**The Effect of Party Affiliation on Views Regarding a Woman Serving as President**

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**Abstract**

The 2016 presidential election could potentially result in a woman serving as the President of the United States. Women have largely been ignored in presidential politics and much of the public opinion literature has attempted to answer why. While the contributions of previous scholars is certainly noteworthy and valuable, past work is outdated and does not directly examine the relationship between party identification and views on female candidates. Today’s political climate is uniquely hyper-partisan and all but certain that Hilary Clinton, a woman, will be the presidential nominee for the Democratic Party. This paper addresses the shortcomings of the previous literature by addressing the relationship between party identification and views regarding having a woman serve as president within today’s hyper-partisan political climate. This paper suggests a model where party culture influences the views of its members. I hypothesize that among individuals in the United States, those who identify with the Republican Party are more likely to have negative feelings towards having a woman serve as president of the U.S., than those who identify with the Democratic Party. The findings of my cross-tabulation confirm my hypothesis and show that people who identify with the Republican Party are more likely to have negative views regarding a woman serving as president than those who identify with the Democratic Party. This finding remains, even when controlling for gender.

1. **Introduction**

With the 2016 Presidential election less than two years away, excitement is growing around who the potential nominees will be. For the GOP, Scott Walker, Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Chris Christie, and even Mitt Romney and many others have been discussed as potential candidates. Across the aisle, some Democrat names have been thrown around such as Vice President Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, and Andrew Cuomo. Besides these candidates, Elizabeth Warren and Hilary Clinton are also considered strong contenders for the Democratic nomination. According to recent Quinnipiac University polling data, Warren and Clinton are the top two candidates, with Clinton far and away ahead of the pack (Malloy, 2015).

Political scientists in the field of public opinion have been fascinated with the idea of having a woman in the Oval Office for years. Many scholars have attempted to answer central questions regarding how public opinion influences the possibility of having a female president. Previous literature has largely operated in a political climate where women are almost non-existent in presidential politics, outside the role of wife and/or First Lady. All forty-four of the United States’ presidents have been male. Sarah Palin and Geraldine Ferraro are the only two women who have been Vice Presidential nominees, and there has never been a female presidential nominee for either major party.

Considering the male-dominant, presidential political landscape, it is exciting and noteworthy to see two female candidates at the forefront of potential presidential candidates. With President Barrack Obama becoming the first African American president in 2008, and the possibility that Hilary Clinton or Elizabeth Warren could become the first female president in 2016, it is clear that the political landscape has shifted away from traditional requirements of electability--being a white male.

This paper will attempt to understand how party identification affects who sees the potential for a female president as positive and who sees the potential for a female president as negative in today’s political landscape.

1. **Women In a Different Political Landscape**

The question of what influences public opinion towards having a woman as president has been pondered by political scientists for decades. Some suggest that opinion changes when going between different demographic groups, while others suggest that issue salience may play an important role. Still others suggest that gender stereotypes play a significant role. Debate exists whether polling data is inherently unreliable due to respondents not being truthful and the potential flaw of the woman-president question or if traditional polling actually overestimates sexism.

Many political scientists have suggested that support for women changes between different demographic groups. Welch and Sigelman found that the core support for a woman to become president was found among people who had more years of education, were younger, and attended church less. The core opposition for a woman to become president was found among people who had less education, were older, and attended church more often. These results suggest that conservatives may be more likely to disapprove of a female president than liberals; yet, the data did not strongly support this conclusion (1982).

Similarly, a 1998 study suggests that differences in support for a female candidate may be the result of regional and cultural differences. Fox and Smith polled students at two universities: one in Wyoming and one in California. They found that despite similar demographics in the cases (young and well-educated people), the group in California was more likely to approve of a female presidential candidate.

Other explanations have involved differences among gender and race. A 1984 study conducted by Singelman and Welch found gender may not influence an individual’s preference for a female candidate. Women were found to not be consistently more supportive of female candidates than men. However, among African Americans, women were more likely than men to support a female candidate. Few gender differences were found among Caucasians.

Despite results that show demographic groups have different degrees of approval for a potential female presidential candidate, others suggest that issue salience may be an important factor. A 2006 study showed that individuals who said that terrorism, homeland security, and/or U.S. involvement in Iraq was the most important issue facing the United States were more likely to feel that a male would do a better job handling the problem as president. The conclusion of Falk and Kenski was that issue saliency affects gender preferences in presidential candidates much more that demographic and party identification variables.

Several scholars have suggested that holding gender stereotypes play an important role with varying degrees of effect. A 2009 study claims that the public perceives gender differences within both parties. They further state that a candidate’s gender plays a role even when the party of the candidate is known. Additionally, stereotypes involving gender have different implications for Democratic women and Republican women (Sanbomatsu and Dolan).

Lawless asserts that women have a harder time wooing public opinion during times of war (i.e. after September 11, 2001). Also, the author challenges the claim that winning elections have nothing to do with sex based off of the possibility that women fare poorer in elections when “men’s issues” are dominate (2004).

In contrast, a 1993 study, that takes a more information-centric approach, finds that when information about candidates is sparse, gender role attitudes are important in initial evaluation of candidates. Specifically, people tend to contribute certain leadership abilities and skills in handling problems based on sex when considering a hypothetical candidate. Further, voters who have equal gender role attitudes are more likely to favorably evaluate a real female candidate. Finally, all incumbents were rated better on “male” and “female” qualities than challengers (Alexander and Andersen).

Outside of possible explanations for why women are almost non-existent in presidential politics, much of the literature has examined measurement concerns. Some scholars question how effective polling can be when asking about sensitive issues, especially those regarding race and gender. Streb, Burrell, Frederick, and Genovese suggest that people may give false answers when asked if they would vote for a qualified female presidential candidate. A “list experiment” was implemented to see if people were lying on polling questions. This experiment involved giving the control group a list of four statements. They were asked to identify how many of the statements made them “angry or upset.” The four statements read: “1. The way gasoline prices keep going up, 2. Professional athletes getting million-dollar plus salaries, 3. Requiring seatbelts to be used when driving, and 4. Large corporations polluting the environment.” The test group was given these four statements with the addition of a fifth statement and were asked to do the same thing. The fifth statement read: “A woman serving as president.” The key to this experiment is that respondents had to identify how many statements made them “angry or upset” not which ones. Since respondents did not have to identify which statements they picked, the researchers saw this method as a way to evaluate the public’s true feeling about a female president without the potential for lying. They found that despite the growing trend of support for a female president over the years, about 25% of the American public would be angry about a woman serving as president. This result was constant among demographic groups (2008).

Similar to Streb, Burrell, Frederick, and Genovese, a 1998 study suggests that the woman-president question is inherently flawed. The researchers state that recent studies at the time found that the candidate’s gender did not have an effect on voter discrimination based on sex. The study involved polling students at two different universities (the details of this study were stated on page two of this paper). The results suggest that bias against women candidates change significantly among regions. The researchers conclude that a woman-president question may be flawed and should not be taken at face value because people may be unaware of their prejudices or are willing to lie about them (Fox and Smith).

In contrast, Falk and Kenski suggest that traditional polling methods actually overestimate sexism and underestimate the role that individual characteristics play, such as party identification, in deciding if one will vote for a woman for president. They further claim that many people would in fact vote for a woman if given a realistic matchup (2006).

A problem that is shared with all past literature is that we are now in a political climate where the possibility of having a woman president is very likely, if not inevitable. Hilary Clinton is the front runner for the Democratic nomination, and the Republicans have not yet found a candidate who is guaranteed to challenge her properly. In the past, asking individuals about having a woman serve as president have been largely hypothetical. Now that the potential for a woman to sit in the Oval Office seems very possible, the American public’s attitudes about this question may have changed significantly.

Additionally, much of the present literature interacts with the relationship between party identification and views on having a woman serve as president; however, none directly explore this relationship. When the new hyper-partisan political climate is considered, this omission is even more important to examine. This paper is an attempt to properly examine the relationship between party identification and views regarding having a woman serve as president in the modern political climate where the potential for having a female presidential candidate is very real and strong partisanship divides the country.

1. **Party Culture Influences Views on Women**

When looking at how the American public views the possibility of having a female president, it is natural to consider divisions along party lines. Due to the hyper-partisanship present in today’s political spectrum, differences between Republicans and Democrats are expected with almost everything. In examining why there may be differences between the two major parties in feelings towards a female president, it is necessary to consider who makes up each party, how this makeup could influence party culture, and who is seen as a presidential front runner for either party.

Republicans tend to be made up of conservatives, including traditionalist conservatives. An emphasis of traditionalist conservatism is the preservation of traditional home life. This view includes valuing gender roles that include men being bread winners and women staying home and taking care of the children. While not all Republicans subscribe to the above view, a significant portion of their voter base may hold this viewpoint. These individuals may find a woman holding the highest office of the country as threatening to the traditional concept of the family. In turn, these individuals may be against seeing a woman in the White House. This line of thinking may influence party culture and direction; thus, affecting the views of other party identifiers in regard to encouraging negative views towards having a woman serve as president.

Additionally, the Republican Party has taken a hard stance against passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act. This bill is designed to close the gender wage gap, which has been reported to be that women, on average, make 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. While the underlying causes for this gap are debatable, the Paycheck Fairness Act is an attempt to eliminate any workplace pay discrimination due to gender. Considering that Republicans have blocked passage of this bill suggests that there may be complacency in allowing for this wage gap to remain. This possible complacency may suggest that people who identify with the GOP may be against women rising to more positions of power, especially the presidency. This concrete policy action may influence members of the Republican Party to hold some anti-women attitudes and be less favorable to the idea of having a woman serve as president.

Looking at the other side of the aisle, the Democratic Party holds many individuals who identify themselves as liberal, specifically social liberals. Many feminists and radical feminists have been drawn to the Democratic Party due to their liberal social values. These individuals would be strongly in favor of having women in positions of power, especially the presidency. This line of thinking may influence party culture to encourage pro-women attitudes, and thus, encourage positive views regarding having a woman serve as president.

Additionally, women tend to identify with Democrats more than with Republicans. Assuming that women would have more favorable views of having a female president than men would, it is possible to believe that the membership of the Democratic Party would be more favorable to having a female president than Republicans.

Important consideration needs to be paid to policy positions as well. The Democratic Party is largely in favor of passing the Paycheck Fairness Act and have made the statistic of 77 cents per every dollar one of their rallying cries. Considering this policy position, it is reasonable to assume that the Democratic Party appears to be pro-women to many, and would thus attract membership that would have more favorable views in regard to having a woman president. This concrete policy position may influence the thinking of party members to be pro-women in focus, and thus, more positive to the idea of having a woman serve as president.

Perhaps most importantly, party identification may influence individuals’ views on having a woman president due to the fact that the Republican field of potential presidential candidates is all male, while the top Democratic contenders are female. Respondents may remember this fact in the back of their minds, specifically that Hilary Clinton will most likely be the Democratic nominee. Considering this partisan spilt, respondents who identify as Republican may rate having a female president lower than respondents who identify as a Democrat.

Essentially, my model suggests that individuals are drawn to a political party for a reason or a set of reasons. Once one identifies with that party, they are influenced by the culture of that party. This party culture could be the result of the membership of the party, the policy positions of that party, and who makes up the “big names” of the party. The culture of the party influences and may change the views of the individual. A concrete example of the above will be given for clarity. Consider Tom. Tom has very favorable views towards free-market economics. Tom sees the Republican Party as being favorable towards free-markets and decides to become a member of the GOP. Now that he identifies as Republican, Tom seeks out what other Republicans think. He reads blogs, online magazines, and news articles that explain and defend the views of various wings of the GOP. He keeps up to date on various policy issues and which side the Republican Party takes. He is aware of current polls and who is being talked about for potential GOP presidential nominees. When faced with the question of if he would vote for a female presidential candidate, Tom may recall the piece he read that eloquently defended traditionalist conservatism. He may also recall how Republicans are against the Paycheck Fairness Act. Finally, he may recall that potential presidential candidates for the GOP include almost exclusively males and that the leading Democratic candidate is Hilary Clinton, a female. Tom may want to be like his fellow Republicans, be a legitimate member of the group. So, Tom considers the above and determines that a true Republican would not vote for a female presidential candidate, or be neutral to the idea.

Therefore, in order to more effectively understand how the U.S. population views the possibility of having a woman president, party identification needs to be considered. When the above are put into consideration, it seems that party culture may have a significant influence on views regarding a woman serving as president. A comparison of the two major parties also suggests that Republicans will have a more negative view than Democrats. The hypothesis for this paper is that among individuals in the United States, those who identify with the Republican Party are more likely to have negative feelings towards having a woman serve as president of the U.S., than those who identify with the Democratic Party.

1. **Research Design**

In order to test this hypothesis, the variables need to be measured properly. The independent variable is party affiliation. The dependent variable is feelings towards having a woman serve as president of the United States. The unit of analysis is individuals.

Data from the American National Election Study (ANES) of 2012 will be used to measure the independent and dependent variables. This study will be used because it is the most recent study available, and it focuses on investigating national election outcomes. Considering that the president is chosen through a national election, the ANES is ideal.

As mentioned earlier, there is debate in the literature surrounding the use of traditional polling methods to measure when inquiring about certain issues, in this case gender. Considering that one camp thinks traditional polling overestimates negative views towards women, while the other camp thinks traditional polling underestimates negative views towards women, this paper will assume that the ANES is a good way to measure the attitudes of voters. While using the ANES is certainly not perfect, it has been long held that traditional polling methods are good measures of respondents’ feelings. Since the goal of this paper is not to resolve the above debate, I will yield to the wisdom of using traditional polling methods.

The variable “WPRES\_GDBD” will be used to measure individuals’ feelings towards having a woman serve as president. The survey question asks, “Would it be good, bad, or neither good nor bad if the United States has a woman President in the next 20 years?” The answers were recorded in three categories: “Good if the United States has a woman President”, “Bad if the United States has a woman President”, and “Neither good nor bad if the United States has a woman President.” This question reliably measures the dependent variable because it consistently measures respondents’ feelings about having a female president. This question is also valid because it contains no systematic error. When examining the question at face value, asking if having a woman president in 20 years is good, bad, or neither should be a valid measure of respondents’ feelings towards having a woman serve as president.

The variable “PID\_SELF” will be used to measure individuals’ party identification. The survey question asks, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [Democrat, a Republican, / a Republican, a Democrat], and independent, or what?” The answers were recorded in three categories: “Democrat”, “Republican”, and “Independent.” The question is a reliable measure of the dependent variable because it measures individuals’ party identification consistently. The question is also valid because it does not suffer from systematic error. At face value, asking someone how they identify themselves in terms of political parties should be a valid measure of respondents’ party affiliation.

I will be performing a cross-tabulation between the independent and the dependent variables. Considering that the independent variable is nominal and the dependent variable is ordinal, a cross-tabulation would be an appropriate tool.

In addition to finding the zero-order relationship between the independent and dependent variables, I will also be finding a partial-effect relationship by controlling for gender. Controlling for gender is important because women may show a more favorable bias towards having a female president than men. Also, women tend to identify with Democrats more than men do, and men tend to identify with Republicans more than women do.

I will be using the variable “GENDER\_RESPONDENT” to measure the control variable. The variable combines the variables for gender face-to-face and web modes of administering the survey. The question may run into reliability issues because the interviewer observes the individual’s gender for administering the survey face-to-face. Considering that the survey was administered by several different interviewers, their categorization of individuals may differ slightly. Additionally, this question runs into issues of validity. The question relies on the interviewer correctly identifying if the respondent is male or female. The interviewer may identify individuals incorrectly. Despite these potential issues, it is still unlikely that the dataset is significantly inaccurate. Since there are no other gender variables in the ANES, this variable is the best option by default.

1. **Analysis and Assessment**

The findings of the cross-tabulations support my hypothesis by showing that individuals in the United States who identify with the Republican Party are more likely to have negative feelings towards having a woman serve as president than those who identify with the Democratic Party.

The charts below display the findings of this study. A majority of Democrats (56.2%) see having a woman serve as president in the next 20 years as good, while only 23.8% of Republicans feel the same way. Additionally, 9.6% of Republicans feel that having a woman serve as president is bad, while only 3.6% of Democrats feel the same way. Finally, 66.7% of Republicans say that having a woman serve as president in the next 20 years as neither good nor bad, which is much more in comparison to only 40.2% of Democrats.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Feelings On Having a Woman President** | | | | |
| **Women President in next 20 years?** | **Democrat** | **Republican** | **Independent** | **Total** |
| **Good** | 56.2%  (1226) | 23.8%  (306) | 37.6%  (642) | 42%  (2174) |
| **Bad** | 3.6%  (79) | 9.6%  (123) | 4.5%  (77) | 5.4%  (279) |
| **Neither good nor bad** | 40.2%  (878) | 66.7%  (858) | 57.9%  (989) | 52.6%  (2725) |
| **Total** | 100%  (2183) | 100%  (1287) | 100%  (1708) | 100%  (5178) |

These three findings are significant at the 0.05 level. Pearson’s chi-square value, for six degrees of freedom is 391.739. The significance value is 0.000, which passes the 0.05 threshold of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected with 95% confidence. Significant differences exist between how Democrats and Republicans feel about having a woman serve as president in the next 20 years. Democrats tend to have more favorable feelings towards having a woman president than Republicans. Republicans tend to have more negative or neutral feelings towards having a woman president than Democrats.

Further, this study finds that 49.7% of male Democrats and 18.6% of male Republicans think that having a woman president in the next 20 years would be good. Also, 3.6% of male Democrats and 9.1% of male Republicans say that having a woman president in the next 20 years would be bad. Of male Democrats, 46.7% feel that having a woman president in the next 20 years would be neither good nor bad, while 72.3% of male republicans feel the same way.

**Feelings on Having a Woman President**

**(Controlling for Gender)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Male** | | | | **Female** | | | |
| **Woman President in next 20 years?** | **Democrat** | **Republican** | **Independent** | **Total** | **Democrat** | **Republican** | **Independent** | **Total** |
| **Good** | 49.7%  (461) | 18.6%  (124) | 32.1%  (302) | 35%  (887) | 60.9%  (765) | 29.4%  (182) | 44.3%  (340) | 48.7%  (1287) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Bad** | 3.6%  (33) | 9.1%  (61) | 5.1%  (48) | 5.6%  (142) | 3.7%  (46) | 10%  (62) | 3.8%  (29) | 5.2%  (137) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Neither good nor bad** | 46.7%  (433) | 72.3%  (482) | 62.8%  (590) | 59.4%  (1505) | 35.4%  (445) | 60.6%  (376) | 52%  (399) | 46.1%  (1220) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | 100%  (927) | 100%  (667) | 100%  (940) | 100%  (2534) | 100%  (1256) | 100%  (620) | 100%  (768) | 100%  (2644) |

The above findings are significant at the 0.05 level. Pearson’s chi-square value for males is 178.755 with four degrees of freedom. The significance value is 0.000, which passes the 0.05 threshold of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected with 95% confidence. Significant differences exist between how male Democrats and male Republicans feel about having a woman serve as president in the next 20 years. Male Democrats tend to have more positive views towards having a female president than male Republicans. Male Republicans tend to have more negative or neutral views towards having a female president than male Democrats.

Among women, 60.9% of Democrats feel that having a female president in the next 20 years would be good, while only 29.4% of Republicans feel the same. Further, 3.7% of female Democrats and 10% of female Republicans think that having a woman president in the next 20 years would be bad. Finally, 35.4% of female Democrats say that having a woman president in the next 20 years would be neither good nor bad, which is much less than the 60.6% of Republican women who say the same thing.

The above findings are significant at the 0.05 level. Pearson’s chi-square value for females, with four degrees of freedom, is 190.637. The significance value is 0.000, which passes the 0.05 significance threshold. With 95% confidence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Significant differences exist between how female Democrats and female Republicans feel about having a woman serve as president in the next 20 years. Female Democrats tend to have more positive feelings towards seeing a woman in the Oval Office than female Republicans. Female Republicans tend to have more negative or neutral feelings towards seeing a woman in the Oval Office than female Democrats.

When comparing males and females who feel that having a woman serve as president is good, there is an additive relationship. The change between the percentage of male Democrats who see it as good and the percentage of male Republicans who see it as good is -31.1%. The change between the percentage of female Democrats who see it as good and the percentage of female Republicans who see it as good is -31.5%. These values are not close to zero; therefore, the relationship is not spurious. Additionally, these values are very close together; thus, indicating an additive relationship.

Further, when comparing males and females who feel that having a woman serve as president is bad, there is also an additive relationship. The change between the percentage of male Democrats and male Republicans who see it as bad is 5.5%. The change between the percentage of female Democrats and male Democrats who see it as bad is 6.3%. These values are not close to zero; therefore, the relationship is not spurious. Also, these values are close together; thus, indicating an additive relationship.

In this comparison of males and females who feel that having a female serve as president is neither good nor bad, the relationship is once again additive. The change between the percentage of male Democrats and male Republicans who see it as neither good nor bad is 25.6%. The change between the percentage of female Democrats and female Republicans who see it as neither good nor bad is 25.2%. The relationship cannot be spurious due to the fact that these values are not close to zero. Further, the relationship must be additive because these values are very close together.

1. **Conclusion**

The research showed that there is a significant relationship between party identification and feelings towards having a woman serve as president of the United States. While more work still needs to be done, the results of this study suggest that my model may be correct. Dealing with causality and reverse causality is always difficult, especially with cross-tabulations. Indeed, I cannot discount the potential for reverse causality; however, the data does not discount the possibility that the causal arrow points from party identification to views on having a woman serve as president. Individuals who identify with Republicans are more likely to have negative views about having a woman president in the next 20 years than individuals who identify with Democrats. When controlling for gender, both male and female Democrats are more likely to have positive views regarding having a woman president in the next 20 years than their respective Republican counterparts.

The relationship between the independent, dependent and control variables is additive. This means that gender has a very minor effect on feelings towards having a woman president. Further, the independent and dependent variables retain a causal relationship even after applying the control variable. While gender helps to explain differences in feelings towards having a woman serve as president, party identification still causes difference in feelings towards having a woman serve as president among individuals.

Considering the results of this study, it seems that negative gender bias towards a female president would be minimal. Most Americans seem to have positive feelings regarding having a woman in the White House, or are neutral on the subject. With 2016 fast approaching, the data in this study bodes well for Hilary Clinton and Elizabeth Warren.

As potential contenders for the Democratic nomination, it seems that they will have no problem gaining the support of their party. With the majority of Democrats saying that having a woman serve as president would be good, there should be few issues of gender bias in the primaries.

Once the primaries are over, the story only changes slightly. The research shows that the total number of individuals who have negative feelings towards having a woman in the Oval Office is 5.4%. Assuming that all respondents have been honest, the level for possible gender bias among voters is minimal. However, if the 2016 election is similar to recent presidential elections, even the slightest disadvantage could decide the election.

Assuming that the results of this study are true, it seems that the United States could have its first female president. This suggestion is not surprising considering that the U.S. elected its first African American president in 2008, and again in 2012. While issues of racism and sexism still exist, it seems that they do not significantly hinder the presidential election process. Fortunately, the 2016 election will come down to the quality of the candidates, not whether they are male or female.

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