

Two Sides of the Coin:
Women, Men, and the Politics of Sexual Harassment

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Abstract: History tells us that elected leaders who are tainted by scandal often pay a political price for their behavior. While some prior research suggests that the impact of economic scandal (e.g., misuse of public funds) is often more damaging than that of sexual misbehavior (e.g., extramarital affairs), we are currently at a moment in time when allegations of sexual misbehavior have taken center stage. The focus today, however, is less on issues of morality (Gary Hart, Bill Clinton, John Edwards) than on allegations of sexual harassment and assault broadly defined (John Conyers, Blake Farenthold, Al Franken). In the past few years, such allegations have engulfed a large and growing number of political (as well as entertainment, business, and even academic) figures. Many were forced to resign their positions, while others chose to end their campaigns for election or re-election.

While the great majority of harassment victims are women, there are a few instances where the sex roles have been reversed – and with more women running for and winning public office (and thereby gaining positions of power and authority), it is possible that we will see more such role reversals in the future. Our study uses data from an internet-based survey of registered voters to examine citizens' attitudes about sexual harassment, and the extent to which those attitudes shape their reactions when allegations of harassment are made against a fictional member of Congress. With an innovative experimental design, we will examine whether reactions vary with the target's (1) partisan affiliation (Republican or Democrat); (2) gender (male or female); and (3) response to the allegations (denial, apology, counterframe).

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In recent years, the American public has witnessed a virtual avalanche of stories detailing instances of sexual misconduct – including harassment, assault, and various other forms of abuse – allegedly committed by entertainment figures, media celebrities, corporate executives, political leaders, and even academics. From Kevin Spacey and R. Kelly, to Matt Lauer and Bill O'Reilly, to Les Moonves and Steve Wynn, to Al Franken and Donald Trump,¹ images of predatory men, date rape drugs, and phrases like "grab her by the p***y" have become hauntingly familiar. Extensive coverage of these incidents in the press contributed to the explosive growth of the #MeToo movement, a grassroots campaign to both publicize and hold accountable the (mostly) men who have harassed and abused (mostly) women and gotten away with it because of the positions of power and influence they hold.

The trigger that ignited all of this was movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, whose extensive record of sexual misconduct, including payoffs to victims in exchange for their silence, first became a major news story in October 2017 (Kantor and Twohey 2017; Grady and Framke 2017). The Weinstein revelations were followed in rapid succession by stories alleging that a number of other public and some not-so-public figures such as Dr. Larry Nassar² also had a history of targeting women, often their co-workers, and subjecting them to inappropriate behavior that ranged from sexual comments passed off as mere jokes to physical abuse. While the great majority of harassment victims are women, a few have been men. Actor Kevin Spacey, for example, was charged with misconduct by a number of co-stars and other young men (Puente 2017a), actors James van der Beek and Terry Crews revealed that they had been groped early in their careers by "older, powerful men" and high-level Hollywood executives (Smith 2017), and photographer Mario Testino was accused by thirteen male assistants and models of behavior that included "groping and masturbation" (Bernstein, Schneier, and Friedman 2018).

Although the offenders in these cases were themselves men, there are instances where prominent women are alleged to have crossed the line. Recent examples include Italian actress and #MeToo advocate Asia Argento, who had a sexual relationship with an underage actor and musician and paid him \$380,000 after his lawyers initiated legal action (Severson 2018); Frankie Shaw, creator and star of Showtime comedy series *SMILF*, who was accused by employees of the show of abusive behavior and staging "inappropriately handled sex scenes" (Masters 2018); and Avital Ronell, a professor of German and comparative literature, who was suspended by New York University for having sexually harassed a male former graduate student (Greenberg 2018). On the political front, state assemblywoman Cristina Garcia (D-California), was accused by several staff members of inappropriate behavior; one said that she fired him after he refused to play a game of spin the bottle with her, while others said that she "talked about her sex life in front of employees; drank alcohol at work; and told staffers that they were expendable" (Phillips 2018). Ironically, Garcia was one of the "silence breakers" named Person of the Year by *Time Magazine* for 2017, thereby recognizing the growing influence of the #MeToo movement and others, both women and men, on American culture.³

As accusations continued to fly throughout 2018, perhaps the biggest story of the year involved the nomination of Washington, DC Circuit Court Judge Brett Kavanaugh to replace Justice Anthony Kennedy on the U.S. Supreme Court. When controversy erupted over allegations by psychology professor Christine Blasey Ford that Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her at a party over thirty years prior when the two were in high school (Wolf and Hayes 2018), it evoked memories of a confirmation battle in 1991 involving Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and his accuser, law professor Anita Hill. In her testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Ms. Hill said that Thomas, with whom she had previously worked in the Department of Education and at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,

spoke about acts that he had seen in pornographic films involving such matters as women having sex with animals and films showing group sex or rape scenes. He talked about pornographic materials depicting individuals with large penises or large breasts involved in various sex acts. On several occasions, [he] told me graphically of his own sexual prowess (Bouchard and Taylor 2018).

Thomas's ultimate confirmation by the Senate⁴ notwithstanding, one might have thought that the experience would be a turning point in terms of sensitizing the American public to issues of workplace harassment (and worse) and politicians (overwhelmingly men) to the importance of addressing those issues in a more serious way. Instead, reflecting on the Kavanaugh controversy, Jocelyn Frye, an African-American lawyer and senior fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, observed that

Twenty-seven years later, we have the same phenomenon rearing its head again. The people who have an interest in protecting the status quo . . . are attacking the integrity of Dr. Ford. It was hard to watch 27 years ago and it's [agonizing] to watch now. To see many of the lessons that we should have learned in 1991 being ignored is infuriating (Smith 2018).

On an episode of HBO's *Last Week Tonight* that dealt with sexual harassment and aired prior to the Kavanaugh hearings, host John Oliver made a similar point, first, in an interview with Anita Hill herself (who was reasonably optimistic, or at least hopeful, about the progress that had been made since her appearance on Capitol Hill); and, second, by showing a vintage 1980s corporate

training video in which actor Ken Howard pointed out the need for changes in workplace culture (the date of the video suggesting that little progress had been made after all; see Perkins 2018).

An important difference between the Thomas and Kavanaugh controversies is that the latter occurred at a time when allegations of sexual harassment and assault receive more publicity and appear to generate a stronger (negative) reaction among the American public than was true in the past. Our goal with the research reported here is to examine that question more closely in a context that is divorced from the particulars of any given case. Specifically, we want to get a feel for the likely fate of political leaders who are credibly accused of sexual misconduct and, going a step further, to determine whether it is possible (and if so, how) to recover one's reputation and standing with voters in the face of such accusations. Recognizing that sexual misconduct often stems from disparities of power (Puente 2017b; Stemple and Meyer 2017), and that women are increasingly moving into positions of authority in every walk of life from politics to the board room, we will look at the issue from both ends of the gender spectrum. Our study uses data from an internet-based survey of registered voters to examine citizens' attitudes about sexual harassment generally, and the extent to which those attitudes manifest when charges are levelled against a fictional member of Congress. With an innovative experimental design, we will determine whether reprobation and electoral support vary with the accused's (1) party affiliation (Democrat or Republican); (2) gender (male or female); and/or (3) response to the allegations made against him or her (denial, apology, counterframe). Before turning to the experiment, however, let us briefly review what prior research tells us about these matters.

Literature Review: Scandal and Accounts

Colorado Senator Gary Hart was the apparent frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination until allegations of marital infidelity forced him to withdraw his candidacy in the

summer of 1987 (Bai 2014). Hart's problem was that his indiscretions occurred at a particular moment in time that was not only *too late* (the press no longer turning its collective head as with John Kennedy and others in the past) but also *too early* for there to be any realistic chance for recovery. Just four years later, Bill Clinton captured his party's nomination and ultimately the presidency despite multiple "bimbo eruptions" that arose over the course of the 1992 campaign (Rosenthal 1992); he subsequently survived an impeachment effort stemming from the Monica Lewinsky scandal and maintained high approval ratings throughout the remainder of his term (Fischle 2000, Miller 1999). More recently, Donald Trump won in 2016 despite evidence of past adulterous relationships and remained popular among his core supporters even in the face of revelations that he had paid "hush money" to two women, including a former adult film star and a *Playboy* model, with whom he had been sexually involved (Rutenberg and Ruiz 2018). It is difficult to reconcile these events with the quick and painful political demise of Gary Hart in 1987.⁵ Indeed, even before Trump, reporter Joshua Green (2013; also see Fisher 2018) proclaimed what he believed to be "the death of the political sex scandal." Pointing to such non-presidential examples as Mark Sanford of South Carolina and David Vitter of Louisiana, Green noted that while "[s]urviving a sex scandal is hardly new," what "used to be an exception" now "looks more like a rule." And yet. . . .

The flood of sexual misconduct allegations occurring in the #MeToo era has led to swift and certain conviction in the court of public opinion – or at least in the court of their peers, who undoubtedly keep tabs on what they believe to be the public pulse, and of the mainstream press – for many politicians, from U.S. Rep. Blake Farenthold (R-Texas) to Sen. Al Franken (D-Minnesota) and on down the line. Indeed, there is a considerable body of research indicating that politicians who are tainted by scandal (sexual or otherwise) often pay a price that can be as mild

as a temporarily reduced re-election margin or as serious as removal from office (whether by forced resignation or defeat at the polls in either a primary or a general election). Many of these studies employ aggregate-level analyses that focus on electoral outcomes involving actual incumbents, usually members of Congress.⁶ However, since incumbents who face the most serious allegations often opt to resign or retire rather than seek re-election, and non-incumbents don't have a record to compare with post-allegation results, examining election outcomes or victory margins may not be the best way to gauge how scandal shapes voter decision making. For this, one must turn to individual-level studies that assess the impact of scandal on citizens' candidate evaluations and vote support.

A good place to start is with Rundquist, Strom, and Peters (1977) who, based on data from a controlled lab experiment, concluded that some voters are willing to support a politician accused of engaging in "corrupt" (but not necessarily sexual) behavior because they weigh other factors more heavily when deciding how to cast their ballots.⁷ Thus, while a candidate who is believed to have misbehaved may not be able to avoid electoral retribution altogether, there are factors that can help to mitigate the damage. While knowledge of the candidates' party affiliations had only a small effect on respondents' vote preference in the Rundquist study, more recent research suggests that shared partisanship is often a major factor providing a "buffer" for politicians who face allegations of misconduct (Chanley et al. 1994; Dimock and Jacobson 1995; Stoker 1997; Miller 1999; Vonnahme 2014; Cortina and Rottinghaus 2017; Klačnja 2017; for evidence in non-American settings, see Anduiza, Gallego, and Muñoz 2013; Bhatti, Hansen, and Olsen 2013; Lee 2015).⁸ Other considerations that can influence how someone reacts to scandal allegations include the wrongdoer's race (Berinsky et al. 2011), whether hypocrisy is involved (McDermott, Schwartz, and Vallejo 2015), citizen attitudes about the importance of "honesty in government" (Rundquist,

Strom and Peters 1977; also see Dancey 2012) – and two other factors that relate directly to our concerns in this paper: type of scandal and gender.

Regarding the former, Basinger's (2013) aggregate-level analysis of post-Watergate congressional elections identified five different types of scandals: financial, sex, corruption (e.g., influence peddling, obstruction of justice; also see Redlawsk and McCann 2005), political, and other actions that mostly involve instances of personal misbehavior such as illicit drug use and lying about military service.⁹ Most research has focused on the first two of these categories and, whereas Basinger concluded that "the electorate does not seem to make sharp distinctions between sex scandals and financial scandals" (p. 395), a number of experimental and survey-based studies indicate that financial misdeeds tend to draw a harsher response (Funk 1996; Carlson, Ganiel, and Hyde 2000; Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2011, 2014). On the other hand, even if marital infidelity does not carry the same stigma with voters that it once did, recent experience tells us that other kinds of "moral lapses" can indeed hasten one's political demise.¹⁰ Our study deals with a form of sexual misbehavior that often (but not always) occurs in the workplace and is more psychologically than physically abusive – and about which very little academic research has been done to date. The quick condemnation of Al Franken, Blake Farenthold, and others in the current era does not shed much light on how the public views allegations of sexual harassment generally, and what factors might lead them to overlook such transgressions when deciding whether a politician should be forced to resign or defeated at the polls on Election Day. These are among the questions that we will address in the analysis that follows.

Another consideration that might shape one's reaction to scandal (specifically harassment) allegations is gender. Because the great majority of elected officials throughout history have been men,¹¹ it is not surprising that most political scandals also involve men (Marion 2015; Mandell

2017). There are, however, at least three perspectives from which it might be fruitful to examine the relationship between gender and scandal. First, do voters hold female candidates and elected officials to a different (higher) standard than their male counterparts? Second, are men and women voters similar in their propensity to withhold support from a misbehaving politician? Third, what is the impact of shared gender, that is, are women voters either more or less likely than men to punish a female politician for her transgressions? The first of these questions taps directly into what some believe to be an important aspect of sexual politics in the 21st century. Prior research on gender stereotypes indicates that

women candidates and officeholders are generally viewed as more compassionate, expressive, honest, and better able to deal with constituents than men. Men are viewed as more competent, decisive, and stronger leaders, and possessing a greater ability to handle a crisis (Dolan 2014a, 97).

While many of these stereotypes undoubtedly persist, Dolan (2008, 2014b) and a number of others (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009; Hayes 2011; Dolan and Lynch 2014; also see Bhatti, Hansen, and Olsen 2013; Craig and Rippere 2016) have concluded that they are no match for party stereotypes (and to a lesser extent, incumbency) in terms of their impact on voter decisions in mixed-gender races.

Our concern here is not with stereotypes in general, but rather with the specific stereotypes that might cause voters to react differently to scandal allegations made against male and female politicians. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center (2018, 12) asked respondents whether they thought men or women "in high political offices are better at being honest and ethical." Most said they saw no difference between the two – but for those who did, women had a sizable advantage (31% to 4%; cf. Smith, Warming, and Hennings 2017). What is uncertain is whether

this perceptual advantage helps or hurts female politicians when they are accused of wrongdoing. According to expectancy violations theory (EVT; see Burgoon and Hale 1988), it should be the latter; that is, because women generally and (one would think) women politicians in particular¹² are believed to be more honest/ethical and less corrupt than men (Leeper 1991; Kahn 1992; Alexander and Andersen 1993; McDermott 1998; Barnes and Beaulieu 2014, 2019; Watson and Moreland 2014; Barnes, Beaulieu, and Saxton 2018a), apparent violations of these norms should cause voters to react more negatively when the transgressor is female.¹³ For the most part, this does not appear to be the case (Smith and Powers 2005; Maule and Goidel 2013; also see Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018).¹⁴ Our experimental design allows us to revisit this question in the context of a fictional scandal involving sexual harassment, and also to examine whether men and women react differently to harassment charges leveled against either a male or female member of Congress.

Finally, because "[s]uccess and even survival in politics frequently depends on the ability of politicians and public officials to extricate themselves from various types of predicaments" (McGraw 1990, 119), we will assess whether there are gender differences in the effectiveness of different "accounts" (or "image repair" strategies) that can be employed when one is faced with allegations of wrongdoing. There are a number of studies (discussed more fully in Cossette and Craig 2020) that examine ways in which political and other public figures might respond, or have responded, when they

- cast a legislative vote or take a position at odds with the views of constituents (McGraw 1990, 1991; McGraw, Timpone, and Bruck 1993; McGraw, Best, and Timpone 1995);

- are the target of negative attacks when seeking re-election (Garramone 1985; Roddy and Garramone 1988; Freedman, Wood, and Lawton 1989; Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2014; Craig and Cossette 2018); or
- find themselves accused of engaging in some sort of illegal, unethical, or immoral behavior (Len-Ríos and Benoit 1994; Benoit and Nill 1998; Benoit 2015, 2017; Johnson 2018).

Among the available options are denial (it never happened), apology (sometimes accompanied by an offer of compensation), justification (portraying the objectionable action in a more favorable light), making excuses (seeking to shift or avoid blame altogether), and counterattack (especially in an election campaign, this may involve a matter unrelated to the original charge).

Outside the electoral arena, where different rules may apply (Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2014), some studies suggest that saying "I'm sorry" is generally the best response, or at least a good and often necessary first step (see Benoit and Brinson 1994) when one is credibly accused of wrongdoing (Benoit, Gullifor, and Panici 1991; Blaney and Benoit 2001; Len-Ríos and Benoit 2004; Sheldon and Sallot 2009). Some, however, have concluded that denial, either alone or in combination with one or more of the other accounts, is a more effective communication strategy than apology (Sigal et al. 1988; Johnson 2018), at least on those occasions when the "facts" are uncertain or open to interpretation.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there are very few studies that address the specific scenario of interest here: Do certain types of "blame avoidance" or "image restoration" strategies work better than others for either female or male politicians who are caught up in a scandal situation? A notable exception is Smith and Powers (2005), who reported no significant gender differences in the effect of any given account (response, rebuttal) provided by the fictional

representative in their survey experiment. Our research seeks to determine whether a similar pattern is evident for politicians who are accused of sexual harassment.

Research Design and Hypotheses

Our analysis employs an internet-based survey experiment conducted by Qualtrics from June 7 to July 17, 2018.¹⁶ Respondents were 1,356 registered voters randomly assigned to one of twelve treatment groups¹⁷ and asked to complete a background questionnaire that measured basic demographics and a wide range of political orientations. They were then told to imagine that it was the fall of 2018, and one of the races on their ballot was a congressional matchup between an incumbent seeking a third term and an experienced challenger who had served in both local office and the state legislature. After reading short biographies,¹⁸ participants indicated a vote preference and rated each contender on a 7-point scale ranging from "very unfavorable" (1) to "very favorable" (7).

They subsequently read what was described as an Associated Press news story that reported harassment allegations (detailing solicitation for sex, inappropriate touching and remarks about the accuser's personal appearance, talking about his/her sex life, vulgar or abusive language; complete wording is provided in our supporting materials at https://www.dropbox.com/s/6ezb2afnx229rbr/wpsa19_appendix.docx?dl=0) made against the incumbent by two former staffers, a campaign worker, and a lobbyist, all of the opposite gender.¹⁹ Although the story indicated that party leaders believed these charges should be investigated to determine if they were true, it also noted a growing consensus that the individual in question should resign from Congress and withdraw from his/her re-election campaign. In order to avoid straying into purely partisan territory, the challenger was quoted as saying that while the behavior described was unacceptable, s/he would leave it to the member's fellow legislators to determine the facts of the matter and

decide whether resignation was an appropriate remedy. Respondents subsequently answered the vote preference and favorability questions a second time, along with two questions asking whether (a) absent additional information, they believed the allegations to be true or false; and (b) they would be more or less likely to believe the allegations if they were reported by a source other than the Associated Press.

In a final stage of the experiment, each person read one of three responses (also in the form of an AP news story) by the accused incumbent. These responses, based on the accounts literature reviewed above and mirroring the actual image repair strategies employed by politicians who have been charged with sexual wrongdoing, were of three types (see our supporting materials for exact wording):

- *denial/attack the accuser*: the accusations are false, inconsistent with my value system, and cooked up by my political opponents and even members of my own party seeking to establish their #MeToo *bona fides*;
- *apology/concession*: I am truly sorry for my poor judgement and offer no excuses, thank each of the women/men who came forward, and promise to do everything possible to win back the trust of those whom I have disappointed; and
- *counterimaging* (providing voters with an alternative frame through which to view the alleged misbehavior): I was shocked and disappointed to learn that my well-intentioned actions were sometimes perceived as threatening and lewd, this is not who I am or how I was raised, and it will certainly never happen again.

The counterimaging (see Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2014) response mixes elements of both denial and apology with a plea for constituents and others to take into account the representative's longstanding commitment to equality in the workplace. After reading one of these accounts, study

participants were asked the vote preference and candidate evaluation questions for a third time, and to indicate whether (a) absent additional information, they believed the member or his/her accusers; and (b) s/he should resign from Congress.²⁰

Our focus in this paper is gender. Without necessarily assuming the worst, it seems likely that the growing number of female candidates and elected officeholders will lead to more women being accused, rightly or wrongly, of sexual and other types of misbehavior. Given the relative paucity of female wrongdoers in the past, however, it is not surprising that prior research tells us only so much about how the public might react when and if this happens. Will voters hold women accused of sexual misconduct to a different (presumably higher) standard than men who are in the same position? Are some types of responses more effective than others at mitigating the political damage wrought by such allegations, and does the answer to this question vary according to whether the accused is a woman or a man? Does their own gender influence how voters react to both allegations and responses? With limited guidance from the literature, we offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Absent other information, both male and female politicians who are accused of sexual harassment will experience an overall loss of voter support.

H1a: The post-allegation loss of support will be roughly (statistically) similar for women and men politicians, regardless of their party affiliation.

H1b: Holding candidate gender constant, there will be a greater post-allegation loss of support among voters who share the accused's party affiliation.²¹

H1c: Holding party affiliation constant, there will be a greater post-allegation loss of support among women voters than among men.²²

H1d: Holding party affiliation constant, women voters will be more likely to withdraw

support for (punish or hold accountable) female politicians accused of sexual harassment than for their male counterparts (Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018).

H2: Any observed post-account recovery of voter support will be greatest for both male and female politicians who deny charges of sexual misconduct, and least among those who offer an apology for their behavior.

H2a: Any observed post-account recovery of voter support will be roughly (statistically) similar for women and men politicians, regardless of their party affiliation (Smith and Powers 2005).

H2b: Holding candidate gender constant, any observed post-account recovery of support will be greater among voters who share the accused's party affiliation.²³

H2c: Holding party affiliation constant, any observed post-account recovery of support will be less among women voters than among men (consistent with H1c).

H2d: Holding party affiliation constant, women voters will be less responsive (that is, any observed recovery will be smaller) to the accounts of female politicians than to those of their male counterparts.

In addition to vote preference and candidate favorability questions, respondents were asked in the final stage of our experiment whether they believed the accused should resign his or her seat in Congress.

Results

A number of items from our background questionnaire provide a snapshot of citizens' attitudes about sexual harassment during the politically charged summer of 2018 (post-Weinstein but pre-Kavanaugh). Consistent for the most part with other surveys conducted during roughly the same time frame,²⁴ we learned the following:

- 60.1% of women and 20.8% of men reported that they have "ever personally received unwanted sexual advances, or been subjected to verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature";²⁵
- almost two-thirds said that it makes them either "angry" (37.2%) or "sad" (28.6%) that sexual harassment is so common, compared with 18.5% who directed their anger at the news media for giving too much attention to "unsubstantiated accusations";
- 29.9% believed (strongly or not strongly) that too many people claim to have experienced sexual harassment or assault "when it hasn't actually occurred," 33.2% said that it is wrong when those who claim to have experienced sexual harassment or assault "are accused of not telling the truth," and 36.7% placed themselves in between these two positions;
- roughly half (49.6%) expressed the belief that too many people are "getting away with committing sexual harassment or assault," compared with 21.4% who felt that employers often fire those who are accused "before finding out all the facts" and 28.8% whose views were somewhere in the middle;
- a plurality (43.2%) evaluated the #MeToo movement either very or somewhat favorably, compared with 19.2% very or somewhat unfavorably, 20.7% in-between, and a sizable 17.0% who felt they didn't know enough to say either way; and
- one in four (24.8%) indicated that #MeToo has "gone too far," almost half said either that it has "not [gone] far enough" (13.8%) or that the level of protest has been "just about right" (35.3%), and 26.0% did not feel that they knew enough to say.

Although a modest gender gap is evident for most of these questions (e.g., women were more likely to believe *strongly* that too many people get away with committing harassment or assault), it is dwarfed by differences observed between Republicans and Democrats (cf. PRRI 2018). These

are illustrated for the two #MeToo questions in Figures 1 and 2.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

Allegations

Two-sample tests of proportions (for vote choice) and paired t-tests (for favorability) provide either full or partial support for our first tier of hypotheses, regarding the stand-alone effect of harassment allegations. H1 and H1a state that such allegations will lead to an erosion of voter support, and that this result will be similar for male and female politicians. As shown in Table 1, this is exactly what happened in our experimental scenario. First, we should note that respondents were significantly ($p < .01$ or better) more likely to express an intent to vote for the female incumbent than for her male counterpart, and to award her a higher favorability score, both *before and after* reading the news story that detailed sexual harassment charges – a finding that echoes other recent studies suggesting that, all else equal, women may have at least a small advantage over men at the polls (Sparks 2018).²⁶ After learning of the allegations, vote intentions declined by approximately one-quarter for the male incumbent and one-third for the female incumbent ($p < .001$ in both cases). Each incumbent also lost about 2.2 favorability points on the 7-point scale ($p < .001$). Consistent with H1a, there were no significant differences in the magnitude of the change (in terms of either vote choice or favorability) between the male and female candidates.

Table 1 about here

Our results also support H1b in that, for both women and men, the largest drop-offs in vote intention and favorability occurred among the incumbent's co-partisans. Following the allegations, each candidate lost about half of his/her initial vote support ($p < .001$) from that group; among Independents, the male incumbent lost 22% and the female 44% ($p < .001$ for both).²⁷ Vote totals declined just 3% ($p < .10$) for men and 9% ($p < .001$) for women among opposing partisans, which

was to be expected given that few of these individuals (5% and 13%, respectively) planned to vote for the incumbent in the first place. As for candidate favorability, incumbents' co-partisans rated both women and men approximately 2.5 points lower on the 7-point scale after reading the allegations; opposing partisans and Independents rated them about 2 points lower ($p < .001$ for all post-treatment changes).

Table 2 about here

Setting candidate gender aside for the moment, results in Table 3 provide partial support for H1c, i.e., that holding party affiliation constant, the loss of support for a politician accused of sexual harassment will be greater for women respondents. As predicted, vote totals for incumbents declined significantly more among co-partisans who were female than among those who were male (56% vs. 43%, $p < .01$). Their favorability scores also declined by 2.7 and 2.3 points, respectively, with the difference again being significant ($p < .05$). Among Independents, women were more likely than men to withdraw their vote support ($p < .05$) but no significant gender differences were observed for favorability. The reverse pattern is evident for opposing partisans, with women exhibiting a larger drop in favorability (from 2.2 to 1.9 points, $p < .05$) but not differing significantly from men in terms of changing their original vote intentions.

Table 3 about here

Finally, H1d posits that, holding party affiliation constant, women voters will be more likely to punish female politicians accused of sexual harassment than their male counterparts. The results shown in Table 4 are mixed. Among opposing partisans ($p = .10$) and Independents ($p = .001$), women withdrew vote support for the female incumbent at a level more than double that seen for a male in similar circumstances. Among co-partisans, however, women reduced their vote support for male and female candidates to a statistically equivalent degree (declines of 55.4% and

56.0%, respectively). In addition, no significant gender differences were observed for post-allegation drops in favorability in any of the partisan groups. We note that results are inconsistent for men voters as well: On the one hand, co-partisans reduced their vote support significantly more for male incumbents (47.7% vs. 38.0%, $p < .10$); on the other, men were significantly more likely to punish female incumbents from the opposing party (7.8% vs. 0.9%, $p < .05$). Independents did not evaluate male and female incumbents differently, nor were there significantly different changes in favorability ratings across any of the groups.

Table 4 about here

Accounts

In order to test the effectiveness of the three response types described earlier (denial/attack, apology/concession, counterframe), we again conducted two-sample tests of proportions (for vote choice) and paired t-tests (for favorability), as well as logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions as appropriate. The dependent variable in vote choice models is a dummy that is coded "1" if the respondent indicated support for the incumbent after reading the response and "0" otherwise. The dependent variable in OLS models measures change in favorability from baseline to post-account (T_3 rating – T_1 rating).²⁸ To reduce length and complexity in reporting our findings, we briefly discuss post-account t-tests but include here (in Table 5) only the regression results; further details regarding the former can be found in our supporting materials.

According to H2, any post-account recovery of support will be greatest for politicians, regardless of gender, who deny allegations of sexual misconduct and least for those who offer an apology for their behavior. Results are consistent with these expectations, but only with regards to the efficacy of a denial response. Female incumbents who denied the charges against them saw their share of the vote increase by 13% ($p < .01$) and their favorability score rise by almost a full

point on the 7-point scale ($p < .001$; see Table A3). Those who pursued a counterframing strategy experienced an increase of 7.8% for vote preference ($p < .05$) and 0.62 points for favorability ($p < .001$), while an apology yielded smaller improvements of 6.5% ($p < .10$) and 0.46 points ($p < .001$), respectively. Differences across response types for vote choice were not statistically significant, though the favorability gain resulting from a denial was significantly larger than that observed for either counterframing ($p < .01$) or apology ($p < .001$). For male incumbents, denial was more effective than counterframing for vote choice ($p < .10$) and led to larger gains in favorability than either counterframing or apology ($p < .05$ for both). Overall, these findings lend some support to H2 and, in particular, suggest that denial/attack is the most effective approach to achieving image repair for a politician of either gender who is accused of sexual harassment.

The regression results displayed in Table 5 confirm the relative effectiveness of a denial account (H2). Specifically, respondents who read the apology ($p < .05$) and counterframing ($p < .001$) responses were significantly less likely to profess a vote for the incumbent (and assigned the incumbent a significantly lower favorability score) than those in the denial treatment group (the reference category). To illustrate, holding all other variables at their actual values, the probability of voting for the incumbent after reading each response was 0.33 for denial, 0.279 for apology, and 0.265 for counterframe.²⁹ Similarly, incumbents who employed the denial response saw their favorability score increase by 0.24 and 0.33 points more on the 7-point scale than those who used the apology ($p < .05$) or counterframe ($p < .01$), respectively.

Table 5 about here

Our next hypothesis, H2a, suggests that any given response will work equally well for female and male incumbents; this is mostly supported by our t-test results, with the exception that denial was more effective than other response types in raising a female incumbent's favorability

score ($p < .05$). Our regression results, however, paint a different picture. Because the coefficients in the logistic regression do not clearly illustrate the relationship between the independent variables and post-account vote preference, we calculated the marginal effect of incumbent gender on vote choice to give us a better picture of the findings (not shown). Doing so tells us that, contrary to H2a, the probability of voting for a female incumbent at T₃ is 4.5 points higher than for a male ($p < .05$), holding all other variables at their actual values in the dataset. The corresponding difference in favorability change is 0.176 points on the 7-point scale ($p < .10$), with the female incumbent regaining more lost ground than the male. Overall, these results suggest that women politicians may fare better than their male counterparts following delivery of a response to (and especially a denial of) sexual harassment allegations.

Our t-tests are mostly supportive of H2b, which predicts that any post-account recovery will be greater among voters who share the incumbent's party affiliation (see Tables A4a and A4b). For female incumbents across all three response types, the largest gains occurred among the incumbent's co-partisans, and these were almost always significantly larger than the corresponding changes among opposing partisans and Independents. For male incumbents, only denial resulted in improvements that were significantly better for co-partisans relative to the other groups; no other differences were observed. In terms of favorability, the gains made among co-partisans were almost always significantly greater than those made among opponents and Independents; the sole exception is for male incumbents who apologized for their behavior (there were no significant differences across partisan groups).

The regression results in Table 5 are also generally in line with H2b: Holding all other variables at their actual values, the probability of voting for the incumbent post-account was 0.348 for co-partisans, 0.222 for Independents, and 0.138 for opposing partisans, with co-partisans

significantly more likely to indicate a vote for the incumbent than were members of the other two groups ($p < .001$ for both). For favorability, the incumbent lost an average of 0.38 points more on the 7-point scale among co-partisans relative to Independents ($p < .001$) but there was no significant difference between opposing partisans and Independents.

Turning to H2c (that any post-account recovery of support will be less among women voters than among men), we do not find support for our hypothesis with either t-test or regression results. In the former case, it turns out that (a) female co-partisans were marginally more likely than their male counterparts to express a vote preference for the incumbent after reading the denial account ($p < .10$); and (b) incumbents consistently recovered more in terms of their favorability score among women than among men across all three partisan groups ($p < .10$ for most). The regression results indicate that the probability of voting for the incumbent at T_3 is statistically equivalent for women (0.293) and for men (0.307), as is the change in favorability rating (1.6 for both), holding all other variables at their actual values. This supports the idea that male and female voters are equally likely to support incumbents of both genders, controlling for partisanship.

Finally, the analysis for H2d is complicated by the inclusion in our regression model of an interaction term between incumbent gender and respondent gender. The simplest way to interpret these results is to examine Figures 3a and 3b. Here we illustrate the probability of voting for each incumbent (male vs. female) separately for women and men in our sample, comparing results across response types. While the data appear to show that both men and women respondents were more likely to vote for a female incumbent rather than her male counterpart across the board, the difference is significant only for men; conversely, only women respondents awarded the female incumbent significantly higher favorability scores after reading both allegations and response. Neither of these findings supports our expectation in H2d that women voters will be less responsive

to female candidates; for vote choice, incumbent gender makes no difference (at least for women voters), and for favorability, women voters are *more* responsive to female candidates compared to males. It is worth noting that the results in Figures 3a and 3b strengthen our conclusion regarding H2, i.e., that deny/attack was a significantly more effective response strategy than either apology or counterframing ($p < .05$ for both vote choice and favorability, and for all combinations of respondent and incumbent gender).

Figures 3a and 3b about here

The bottom line is not, however, an encouraging one for politicians who have been accused of sexual harassment. As is evident in Table 6, the net effect of allegation + response was negative for male and female incumbents alike, for both vote choice and favorability, and for all three types of account. Men lose between 16.5 and 26.0 percentage points in vote share, and between 1.514 and 1.878 points on the favorability measure; the comparable figures for women are between 20.0 and 24.4 percent (vote) and between 1.350 and 1.696 favorability points.³⁰ We do not conclude from these results that it is impossible for politicians to recover from harassment allegations (history tells us otherwise), but rather that a full recovery is uncertain and, importantly, may occur gradually over a longer period of time than is captured by our survey snapshot.

Table 6 about here

Conclusion

Complex statistical analysis is not required to confirm that being targeted by allegations of sexual harassment can be a career-ending experience for some politicians. While Donald Trump may have survived politically after being accused of sexual misconduct by several women, others – including both senior (John Conyers) and junior (Trent Franks, Blake Farenthold) members of Congress, and a prospective candidate for president (Al Franken) – were less fortunate. This study

has examined one particular type of misconduct that remains all too common even in the #MeToo era, posing a number of questions: To what extent do voters hold elected leaders accountable for their actions? Do they apply the same standard to co-partisans and members of the opposition? to both female and male (alleged) offenders? Do men and women voters respond similarly to such allegations? When accused of wrongdoing, what is the most effective response for politicians as they seek to regain the support of those who took a step back when the charges came to light?

Although inconclusive on some points, the results from our survey experiment suggest the following:

First, there are clear partisan differences in attitudes about sexual harassment in general: Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to express either anger or sadness that it still is a frequent occurrence, to say that we should take those who claim to be victims at their word, to believe that too many offenders get away with their actions, and to view the #MeToo movement in a positive light. Whatever gender gap may exist for these questions is consistently dwarfed by the partisan divide.

Second, allegations of harassment contribute to a loss of voter support that is roughly equal for male and female politicians.

Third, the post-allegation erosion of support is greatest among those who were mostly on the targeted incumbent's side to start with, i.e., his/her co-partisans, and especially female co-partisans.

Fourth, neither women nor men voters are consistently more likely to "punish" female and male candidates differently for their alleged wrongdoings.

Fifth, the most effective type of account when a politician is accused of sexual harassment is denial, augmented by assertions that the charges have been manufactured by disgruntled

former employees or political opponents; while this appears to be true for all combinations of respondent and candidate gender, our data indicate that responses generally, and denials in particular, may work better for women incumbents than for men.

Sixth, just as the initial drop-off in voter support is greater for the targeted incumbent's co-partisans, post-account recovery is usually most pronounced with this same group.

Seventh, contrary to our expectations, there is little to suggest that women and men voters react differently to the accounts of politicians who have been accused of sexual harassment.

Eighth, neither denials nor either of the other accounts tested are likely to be successful in the short term at restoring all of the support initially lost as a result of the allegations.

Perhaps the most notable of our conclusions is that the best way for a politician (women even more than men) to survive a harassment scandal is to deny the charges and attack the people making them. While some readers might worry that this finding could encourage sexual predators and other wrongdoers to employ such an account strategy in a cynical (and dishonest) effort to salvage their political career, we note that there are times when a denial is simply not credible, at least in the long run. The photo of Al Franken pretending to grab a woman's breasts during a USO tour (Garber 2017) and the tests that matched a semen stain on Monica Lewinsky's dress to Bill Clinton's DNA (Waxman and Fabry 2018) effectively precluded a claim that "I didn't do it" by either of these two offenders. Claims of sexual harassment or assault, however, often turn into "he said/she said" confrontations in which the truth is difficult to establish. Indeed, during the debate over Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court, one observer maintained that the world is different today than it was when Clarence Thomas was accused of harassment in 1991.

Few people are defending the behavior of which Kavanaugh stands accused, even among conservatives who would very much like to see him confirmed. . . . For conservatives and

liberals alike, the pertinent question regarding Ford's accusation is not whether she's lying, or whether Kavanaugh's alleged behaviors can be forgiven as the folly of youth. The question is whether there's enough *evidence*, and what would constitute evidence of a crime (Ungar-Sargon 2018, emphasis in original).

Unfortunately, the lack of clear evidence in most cases means that politicians (of either gender) will continue to offer accounts and the public will serve as the ultimate arbiter of what is the "truth" when they do. We believe that it is important to know what kind of yardstick citizens are likely to employ when making this judgment.

We close by acknowledging the difficulty of re-creating political reality in a laboratory or survey setting. The circumstances of our controlled experiment involved a fictional member of Congress, a fictional opponent in a hypothetical upcoming election, fictional allegations of sexual harassment, and fictional responses to those charges. This approach has become increasingly common as scholars seek to identify the political effects of scandal generally, and of sex- or gender-based scandal in particular. It is nonetheless important for future work on related topics to employ a healthy mix of research designs, including aggregate-level and survey studies that examine how voters react to real-life politicians about whom they may already have developed strong feelings one way or the other. In addition, we hope that our study – along with the apparently endless flow of news reports detailing the sexual misadventures of our elected leaders – encourages scholars to look more closely at the decisions voters make regarding whether, when, and how politicians should be held accountable for the poor choices they sometimes make. And, in doing so, whether that calculus remains intact as more women achieve positions of political authority.

Notes

1. See <https://www.vox.com/a/sexual-harassment-assault-allegations-list> for a running list of those who have been accused of sexual misconduct.

2. Nassar was an associate professor at Michigan State University and national medical coordinator for USA Gymnastics for almost two decades and, during that time, sexually molested hundreds of young women and at least one man, mostly minors; see Levenson (2018); Levenson and Watts (2018).

3. See <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>. An investigation subsequently cleared Garcia of some, but not all, of the charges against her; she was easily reelected in November 2018 over a Republican challenger who tried to make Garcia's behavior an issue in the campaign (Modesti 2018).

4. The final vote was 52-48, split largely along party lines.

5. For more on the public's reaction to Hart, see Stoker (1993).

6. For a detailed discussion of the scandal literature, see Cossette and Craig (2020). Among the notable aggregate-level studies on this topic are Peters and Welch (1980); Welch and Hibbing (1997); Brown (2006); Basinger (2013); Praino, Stockemer, and Moscardelli (2013); Rottinghaus (2014).

7. In this case, the probability of participants voting for a corrupt candidate varied with the former's issue preferences (Vietnam) and belief in the importance of honesty in government.

8. For a somewhat different take, see Cobb and Taylor (2015).

9. Basinger's results revealed a significant negative effect on incumbent vote share for all types except political scandal, a category that included (among other things) campaign finance

violations. However, the idea that voters today may be willing to forgive this type of misbehavior is challenged by Wood and Grose (2018).

10. Consider, for example, the repeated "sexting" with women and girls that brought down former Congressman Anthony Weiner (D-New York) and accusations of having dated underage girls as an adult that contributed to Roy Moore's (R-Alabama) loss in a 2017 special U.S. Senate election. See Weiser (2017); McCrummen, Reinhard, and Crites (2017).

11. The 2018 midterm elections witnessed some fairly dramatic changes in this regard. See <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers> for an up-to-date accounting.

12. See Schneider and Bos (2014) for a different take on the stereotypical uniqueness of "female politicians" as a subgroup of women more broadly; and Winter (2010, 587) for evidence of Americans' "unconscious cognitive connections between gender and party stereotypes."

13. Applying the EVT model to political campaigns, Cassese and Holman (2018, 785) concluded that "female candidates are particularly vulnerable to trait based attacks that challenge stereotypically feminine strengths" (in this case, demonstrating compassion and getting along with others).

14. An exception is Gryffindor and Hufflepuff (2019). Also see Barnes, Beaulieu, and Saxton (2018b), who observed that some voters – namely, those with attitudes reflecting "hostile sexism" (Glick and Fiske 2001) – were more likely to punish women than men for sexual, but not corruption-related, transgressions.

15. Benoit (2016, 7) is critical of experimental research that has been done on image repair, in part because "most studies test but a few . . . of the image repair strategies, making a complete understanding of image repair discourse impossible." One study compares excuse and justification, another looks at the effects of excuse, justification, and denial, while a third examines excuse,

justification, concession, and apology . . . and so on (p. 8). We acknowledge that our data capture only a portion of allegation-response dynamic that typically occurs in real life, but the rhetoric on both sides (accuser and target) is derived from actual cases of sexual harassment that have been reported in the news over the past few years. Even taking the inherent limitations of experimental designs into account, we believe that the analysis presented here will help us to understand how the public truly feels about the sexual (mis)behavior in which far too many of their political leaders have engaged.

16. Data were provided by Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>) from panels consisting of millions of pre-screened individuals who have been recruited to participate in a variety of research studies. Respondents for our study were drawn from a national panel and self-identified as registered voters. The sample was collected to meet demographic quotas reflecting age, gender, race/ethnicity, and education level of the U.S. population as reported by the U.S. Census (details are provided in our supporting materials). Although Qualtrics's panel is quite diverse, we make no claim that it is representative of registered voters nationwide.

17. The structure of our experimental design is as follows: 1 (allegation) X 4 (party affiliation + gender combinations) X 3 (response/account type). The randomization process appears to have been successful, as no statistically significant pre-exposure differences were observed among members of the various treatment groups with regard to demographics, partisanship, ideological self-identification, issue positions, or baseline candidate preferences. Thus, if differences are found after respondents read a paired attack and response, we can be confident that these were driven by exposure to the experimental stimulus.

18. Each candidate's party affiliation and status as either challenger or incumbent was specified, but otherwise the biosketches were crafted in such a way as to ensure that the two

portrayals were essentially equivalent.

19. The content of both allegations and responses was based on actual cases reported in the news, mostly during the period since the Weinstein scandal broke in October 2017.

20. Our survey included a validity check at each stage of the experiment (post-allegation and post-response) asking respondents to identify the content of the news story they had just read, i.e., the nature of the charge that was being made against the representative (inappropriate sexual behavior) and the accused's response (denial, apology, counterimaging). Anyone who answered incorrectly was dropped from the analysis.

21. Although this might seem counterintuitive, it is based on the fact that very few out-party identifiers supported the incumbent (5.3% for a male incumbent, 13.2% for a female) even before reading about the harassment allegations.

22. Whether or not this is true for other types of scandals (Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018), the emergence of #MeToo, #NeverAgain, and a sea of female whistleblowers might lead one to predict that women will be especially sensitive to charges of sexual misconduct – even when traditional sex roles are reversed, i.e., when the alleged wrongdoer is a woman. In response to a pre-allegation question in our survey, for example, women (76.4%) were slightly but significantly ($p < .001$) more likely than men (68.3%) to say that "any accusation of sexual harassment should be investigated and, if found to be true, the elected official should immediately resign or be removed from office." This was a question asking respondents to indicate which of two statements was closer to their own opinion (the alternative was that "I am willing to tolerate an elected official who has been accused of sexual harassment if he or she has the potential to pass laws that I support"); see our supporting materials for exact wording and format.

23. Our expectation here is based on the prediction in H1b that the initial post-allegation

loss of support will be less among in-party identifiers, thereby leaving less room for a post-account recovery among the same individuals.

24. For example, see

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/221216/concerns-sexual-harassment-higher-1998.aspx>;

<http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2018/images/10/11/re19c.-.trump.and.russia.pdf>;

<http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2017/images/12/21/re112d.-.sexual.harassment.pdf>;

<https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/NPR-Sexual-Harassment-and-Assault>;

<https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018->

10/ipsos_npr_sexual_harassment_topline_103118_final.pdf.

25. Estimates of victimization have varied considerably over the years, largely (we suspect) due to differences in question wording and sampling methodology from one survey to the next; see Cossette and Craig (2020).

26. The "all else equal" caveat is important. Whatever general preferences someone might have (and express in response to a non-specific survey question), the impact of candidate gender in a particular election is often conditioned by other factors. For example, see Brooks (2013); Dolan (2014b); Bauer (2015); Martin (2018); Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth (2018).

27. Although the difference here ($p < .01$) suggests that Independents may be more likely to punish women than men for sexual misconduct, the post-allegation decline in favorability does not vary significantly by candidate gender among this group.

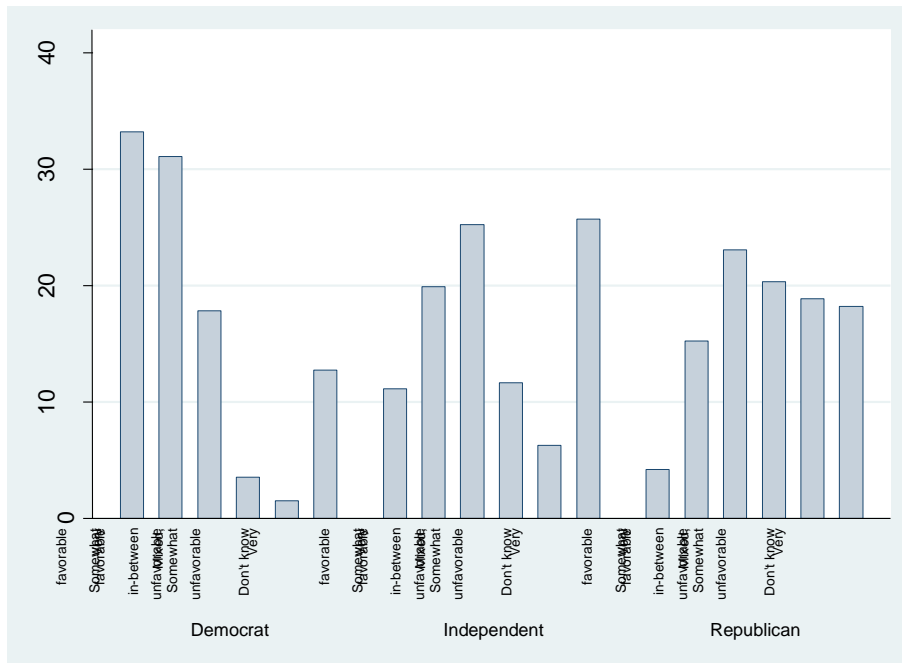
28. We look at change in this instance using OLS because, unlike vote preference, the favorability variable is not dichotomous. When this model is replicated using favorability at T_3 as our dependent variable (and including favorability at T_1 as a predictor), results are very similar to those portrayed in Table 5 below. The same is true when we run the favorability model using

ordered logit, with favorability at T₃ as dependent (and including favorability at T₁ as a predictor).

29. Results were calculated using the margins command in Stata.

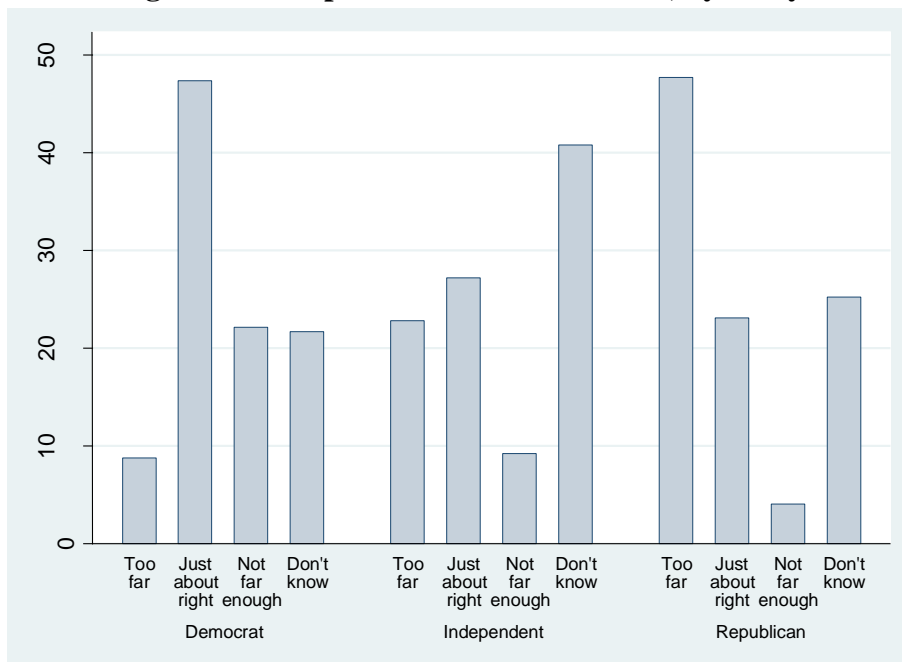
30. Each of these declines is statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Opinions of the #MeToo Movement, by Party



"In general, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the #MeToo movement?"

Figure 2. Perceptions of #MeToo Protest, by Party



"Has the #MeToo movement gone too far, not far enough, or has the level of protest been just about right?"

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics.

Figure 3a. Effect of Accounts on Vote for Incumbent

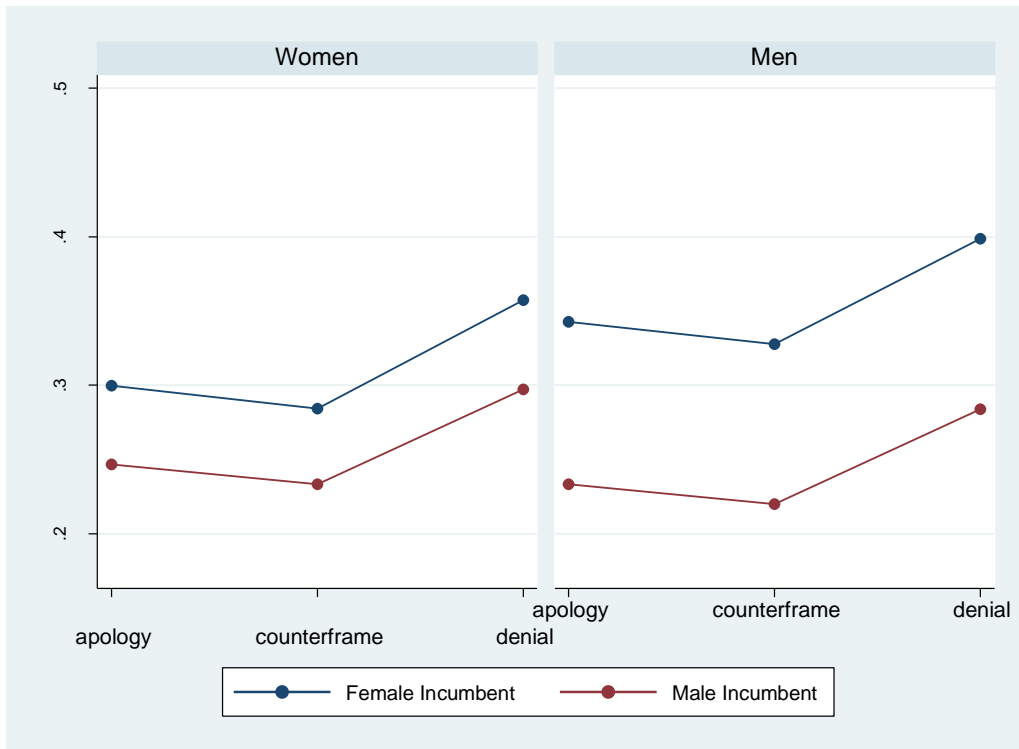
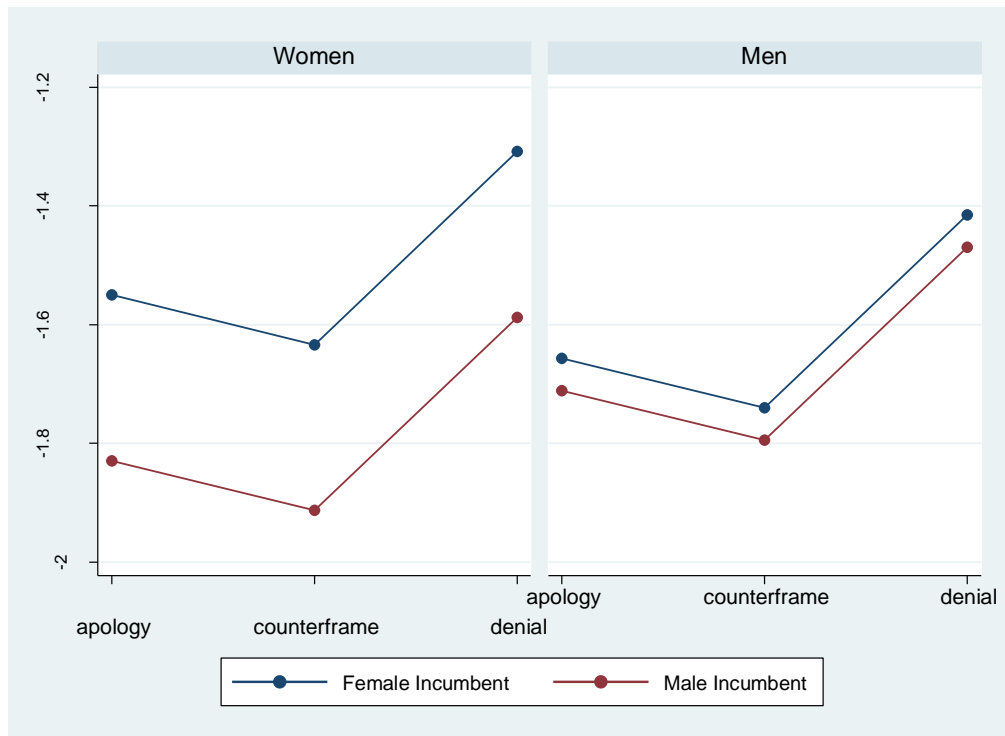


Figure 3b. Effect of Accounts on Incumbent Favorability



Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics.

Table 1. Stand-Alone Effects of Allegations, by Incumbent Gender

Vote for Incumbent				
	Male Incumbent		Female Incumbent	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>
Baseline vote	677	0.462	679	0.560
Post-allegation vote	677	0.189	679	0.244
diff		-0.273		-0.315
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Favorability				
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Baseline evaluation	674	4.723	672	4.926
Post-allegation evaluation	674	2.461	672	2.696
diff		-2.261		-2.229
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Respondents who say they lean toward one party or the other are classified as partisans.

Table 2. Stand-Alone Effects of Allegations, by Respondent Partisanship

Vote for Incumbent												
	Male Incumbent						Female Incumbent					
	Co-partisans		Opponents		Ind.		Co-partisans		Opponents		Ind.	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>
Baseline vote	299	0.876	262	0.053	104	0.337	296	0.922	265	0.132	102	0.608
Post-allegation vote	299	0.361	262	0.027	104	0.115	296	0.446	265	0.045	102	0.167
diff		-0.515		-0.027		-0.221		-0.476		-0.087		-0.441
	p = 0.000		p = 0.060		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Favorability												
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Baseline evaluation	297	5.525	262	3.924	103	4.553	292	5.825	264	3.996	100	4.740
Post-allegation evaluation	297	3.010	262	1.855	103	2.456	292	3.342	264	1.962	100	2.830
diff		-2.515		-2.069		-2.097		-2.483		-2.034		-1.910
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Respondents who say they lean toward one party or the other are classified as partisans.

Table 3. Stand-Alone Effects of Allegations, by Respondent Gender

Vote for Incumbent												
	Male Respondents						Female Respondents					
	Co-partisans		Opponents		Ind.		Co-partisans		Opponents		Ind.	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>
Baseline vote	288	0.896	245	0.082	91	0.429	307	0.902	282	0.103	115	0.504
Post-allegation vote	288	0.465	245	0.037	91	0.187	307	0.345	282	0.035	115	0.104
diff		-0.431		-0.045		-0.242		-0.557		-0.067		-0.400
	p = 0.000		p = 0.018		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.001		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Favorability												
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Baseline evaluation	286	5.661	245	3.910	88	4.614	303	5.686	281	4.004	115	4.670
Post-allegation evaluation	286	3.332	245	2.016	88	2.739	303	3.026	281	1.815	115	2.565
diff		-2.329		-1.894		-1.875		-2.660		-2.189		-2.104
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.		p = 0.000	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Respondents who say they lean toward one party or the other are classified as partisans.

Table 4. Stand-Alone Effects of Allegations, by Respondent and Incumbent Gender

		Vote for Incumbent							
		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		Male Incumbent		Female Incumbent		Male Incumbent		Female Incumbent	
		<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>
Incumbent Co-Partisans	Baseline vote	151	0.868	137	0.927	148	0.885	159	0.918
	Post-allegation vote	151	0.391	137	0.547	148	0.331	159	0.358
	<i>diff</i>		-0.477		-0.380		-0.554		-0.560
		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Opponents	Baseline vote	117	0.034	128	0.125	145	0.069	137	0.139
	Post-allegation vote	117	0.026	128	0.047	145	0.028	137	0.044
	<i>diff</i>		-0.009		-0.078		-0.041		-0.095
		p = 0.351		p = 0.013		p = 0.050		p = 0.003	
Independents	Baseline vote	51	0.372	40	0.500	53	0.302	62	0.677
	Post-allegation vote	51	0.157	40	0.225	53	0.075	62	0.129
	<i>diff</i>		-0.216		-0.275		-0.226		-0.548
		p = 0.007		p = 0.005		p = 0.001		p = 0.000	
		Incumbent Favorability							
		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Incumbent Co-Partisans	Baseline evaluation	150	5.433	136	5.912	147	5.619	156	5.750
	Post-allegation evaluation	150	3.080	136	3.610	147	2.939	156	3.109
	<i>diff</i>		-2.353		-2.301		-2.680		-2.641
		p = 0.		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Opponents	Baseline evaluation	117	3.932	128	3.891	145	3.917	136	4.096
	Post-allegation evaluation	117	1.983	128	2.047	145	1.752	136	1.882
	<i>diff</i>		-1.949		-1.844		-2.166		-2.213
		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Independents	Baseline evaluation	50	4.640	38	4.579	53	4.472	62	4.839
	Post-allegation evaluation	50	2.580	38	2.947	53	2.340	62	2.758
	<i>diff</i>		-2.060		-1.632		-2.132		-2.081
		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Respondents who say they lean toward one party or the other are classified as partisans.

Table 5: Effects of Allegation Plus Response

	Vote for Incumbent	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>
Vote for Incumbent, Baseline	3.358***	28.718***
Democratic Incumbent	-0.542***	0.582***
Party Identification		
Incumbent Co-partisans	0.907***	2.478***
Incumbent Opponents	-0.719**	0.487**
Male Incumbent	-0.162	0.851
Male Respondent	0.319	1.376
Male Incumbent x Male Respondent	-0.433	0.649
Response		
Apology	-0.429**	0.651**
Counterframing	-0.542***	0.582***
Constant	-3.150***	0.043***
N	1,328	
Pseudo R²	0.39	
	Incumbent Favorability	
	<i>Coeff.</i>	
Democratic Incumbent	-0.208**	
Party Identification		
Incumbent Co-partisans	-0.384***	
Incumbent Opponents	-0.185	
Male Incumbent	-0.282**	
Male Respondent	-0.107	
Male Incumbent x Male Respondent	0.225	
Response		
Apology	-0.242**	
Counterframing	-0.325***	
Constant	-0.957***	
N	1,317	
R²	0.023	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Vote for Incumbent is a logit model in which the dependent variable is a dummy measuring post-account vote for the incumbent (1 = yes, 0 = no). Incumbent Favorability is an OLS model in which the dependent variable is change in incumbent favorability from baseline to post-account (T_3 rating - T_1 rating). Party identification is a three-category variable with respondents opposite the party of the incumbent used as the reference category. Significance tests are two-tailed: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

Table 6. Net Effect of Allegation + Response, by Incumbent Party

Vote for Incumbent												
	Male Incumbent						Female Incumbent					
	Apology		Counter-frame		Denial		Apology		Counter-frame		Denial	
	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Prop</i>
Baseline vote	207	0.478	173	0.462	297	0.451	201	0.537	193	0.534	285	0.593
Post-account vote	207	0.251	173	0.202	297	0.286	201	0.294	193	0.311	285	0.393
diff		-0.227		-0.260		-0.165		-0.244		-0.223		-0.200
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	
Incumbent Favorability												
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Baseline evaluation	206	4.825	172	4.831	296	4.588	197	4.883	191	4.827	283	5.018
Post-account evaluation	206	3.058	172	2.953	296	3.074	197	3.254	191	3.131	283	3.668
diff		-1.767		-1.878		-1.514		-1.629		-1.696		-1.350
	p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000		p = 0.000	

Note: Data are from a June/July 2018 national survey of registered voters, conducted by Qualtrics. Respondents who say they lean toward one party or the other are classified as partisans.

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