

**Gender Goggles: Does Candidate Gender Impact Viewer Perception of Negativity in Campaign Advertisements?**

Leigh Welch

Oklahoma State University

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## **“Gender Goggles: Does Candidate Gender Impact Viewer Perception of Negativity in Campaign Advertisements?”**

**Abstract:** *Political campaign advertisements are a common staple for current campaign efforts, and negative advertisements in particular are a popular campaign tool. It is evident both male and female candidates often attempt to win elections by tearing down opponents through the use of negative campaign advertisements. What is unclear is whether viewers perceive the message a candidate presents to be more or less negative based on the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad, and where the perception of negativity in an ad impacts candidate favorability. An experimental study was conducted to determine if a candidate's gender impacts the viewer's perception of message negativity. A political advertisement was written and filmed once with a male candidate, and once with a female candidate. This advertisement was shown to separate groups who were then asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the treatment they were exposed to. Findings show that there are significant results that show a correlation between certain perceived message tones and gender of the candidate. Additionally, there were interesting results regarding candidate favorability.*

## **Introduction**

We consistently see the various ways that a person's identity can affect different spheres of their life and the different opportunities they have available to them—this is also true within the political arena. Gender has historically played a large role in determining what goals, policy initiatives, political offices, etc. were attainable for women, and most female candidates typically create some way to account for their gender when crafting campaign strategies. It may be beneficial to form campaign strategies that account for one's gender as there are many opportunities for sexist and stereotypical judgements being placed on women when they enter the political battlefield. Many of the traditional strategies enjoyed by male candidates may not serve to be as beneficial for female candidates as they are stereotyped differently than their male opponents. For this reason, we need to consider where there may be differences in the effectiveness of certain strategies—including the use of negative campaign advertisements. Negative advertisements are one of the most popular campaign practices used by both male and female candidates. However, the efficacy of this is not entirely clear for female candidates. Additionally, what is unclear is whether viewers perceive the message a candidate presents to be more or less negative based on the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad, and where the perception of negativity in an ad impacts candidate favorability. This research seeks to extend previous research done on candidate communication and audience perceptions by examining televised negative political campaign advertisements within a gendered framework to assess whether the gender of the candidate impacts perceptions of negativity and how these perceptions then might impact candidate favorability. Using an experimental design exposing subjects to either a male political advertisement or a female political advertisement we directly test if a candidate's gender impacts the viewer's perception of message negativity. Findings indicate

there are times when gender of a candidate does appear to impact a viewer's perception of negativity and of the candidate and perceptions of negativity did impact assessments for favorability. To gain more clarity on this, we used two research questions to guide an experimental study:

R1: Are female candidate advertisements viewed as being more or less negative than male candidate advertisements?

R2: Does perception of negativity influence candidate favorability?

Given the prevalence of existing literature surrounding this subject, we will first provide a literature review, and then go on to explain the theory that informs our hypotheses. Next, I will describe the research design of our study as well as what analyses we decided to run followed by a review and discussion of the results we found.

## **Literature review**

Past research indicates that male and female candidates are stereotyped by people as having different strengths and weaknesses (Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall, 2009: 56; Sonbanmatsu, 2002; Fridkin and Kenney 1999; Dolan, 1998). Generally speaking, female candidates are not seen as possessing the kind of expertise necessary to be an effective officeholder and are seen as being more emotional than male candidates. (Kahn 1993; Huddy and Capelos 2002; Sonbanmatsu, 2002). Because people stereotype female candidates as being more emotional and believe they are not as capable as men at holding office, it stands to reason that people will perceive a negative message presented by a woman differently than a negative message presented by a man. The stereotype that women are more emotional than men will lead viewers to perceive a televised message presented by a female is more negative than when a man

presents the same message. At the same time, we know negative advertising can have short-term effects. King and McConnell (2003) find that “the sponsor initially benefits from an enhanced image but suffers a decline in image when the voters become overexposed to negative advertisements.” If female candidates then are perceived to be more negative, do they then benefit by increased candidate favorability following the advertisement?

### **Negative Advertisements as a Campaign Tool**

Negative advertisements enhance the democratic process by informing the general public and presenting information about the voters’ issues and concerns (Fowler, Franz, Ridout 2016; Geer, 2006). Negative advertisements potentially raise personal incentives for voters as they bring to light issues that may motivate people to vote for or against a candidate (Martin, 2004; Wattenberg and Briens, 1999). Additionally, the quantity of information regarding policy in negative advertisements is often higher than any other type of political advertisement, and voters are more likely to accurately recall the information presented in negative ads than any other type of advertisement (Fowler, Franz, Ridout 2016; Stevens, 2005). Using negative advertising is a popular tactic among candidates, and they are full of useful information that is retained by the electorate (Franz, 2011, Franz, et. al 2008). Both male and female candidates use negative ads as a part of their campaign strategy, but it is not evident if the candidates are seeing the same results (regardless of gender) from using this type of advertisement.

### **Campaign Communication Similarities and Gender**

Women no longer play a minor role in the political process, and the number of women seeking and obtaining political office is ever-increasing (Kahn, Kenney, Woodall, 2009).

Dabelko and Herrnson (1997) argue men and women tend to run very similar campaigns, and gender does not appear to have an impact on the types of resources utilized or how a candidate will run a campaign (Panagopoulos 2004). In fact, previous research suggests that male and female candidates generally create similar campaign strategies, and the roles that gender may play in campaign advertising is more likely circumstantially based (Sapiro, et. al 2009; Sapiro, et. al 2011; Herrnson, Lay and Stokes, 2003). Male and female candidates raise similar amounts of money, and both hire professional campaign staff to create strategy and manage the overall campaign (Herrnson, Lay and Stokes, 2003). Men and women running for office spend almost equal portions of money on “radio, literature, direct mail, and most other kinds of communication” (Sapiro, et. al. 2011; Dabelko and Herrnson 1997, 124). When crafting the actual campaign communication message both male and female candidates stay focused on policy-based appeals (Sapiro, et. al. 2011; Fridkin Kahn 1993). However, while they may focus on policy-based appeals, male and female candidates both tend to compensate for and reflect gender stereotypes. The consistent pattern is that male and female candidates tend to reflect gender stereotypes instead of challenging them (Panagopoulos 2004). This previous research indicates not only are the amount of available resources attainable regardless of gender, but men and women are communicating with voters in very similar ways. Gender does not affect the way money is spent on getting the message out, or how a candidate chooses to run a campaign.

### **Negative Advertisements Use and Gender**

Negative political advertisements are an extraordinarily popular weapon in a campaign arsenal (Franz 2011, West 2010). Not only do these types of ads serve as a way for the public to gather information on the candidates, but they also serve as an important communication strategy

(Herrnson and Lucas, 2006, West 2005). Men and women both employ negative ads when campaigning and women are found to “use similar amounts of negative advertising as male candidates” (Herrnson and Lucas 2006, 71). Therefore, gender does not appear to be a determinant of whether male and female candidates use negative attack advertising techniques as a part of their campaign strategy. It is clear that men and women run similar campaigns, including their use of advertising. What must be determined is whether the viewers receiving the negative messages are perceiving differences based on gender, and if candidate likability is impacted by a negative message.

## **Theory**

### **Issue Stereotypes and Gender Effects**

Voters hold stereotypical ideas about male and female candidates running for political office based solely on the gender of the candidate (Fridkin, Kenney, Woodall, 2009; Dolan 2004; Sonbanmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 1998). Stereotyping refers to the process by which individuals categorize other people in order to make sense of the world in which they live (Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall, 2009; Rahn, 1993; Lipmann, 1965). Gender stereotyping is linked to traditional ideas of socially accepted sex/gender roles where men work outside of the home and are encouraged to be involved in politics, and women are seen as better suited to stay home and tend to domestic issues (Lawless, 2004). Both a candidate’s personality, political party, and issue stance may be categorized and stereotyped according to the gender of the politician, and these stereotypes are used as a cue when assessing a male or female candidate (Dolan 2004; Fridkin, Kenney, Woodall, 2009; Schaffner, 2005; McDermott, 1997). For example, voters perceive a female politician to be more “willing to compromise” and “more likely to seek consensus”,

whereas a male politician is seen as “more assertive” and “quick to action” (Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall, 2009: 56; Sonbanmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 1998). Voters not only use gender stereotypes when scrutinizing a candidate, they also classify issues in a stereotypical manner.

Issues often serve to cue voters and/or serve as a shortcut when forming opinions about male and female candidates (Fridkin, Kahn, Kenney, 2009; Schaffner, 2005; Sonbanmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 1998; McDermott, 1997). In other words, certain issues may be used by voters to make a vote choice similar to the way voters “use party identification and other voting cues” (Hernnson, Lay and Stokes 2003, 245). In general, people have a tendency to assign gender to specific issues. This association of issues to gender by voters leads male and female candidates to focus on different topics in an attempt to overcome voter stereotypes (Panagopoulos 2004; McDermott, 1997). Additionally, this is exacerbated when gender stereotypes intersect with party. For example, voters tend to believe that Democratic women candidates are more liberal than Democratic men candidates, and Republican women candidates are seen as less conservative than Republican men candidates. This can help Republican women in candidacy but hurt Democratic women chances of being elected (Dolan 2004). Male candidates are more likely to be considered strong when it comes to issues like the economy, foreign policy, and the military (Schaffner, 2005; Dolan, 1998; Kahn, 1993). On the other hand, female candidates’ strengths are most likely to be perceived as being related to compassion issues, including topics like health care and education (Sonbanmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Kahn, 1993). Gender’s intersection with political party is also important here as Democratic voters are more likely to list “female issues” as issues that are important to them when their representatives are women than if they are men. This is due to the stereotypes of party and gender aligning with one another which activates stereotypical beliefs about the candidate’s interests. Contrastingly, the unalignment of gender



and party stereotypes for Republican female candidates allows for party stereotyping to overcome gender stereotyping (Dolan 2004). If a voter values male issues over female issues, it is likely that voter will possess an inherent preference to vote for a male candidate, or vice versa (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 1998; Huddy and Terkildson, 1993).

Past research indicates citizens feel more favorably towards male candidates because they are seen as more able to lead and appear more competent than female candidates (Lawless, 2004). People have also stereotyped female candidates as being more emotional and sensitive, and therefore not as qualified to run for, obtain, and successfully navigate political office (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Kahn, 1993). Women candidates walk a delicate between being perceived as too masculine or too feminine. Stepping outside of their gender's stereotypical role may cause women to look "too much like a man" and unlikeable, but showing emotion or femininity may make them appear unstable or weak (Messner 2007). Voters have formed stereotypical ideas of candidates in order to make choices and assessments about those individuals in an electoral contest (Fridkin, Kahn, Kenney, 2009; Schaffner, 2005; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 1998; McDermott, 1997). Because people stereotype female candidates as being more emotional and believe they are not as capable as men at holding office, it stands to reason that people will perceive a negative message presented by a woman differently than a negative message presented by a man.

### **Candidate Favorability and Negative Advertising**

Much of the research on impact of negative ads has focused on if the negativity of the ad impacts voter turnout or decision making. Through a meta-analysis of 100 studies on the impact of negative advertisements, Franz (2018) concludes that negative advertising is not an effective

means to winning votes, and it does not suppress voter turnout as once found. It does however lead to “slightly lower feelings of political efficacy, trust in government, and possibly overall public mood.” In terms of gender and impact of negative advertisements, less can be found. Again, King and McConnell (2003) show that the sponsor of the negative advertisement benefits in the short term, and this holds true for female candidates sponsoring negative ads.

While this is often true in the short term, results can vary for female candidates as stereotypes are more likely to be activated in a voter’s mind and mediate the evaluation of female candidates if they are perceived to instigate an attack instead of defending their position and are the opposite party of the voter. When these two things occur, voters of the opposite party who have biased reasons to rely on stereotypes will find female candidates more counter-stereotypic since they are not adhering to the “submissive” or “less adversarial” stereotype often placed on women, and they use this as reasoning to find them as the less favorable candidate. This is a result of conditional stereotyping that then disproportionately affects some female candidates for engaging in negative political ads (Krupnikov & Bauer 2013).

Additionally, Hitchon and Chang (1995) examine the effects of gender of the candidate and negative advertising by looking at the way voters think and feel about political candidates—specifically when interacting with different message tones. The idea is that when different genders appear in political ads, they activate gender schema. Two of their hypotheses directly address message, time, and gender. The first predicts “that men’s attacks against women produce more negative affective responses than women’s attacks against men.” The second predicts that “that men’s attacks against women produce fewer favorable and more unfavorable cognitive responses toward the ad and the candidate than women’s attacks against men.” They find support for the affective responses, respondents voiced more negative reactions to men’s ads

than to women's and more negative responses to men's attacks on women. There was no support for the second hypothesis; however, they found that negative ads produced more critical thought of the ads, respondents were more critical of male candidates than female candidates, and women elicited more support arguments than men. However, in a separate study, they also found that women utilizing emotional appeals—negative or positive—is typically less effective than using neutral advertising for female candidates (Hitchon, Chan, Harris 1997). This is tied to the perception that women are “too emotional” or “weak” to hold political offices, thus, activating stereotypical beliefs (Messner 2007).

Connecting these results to gender stereotypes, we wonder if messages presented by female candidates will be perceived as more negative because female candidates are perceived as more emotional, and in return if through the use of gender schema if these perceptions of negativity will lead to more unfavorable evaluations of male candidates.

## **Research design**

To answer our proposed research questions, an experimental design with various treatments was performed. We wanted to be able to isolate gender's influence on perception of negativity and candidate favorability, and the use of an experimental design allowed us to control for external factors and mitigate their effects. By doing so, our project gained measurement validity and internal validity as we were able to lessen the influence of certain factors that come alongside running a campaign. For example, within the environment that we created, we could avoid the possibility of a candidate's partisan record or talking points influencing how respondents perceived them. For the study, 912 subjects were exposed to a negative campaign video advertisement highlighting either a male or a female candidate as the main, and only,

subject of the advertisement. Additionally, as a control group, 912 subjects were exposed to a picture and biography of a male or female candidate as the only subject of the picture/biography. Subjects were then given a survey to answer and submit which asked various demographic questions as well as questions regarding what they had just viewed.

Our sample consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in a lower division American Government course who had not yet been exposed to lectures or discussions regarding media effects or campaigns and elections in order to avoid their education on this specific matter influencing their survey answers. This, again, helped us gain internal validity, but it may have lessened the generalizability, or external validity, of our study. The sample collected represents a pool of young voters which is both beneficial and a drawback to the study. By only collected data from young people, we can use our results to predict the effects of negative advertisements on the youngest generation of voters which is an up-and-coming generation; however, we may not be able to apply our results to aging voter populations who may have responded differently due to age and ideological differences.

## **Stimuli**

In order to assess respondent's perceptions of negativity in the video advertisements of male candidates versus female candidates, many treatments were put in place to control for outside forces such as ad quality and message content that could sway a voter's opinion. First, each candidate read the same script with substituted names as seen below.

*"I'm Liz Davis and I've been getting to know my opponent Robert Jones. He claims he's a different kind of politician, but check his record: in 2014 he voted to increase his own salary by 25%. He claims to be in support of campaign finance reform, but has been fined over \$10,000 by the Federal Election Commission for campaign violations. He has one of the worst attendance records in Congress,*

*missing 95 votes last year. Maybe you should get to know Robert Jones too. After all he's just a typical politician."*

The names selected for the candidates were selected based off of how common the name is. The first names are the third most common male and female first names, and the last names are the fourth and sixth most common last names. This was done instead of selecting the first most common first and last names in order to avoid the names sounding too generic and less believable.

Next, much care was put in to ensure that each candidate used similar body language and inflection in their line delivery when reading the script for the video. Also, the issues brought forth in the advertisement are non-partisan and do not reflect party alignment as the candidates' party was not mentioned and they were stated to be running in a primary election against each other in order to avoid any biases of respondents based off of party alignment. This helped us avoid respondents having an ideological reaction that did not reflect their actual interpretation of the negativity of the ad. Additionally, the language of the advertisement was written to reflect a negative tone to a certain level. Care was used to ensure that the tone was not too negative, so we could avoid respondents having a backlash effect. If the message's tone had been too harsh, it may have caused respondents to have a poor reaction to the candidate for choosing to use a negative ad and not respond in a manner that reflected the actual content of the advertisement (Pinkleton 1997). This allowed us to accurately test the hypothesis by including some level of negativity but without skewing the results by including too much negativity. To control for other external factors, the same bare set was used with no music in both videos and both candidates were similar in age, positioning on screen, and wore similar outfits.

As an additional control variable, we found it important to include a control group of respondents who viewed a photo and biography of the candidate before answering a similar survey. This was seen as necessary to ensure that when respondents were answering questions regarding tone and perceived negativity, their answers were reflective of the actual tone of the video advertisement and not a reflection of how female candidates are typically viewed in general. By accounting for this, we can see whether female candidates are always perceived less favorably and more negatively, or if they are only perceived that way when utilizing negative advertisements.

For the biography, the same names were used and substituted as were in the video advertisements, and both candidates were listed as having the same educational background, profession, political party, and birthday. The listed political party was chosen to be Republican because in a previous set of data collected for this study (which had to be thrown out due to a change in the survey questions) the respondents were predominantly Republican or Republican leaning, and the rural university the survey was administered in was located in a predominately Republican state.

The biography was given as follows:

**Liz Davis:**

Born: August 3, 1968 (age 51 years)

Spouse: John Davis

Education:

- B.A., History- Oklahoma State University
- M.A., Business- Oklahoma State University

Profession: Realtor

Political Party: Republican

Type of Election running in: Primary

**Robert Jones:**

Born: August 3, 1968 (age 51 years)

Spouse: Mary Jones

Education:

- B.A., History- Oklahoma State University
- M.A., Business- Oklahoma State University

Profession: Realtor

Political Party: Republican

Type of Election running in: Primary

After watching a video or viewing a picture, subjects were then asked to answer a survey with questions ranging from basic demographic questions, general candidate preferences, and interest questions, to questions specifically pertaining to the treatment the subject just viewed. Additionally, respondents were asked opinion questions regarding who they believed would best represent their interests: a male or a female candidate, and if they felt a male or female candidate would do a better job of dealing with homeland security and education issues. These questions were used to help gauge whether a respondent was naturally inclined to favor a male or a female candidate.

**Coding and variable measurement**

We had to account for several variables when organizing our data in order to ensure that each area of our analysis was properly accounted for and measured. First, we controlled for a series of demographic variables. We coded gender as 1 if the respondent was male (45.4%), 2 if female (44.3%), 3 if transgender male (0.2%), 4 if transgender female (0.1%), 5 if gender variant/non-

conforming (0.3%), 6 if not listed (0.1%), and 7 if they preferred not to answer (0.7%). Age was coded as 1 for 18-21 years old (4.9%), 2 for 22-25 (11.6%), 3 for 26-29 (15.3%), 4 for 30-34 (17.1%), 5 for 35-39 (12.1%), 6 for 40-44 (8.4%), 7 for 45-49 (6.8%), 8 for 50-54 (5%), 9 for 55-59 (4.4%), and 10 for 60 or older (5.4%). Next, educational attainment was coded as 1 for less than high school (0.3%), 2 for high school graduate (7.3%), 3 for some college (21.3%), 4 for associate's/2 year degree (11%), 5 for bachelor's/4 year degree (35.9%), 6 for professional degree (13.4%), and 7 for doctorate (1.8%). We also asked respondents to identify with one of more racial and ethnic groups. Based on the low number of respondents across categories, we use a single variable of white with 1 if the respondent is white (68.8%) and 0 if the respondent identified with another racial or ethnic group (31.2%). Party identification was measured through self-report and coded as – 1 for Strongly Democrat (23.2%), 2 for weak Democrat (15.7), 3 for lean Democrat (11.1%), 5 for lean Republican (12.8%), 6 for weak Republican (11.1%), and 7 for strong Republican (12.3%). We also coded ideology as 1 for very liberal (11.4%), 2 for liberal (20.4%), 3 for slightly liberal (14%), 4 for moderate (20.4%), 5 for slightly conservative (10%), 6 for conservative (10.5%), and 7 for very conservative (4.8%).

Additionally, we controlled for interest and activity in politics through six questions. First we measured political interest by asking if the respondent is interested in information about what is going on in government and politics. We coded this as 1 for extremely interested (19.8%), 2 for very interested (27.3%), 3 for moderately interested (29.6%), 4 for slightly interested (11.2%) and 5 for not interested at all (3.7%). We also measured the number of days per week the respondents gathered news (mean 5.69 days per week). We measured voter registration as 1 for registered to vote (82.1%) and 2 for not registered (8.3%). We also asked who the current president was (correct answer being Donald Trump) and coded 1 as Barack Obama (0.7%), 2 as



George W. Bush (0.5%), 3 as Donald Trump (90%), 4 as Mike Pence (0.2%), and 5 as Joe Biden (0.1%). In addition, we asked if they voted in the previous presidential primary election (2018) and coded 1 as yes (69.8%), 2 as no (18.4%), and 3 as prefer not to answer (2.8%). Lastly, we asked them if they approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president and coded it using a likert scale using 1 as approve very strongly (7.2%), 2 as approve strongly (8.9%), 3 as approve slightly (13.2%), 4 as neither approve nor disapprove (8.7%), 5 as disapprove slightly (6.2%), 6 as disapprove strongly (11.9%), and 7 as disapprove very strongly (35.2%).

To measure negativity of the campaign, we asked respondents how positive or negative they felt the tone of the message was in the advertisement. Using a likert scale, we coded ad tone as 1 for extremely negative (13.1%), 2 for moderately negative (16.7%), 3 for slightly negative (7.1%), 4 for neither negative nor positive (4.2%), 5 for slightly positive (2.8%), 6 for moderately positive (0.7%) and 7 for extremely positive (0.4%). Because of the overwhelming perception that the advertisement tones were negative, we use a few additional proxies for message tone. We asked respondents to indicate if any of the following words could be used to describe the message tone of the ad: humorous, appropriate, light-hearted, mean-spirited, distasteful, boring, or inappropriate. Each were coded as a 1 if the word was checked and 0 if not. The percentage indicating the word can describe the ad is as follows: humorous (2.4%), appropriate (11%), light-hearted (3.8%), mean-spirited (19.9%), distasteful (12.5%), boring (10.1%), and inappropriate (5%).

In addition, we asked how likely they would be to vote for the candidate they just viewed and coded 1 as extremely unlikely (12.1%), 2 as unlikely (21.9%), 3 as neither likely nor unlikely (40.1%), 4 as likely (16.6%), and 5 as extremely likely (2.4%). We also asked

respondents how favorable they felt toward the candidate following the advertisement. This was coded as 1 for extremely unfavorable (6.6%), 2 for moderately unfavorable (10.3%), 3 for slightly unfavorable (17%), 4 for unfavorable nor favorable (31.6%), 5 for slightly favorable (17.5%), 6 for moderately favorable (8.4%) and 7 for extremely favorable (2%). Additionally, we coded for the perceived purpose of the advertisement and coded 1 as promote (2.6%), 2 as attack (37.3%), and 3 as compare (4.3%).

Lastly, we decided to ask five questions to gauge respondents existing attitudes toward male and female candidates. We asked respondents to indicate which of the following positive traits they generally associate with male candidates: honest, intelligent, hardworking, decisive, ambitious, compassionate, emotional, capable of leadership, or none of the above. Each were coded as a 1 if the word was checked and 0 if not. The percentage indicating the words to describe male politicians is as follows: honest (12.6%), intelligent (31.8%), hardworking (37.6%), decisive (38%), ambitious (51.7%), compassionate (10.6%), emotional (8.2%), capable of leadership (44.8%).

This was then repeated using female politicians and the percentages are as follows: honest (31.6%), intelligent (48.6%), hardworking (50.5%), decisive (26.9%), ambitious (46.7%), compassionate (46.1%), and emotional (29.2%).

In addition, we asked whether they believed a male or female official is better suited to handle homeland security issues and coded 1 as a male is much more capable (8.1%), 2 as a male is somewhat more capable (7.8%), 3 as males and females are equally as capable (71.2%), 4 as a female is somewhat more capable (2.6%), and 5 as a female is much more capable (1.8%). We also asked if they thought female politicians were more or less emotional than male politicians and coded 1 as more emotional than male politicians (23.3%), 2 as less emotional than male

politicians (7.6%), and 3 as male and female politicians are equally emotional (53.6%). Lastly, we asked who they thought would do “a better job as a government official representing your [their] interests” and coded 1 as a man (12.2%), 2 as a woman (13.9%), and 3 as the gender of the elected official makes no difference (65.3%).

We also coded the video advertisement as 0 if the ad featured the male candidate and 1 if the ad featured the female candidate, and for the picture/biography variable, we coded 0 as received the male picture/biography and 1 as received the female picture/biography.

## **Results**

The first analysis we ran was a series of ttests to determine the various message tones perceived by respondents who viewed the male candidate video advertisement versus the message tones perceived by respondents who viewed the female candidate advertisement (Table 1). The respondent’s options were to select any of the following that applied: humorous, appropriate, lighthearted, mean-spirited, distasteful, boring, and/or inappropriate (Each were coded as 1 if it was checked and 0 if it was not). This information is useful in detecting what negative or positive messages in particular respondents were detecting which can further our understanding and discussion surrounding the efficacy of using negative advertisements for female or male candidates. The ttests showed no statistical significance for humorous, appropriate, or lighthearted. However, we did find statistically significant mean differences for mean-spirited where the male advertisement had a mean of .45 and the female advertisement had a mean of .34 meaning that respondents perceived the male ad to be more mean-spirited than the female ad. Additionally, the male advertisement was perceived to be more distasteful than the female ad showing a mean of .28 while the female ad had a mean of .22. The male ad was also perceived as more inappropriate than the female ad. The male received a mean of .13 for

inappropriateness and the female ad received a mean of .08. The only message that was more highly perceived in the female advertisement than the male ad was for boringness where the female ad had a mean of .23 and the male ad had a mean of .18. The next step will be to run a series of regressions to account for other variables that may have influenced subjects' responses such as gender, age, education, voter registration, race, political party, ideology, news intake, and interest in politics.

**Table 1. Perceptions of Advertisement Tone in Each Video Advertisement**

	Humorous	Appropriate	Light-hearted	Mean-spirited	Distasteful	Boring	Inappropriate
Male Ad	.05	.22	.07	.45	.28	.18	.13
Female Ad	.04	.22	.08	.34	.22	.23	.08
Mean difference	-.011	.007	.002	-.107	-.061	.055	-.048
T-statistic	-.781	.239	.125	-3.331	-2.144	2.061	-2.424
P-value	.435	.811	.9	<.001	.032	.04	.016

N = 912

Next, an additional ttest was run to evaluate candidate favorability (measured on a likert scale of 1 being extremely unfavorable – 7 being extremely favorable) in relation to gender of the candidate in the picture/biography control group (Table 2). This test was used in order to determine whether female candidates are at baseline disadvantage due to their gender and are typically evaluated as less favorable due to their gender—regardless of negative advertisement

use, and thus, justify the inclusion of our control group and add validity to our findings surrounding negativity. The results showed that it is likely the case that female candidates are not always perceived less favorably than male candidates. Respondents that viewed the male picture had a mean of 4.08 and the respondents that viewed the female picture had a mean of 4.37 which means that respondents who viewed the male picture/biography were more likely to view the male candidate less favorably than the respondents who saw the female photo. This adds validity to our data collected from the respondents who viewed the negative video advertisements as we now have more reason to believe that changes in candidate favorability or perceived negativity are due to the negativity perceived in the advertisement given by a certain gender instead of female candidates precedingly being thought of as less favorable.

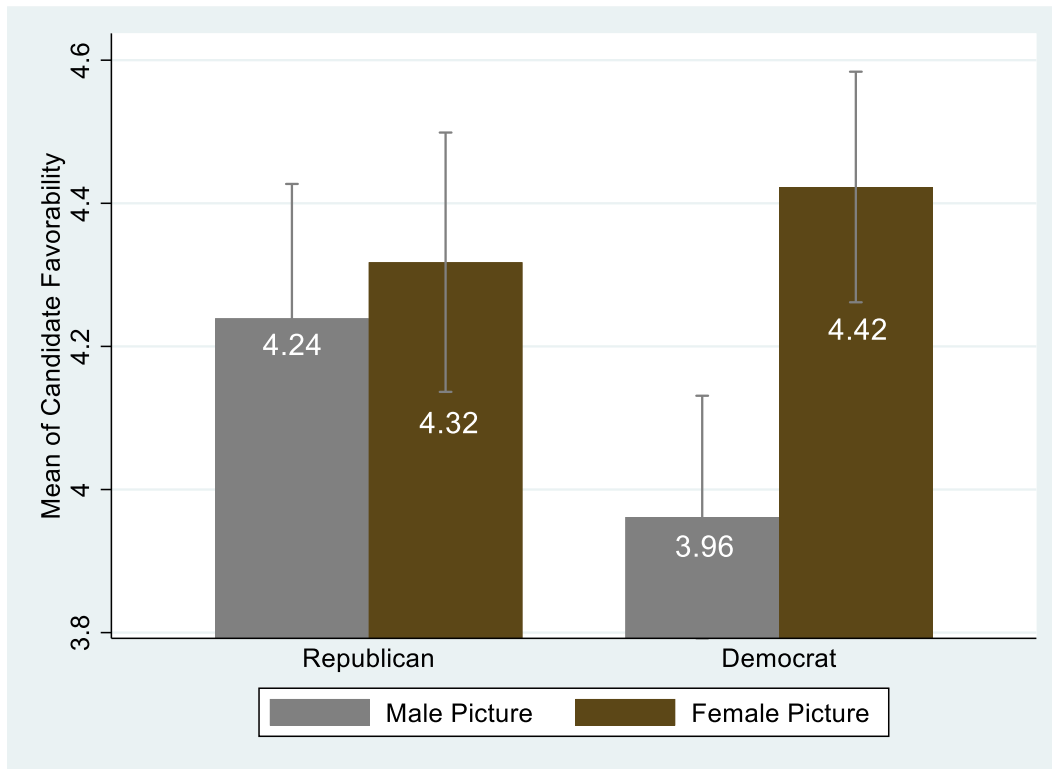
**Table 2. Perceptions of Candidate Favorability**

	Candidate favorability
Male picture/biography	4.08
Female picture/biography	4.37
Mean difference	.287
T-statistic	3.393
P-value	<.001
N = 911	

While this information is useful and offers us a baseline, it is not conclusive. Given the biography for this sample listed the candidate's political party as Republican, it is possible that candidate favorability may have also been influenced by the identified political party of the respondent. To solve for this, we looked more closely at this distribution of responses using the cibarc on STATA to create a bar graph to get a closer look at how respondent's self-identified political party corresponded with their perception of candidate favorability (Table 3). First, we

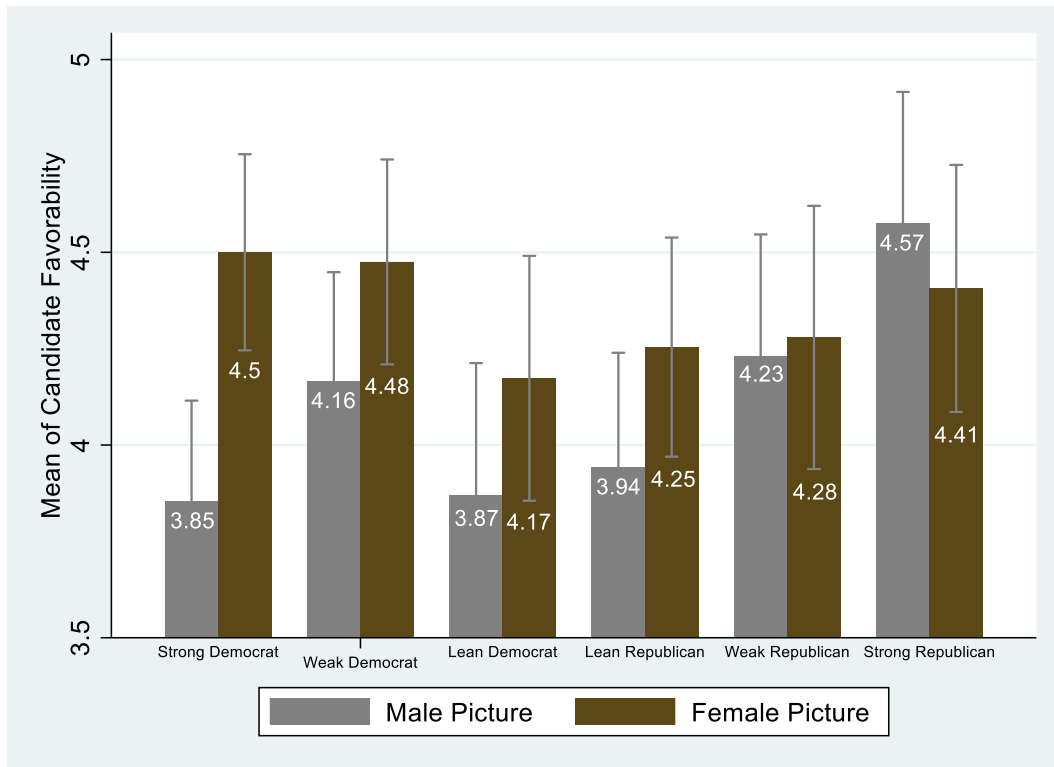
grouped respondent's that identified as Republican (Strong Republican, weak Republican, or lean Republican) and Democrat (Strong Democrat, weak Democrat, and lean Democrat) into two separate groups.

**Table 3. Mean Candidate Favorability of Democrats and Republicans**



This shows us that the female picture/biography was viewed more favorably by Democrats than Republicans. Additionally, Democrats who viewed the male picture/biography found the candidate less favorable than the Republicans who viewed the male picture/biography. There also seems to be a significant difference between the means of candidate favorability when Democrats viewed the female picture/biography versus when they viewed the male picture/biography which encouraged us to take a closer look into the different party categories answers to this question. To gain a closer look, we looked at each of these categories in a similar graph (Table 4).

**Table 4. Distribution of Mean Candidate Favorability of Strong Democrats to Strong Republicans**



Based on the grey lines which represent the 95% confidence interval for mean responses, this showed us that the only significant finding was with the “strong Democrats.” “Strong Democrats” were significantly more likely to find the female picture/biography favorable than the male picture/biography. This seems to be in keeping with literature that found that female candidates of any party were found to be viewed as more liberal than their male opponents (Dolan 2004). This could be an explanation for this large perception difference as strong Democrats are likely to have the most liberal views and find the female candidate more liberal than the male candidate that the candidate was shown to be opposing. Even though the respondents only viewed one picture/biography, they were told that it was a primary race, and

that the opponent was of the opposite gender, so it is possible that the female candidate was perceived as more favorable as they may have been perceived to be more liberal.

These results were affirmed by an ordinal logistic regression we ran to view candidate favorability in relation to party and gender of the candidate more closely (Table 5). In our analysis, we found that, controlling for the gender of the candidate, there was an increase in perceived candidate favorability with each unit change from “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican,” so as the respondent became more strongly Republican, the more likely they were to find the candidate they viewed favorably. This was in keeping with what we believed may happen given that the party of the candidate listed in the biography was Republican.

Additionally, we found that our original *t*-test was confirmed, and, controlling for political leaning, respondents viewed the female candidate more favorably than the male candidate.

Lastly, we again found significance when looking at the interaction between the gender of the candidate shown and the party affiliation of the respondent. This showed that there was a slight decrease in favorability for the female candidate the more Republican the respondent identified as. While we cannot draw firm conclusions for why this is occurring, it seems to be in keeping with the previous literature that discusses gender stereotyping. Given that Republicans are more likely to hold conservative views and gender norms, it would make sense that these may have influenced how favorably they view the candidates.

[Insert table] (This won't be the table that I include but in order to verify my interpretation, I included the full results for you)



**Table 5. Party as a Determinant of Perceptions of Candidate Favorability**

	Coefficient
Party	.14** (.05)
Female picture/biography	1.01*** (0.26)
Female picture/biography*party	-.19** (0.07)
Cut point 1	-3.03 (0.27)
Cut point 2	-1.66 (0.20)
Cut point 3	-.60 (0.19)
N	813
LR chi2, prob>chi2	18.45,0.0004

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.01, + p<0.10

While there is a connection between party influencing how the female picture/biography was perceived, our justification for including the picture/biography as a control group is still valid. Overall, the female candidate was viewed more favorably than the male candidate, so we are still able to say that it is not always the case that female candidates are viewed less favorably than male candidates simply due to their gender. There is a similar distribution of party affiliation in the picture/biography sample and the negative video advertisement sample, so by controlling for party, we may see these interesting interactions and potential gender stereotyping occurring again within a different analysis. However, this does emphasize our need to control for party in future analyses we run, so we can prevent these interactions from skewing future results.

We then ran an ordinal logistic regression to control for other variables while paying attention to the interaction between gender of the candidate and party identification (Table 6). We controlled for their interest in politics (measured on a likert scale of 1 being extremely interested – 5 being not interested at all), whether they were registered to vote or not, how often they gathered information in the news per week, and whether they voted in the past election or not in order to gauge their interest and activity in politics. We believed doing this would help us see if the relative participation in politics affected the respondent's perceptions of candidate favorability. Doing this, we did not find significant results for any of the new control variables, but party, the gender of the candidate, and the interaction between party and gender of the candidate remained significant showing again the results we previously discussed.

**Table 6. Determinants of Candidate Favorability Based on Interest in Politics**

	Coefficients
Female picture/biography	.97*** (.26)
Party	.14** (.05)
Female picture/biography*party	-.19** (.07)
Interest	.04 (.08)
Voted in Past election	-.33+ (.19)
News	.01 (.04)
Registered	.12 (.26)
Cut point 1	-2.94 (.43)
Cut point 2	-1.57 (.39)
Cut point 3	-.50 (.38)
N	801
LR chi2, prob>chi2	22.50, 0.0041

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.01, + p<0.10

Next, we ran an ordinal logistic regression where we controlled for demographic variables (Table 7). We controlled for whether the respondent was white or not, party identification, age of the respondent, and received education. We excluded controlling for gender as after viewing the distribution of responses using the cibar on STATA men and women were shown to have nearly identical perceptions of candidate favorability. After viewing the male

picture/biography, women respondents had a mean of 4.03 and men had a mean of 4.16, and after viewing the female picture/biography, women respondents had a mean of 4.36 and men had a mean of 4.35. In addition, limited respondents within the categories transgender man, transgender woman, gender variant/gender-nonconforming, not listed, and prefer not to answer made us believe that including them would do more to skew the results than inform them.

We controlled for the other variables in order to see if there were any key differences between the perceptions of candidate favorability and the demographic positionalities of the respondents as that could skew how they perceive the candidate due to different experiences or views they may hold due to their identity. In these results, we found significance for respondents who received less than a full high school education showing that they were 2.71 times as likely to view the candidate as favorable than respondents who had a high school degree. However, it is worth noting that there were only 6 out of 807 observations in the sample that fell into the category of having less than a high school degree. Additionally, we found near significant results (p-value of .058) for the age of the respondent which showed that there was a .05 unit increase in perceived favorability of the candidate the older the respondent was. This means that with each unit the respondent's age increased, the perceived candidate favorability increased by .05.

Given the small sample size of respondents that received less than a high school education, this led us to run an interaction between gender of the candidate and age of the respondent but not for gender of the candidate and the received education of the respondent. However, controlling for the same variables as before, this did not show significant results.

**Table 7. Determinants of Candidate Favorability Based on Demographics**

	Coefficients
Female picture/biography	.35** (.13)
Party	.04 (.04)
White	-.11 (.15)
Age	.05+ (.03)
Less than high school	2.71** (1.09)
Some college	-.29 (.25)
Associate's/2 year degree	-.03 (.28)
Bachelor's/4 year degree	.20 (.24)
Professional degree	.01 (.27)
Doctorate	-.43 (.49)
Cut point 1	-3.22 (0.35)
Cut point 2	-1.85 (0.30)
Cut point 3	-.78 (.29)
N	807
LR chi2, prob>chi2	30.16, 0.0008

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.01, + p<0.10

## **Conclusion**

Negative advertisements are a commonplace and popular practice among all candidates on the campaign trail. They typically highlight policy and stick out in people's minds which makes them a useful tool for getting a candidate's message across. However, what is unclear is how effective they are each of the different kinds of candidates that utilize them. A person's identity greatly shapes how they are perceived when engaging in different behaviors, and there is not an exception when it comes to women running a political campaign. In this study, we see that message tones perceived by respondents do differ depending on the gender of the candidate. However, preliminary findings show that male candidates are more likely to be perceived as mean-spirited, distasteful, and inappropriate when utilizing this campaign strategy; whereas, female candidates may be seen as being more boring. Going forward, this will be interesting to relay back to after evaluating whether female candidate's negative advertisements are perceived to be more or less negative than their male counterpart's. To further this research, we would like to run a series of regressions that reevaluate the perceived message tones related to each candidate's gender while controlling for certain variables—with special interest in perceived purpose of the ad and the political party alignment of the respondent—as well as a regression that evaluates the perceived negativity in the ad (tone) in relation to the gender of the candidate while controlling for the perceived purpose of the ad and the political party of the respondent.

By doing these additional analyses, we may be able to get a closer look and gain insight into how these advertisements may affect male and female candidates. It is worth noting the limitations of this study as they may not be as generalizable as would be preferred. However, this information still may allow more information on effective campaign strategies for those running

a campaign, and it could allow scholars greater insight in the various ways that gender identity impacts public opinion.

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