

Is Sexism for White People? Gender Stereotypes, Race, and the 2016 Presidential Election

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Abstract On November 8, 2016 Donald Trump, a man with no office-holding experience, won the Electoral College, defeating the first woman to receive the presidential nomination from a major party. This paper offers the first observational test of how sexism affects presidential vote choice in the general election, adding to the rich literature on gender and candidate success for lower-level offices. We argue that the 2016 election implicated gender through Hillary Clinton's candidacy and Donald Trump's sexist rhetoric, and activated gender attitudes such that sexism is associated with vote choice. Using an Election Day exit poll survey of over 1300 voters conducted at 12 precincts in a mid-size city and a national survey of over 10,000 White and Black Americans, we find that a politically defined measure of sexism—the belief that men are better suited emotionally for politics than women—predicts support for Trump both in terms of vote choice and favorability. We find the effect is strongest and most consistent among White voters. However, a domestically defined measure of sexism—whether men should be in control of their

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wives—offers little explanatory power over the vote. In total, our results demonstrate the importance of gender in the 2016 election, beyond mere demographic differences in vote choice: beliefs about gender and fitness for office shape both White men and women’s preferences.

Keywords Presidential vote · Sexism · Gender · Race · Exit poll

Introduction

“Where women run they win.” This claim is supported by a bevy of studies examining gender and candidate success (Bauer 2015; Brooks 2013; Burrell 1996; Darcy et al. 1994; Dolan 1998; Fox and Oxley 2003; Seltzer et al. 1997; Smith and Fox 2001) despite a rich body of experimental literature showing that voters often have baseline gender preferences, prefer male traits among candidates, and that generally female candidates are disadvantaged (Ditonto 2017; Huddy 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2003b; Schneider and Bos 2014). Even the most optimistic experimental findings are limited to demonstrations of the conditions under which women candidates can sometimes overcome the public’s reliably negative evaluations of them (Bauer 2015, 2017; Holman et al. 2011). The seemingly contradictory findings from experimental and observational studies are widely explained by the gender gap in perceived qualifications and the decision to seek office (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2005; Fox and Oxley 2003). Given that women are less likely to believe that they are qualified to hold office compared to similarly experienced men, the pool of women candidates we observe is likely to be significantly more qualified than the pool of men seeking office. Therefore, the fact that “a candidate’s sex does not affect his or her chances of winning an election” (Seltzer et al. 1997, p. 79) is evidence that women must be more qualified to overcome sexism and stereotypes of women’s relative incompetence (Holman et al. 2011; Lawless and Pearson 2008).

Given this, the 2016 presidential election presents a puzzle for existing research. Hillary Clinton, who possesses one of the most extensive political résumés of any presidential candidate, clinched the Democratic nomination to run against Donald Trump—a candidate with zero electoral experience. And yet, Trump prevailed. While we recognize the importance of caution when it comes to extrapolating from a single election, the 2016 election cycle offers a unique opportunity for researchers to test how gender might still constrain the chances of presidential candidates. For while men and women have equal chances of winning election to state government and to the U.S. Congress and Senate, we argue that sexism worked to shut out the most qualified presidential candidate in 2016. Specifically, we argue that gender became salient in the campaign through the combination of Clinton’s historic candidacy and Trump’s rhetoric about women. This activation process led to an association between beliefs about gender, or sexism, and vote choice.

Our paper presents data from two surveys: one Election Day exit poll in a mid-size U.S. city and one post-election survey administered online to a large national

sample of White and Black Americans. Across both surveys we find that sexist beliefs about women's emotional suitability for political office shaped Whites' vote in 2016. In the national data we find that sexism is an equivalent predictor of Whites' vote choice across gender, but in the exit poll survey we find that White women were particularly affected by sexist beliefs about women's fitness for office while White men were statistically unaffected by sexism. In the national data we uncover a small, but significant effect of sexism on African Americans' vote, but in the exit poll data sexism did not shape non-White voters' choices. We also show that while political realm sexism was politically relevant in 2016, domestic sexism—the belief that husbands should control wives—was much less influential. Our results demonstrate the powerful effects of beliefs about gender on politics, and suggest that sexism may remain a barrier to women accessing the Oval Office.

Prior Research

Once women decide to run for office, they are as likely to win elections as men, at least at the congressional and state level (Brooks 2013; Burrell 1996; Darcy et al. 1994; Dolan 1998; Fox and Oxley 2003; Seltzer et al. 1997; Smith and Fox 2001). However, despite this set of findings, the effects of gender on political campaigns appear at multiple points in the process. At the earliest stage, women are less likely to consider running for office and less likely to be recruited to run than comparably qualified men (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2005). Once women decide to run, the media coverage they receive is often gendered and sexist (Conroy et al. 2015; Han and Heldman 2007; Heldman et al. 2005), and they are more likely to face competition in party primaries (Lawless and Pearson 2008). Gender also shapes how voters evaluate candidates (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1992; Lawless 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2002). These findings fit with the rich literature on gender and leadership. Social psychology demonstrates that women tend to perceive themselves as less qualified and that they are viewed as less competent and less effective leaders than men, particularly in domains considered masculine (Carli and Eagly 1999; Foschi 1996; Swim et al. 1989). Moreover, when women are agentic or confident leaders, they are viewed as unlikable (Carli and Eagly 1999; Rudman 1998; Rudman and Glick 2001). This research suggests how difficult the path for women candidates is likely to be, particularly for the highest office in the United States, where likability is essential (Baum 2005; Campbell et al. 1960; Huber and Arceneaux 2007; Miller and Shanks 1996; Oliver and Ha 2007).

After entering the race, women can be subjected to particularly negative and sexist coverage. While there have been few cases of women seeking the presidency or vice presidency, media studies of these cases demonstrate that women who run for national or executive office are covered in systematically different ways than their male counterparts. At the presidential level, media coverage of women candidates is more likely to focus on their appearance, dress, and their families, and is both more sexist and more negative (Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Conroy et al. 2015; Han and Heldman 2007; Heimer 2007; Heldman et al. 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Miller et al. 2010; Stein 2009). Similarly, media coverage of women

candidates at lower levels of office is more negative and more likely to focus on feminine trait stereotypes and stereotypically feminine policy issues (Braden 1996; Bystrom et al. 2004; Carroll and Schreiber 1997; Kahn 1994a, Kahn 1994b, Kahn 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Weir 1996; Woodall and Fridkin 2007). Scholars argue that these gendered differences in coverage negatively impact women seeking office by undercutting voters' perceptions of them as serious contenders (Burns et al. 2013; Bystrom et al. 2001; Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Heldman and Wade 2011; Kahn 1992).

While media coverage of candidates certainly shapes voter perceptions by framing debate and setting the agenda (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), voters also bring their own views of gender to their candidate evaluations. Research demonstrates that all else equal, gender affects perceptions of competence on particular issue areas and shapes beliefs about personal traits. Women are typically perceived as being more honest and better able to handle “compassion” issues, while male candidates are seen as more competent in the realm of military and defense policy (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1992; Koch 1999; Lawless 2004). And, while there is evidence to suggest sexism's influence is conditional on the campaign environment's ability to activate stereotypes (Bauer 2015), most research shows a reliable negative impact of stereotypes on evaluations of women candidates (Holman et al. 2011; Schneider and Bos 2014).

Women can learn to operate their candidacies within these gendered confines, but that is not evidence that gender does not matter (Lawless 2009). Rather, gender continues to constrain the lives and choices of political candidates, just as it does for all people. Until 2016 there had not been an opportunity to test how gender constrains women candidates in the presidential general election. This election provides a hard test for the effects of gender and sexism. While women are viewed as less competent on average, Clinton is not an average candidate (Lawless 2009). She has decades of public service in multiple offices and high name recognition. Moreover, informational cues and heuristics (such as gender) are likely to exert the largest effect when little information is known (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Lupia 1994; McDermott 1997, 1998); gendered assumptions are most likely for political newcomers (Brooks 2013); and gender disadvantage is most likely to occur at the primary stage (Lawless and Pearson 2008). The 2016 general election does not meet any of these criteria. Therefore, if we are able to determine that sexism shaped the outcome of the 2016 election, that finding would provide strong evidence for how gender constrains our political system—even in the final step where we observe qualified women running for office.

Theoretical Expectations

Gender remains a fundamental structure in the lives of both men and women (Ferree and Hess 1987; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 1998). While a great deal of research has examined so-called gender gaps in public opinion and political participation (Brooks and Valentino 2011; Conover and Sapiro 1993; Herek 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Lien 1998; Mansfield et al. 2015;

Norrander 1999; Schlesinger and Heldman 2001; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986), some gender scholars argue that men and women share more similarities, and are less distinct as groups than the gender differences literature might suggest (Hyde 2005; Ridgeway 2011). Indeed, men and women both tend to endorse views of gender difference in competence politically, socially, and economically. Thus, researchers find women and men are similarly opposed to female presidents (Burden et al. 2017; Sigelman and Welch 1984). As Strolovitch et al. (2017) argue, women are not necessarily tied to ideas of women's political equality, and instead often have sexist preferences and choose to "invest in white heteropatriarchy." Therefore, instead of expecting gender identification to condition political attitudes and behavior, we might expect that ideas *about* gender as a construct would shape everyone's politics, such that the way that both men and women think about gender structures political attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2003b; Winter 2005, 2008).

Although there is increasing support for gender equality generally, inequality in labor markets, division of unpaid household labor, and political representation persists. Moreover, much as Americans continue to express racist attitudes despite a general trend away from old-fashioned prejudice, research suggests that Americans express sexist beliefs and that these beliefs are associated with opposition to women candidates (Swim et al. 1995). In contrast to racist attitudes however, sexism is often expressed benevolently. Benevolent sexism views women as weak and best-suited for tasks associated with conventional gender roles, and as poorly suited for high-status roles such as leadership positions (Glick and Fiske 2001); women who adhere to these conventional roles are viewed favorably, while those who challenge societal norms are often punished (Jackman 1994). This resonates with the doctrine of separate spheres. Although historical accounts suggest that women always played a larger role in politics than has been realized, (White) women's political activities in early American history were certainly viewed as complementary to men's rather than substitutable (Varon 1998). This continues in the present day: although explicit prejudice is typically rejected (Mendelberg 2001), Americans are quite comfortable expressing beliefs about differences in gendered competence for different tasks (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Ditonto 2017; Sanbonmatsu 2002, 2003a; Sapiro 1981, 1983; Welch and Sigelman 1982).

Certainly in the 2016 election, we might expect attitudes about gender to affect candidate preference and vote choice. Gender politics scholars have amassed a great deal of evidence to suggest women can be successful in elections, yet sexism may still operate in voters' electoral calculus, particularly at the presidential level, which is a uniquely masculine office (Conroy 2015; Katz 2016). Therefore, the mere presence of a woman candidate could be sufficient to activate sexism, consistent with existing research on sexist voting patterns in response to Hillary Clinton's candidacy in 2008 (Dwyer et al. 2009; Paul and Smith 2008). This is not to say that the presence of a woman candidate is necessary to activate sexism, as research shows campaign communication is sufficient (Bauer 2015). This activation process is similar to the racism activation process discussed in the race and politics literature. While racial attitudes are consistently present, they may not always be associated with political behaviors. Instead racial attitudes are likely to be activated

when race is implicated in a campaign, either by the issues on the agenda or the candidates on the ballot (Citrin et al. 1990; Mendelberg 2008; Reeves 1997; Winter 2006, 2008). When race is made salient, it activates the racial schema—or how people think about race—causing racial attitudes to influence political behavior (Winter 2006, 2008). The same identity activation process can take place for gender (Bauer 2015; Winter 2005, 2008). When gender is implicated in a campaign, we should expect that how voters think about gender would become relevant to their behavior.

In the 2016 presidential election gender was certainly made salient via Hillary Clinton's presence on the Democratic ticket, but was also implicated through Donald Trump's comments about women. While it is unclear which factor may have influenced voters more in this particular election, it is reasonable to assume that both the presence of a woman candidate and the campaign communication in 2016 made the electoral environment ripe for sexism's activation. Whether unwittingly or on purpose, Trump regularly appealed to Whites with conservative gender views. Trump's public persona has long relied on degrading women, from his role in the Miss Universe pageant where he boasted about entering the dressing room to see contestants naked, to his open objectification of his own daughter during media appearances, to the leaked *Access Hollywood* tape where he bragged to Billy Bush about how being a star allowed him to “grab them [women] by the pussy.” Researchers have pointed to the increasing objectification of women in politics as one of the obstacles to women's candidacies (Heldman and Wade 2011). During the campaign he infamously referred to Clinton as a “nasty woman” and tweeted that she didn't “look presidential,” implying that politics, particularly the presidency, is not an appropriate sphere for women. At the same time, he invoked forms of benevolent sexism when he claimed, “I have tremendous respect for women, and I am going to protect women” (Blake 2017). In addition to his rhetoric about women, he also invoked the concept of White womanhood (Junn 2017) by referring to Mexicans as rapists, tapping into historical racist fears of men of color as sexual predators and dangers to White women (Mendelberg 1997, 2001). This simultaneously implied a need for a competent protector, and questioned the suitability of a White woman for the presidency—of, indeed, “a nasty woman,” an individual truly far from the ideal protector of White purity to which Trump appealed.

Importantly, his comments were widely interpreted as sexist by American news media outlets, which, along with Clinton's presence on the ballot, had the effect of routinely highlighting gender (D'Angelo 2016; Wayne et al. 2016). Furthermore, the implications of his remarks are politically meaningful precisely because of the continued acceptance of politics as an arena for men—an idea that dates back centuries to separate spheres ideology, which holds that a woman's place is in the home and the practice of politics is reserved for men (Kerber 1988). Although we might imagine that perceptions of politics as vulgar and corrupting of women (Varon 1998) have been relegated to history, the belief that women are less emotionally capable in politics lingers (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2003a; Welch and Sigelman 1982). While we cannot disentangle the effects of Clinton's candidacy from Trump's rhetoric, we view the election in total to be

one where gender was implicated. We therefore expect that sexist attitudes, especially sexism that focuses on the political realm, will be predictive of support for Donald Trump and opposition to Hillary Clinton:

H₁ Sexism, especially within the political realm, will be positively associated with support for Donald Trump.

While we expect to find an overall association between sexism and support for Trump, sexism is most likely to cleave White voters. Sexist attitudes certainly exist among communities of color (Barnett 1993; hooks 1981; Tate 1994), and entrenched norms lead to hierarchy-reinforcing beliefs and stereotypes about subordinate groups among dominant group members and subordinate group members alike (Ashburn-Nardo et al. 2003; Bobo and Massagli 2001; Jost and Banaji 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). However, the most reliable linkage between hierarchy affirming stereotypes and political attitudes comes from society's dominant racial group—White people (Blumer 1958; Cassese et al. 2015; Fiske 2011; Masuoka and Junn 2013; McConaughy and White 2011; Samson and Bobo 2014). While hierarchy-affirming stereotypes can be internalized by all groups, dominant groups tend to adhere to them most closely (Burns and Gimpel 2000; Cuddy et al. 2007; Fiske 1993, 2011; Jost and Banaji 1994; Pickett and Brewer 2001; Segura and Valenzuela 2010). Therefore, the existing research suggests that Whites should be more likely than people of color to employ sexism to inform their political decision-making, as they have been routinely incentivized to maintain society's dominant power structures. This argument extends beyond a simple explanation of “us” versus “them” attitude formation; instead, it highlights the meaning of sexism and power as these concepts have been defined by society, and examines how this structurally defined form of group subordination influences the behavior of men and women, as well as Whites and people of color.

Research on African Americans' gender attitudes also finds greater support for gender equality than among Whites (Gooley 1989; Gurin et al. 1980; Hunter and Sellers 1998; Kane 1992). For example, adherence to separate spheres ideology is weaker among people of color (Collins 1991; Harris-Perry 2011; hooks 1981). Women of color have traditionally worked outside the home, whether for pay or under chattel slavery, and due to fundamentally different experiences with labor and reproduction, they are more willing to reject White dominant views of gender (Crenshaw 1989; Dugger 1988) and are more willing to vote for women (Sigelman and Welch 1984) than are White women. More generally, greater support for gender equality among Black Americans could, at least in part, be a result of the history of activist and academic work of Black feminists who advocate for a simultaneous struggle against racism and sexism. Research from Simien (2004) suggests that this view has emerged in African American mass opinion, and there are generally high levels of Black feminist consciousness among both Black men and women, compared to the relatively weak gender consciousness of White women (Gurin 1985). This research suggests that sexism, particularly beliefs about women's unsuitability for political leadership, would be less salient for African Americans than for Whites.

Finally, while gender was salient in the election, it was certainly not the only identity category made relevant by either candidate. Trump promised to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, to ban or pause entry to the country by Muslims, and repeatedly referenced dangerous and violent “inner cities.” This rhetoric threatened multiple racial/ethnic/religious minority groups, which likely mobilized these voters in opposition (Bowler et al. 2006; Cho et al. 2006; Pantoja et al. 2001; Pérez 2015; White 2016). This means that while members of non-White groups might hold sexist attitudes, they are less likely to act on these attitudes because they are cross-pressured by their racial, ethnic, and/or religious group’s needs.¹ Therefore we also expect to find support for the following hypothesis:

***H*₂** We expect that sexism will be most strongly predictive of candidate preference for White voters.

Data and Methods

We use two separate data sets to test our expectations. The first is a November 2016 Election Day exit poll of 1327 respondents at 12 precincts in Oklahoma City.² The second data set is a post-election survey fielded to a sample of 11,861 White and Black adults via Survey Sampling International’s (SSI) online panel from May 1–31, 2017. To field the election exit survey, we recruited 54 undergraduate and 7 graduate students from the flagship state university.³ We selected our precincts based on the racial demography of the neighborhoods. Similar to many U.S. cities, Oklahoma City is racially diverse but considerably segregated. We made use of this fact and chose precincts to achieve a demographically balanced set of respondents. We conducted the poll in four types of precincts—predominantly Black, predominantly Latino, predominantly White, and racially mixed. The survey was offered in both English and Spanish, and there was at least one Spanish-speaking pollster at every predominantly Latino precinct throughout the day. All surveys were self-administered by respondents rather than completed face-to-face in order to comply with state election law and to decrease social desirability bias (Bishop and Fisher 2017; Traugott and Price 1992).

¹ The majority of Muslim Americans are White, but they comprise a small segment of the overall population. Therefore we do not expect the inclusion of any Muslim Americans among White respondents to seriously change any results.

² A recent FiveThirtyEight article identified Oklahoma City as one of the ten metropolitan areas that most closely match national demographics (age, educational attainment, race, and ethnicity) in the country (Kolko 2016).

³ Undergraduate students received course credit for completing CITI training, attending three instructional sessions, surveying on Election Day, and attending a data entry session. Altogether, students received between 10 and 12 hours of instruction. While we were at the polling locations all day, undergraduates typically recruited respondents for 2–4 hours each. In field training students practiced random selection, learned when to direct a participant toward one of the authors, and practiced interacting with respondents. The latter was instrumental in resolving pollster idiosyncrasies, with the aim of consistent survey delivery.

Table 1 presents the racial demography of the sample in each type of precinct as well as the average income bracket of respondents. Table 2 presents party registration statistics from the County Election Board and from the sample for each precinct type. The sample of voters in each precinct type matches our expectations. The majority of sampled voters in Black precincts are Black, and the majority of sampled voters in White precincts are White. In Latino precincts, Latinos are a plurality of sampled voters.⁴ In racially mixed precincts, 70 percent of sampled voters are White. Income is associated with the racial make-up of the precincts as well. The average income category of the sample is lowest in Latino precincts (\$20,000–\$29,999) and highest in the White precincts (\$60,000–\$74,999). The Black and mixed precincts are both in the middle (\$40,000–\$49,999). Finally, the party registration statistics closely match the population party registration statistics from the County Election Board. Table 2 shows that the precinct types vary dramatically in terms of partisanship. Only the White precincts are majority registered Republican. Our estimate of Democratic voters is between 4.2 and 7.19 percentage points away from the population estimate across precincts, while our estimate of Republican voters is between 0.56 and 5.47 percentage points away from the same.

We collected three dependent variables from the exit poll and one in the post-election survey. We asked respondents for which candidate they voted in the presidential election. We code this variable, *Trump vote*, as 1 if they voted for Trump and 0 if they voted for any other candidate. Then we asked respondents, regardless of vote choice, how much they favored both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. These two variables, *Favor Trump* and *Favor Clinton*, are both measured on a five-point Likert scale from “unfavorable” to “favorable.” In the post-election survey our dependent variable is presidential vote choice, again coded 1 for a Trump vote.

To capture gender attitudes in both surveys we asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they agreed with two statements regarding men’s dominance in the political and domestic spheres. One measures beliefs about whether women can be capable political leaders, while the other measures support for gendered control and inequality in the home. The first statement reads: “Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.” We chose this measure because it has been used elsewhere and has been shown to affect predispositions toward female candidates, but usually in low-information elections or generic support for increased women’s representation (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2003a). While most of these studies refer to this measure as a gender stereotype, we follow the lead of racial politics scholars who identify adherence to stereotypic views as a measure of old-fashioned prejudice (Gilens 1999; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Huddy and Feldman 2009). Just as endorsing stereotypes of African

⁴ The lower proportion of Latinos in the Latino precincts is relatively unsurprising given the lower rate of Latino turnout (Krogstad et al. 2016) and the relatively recent immigration history in the city.

Table 1 Demography of exit poll sample, by precinct type

Precinct type	Black (%)	Latino (%)	White (%)	Avg. Income (Approx.)
Black	56.92	1.28	28.46	\$40,000–\$49,999
Latino	9.62	41.83	35.58	\$20,000–\$29,999
White	2.57	1.14	86.57	\$60,000–\$74,999
Racially	7.81	6.88	70.00	\$40,000–\$49,999
Mixed				

Sample statistics come from survey questions

Table 2 Exit poll party registration, population and sample statistics

Precinct type	Dem. registered (%)	Rep. registered (%)	Dem. in sample (%)	Rep. in sample (%)
Black	78.44	11.37	74.24	15.40
Latino	50.64	24.73	57.35	24.17
White	32.03	56.73	39.22	51.26
Racially	51.53	27.20	58.02	23.15
Mixed				

Party registration population statistics come from the County Election Board. Sample statistics come from a survey question, which asked respondents about their partisan voter registration

Americans as lazy is a measure of racism, endorsing views of women as less able to work in politics is a measure of sexism.

The second measure reads: “A man should be in control of his wife.” This measure has been used less often in empirical research (but see Arciniega et al. 2008; Liang et al. 2011), but captures the argument that preferences for traditional male dominance at home translate into men’s dominance in the public and political sphere (Snyder-Hall 2008). Each sexism measure in the exit poll ranges from 0 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree). In the SSI data we use the same questions, but also provide respondents with a “neither agree nor disagree” response option. Therefore, in the SSI sample, the measures of sexism range from 0 to 4.

We capture a host of relevant covariates for which we control in regression models. In particular, we wish to isolate the effects of sexist attitudes from racial attitudes and immigration preferences, as we anticipate that each of these should have mattered in the 2016 election, and they may be correlated (Kalkan et al. 2009; Strolovitch et al. 2017). In the exit poll, our measure of anti-Black racial attitudes is agreement with the statement that Blacks should not receive special governmental treatment due to discrimination, and our measure of immigration attitudes is whether or not the U.S. should decrease illegal immigration. The SSI data uses the standard four-item racial resentment scale to capture anti-Black racism. In the exit poll, we also capture the following relevant covariates: demographic variables

(race,⁵ gender, party registration,⁶ nativity status, and precinct type), attitudes toward government and institutions (support for greater government regulation, whether they thought there should be less government, trust in media, and perceptions of voter fraud), and ideological attitudes (political ideology, religious attendance and biblical literalism). In the SSI data we have a smaller number of covariates but they capture a similar range of important demographics and political attitudes.

Results

Overall, the findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between sexism in the political realm and vote choice, as well as favorability toward Trump—but most strongly for White voters. We find no relationship between political sexism and the decision calculus for non-White voters in the exit poll data, although we capture a small association for Black respondents in the national survey sample. Across all racial groups analyzed, men express higher levels of sexism. However, Whites most strongly employ gendered stereotypes about political competence to arrive at their vote choice. Across both surveys we find very limited evidence of an association between sexism in the domestic realm and political behavior. The main takeaway of our findings is that gender mattered in the 2016 election beyond an identity category: stereotypes about gender and fitness for office influenced candidate preferences.

The left portion of Table 3 shows that across all racial groups, male respondents are more likely to believe that men are better suited emotionally for politics than female respondents, in both the exit poll and national SSI samples. The size of the gap is relatively consistent, but the statistical significance of the gap varies depending on racial group. For example, in the exit poll data, we find significant gender gaps in the belief that men are better suited for politics among every racial group except Latinos. On the measure of whether men should be in control of their wives, only Whites and those coded as “Other race” exhibit significant gaps in their sexism levels. However, these inconsistencies are likely due to smaller sample sizes. In the national SSI sample, there are larger gender gaps across both measures of sexism. This may be due to the wider scale in the SSI sample relative to the exit poll. The significant gender gaps for Whites on both measures hold for the national survey, and Black men in the national sample are significantly more likely than Black women to express sexist attitudes on both measures.

Overall, Table 3 shows that across racial groups, men express higher levels of sexism than women but that the gender gap is not overwhelming in magnitude.

⁵ We categorize respondents' race from a mark-one-or-more measure. This measure included Hispanic/Latino as a racial category. From there, we identify respondents with a singular racial category if that is the only group they marked. Respondents who selected more than one category are coded as “Mixed race” given recent research on the political uniqueness of those who identify with two or more racial groups (Davenport 2016).

⁶ We measure party registration rather than party ID so that we can examine the quality of our sample against the known population parameters from party registration statistics for each precinct.

Table 3 Gender attitude differences by race and gender

	Men better suited for politics	Men should be in control
Exit poll		
Whites	0.202*	0.176*
Blacks	0.246*	0.182
Latinos	0.280	0.137
Other race	0.362*	0.273*
SSI		
Whites	0.399*	0.469*
Blacks	0.506*	0.604*

Each number represents the mean score for men minus the mean score for women. The “Other race” category includes Asian, Native, and multiracial identifiers. Scores are not directly comparable across samples due to slightly different response categories

* $p < 0.05$ from a t test

Moreover, the presence of a gap does not necessarily mean that men are more likely to employ sexism in their voting behavior. Given what we know about appeals to White womanhood and exclusionary preferences during the 2016 election (Junn 2017), it seems more likely that White people—both men and women—employ sexism to voice support for sexist candidates. To examine this possibility, we turn to an analysis of voter behavior controlling for a host of relevant variables.

Exit Poll Data

In Table 4, we use OLS regression to examine the relationship between sexism and voter behavior, controlling for important factors (Achen 1982; Hellevik 2009). The models reveal that political sexism is associated with voter behavior, but sexism in the domestic sphere is not. Respondents who believe that men are better suited for politics are significantly more likely to vote for and favor Trump. Those who most strongly endorse this belief are 12 percentage points more likely to vote for Trump and score 0.60 points higher on the five-point, Trump favorability scale than those who most strongly reject the stereotype. This measure of sexism does not have a significant effect on Clinton’s favorability. This suggests that sexist attitudes were more closely linked to support of Trump than to rejection of Clinton. In other words, sexists did not so much oppose Clinton as favor Trump. Sexism, then, is not linked to mere opposition toward women running for office. Instead, it is linked to active support of a man whose penchant for degrading women constitutes a vital part of his public image. By contrast, the measures of racial attitudes and immigration preferences are consistently predictive across all three dependent variables, including Clinton’s favorability. Respondents who score highly on the anti-Black racism measure are more likely to vote for and favor Trump and less likely to favor Clinton. The same pattern obtains for voters with restrictive immigration preferences. This likely reflects the longstanding racial divisions between the two

Table 4 Sexism and candidate support, exit poll data

	Vote	Favor Clinton	Favor Trump
Men better suited	0.04* (0.02)	− 0.07 (0.06)	0.15* (0.06)
Control wife (Ref = White)	0.02 (0.02)	0.08 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
Black	− 0.17* (0.03)	0.44* (0.12)	− 0.29* (0.12)
Latino	− 0.13* (0.04)	0.52* (0.17)	− 0.28† (0.16)
Mixed race	− 0.11* (0.04)	0.14 (0.14)	− 0.22 (0.14)
Other race	− 0.15* (0.04)	0.34* (0.15)	− 0.32* (0.15)
Woman (Ref = Democrat)	− 0.03 (0.02)	0.18* (0.07)	− 0.11 (0.07)
Republican	0.30* (0.03)	− 1.14* (0.12)	0.71* (0.11)
Other	− 0.02 (0.03)	− 0.53* (0.11)	− 0.10 (0.10)
Religious attend.	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.03)	− 0.01 (0.03)
Biblical literalism	0.05* (0.02)	− 0.03 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)
Nativity	− 0.01 (0.03)	− 0.13 (0.10)	− 0.06 (0.09)
Regulation	0.01 (0.01)	0.10* (0.05)	− 0.01 (0.04)
Less government	0.03 (0.02)	− 0.53* (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)
Ideology	0.05* (0.01)	− 0.15* (0.05)	0.19* (0.04)
Trust media	− 0.05* (0.01)	0.30* (0.04)	− 0.11* (0.04)
Voter fraud	0.05* (0.01)	− 0.18* (0.04)	0.16* (0.04)
No special treatment (Ref = White precinct)	0.04* (0.01)	− 0.16* (0.03)	0.10* (0.03)
Black precinct	− 0.06* (0.03)	0.14 (0.10)	− 0.16 (0.10)
Latino precinct	0.03 (0.04)	0.12 (0.14)	0.22† (0.13)
Mixed precinct	− 0.01 (0.03)	− 0.09 (0.10)	0.02 (0.09)
Less illegal immigration	0.04* (0.01)	− 0.16* (0.04)	0.08* (0.04)
Age	0.03* (0.01)	0.08* (0.04)	0.15* (0.03)
Income	− 0.01 (0.00)	0.05* (0.01)	− 0.03* (0.01)
Constant	− 0.10* (0.06)	2.94* (0.23)	− 0.15 (0.22)
N	828	857	844
Adjusted R ²	0.63	0.65	0.47
Residual standard error	0.26	0.99	0.94
F Statistic	58.93†	66.61*	32.56*

†p < 0.1; *p < 0.05

parties and the salience of racial attitudes on partisanship following the Obama presidency (Mendelberg 2001; Tesler 2013; Valentino and Sears 2005).

While the regression results in Table 4 support our hypothesis that political realm sexism is associated with increased support for Trump (H_7), we also expect variation by racial group. Indeed, consistent with national election results, our model of all respondents shows that Whites are significantly more likely to vote for Trump than every other racial group. Similarly, Whites are less favorable toward

Clinton and more favorable toward Trump, although the difference fails to achieve significance compared to mixed race identifiers. These models show that racial identification is associated with political behavior, however they assume that each of the variables have consistent effects for each racial group. Several studies question this assumption (Claassen 2004; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Lien 1998; Pérez and Hetherington 2014).

In Table 5, we model vote choice among White and non-White respondents separately.⁷ In the first model we again find that White respondents who believe that men are better suited for politics are significantly more likely to vote for Trump. The magnitude of the coefficient in this model is nearly twice as large as in the model of all respondents, which suggests that the aggregate finding is largely driven by White voters. Again, we find that the measure of spousal control is insignificant, but the magnitude of the coefficient is twice as large in the model of White respondents alone than in the model of all respondents.

Our hypothesis that sexism is most predictive of Whites' political choices in this election (H_2) is further supported by the model of non-White voters in Table 5. Among non-Whites, neither measure of sexism is significantly associated with candidate preference, and the magnitude of the coefficients is much smaller than among Whites. Importantly, this does not mean that non-Whites cannot hold sexist views; a substantial number of our non-White respondents still subscribe to the stereotype. Further, the fact that the stereotype is not correlated with vote choice or candidate favorability in this election does not necessarily mean that gender attitudes would always be inconsequential for non-White voters. Instead, the findings merely show that gender attitudes of non-Whites were not significant in *this* election. Reacting to Trump's anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-urban rhetoric, non-White voters who endorse sexist beliefs were likely cross-pressured by the needs of their racial, ethnic, and/or religious communities. Sexist attitudes, to the extent they were held, might have been simply outweighed by other concerns. In total, these exit poll regression models support both hypotheses: sexism operated in voters' decision-making, particularly for White voters.

While our analysis of all White respondents supports our argument that beliefs about gender are powerful for both men and women, we also examine whether sexism was politicized equally for White men and women (Kaufmann 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). To test this, we interact political sexism with respondent gender. In the second model of White respondents in Table 5, we find that among exit poll respondents, sexism was actually most important for White women's vote choice. In this interaction model there is no independent effect of either sexism measure. Rather, women who express high levels of agreement with the idea that men are better suited for politics are much more likely to vote for Trump than women who disagree with this notion. By contrast, White men's vote choice is not significantly affected by this idea. This means that while White men in the exit poll expressed, on average, more agreement with our measures of sexism, those sexist attitudes were not politically meaningful to them.

⁷ Ideally, we would specify models for each racial group separately, however the sample sizes for each non-White racial group are too small.

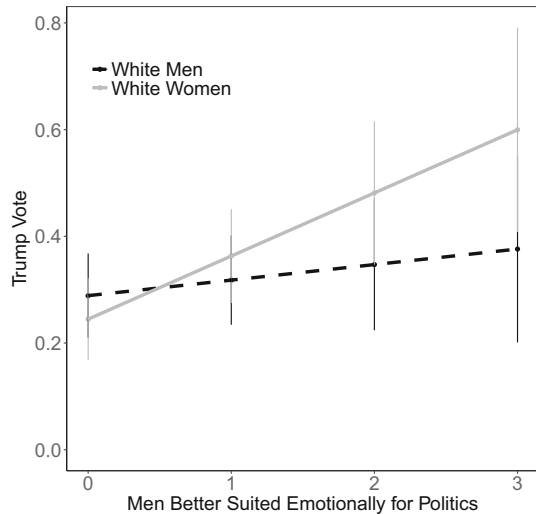
Table 5 Sexism and Trump vote by race, exit poll data

	White Rs	White Rs	Non-white Rs
Men better suited	0.07* (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Control wife (Ref = Black)	0.04 (0.03)	0.05 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Latino			0.03 (0.04)
Mixed race			0.01 (0.03)
Other race			- 0.01 (0.04)
Woman (Ref = Democrat)	- 0.02 (0.03)	- 0.04 (0.03)	- 0.02 (0.02)
Republican	0.20* (0.04)	0.20* (0.04)	0.43* (0.04)
Other	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	- 0.07* (0.03)
Religious attendance	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)
Biblical literalism	0.09* (0.03)	0.08* (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Nativity	- 0.03 (0.05)	- 0.04 (0.05)	0.02 (0.02)
Regulation	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)
Less government	0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.05† (0.03)
Ideology	0.06* (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)
Trust media	- 0.05* (0.02)	- 0.05* (0.02)	- 0.04* (0.01)
Voter fraud	0.07* (0.02)	0.07* (0.02)	0.02* (0.01)
No special treatment (Ref = White precinct)	0.04* (0.01)	0.04* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)
Black precinct	- 0.05 (0.04)	- 0.05 (0.04)	- 0.08* (0.04)
Latino precinct	0.05 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	- 0.04 (0.05)
Mixed precinct	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	- 0.08† (0.04)
Less illegal immigration	0.06* (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Age	0.04* (0.01)	0.04* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)
Income	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.01 (0.01)	- 0.00 (0.00)
Men better suited * woman		0.09* (0.04)	
Constant	- 0.26* (0.10)	- 0.23* (0.10)	- 0.03 (0.07)
N	486	486	342
Adjusted R ²	0.64	0.64	0.53
Residual standard error	0.28	0.28	0.19
F Statistic	44.52*	42.95*	17.98*

†p < 0.1; *p < 0.05

To better interpret the substantive meaning of the interaction model, we plot the association between perceptions of gendered fitness for political office and Trump vote for White men and women in Fig. 1. The most striking result from this plot is that among respondents who most agree that women are less emotionally suited for political office, female respondents are significantly more likely to vote for Trump than male respondents. It is only among those who most strongly disagree with this

Fig. 1 Gender attitudes and predicted vote choice for White men and women, exit poll data. Notes: The plot comes from the interaction model presented in Table 5. The plot represents a U.S.-born Democrat who prefers less government and resides in a majority-White precinct. All other variables are held at their means



measure of sexism that there is the expected partisan gender gap with men more likely to support the Republican candidate than women. Clearly, in the exit poll data, sexism was predictive of voting behaviors overall, but it was most strongly operative among White women.

The data from the exit poll show clearly that sexism shaped electoral preferences for Whites, particularly White women in 2016. The measure of political sphere sexism predicts vote choice and Trump favorability among Whites generally, and for White women in an interactive model. However, we might wonder whether the results in the exit poll are specific to the sample location. Oklahoma has scored among the bottom ten states for women's representation in government for the past thirty years (CAWP 2017). Given the association between traditional gender cultures and success of female candidates (Fox and Lawless 2004), we test whether the relationship between sexism and vote choice we identify in the exit poll is present nationally. Briefly, we are able to replicate the finding for Whites. However, we find that the stronger relationship between sexism and vote for White women is specific to the exit polling location. In addition, we find that sexism is predictive of African Americans' vote choice, although the size of the effect is much smaller than for Whites. In total, both data sets indicate that the connection between sexism and vote choice in 2016 is strongest among Whites.

Post-Election Survey Data

Table 6 shows the regression results from the SSI data. In the first model of vote choice for White respondents, both measures of sexism are predictive of voting for Trump. Whites who agree most strongly that men are better suited for politics are 12 percentage points more likely to vote for Trump than those who disagree most strongly. In this model we also find a significant, but modest, effect of our other measure of sexism—that men should control their wives. Those respondents who

Table 6 Sexism and vote choice, national SSI sample

	White Rs	Black Rs	White Rs
Men better suited	0.03* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)
Control wife	0.01* (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
Woman	0.00 (0.01)	− 0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Age	0.03* (0.00)	− 0.00 (0.01)	0.03* (0.00)
Income	− 0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	− 0.00 (0.00)
Partisanship	0.15* (0.00)	0.05* (0.00)	0.15* (0.00)
Trust government	0.03* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)
Religious attendance	0.02* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Racial resentment	0.02* (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)
Men better suited*woman			− 0.00 (0.01)
Constant	− 0.27* (0.02)	− 0.09* (0.02)	− 0.28* (0.02)
N	5957	1676	5957
Adjusted R ²	0.53	0.18	0.53
Residual standard error	0.34	0.21	0.34
F Statistic	758.22*	41.76*	682.32*

*p < 0.05

agree most strongly with this assertion are 4 percentage points more likely to vote for Trump than those who disagree. In the second model, we find—in contrast to the exit poll data—that sexism is significantly associated with voting for Trump for Black respondents as well. However, the magnitude of this effect is only one-third of the size of the relationship for White voters. Among African Americans there is no statistical association between agreement with controlling wives and vote choice. It is perhaps unsurprising that sexism offers limited explanatory power over African Americans’ vote choice. In addition to the racial appeals that repelled Black voters from Trump, there is less variation in African Americans’ vote choice due to high levels of group solidarity (Dawson 1994; Tate 1994).

The last model in Table 6 interacts gender with sexism for White voters. In contrast to the findings from the exit poll data—that White women most strongly utilized sexism to make their vote choice—the SSI data show no interactive effect. At the national level, White men and women both relied on sexism about women’s fitness for political office in forming their presidential vote choice. Similarly, we find no interactive effect for Black respondents (not shown here). While we are unable to determine precisely why the effect of sexism is weaker for White men in the exit poll than in the national sample, it suggests the importance of examining contextual factors that shape sexism in future research, and indicates that the effect of gender attitudes on voter behavior may not be homogeneous across the nation.

In total, our results from both samples show a robust relationship between sexist beliefs about women’s ability to hold political office and voting for Donald Trump among White voters, and a more limited and contingent association among non-White voters. However, we are not merely interested in the statistical significance of the relationship, but also in the relative magnitude of the effect compared to other predictors of vote choice. In Fig. 2

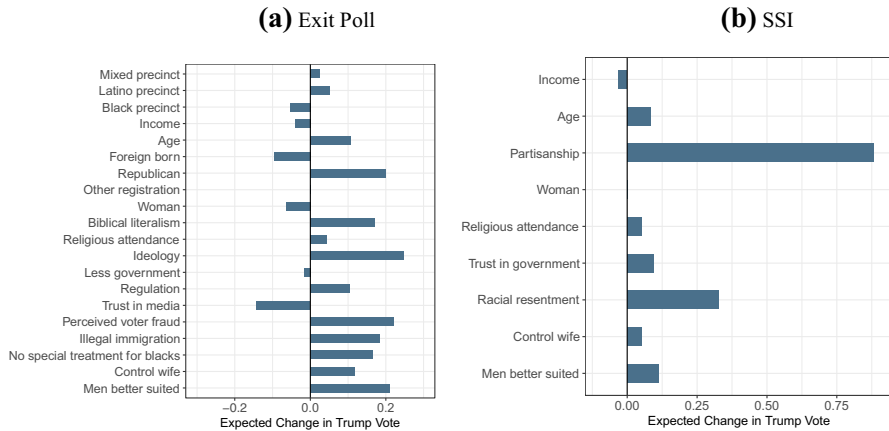


Fig. 2 Relative effect sizes from regression models of White respondents. **a** Exit poll, **b** SSI. Notes: Each plot shows the magnitude of each variable’s full expected effect on *Trump Vote*. The plot in Panel **a** comes from the first model in Table 5. The plot in Panel **b** comes from the first model in Table 6

we show the magnitude of sexism’s effect across both surveys in comparison to our control variables. The models used here are the non-interaction models of White voters from each data set. The left portion of the figure shows that the effect of our key sexism measure is quite large in the exit poll data. It is outranked only by ideology and perceptions of voter fraud. These effects are expected, given the importance of ideology in voter preferences as well as the prominence of Trump’s claims of voter fraud in the 2016 election. Meanwhile, the effect of the sexism measure is slightly larger than those of restrictive attitudes toward illegal immigration and beliefs that African Americans should not receive any special treatment from the government. The right portion of Fig. 2 exhibits the effects from the national SSI sample. Here, the magnitude of the political sexism measure is not quite as large and is notably smaller than respondent partisanship and the full racial resentment scale. Again, this is expected given the predictive power of partisan identity (Fiorina 1981; Iyengar and Westwood 2015) and the historical importance of racial resentment for public opinion and vote choice (Lewis-Beck et al. 2010; Sears 1988; Sears et al. 1979; Tesler and Sears 2010; Tuch and Hughes 2011; Unnever and Cullen 2007). Still, the effect of women’s suitability for politics is the next largest in magnitude, eclipsing religiosity, respondent gender, and income.

Beyond the influence of gendered stereotypes, our findings reveal a patchwork of outgroup disaffections that explain the vote for Trump and dislike of Clinton (see Strolovitch et al. 2017). Despite the fact that negative feelings toward cultural, racial, or ethnic minority groups tend to be correlated (Kalkan et al. 2009), we are able to uncover significant effects of anti-immigrant and anti-Black attitudes that are independent from the effects of sexism.⁸ First, we find that restrictive immigration

⁸ That the effects of sexism would be independent from other anti-outgroup attitudes is not unexpected, as the structure of the gender schema does not rely on the same social segregation and negative feelings toward outgroups that structure the racial schema. Instead, gender schemas are built on intimate contact between men and women and feelings of mutual dependence (Huddy and Carey 2009; Ridgeway 2011; Winter 2008).

attitudes pose a reliably positive and significant relationship to support for Trump and a negative association with favorability towards Clinton—but only for White voters in the exit poll data. Next, we find that anti-Black prejudice predicts support for Trump and unfavorable views of Clinton, across race. Even the Black respondents in the SSI survey who ranked higher on the anti-Black resentment scale were more likely to vote for Trump. Meanwhile, White voters drew on all the factors—sexism, racial resentment, and anti-immigrant attitudes—to arrive at their support for the restrictive candidate. When taking into consideration our findings regarding sexism's effect, as well as the independent effects of anti-immigrant attitudes and anti-Black prejudice, our results reveal a diverse array of prejudicial attitudes that voters could draw on to lead them to a Trump vote in 2016.

We additionally find that respondents in the exit poll who do not trust the media are more likely to vote for Trump and to view Clinton unfavorably, as are respondents who believe voter fraud occurs frequently. These significant and positive relationships could illustrate the tendency of voters with high levels of distrust for the media and elections to favor and vote for the candidate who was described as anti-establishment during the 2016 election. Alternatively, voters who liked Trump may have simply adopted his campaign rhetoric about the media and the presence of voter fraud. Finally, we find that respondents in the SSI survey who trust the government were more likely to vote for Trump. This is surely a reflection of the timing of the SSI survey; as a post-election survey, respondents were asked their trust levels after Trump had already assumed the presidency.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis shows consistently that beliefs about gender affected voters in the 2016 presidential election. In the exit survey, Whites—particularly White women—who endorse the idea that women are not emotionally fit for office are significantly more likely to vote for Trump, and to perceive him favorably. The findings from the national post-election sample replicate the finding for Whites overall, but show no gender interaction. The national sample also uncovers a small but significant relationship between support for spousal control and vote choice. These findings persist when controlling for a host of relevant demographics and other political attitudes activated during the presidential campaign.

The results add to several studies that examine how attitudes may be differentially politicized across different social groups (Claassen 2004; Kaufmann 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Lien 1998; Segura and Valenzuela 2010). Sexism is a significant predictor of Whites' and Blacks' vote choice at the national level, but the magnitude of the effect for African Americans is substantially smaller, and it is not significant among voters of color in our exit poll data. People of color in the exit survey might hold sexist views (and our data suggest some do), but in the 2016 election views about gender were simply less likely to be politicized when the candidate who used sexist language was also using racial dogwhistles and explicitly racist language. Similarly, we find evidence that within Oklahoma City, sexism is most strongly politicized by White women. While White men express higher

average levels of sexism, the attitude was the most politically meaningful for White women. This finding supports the argument that, “men and women politicize their issue opinions in substantially different ways” (Kaufmann 2002, p. 296), but also suggests that factors such as geographic or social context can affect the link between gender identity and issue opinion formation (Dugger 1988).

Our findings are unable to answer several questions. We are necessarily bound by the observational data on which we rely. While this allows us to move beyond experimental tests of support for hypothetical female presidents, we are not able to analyze whether sexism would equally constrain the chances of all women seeking the executive office. In 2016, a White Democratic woman faced off against a White Republican man. Would support for a Republican woman be similarly associated with gender attitudes? Would women of color face comparable constraints? Although women of color are sometimes able to draw on both their gender and racial identities to construct broader coalitions (Bejarano 2013; Tate 2003), other research suggests the difficulty of this path (Philpot and Walton 2007). Future research should attempt to understand how sexism shapes the chances of all women’s presidential candidacies.

Finally, our findings help to clarify how gender shapes the electoral chances of both men and women candidates. While a body of literature convincingly shows that women can win elections, we have underestimated the ways that gender may shape political opportunities particularly with regard to the presidency. Sexism may not create immediate opposition to women candidates, but may affect how voters evaluate candidates of diverse genders. We are most struck by the greater importance sexism has on evaluations of Trump rather than Clinton. Sexism did not greatly affect Clinton’s favorability in the exit poll data. Instead, respondents who expressed high levels of sexism were significantly more likely to view Trump favorably compared to those who scored low on sexism. This suggests that just as racism can be activated in campaigns, so too can sexism. Donald Trump’s sexist insults and misogynistic persona seem to have earned him the votes of sexists, more so than Clinton’s gender seems to have lost those votes. This effect appears to have persisted despite the repeated attempts of Democrats and women’s groups to condemn Trump’s treatment of women. In the conclusion to her excellent book on implicit and explicit racial messaging, Mendelberg (2001) argues that in contrast to race, the two major parties are unlikely to either implicitly or explicitly denigrate women because both must compete for women’s votes. However, our results suggest that sexism can actually attract voters—including women—who believe that women are less competent than men in the political realm. These results should lead us to question whether voters are truly committed to the norm of equality. A significant portion of the electorate seems willing to embrace explicit sexism.

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