

## **Fear of Gender Favoritism and Opposition to Women Candidates**

Keywords: gender, elections, women candidates, stereotypes, bias

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, recent research suggests that beliefs about gender stereotypes no longer undercut support for women candidates (e.g., Brooks 2013, Dolan 2014). For instance, several studies – including two that used the 2008 ANES – found that attitudes about gender roles had little-to-no effect on men’s support for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Democratic primaries (Gervais and Hillard 2011; Huddy and Carey 2009; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). By contrast, a list experiment found that 26% of men in a nationally representative sample were “angry or upset” about “a woman serving as president” (Streb et al. 2008). How can we explain these contradictory findings? One possibility is that social desirability bias interfered with the assessment of beliefs about gender stereotypes in prior surveys. Yet recent experiments using fictional candidates avoided this problem and still found that men did not apply a double-standard to women candidates (Brooks 2013). So the question remains: why do some men oppose women candidates *because* they are women?

In this proposal, I offer a new explanation: fear of gender favoritism. Drawing on theories of group conflict, I propose that some men perceive that female elected officials are a threat to men’s interests – in other words, that female political leaders will show outsized concern for women, at the expense of men. In social psychology and sociology, scholars have long examined the impact of perceptions of group threat (e.g., Blumer 1958; Bobo and Tuan 2006; Esses et al. 2010; Levine and Campbell 1972). To my knowledge, however, none have applied this approach toward understanding men’s opposition to women candidates. So, to test this theory, I developed new survey items designed to measure men’s fear of gender favoritism and included them on two waves of a nationally representative panel survey fielded between fall

2007 and summer 2008. In the next section, I describe the data, the new measures, and then demonstrate their impact on support for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Democratic primaries.

## **Data and Measures**

For this proposal, I rely on the 2008 National Annenberg Election Study (NAE) Internet panel survey, which included five waves fielded between fall 2007 and winter 2009. Wave 1 began with approximately 20,000 respondents, with fresh samples added to each subsequent wave. The 2008 NAES was fielded over the Internet by GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks), which recruits nationally representative samples using address-based sampling, and supplies free Internet access to those who need it. My analyses use responses from men on waves 1 and 3, which were fielded during and immediately after the 2008 Democratic primaries (wave 1: Oct. 2, 2007—Jan. 1, 2008; wave 3: April 2—Aug. 29, 2008).

To measure fear of gender favoritism, I created survey items designed to tap two concepts: *perceptions* of gender favoritism (i.e., the perceived frequency with which female elected officials favor women over men) and *attitudes* about gender favoritism (i.e., evaluations of favoritism as good or bad). Wave 1 included only the four perception items, whereas wave 3 included the perception items as well as one attitude item (all were removed on June 9 after Clinton exited the race). Table 1 presents the full wording of the items along with their frequencies on wave 3. Between 25% and 39% of men perceived female elected officials as likely to favor women over men in government policymaking. Despite the considerable variance in levels of perceived favoritism across items, responses were still highly correlated and so were averaged to create a reliable scale (the cronbach's alphas on waves 1 and 3 are .90 and .91).

Table 1. Perceptions and Attitudes about Gender Favoritism among American Men

---

**Perceptions of Gender Favoritism**

Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Female elected officials are more likely to. . .

1. Favor women for government jobs over male applicants.	
Strongly agree	5.8%
Somewhat agree	32.8%
Somewhat disagree	41.2%
Strongly disagree	20.1%
2. Promote educational programs targeted at girls at the expense of boys.	
Strongly agree	4.5%
Somewhat agree	20.6%
Somewhat disagree	45.9%
Strongly disagree	29.0%
3. Support government spending that favors women.	
Strongly agree	5.2%
Somewhat agree	31.7%
Somewhat disagree	39.8%
Strongly disagree	23.2%
4. Focus on issues that mainly affect women.	
Strongly agree	5.4%
Somewhat agree	27.2%
Somewhat disagree	42.8%
Strongly disagree	24.6%

**Attitudes about Gender Favoritism**

Thinking about the statements you just read, would it be good or bad if female elected officials favored women?

Very good	3.3%
Somewhat good	26.5%
Somewhat bad	46.7%
Very bad	23.5%

---

*Note:* Includes all male respondents on wave 3 who received the gender favoritism questions (N = 4,343). Excludes those who declined to answer—about 2% of the sample.

The follow-up question assessing attitudes about racial favoritism also exhibited substantial variance. Interestingly, about a third of men said that gender favoritism was a good thing. And although most men (70%) evaluated gender favoritism negatively, there was a split

between those who said favoritism was somewhat bad (47%) versus very bad (24%). Consistent with attitudes about gender favoritism and perceptions of gender favoritism measuring distinct concepts, they were weakly correlated on wave 3 ( $-0.16, p < .001, N = 4,256$ ). Moreover, I found no evidence of a significant interaction between them in any of the analyses that follow.

### **Effects of Fear of Gender Favoritism during the 2008 Democratic Primaries**

I begin with cross-sectional models that assess the impact of perceptions and attitudes about gender favoritism on favorability toward Hillary Clinton (using the standard 0-100 feeling thermometer) and vote choice, which was asked of all self-identified Democrats (where 1=support for Clinton and 0=support for another candidate). I control for party strength, ideology, race, education (in years), income (in dollars), age, and region of residence (South). Following Tesler and Sears (2010), I also control for racial attitudes, in this case using measures of perceptions and attitudes about *racial* favoritism.<sup>1</sup> All of the independent variables were coded to range from 0 to 1. Table 2 presents the results; to conserve space, I only show the coefficients for the gender favoritism variables. As shown in the OLS models in columns 1 and 2, men who perceived more gender favoritism were significantly less likely to feel warmly toward Clinton. And by a wide margin: the difference between those who perceived a lot versus a little favoritism was 24 points on wave 1 and 23 points on wave 3. Negative attitudes about gender favoritism were also related to significantly lower feeling thermometer scores for Clinton – with those who thought negatively of favoritism rating Clinton 19 points lower on wave 3.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Black elected officials are more likely to. . . Favor blacks for government jobs over white applicants. Support government spending that favors blacks. Support policies that could cost whites jobs. Give special favors to the black community.” (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree) “Thinking about the statements you just read, would it be good or bad if black elected officials favored blacks?” (very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, very bad).

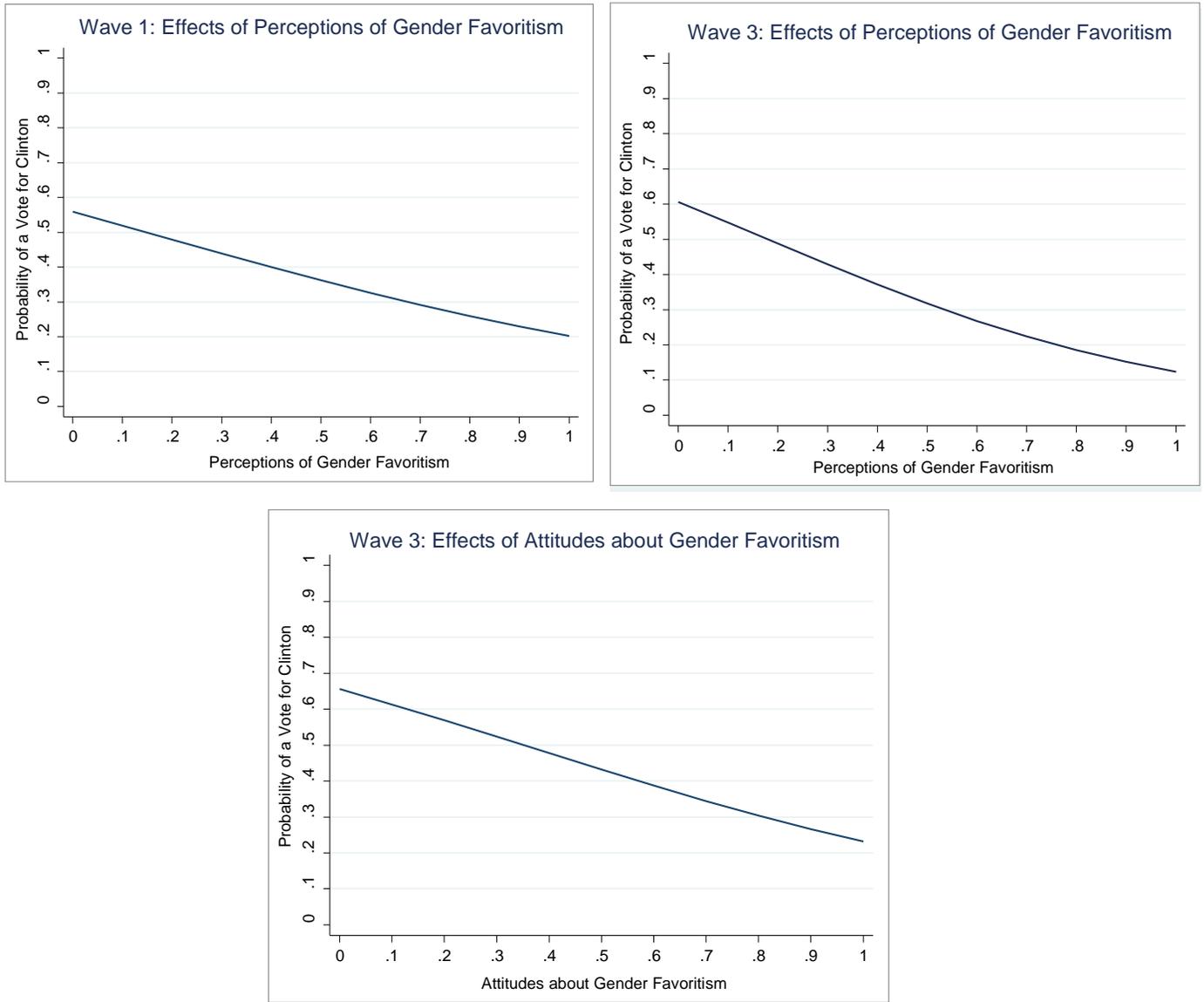
Table 2. Effects of Fear of Gender Favoritism on Support for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Primaries among Male Democrats

	Clinton Favorability		Clinton Vote Choice	
	Wave 1	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 3
Perceptions of Gender Favoritism	-23.99*** (2.15)	-23.23*** (2.85)	-1.61*** (.19)	-2.39*** (.30)
Attitudes about Gender Favoritism		-19.26*** (2.53)		-1.84*** (.26)
Constant	55.22*** (1.99)	54.58*** (3.06)	-.63*** (.17)	-1.25*** (.29)
Sample Size	3,914	2,006	3,907	2,029
Adj. R <sup>2</sup> /Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.13	.03	.16

*Note.* Presents unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses (OLS for columns 1 and 2, logit for columns 3 and 4). Favorability ranges from 0 to 100 (higher values = more positive feelings toward Clinton). Vote choice is dichotomous (1 = support for Clinton, 0 for all others). The independent variables range from 0 to 1. The pseudo R<sup>2</sup> is McFadden. Each model includes party strength, ideology, race (black), education, income, age, and region (South). \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

The logistic regression models in columns 3 and 4 of Table 2 show that perceptions and attitudes about gender favoritism also significantly reduced Clinton’s vote share. To ease interpretation, Figure 1 shows the predicted probability of expressing a Clinton preference at different levels of the favoritism variables. The top-left panel reveals a substantial negative impact of perceptions of gender favoritism on wave 1: the predicted probability of a Clinton vote ranged from 20% among those who perceived a lot of favoritism to 56% among those who perceived little favoritism. The effect for wave 3 was even larger, as shown in the top-right panel, ranging from 12% to 61%. The bottom panel shows that attitudes about gender favoritism also had a significant impact: the probability of a Clinton vote ranged from 23% among those who thought gender favoritism was very bad to 66% among those who thought gender favoritism was very good.

Figure 1. Effects of Fear of Gender Favoritism on the Probability of a Vote for Clinton



Note: Probabilities are based on the logistic regression model in Table 2, columns 3 (wave 1) and 4 (wave 3). All other variables are held at their means.

Fear of gender favoritism significantly reduced support for Hillary Clinton on waves 1 and 3. Another interesting question is whether fear of gender favoritism can help explain *change over time* in support at the *individual level*. On the one hand, the 2008 NAES data shows that Clinton’s overall share of the male Democratic vote was about the same in wave 1 (44.2%) and

wave 3 (42.6%). But these numbers overshadow a significant amount of within-person change in vote choice during this time period. Of Clinton's wave 1 supporters, nearly a third (32.2%) defected to Obama by wave 3. At the same time, Clinton picked up some (6.4%) of Obama's wave 1 voters, and, more importantly, about a third (35.0%) of voters who had initially sided with a third candidate. Why did some voters leave the Clinton camp, while others flocked to her side? To examine whether fear of gender favoritism influenced within-person change in vote choice, I employ fixed effects logistic regression, which is unique in that it only uses within-person variance (Allison 1999, 2009). In other words, fixed effects regression can help us understand why *each individual* changed his vote choice over time.

As shown in Table 3, male Democrats who increased over time in their perceptions of gender favoritism became less likely to express a preference for Clinton on wave 3, whereas those who decreased over time in their perceptions of gender favoritism became less likely to express a preference for Clinton. In substantive terms, a male Democrat in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of change in perceived favoritism (-.33) – that is, someone who became substantially less likely to perceive favoritism – had a .59 probability of becoming a Clinton voter, while a male Democrat in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (.33) – that is, someone who became substantially more likely to perceive favoritism – had just a .29 probability of becoming a Clinton voter. Those who *initially* perceived more gender favoritism on wave 1 were also less likely to become a Clinton voter on wave 3. Male Democrats who were initially in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of perceived gender favoritism (0) had a .58 predicated probability of becoming a Clinton voter, while those who were initially in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of perceived gender favoritism (.67) had just a .36 predicted probability of becoming a Clinton voter.

Table 3. Effects of Perceptions of Gender Favoritism on *Within-Person Change* in Clinton Vote Choice during the 2008 Primaries among Male Democrats

	Change in Clinton Vote
Change in Perceptions of Gender Favoritism	-1.94** (.70)
Initial Perceptions of Gender Favoritism	-1.37# (.82)
Constant	-1.12# (.60)
Sample Size	408
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.18

*Note.* Presents unstandardized fixed effects logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The model only includes those who changed in their vote choice from wave 1 to wave 3. The dependent variable is the Clinton Vote (1 = support for Clinton, 0 for all others). Change in Perceptions of Gender Favoritism ranges from -1 to 1; Initial Perceptions of Gender Favoritism ranges from 0 to 1. The model includes change in perceptions of racial favoritism, initial perceptions of racial favoritism, initial party strength, initial ideology, race (black), education, income, age, and region (South). \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05, #p<.10

## Discussion

The current understanding of public opinion during the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries is that beliefs about gender stereotypes had little-to-no effect on support for Hillary Clinton. Two of the major contributors to this perspective relied on the available measures of gender stereotypes included on the 2008 American National Election Studies (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010). The findings presented in this proposal strongly suggest that gender bias did, in fact, play an important role in reducing support for Clinton, though not due to gender traditionalism. Instead, what drove down men’s support for Clinton was a different kind of bias stemming from group threat, specifically fear of gender favoritism. Using new survey measures, I found that a significant proportion of men expected female elected officials to favor women over men in government policymaking. Moreover, across a variety of analyses fear of gender favoritism had a significant and substantial negative impact on male Democrats’ support for Clinton. In cross-sectional analyses, fear of gender favoritism was

correlated with lower favorability ratings of Clinton and a lower likelihood of expressing a preference for her over the other candidates. Even more impressively, fixed effects regression models demonstrated that perceptions of gender favoritism influenced *within-person changes* in Clinton vote choice *over time*. Taken together, these results strongly suggest that fear of gender favoritism is highly relevant for understanding support for women candidates, and so I propose including the five items measuring this concept on both the American National Election Studies pilot study and time-series surveys.

### References

- Allison, Paul D. 1990. Change Scores as Dependent Variables in Regression Analysis. *Sociological Methodology* 20, 93-114.
- . 2009. *Fixed Effects Regression Models*. Sage Publications.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1958. Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1, 3-7.
- Bobo, Lawrence D., and Mia Tuan. 2006. *Prejudice in Politics: Group Position, Public Opinion, and the Wisconsin Treaty Rights Dispute*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brooks, Deborah Jordan. 2013. *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2014. *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Esses, Victoria M., Lynne M. Jackson, and Caroline Bennett-AbuAyyash. 2010. Intergroup

- Competition. In *The Sage Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (pp. 225-240), eds. John F. Dovidio, Miles Hewstone, Peter Glick, and Victoria M. Esses. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gervais, Sarah J., and Amy L. Hillard. 2011. "A Role Congruity Perspective on Prejudice toward Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 11, 221-240.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Tony E. Carey, Jr. 2009. "Group Politics Redux: Race and Gender in the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primaries." *Politics and Gender*, 5, 81-96.
- Kinder, Donald R., and Allison Dale-Riddle. 2012. *The End of Race?: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- LeVine, Robert A., and Donald T. Campbell. 1972. *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior*. Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Streb, Matthew J., Barbara Burrell, Brian Frederick, and Michael A. Genovese. 2008. "Social Desirability Effects and Support for a Female American President." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72, 76-89.
- Tesler, Michael, and David O. Sears. 2010. *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.