Gender, Party, and the Press:

Media Coverage of the Second "Year of the Woman"

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Sociology

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ABSTRACT

The 2018 election cycle was marked by many as the second "Year of the Woman." Much like in 1992, considered the first such "Year of the Woman," issues of gender were on the political forefront in 2018, as a Supreme Court justice nominee faced allegations of sexual misconduct. More female candidates ran in 2018 than ever before, particularly in the Democratic party, suggesting the galvanizing influence of this political climate. This study seeks to examine whether media coverage of candidates in 2018 was similarly affected by the gendered political climate, and whether coverage patterns varied by party, given the widespread anti-Trumpist midterm sentiment. I examined both the gender and party of the candidates being covered and of the sources covering them. My content analysis examined 745 articles covering three salient midterm races—the Georgia gubernatorial race and the Arizona and Tennessee Senate races. I concluded that in-depth media coverage of male and female candidates is more equitable and representative than previous studies have indicated. Female candidates received even more positive resource assessments and more male trait coverage than their male counterparts. Partisan coverage was driven more by party than by gender, though left-leaning outlets provided less issue-based coverage per article than their non-partisan and right-leaning counterparts. Male journalists tended to favor Republican candidates in their coverage and female journalists somewhat favored Democrats. Articles that focused on gender typically concentrated on female Democrats' intersectional identities or the conflicting cues female Republican candidates send to voters.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Brunhilde Goodman, a champion of women's rights and a prime example of a strong, independent woman. A single mother who worked two jobs and raised her three children without child support, my grandmother was a role model to the younger generations of women in my family, and her legacy lives on in donations to Planned Parenthood.

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INTRODUCTION

Hailed by many as a second "Year of the Woman," the 2018 midterms saw a record number of female candidates running for office amidst a highly contested national climate of gender-based conflict (Kurtzleben 2018). In the heat of the campaign cycle, in late September 2018, Supreme Court Justice nominee Brett Kavanaugh faced accusations of sexual assault. These allegations and the contentious confirmation hearing that followed built on the momentum of the #MeToo movement, in which women across the country raised violence against women as a key social issue and called out perpetrators of sexual harassment. For many scholars following the election, it was no coincidence that the gendered debates playing out in the political arena sparked an increase in the number of female candidates running. This pattern mirrored that of the previous "Year of the Woman," 1992, when a then-record number of female candidates ran for office in light of the sexual misconduct allegations against and confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court (Kamarck 2018). The partisan breakdown of the 2018 female candidates suggests a similar correlation between Kavanaugh and female motivation to run, as it was mainly Democratic women who entered the races. Of the 257 women who won their Congressional primaries in 2018, only 59 were Republican (Dittmar 2018).

It is clear that the national political climate played a role in encouraging female candidates, particularly Democrats, to run for office. Would that climate similarly influence media coverage of these candidates? Coverage of female candidates has historically been less substantive and less representative than that of

men (Braden 1996; Fridkin and Kenney 2014; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994ab, 1996; Lühiste and Banducci 2016; Norris 1997; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson 2001, 2003; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Jamieson 1995; Aday and Devitt 2001; Devitt 2002; Wasburn and Wasburn 2011; Kahn and Gordon 1997). Perhaps this year would be different. Media coverage is one way in which candidates' messages reach the public, thus shaping voters' perceptions of the female candidates running each election cycle. Given the anti-Trumpist climate surrounding the 2018 midterm elections, I wondered whether there might be coverage variation by party. By examining a female Democrat vs. female Republican race, this study seeks to examine intra-gender, inter-party media coverage, and by looking at female Democrat vs. male Republican and male Democrat vs. female Republican races, it seeks to assess the degree to which existing stereotyped patterns of coverage continue to persist across parties and genders. Moreover, by exploring differences in the gender and party of content creators, this study investigates the influence of media source identities on candidate coverage.

This study seeks to answer the question, "How does media coverage of candidates vary based on gender and party?" These questions can be broken down into two categories: variation in the gender and party of the candidates, and in the gender and party of the people covering them. Although existing research notes the variance in stereotyped perceptions of Democratic and Republican female candidates (Dolan 2004ab, Koch 2002, Gimenez et al. 2016, Koch 2000, Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009, Costa and Schaffner 2018, Dolan and Lynch 2014), to date no studies have examined whether these gaps appear in news media

coverage. Moreover, existing studies fail to address whether partisan media outlets cover female and male candidates in ways that differ from the images presented in mainstream, centrist outlets. In order to answer these questions, I will compare the differences in coverage between female and male candidates across outlet partisanship and reporter gender, and will compare coverage of female candidates of different parties.

Based on my findings, I argue that in-depth coverage of female candidates has significantly improved in almost every dimension, with qualitative and quantitative measures indicating equal coverage, and assessments of campaign resources suggesting even more positive coverage than their male opponents. My findings indicate that media coverage reflects the nature of each individual race rather than gender-based assumptions about particular candidates. I also found that coverage of candidates' personality traits no longer reflects their gender, as female candidates received more coverage of male than female traits, and more coverage of male traits than their male opponents.

I also argue that coverage in partisan outlets is driven more by a candidate's ideology than by gender, with outlets on both sides of the aisle favoring candidates of their own party, and that left-aligned sources provide less issue-based coverage than those of other partisan leanings. Male reporters additionally seem to favor Republicans and female reporters somewhat disadvantage Republicans in their coverage. Lastly, I found that articles that primarily focused on gender were most often related to the difficulties female Democrats face due to intersectional identities, or the difficulties female Republicans face due to their conflicting gender and party cues. This indicates the ongoing struggles female candidates confront

despite “fair” media coverage, or at least the media’s ongoing focus on these supposed struggles.

CHAPTER 1: EXISTING LITERATURE

In preparing for this study, I examined three relevant bodies of existing literature: gender theory, gender stereotypes in politics—which I broke down into trait, issue, and ideology stereotypes—and gender in the media. For the purposes of this study, I will be operating within a gender binary, only comparing candidates who identify as male to those who identify as female.

GENDER THEORY

Gender is a socially constructed status that is produced through "social doings" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 129). As West and Zimmerman wrote, it is "doing gender" that creates the notion of binary differences between men and women, rather than some intrinsic, biological quality (Ibid, 137). Gender differences are formed through social interaction, and then reinforced to establish "the 'essentialness' of gender" as a category by suggesting that differences between men and women are "fundamental and enduring dispositions" (Ibid, 138, 146).

Within the supposed male/female binary, each gender category holds a set of expectations regarding the traits and behaviors members of that group will exhibit. These gender role expectations become a form of hegemony, which men and women must confront in their daily actions and behaviors. Antonio Gramsci first described hegemony as the normative ideal imposed by a dominant group on society—an ideal that becomes generally accepted as the norm (Gramsci 1971). In gender, "hegemonic masculinity" is the currently accepted strategy used to legitimize and uphold patriarchy, or "the overall subordination of women and

dominance of men" (Connell 1995, 77, 74). Hegemonic femininity, then, is the accepted gender behavior by which women operate within and become complicit in upholding patriarchy (Schippers 2007, 94). Non-hegemonic behaviors and qualities are characterized as "deviant and stigmatized," coercing both men and women to operate in hegemonic ways (Schippers 2007, 95). Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are constantly evolving, allowing them to rework deviant behaviors into subordinated, marginalized, and complicit roles within the hegemonic gender framework (Connell 1995, 76). In this way, hegemonic masculinity and femininity work in conjunction with "doing gender," the everyday interactions that shape gender norms, to reinforce patriarchy. Hegemonic gender expectations result in stereotyped notions of the interests, competencies, traits, and beliefs of men and women. Beyond shaping the ways people of both genders operate on a daily basis, these stereotypes can impact the political assessments and media coverage of female candidates.

POLITICAL GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender is one of the stereotypes on which people rely to form judgements and make assumptions about people, particularly when they lack much other information. These gender stereotypes can be particularly salient in politics, when people are asked to make judgements about candidates and often do so based on little information (Dolan 2004a). Studies have found that, especially when little other information is provided, people rely on gender as a cue in assessing female candidates (Alexander and Andersen 1993). The gendered notions on which people

rely as cues can be broken down into three relevant categories: trait stereotypes, issue stereotypes, and ideology stereotypes.

Trait Stereotypes

Research in gender stereotypes has found that certain personality traits are considered more common among men and others more common among women (Lawless 2004; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). These "male" traits include being independent, objective, competitive, insensitive, aggressive, unemotional, ambitious, tough, decisive, experienced, intelligent, active, ambitious, able to handle a crisis, and a strong leader (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Dolan and Lynch 2016; Alexander and Andersen 1993). "Female" traits, on the other hand, include being dependent, noncompetitive, passive, gentle, emotional, compassionate, honest, passive, seeking change, able to compromise, and a weak leader (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Dolan and Lynch 2016; Alexander and Andersen 1993). In a 2009 study, Linda Fowler and Jennifer Lawless conceptualized gendered personal traits as comments about a candidate's appearance, mannerisms, personality, and marital and parental status.

These trait stereotypes can be significant in politics because male and female traits are valued differently by voters. Lawless (2004) asked respondents to rank the most important traits for political candidates to possess and found that stereotypically male traits took up three of the top four places. The perception of men as possessing male traits can have a significant impact on vote choice when voters deem male traits more important for political candidates. Some studies have even considered whether male and female traits have different effects in elections

for different levels of office, but found that male traits are prioritized across local, state, and national levels of office (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b, Rosenwasser and Dean 1989).

These stereotypes often overlap with stereotypes about political parties. Winter (2010) asked respondents to list the reasons why they liked or disliked the Democratic or Republican party and found that male traits were more likely the reason that respondents supported Republicans or disliked Democrats, and female traits the reason for supporting Democrats and disliking Republicans. According to Costa and Schaffner (2018), gender did not impact assessments of Democratic representatives, but Republican women were viewed as having more competence, integrity, and representation of their constituents' interests than their male counterparts. Moreover, Dolan and Lynch (2014) found that in House races where Republican women were facing Democratic men, respondents who held stronger gender trait stereotypes were more likely to support the Republican woman, who benefitted from assumptions of honesty.

The last two studies indicated that trait stereotypes may benefit female Republicans, and still others have argued that trait stereotypes can benefit all female candidates (Kahn 1992, 1994a; Leeper 1991; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Costa and Schaffner 2018). In Kahn's 1994a study, while respondents consistently assessed female candidates as possessing more female traits, they did not always perceive male candidates as possessing male traits. This can be an advantage when the female traits the women are assumed to possess are positive. For instance, a female candidate was considered more compassionate than an equivalent male candidate, but the man was not deemed a stronger leader (Kahn 1994a).

However, some studies have noted that trait stereotypes do not impact support of female candidates as much as other factors (Dolan 2010). Gitelson and Gitelson (1980) found that, when presented with data about fictional candidates after an election, respondents judged candidates based on the outcome of the election more than on their gender, suggesting that gender could simply be a less salient cue than other factors. Hayes (2011) supported this finding, noting that party stereotypes provided stronger cues than gender stereotypes in voters' evaluations of 2006 Senate candidates. Democratic candidates were viewed as more compassionate and empathetic than their Republican counterparts, regardless of gender.

Gender cues are more salient for some voters than others. Kahn (1994a) found that it was much more common for female respondents to rely on gender as a cue in evaluating comparable male and female candidates. Costa and Schaffner (2018) also noted that although male respondents were not impacted by candidate gender, female respondents were more likely to view a representative as possessing more integrity and competence when the representative was female. Moreover, trait stereotypes may have different impacts on candidates based on the partisanship of the respondents assessing them. King and Matland (2003) noted that being female increased support from Democratic and Independent respondents, who saw women as more trustworthy and likely to share their concerns, but decreased support amongst Republicans, who perceived them as lacking strong leadership.

Issue Stereotypes

Like trait stereotypes, people often hold stereotypes about the issue areas men and women are more interested in and capable of handling (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Kahn 1994a; Brown, Heighberger and Shocket 1993; Leeper 1991; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002ab). Traditionally, "male" issues are considered foreign policy, the economy, agriculture, defense, crime and infrastructure, and "female" issues considered health care, poverty, education, the environment, minority rights, and child-related issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Bystrom 1995; Koch 1999; Sapiro 1981; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). According to many researchers, these issue stereotypes can be disadvantageous to female candidates running for local, state, and national offices (Brown, Heighberger and Shocket 1993; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). Across all levels of office, respondents considered "male" issues more important than "female" issues, indirectly disadvantaging female candidates, whom voters deem more competent in female areas and less so in male areas. Smith, Paul and Paul (2007) found that, although gender had a less significant impact in Senate races, issue stereotypes meaningfully impacted evaluations of presidential candidates to the advantage of male candidates.

However, other researchers have found that gendered issue stereotypes can sometimes benefit female candidates, as female issue stereotypes are more consistently present than male. In a landmark 1981 study, Virginia Sapiro explored the way voters evaluate male and female candidates based on a speech that contained few cues regarding partisanship or specific policy proposals. Sapiro

found that although respondents were more likely to disagree with the female candidate's issue proposals and expect them to result in negative outcomes, the only issues in which candidate gender had a significant impact were "improving our education system," "maintaining honesty and integrity in government," and "dealing with health problems," all of which were issues on which the female candidate was deemed more competent. Kahn also determined that participants viewed women as more competent in areas of education, health, and women's issues, but did not view men as more competent in stereotypical male issue areas, indicating that female stereotypes are more salient and could have a positive impact on female candidates (1994a, 1996).

Moreover, Leeper (1991) noted the potential for female candidates to capitalize on stereotypes by focusing on male issues. In his 1991 study, Leeper found that a female candidate who espouses male issue positions is deemed equally as competent as a male candidate on those issues, but is still privileged in competence on the female policy issues not explicitly mentioned. Anderson, Lewis and Baird (2011) furthermore noted the difficulty that male candidates face when they choose to campaign on female issues. Female voters were no more likely to support male candidates who took on issues deemed important to women, such as sexual assault, and male voters were less likely to support these male candidates. However, the same was not true for female candidates attempting to adopt male issues, according to Dolan (2010). She found that respondents who viewed women as competent in male policy areas were more likely to express support for gender parity in government.

It is also possible that the advantages of issue stereotypes vary by party. Costa and Schaffner (2018) noted that Democratic respondents were more likely to view women as better political leaders than were Republican respondents. According to Dolan and Lynch (2016), Democratic respondents were more likely to view women as better at dealing with female issues and Republican respondents more likely to view men as better at dealing with male issues. The researchers emphasized how the relationship between these gender stereotypes and vote choice differs based not only the partisan affiliation of voters, but of the candidates as well. In House races, gender issue stereotypes impacted vote choice for Republican, but not Democratic women; in Senate races, both issue and trait stereotypes impacted vote choice for Democratic, but not Republican, female candidates; and in gubernatorial contests, voters relied more on issue stereotypes in vote choice for Democratic women, and more on trait stereotypes for Republican women.

Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2009) noted that stereotype usage in assessing Republican female candidates has an overwhelmingly negative effect. Although voters perceive Democratic women as more competent than men on education issues, voters do not deem Republican women any more capable than men in this area. Moreover, Republican women are deemed less competent than their male counterparts in issues of crime, thus stereotypes serve only to act against them. Dolan and Lynch (2014) came to a similar finding. They noted that gender trait stereotypes worked to the advantage of Republican women when facing a Democratic male opponent for the House, because they were assumed to have more compassion and other positive female traits. However, when it came to issue assumptions, stereotyped perceptions worked against Republican women.

In support of the notion that stereotype usage and impacts differ by party, Dolan (2010) described a "sex superiority" effect in which certain people view one sex as more competent in all issue areas. For female and Democratic respondents, this was typically privileging female candidates, and for male and Republican respondents, this often privileged male candidates. Dolan (2004a) also found that Democratically identifying respondents were more likely to mention female issues in their assessments of candidates of their party than were Republican identifying respondents. The same did not hold true for male issue stereotypes, implying that female issue stereotypes may hold a greater impact on candidate evaluations than male issue stereotypes.

Party may not be the only factor impacting the use of gender issue stereotypes. Dolan (2004a) also found that male respondents were more likely to mention male issues when evaluating candidates than were female respondents. Another study by Brown, Heighberger and Shocket (1993) conversely concluded that men were less likely to rely on gender issue stereotypes than women, but this study's sample size was much more limited than that of Dolan. In another study, Dolan (2004b) noted that the type of race may also impact the public's reliance on issue stereotypes as a cue. She found that in Senate elections, voters who prioritized female issues were more likely to support female candidates, but in House elections, a respondent's feeling about the women's movement was the only variable correlated with voting for a female candidate. Fox and Oxley (2003) also suggested that level of office plays a role. They found that women were less likely to run for offices that heavily focused on male issues, and, beginning in 1990, were more likely to run for offices focused on female issues. In this way, the perpetuation

of gender stereotypes may not only influence who gets elected, but who chooses to run at all.

The choice of female candidates to run only for offices that privilege female issues may reflect the finding from Iyengar et al. (1997) that female candidates benefit electorally when their races are focused on female issues. In an experimental study, when a political race between a male and female candidate focused on education and jobs, the female candidate won; when each candidate focused on his or her gender's stereotypical issue strengths, the race was a standoff; and when the race focused on crime and immigration, the male candidate won. Looking at exit-poll data, Schaffner (2005) found that level of office can similarly impact female voters: when races focused more on women's issues, female voters were more likely to vote Democratic. There was no significant impact on men's vote choices.

Issue stereotypes are just that—stereotypes—as they do not accurately reflect the messages that female candidates voice in their campaigns. Dolan (2005) found that the issues on which male and female candidates focused were much more similar than they were different, overwhelmingly holding the same issues of primary concern. The only difference was the addition of some women's issues on which female candidates focused, but which male candidates ignored. However, as stereotypes continue to inform voters in spite of their inaccuracy and unreliability, it is important to consider them in evaluating equal portrayals of male and female candidates.

A recent study, however, suggested that issue stereotypes may be less salient than they once were. Based on a two-wave panel study during the 2010 elections, Dolan (2014b) noted that respondents were only slightly more likely to

rate female candidates as better at female issues and men better at male issues. Dolan concluded that stereotypes were not generally linked to candidate assessments or vote choice, and that a candidate's party is a much more significant influencer than his/her gender (2014ab). This builds on existing research suggesting that party trumps gender in political evaluations, and further indicates that stereotypes may be losing their salience in a growing climate of gender fluidity and increased female representation in politics.

Ideology Stereotypes

Besides influencing voters' impressions of the issue areas in which candidates would be best equipped, gender stereotypes have been found to influence perceptions of candidates' partisan and ideological stances. Many studies have found that respondents rely on gender to assume candidates' ideological positions, with women of both parties presumed to be more liberal than their male counterparts (Koch 2000, 2002; King and Matland 2003; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009; Dolan 2014b; McDermott 1997, 1998; Kahn and Gordon 1997). Some research has found that this gender ideology stereotyping can be used differently, and can differentially impact, female candidates of different parties.

Jeffrey Koch (2002) found that respondents' levels of political awareness influenced the assumptions they made about female Republican candidates' ideology positions, but not those of Democratic candidates. Koch posited that this phenomenon could be explained by the clashing cues that "female" and "Republican" provide, as "the contradictory nature of these two pieces of information attenuate the impact of candidate gender on impression formation"

(Koch 2002, 460). For Democratic women, party and gender provide compatible cues, allowing respondents of both high and low levels of political awareness to make reasonable assumptions about a candidate's ideology. Republican women, however, confuse candidates with their seemingly contradictory identities, and make voters of varying levels of political awareness differentially able to evaluate their ideological positions. Dolan (2004ab) came to a similar conclusion when she found that candidate sex impacted respondents' issue assessments of Democratic candidates, but not their Republican counterparts. "[B]ecause the sex and party stereotypes are consistent," voters can more easily apply stereotypes and build a comprehensive assessment of Democratic female candidates' issues of focus (Dolan 2004a, 214). Respondents relied on more female stereotypes in assessing Democratic women than men, but this difference was only apparent for Republican candidates in one of the six election years she examined, indicating unequal stereotype reliance based on a candidate's gender (Dolan 2004b). In a 2010 survey, Dolan (2014) also concluded that gender stereotypes did not impact voters' views of Republican female candidates, suggesting that their conflicting cues prevent effective stereotyped assessments by voters.

Some studies have suggested that these differences in stereotype use can harm female Republican candidates. King and Matland (2003) found that the perception that female candidates were less conservative than their male counterparts translated into negative electoral impacts on female Republicans. Being a woman increased the support a candidate received from Democrats and Independents, but decreased support amongst Republicans. Ekstrand and Eckert (1981) also noted that both Republican and Democratic respondents were more

likely to support a liberal candidate when the candidate was female, and less likely to support the conservative candidate when that candidate was female. Gimenez et al. (2016) noted how the "double bind" facing female politicians, of struggling to establish themselves both as strong leaders and as feminine, has lessened overall, but less so for Republican women. In their study on precinct-level elections in a Republican-dominated state, the scholars found that female candidates were more likely to mention their families and invoke traditional gender roles as homemakers and mothers, yet these appeals to traditional femininity hurt the candidates electorally.

One notable study suggested that stereotypes can benefit Republican women. Koch (2000) noted that gender stereotypes increase the ideological distance between the average citizen and Democratic women candidates, but reduce the distance between the average citizen and female Republicans. In other words, assuming that the average citizen is moderate, the cues given by "female" and "Democrat" are compounding, making female Democrats seem significantly more liberal than the average citizen. The cues given by "female" and "Republican," however, work to cancel each other out, bringing Republican female candidates seemingly closer to the average citizen's ideological position. This may be to the advantage of Republican women, who can draw in more support based on their assumed ideological alignment. In fact, in Koch's study, this phenomenon did translate into electoral advantages, as the impact of gender stereotypes on Democratic women reduced their chances of vote support, while they increased the chances of electoral support for Republican female candidates. The dataset used in this study came from 1988-1992, thus the contrast between the findings of this

study and all others suggest that its findings could be outdated and warped by 1992's unique climate of female candidate support.

Whichever group holds the advantage, previous research indicates that the use of gender stereotypes in forming candidate assessments cannot be presumed equal, as these stereotypes may be relied upon more heavily by certain portions of the electorate. This differential use of stereotypes may not only vary by respondent party as aforementioned, but also by respondent gender. Ekstrand and Eckert (1981) found that male respondents did not use candidate sex as a cue in making assessments, but female respondents were more likely to support a liberal-leaning candidate when that candidate was a woman. Moreover, stereotyping could vary based on candidate incumbency status. Kathleen Dolan (2004a) found that Democratic female challengers were viewed as more liberal than their male counterparts, but Democratic incumbents were viewed as less so. Dolan also noted that stereotypes were not used to assess female Republicans overall, but Republican incumbent women were viewed as less conservative than men.

Historically, women have been more likely to run as Democrats than as Republicans—between 1917 and 2019, 247 female Congressional representatives were Democrats compared to only 118 Republicans (Congressional Research Service 2018, ii). However, the ideological stereotypes on which voters rely do not present an accurate portrait of all female candidates' beliefs, and respondents' political knowledge is another factor that influences stereotype reliance. McDermott (1997) found that voters with the least amount of political knowledge were in fact the most likely to rely on gender as a cue in assessing candidates. This disputes the likely outdated theory proposed by Stokes and Miller (1966) that voters

pay more attention to races with female candidates because of their novel nature, which would allow them to absorb more information and suggest that female candidates truly are more liberal. A more recent study by Lawless (2004) did not find evidence that higher levels of political information decreased respondents' reliance on stereotypes, yet it remains evident that the assumption that female candidates are liberal derives from stereotypes rather than heightened attention paid to female candidates' races.

Intersecting Stereotypes

All three areas of gendered stereotype categories can intersect in voters' evaluations of political candidates, as evidenced by Huddy and Terkildsen's 1993a study. In comparing the impact of trait stereotypes and ideological stereotypes on candidate assessments, the authors found that trait stereotypes had a greater impact on voters' evaluations of candidates' areas of issue competence than did ideological stereotypes. Additionally, male traits increased candidates' perceived competence on more issues than did female traits. Moreover, Sanbonmatsu (2002b) argued that voters have a "baseline gender preference" to support either male or female candidates, and this preference is based on gender trait, belief, and issue stereotypes, in addition to the gender of the voter.

Candidates can deploy both male and female trait and issue stereotypes in order to send messages to voters about the way they wish to be perceived. For example, in Hillary Clinton's 2008 bid for president, her campaign took efforts to position Clinton as tough, rather than feminine, and to draw attention away from her history of women's issue advocacy (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 114, 117).

However, use of masculine stereotypes did not have the effect Clinton intended, instead telling voters that Clinton was too aggressive and ambitious (Ibid, 137). In particular, by changing her messaging strategies throughout the campaign to emphasize or deemphasize her femaleness at different moments, Clinton faced the stereotypical criticism of women as emotionally unstable and changeable (Ibid, 139). Although candidates can attempt to utilize gender stereotypes as tools to shape their image, this example illuminates the persistence of certain stereotypes and the difficulty candidates can face in subverting them. Another way candidates can use gender to their advantage is through campaign focuses. According to Herrnson, Lay and Stokes, (2003) women can benefit from running on campaigns centered on their gender.

Another set of stereotypes on which voters rely in making assessments of candidates is race. Historically, Black voters have overwhelmingly supported Democratic candidates, so the ideology stereotype has developed that Black candidates are more liberal than their White counterparts (McDermott 1998; Schneider and Bos 2011). Hand in hand with these ideological stereotypes come issue stereotypes about Black candidates, whom voters perceive as better able to help poor and minority groups (McDermott 1998).

As for trait stereotypes, experimental studies have found that White voters view Black and Hispanic candidates as less competent but more compassionate than White candidates (Sigelman et al. 1995). The results of a 2011 study comparing students' perceptions of "politicians" to "Black politicians" indicated that Black politicians are more often described as opinionated, passionate, and vocal, and less often described as educated, powerful leaders compared to politicians in general.

Though deemed less prestigious and accomplished, Black politicians were more likely to be described as honest and empathetic than general, non-raced politicians. The study also found that respondents in the study viewed Black politicians as more competent in areas of minority issues (i.e. civil rights, affirmative action, and race relations), welfare, unemployment, and urban problems. On the other hand, general "politicians" were more likely to be described as adept at issues regarding the economy, national security, terrorism, and education (Schneider and Bos 2011). Much like the ways issue stereotypes can disadvantage female candidates, these assumptions can harm candidates of color in races where the latter group of issues forms the cornerstone of debate.

These racialized stereotypes can impact vote choice, as the scholars of this study noted, using survey data to compare perceptions of and support for the candidates in the 2008 Democratic primary. The study presented respondents with a list of adjectives and asked them to select those that they thought most described each group. The researchers noted that both female candidates and candidates of color are typically deemed more honest than White male candidates, and hypothesized that these stereotypes would affect electoral outcomes. Indeed, they found that when choosing between Barack Obama and John Edwards, the White male candidate, voters were more likely to rely on honesty assessments, but when comparing Obama to Hillary Clinton, they used judgements of leadership and intelligence. The researchers suggested that, because both women and minorities are stereotyped as honest, voters turn to other trait stereotypes in attempting to distinguish between female and minority candidates (Schneider and Bos 2011). However, when dealing with intersecting identities, it is impossible to separate a

candidate's race from his/her gender or other marginalized identities. In my study, this becomes relevant when examining candidates like Stacey Abrams, a Black female candidate, and Kyrsten Sinema, a bisexual woman.

Research Considerations

It is important to consider the experimental stimulus involved in collecting data on stereotyped perceptions of political candidates. For example, Dolan (2014a) noted that respondents were more likely to perceive trait and issue differences between real male and female candidates in contemporary elections than between abstract "women and men," calling into question the results of other studies that hinge on fictionalized candidate assessments. Perhaps this could indicate a social desirability bias hindering respondents from expressing their stereotyped views, which would mean that people hold even stronger stereotypes than studies have been able to identify. However, Dolan and Lynch (2014) also concluded that gender stereotypes may influence abstract assessments of candidates, but not actually impact vote choice. This could indicate that experimental stimuli do not accurately measure attitudes that impact electoral decisions.

Another body of literature that provides a look into the forces behind candidate evaluations and vote choice is political neuroscience. In *Talking to Our Selves* (2015), John M. Doris proposed that the justifications behind a person's behavior are often not the actual reasons the person acted in that way. Instead, incongruent parallel processes occur that obscure a person's true motivations from themselves. One such example he provided was that of Ballot Order Effects—

candidates listed higher on a ballot are more likely to receive votes, yet voters would not cite ballot order as the reason behind their vote (Doris 2018, 1). This phenomenon, known as post hoc confabulation, describes the human tendency to create justifications for one's actions after the fact, when in fact many decisions are made automatically rather than analytically (Ibid, 13). Other scholars like Jonathan Haidt have similarly argued that "intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second" (Haidt 2013, 281). If this is the case, evaluations that voters make about candidates may be driven by more innate qualities or stereotyped assumptions, rather than the self-reported reasons they provide. It is important to keep this in mind when examining voter behavior, stereotypes, and candidate assessments.

GENDER IN THE MEDIA

Voter assessments of candidates are often shaped by the information voters receive through news media consumption. Previous research has noted the powerful effect the media can have on shaping political opinions (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 9; Iyengar 2017). Through agenda-setting—signaling what issues are most important—and priming—dictating the standards on which the public should rely when making political evaluations—the media is able to shape what issues and dimensions of issues the public considers (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 11; Iyengar 2017, 61-2). In 2008, for instance, studies found that the media focus on the economic crisis drove voters to support Obama rather than McCain under the assumption that Republicans favor the very business interests that had caused the crash (Iyengar 2017, 62). Issue framing, another media effect, shapes the way the public thinks about and understands the subjects that have been put on

the agenda (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 11; Iyengar 2017, 63). Journalists present information through certain frames that make the topics easier for audiences to understand (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 11). With agenda-setting, priming, and framing working in conjunction, the media is able to dictate what issues are thought about and how they are thought about. This power to shape conversations is crucial in elections, when much of the public relies on the media to receive information about potential candidates. The media can thus determine what information the public receives about particular candidates, and what standards people use to assess them.

Historically, journalists have overlooked female candidates in their coverage of political campaigns, with male candidates receiving more media coverage than their female opponents (Braden 1996; Fridkin and Kenney 2014; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1996; Lühiste and Banducci 2016; Norris 1997). Fridkin and Kenney (2014) found that news coverage privileges male candidates in the number of paragraphs covering them, the prominence of this coverage, and the degree of accuracy with which the media reflects candidates' campaign messages. Not all studies have witnessed this pattern of unequal coverage benefitting male candidates, however. Some research has come to the contradictory conclusion that female candidates receive equal or even more coverage compared to their male opponents (Bode and Hemmings 2012; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2001; Carroll and Schreiber 1997; Devitt 2002; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Meeks 2013; Smith 1997). Since most research uses a case study approach to compare the quantity of coverage that male and female candidates receive, it is possible that this methodological limitation could explain the conflicting data.

Reporters can promulgate stereotyped notions of traditionally male and female personality traits by portraying male and female candidates through a lens of stereotyped bias. The media often focuses on female traits in relation to female candidates, rather than accurately reflecting their campaign messages that focus on male as well as female traits (Kahn 1996; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). Gender, appearance, children, and marital status—all personal traits associated with women—have also historically appeared more frequently in media coverage of female candidates than their male counterparts (Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson 2001, 2003; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Jamieson 1995). However, the media continues to privilege male traits overall. Both Meeks (2013) and Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) noted more discussion of male than female traits in the media, and Atkeson and Krebs (2008) found that races with two male candidates had more discussion of male traits overall than races that featured a female candidate. The media's overall focus on male traits, particularly in relation to male candidates, could reflect a tendency to rely on male traits in candidate evaluations, as men have historically been those running for office.

However, some recent studies have indicated that the gendered trait frames on which reporters rely may be waning. Major and Coleman (2008) noted more mentions of a woman's gender, but not of her appearance, in the 2003 Louisiana gubernatorial run-off. Looking at the 2008 primaries, Lawrence and Rose (2010) found more mentions of female candidates' families, but no greater focus on their appearance and emotions than male candidates.

It is unclear whether this gendered trait coverage impacts female candidates positively or negatively. Kahn (1992) noted how incumbent men and women

benefit differently from positive gender trait stereotypes in media coverage, with men presented as stronger leaders, but women viewed as compassionate and honest. In 2014, Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney found that female senators received more positive trait coverage than their male counterparts. However, Hayes (2011) found that both male and female candidates performed better when presented with male personality traits. Schlehofer, Casad, Bligh, and Grotto (2011) found that positive media coverage can increase perceptions of female senators' warmth and competence, indicating the power that media framing can have.

Besides a difference in the traits attributed to women and men, research has found evidence of a difference in the amount of attention given to traits, as opposed to issues, in the media. Male candidates often receive more issue-based coverage than female candidates, which can disadvantage female candidates by depriving voters of information on their policy positions and restricting them to stereotyped assumptions (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994ab, 1996; Aday and Devitt 2001; Heldman, Carroll and Olson 2005; Devitt 2002; Wasburn and Wasburn 2011). Despite female candidates' attempts to emphasize issue positions in their campaigns, their media coverage does not reflect this effort (Kahn and Gordon 1997; Kahn 1994b).

On the other hand, some studies have indicated that the quantity of trait and issue coverage is more equal among male and female candidates (Meeks 2013; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Hayes 2011; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson, 2001; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2003; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Smith 1997; Fowler and Lawless 2009). However, some of these studies revealed other ways in which media coverage might be working against

female candidates, like focusing on male traits overall (Meeks 2013; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Atkeson and Krebs 2008) and describing female candidates with more female than male traits (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). According to Devitt (2002), female gubernatorial candidates received less issue coverage and more personal coverage than their male counterparts overall, but some of these differences disappeared when comparing individual campaigns rather than looking at the aggregate.

When female candidates do receive issue coverage, this coverage often reflects stereotypical female issues (Kahn 1996; Kahn and Gordon 1997; Carroll and Schreiber 1997; Kahn 1992; Lawless 2004). Kahn (1992) found that the media presented incumbent men as better at dealing with military issues and women as better at issues of health. According to several scholars, despite an increased focus on male issues and traits in their campaign advertisements, female candidates continue to receive less male issue and trait media coverage than their male counterparts (Kahn 1996; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). The media fails to accurately reflect the messages on which female candidates focus their campaigns, but does, however, faithfully portray male candidates' messages (Kahn 1996). On the other hand, Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson (2001, 2003) found that both female and male candidates focus more on female issues than male in their advertising and online campaigns. These researchers noted, however, that media mentions of female issues in relation to female candidates increased between the primary and general election, while that of male candidates decreased.

The press also continues to cover male issues in relation to male candidates more often than female candidates (Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). Across candidate

genders, however, Meeks (2013) found that both male and female candidates in the 2008 presidential election received more male than female issue and trait coverage overall. Female candidates may additionally suffer more from broad generalizations than male candidates. Media coverage of the 103rd Congress revealed a tendency of news outlets to focus on female candidates' shared issues or actions, rather than their individual stances (Carroll and Schreiber 1997).

One study suggested a more positive media landscape. In examining coverage of 20 female world leaders and their closest male counterparts, Norris (1997) found that the press gave a nuanced picture of different leaders' personalities and issue priorities for both men and women. The inclusion of international news sources alongside U.S.-based outlets could explain the difference between this finding and those of numerous other studies that suggest less representative issue coverage for female candidates.

When female candidates' issue positions are covered, the candidates themselves are less frequently quoted directly or with evidence to support their positions (Aday and Devitt 2001; Lawrence and Rose 2010). Fowler and Lawless (2009) found that although female candidates received slightly more coverage of their issue positions than men, coverage of male candidates was almost twice as likely to mention concrete actions, while women were more likely to receive personal trait coverage.

Another area of coverage disparity is horse race coverage, focused on the competitive aspects of the race and viability assessments of the candidates. Studies have concluded that female candidates receive more horse race coverage than their male counterparts (Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005;

Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994b, 1996; Smith 1997; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Smith 1997). Scholars have not only found that horse race coverage is more common for female candidates, but also that this horse race coverage tends to disadvantage female candidates by assessing their viability as a candidate in a negative light (Kahn 1994ab, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Lawrence and Rose 2010). Horse race coverage and corresponding candidate viability assessments are thus crucial indicators of the media coverage a candidate is receiving and the message it may be sending to voters.

Some research has tempered this notion of horse race coverage that disadvantages female candidates. According to Kahn, (1994b) the differential quantity of horse race coverage was apparent for Senate, but not gubernatorial, candidates. Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson (2003) found no difference in the viability assessments of male and female candidates in the 2000 general election, and Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) came to the same conclusion regarding elections in America, Canada, and Australia in 2004 and 2006.

Evidence is inconclusive on whether these differences in media coverage of male and female candidates have the potential to negatively impact female candidates electorally. However, in Kahn's 1994 experiment, Senate candidates who received prototypical male media coverage were more likely to win their race (1994a).

There is some evidence that male and female reporters may cover male and female candidates differently. For instance, male reporters used the issue frame less frequently, and the personal frame more so, in covering Elizabeth Dole than her male opponents (Aday and Devitt 2001). Reporting on Senate elections between

1982 and 1986, female journalists were more likely not only to cover female candidates, but also to mention female issues in their coverage of women (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). In 1996, Kahn again found that female reporters were more likely to emphasize female issues and traits than were male reporters. Liebler and Smith (1997) concluded that female reporters were slightly more likely than male reporters to cite female sources and use professional titles when referring to women, but a larger proportion of male reporters' sources were female.

Building on the foundation of previous research, this study seeks to fill the gaps in stereotypical media coverage of candidates based on party and gender. Although there is no consensus on whether potential differences in coverage harm or help female Republican candidates, it is clear that female candidates are subjected to different stereotyped assumptions based on their party and these assumptions may be reflected in media coverage. This study seeks to elaborate on other scholars' work and apply it to the unique political climate of the 2018 midterm elections, while also fleshing out the role that partisan differences may play in gendered media coverage. It also seeks to examine more explicitly the impact of content creators' gender and partisan identities on coverage of candidates.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY

Women in Politics

The differential treatment of and assumptions about male and female political candidates are rooted in a long history of female disenfranchisement in the U.S. In the early days of American politics, the assumption that women were not fit for the political arena was so widely accepted that only one colony explicitly prohibited women from voting by law (Dolan 2004b, 31). By the American Revolution, activists were voicing a desire for female political participation—Abigail Adams even sent a letter to her husband John at the 1776 Continental Congress imploring him to "Remember the Ladies" (MacManus 2014, 88). However, it was not until 1848 when American women organized in Seneca Falls, New York, at the first women's rights convention, and in 1866, the American Equal Rights Association was formed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (MacManus 2014, 88).

Female candidates began throwing their names in the political arena, at first with limited success. When Stanton ran for Congress as the first ever female candidate in 1866, she received a mere 24 votes (Dolan 2004b, 32). 1872 brought the formation of the Equal Rights Party, which put forth unsuccessful female candidates for president and for local positions across the country (Dolan 2004b, 32). Although some states allowed women to vote and female candidates were able to win local positions, it was not until 1916 that a woman was elected to Congress, with Jeannette Rankin earning a spot in Montana's delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives (Dolan 2004b, 34).

Four years later, the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, which gave women across the nation the right to vote (MacManus 2014, 90). The right to vote did not immediately imply the right to run for elected office, however. It took an additional 22 years before every state had removed gender-based restrictions on eligibility to run for office (Dolan 2004b, 35). Moreover, the constitutional amendment did not eliminate barriers to women running for office, as they continued to face a resistant public and party system (Dolan 2004b, 36). In the early days of female candidates running for Congress, it seemed as if widows whose husbands had died in office were the only women that voters and party leaders were comfortable accepting (Fox 2014, 193). These widows won their elections at a much higher rate than other female candidates—between 1916 and 1964, their electoral success rate was 88 percent, compared to 14 among other female candidates (Ibid). By the 1960s and '70s, women began successfully converting community civic engagement into political activism and achieving electoral success (Ibid). From 1970 onward, women's representation in the political arena has spiked significantly. 1992, considered the first "Year of the Woman," saw a then-record number of female candidates elected to the House and Senate, but this growth has not consistently continued in subsequent years (Fox 2014, 192).

An ongoing issue that perpetuates gender disparities in government is the comparatively low number of female candidates who choose to run for office. In a survey of 2,100 college students, 20 percent of men said they had considered running for office "many times," compared to only 10 percent of women, and 63 percent of women said they had never considered it, compared to only 43 percent of men (Lawless and Fox 2013, 2). The researchers identified five factors that

contribute to this gender gap in political ambition from a young age: parental socialization, exposure to political discourse, organized sport participation and competitiveness, external encouragement, and self-perception of qualifications (Ibid, 6). Similarly, the 2011 Citizen Political Ambition Study, which surveys potential political candidates, concluded that women are less interested in running for office because they receive less encouragement to do so, do not perceive their qualifications as sufficient, and say they are responsible for taking care of children and their homes (Fox 2014, 207-8). Moreover, many women have voiced concern about lacking the fundraising abilities necessary to win an election (Anzia and Berry 2011, 479). A further hurdle for women to face is the advantage of incumbency—as incumbents typically win reelection, and more men are already in office, female candidates are confronted with additional odds against their success (Cook 1998, 71).

Although in recent years, the gap in women running has improved among Democrats, a dramatic disparity remains within the Republican party. Between 1970 and 2012, the number of female Democratic House candidates who won their primaries increased from 15 to 118, whereas that of female Republicans only shifted from 10 to 48 (Fox 2014, 191). With more female candidates running, more women have been elected to represent their parties, resulting in a dramatic shift from 3.9 to 28.9 percent of Democratic winners being female, and a less dramatic increase from 1.7 to 8.1 percent of Republican winners being female (Ibid). Party is not the only line along which numbers of female candidates differ substantially. It is important to note that the vast majority of female candidates elected to office, historically and still today, have been wealthy White women. Though gender-based

restrictions have improved over time, socioeconomic status and race remain powerful indicators of a person's chances of running and being elected.

Recent data suggest that the odds of election have significantly improved for female candidates. Female and male candidates now have the same success rate in general elections, and female candidates do not have greater difficulty fundraising than their male counterparts (Fox 2014, 196; Anzia and Berry 2011, 479). However, as recently as 2000, 42 percent of survey respondents said that they would prefer a male president, compared to 31 percent preferring a woman (Dolan 2004b, 44). In 2016, 18 percent of adults saw men as more emotionally fit more politics, and in 2008, 21 percent thought men were better leaders than women (Smith, Davern, Freese and Hout 2018; Anzia and Berry 2011, 479). A 2014 Pew survey found that about two-thirds of Americans still believe that it is easier for a man to be elected to a high political position than it is for a woman (Pew Research Center 2015). 38 percent of respondents attributed this to women being held to higher standards and 37 percent posited that many Americans are not yet comfortable electing a woman to higher office.

Gender gaps in representation continue to persist when examining data on a regional level. For the states in my analysis, before the 2018 midterm elections, Georgia had only ever elected seven female Representatives and one female Senator, and both Tennessee and Arizona had elected five Representatives and no female Senators (Congressional Research Service 2018). Neither Georgia nor Tennessee had ever elected a female governor, though Arizona had elected four (Carroll 2016, 449). Based on these historical state-to-state differences, I expect to

find remaining differences in the media viability assessments and eventual electoral success of female candidates.

1992: The "Year of the Woman"

1992 was dubbed the "Year of the Woman," as various contextual factors encouraged women to run for office and allowed many of them to achieve electoral success. The confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, despite Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment, sparked open discussion of the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and prompted the political engagement of female candidates and voters alike (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994; Braden 1996, 120). More women than ever ran for office that year, and not only did more women run, but more women won. In fact, the number of female House representatives nearly doubled, with the addition of 24 new representatives bringing the number from 29 to 47 (Carroll and Schreiber 1997, 133). This success was called by Witt, Paget, and Matthews the "Anita Hill effect on women's political chances" (1994, 5). Other than the Thomas appointment, factors such as the reapportionment of House seats after the 1990 census, strong anti-incumbent sentiment, and large number of experienced female candidates contributed to making 1992 the Year of the Woman (Ibid, 8). However, according to some, the year was less a Year of the Woman and more a Year of Opportunity, as the vast majority of the female candidates who won did not have to face incumbents (Braden 1996, 119). The large number of open seats—a byproduct of redistricting and retirements in addition to other factors—allowed for widespread success among the many women who ran for office (Ibid).

The historic nature of this year was reflected in the media, bringing a groundbreaking amount of press coverage to female candidates (Carroll and Schreiber 1997, 133). Even the number of female reporters increased. Nearly half of the White House press corps was female in 1992, and the highest-ranking political reporter—chief political correspondent for *The New York Times*—was a woman for the first time ever (Braden 1996, 180). The female candidates running may have been able to use this gendered coverage to their advantage by arguing that they would be more effective in addressing the issues at hand, thus turning a focus on their stereotypical differences into a strength (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994). Not only were female candidates more centered in the political arena, but studies also found that female voters were more psychologically engaged in the election that year than in previous years (Dolan 2004b).

Although this phenomenon remained an exception rather than becoming the new rule for women in politics, it marked an important historical moment comparable to the one the country faced in 2018. The midterm elections came on the heels of Brett Kavanaugh's appointment to the Supreme Court, in spite of Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against him of sexual misconduct. More women than ever ran for Congressional office, with a historic 257 female candidates seeking positions (Lu and Zernike 2018). The 235 female House nominees eclipsed the previous record of 167 in 2016, and the 22 female Senate nominees surpassed the 2012 record of 18 (Dittmar 2018). Would these women achieve the same electoral successes as their 1992 predecessors?

Female Voters

Since gaining suffrage, female voters have exercised their political voices at even higher rates than their male counterparts. In every election since 1980, female voter registration and turnout rates have consistently surpassed those of men (MacManus 2014, 94, 100; Center for American Women and Politics 2017).

Not only is there a gender gap in voting numbers, but there has historically also been a gender gap in partisan voting, with more men typically voting Republican and more women supporting Democrats, ever since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 (Carroll 2014, 128). The stark differences between Reagan and his opponent Jimmy Carter's policy positions seemed to divide voters along gender lines, with men supporting Reagan's philosophy of decreased government spending and increased military might to challenge the Soviet Union (Ibid, 128). Societal developments, such as higher divorce rates, women's gains in the workforce, and the growth of the contemporary women's movement, also pushed women to increasingly differentiate their political stances from those of men (Ibid, 127). The gender gap has remained to this day, although some scholars argue that it is more reflective of changing voting patterns among men than those of women (Ibid, 131).

This gender gap varies in intensity by candidate party and gender, with female voters more likely than men to support female Democratic candidates, and less likely than men to support female Republican candidates (Carroll 2014, 133). The gender gap is typically largest when the Democratic candidate is female and the Republican candidate is male; the opposite is true when the gender-party pairings are reversed, as is revealed by examining races in the early 1990s (Cook

1998, 68). The Republican woman-Democratic man race with the largest gender gap that year saw female voters supporting the Democratic man significantly more than male voters (Ladd 1997, 121).

Scholars trying to explain the gender gap in voting have offered four main theories. The first "compassion" explanation argues that women are still expected to take on more caregiving roles than men, and thus focus on issues traditionally associated with the Democratic party, supporting education and health care access and shying away from military conflict (Carroll 2014, 137). The second explanation proposes that the feminist movement has influenced the issues that female voters prioritize and the way they view themselves and the world around them (Ibid, 138-9). A third explanation is economic, focusing on social services programs. This theory argues that the gender pay gap results in more impoverished women reliant on public services, and many of those not in poverty work in human services job sectors, thus relying on public services either as a source of support or of income (Ibid, 139-40). The final theory points to differences in women's and men's opinions on the role that government should play in daily life, with women favoring greater government intervention and men seeking cutbacks (Ibid, 140-1).

It is worth noting that this gender gap in voting was particular large in 1992, the "Year of the Woman," and in certain other elections such as a 1990 California race featuring two female candidates (Cook 1998, 70). This suggests that the voting gender gap may be exaggerated by a particular focus on issues of gender in a given race or year.

Women in the Press

As women have increasingly entered the labor force in America, journalists have seen an increase in the numbers of women within their ranks. While only one-fifth of journalists were female in 1971, by 1982, that number had risen to one-third (Weaver 1997, 23). In the subsequent 10 years, however, the percentage of female journalists remained unchanged, indicating dwindling growth in the gender parity of newsrooms (Ibid, 23). The percentage of female journalists also varies significantly between news media—in 1992, radio had the lowest percentage of women, with only 29% of radio reporters female, and news magazines had the highest, 45.9% female (Ibid). The two forms of media I will examine in this study, television and newspapers, also differed substantially. The percentage of female reporters in television rose from 10.7% in 1971 to 33.1% in 1982, and then dropped again to 24.8% in 1992; that of women in daily newspapers rose somewhat more consistently from 22.4% in 1971 to 34.4% in 1982 and 33.9% in 1992 (Ibid).

Historically, women have not had the freedom to cover the range of issues that men have. Early female journalists had fewer limitations on their coverage, even being allowed entry to the Capitol press galleries until the number of female reporters had grown sufficiently and a ban was enforced in 1879 (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994, 188). From then on until the 1960s, female journalists were largely delegated to society or homemaking reports (Mills 1997, 42; Braden 1996, 173). There were some notable exceptions to this norm. Eleanor Roosevelt insisted that only female journalists report on her news conferences, though this had the effect of pushing women into coverage of national, regional, and local First Ladies' social lives and actions—stories that were considered less important and thus bumped to

the back of publications (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994, 190). Additionally, newspapers temporarily opened up to women while men were overseas during World War II (Mills 1997, 42-3). Otherwise, though, women were forced to report on purely "soft issues." The stories that female journalists covered were the antecedents of modern-day feature stories, and influenced the attention the contemporary media pays to the personal lives of political candidates (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994, 190). Over time, women were able to push into coverage beyond the "women's page," driven in part by the emergence of subjects like abortion—a "woman's issue" that was salient in the political arena (Ibid, 192). Still, female journalists had to push their way into newsrooms and convince their editors that they could cover politics. Eleanor Randolph, a *St. Petersburg Times* reporter, attested to being told in 1972 that because she "couldn't smoke cigars in [her] shorts in the back rooms with the boys," she would not be allowed to cover the presidential election (Braden 1996, 175).

Despite an increase in female representation in the media in 1992, gender inequality has persisted in newsrooms to this day. In particular, male reporters receive significantly more bylines, front-page stories, and op-eds than their female counterparts (Ibid, 180-1). In 2017, male journalists still received 62% of byline credits across online, television, and print news sources (Chancellor and Hill 2017, 9). The subject that women are most likely to report on remains "lifestyle news and commentary," with 57% of those stories covered by female reporters, while women cover only 34% of stories about U.S. politics (Ibid, 13).[1]

[1] It is also worth mentioning that, as of 2017, 83.06% of American Society of News Editors members identified as White, indicating the vast racial inequality that persists in newsrooms across the country (Chancellor and Hill 2017, 4).

The presence of women in a newsroom can have a noted difference on which issues are covered and in what manner. Increasing female representation in the media was the driving force behind coverage of the unique issues women face in society, politics, and the workforce. Female reporters convinced editors to run these stories or incorporated the women's movement into whatever beat they had been assigned (Mills 1997, 44).

Besides the influx of female voices in the field of journalism, standards and guidelines for reporting have the power the shape the media discourse around women. In 1977, the Associated Press stylebook told reporters to give women "the same treatment as men in all areas of coverage. Physical descriptions, sexist references, demeaning stereotypes and condescending phrases should not be used" (Beasley 1997, 239). Only in 1995 was it proposed that the *Society of Professional Journalists'* Code of Ethics be updated to explicitly ask journalists to "avoid stereotypes in covering issues of race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation and social status" (Ibid, 237).

Case Studies of Female Candidate Coverage

As early as 1872, female candidates were placing themselves in the political arena and facing harsh media criticism in response. Victoria Woodhull was the first female presidential candidate, challenging the incumbent Ulysses S. Grant. Woodhull received overwhelmingly negative coverage, belittling her viability as a candidate (Finneman 2015). Stories portrayed Woodhull's candidacy as a joke, calling her a "figure of fun" and her nomination "a broad farce" (Ibid, 33), and

focused on her lack of resources, saying that Woodhull and her fellow magazine owners did "not own a dollar's worth of property" (Ibid, 37).

By the time Jeannette Rankin ran for Congress in 1916, as the country's first successful female congressional candidate, standards of journalism had shifted and independent, non-partisan reporting striving for objectivity had become the norm (Ibid, 52). Reports on Rankin's candidacy were mainly positive, praising her as a popular candidate drawing support from "men and women and all parties," and boasting political qualifications in "legislative experience," "hand shaking and speech making" (Ibid, 60-61). Papers also evaluated her chances of success optimistically, with several even quoting a Montana Republican National Committeeman voicing his confidence that she was "certain of election" (Ibid, 59).

Still, the focus remained on her competence in women's issue areas, and included stereotyped coverage of her personal traits, focusing on her sexuality and appearance. For instance, an October 1916 *New York Times* story urged voters to support Rankin: "She cannot, single-headed, make the House beautiful, but a little red hair will go a long way toward it" (Ibid, 70). Moreover, the press harped on Rankin's vote against entering World War I, with *New York Times* headlines such as "One Hundred Speeches Were Made—Miss Rankin, Sobbing, Votes No" (Witt, Paget and Matthews 1994, 186-7). In fact, Rankin was one of 56 representatives who voted against the war, and one of many who cried at the vote (Ibid; Braden 1996, 25). As the only female representative, Rankin was made to be the face of all women.

When Geraldine Ferraro ran as Walter Mondale's vice presidential nominee in 1984, the media faced new terrain in covering a female candidacy post-women's

movement (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994, 198). One common phenomenon in Ferraro's coverage was the focus on her husband as a campaign issue. The Associated Press reported, "John Zaccaro said Wednesday that he will stay in New York...if his wife, Rep. Geraldine Ferraro, is elected vice president. 'I still have to pay the bills,' he explained" (Ibid). Similar coverage was not apparent for other male candidates at the time and reflected a more common theme of presenting women in relation to the men in their lives (Ibid). Ferraro also faced questions of a woman's ability to tackle difficult problems—she was asked if she was "strong enough to push the button" to detonate a bomb, and if she could protect the country despite the fact that "the Soviets might be tempted to take advantage" of her due to her gender (Braden 1996, 109-110). These pointed lines of questioning reveal the ongoing doubts female candidates faced regarding their ability to be strong leaders, and the media's reflection of this broader skepticism.

Elizabeth Dole's bid for the 2000 Republican nomination provides another interesting case study. Heldman, Carroll and Olson (2005) found that the quantity of in-depth coverage that Dole received did not reflect her popularity compared to the other candidates, but Aday and Devitt (2001) concluded that there were no notable differences in coverage quantity between Dole and her opponents. Regardless of coverage quantity, there were evident differences in the quality of Dole's coverage compared to that of her male opponents. Dole appeared most often in articles focusing on the horse race between the candidates, while both Bush and McCain were mostly mentioned in issue-focused articles (Heldman et al. 2005, 322). Moreover, Dole's horse race coverage presented her as a less viable candidate who lacked resources, with about 42% of her coverage mentioning fundraising

struggles (Ibid, 325). Readers were much more likely to find media coverage about Dole's appearance and personality traits than those of her male opponents (Ibid, 324; Aday and Devitt 2001). Dole was also less likely to be quoted directly than her male opponents, and less likely to have her quotes backed up with evidence (Aday and Devitt 2001, 68). However, more often than not, her quotes were supported with evidence, providing inconclusive results on the substance of her quotation coverage (Ibid, 69). Moreover, Dole's gender was the most common focus of in-depth coverage of the candidate, with 63.9% of stories noting her gender and 45.8% using the "first woman" frame (Heldman et al. 2005, 325). According to Heldman et al., the focus on gender over all other campaign aspects communicated "implicitly, if not explicitly, that she was a novelty in the race rather than a strong contender with a good chance of winning" (2005, 332).

2008 offered two salient case studies of women in politics: Sarah Palin, who ran as John McCain's vice presidential candidate, and Hillary Clinton, who ran for the Democratic presidential nomination. Although Palin received more coverage than her male opponent, Joe Biden, most of her coverage dealt with "trivial topics" such as family, appearance, clothing, and personality (Wasburn and Wasburn 2011, 1032; Finneman 2015; Bode and Hemmings 2012).

The media was particularly fascinated with Palin's balance of stereotypically masculine and feminine traits as a self-described "hockey mom" (Finneman 2015, 151). She received widespread criticism for her lack of experience, with the Associated Press even writing that she "has more experience catching fish than dealing with foreign policy or national affairs" (Finneman 2015, 129). Although Palin took a firm stance on many issues in the campaign, including

taxes, military action, foreign policy, abortion, the environment, and education, the media only covered her positions on the last three, all considered female issues (Wasburn and Wasburn 2011, 1036). The only positive press Palin garnered was in terms of her popularity, focusing on her celebrity rather than her substance. At the start of the campaign, the media frequently employed the novelty frame, emphasizing Palin's history-making as the "first woman on a Republican presidential ticket" (Finneman 2015, 152).

With a woman running on each major party presidential ticket, the 2008 election provides an interesting case study comparison. In a study of *The New York Times* coverage of Palin, Clinton, McCain, and Obama, Meeks (2013) surprisingly found that there were no differences in the amount of trait coverage each candidate received. However, both women received less issue coverage than their male counterparts. Moreover, in examining their media coverage over time, Meeks noted that the *Times* coverage became less equal as the race progressed—over the course of the campaign, Clinton received less issue coverage and more novelty coverage, while Palin received less issue and female trait coverage, and more coverage focused on her gender.

Carlin and Winfrey (2009) compared Clinton and Palin through the lens of four popular stereotyped frames of women: sex object, mother, pet, and iron maiden (327). While the media objectified Palin, particularly harping on her beauty pageant past, they saw Clinton as "the antiseductress," dwelling on her choice of pantsuits as a symbol of her maternal nature compared to Palin's vitality (Ibid, 331). Both women suffered from a focus on their motherhood, with journalists questioning Palin's ability to act as both mother and vice president, and framing Clinton as a

nagging adult figure. The "pet" stereotype was employed to paint both women as in need of a man's protection—for Palin, this was McCain, and for Clinton, though this frame was less common, it was her husband Bill. Lastly, because Clinton was overwhelmingly framed with tough, masculine traits, she was less able to "go negative" successfully in campaign rhetoric. Palin's feminine image allowed her to go negative with less criticism from the press (Ibid, 338). The 2008 campaign was also interesting in the media coverage allotted to Palin and Clinton's relationship, which played into "the women's bloc myth" by assuming that female candidates can appeal to women across party lines (Finneman 2015, 140).

It is particularly interesting to compare Palin and Clinton's media coverage, as a female Republican and Democrat running in the same race. However, because of their vastly different personality traits, areas of issue focus, and experience in government, it is impossible to extrapolate based on differences in their coverage. This study seeks to examine this question using more representative and comparable female Republican and Democratic candidates, and to interrogate what, if any, coverage differences remain for candidates across gender and party.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this study, I seek to answer the question: How does media coverage of candidates vary based on gender and party? I will examine differences in both quantity and quality of coverage, looking at differential media treatment of candidates across gender and party lines by outlets of differing partisanships and reporters of different genders.

As my sample, I have selected three highly contested races, which represent the two levels of office that received the most significant media coverage during the midterms—senatorial and gubernatorial races. Incumbency is a powerful factor in shaping election outcomes (Devitt 2002; Dolan 2005), so I chose to only sample races that had no incumbents, eliminating that variable so as to more clearly examine the impact of gender and party on these races. Each race had at least one female candidate, and the races I selected represent each of the possible gender-party matchups—one with a female Democrat vs. a male Republican, one with a female Republican vs. a male Democrat, and one with two female competitors, a female Democrat vs. a female Republican.

The races I selected are: the Georgia gubernatorial race (Democratic woman Stacey Abrams vs. Republican man Brian Kemp); the Tennessee Senate race (Republican woman Marsha Blackburn vs. Democratic man Phil Bredesen); and the Arizona Senate race (Republican woman Martha McSally vs. Democratic woman Kyrsten Sinema). Although these races do not represent every geographical region of the country, I prioritized competitiveness, incumbency, and candidate gender/party breakdowns over geographical diversity, as the former qualities are

more relevant to this study. Moreover, these three "red" states all voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential race, presenting an interesting case study in a year when many candidates and voters viewed the midterm races as a referendum on Trump's presidency (Politico 2016).

I selected publications to sample based on circulation statistics and accessibility through the Nexis Uni database. For mainstream, "centrist" publications, I selected *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the Associated Press, all of which offered significant coverage of these races. The former two publications are among the most widely circulated publications in the U.S., and content from the Associated Press is syndicated in newspapers across the country (Statista 2017).

I also selected the newspaper with the largest circulation in each state that was accessible via the Nexis Uni database: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Tennessean*, and the *Arizona Capitol Times*. Additionally, I looked at television news transcripts from Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC, in order to assess whether partisan and centrist outlets cover female and male candidates differently. Fox News represented my right-leaning source, and MSNBC and CNN left-leaning, although I also tabulated results for left-leaning sources without CNN, as its non-opinion daytime coverage is more mainstream.

I pulled all articles in the time frame from September 1, 2018 through election day, November 6, 2018, to capture the traditional campaigning period. For each news source in which a candidate appeared in over 30 articles during this time frame, I performed a simple random sample of the articles to select 30 for my analysis. For example, I pulled 179 articles from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

that mentioned Stacey Abrams but performed a random sample on those stories so that I only analyzed 30 of them. Before conducting my simple random sample, I removed any duplicate articles from my sampling frame. I used the most recently updated versions of each story on its original source's website at the time of selection. I performed my data analysis on the original source of each article so as to ensure the paragraph breaks were correct. For those articles that were locked on their original source, I used the version accessible through Nexis Uni and guessed where paragraph breaks would have been made. I omitted stories that were not structured as articles, but rather as field notes from campaign rallies, nor did I include stories where a candidate was referenced fewer than three times, except when the article's primary focus was gender. In some cases, there were not 30 articles in which a candidate was mentioned more than three times, resulting in smaller sample sizes.

For print news articles, I examined the entire story, unless the story was made up of several shorter segments—for example, a "Races to Watch" election recap—in which case I examined only the relevant segments. For television news transcripts, I examined the segment of the show related to the candidate, delineating the start and end of segments based on host intros and outros, panels starting and ending, or concluding statements (i.e. "Back to you"; "Up next"; "Thank you for joining us"). If a news transcript included multiple segments with significant coverage of the candidate in question, I coded it twice—once for each segment. I did not include op-eds written by the candidates themselves. I manually coded each of the articles I examined, inputting data into a spreadsheet. To analyze the data, I used STATA, a statistical analysis computer software program.

My sample resulted in a total of 745 articles coded. 458 focused on female candidates, and 287 on male candidates. This can be further broken down by candidate—Abrams was featured in 190 articles, Kemp in 179, Blackburn in 119, Bredesen 108, McSally 72, and Sinema 77. When looking at the sources themselves, 401 articles came from nonpartisan news sources, compared to 228 left-aligned sources (including CNN) and 116 right. However, nonpartisan articles came from six different outlets, while there were only two left-aligned and one right-aligned partisan sources, making the nonpartisan sample more representative than the other two.

I developed measures intended to capture qualitative patterns identified in previous literature such as issue-based coverage, trait stereotypes, ideological assessments, and candidate viability, in addition to quantitative measures of an article's focus on the candidate. For all decision rules and details, see the codebook in the Appendix.

When assessing the article's assessment of a candidate's ideological stance, I only coded based on explicit statements about the ideology of the candidate or his/her supporters. For example, I did not infer ideological positions from issue stances or statements about a candidate's "Trumpian" style. I looked for the words "liberal," "conservative," "moderate," or "centrist" in evaluating a candidate's ideological positioning, as presented by the article in question.

I based my assessment of the gendered nature of particular issues on existing research (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Alexander and Andersen 1993; Bystrom 1995; Koch 1999; Sapiro 1981; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). Similarly, my gendered trait categories were modeled off of those used by previous studies

(Alexander and Andersen 1993; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Dolan and Lynch 2016). When coding for these traits, I included any traits that were inferred by language in the article. Traits need not be explicitly mentioned—for instance, if a candidate is described as "attacking" the opponent, it can be coded as a male trait (aggressive). I additionally included those traits presented by quotations from the candidates themselves, assuming they were not contradicted by the article itself. For example, if an article stated that a candidate was dishonest, but included a defense from the candidate claiming his/her honesty, I only coded the article's perception of the candidate. In other instances, however, in which an article presented the candidate's quotation without contradiction, I did include the candidate's self-presentation, as it contributed to the article's portrayal of the candidate. However, I never coded quotations from an opponent as an article's presentation of the candidate, as I considered these reflections of the opponent's rhetoric rather than depictions of the candidate.

I measured the amount of horse race coverage each candidate received, as previous literature indicates an undue focus on the competition rather than issues in coverage of female candidates (Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994b, 1996; Smith 1997; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Smith 1997). I sought to determine whether this horse race coverage was to the detriment of female candidates by recording each article's assessment of the candidate's viability in the race. To measure viability assessments, I adopted a 1-7 scale from "sure loser" (1) to "likely winner" (7), inspired by a similar scale used by Atkeson and Krebs (2008). Moreover, I recorded mentions of positive resources, such as endorsements from party leaders, or

negative resources, such as scandals or party disadvantages. This examination of resource coverage was inspired by Kahn, who analyzed campaign resource mentions in her study on gender stereotypes in coverage of statewide races (1994a).

I coded for the presence of a novelty frame in coverage of candidates, as existing research notes that a focus on a candidate's novelty can detract from his/her perception as a serious competitor (Heldman et al. 2005). I also looked at the number of paragraphs that included direct quotations from the candidate, as previous studies have noted that female candidates are less frequently quoted than their male counterparts (Aday and Devitt 2001; Lawrence and Rose 2010). My categories of an article's primary focus—issues, traits, horse race, campaigning, gender, scandal, other—were inspired by those of Heldman, Carroll and Olson (2005). I adapted one of their categories from "fundraising" to include a more general focus on campaigning, which additionally incorporates factors such as endorsements from party leaders and coverage of debates. I also added the category of gender, and a category of scandal/controversy, as I found many articles to focus on particular controversies in which candidates were involved, whether based on past statements, financial trouble, or criticisms over actions undertaken while holding other political positions.

I sought to measure each article's tone to determine whether outlets were giving more favorable and flattering coverage to candidates of one gender or party. Previous literature on the "outrage industry" indicates that partisan outlets would have more negative tones than nonpartisan, but I also sought to understand whether there was a difference in the amount of positive and negative coverage that candidates of different genders and parties received (Berry and Sobieraj 2014).

Lastly, I took note of any particularly gendered discussions or terms as I coded, to return to later for more qualitative analysis of the articles in my sample.

The codebook is flawed in several notable ways. Firstly, there is no way to differentiate between the brief mention of an issue and extended discussion of it, except if an article's primary focus is one issue. Similarly, there is no way to distinguish between an entire monologue of Sean Hannity ranting about a candidate (coded as one paragraph), and a single paragraph in a *New York Times* piece in which a candidate is mentioned by name once. As I coded "mentions" by paragraph, each of these would be coded as 1. Additionally, though certain traits are considered female, their inverses are not considered male, and are thus not codable. For example, though honesty is considered a female trait, dishonesty is not considered male, so there is no way to document it. Certain issues are hard to code into clear gender categories—for example, I coded gun control as a male issue, because guns are generally related to self-defense and crime, but gun control advocates do not support the use of guns. Similarly, I coded positions on Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court as a female issue, because the debate over Kavanaugh's appointment was rooted in sexual assault allegations, considered a subset of women's issues.

Moreover, particular issues could only be coded as issue stances for one of the two candidates. In Georgia's gubernatorial race, for example, I was able to code Stacey Abrams' criticisms of Brian Kemp for limiting the minority vote as an issue position in support of voting rights, but could not code coverage of Kemp's voting access restrictions, as Kemp did not take an explicit stance to limit minority voting. Similarly, the Arizona Senate race saw McSally assert her current pro-war stance

in opposition to some of Sinema's past statements opposing the war in Iraq. These gaps result in inconsistency in the coding of an issue, which is considered an issue for one candidate but not another.

Additionally, by coding only the articles in which a candidate was mentioned three or more times, it is possible that my results obscure significant coverage gaps by starting with a sample that is more equitable. This could result in findings that paint a more positive picture of coverage equity than truly exists. For this reason, my findings can only speak to articles that provide in-depth coverage of each candidate, which I defined as mentioning the candidate at least three times.

Moreover, my codebook did not account for a very nuanced analysis of article tone, as I could only assign one tone to an entire piece regardless of how many voices may be speaking in it. For example, partisan news segments sometimes featured a variety of panelists who had drastically different tones in addressing the candidates, and this tone diversity was lost in my coding.

The last apparent difficulty posed by my research design was the small sample size. Although I coded a substantial number of articles overall, my sample sizes significantly decreased when I broke down my results by variables such as candidate, outlet partisanship, and reporter gender. This resulted in certain findings having large margins of error, which prevented statistical significance. Additionally, by using a case study approach rather than a random sample of all candidates running in the 2018 midterm elections, my study is inherently limited. Though I can deduce certain trends from the races I examined, which I selected specifically for their unique characteristics, I cannot infer any broader trends or make comprehensive generalizations that apply to any race or candidate. For this

reason, my results are somewhat limited and must be considered as particular examples rather than defining the rule.

My main research question is: how does media coverage of candidates vary based on gender and party? I predicted that female candidates would receive less issue-based and more personal trait coverage, particularly of female traits and issues. However, I predicted that Republican female candidates would be presented as more masculine in their issue and trait focuses, due to their conflicting gender and party cues. I thought that all female candidates would be quoted less frequently, more often featured in horse race stories, and portrayed as more liberal than their male counterparts, as is consistent with previous literature.

The second part of my research question looks at sources of media coverage. I predicted that conservative outlets would adhere to more traditional gender roles in their portrayal of female candidates, emphasizing stereotypically female issues and traits and being more critical of female candidates who deviate from norms. Additionally, I anticipated female reporters would provide more coverage, and more representative coverage, of female candidates.

CHAPTER 4: STRIDES TOWARD EQUAL COVERAGE

In the following three chapters, I present the results of my analysis of in-depth news articles about male and female candidates in the 2018 midterms. I found that coverage of female candidates has significantly improved in almost every qualitative and quantitative dimension, compared to findings in many prior studies. While most of my variables indicated equal or fair coverage of candidates regardless of gender, female candidates received even more positive assessments of campaign resources than their male opponents, suggesting vast improvements in markers of candidate viability. Moreover, female candidates were described with male traits more often than female traits, and were described with male traits more than their male opponents, indicating a significant shift in gendered trait coverage. Notably, appearance-based coverage was all but absent across the 745 articles. Overall, media coverage seemed to represent the issues and emphases of each individual race, with reporters highlighting salient factors rather than making assumptions based on candidates' genders.

Quantity, Traits, and Issues

A significant portion of my findings indicate that the media landscape has improved overall in its coverage of female candidates, giving them equal or even more positive coverage compared to their male counterparts. When looking at all of the articles I coded, regardless of outlet partisanship, I found no statistically significant distinctions in the percentage of an article that covered each candidate or the percentage of article headlines that mentioned the candidate. The candidate

with the least amount of coverage per article was Martha McSally, who was mentioned in 30.72% of each article on average. However, the difference between this amount of coverage and that of the candidate with the most coverage, Phil Bredesen's 36.63%, was not statistically significant, nor were there any significant gaps in coverage within each race.

Moreover, when broken down by gender, exactly 16.38% of articles mentioned the candidates by name in the headline, whether female or male. Phil Bredesen received the greatest amount of headline coverage (23.15%), and Kyrsten Sinema the least, with only 7% of headlines mentioning her by name. Within each race, there were no statistically significant differences between the amount of headline coverage received by each candidate.

Table 1: Percentage of Articles with Candidate in Headline

RACE	**Percentage of headlines**
RACE 1 Abrams (FD)[2] Kemp (MR)	 18.42% 12.29%
RACE 2 Blackburn (FR) Bredesen (MD)	 20.17% 23.15%
RACE 3 McSally (FR) Sinema (FD)	 12.50% 9.09%

When examining quantity-based measures, it is important to keep in mind an aforementioned codebook flaw. I eliminated any articles in which a candidate

[2] As a reminder for the reader, I have included notations indicating the gender and party of each candidate, with F as female, M as male, D as Democrat, and R as Republican.

was mentioned fewer than three times, thus my sample may be missing gaps in coverage based on quantity. In fact, when I looked at all articles in the time frame that mentioned each candidate, without eliminating repeat publications or brief mentions, I found that the two male candidates did receive more coverage on average than female candidates. Each male candidate was mentioned in an average of 522 articles across all seven publications, compared to 411.75 for the female candidates. Perhaps, had I not eliminated articles in which a candidate was hardly mentioned, I would have found more significant gaps in quantity and quality of coverage. This indicates that my findings are only relevant for articles with in-depth coverage of each candidate, which I defined as mentioning the candidate at least three times.

There was only one significant gap in the number of direct quotations a candidate received over their opponent. This appeared in the Georgia governor's race, where Stacey Abrams received significantly more direct quotations than Brian Kemp ($p=0.0465$). Rather than revealing patterns of gendered coverage, I argue that this reflects the historic and intersectional nature of Abram's candidacy, as she was running to be the nation's first Black female governor.

Overall, my data appear to show that female candidates receive significantly more issue-based coverage than male candidates. On average, female candidates' positions on issues came up in 1.56 paragraphs per article, compared to only 0.94 paragraphs on male candidates' issue stances ($p=0.0001$). However, when broken down by candidate, it becomes clear that this gendered coverage is driven by the Abrams/Kemp race, in which Abrams received significantly more issue-based coverage than Kemp. In the other two races, there were no statistically significant

differences, and in fact, Phil Bredesen received slightly more issue coverage than his female opponent, preventing any broader gender-based conclusions. The gap in the Georgia gubernatorial race can be attributed to the aforementioned codebook flaw, through which Abrams' positions on minority voting rights were coded as issues, but Kemp's voter restrictions were not considered issue stances.

Table 2: Average Paragraphs of Issue Coverage by Race[3]

RACE	**Average issue paragraphs**
RACE 1	
Abrams	1.44 ± 0.28
Kemp	0.56 ± 0.19
Difference	0.88***
RACE 2	
Blackburn	1.12 ± 0.38
Bredesen	1.56 ± 0.35
Difference	-0.45**
RACE 3	
McSally	2.31 ± 0.88
Sinema	1.83 ± 0.56
Difference	0.45

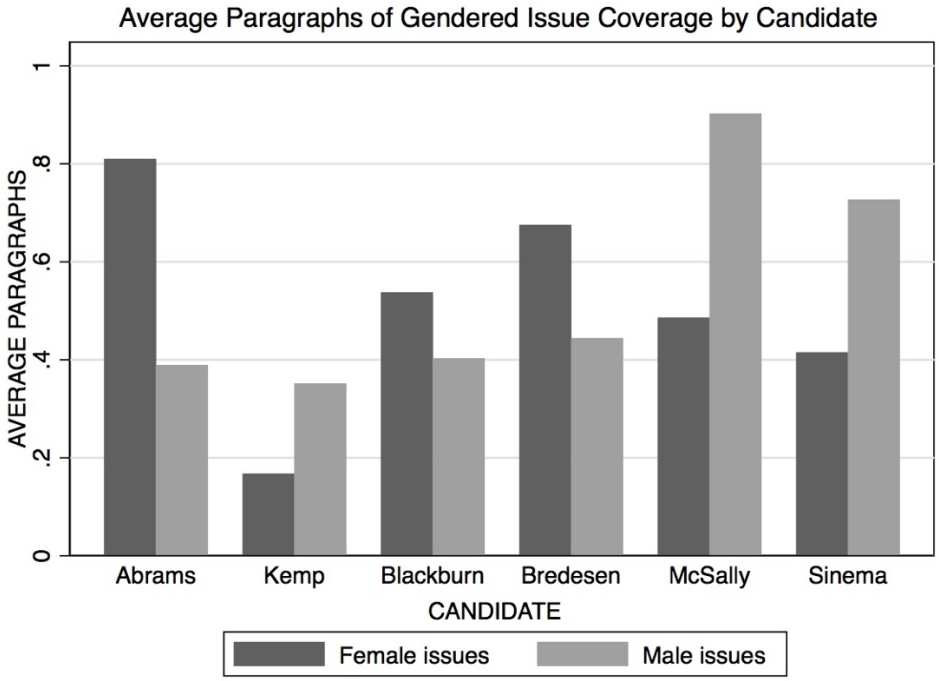
Next, I examined the breakdown of these issues along stereotypically gendered lines. I expected to find that female candidates would be more often associated with issues considered female, such as minority rights, education, and health care, whereas male candidates would be more often associated with male issues like the economy, crime, and foreign policy. When looking by gender overall, my findings seemingly supported this hypothesis, with articles bringing up

[3] I denote statistical significance with asterisks indicating the p-value of each t-test:
* $p \leq 0.05$
** $p \leq 0.01$
*** $p \leq 0.001$

female issues for female candidates significantly more than for male candidates ($p < 0.0001$). Female candidates also received significantly more coverage of male issues than male candidates did ($p=0.039$), however, indicating that female candidates received more issue coverage of all sorts, as previously noted. Because this finding was driven by the Abrams/Kemp race, I sought to break down my results to examine individual candidates' coverage. When I did so, my findings suggested that gendered issue coverage was correlated more with the nature of each race than the gender or party of each candidate.

Stacey Abrams, a female Democrat, received significantly more female than male issue coverage ($p < 0.0001$), and received significantly more female issue coverage than her male Republican opponent ($p < 0.0001$). Her opponent, Kemp, received significantly more male issue coverage than female issue coverage ($p=0.0003$). These gendered patterns suggest possible adherence to stereotyped expectations of female and male areas of issue focus. However, Phil Bredesen, a male Democrat, received significantly more female issue coverage than male ($p=0.018$). This greater quantity of female issue coverage for Abrams and Bredesen, both Democrats, might suggest that gendered issues are more correlated with party than with gender. However, Kyrsten Sinema, the last Democrat I studied, received significantly more male issue coverage than female ($p=0.003$), and although Blackburn's male-female coverage gap did not achieve statistical significance, she, like Bredesen, received more female issue coverage than male. McSally, too, mirrored her opponent's coverage patterns, though not achieving statistical significance.

Figure 1: Average Paragraphs of Gendered Issue Coverage by Candidate



I argue that these results indicate that contemporary media coverage is driven more by the particular issues central to a race than by gender or party, as is visually apparent in Figure 1. The only race in which trends in opposing candidates' gendered issue coverage did not closely align was the Abrams/Kemp race, which is explained by the codebook flaw that caused Abrams' minority rights views, and thus female issue coverage, to spike. The candidates in the two other races, on the other hand, had strikingly similar patterns of gendered issue coverage—both Tennessee candidates had more female issues than male, and both Arizona more male than female. The Arizona Senate race was heavily focused on immigration and foreign policy, particularly as McSally was a former Air Force pilot and Sinema had previously spoken out against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Coverage of the Tennessee Senate race, on the other hand, focused more on abortion and

Kavanaugh's confirmation, driving female issue coverage. These findings suggest that media coverage of candidates has improved, with a focus on issues representative to the race rather than driven by assumptions due to a candidate's gender.

In comparing personal coverage, I found that Abrams and Sinema, the two female Democratic candidates, received more paragraphs of personal coverage on average than their male opponents, reaching statistical significance in Abrams' case ($p < 0.0001$). Blackburn also received slightly more personal coverage than Bredesen, but this difference was particularly minor. The intersecting identities that both Abrams and Sinema hold, as a woman of color and a bisexual woman, respectively, could be the reason for this focus on personal coverage. However, the lack of statistical significance in Sinema's case makes this finding less conclusive, and Sinema's sexuality was rarely mentioned in the articles in my sample. For this reason, it seems that Abrams is the exception rather than the rule.

My findings corroborated previous research that indicated an overall focus on male traits in the media. As I posited earlier, this may be attributed to the traditional reliance on male traits in evaluating candidates, since political candidates have historically been male. However, although both male and female candidates were more often described by male than female traits[4], I found that female candidates received significantly more male trait coverage than male candidates did ($p=0.045$). The finding that female candidates received more male than female trait coverage and more male trait coverage than their male opponents

[4] Female candidates' male-female trait t-test had a p-value < 0.0001, and that of male candidates had a p-value = 0.0097.

indicates a significant development in the representation of female candidates in the media, with previous gendered trait trends completely reversed.

Table 3: Difference Between Average Mentions of Female and Male Traits by Candidate

CANDIDATE	Average Female/Male Trait Difference
Abrams	-0.21***
Kemp	-0.12*
Blackburn	-0.03
Bredesen	-0.12
McSally	-0.61***
Sinema	-0.01

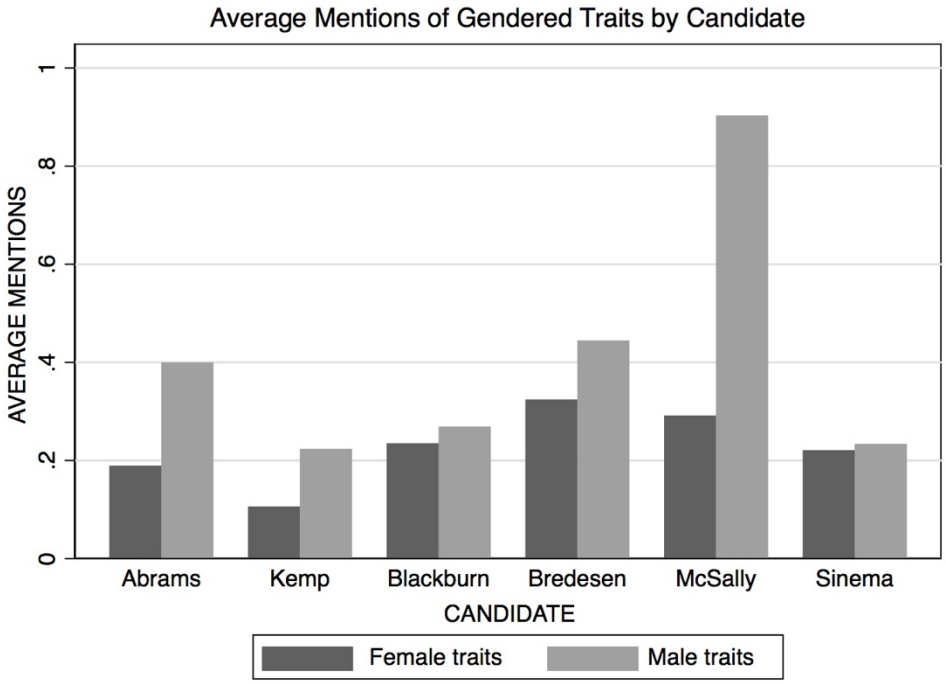
When broken down by candidate rather than gender, more interesting findings emerge. Firstly, the greater overall presence of male traits over female traits becomes starkly evident by examining the breakdown of female to male traits for each candidate. For every one of the six candidates I studied, male traits were mentioned more on average than female traits. Though not always achieving statistical significance, the male trait focus remained constant across candidates and races, as evidenced by the negative numbers in Table 3.

Table 4: Average Mentions of Gendered Traits by Candidate

RACE	Female traits	Male traits
RACE 1 Abrams Kemp Difference	 0.19 ± 0.07 0.11 ± 0.07 0.8	 0.4 ± 0.25 0.22 ± 0.07 0.18*
RACE 2 Blackburn Bredesen Difference	 0.24 ± 0.1 0.32 ± 0.1 -0.09	 0.27 ± 0.11 0.44 ± 0.13 -0.18*
RACE 3 McSally Sinema Difference	 0.29 ± 0.12 0.22 ± 0.09 0.07	 0.9 ± 0.25 0.22 ± 0.12 0.67***

On the level of each race, more significant differences emerged. Although Kemp received significantly more male trait coverage than female ($p=0.029$), Abrams was described with male traits significantly more than Kemp was ($p=0.0123$). Moreover, Abrams was described with male traits significantly more than she was female traits ($p=0.0001$). This undermines previous literature suggesting that female traits would be more often associated with female, Democratic candidates, and male traits more with male, Republican candidates. Bredesen, the other male candidate I examined, received significantly more male trait coverage than his female opponent ($p=0.0444$), but both Blackburn and Bredesen received more male than female trait coverage overall, further suggesting the lack of an apparent gap in gendered trait portrayals.

Figure 2: Average Mentions of Gendered Traits by Candidate



Another interesting finding emerges in the Arizona Senate race, pitting a female Democrat against a female Republican. Here, McSally, the Republican, received significantly more male than female trait coverage ($p < 0.0001$), and significantly more male trait coverage than Sinema, her Democratic opponent ($p < 0.0001$). This could be attributed to the conflicting signals sent by female Republicans, whose party and gender cues tell different stories. Perhaps reporters read McSally's conservatism as masculine and thus perceived her as possessing more male traits to match her pro-war, "Trumpian" stances and her experience in the military. Comparing across races, McSally's association with male traits was significantly greater than that of Abrams, a female Democrat, ($p < 0.0001$) but was also significantly greater than that of Blackburn, another female Republican ($p < 0.0001$). Blackburn also received significantly less male trait coverage than Kemp,

a male Republican ($p < 0.0001$). As previously mentioned, Blackburn was associated with male traits significantly less often than her male Democratic opponent, thus these varied findings suggest that female Republicans are not always deemed more masculine than other candidates of varied genders and parties. However, it is possible that, when isolating all other factors and examining two female competitors, Republican women may be more often associated with male traits than their Democratic opponents, as was the case in Arizona. It seems most likely that McSally and Sinema presented a stark contrast due to their histories of war and war protest, resulting in the significant gap.

Even stereotypical ideological assessments were absent in these articles. Although previous research has noted that women are consistently deemed more liberal than equivalent male candidates, my results did not support this finding. Sinema, a female Democrat, was described as centrist slightly more often than Bredesen, a male Democrat, though Sinema's 38.96% of moderate coverage was not significantly greater than Bredesen's 36.11%. While Abrams was deemed significantly more liberal than Bredesen ($p=0.006$), this is reflective of their respective policies and ideological positions rather than their genders. Although Abrams sought to emphasize her collaboration with Republicans, she campaigned on issues such as minority voting rights, health care expansion, and gun control, on which she took traditionally liberal stances. Bredesen, on the other hand, explicitly took pains to distance himself from national Democrats, as evidenced by an Associated Press headline, "Tenn. Democrat aims for Senate win by edging away from party." For this reason, I argue that Abrams' media portrayal as more liberal

than Bredesen does not reflect gendered trends in media coverage, but is instead representative of the two candidates' stances.

There were no apparent trends in ideological assessments of Republican candidates. One of the women, Blackburn, was considered conservative more often than Kemp, but the other, McSally, was called conservative less than Kemp was. Neither of these gaps achieved statistical significance. These findings do not support literature that would suggest that female Republican candidates would be portrayed as more liberal than male Republican candidates due to their gender.

Additionally, no notable gendered gaps appeared when comparing the primary focus of each candidate's coverage. However, it is interesting to note that only the candidates in the Arizona race, McSally and Sinema, had the greatest percentage of their coverage focus on issues. Perhaps this could indicate that when gender differences between the candidates are eliminated, reporters are more willing to focus on the issues of the campaign. In all of the races, patterns of focus between the two competitors were markedly similar—the two areas of greatest focus for McSally and Sinema were issues followed by campaigning and those for Blackburn and Bredesen were campaigning followed by issues. The greatest amount of Abrams' coverage was on the horse race followed by scandals, and Kemp's was scandals followed by the horse race.

When measuring article tone, although there was a statistically significant gap with female candidates receiving more positive coverage than male ($p=0.002$), the sample sizes of articles with non-neutral tones were so small that this finding should not be weighed heavily. I only coded a single article of male candidate coverage as explicitly positive in tone. As I mentioned, my codebook did not

capture nuances in article tone between multiple voices within each television segment, and most print stories were written in an objective manner.

Perceptions of Candidate Viability

Another dimension in which coverage of female candidates has seemingly improved is the portrayal of a candidate's qualifications, campaign successes, and chances of being elected. Unlike previous studies, which have found that female candidates are belittled in the eyes of journalists and presented as novelties rather than serious competitors, my data suggest otherwise. On average, female candidates were assessed as having better chances of winning than male candidates. This finding is statistically significant, indicating that female candidates were not only deemed as competitive, but even more so than their male opponents.

Table 5: Average Viability Assessment by Candidate Gender

GENDER	Average viability
Female	4.22 ± 0.11
Male	3.87 ± 0.13
Difference	0.35***

However, when broken down by candidate, this trend disappears. Kemp was deemed as having a significantly better chance at victory than Abrams ($p=0.0001$), and Blackburn better than Bredesen ($p < 0.0001$). There were no statistically significant differences in the Arizona Senate race. Although there no longer appears a female advantage when examining individual case studies, these findings also indicate the lack of a male viability assessment advantage, as would have been expected based on previous research.

Table 6: Average Viability Assessment by Candidate

RACE	Viability assessment
RACE 1 Abrams Kemp Difference	 3.85 ± 0.09 4.14 ± 0.12 -0.29***
RACE 2 Blackburn Bredesen Difference	 4.75 ± 0.22 3.76 ± 0.41 1.18***
RACE 3 McSally Sinema Difference	 4.02 ± 0.21 4.18 ± 0.24 -0.15

Moreover, the amount of horse race coverage allotted to each candidate seemed to be reflective of the nature of each race, rather than the candidate's gender. Within each race, candidates received very equitable amounts of horse race coverage, both in average number of paragraphs per article and in percentage of articles overall that primarily focused on the horse race. There were no statically significant differences in horse race coverage for any of the races. This finding indicates that female candidates may no longer suffer from a lack of substantive content, with articles focusing on the horse race rather than their issue positions.

Figure 3: Average Paragraphs of Horse Race Coverage by Candidate

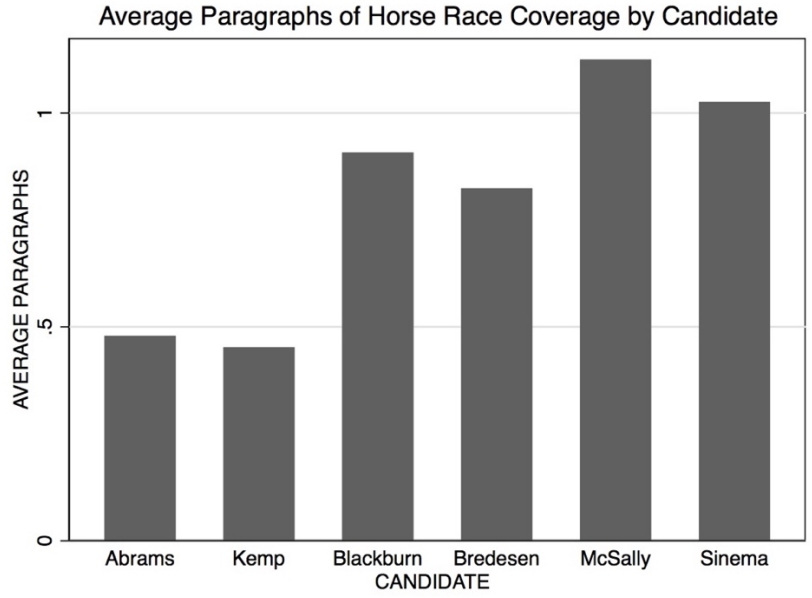
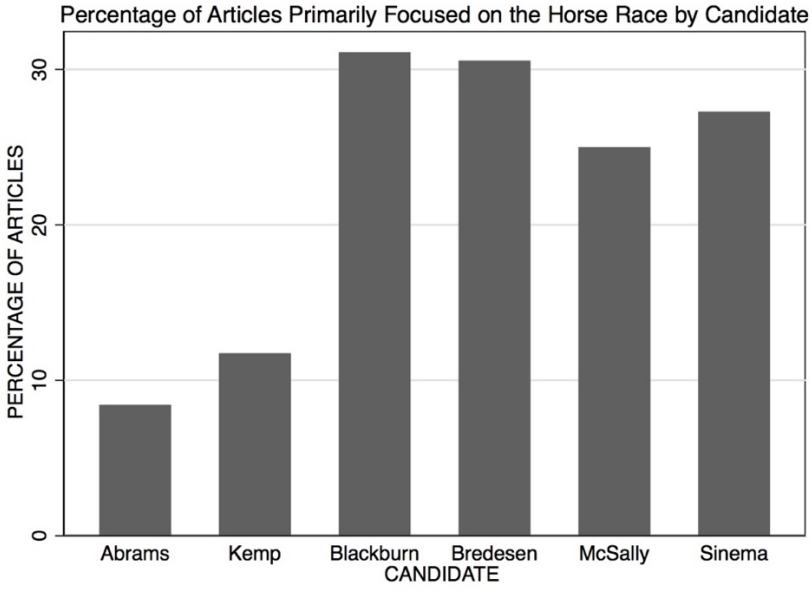


Figure 4: Percentage of Articles Primarily Focused on the Horse Race by Candidate



Even more noteworthy are the differences between mentions of a candidate's positive or negative resources. The gendered breakdown of resource allocation is virtually a mirror image, with female candidates assessed as having

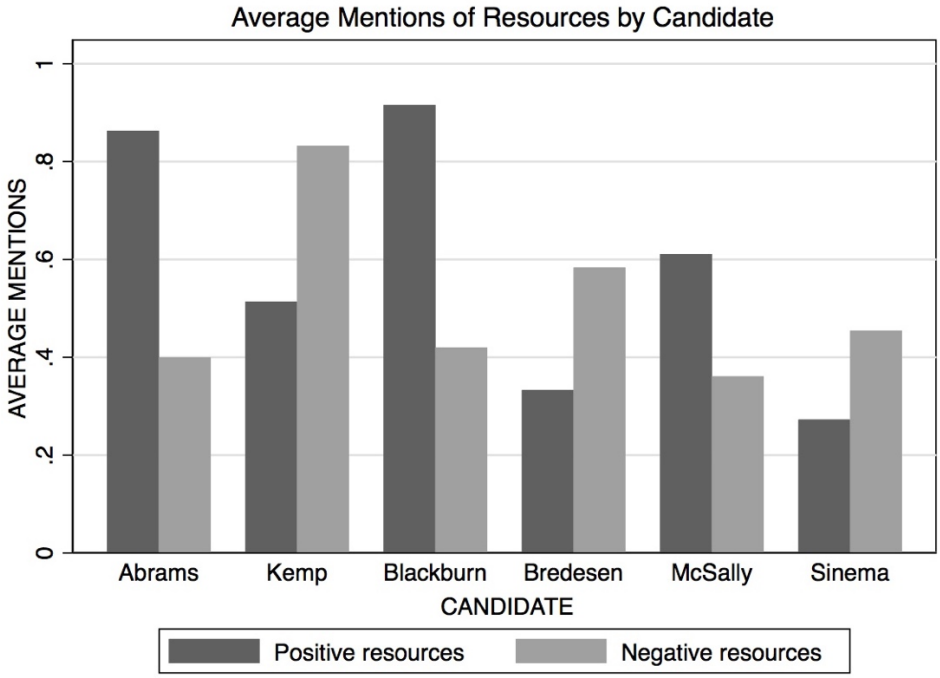
nearly double the amount of positive resources as negative, and male candidates having nearly double the amount of negative resources as positive.

Table 7: Average Mentions of Resources by Candidate Gender

GENDER	Positive resources	Negative resources	Difference between positive and negative resources
Female	0.74 ± 0.1	0.41 ± 0.06	0.33***
Male	0.45 ± 0.09	0.74 ± 0.08	-0.29***
Difference	0.29***	-0.33***	n/a

These findings hold true on the level of individual races, as well. Nearly all the female candidates I studied received significantly more positive mentions than negative, while male candidates were more likely to be associated with negative resources. The only candidate for whom this pattern went in the opposite direction was Kyrsten Sinema, whose media coverage was highly focused on her controversial comments as a Democrat running in a red state. I would argue that this is the exception rather than the rule, as the two other races both showed statistically significant differences between the mentions of positive and negative resources for each candidate, falling along gendered lines.

Figure 5: Average Mentions of Resources by Candidate

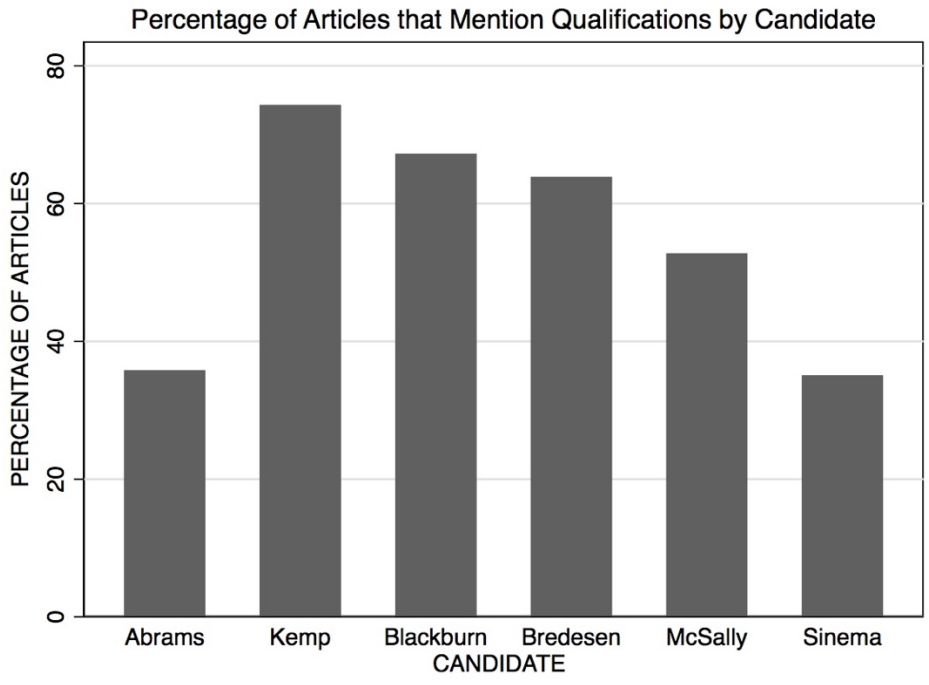


The one area in which male candidates received more favorable coverage of their candidacy than female candidates was in discussion of their qualifications. Though 70.38% of articles about male candidates mentioned their qualifications for the role, only 46.51% of articles about female candidates did the same—a statistically significant gap ($p < 0.0001$). However, when examining this finding in more detail, it becomes clear that media coverage of Brian Kemp drove this trend. Kemp received mention of his qualifications in 74.30% of articles about him, significantly more than Abrams' 35.79% ($p < 0.0001$), but this can largely be attributed to the position he was holding at the time of the campaign. Kemp was Georgia's acting Secretary of State, which became relevant in the race due to his oversight of vote counting. Although Phil Bredesen also received a great degree of qualification coverage, 63.89% of articles, this was slightly less than that of his

female opponent, Blackburn, for whom 67.23% of articles mentioned her qualifications. For these reasons, qualifications do not seem to be a gendered issue benefitting male candidates.

However, the finding that McSally also received significantly more qualification coverage than Sinema ($p=0.029$) suggests that there could be a partisan divide in qualification coverage. All three Republican candidates received more qualification coverage than their Democratic opponents, with the gaps achieving statistical significance for two of the three. However, the exceptional nature of Kemp's candidacy and the fact that Blackburn and Bredesen received relatively equitable amounts of qualification coverage suggest that perhaps this finding is not more broadly applicable.

Figure 6: Percentage of Articles that Mention Qualifications by Candidate



Novelty frames most commonly appeared in coverage of Stacey Abrams. This can be attributed to her intersectional identity, as she was running to become the first Black female governor in the nation. Nearly half of Abrams' coverage included a novelty frame, while only 8.4% of Blackburn's, 22.22% of McSally's, and 9.09% of Sinema's mentioned the candidates' novelty. It is interesting to note that Sinema was running to be the first openly bisexual member of Congress, yet she still received the least amount of novelty coverage of any of the candidates I studied. Unlike Abrams' race, Sinema's sexual identity was not a focus of coverage in the sources I analyzed. Overall, although novelty frames were present for some female candidates, mentions of a female candidate's novelty did not detract from the acknowledgement of her positive resources, campaign successes, and likely chances of victory. For this reason, I argue that the age of viewing women as a novelty rather than a real competitor has largely come to a close.

CHAPTER 5: THE SOURCE OF THE STORY

Until this point, I have been looking at aggregate results including articles from all sources, regardless of partisan leaning or reporter gender. However, further coverage patterns emerge when examining differences between the content creators themselves. I studied these variations through the partisan leanings of news outlets and the genders of the reporters themselves. I found that partisan sources are typically driven more by a candidate's ideology than by gender, more favorably covering candidates who align with their own partisan leaning. I also noted that left-leaning outlets included less issue coverage per article than non-partisan and right-leaning sources. Lastly, I discovered a split between female and male reporters, with men providing more favorable coverage to Republican candidates and women providing them with somewhat less favorable coverage.

Partisan Outlets

Coverage gaps between outlets of different partisan alignments emerged, but not along gendered lines. An apparent gap exists between the amount of issue-based coverage provided by partisan left outlets when compared to nonpartisan or right-leaning partisan outlets. On average, left-aligned partisan news sources provided only 0.65 paragraphs of issue coverage per article, compared to 1.65 in nonpartisan coverage and 1.5 in right-aligned partisan coverage. This statistically significant gap ($p < 0.0001$ for both differences) remains regardless of candidate gender, with both female and male candidates receiving significantly less issue

coverage in partisan left outlets than nonpartisan or partisan right.[5] Since only the nighttime opinion shows on CNN exhibit a consistent left-leaning bias, I also examined my results looking at just MSNBC as a left-leaning partisan source and found that the same coverage gaps remained.[6] The only change when eliminating CNN from my left-leaning data was that the gap between the amount of issue coverage female candidates received from left-leaning and right-leaning sources was no longer statistically significant, suggesting that CNN provides less issue coverage and drives the difference between left- and right-leaning outlets.

Table 8: Average Paragraphs of Issue Coverage, by Candidate Gender and Outlet Partisanship

OUTLET TYPE	Female candidates	Male candidates
Nonpartisan	1.94 ± 0.35	1.21 ± 0.28
Partisan left (w CNN)	0.82 ± 0.25	0.41 ± 0.16
Partisan left (w/o CNN)	0.95 ± 0.44	0.49 ± 0.3
Partisan right	1.61 ± 0.49	1.15 ± 0.67

On the candidate level, the issue coverage gap remains between partisan left and nonpartisan outlets, achieving statistical significance for Abrams (p=0.0007;

[5] The t-test comparing partisan left and nonpartisan sources for female candidates had a p-value < 0.0001, and the one comparing partisan left and partisan right sources had a p-value of 0.0023. For male candidates, the t-test comparing partisan left and nonpartisan sources had a p-value of 0.0001, and that comparing partisan left and partisan right sources had a p-value of 0.0019.
[6] The gap in issue coverage for all candidates between MSNBC and nonpartisan sources had a p-value of 0.0005, and that between MSNBC and Fox News was 0.004. For female candidates, the MSNBC-nonpartisan gap had a p-value of 0.0085, and MSNBC-Fox gap 0.06. For male candidate, the MSNBC-nonpartisan gap p-value was 0.0131, and the MSNBC-Fox gap 0.0419.

p=0.0096[7]), Blackburn (p=0.002; p=0.0334), and Bredesen (p < 0.0001; p=0.0277), whether looking at just MSNBC or including CNN as a leftist source. Although partisan left outlets continue to have less issue-based coverage than partisan right outlets on the candidate level as well, this difference falls within the margin of error and is thus not statistically significant.

Table 9: Articles with Issues as Primary Focus, by Candidate and Outlet Partisanship

CANDIDATE	Nonpartisan	Partisan left (w CNN)	Partisan left (w/o CNN)	Partisan right
Abrams	21.62% n=24	13.33% n=8	13.33% n=4	36.84% n=7
Kemp	8.41% n=9	1.64% n=1	3.33% n=1	9.09 n=1
Blackburn	11.76% n=8	5.71% n=2	0% n=0	6.25% n=1
Bredesen	35.71% n=20	25% n=9	38.46% n=5	6.25% n=1
McSally	36.67% n=11	61.11% n=11	71.43% n=10	33.33% n=8
Sinema	37.93% n=11	16.67% n=3	0% n=0	30% n=9

I sought to understand the topics on which partisan left outlets focused, if not issue coverage. When comparing the primary focus of articles across outlets of varying partisanships, as displayed in Table 9, I found that left-leaning outlets were not always less focused overall on issues than right-leaning or nonpartisan outlets.

[7] Here I list results for both MSNBC and CNN first, followed by the findings from only looking at MSNBC after the semicolon.

This pattern did remain in coverage of Abrams, Kemp, Blackburn, and Sinema, but in the cases of Bredesen and McSally, partisan left sources were more likely to focus on issues than were right-leaning sources. In fact, the only statistically significant gaps in issue-based coverage did not indicate that left-leaning outlets provide less coverage than outlets of the other two partisan leanings. Bredesen received significantly less coverage focused on issues from right-leaning outlets than from left-leaning ($p=0.033$)[8] and nonpartisan sources ($p=0.022$), and McSally received significantly more issue-focused coverage from left-leaning outlets than from nonpartisan ($p=0.032$) and those on the right ($p=0.023$). Differences in coverage of McSally are particularly notable, as issue-based coverage in left-aligned outlets spiked to a whopping 61.11% including CNN and 71.43% without. This could be attributed to the focus on McSally's conservative stances on immigration, health care, and foreign policy, and her attacks on Sinema's history of war protests, all issues that were a centerpiece of the campaign. It is worth noting the small sample sizes for these percentages, as there were very few articles of issue-based coverage overall.

It is interesting to note that when incorporating CNN into the dataset of left-leaning sources, the statistically significant gaps for Bredesen and McSally disappeared. This could indicate that MSNBC provides a disproportionate amount of issue-focused coverage compared to other sources, and the addition of CNN has a moderating effect, providing less issue-based coverage to more closely mirror the coverage provided in other types of outlets. When incorporating CNN, one new statistically significant gap emerged between left-leaning and right-leaning

[8] The p-values in this paragraph refer to the dataset including only MSNBC as a left-leaning source.

coverage of Abrams (p=0.023), with right-leaning sources providing significantly more issue-based coverage. These trends further support the previously noted finding that adding CNN to the left-leaning dataset reduced the average amount of issue coverage per article.

Table 10: Most Common Primary Focus by Outlet Partisanship

CANDIDATE	Nonpartisan	Partisan left (w CNN)	Partisan left (w/o CNN)	Partisan right
Abrams	Campaigning: 38.74%	Campaigning: 35%	Campaigning: 53.55%	Issues: 36.84%
Kemp	Scandal: 50.47%	Scandal: 78.69%	Scandal: 86.67%	Campaigning: 36.36%
Blackburn	Campaigning: 45.59%	Horse race: 45.71%	Horse race: 50%	Horse race: 56.25%
Bredesen	Issues: 35.71%	Horse race: 50%	Horse race: 46.15%	Scandal: 56.25%
McSally	Issues: 36.67%	Issues: 61.11%	Issues: 71.43%	Horse race: 37.5%
Sinema	Issues: 37.93%	Horse race/ Other: 27.78%	Traits/Horse race: 33.33%	Issues: 30%

In comparing the most frequent primary focus of articles based on the partisanship of their creators, it appears that ignoring issue coverage is less of a problem for left-leaning outlets than it first appeared. There are no apparent coverage gaps between the subjects focused on by left-leaning outlets and outlets of the two other categories. In fact, one of the most apparent gaps appeared for right-aligned coverage of Brian Kemp, which largely minimized the controversies in which he was embroiled throughout the campaign. Only 27.27% of right-leaning

coverage of Kemp focused on his scandals, compared to 50.47% among nonpartisan outlets ($p < 0.0001$), 78.69% of left-leaning sources including CNN ($p=0.001$), and 86.67% without CNN ($p < 0.0001$), a statistically significant gap with or without CNN. However, a similar gap occurred in coverage of Abrams, in which 33.33% of left-leaning articles focused on scandals (16.67% without CNN), but only 5.26% of right-leaning did so—a statistically significant gap when looking at just MSNBC ($p=0.016$). This could indicate less scandal-driven coverage overall in right-leaning outlets. However, in the Tennessee and Arizona Senate races, right-leaning outlets featured much more scandal-driven coverage than outlets of the other two partisan leanings, often reaching statistical significance and indicating the absence of a consistent gap in controversy-based coverage by outlet partisanship. Another notable gap shows that while nonpartisan outlets focused most on Blackburn's campaigning, all partisan sources focused instead on the horse race, suggesting that partisan outlets may sometimes provide less substantive coverage than nonpartisan sources.

Differences also appear between the gendered issues covered by outlets of differing partisanships. Interestingly, right-leaning partisan outlets provided Blackburn and Bredesen with exactly the same amount of average male issue coverage but gave Bredesen significantly more female issue coverage than Blackburn ($p=0.0006$). This finding could suggest that right-leaning partisan outlets associate Democrats with stereotypically female issues and Republicans with male issues. Blackburn, a Republican, also received significantly less female issue coverage in partisan right outlets than in nonpartisan sources ($p=0.0161$), further supporting this hypothesis.

However, other findings suggest this is not always the case. Blackburn not only received significantly less female issue coverage from right-leaning outlets than nonpartisan, she also received significantly less male issue coverage from right-leaning outlets than nonpartisan ($p=0.044$). Moreover, while Abrams received significantly more female issue coverage than Kemp in nonpartisan ($p < 0.0001$) and partisan left outlets ($p < 0.0001$ with CNN, $p=0.0119$ without), this gap disappeared in right-leaning sources. The Arizona Senate race further disproved this hypothesis, as partisan right outlets gave McSally, a Republican, significantly less male issue coverage than did partisan left outlets ($p=0.0042$ with CNN, $p=0.0205$ without). Right-leaning sources also gave Sinema significantly more male issue coverage than did partisan left outlets ($p=0.0067$ with CNN, $p=0.0425$ without). However, partisan right outlets also gave Sinema significantly more female issue coverage than partisan left outlets, as partisan left outlets provided no female issue coverage of Sinema at all. My findings on partisan right outlets are prone to error, as I only included one partisan right outlet in my sample, compared to two partisan left sources and a much larger sample of nonpartisan sources.

Table 11: Average Paragraphs of Gendered Issue Coverage, by Candidate and Outlet Partisanship

CANDIDATE	Nonpartisan	Partisan left (w CNN)	Partisan left (w/o CNN)	Partisan right
Abrams	Female issues: 0.94 ± 0.18 Male issues: 0.42 ± 0.13	Female issues: 0.6 ± 0.22 Male issues: 0.27 ± 0.17	Female issues: 0.57 ± 0.35 Male issues: 0.33 ± 0.28	Female issues: 0.74 ± 0.45 Male issues: 0.58 ± 0.33
Kemp	Female issues: 0.2 ± 0.11 Male issues: 0.41 ± 0.15	Female issues: 0.07 ± 0.07 Male issues: 0.25 ± 0.16	Female issues: 0.1 ± 0.11 Male issues: 0.2 ± 0.2	Female issues: 0.45 ± 0.46 Male issues: 0.36 ± 0.46
Blackburn	Female issues: 0.76 ± 0.24 Male issues: 0.54 ± 0.22	Female issues: 0.29 ± 0.23 Male issues: 0.26 ± 0.18	Female issues: 0.1 ± 0.22 Male issues: 0.00	Female issues: 0.13 ± 0.18 Male issues: 0.13 ± 0.26
Bredesen	Female issues: 0.88 ± 0.68 Male issues: 0.7 ± 0.33	Female issues: 0.36 ± 0.16 Male issues: 0.19 ± 0.17	Female issues: 0.46 ± 0.31 Male issues: 0.15 ± 0.23	Female issues: 0.69 ± 0.26 Male issues: 0.13 ± 0.18
McSally	Female issues: 0.73 ± 0.42 Male issues: 0.93 ± 0.8	Female issues: 0.5 ± 0.26 Male issues: 0.33 ± 0.3	Female issues: 0.57 ± 0.3 Male issues: 0.43 ± 0.37	Female issues: 0.17 ± 0.16 Male issues: 1.29 ± 0.52
Sinema	Female issues: 0.69 ± 0.34 Male issues: 0.9 ± 0.46	Female issues: 0.0 Male issues: 0.28 ± 0.23	Female issues: 0.0 Male issues: 0.17 ± 0.43	Female issues: 0.4 ± 0.27 Male issues: 0.83 ± 0.28

Patterns of resource coverage by outlet partisanship again suggest that outlets are driven more by party alignment than by the gender of the candidates they cover. Partisan left outlets gave Abrams significantly more coverage of positive than negative resources ($p < 0.0001$ with CNN, $p=0.0004$ without), while

they gave Kemp significantly more negative than positive resource coverage ($p < 0.0001$ with and without CNN). Bredesen received more positive resource coverage than Blackburn in nonpartisan outlets ($p=0.0002$), but right-leaning partisan outlets gave Blackburn more positive resource coverage than Bredesen ($p=0.0008$) and Bredesen more negative than positive resource coverage overall ($p=0.0015$). No statistically significant differences appeared in the Arizona Senate race, which could be a product of the small sample size. The trend of outlets privileging candidates of their own party did not always appear, however, as is evident in Table 12, and many findings fell within the margin of error.

Figure 7: Average Mentions of Resources, by Candidate and Outlet Partisanship

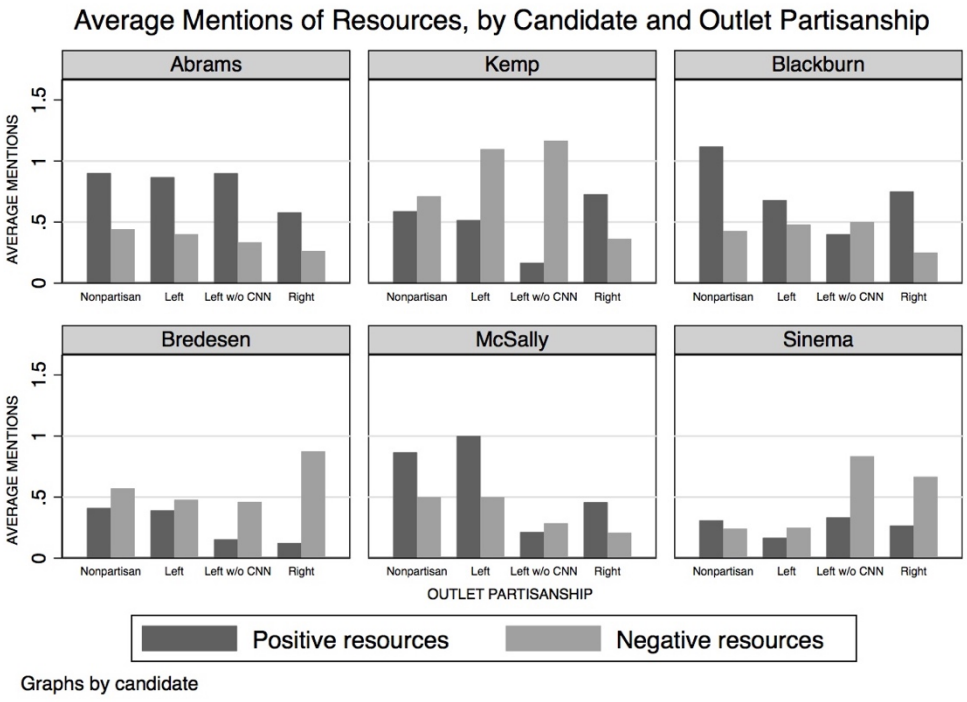


Table 12: Average Mentions of Resources, by Candidate and Outlet Partisanship[9]

CANDIDATE	Nonpartisan	Partisan left (w CNN)	Partisan left (w/o CNN)	Partisan right
Abrams	*Positive:* 0.9 ± 0.25 Negative: 0.44 ± 0.12	*Positive:* 0.88 ± 0.22 Negative: 0.37 ± 0.15	Positive: 0.9 ± 0.28 *Negative:* 0.33 ± 0.20	*Positive:* 0.58 ± 0.16 Negative: 0.26 ± 0.21
Kemp	Positive: 0.59 ± 0.16 *Negative:* 0.71 ± 0.13	Positive: 0.34 ± 0.16 *Negative:* 1.13 ± 0.19	Positive: 0.17 ± 0.17 *Negative:* 1.17 ± 0.24	*Positive:* 0.72 ± 0.6 Negative: 0.36 ± 0.34
Blackburn	*Positive:* 1.12 ± 0.29 Negative: 0.43 ± 0.13	*Positive:* 0.6 ± 0.21 Negative: 0.49 ± 0.2	Positive: 0.4 ± 0.5 *Negative:* 0.5 ± 0.37	*Positive:* 0.75 ± 0.31 Negative: 0.25 ± 0.24
Bredesen	Positive: 0.41 ± 0.18 *Negative:* 0.57 ± 0.19	Positive: 0.31 ± 0.2 *Negative:* 0.47 ± 0.17	Positive: 0.15 ± 0.23 *Negative:* 0.46 ± 0.31	Positive: 0.13 ± 0.18 *Negative:* 0.88 ± 0.27
McSally	*Positive:* 0.87 ± 0.45 Negative: 0.5 ± 0.27	*Positive:* 0.39 ± 0.39 Negative: 0.33 ± 0.24	Positive: 0.21 ± 0.25 *Negative:* 0.29 ± 0.27	*Positive:* 0.46 ± 0.25 Negative: 0.21 ± 0.18
Sinema	*Positive:* 0.31 ± 0.19 Negative: 0.24 ± 0.16	Positive: 0.22 ± 0.21 *Negative:* 0.44 ± 0.35	Positive: 0.33 ± 0.54 *Negative:* 0.83 ± 1.03	Positive: 0.27 ± 0.17 *Negative:* 0.67 ± 0.25

Results on the inclusion of qualifications, as seen in Table 13, are sometimes deceiving. It at first appears surprising that left-leaning partisan outlets mentioned Kemp's qualifications at a higher rate than both nonpartisan and right-

[9] Italics indicate which type of resources were given more coverage in outlets of a particular partisan leaning.

leaning outlets, as Kemp is a Republican. However, this obscures the context of the qualifications' mentions—in the case of Kemp in left-leaning coverage, his position as Secretary of State was often included to criticize his handling of voter registration and voting access issues. Still, when comparing Abrams' and Kemp's coverage in right-leaning partisan outlets, it is no surprise that Kemp was favored by the television station of his own party, with 54.55% of Kemp's Fox News coverage mentioning his qualifications compared to only 15.79% of Abrams' ($p=0.026$).

Table 13: Percentage of Articles that Mention Qualifications, by Candidate and Outlet Partisanship

CANDIDATE	Nonpartisan	Partisan left (w CNN)	Partisan left (w/o CNN)	Partisan right
Abrams	44.14% n=49	26.67% n=16	30% n=9	15.79% n=3
Kemp	70.09% n=75	85.25% n=52	90% n=27	54.55% n=6
Blackburn	80.88% n=55	57.14% n=20	30% n=3	31.25% n=5
Bredesen	75% n=42	50% n=18	38.46% n=5	56.25% n=9
McSally	56.67% n=17	11.11% n=2	7.14% n=1	79.17% n=19
Sinema	44.83% n=13	38.89% n=7	66.67% n=4	23.33% n=7

The most apparent gap in qualification mentions appears for Martha McSally—left-leaning outlets noted her qualifications only 11.11% of the time (7.14% without CNN), whereas right-leaning outlets did so in 79.17% of stories.

While this distinction is stark ($p < 0.0001$), it must be recalled that the sample size for the Arizona race was the smallest, and that I only examined three partisan outlets overall. Looking at the sample sizes for the results of each outlet type, it is evident that the sample of partisan right outlets was particularly limited, with nearly all counts in the single digits. The only count not in the single digits, in fact, was for McSally. It is interesting that Fox News provided McSally with so much coverage of her qualifications, while the station did not do so for other candidates. This may be attributed to the campaign's focus on McSally's war veteran history, a topic that frequently emerged throughout the race and may have been emphasized by a conservative station prioritizing pro-war stances. Meanwhile, Sinema, McSally's opponent, received significantly less qualification coverage from Fox News than MSNBC ($p=0.035$), suggesting that partisan outlets may in certain races favor candidates of their own party. This was not the case across all races, however—in Tennessee, right-leaning outlets mentioned Bredesen's qualifications more than Blackburn's, and left-leaning outlets did the opposite, though these findings were not statistically significant.

When examining ideological assessments, the strongest theme to emerge was among left-leaning outlets, which tended to present Democratic candidates as less liberal than nonpartisan or right-aligned outlets. These sources portrayed Abrams, Bredesen and Sinema as significantly less liberal than right-aligned outlets.[10] They also presented Bredesen and Sinema as more moderate than any

[10] These findings achieved statistical significance when comparing left- and right-leaning outlets' coverage of Abrams ($p=0.039$), Bredesen ($p=0.002$), and Sinema ($p=0.002$) when including both CNN and MSNBC. When removing CNN from the dataset, each of these differences fell just within the margin of error, no longer reaching statistical significance. This can be attributed to the small sample sizes that remained once CNN was removed.

other source, achieving statistical significance in the gaps between left- and right-leaning coverage of both Bredesen (p=0.007) and Sinema (p=0.001).[11] No similar trend existed among right-aligned outlets, however. For instance, right-leaning outlets saw Kemp as more conservative than other sources, but viewed Blackburn as less conservative than sources of other partisan leanings. None of these findings reached statistical significance, as the sample size of right-leaning outlets was quite small. However, right-leaning sources did present Kyrsten Sinema in a notably different way than other outlets. Sinema was described as moderate by 51.72% of nonpartisan sources and 61.11% of left-leaning sources (including CNN), but right-leaning sources described her as liberal 40% of the time—significantly more than nonpartisan (p=0.003) or left-leaning outlets (p=0.002).[12] This finding is not surprising, as Sinema may be comparatively liberal for conservative sources.

Lastly, I attempted to identify outrage media by measuring the tone of each article I analyzed. By and large, I found articles to have a neutral or mixed tone, as the majority of the articles I coded were nonpartisan, and even partisan outlets sometimes had guests who espoused different viewpoints than the show's hosts. I found that Fox News had the greatest percentage of negative stories (18.10%), followed by liberal outlets (7.46%) and nonpartisan outlets (4.99%). However, when I eliminated CNN from my liberal outlet dataset, I found that 15.53% of MSNBC's coverage was negative, closely mirroring that of Fox News. This finding reflects the tendency among partisan outlets to resort to anger and vitriol in covering

[11] This gap disappeared when removing CNN from the dataset and looking at left-right coverage of Sinema. As previously noted, the small sample size could be the reason for this shift.
[12] When removing CNN from the dataset, statistical significance remained for the gap between nonpartisan and left-leaning outlets (p=0.003), but that between left- and right-leaning outlets fell within the margin of error.

candidates and policies that do not align with their own views. Outside of partisan media outlets, there were no significant differences in the tone used to cover candidates of different parties and genders.

Reporter Gender

Another interesting finding relates to the gender of the reporters, rather than candidates they covered. In areas where there was a gap between the portrayals of candidates provided by male and female reporters, it appears that male reporters seemed to favor Republican candidates and female reporters worked against them in their coverage. The only statistically significant gap in quantity of coverage based on reporter gender was in the case of Marsha Blackburn, who received significantly more paragraphs of coverage on average from male reporters than female ($p=0.03$). Blackburn also received significantly higher viability assessments from male reporters than female ($p=0.0227$) and was deemed significantly more viable than Bredesen according to male reporters ($p < 0.0001$), but not female. Male reporters assessed Kemp, too, as significantly more viable than Abrams ($p=0.0353$), but this gap did not appear in the coverage that female reporters gave these candidates.

Female reporters, too, seemed to exhibit a bias in the other direction. They mentioned Abrams' name in headlines significantly more than Kemp's ($p=0.02$), though this was not the case for male reporters. Moreover, female journalists mentioned Kemp's negative resources significantly more than positive resources ($p=0.0051$), while there was no such statistically significant gap in male reporters' resource coverage of Kemp. The opposite trend appeared in male reporters'

coverage of Blackburn's resources—they mentioned her positive resources significantly more than her negative resources (p=0.0002), while there was no such gap in female reporters' stories. Bredesen also received significantly more negative than positive resource coverage from male reporters (p=0.0029) but not female reporters. These findings support the theory that male reporters privilege Republican candidates, while female reporters provide them with less positive coverage.

The only exception to this trend appears in mentions of qualifications. In coverage produced by male reporters, Martha McSally received significantly fewer mentions of her qualifications than Kyrsten Sinema (p=0.01), while no similar gap emerged among female reporters. It is interesting that McSally received fewer qualifications mentions from male reporters than Sinema did, as McSally received significantly more mentions of her qualifications in right-leaning outlets than left. As previously mentioned, McSally made an effort to evoke her history as a former air force pilot in her campaign, which could explain her greater qualification coverage on the right. The lack of accordance between patterns of coverage produced by male reporters and right-leaning outlets suggests that although male reporters may often privilege Republican candidates, this is not due to the partisan leanings of the reporters or publications themselves.

As aforementioned, women are more likely to be Democratic than Republican, and men more likely to be Republican than Democratic. In 2017, 48% of male registered voters identified as Republican or Republican-leaning, compared to 44% associating with the Democratic party; 56% of female registered voters identified as Democratic or Democratic-leaning, while only 37% leaned toward the

Republican party (Pew Research Center 2018). However, it is worthwhile to note the partisan breakdown of journalists regardless of gender—a 2013 study found that only 7 percent of journalists identified as Republican, compared to 28 percent who identified as Democratic (Cillizza 2014). This suggests that the issue is less based on reporter partisanship and more based on gender, as the gaps that emerge fall along gendered, but not always partisan lines. However, it is possible that men's tendency to favor Republicans in their coverage could stem from the issues male reporters prioritize, mirroring Dolan's 2004a finding that men evaluate candidates using male issues more than women do. If this is the case, male reporters are perpetuating the stereotypical pattern of male issues and traits being more heavily weighted than female qualities in the media.

Another interesting finding is the difference between male and female reporters' ideological assessments of candidates. For each article I coded, I noted the ideological stance that the candidate was presented as holding, if any was explicitly stated. When looking at my findings in the aggregate, I found that female reporters mostly presented candidates as having the same one ideological stance. Male reporters, however, described female candidates' ideology with more variation. This can be clearly seen in the cases of Bredesen and Sinema, displayed in Table 14.

Table 14: Percentage of Articles with Given Ideological Assessment by Candidate

CANDIDATE	Female reporter	Male reporter
Abrams	13.95% liberal	16.67% liberal
Kemp	23.08% conservative	12.2% conservative
Blackburn	20.83% conservative	30.19% conservative
Bredesen	40.91% moderate	7.27% liberal 38.18% moderate 1.82% conservative
McSally	21.74% moderate 4.35% conservative	5.88% moderate 14.71% conservative
Sinema	57.14% moderate	33.33% liberal 28.21% moderate

Lastly, female reporters at outlets of all partisan leanings were significantly more likely to cover gender as an article's primary focus than were male reporters, with 7.27% of articles written by women focusing on gender, compared to 2.05% of those written by men ($p=0.004$). This supports previous research on the tendency of female reporters to provide more coverage of female candidates and female issues, but it is unclear whether contemporary articles focused on gender harm or hurt female candidates by focusing on their differences in this way.

CHAPTER 6: GENDER-BASED COVERAGE

I coded all articles that were primarily focused on the candidate's gender, even those that had fewer than three mentions, in an attempt to gain a clearer picture of the media's representation of gender in the 2018 midterm elections. Throughout my coding, I also took note of any articles in which particularly gendered terms or discussions emerged. Among articles that primarily focused on gender, many did not provide significant coverage, instead briefly mentioning that a candidate sought to be the first woman in her office. Those articles that did provide in-depth gender-based coverage revealed interesting trends, with a focus on female Democrats navigating intersectional identities and female Republicans navigating conflicting gender and party cues. Although media coverage of female and male candidates appears fair on most quantitative values, gendered discussions continue to emerge in relation to female candidates that are absent in male candidate coverage.

Gender as a Primary Focus

I sought to examine the substance of the articles that were primarily focused on gender, which made up 21 of the 745 articles in my sample. When broken down by candidate, I found that all of the stories except one were focused on female candidates. A single Associated Press story, "Bredesen seeks votes from women in Tennessee Senate race," focused on Phil Bredesen's attempts to capture female votes through founding a "campaign-within-a-campaign" to "highlight issues important to women, such as health care costs for their families" (Sainz 2018). Though the story linked Bredesen, a male candidate, to stereotypically female issues, undermining gender norms, it only did so by reinforcing these very same

norms in calling health care and family issues "important to women." Moreover, Bredesen himself seemed to coopt these female issues, creating a narrative in which he could capitalize on them, while still portraying them as women's issues.

Table 15: Gender-based Articles by Candidate

CANDIDATE	Percentage of total gender-based articles	Number of articles
Abrams	14.28%	3
Blackburn	33.33%	7
Bredesen	4.76%	1
McSally	23.81%	5
Sinema	23.81%	5

The candidate who received the most gender-based coverage was Marsha Blackburn, with seven stories focusing on her gender in relation to her candidacy. Most of Blackburn's coverage highlighted the conflicting cues she sends as a conservative female candidate. One Associated Press story, "Tennessee women slow to back GOP's Blackburn in Senate race," noted her difficult positioning amidst a female population that is becoming increasingly liberal, but it also described instances in which her campaign sought "to play the gender card" by drawing on her "attempts to break the glass ceiling" (Kruesi 2018). It even quoted Blackburn herself, who said "Republican women are never going to get the attention that Democratic women are going to get...I fully understand that Republican women do not fit the narrative that many in the media would like to construct" (Ibid).

A *New York Times* story described Blackburn as "invoking her gender without being prompted," but subsequently retreating "from what could be seen as making any claim of misogyny" by claiming that "skepticism" about her candidacy stems from unfamiliarity, not sexism (Martin 2018). The theme of walking a fine line between her conservative and female sides appeared across the nonpartisan stories I coded. Another *Times* story noted that Blackburn "chose to calibrate her response" to the allegations against Brett Kavanaugh, carefully denouncing the Democrats' accusations while noting the importance of listening to all women who speak out about such allegations (Zernike 2018). An article from *The Washington Post*, "For women on the 2018 campaign trail, 'sexism' is no longer a forbidden word," suggested that Blackburn has been unique among Republican candidates in how she "has leaned into gender confrontations" with her opponent, considering Trump's popularity with the party, but the story also noted the increasing group of voters for whom candidate gender matters (Selk 2018). Interestingly, nearly all coverage of Blackburn's gender came from nonpartisan outlets—only one CNN segment focused on her gender, and it was in a brief mention of her novel and potentially historic candidacy, running to become Tennessee's first female Senator.

Since the bulk of Blackburn's gender-based coverage focused on her as a female Republican, I wondered whether this would also be the case for McSally, as a Republican woman running against another female candidate. Although McSally and Sinema received the same amount of gender-based coverage, I sought to understand whether the content of their coverage differed and whether that of McSally resembled that of Blackburn. Unfortunately, coverage of McSally was not substantive—all of the articles that focused on her gender consisted only of brief

mentions, often noting that both she and Sinema were running to become Arizona's first female Senator. Out of the case studies in my sample, this is the race that received the least amount of media coverage overall, thus I can only posit that Blackburn's pattern of gender-based coverage focusing on her conflicting gender and party cues would hold true for other female Republican candidates.

The one article that provided in-depth gender-based coverage of the Arizona race focused on Sinema, not McSally. The story, entitled "Women, minority candidates emerge in Democratic slate," was published in the *Arizona Capitol Times.* The piece quoted a Republican political consultant, who described the importance of candidates appealing to a broad range of voters across the ideological spectrum. He cited Sinema as an ideal example of someone who "is not relying on the female or LGBT candidate equation to mean victory" (Campbell and Forman 2018). Instead, she and other strategic "diversity" candidates are moving beyond "identity politics" to connect with voters (Ibid). Interestingly, this article suggested a potential harm that could come from too great a focus on one's marginalized identities, stating that "diversity alone is not enough" to win (Ibid). However, it presented the pool of "diverse Democratic nominees" as a "backlash" to Trump's extreme brand of identity politics, and suggested that for many voters, the races may come down to a vote for or against Trump (Ibid). This article approached the subject of Sinema's gender and sexual orientation as a campaign strategy, rather than an aspect of her identity. By emphasizing or de-emphasizing these qualities, the article suggested, a candidate could be more or less likely to succeed electorally. Overall, however, these identities may make a difference no matter how a candidate

chooses to address them, as they fundamentally represent opposition to the current presidential administration.

Similar attempts to address intersectional identities appeared in coverage of Stacey Abrams, for whom gender was linked with her party and race. A local article published in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* focused on the gender of Georgia voters, describing how the female voting pool is split by race, with White women continuing to lean Republican. Although female voters overall favor Abrams' positions on the issues of public education and health care, both stereotypically female issues, these issues are not enough to give Abrams the necessary margin of female support to propel her to victory. This article, like the previous one on Sinema, suggested the difficulty that candidates of "diverse" identities face in capturing votes across the political spectrum—a necessity if they want to win. However, unlike the previous article that suggested Sinema's gender and sexuality were easily contained under the banner of "diversity" candidate, this story explored the nuanced struggles that Abrams must face as a female Democratic candidate of color, when women of a different race fail to support her.

Another article on Abrams, "Women who become governor will have to manage expectations," presumably focused on gender, but in fact just highlighted the obligatory give-and-take between all governors and their state legislatures. Its only relation to gender was covering female governors like Abrams, whom it described as championing issues such as "abortion, marriage equality and voting access" (Cassidy and McDermott 2018). This article, unlike the others, seemingly presented being a woman as, in and of itself, a candidate's defining quality that

would influence the issues she champions and her negotiations with others once in office.

My sample of articles that focused on gender in-depth indicated the continued attention paid to female Republicans' conflicting signals. This finding suggests that even if media coverage is not biased against them, these candidates continue to struggle with getting their campaign messages across—or at least that journalists present such a conflict. Moreover, the in-depth gender stories on female Democratic candidates indicate the salience of intersectional identities and the difficulties female candidates of other marginalized identities continue to face in being understood by and appealing to voters and the media.

Gendered Discussions

Even in articles less directly focused on gender itself, certain discussions indicated patterns of female candidate coverage that would likely not appear for male candidates. For instance, an MSNBC report from September 2018 primarily focused on McSally's need to improve her "likeability"—a quality never discussed in relation to any of the male candidates I studied and reflective of past research on the undue focus on female candidates' personalities (Todd and Marcus 2018). Similarly, although there was vast improvement in the dimension of appearance-based coverage, the one article that featured descriptions of candidates' outfits was an Associated Press story on the Arizona Senate race. This piece, "Campaigns make final push to galvanize voters for midterms," opened by noting that McSally "wore a maroon-and-gold Arizona State University T-shirt and jeans," while Sinema "wore a canary-yellow dress and 4-inch platform shoes with cactus applique"

(Riccardi 2018). Though revealing nothing about the content of the candidates' campaigns or the issues for which they stood, the article sought to position the candidates as starkly different through focusing on their appearances. This sort of appearance-based coverage was seen in none of the coverage of other campaigns. I suspect that it remains here only because both candidates were female and the juxtaposition of their outfits seemed to the reporter an apt way to illustrate their different personalities. This technique perpetuates the historic pattern of focusing on female candidates' superficial qualities over substantive issue coverage, and establishes inequitable expectations for candidates of different genders, forcing female candidates to carefully consider their outfit choices while men face no such scrutiny.

In certain cases, gendered discussions were driven by the candidates themselves. McSally sought to harness gender to belittle her opponent by asserting, "while we were in harm's way, she was protesting our troops in a tutu" (Wallace 2018). McSally used the image of a tutu to evoke Sinema's femininity and juvenility, suggesting weakness and a lack of leadership potential. Juxtaposed against McSally's own description of herself as a former air force combat pilot, this image of Sinema is particularly disparaging.

In other instances, female Republican candidates used their gender to justify policy decisions that a woman might not be expected to take. When describing the need for heightened border security, Blackburn described hearing from mothers about their children's safety, rather than taking a stereotypically masculine stance focused on crime and defense. She cited "the security mom in every one of us" as the driving force behind immigration crackdowns, seeking to reconcile the apparent

conflict between her issue stance and her gender (Ebert 2018). Similarly, McSally noted the importance of supporting "Angel Families," relatives of those killed by undocumented immigrant crime, using family to strengthen her position on immigration restrictions (Ingraham 2018). Despite a national conversation linking strict immigration policy to the separation of children from their parents at the border, these female Republicans flipped the narrative to focus on families as the reason to support immigration crackdowns.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

Gender gaps in government have steadily improved since women first entered the political arena, but significant gulfs remain. It is important to have women in elected office not only to improve gender equity in government, but also to improve legislative productivity. Some research has suggested that female Congressional representatives are more effective than their male counterparts. Studies have found that female representatives speak more on the House floor (Congressional Research Service 2017, 15), bring home more federal spending, and sponsor or co-sponsor more bills per Congress than men (Anzia and Berry 2011, 490). Additionally, women's voices are vital to ensure that "women's issues" receive congressional attention. Female members of Congress are more likely than their male counterparts to take on a leadership role, such as sponsorship, on women's issues legislation (Congressional Research Service 2017, 14), and are more likely to devote time and resources to keep issues that impact women and families on the forefront of behind-the-scenes discussions (Ibid, 17).

In a year in which so many female candidates ran and issues of sexual assault were propelled to the forefront of political conversation, it is particularly important to consider the treatment of female candidates in the media and the impact it may have on voters. As aforementioned, the number of women in the House went from 29 to 47 in 1992 alone, making it the first "Year of the Woman" (Carroll and Schreiber 1997, 133). That election cycle brought female candidates unprecedented media attention, gave female reporters more opportunities, and even mobilized female voters (Ibid; Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994; Dolan 2004b). The

electoral contest and the issues on which a campaign is focused can influence the outcomes of an election, thus the electoral climate in 2018 provides an ideal case study to examine female candidates and their treatment in the media.

My findings have largely proven my hypotheses incorrect. Female and male candidates received equitable amounts of issue-based and personal coverage, and within this coverage, no notable gaps emerged for gendered issues or traits. These trends held true across candidate party, with female Republicans presented as no more masculine than their Democratic counterparts. However, I was correct in noting the ongoing struggles female Republicans face, as became clear through the qualitative analysis of articles that primarily focused on gender. Moreover, there were no notable differences in quotations, horse race coverage, or ideological assessments between female and male candidates.

My analysis of partisan news outlets also disproved my hypotheses. Fox News was no more likely to portray female candidates with female issues and traits than were MSNBC and CNN. I was correct in predicting differences in the coverage male and female reporters provided, but this gap was not along gender lines, as I had hypothesized, but instead along party lines. My findings on article tone were inconclusive, as the vast majority of the articles I coded were neutral in tone, and my codebook did not capture variations in the tones of different voices in each article or news segment. Article tone could provide an interesting focus for future research, looking at whether negative and "outrage" media coverage varies by candidate gender and party.

Overall, my results indicate a much more optimistic media landscape for female candidates, providing more representative and fair coverage which could

help them better reach potential voters. My findings corroborate the work of previous scholars who have argued that female candidates are not disadvantaged in the quantity of coverage (Bode and Hemmings 2012; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2001; Carroll and Schreiber 1997; Devitt 2002; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Meeks 2013; Smith 1997), and quantity of trait and issue coverage received in the media (Meeks 2013; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Hayes 2011; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson, 2001; Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2003; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Smith 1997; Fowler and Lawless 2009). My findings deviate from those of scholars who have found female candidates to receive fewer quotations (Aday and Devitt 2001; Lawrence and Rose 2010), more horse race coverage (Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994b, 1996; Smith 1997; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Smith 1997), and more negative viability assessments than male candidates (Kahn 1994ab, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Lawrence and Rose 2010). I found that male traits were mentioned more than female traits overall, as Meek (2013) and Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) previously noted. My findings on reporter gender differed from those of past studies, as they indicated differences in the ways male and female reporters cover candidates of different parties rather than different genders.

My results indicate that being a woman alone does not dictate media coverage. The extensive coverage of Stacey Abrams' candidacy indicates the salience of race and intersectional identities other than gender in the contemporary political climate. Interestingly, there was minimal coverage of Kyrsten Sinema's sexual orientation, despite her noteworthy candidacy as she was running to be the

first bisexual member of the Senate. However, nearly all of the in-depth articles based on gender did focus on either the intersectional identities of the election's female Democratic candidates or the conflicting cues sent by female Republicans.

In this way, my findings about articles that focused primarily on gender revealed striking trends lost in the quantitative coding data. Of the articles that provided in-depth coverage, many described a female Republican and the challenges she faces by sending conflicting gender and party cues. Although Blackburn and McSally did not suffer from unfair media coverage quantitatively, these articles suggested that reporters continue to focus on the confusing messages female Republicans send. Whether this focus harms or helps these candidates remains unknown and could provide ample material for future study. However, it suggests the importance of reporters being mindful of the coverage they give to female Republican candidates and voters taking care to understand the positions these candidates take on various issues.

My qualitative findings suggest the powerful effect that gendered assumptions and expectations continue to have on female candidates when their party cues do not align with their gender. Female Republicans fail to neatly fit into gendered norms, and by undermining hegemonic notions of what it is to be a female political candidate, they confuse voters and reporters alike. Ideological stereotypes reveal that women are typically assumed to be liberal, yet Republican women champion conservative policies and sometimes present a tough, "masculine" façade. McSally asserted a strong pro-war stance and emphasized her past as an air force combat pilot; Blackburn opposed abortion and supported strict border security. These are not the positions of the liberal female candidates voters expect

to find. Even in three "red" states that voted Republican in the last presidential election, media coverage reveals the confusion that these candidates continue to elicit. Voters and reporters struggle to understand female Republican candidates because they so clearly undermine the hegemonic expectations of their gender in this way. Whether or not this harms Republican women electorally is undetermined, but media coverage suggests that, at the very least, the assumed conflicts between gender and party remain a relevant consideration for female Republicans.

Additionally, one quote in particular indicated that these female Republican candidates may be aware of the public's inability to understand their norm-breaking positions. Blackburn's statement that "Republican women do not fit the narrative that many in the media would like to construct" (Kruesi 2018) demonstrated her acknowledgment of the role conflict she faces. The limiting conceptualization of the gender binary can often result in role conflict, by which "persons of a particular sex category can 'see' quite clearly that they are out of place and that if they were not there, their current troubles would not exist" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 140). Republican women acknowledge that their conservatism does not adhere to hegemonic notions of femininity and can clearly conceptualize the barriers this creates to their being understood by voters and the press. Marsha Blackburn evidently revealed her own understanding of the conflicting cues she and others in her group send to voters, and suggested that the news media would unfairly cover them because of it. In fact, all quantitative measures suggest that Republican women receive media coverage equitable to that of candidates of other parties and genders. However, qualitative evidence suggests that Republican women do face unique obstacles that remain a media focus, which could harm these candidates by

detracting from the issues or putting undue emphasis on the conflicting signals they send to voters.

For female Democrats, too, a qualitative examination of articles focused on gender revealed the ongoing conversations that are occurring for candidates of intersectional identities. Rather than simply facing the challenge of entering a predominantly male field, these candidates, by nature of who they are, confront additional hurdles to appealing to a broad voter base. Research on Trump's 2016 election victory suggests that racism and sexism played a significant role in driving support among his base (Schaffner, MacWilliams and Nteta 2017). For a female candidate of color or female bisexual candidate, then, holding multiple minority identities can be a disadvantage when facing the inherent biases that voters hold. My findings indicate that these candidates not only suffer electorally in this way, but may also struggle with how to present their identities to voters through the media. Discussion of Sinema's strategy of not emphasizing her sexual identity too heavily and Abrams' difficulty in capturing a White female electorate highlight the conflict the media presents when covering these candidates. Much like female Republicans, whose conflicting gender and party cues confuse the public, female Democratic candidates of intersectional identities may struggle to be easily understood or to appeal to a wider base of voters. Whether or not these identities are truly harder for the public to comprehend or accept, the media generates a narrative of conflict that could shape voters' perceptions and influence votes.

It seems as if the media's search for stories driven by novelty, controversy, or conflict has shaped the gender-based coverage female candidates across the aisle have received. After years of industry dominance by the "Big Three" major

television news networks, the recent proliferation of media outlets, audience fragmentation, and technological advances have generated the 24-hour news cycle that exists today (Akdenizli et al. 2008; Bennett 2011, 23). In this highly competitive environment, news outlets have been forced to develop models to draw in audiences and generate a profit. This economic necessity led to the emergence of news "infotainment," in which relaying information is secondary to the goals of including "drama, emotion, plot simplicity, personal morals, and character conflicts" (Bennett 2001, 8; Gunther 1999). Profit motives incentivize "substituting controversy for reporting" and push even renowned news organizations towards "sensationalism" (Bennett 2001, 23). Moreover, research has indicated that episodic frames, in which a story focuses on a particular narrative, are more accessible to audiences than thematic frames, focusing on broader issues (Iyengar 1991; Springer and Harwood 2015). These imperatives can push reporters to seek out compelling, conflict-driven narratives in their political reporting.

In 2018's "Year of the Woman," being a female candidate did not make someone noteworthy. Instead, in an effort to tell compelling stories that draw in an audience, the media shifted to focus on other conflicting or marginalized identities these candidates held. While there was no greater degree of scandal-driven coverage for female candidates, my qualitative findings suggest that reporters chose to highlight conflict-driven stories in relation to gender. For this reason, although my quantitative measures suggested fair and representative coverage of candidates across gender and party lines, my qualitative findings on gender-focused coverage indicate that the media continues to focus on the particular struggles female candidates face.

CONCLUSIONS

On November 6, the last day included in my sampling frame, Brian Kemp, Marsha Blackburn, and Kyrsten Sinema won their states' 2018 midterm election races. The election's many female candidates saw record-breaking success—24 women were elected to the Senate, surpassing the previous record of 23 women in Senate; 102 were elected to the House, surpassing the previous record of 85; and 9 women were elected governor, matching the previous record (Center for American Women and Politics 2018). Across the country, a "blue wave" was declared with Democrats successfully flipping the House (Siddiqui 2018). Shortly after the election, a photo circulated comparing the Democratic and Republican freshman representatives. The Republican photo showed a sea of White men, while the Democrats appeared a patchwork of diversity (Jacobs 2018). Despite talk of 2018 as the "Year of the Woman," this "so-called pink wave was hardly bipartisan" (Edmondson and Lee 2019). Though the 116th Congress is the most female in history, only four new Republican representatives were women, compared to 38 Democrats.

No trends of gendered or party success emerged in the three open[13] Senate races. A Republican man (Mitt Romney) defeated a Democratic woman, a Republican woman (Marsha Blackburn) defeated a Democratic man, and a Democratic woman (Kyrsten Sinema) defeated a Republican woman (*The New York Times* 2018). Of the 16 gubernatorial races with no incumbents, Democrats won eight seats—five male, three female—and Republicans won the other eight,

[13] I use "open" to indicate races in which no incumbent was running for reelection.

with only one Republican woman winning. Both Democratic men and women won 50% of the open gubernatorial seats they sought; Republican men won 46.67% of their open seats, and the one Republican woman who ran was successful in securing her seat. In the House, 58 seats without incumbents were up for election. On the Democratic side, nearly an equal number of women and men ran, with 28 female and 30 male candidates, and women's success rate was even higher than that of men, with 64.29% of Democratic women winning their races, compared to 50% of Democratic men. For Republican women, however, the numbers indicated less progress. Only 15 Republican women ran, compared to 43 men, and only 13.33% of Republican women won, compared to 53.49% of men (Ibid).

Though the media environment has seemingly improved for women, the political arena remains an unequal playing field, particularly for Republican women. Much like the articles that highlighted the difficulties these candidates face in sending conflicting gender and party cues, electoral results too indicate the ongoing struggle that conservative female candidates face.

My results indicate that media producers play a significant role in shaping the coverage that candidates receive. Whether comparing the partisanship of the outlets for which reporters work or the gender of the reporters themselves, my findings suggest that differences in source often mean differences in quantity or quality of coverage for candidates of different genders or parties. This makes it all the more crucial that media consumers be informed about the sources of their news, increasing the need for media literacy programs and anti-fake news initiatives. Additionally, future research could consider coding for mis- and disinformation, to see whether issues of "fake news" differentially impact candidates of various

genders and parties, and whether trends of fake news appear along lines of outlet partisanship and/or reporter gender.

My findings suggest that it would be in the best interests of the Republican party to support more female candidates and engage with more "female" issues. The electoral successes Democrats enjoyed from female wins in 2018's "Year of the Woman" indicate lost opportunities for Republicans by not inspiring as many female candidates or voters. In a nationally representative survey I conducted for class, I found that female Republican voters were the gender-party group most split on opinions about Kavanaugh's confirmation (Press and Johnson 2018). Much like these female Republican voters, my findings here suggest that female Republican candidates continue to struggle in navigating their conflicting gender-party cues. Although media coverage of these candidates seems representative, outlets continue to focus on this contradiction in gender-based coverage. By receiving more support from their party, female Republicans might be better able to navigate this confusing landscape.

Overall, my findings are optimistic, suggesting vast improvements in the media climate for female candidates. News outlets have made great strides in providing equal and fair coverage to candidates regardless of their gender, and even partisan outlets do not exhibit clearly gendered biases. Though articles focused on gender reveal ongoing struggles female candidates face, if media trends continue in this direction, voters will increasingly be able to rely on receiving accurate coverage of candidates' traits and positions regardless of gender.

As the 2020 presidential election field solidifies, it would be pertinent to examine how the media trends that appeared in my findings play out among the

diverse field of Democratic candidates. From a gay mayor of Indiana to a Samoan Hindu female war veteran from Hawaii, the field is full of candidates who present novel and marginalized identities both in and outside the political arena. The strategies the media uses to cover these candidates, and the impact of these messages on the public, present an ideal case for future study.

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APPENDIX

CODEBOOK

[ID] Article ID

ID number (i.e. 0001, 0002)

Article source

[PUB] Publication name

(1) *The New York Times* (2) Associated Press (3) *The Washington Post* (4) CNN (5) MSNBC (6) Fox News

(7) *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (8) *Tennessean* (9) *Arizona Capitol Times*

[HEADLINE] Headline

[URL] Link to article

[CANDIDATE] Candidate name

(1) Stacey Abrams (2) Brian Kemp (3) Marsha Blackburn (4) Phil Bredesen (5) Martha McSally (6) Kyrsten Sinema

[GENDER] Candidate gender

(1) Female (2) Male

[PARTY] Party ID of candidate

(1) Democrat (2) Republican

[RACE]

(1) Georgia gubernatorial (2) Tennessee senatorial (3) Arizona senatorial

[MEDIUM] Medium of outlet

(1) Print (2) TV

[PARTISAN] Partisan leaning of outlet

(1) Nonpartisan (2) Partisan left (3) Partisan right

[REPORTER] Gender of reporter(s)

Indicate the gender of anyone talking or writing about the candidate (reporter, commentator, talk show host, talk show guest, panelist, etc.)

(1) Female (2) Male (3) Other (4) Both (multiple authors) (5) Unknown

[LENGTH] Length of article

Number of paragraphs of the article. For news transcripts, the "article" is the segment of the show related to the candidate, delineated by host intros and outros, panels starting or ending, or concluding statements, (i.e. "Back to you"; "Up next"; "Thank you for joining us") without including concluding statements in the paragraph count. Note: for news transcripts in

which a candidate is mentioned in multiple segments, code each segment as one article.

[QUANT] Paragraphs about candidate

Number of paragraphs in which the candidate is mentioned or quoted (social media posts such as tweets count as quotes). Includes pronouns or words referring to candidates (i.e. "she," "the candidates"), not just proper nouns.

[HEAD] Headline

(1) Mentions candidate by name (2) Does not

[ISSUE] Issue frame

Number of paragraphs that mention the candidate's stances on specific issues.

Content of issues

[QUANTISSF] Female issues

Number of female issues mentioned in relation to the candidate. Female issues include: health care, poverty, education, child-related, environment, minority rights.

[QUANTISSM] Male issues

Number of male issues mentioned in relation to the candidate. Male issues include: foreign policy, economy, agriculture, defense, crime, infrastructure.

[IDEOLOGY] Ideology

Candidate's ideological stance, as presented by the news source. Only code when a publication explicitly writes about a candidate's ideology or the ideology of voters who support the candidate, do not infer from issue stances.

(1) Liberal (2) Moderate/Centrist (3) Conservative (4) n/a

[HORSEQUANT] Horse race coverage

Number of paragraphs that focus on the horse race, or coverage that emphasizes the competition, polling, or likelihood of victory

[VIABILITY] Horserace assessment of candidate

(0) n/a (1) sure loser, (2) behind but gaining ground, (3) slightly behind, (4) competitive, (5) slightly ahead, (6) ahead but losing ground, (7) likely winner

[POSRES] Positive resources

Number of mentions of the candidate's positive resources (i.e. successful fundraising, support from leaders or public figures, party advantages). Personality traits should be coded under PERSONAL, not POSRES. Qualifications that prepare the candidate should be coded under QUALS, not POSRES.

[NEGRES] Negative resources

Number of mentions of the candidate's negative resources (i.e. unsuccessful fundraising, lack of support from leaders or public figures, party disadvantages, controversial scandals)

[QUALS] Qualifications

Whether an article mentions a candidate's presence or lack of experience in office, relevant professional non-political experience, or education.

(1) Qualifications mentioned (2) No qualifications mentioned

[PERSONAL] Personal frame

Number of paragraphs that mention the candidate's personal background and traits. This can include mentions of the candidate's identities (i.e. race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation), family (children, marriage), personal interests, and personality traits. Personality traits should only be counted under PERSONAL if explicitly mentioned, not implied as in the QUANTTRAITF and QUANTTRAITM categories.

[APPEARANCE] Appearance

Number of mentions of the candidate's appearance in the body of the article or headline.

Content of traits

Traits need not be mentioned explicitly, but inferred from context—for example, if one candidate "attacks" another, code it as a male trait (aggressive). In interviews with candidates, include traits the candidates themselves present (i.e. "I'm tough on the border"), but not in cases when the article contradicts the candidate's presentation of him/herself. Do not include traits that others present (i.e. "My opponent is weak on the border").

[**QUANTTRAITF] Female traits**

Number of female traits mentioned in relation to the candidate. Female traits include: honest, compassionate, able to compromise, emotional, dependent, noncompetitive, passive, weak leader, feminine.

NOTE: Only code competitiveness as a trait when explicitly mentioned in relation to a candidate's character, not the nature of the race.

[QUANTTRAITM] Male traits

Number of male traits mentioned in relation to the candidate. Male traits include: able to handle a crisis, decisive, emotionally stable, strong leader, aggressive, independent, objective, competitive, ambitious, tough, masculine.

NOTE: Only code competitiveness as a trait when explicitly mentioned in relation to a candidate's character, not the nature of the race.

[TONE] Overall tone of article

Assessment of whether the article generally uses language and quotations that are positive, approving, optimistic, favorable, or that which is angry, antagonistic, critical, unfavorable.

(1) Positive (2) Negative (3) Neutral (4) Mixed

[NOVELTY] Novelty frame

Whether the article focuses on the candidate or campaign as novel in some way (i.e. "first female representative")

(1) Present (2) Absent (3) Not applicable

[QUOTES] Quotations

Number of paragraphs that include direct quotations from the candidate. Social media posts, excerpts from campaign advertisements, and statements from candidate proxies (i.e. campaign managers) count as direct quotes.

[PRIMFOC] Primary focus

(1) Candidate traits or background (2) Issues (3) Horse race (4) Campaigning (fundraising, strategy, support from party leaders, debate coverage, etc.) (5) Gender (6) Scandal/controversy (7) Other