RNC. These totals yielded a sample that was 11 percent of the population of pledged Democratic convention delegates and 13 percent of the population of pledged Republican convention delegates. Forty-seven percent of the Democratic respondents and 30 percent of the Republican respondents were women, which differed only marginally from the 53 percent of

Democratic pledged delegates and 36 percent of Republican pledged delegates who were women.

While collecting a purely random and representative sample of delegates under such conditions is impractical, we took steps to approximate randomness, similar to those in studies undertaken in recent years (cf. Heaney and Rojas 2007; Walgrave and Verhulst 2011). We used survey weights to adjust for differences between a pure random sample of the population and the sample that we actually obtained (Scheaffer et al. 2011). We weighted the data based on respondents' sex and the candidate to whom they were pledged so that our estimates are consistent with the Republican and Democratic delegate population proportions on these two dimensions. The calculated survey weights are reported in online Appendix A.

The parties' national convention delegates serve in many ways as an ideal barometer of broad sentiment within the parties. They were selected as delegates through a variety of means—some elected, some appointed, some by virtue of already holding government posts—but they, nonetheless, represent a broad range of significant activist and interest group sentiment within their respective parties. To be sure, they do not represent the totality of “the party,” which can be conceived of as anything from a network of intense policy demanders (Bawn et al. 2012; Cohen et al. 2008) to a creature of strategic politicians and candidates (Aldrich 1995). Nonetheless, through their advocacy of positions and candidates championed by representative factions within the party, they represent well the range and intensity of partisan sentiment and debate.

Comparatively evaluating Clinton and Palin

The emergence of the Clinton and Palin candidacies in 2008 affords a unique and underexploited opportunity to compare the role of gender in elites' candidate evaluations because this varies by party. However, there are significant differences between the candidacies of Clinton and Palin, some of which present methodological and substantive challenges to exploiting the opportunities they offer. Before proceeding with our analyses, we first examine these challenges, arguing that although the two candidacies are not perfectly analogous, the differences between them can be reasonably addressed analytically and substantively.

Substantive challenges

The first and most obvious difference between Clinton's and Palin's candidacies is that each of them was vying for a different office. Clinton was a candidate in the highly competitive Democratic presidential primaries, whereas Palin was John McCain's running mate and did not have to stand

as a candidate in nomination contests. In addition, while Clinton did not secure the Democratic nomination for the presidential race, Palin was, in fact, nominated by her party for the vice presidency. Thus, while it may be sensible to consider delegates' satisfaction with Palin as the Republican Party's vice presidential nominee, Democratic delegates' satisfaction with Clinton is not an exact analog to Palin's candidacy. We could have asked a hypothetical question about whether delegates "would have been satisfied" with Clinton as the presidential nominee. However, this is quite a different question than whether they "are satisfied" with an actual nominee, and the parameters of such a hypothetical would have been very unclear to respondents. Would delegates have been satisfied if Clinton had been the legitimate winner of the nomination? Would it have mattered *how* Clinton became the nominee (e.g., won a majority of delegates in the primaries and caucuses, enough delegates converted to supporting her at the convention)? These considerations suggest that it is necessary to ask different questions of delegates to compare their evaluations of Clinton and Palin.

Second, because Clinton and Palin sought nominations for different offices within their respective parties, each of them had a different relationship to their party's presidential candidate. Clinton had just engaged in a long and hard-fought battle with Obama, and feelings of animosity and bitterness persisted among some of their supporters (Kornblut 2008; Patterson 2008; Sherwell 2008). Clinton's delegates attended the convention and many of them remained loyal to her (Fairbanks 2008). Palin, for her part, had not been a candidate in the 2008 Republican primaries, so she did not arrive at the convention with her own loyal delegates. Instead, she was invited by McCain to be the vice presidential nominee. When our survey was in the field, it was likely that most delegates knew little about her other than that she was a governor, a woman, and a conservative. In short, at the time of her nomination, Palin had neither a distinct constituency nor her later controversial reputation and was therefore less likely than Clinton to receive negative evaluations from her party's delegates.

Measurement of attitudes toward Clinton and Palin

In addition to the issues associated with differences between Palin and Clinton, there is another caveat that bears emphasis: our survey targeted delegates, who are highly committed supporters of their parties rather than a random sample of the electorate. Thus, an additional measurement issue stems from the fact that delegates may be expected to evaluate leading figures in their parties positively, even if they harbor some dissatisfaction with individual ones. Without considering a within-party comparative benchmark, it is likely that we would find that Clinton and Palin both had strong support among many of their parties' delegates.

We establish such a benchmark and control for potential delegate predispositions by evaluating each candidate relative to the nominees within their party (i.e., Clinton versus Obama and Palin versus McCain) rather than using independent evaluations of each of them on their own. To this end, in place of identical survey questions to solicit evaluations of Clinton and Palin, we devised distinct questions to reflect variations in the positions sought and relationships to the party's nominee. Republican delegates were therefore asked the relatively straightforward question, "How satisfied are you with Sarah Palin as McCain's vice presidential running mate?" Respondents were asked to choose one of the following options: "Very Satisfied" (which we scored as 5 points), "Somewhat Satisfied" (4 points), "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" (3 points), "Somewhat Dissatisfied" (2 points), and "Very Dissatisfied" (1 point). Answers to this question were compared to the similarly direct question, "How satisfied are you with John McCain as the presidential nominee of the Republican Party?" with the same response options. We then judged respondents' evaluations of Palin by subtracting respondents' scores on the McCain satisfaction question from respondents' scores on the Palin satisfaction question.

Assessing Republican delegates' approval of Sarah Palin and its relationship to their views about gender is fairly straightforward, but such assessments are more complicated when it comes to Hillary Clinton. While Republican delegates could feel content with both Palin *and* McCain, the trade-off was functionally zero-sum among Clinton supporters, whose favored candidate had lost. In this context we could not simply ask Democratic delegates which candidate they approved of or liked best. Instead, our approach to measuring Democratic convention delegates' satisfaction with Clinton is informed by media coverage of concerns on the part of Democratic Party elites that the two candidates had been insufficiently supportive or respectful of one another and that this was threatening party unity heading into the general election (Smith 2008).⁷

To operationalize this idea as a measure of delegates' relative assessment of each candidate, we asked them to rate the following two statements on a five-point scale from "Agree Strongly" to "Disagree Strongly:" (1) "Since Barack Obama became the presumptive Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton has treated Obama with the respect that he deserves;" and (2) "Since Barack Obama became the presumptive Democratic nominee, he has treated Hillary Clinton with the respect that she deserves." We then assessed respondents' evaluations of Clinton by subtracting respondents' scores on the first statement from their scores on the second statement. This approach allows us to account for the residual animosity from the primary campaign and to determine Clinton's relative standing to Obama without resorting to hypothetical questions.

We recognize that this measure is somewhat indirect and unconventional. To assess whether the “respect” variable can, in fact, be treated as a general measure of attitudes toward Clinton (compared to Obama), we considered a range of other variables that would be expected to be correlated with general attitudes toward Clinton. The correlations among these variables and our measure are reported in online Appendix C, Table C. These correlations make clear that the respect measure is, in fact, strongly and negatively correlated with other indicators of positive attitudes toward Obama and strongly and positively correlated with other measures of positive attitudes towards Clinton. These results therefore validate our contention that the respect variable reflects a general predisposition toward liking one of the candidates more than the other (or liking them equally, in the case of a zero-difference score). Appendix C also includes the analogous correlations for the Palin and McCain evaluations, with similarly robust results. This finding suggests that, in addition to being appropriate measures of attitudes toward each candidate that can be used as general evaluations of Palin and Clinton held by delegates, it is also reasonable to compare our differential evaluation variable across party lines (although the measure is admittedly imperfect). Predicting responses to these attitude questions from data on respondent sex, participation in women’s organizations, and liberal or conservative views on gender allow us to test our hypotheses.

Statistical models and results

Our resulting dependent variable consists of two differential evaluations: (1) Republican delegates’ differential evaluations of Palin and McCain and (2) Democratic delegates’ differential evaluations of Clinton and Obama. Among Republicans, the variation for our dependent variable is provided by the 21 percent of respondents whose ratings of Palin and McCain differed from one another. Among Democrats, the variation is provided by the 63 percent of delegates who differentially rated Clinton and Obama. [Table 1](#) reports the results of regression analyses for each party in which the differential evaluations of each candidate are the dependent variables. We test the baseline *direct effects of sex hypothesis* by including a variable in our model for respondent sex, with the expectation that female delegates would evaluate Palin and Clinton more positively than their male counterparts. To test the *sex-based mobilization hypothesis*, we use a variable that measures membership in a women’s organization (e.g., the Women’s Leadership Forum, the National Federation of Democratic Women, the National Federation of Republican Women, Concerned Women for America, Feminists for Life, the National Organization for Women, or EMILY’s List), with the expectation that members of such groups would be more likely than nonmembers to positively evaluate Palin and Clinton.

Table 1. Regression analysis on differential evaluation of candidates, split by party.

	Republican Delegates Palin vs. McCain Model 1			Democratic Delegates Clinton vs. Obama Model 2		
	Beta (Robust SE)	Mean (SD)	Percent Imputed	Beta (Robust SE)	Mean (SD)	Percent Imputed
Sex is Female = 1	-0.242 (0.128)	0.358 (0.476)	5.88%	0.129 (0.150)	0.521 (0.496)	7.52%
Member of Women's Organization = 1	0.348 (0.220)	0.148 (0.349)	9.80%	-0.030 (0.261)	0.120 (0.316)	6.47%
Women Discriminated Against at Work (1 = Disagree Strongly to 5 = Agree Strongly)	-0.189** (0.068)	2.544 (1.295)	10.05%	0.190* (0.082)	4.201 (0.924)	8.77%
Race/Ethnicity is Black/African American = 1	1.002* (0.495)	0.038 (0.186)	6.62%	-0.540* (0.226)	0.159 (0.364)	7.93%
Age in Years	-0.005 (0.005)	51.299 (14.112)	9.07%	-0.010* (0.005)	46.601 (15.427)	10.02%
Income in Thousands of Dollars	0.000 (0.000)	136.013 (98.928)	18.14%	0.001 (0.001)	99.384 (90.216)	12.94%
Level of Education (1 = Less than High School Diploma to 6 = Graduate Degree)	-0.068 (0.055)	4.567 (1.278)	7.84%	0.051 (0.058)	4.646 (1.336)	8.77%
Ideology (1 = To the "left" of strong liberal to 9 = to the "right" of strong conservative)	-0.039 (0.055)	7.405 (1.144)	7.84%	0.016 (0.057)	3.115 (1.46)	6.68%
Frequency of Religious Service Attendance (1 = Never to 5 = Every Week)	-0.015 (0.052)	3.826 (1.363)	8.33%	0.101* (0.055)	2.865 (1.446)	9.60%
Pledged to Party's Nominee = 1	-0.848*** (0.224)	0.719 (0.450)	0.00%	-2.116*** (0.153)	0.518 (0.500)	0.00%
Constant	2.373* (0.943)			0.098 (0.481)		
Dependent Variable – Differential Evaluation		0.309 (1.005)			-0.025 (1.864)	
N	270			414		
F	3.450***			25.220***		
F Degrees of Freedom	10,260			10,404		
Number of Strata	1			1		
R ²	0.261			0.381		

Notes. * $p \leq .050$, ** $p \leq .010$, *** $p \leq .001$. All estimates are adjusted by using survey weights.

Finally, we test the *conditional effects of gender hypothesis* using a variable that measures views about gender discrimination. Following scholars who use attitudes about workplace discrimination as an indicator of "modern sexism" (see Campbell, Schellenberg, and Senn [1997]; Kane and Whipkey [2009]; Swim et al. [1995]; and Tougas et al. [1995]), we operationalize this concept using a question that asked delegates how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "In general, women are more likely to be treated unfairly in the workplace compared to men."⁸ Respondents were provided with the following response options: "agree strongly," "agree somewhat," "neither agree nor disagree," "disagree somewhat," and "disagree strongly" (coded 1 to 5, so that higher numbers indicate a stronger belief that women are disadvantaged or discriminated against in the workplace).

Answering that women are *not* treated fairly is interpreted as an indicator of a liberal feminist view that recognizes ongoing gender discrimination, with the expectation that respondents giving this answer will be more likely to support both policies aimed at alleviating this disadvantage as well as candidates who advocate on behalf of gender equality. Conversely, responding that women *are* treated fairly is treated as an indicator of a conservative view that denies the existence of gender discrimination. This relationship was particularly salient in the context of the 2008 election, during which Clinton articulated prototypically liberal feminist positions on questions of workplace discrimination while Palin's statements on this topic were more recognizably conservative. As such, this variable should negatively affect evaluations of Palin and positively affect evaluations of Clinton. As we expect, among Democratic delegates, 84.6 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that women continue to experience discrimination in the workplace, whereas only 28.3 percent of respondents among Republican delegates held the same position. In an era of purported *de jure* equality, this question asks respondents to indicate their opinion regarding the extent to which gender nevertheless continues to disadvantage women in the workforce. As such, this item is a valid indicator of attitudes about the political meanings of gender, revealing opinions about how it continues to disadvantage women economically and professionally.

We also included seven control variables in the models. First, we consider the effects of respondent race. To capture generational differences among delegates, we include a measure of respondents' age in years. To account for the effects of socioeconomic status, we include a variable for annual income measured in thousands of dollars.⁹ We account for variations in educational attainment using a measure of respondents' level of education.¹⁰ We measure ideology by asking respondents to place themselves on a nine-point ideological scale from "to the left of strong liberal" (1) to "to the right of strong conservative" (9).¹¹ We account for religiosity with a variable measuring the frequency of attendance at religious services.¹² Finally, we include a variable indicating whether the respondent was pledged to the nominee, allowing us to interpret all other variables as a deviation from the average evaluation given by pledged delegates.

We estimated separate regression models for Republican (Model 1) and Democratic (Model 2) delegates using ordinary least squares regression with survey weights and robust standard errors. Missing values of the independent variables were imputed by using complete-case imputation (Little 1988).¹³ The results for Republican delegates are reported in Table 1 and provide no support for the *direct effects of sex hypothesis*, which posited that women would have more positive attitudes toward Palin than men would. The analysis also fails to provide support for the *sex-based mobilization*

hypothesis, which postulated that delegates of either sex who had participated in women's organizations would support Palin at higher levels than those who had not. The negative coefficient for the workplace discrimination variable, however, shows that Republican delegates with more traditional views about gender did, indeed, evaluate Palin significantly more positively than did delegates who expressed more liberal views, providing support for the *conditional effects of gender hypothesis*. Among the control variables, the results show that African American delegates to the Republican convention evaluated Palin more positively than did other respondents and that delegates pledged to candidates other than McCain were more likely than delegates pledged to McCain to evaluate Palin positively.

The results for Democratic delegates are also reported in [Table 1](#). As was the case among Republicans, the analysis provides no support for either the *direct effects of sex* or the *sex-based mobilization* hypotheses. That is, women were not more likely than men to provide more positive evaluations of Clinton, and delegates who had participated in women's organizations were not any more positive than delegates who had not previously been involved in women's organizations. Once again, however, as reflected in the positive coefficient associated with the workplace discrimination variable, the results provide support for the *conditional effects of gender hypothesis*. That is, delegates who profess more liberal and feminist views about gender discrimination in the workplace evaluated Clinton more positively than delegates with less liberal views on gender. Among the control variables, the results show that African American delegates evaluated Clinton less positively than did members of other racial groups and that delegates pledged to Clinton were more likely than delegates pledged to Obama to evaluate Clinton positively.

Taken together, the results of Models 1 and 2 make clear that party heavily conditions the effects of gender attitudes on delegates' evaluations of Palin and Clinton. That is, Republicans evaluate Palin more positively when they hold traditional and conservative views on gender, while Democrats evaluate Clinton more positively when they hold liberal feminist views on gender. We test this conditionality more formally by pooling the data about Republican and Democratic conventions into a single model, using interaction terms to consider whether the effects of sex, membership in a women's organization, and gender attitudes are conditional on party. Because the variance of the differential evaluation variable differs by party, we estimate the standard errors using a stratified regression model that accounts for this interparty variation (Scheaffer et al. 2011). We use the same variables that we included in Models 1 and 2, plus interaction terms and a variable measuring whether a delegate is a Democrat (1) or a Republican (0).

We also ran models testing for possible interactions between delegate sex and attitudes toward discrimination, participation in women's organizations,

race, and age. None of the interactions were significant. Next, we estimated a series of additional models to make sure that our results were not sensitive to the exact specification of the model. We pooled the Democratic and Republican data to estimate a single, unified model. We also estimated a separate model to test each focal hypothesis to ensure that our results were not an artifact of multicollinearity. The results, which are available in online Appendix D, show that our results are sensitive neither to pooling nor to multicollinearity.

Discussion and conclusion

The foregoing analyses provide a lens onto some of the ways in which sex and gender norms simultaneously reflect and structure modern partisanship among political elites. They show that Clinton's and Palin's candidacies made questions about women's equality and progress freshly salient in mainstream politics not simply because both candidates were female but because their candidacies tapped into solidifying and increasingly polarized beliefs about gender issues among elites in each party. This more subtle point is evident in our double-sided findings that although neither women nor members of women's organizations were more likely to support Clinton or Palin (i.e., neither delegate sex nor sex-based mobilization was significant in determining support for either candidate), respondents' ideas about the persistence of sex discrimination consistently influenced their attitudes and did so in diametrically opposing ways for delegates from each party. While the belief that women continue to face job discrimination predicted affinity for Clinton among Democrats, this issue played the opposite role among Republican delegates. In this light the role of gender ideology in support for Palin among Republican delegates mirrors Palin's own views about gender and the workplace, as respondents who do *not* believe that women face workplace discrimination express stronger support for Palin. Even among a quite conservative group of Republican Party elites, it was conservative ideas about sex discrimination that best predicted support for Palin's nomination in our analysis. Conversely, feminist attitudes about this issue predicted support for Clinton even among that party's very liberal delegates.

From this perspective, support for Clinton and Palin is a manifestation of an important and overlooked gendered component of the partisan polarization that has come to characterize American politics over the past three decades. But even as Republicans and Democrats have been sorting themselves based, in part, on their policy preferences on issues, such as abortion, the ERA, and workplace discrimination, gender norms in politics and society have also been evolving. Although Republicans remain more supportive of traditional gender roles, they have also come to normalize women's workforce participation and positions as political actors and

policymakers. In these ways, our findings demonstrate some of the ways in which political processes and institutions reflect and construct ideas about women and gender and help to clarify the role of these ideas in broader processes of polarization.

The 2016 presidential campaigns were well underway as we reviewed the copyedited version of this article, and they made clear that the salience of, partisan differences between—and battles over—the political meanings of gender have not subsided in the years since 2008. Throughout the Democratic primaries, for example, Clinton and her main opponent Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) battled to win over female primary voters and competed to claim the “best for women” mantle, as high-profile feminist women such as Gloria Steinem (for Clinton) and Susan Sarandon (for Sanders) rallied to endorse the feminist bona fides of each.

Also evident, however, was the growing gap between these Democratic battles for “best feminist” and the ways in which women and gender figured among Republicans. Although that party, too, tried to win women’s votes, Carly Fiorina was the only female candidate with enough support to participate in its primary debates. During her short-lived campaign, she did not shy away from gender issues, describing the Republican Party as “the party of women’s suffrage” and using a disparaging comment by Donald Trump about her looks to rally women’s support (Brown 2015). Like Palin, she claimed her own brand of conservative feminism, but unlike Palin, Fiorina also spoke about her experiences of sex discrimination in the workplace and noted the lack of a “level playing field” for women in the business world (Foran 2016). Our findings that the vast majority of Republican party activists reject the idea that women face workplace discrimination and that they prefer female candidates who themselves deny its existence suggest that Fiorina’s statements on this topic did little to help win the support of female Republican party activists. And in the end it was Trump who won the Republican nomination contest, another indication that Americans are as polarized over gender and sexuality as they are over any other issue.

Notes

1. The Convention Delegate Study, the longest-standing study of party delegates, was not fielded in 2008. Thus, while there are other data available about convention delegates from 1972 to 1992, 2000, 2004, and 2012, and although some news organizations conducted surveys of delegates, our data are some of the only information available about the 2008 delegates.
2. Activists, scholars, and political observers have long debated whether women constitute a group that has “common interests” that can be “represented” (see, *inter alia*, Alcoff 1996; Crenshaw 1994; Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1998; Strolovitch 2007; Young 1994).

3. As the campaign progressed, voters' attitudes might have been shaped not only by candidates' positions and statements but also, as Sisco and Lucas (2015) demonstrate, by the propensity of media organizations to frame their candidacies in terms of feminism.
4. Historian Estelle Freedman commented in a radio interview during the fall 2008 election season that "conservative women have mobilized in the United States, certainly since the 1920s," noting in particular the movements of women "against Communism, against sex education in the schools, for strong national defense" (Lyden 2008).
5. The contest between Clinton and Obama also underscored the fact that they each represented historically underrepresented but core constituencies within the Democratic base. Although these constituencies intersect, overlap, and are often allies, that Clinton was a *white* woman and Obama an African American *man* led some to frame the nomination battle as a zero-sum contest (Makse and Sokhey 2010; Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman 2010).
6. Of course, Clinton and Palin's individual biographies did not narrowly conform to binary "traditional" versus "liberal" distinctions. Clinton did support a liberal feminist agenda, and like many female candidates, she also struggled with how much to emphasize her own experiences as a woman and gender issues more generally. Palin, for her part, simultaneously upheld but also renegotiated traditional gender roles. From the beginning of her campaign she espoused conservative views, but she also arrived on the national political stage as a state-level, executive officeholder, a mother with a large family beside her, and as a woman who claimed to identify as a feminist. Over time, the media held her self-described "feminism" to greater scrutiny, but during the Republican National Convention Palin's positions on most issues remained unknown. Instead, what delegates were given to evaluate while our survey was in the field were the bare bones of Palin's biography, including her staunchly conservative convention rhetoric and her approach to public motherhood and self-proclaimed "family values." Delegates evaluated these more symbolic elements of Palin's character, as most were not yet privy to the more complex figure that Palin would become.
7. The calls that Obama demonstrate his "respect" for the white female Clinton were complicated by their conjuring of a racially charged history in which such calls for respect evoked whites' fixation with protecting and preserving white women's "virtue"—a fixation that has long led to violence against Black men who were accused of violating it (Dorr 2004; Sommerville 2004). We discuss this dynamic further in online Appendix B.
8. Scholars, including Swim et al. (1995), operationalize what they call "modern sexism" using questions that ask respondents to choose from a five-point Likert scale to respond to the prompt: "Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States" and "Women often miss out on good jobs due to sex discrimination" (212). Campbell, Schellenberg, and Senn (1997) show that Swim et al.'s (1995) measures have strong internal reliability and predict other "gender-related political attitudes." They also test "neosexism" measures developed by Tougas et al. (1995, 102). Kane and Whipkey (2009) use the General Social Survey question: "What do you think the chances are these days that a (woman/man) won't get a job or promotion while an equally or less qualified (man/woman) gets one instead: Is this very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely these days?" (242). Other scholars show that attitudes toward feminism and gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004) and gender consciousness (Gurin 1985) inhere in opinions toward labor force participation, family structure, and public sphere gender roles.

9. Race was coded 1 if the respondent is Black/African American, 0 otherwise. To measure our variable on income, we asked: "Could you please tell us your level of annual income in 2007?" Respondents were asked to choose one of the following options: "less than \$15,000"; "\$15,001–\$25,000"; "\$25,001–\$50,000"; "\$51,001–\$75,000"; "\$75,001–\$100,000"; "\$100,001–\$125,000"; "\$125,001–\$150,000"; "\$150,000–\$350,000"; or "More than \$350,000."
10. To measure this variable, we asked: "Could you please tell us the highest level of formal education you have completed?" Respondents were asked to choose one of the following options: "Less than high school diploma" (1 point in our coding system); "High School diploma" (2 points); "Some college/Associate's or technical degree" (3 points); "College degree" (4 points); "Some graduate education" (5 points); or "Graduate or professional degree" (6 points).
11. To measure this variable, we asked: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as" and provided them with the following list: "To the 'left' of strong liberal" (1 point in our coding system); "A Strong Liberal" (2 points); "A Not very strong Liberal" (3 points); "A Moderate who leans Liberal" (4 points); "A Moderate" (5 points); "A Moderate who leans Conservative" (6 points); "A Not very strong Conservative" (7 points); "A Strong Conservative" (8 points); "To the 'right' of strong conservative" (9 points); or "Other (please specify)," which we coded as missing. A nine-point scale (as opposed to a seven-point scale) is used to measure ideology to capture more extreme views. At the same time as we surveyed delegates, we also surveyed convention protestors whom we expected to be more ideologically extreme and with whom we hoped to compare delegate opinion. Among delegates, only 6 percent answered "1," and only 2 percent answered "9."
12. To measure this variable, we asked: "How often do you attend religious services?" Respondents were given the following options: "Every week" (5 points); "Almost every week" (4 points); "Once or twice a month" (3 points); "A few times a year" (2 points); or "Never" (1 point).
13. We predicted the missing values for each independent variable by using other independent variables in the model as regressors. For example, given a set of three independent variables, x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 , we conducted three imputations: x_1 regressed on x_2 and x_3 ; x_2 regressed on x_1 and x_3 ; x_3 regressed on x_1 and x_2 . Predicted values of the variable were constrained to the actual range of the variable. For example, if a variable exists on the set [1,5], we constrained the imputation so that predictions of 0.5 and 5.5 are impossible.

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Notes on contributors

Elizabeth A. Sharrow is assistant professor of political science and history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Dara Z. Strolovitch is associate professor at Princeton University, where she holds appointments in Gender and Sexuality Studies, African American Studies, and the Department of Politics.

Michael T. Heaney is assistant professor of organizational studies and political science at the University of Michigan.

Seth E. Masket is professor of political science at the University of Denver.

Joanne M. Miller is associate professor of political science and affiliated faculty in the Department of Psychology and the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota.

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