

Flip-Flopping Politicians

How Voters Punish and Reward a Changing of Opinion

An honors thesis for the Department of Political Science

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Tufts University, 2016

Abstract

This thesis examines how voters respond to politicians who flip-flop on their opinions. Flip-flopping has become a harsh insult, thrown around by the media at politicians who change their opinion on a topic, often no matter the timespan. While it frequently brands politicians as inconsistent, untrustworthy, and insincere, “flip-flopper” can be a label that masks a legitimate evolution of opinion that may benefit an electorate. How voters react to politicians who flip-flop provides insight into what type of representation is valued in America, as well as what personality traits people value in their elected officials. I seek to understand how rationales given for flip-flopping and candidate gender affect voters’ evaluations of flip-flopping.

To evaluate these hypotheses I turn to four case studies (John Kerry in 2004, Kirsten Gillibrand in 2009, Mitt Romney in 2012, and Hillary Clinton in 2016), as well as an experimental survey. The case studies suggest that candidates are punished for flip-flopping, and that the accusation carries with it negative trait implications. The findings of the experimental survey also reveal that flip-flopping brings with it negative trait evaluations, but suggest that the rationale a candidate gives for flip-flopping may be able to mitigate some of the negative reactions to flip-flopping. Significantly, the findings also show that candidate gender did not have as significant an effect as anticipated on voter evaluations of candidates, and that ambiguity is not necessarily a winning strategy for politicians.

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Acknowledgments

Thank you, first, to Professor Schildkraut, for suggesting I take my seminar final paper topic and turn it into a thesis. Thank you for your encouragement, interest, and fantastic mentorship. Thank you as well to Professor Berry who provided fresh eyes for my thesis along the way, and Professor Eichenberg and Professor Penvenne for the thesis communities they have created through class and monthly exchanges. I am very grateful to the Tufts University Summer Scholars Program, which allowed me to dive straight into my research, and provided me with the funds to not only carry out that research, but also to present my work to other undergraduates at the Stanford Research Conference in April. Lastly, a huge thank you to my friends and family who probably never want to hear the word “flip-flop” again.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Flip-flopping has become a harsh insult, thrown around by the media at politicians who change their opinion on a topic, often no matter the timespan. While it frequently brands politicians as inconsistent, untrustworthy, and insincere, as was seen in the 2004 and 2012 presidential campaigns, “flip-flopper” can be a label that masks a legitimate evolution of opinion that may benefit an electorate. How we, as voters, respond to politicians who change their opinions can have significant ramifications for our understanding of, interaction with, and implicit advocacy for certain types of governance. If we, as the media suggests, do have strong negative reactions to flip-flopping, this raises several questions about the type of representation for which we implicitly advocate. The first question we must ask is, does the media and do politicians overestimate how much the public dislikes flip-floppers? If so, in punishing flip-floppers are we telling our representatives that we value consistency over flexibility even in the face of a government shutdown or changing social preferences? Are we affecting the responsiveness of politicians in office? This thesis will focus on how voters respond to politicians who flip-flop on their opinions. I examine how a politician’s explanation for flip-flopping, as well as the gender of the politician affect how he or she is rewarded or punished for changing opinions. For the purposes of my experiment, literature review, and case studies, my operational definition of flip-flopping will be broad and focus more on what is perceived and labeled by the media as flip-flopping, not necessarily just those policy stances that were changed abruptly and quickly within a short period of time.

The foundation of our democracy, representation is hardly straightforward and our founding documents offer little insight into how a representative is meant to behave. The broad foundational theories presented by Burke and Rousseau argue for trustee and delegate representatives, respectively. In the trustee model, once elected representatives are free to act on their own volition, whereas in the delegate model the representative is beholden to the people and should act in ways that represent their own ideas and policy positions. When trying to understand the role of the representative in representation, the role of the voter must also be considered. The relationship between voter and representative is a two-way street. As the transformative work *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* by Fenno demonstrates,

trust plays an integral part in representation.¹ What makes citizens vote for certain candidates, and what should voters expect from those candidates once they are in office? These essential and long studied questions continue to be important today as they inform our interactions with the government and therefore help to shape our society and the rules by which we live, specifically how we act for political, social, and economic change and how we on a whole perceive our form of government.

The dichotomy of the trustee-delegate debate and theories of Burke and Rousseau offer a baseline for understanding representation and how our responses to flip-flopping may implicitly advocate for one style over another. For instance, if we punish flip-flopping even when we as an electorate have changed our opinion on an issue, are we telling representatives to take on more of a trustee model of representing, or rather is this the only instance in which we will accept flip-flopping, since it plays into the delegate representative model? Urbinati and Warren argue that the trustee versus delegate categories of representation are less and less applicable as our representative bodies move away from solely territorial representation.² Pitkin focuses on a simple yet very powerful notion of representation stemming from its linguistic roots “to make present again,” which highlights that true representation does to some extent convey the wills of the people in policy decisions.³ However, Pitkin also breaks representation down further into formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive representation.⁴ Flip-flopping has the possibility to affect formalistic, symbolic, and substantive representation in how it brings up questions of overarching campaign themes, accountability, and votes or other measures of support for certain policies. If voters do react negatively to flip-flopping, that negative reaction could chip away at perceived accountability and trust in government officials and lead to electoral punishment for that representative. Flip-flopping may also make it more difficult for voters to understand what kind of representation they are voting for and cause them to lose faith in substantive representation, feeling as though their voices are not being heard.

Fenno’s work *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* underscores the importance of representation’s definition to include constituents’ voices through the analysis of presentation of self, trust, and the act of explaining as integral elements of representation. These three

¹ Fenno Jr., Richard F, *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. (New York: Longman Classics in Political Science, 1978).

² Nadia Urbinati and Mark E. Warren, “The Concept of Representation in Contemporary Democratic Theory.” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11, (June 2008):387-412, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053006.190533, 389.

³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*,. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 8.

⁴ Ibid.

elements are each easily associated with and relevant to the act of flip-flopping and our understanding of that political act. Fenno's findings on representation can be broken down into four subcategories of the representative-constituent relationship. First, congressmen felt that they had to present themselves in ways that made people "like you and trust you as an individual," for then "they will vote for you."⁵ Second, Fenno found that this trust is necessary in part on the side of constituents, who in voting have to have trust in the candidate to carry out his or her campaign promise once in office. Third, part of this presentation of self and formation of trust requires time and involves notions of honesty and competence, qualities that inform candidate qualification. Fourth, important in considering accusations of flip-flopping, Fenno found that House members feel the need to "explain" what they have done while away from their district, and hold explaining to high importance in earning and keeping trust.⁶

The formation of trust, Fenno found, is cumulative, requires continuous effort, and is fragile. Presentation of self enhances trust, enhancing trust takes time, and the presentation of self takes time. However, he wrote, "presentation of self enhances trust which enhances acceptability of explanations; the acceptability of explanations enhances leeway; therefore presentation of self enhances voter leeway."⁷ The importance of trust, as Fenno outlines it, points to several key problems that flip-flopping may pose; the act may chip away at the trust constituents have in representatives to carry out campaign promises, it may damage the perceived honesty of the candidate, which in turn diminishes the candidate's qualification which helps ensure trust, and lastly as a candidate attempts to explain his or her flip-flops this may alter his or her presentation of self. However, the fluidity of the presentation of self may allow for leeway in terms of political flip-flopping; perhaps if a politician establishes him or herself as someone who explains votes well, connects with, and listens to voters then he or she has gained constituents' trust and can act more as a trustee-style representative than a new politician who has not yet cultivated a strong presentation of self.

How voters react to politicians who flip-flop provides insight into what type of representation is valued in America, as well as what personality traits people value in their elected officials. Political science research suggests that politicians are punished for flip-

⁵ Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, 56.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 141, 144, 149, 151.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

flopping, though surprisingly less so when voters feel strongly about the issue.⁸ Research also suggests that female politicians are evaluated differently than male candidates, but these two fields, flip-flopping and gender, have not been merged.⁹ There has also not been data collected on how the reason given for flip-flopping affects voters' perception of those candidates. Given previous research in these fields, I present several hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that candidates who flip-flop will be evaluated negatively. Second, I hypothesize that female candidates will be evaluated less favorably than their male counterparts. Third, I hypothesize that candidates who give a moral reason for flip-flopping (i.e., "I think this is the right thing to do,") will be rated more favorably than those who give a constituency based response, with candidates who provide no rationale being rated more favorably than candidates giving either rationale for flip-flopping.

In addition to four case studies which explore these hypotheses, I have developed an experimental survey to understand how voters react to flip-flopping, and how gender of the candidate and rationale for flip-flopping interact with those evaluations. In the survey, participants read several hypothetical situations with fictional, unnamed candidates who expressed their policy stance, or stances, on immigration reform. The independent variables manipulated in the hypothetical situations were if the candidate flip-flops or not, the candidate's gender, and the candidate's rationale for flip-flopping. The rationale presented in the scenarios were either that the candidate flip-flopped on immigration and gave, (1) no reason, (2) a moral explanation, or (3) a representative explanation (i.e., "The people I represent are in favor of this new opinion,"). I will be analyzing the results using traditional statistical methods.

The organization of this thesis is as follows. The second chapter is the literature review. The literature review is separated into two sections, one on gender stereotypes in politics and the other on flip-flopping and opinion change. The third chapter contains a series of short case studies of politicians who have flip-flopped and examines how citizens and the media have perceived their actions. The goal of the case studies is to add important context to the literature reviews and experimental results. The case studies include John Kerry in the 2004 presidential campaign, Kristen Gillibrand's move from the House to the Senate, Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential campaign, and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential campaign. The fourth chapter discusses my experimental design (methods and procedure), and the fifth chapter discusses the

⁸ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, "Candidate Repositioning," Draft, November 2010, <http://web.stanford.edu/~tomz/working/TomzVanHouweling-Repositioning-2010-11-02.pdf>, 3.

⁹ Kathleen Dolan and Timothy Lynch, "It Takes a Survey Understanding Gender Stereotypes, Abstract Attitudes, and Voting for Women Candidates," *American Politics Research* 42, no. 4 (July 1, 2014): 656–76, doi:10.1177/1532673X13503034., 658.

results. The full text of the experimental survey can be found in Appendix I. The sixth chapter is my conclusion.

Through the case studies and experimental survey I find that flip-flopping does indeed carry with it negative trait evaluations. However, the survey data revealed that positive traits are also associated with flip-flopping, and respondents were more sympathetic toward politicians flip-flopping towards their own preferred policy position. Most striking from the quantitative analysis was two findings. First, candidate gender did not influence candidate evaluations as much as I anticipated. In fact, where gender was most influential was in considering the respondents' gender when evaluating female candidates. While these findings on gender do not negate the gendered coverage of elements of campaigns that I find with Kerry, Gillibrand, and Clinton, they do offer further hope that gendered stereotypes, at least in the political realm, are becoming less engrained in our immediate evaluations and perceptions of candidates. Second, ambiguity was not the winning policy I expected it to be, and moral rationales provided candidates with more positive evaluations across most trait evaluations and favorability rankings. The weight of the influence of rationale that appeared from the data in changing trait evaluations of candidates is powerful. The importance of rationale suggests that flip-flopping does not have to be a similarly harsh insult across circumstances and campaigns; candidates can mold their response in ways that may combat some of the negative evaluation. In addition, this result challenges the notion that we are completely repelled by flip-flopping. Flip-flopping is not the same in every circumstance despite how quick we are to call all sorts of political action out as such. The results of the survey suggest that voters understand nuances associated with behavior labeled as flip-flopping. The distaste respondents had for ambiguous policy flip-flops also suggests that more explanation from candidates could further enhance trust in representation even during times of confusing political behavior.

Chapter 2: Literature Reviews

- I. Flip-flopping
- II. Gender Stereotypes in Politics

I. Flip-flopping

A term developed in the 1880's, "flip-flopping" has turned into the media and political opponents' favorite insult to throw at candidates and politicians. Called the "kiss of death for a campaign" in an ABC News article, and "one of the dirtiest words in American Politics," in an article on CNN, the label of flip-flopper can brand a candidate as dishonest, incompetent, and power-hungry.¹ The name infamously labeled John Kerry as untrustworthy and flippant in the 2004 campaign ad "Whichever Way the Wind Blows," and similarly made Mitt Romney in the 2012 campaign look irresponsible and confused. While flip-flopping generally refers to a very abrupt reversal of policy, the term is often used with a lack of discretion when it comes to specific contexts revolving around a candidate's repositioning. Our distaste for flip-flopping, at least as the media and political opponents portray it, implies that voters prefer consistency on policy positions, a preference that may deter politicians from meaningfully adjusting their policy stances even in light of new information or constituency changes. This distaste, if significant, is important since repositioning is not always necessarily negative or power seeking. If we as voters consistently punish candidates for changing their minds, we may never see issue evolution that allows members of Congress to find compromises or create a political climate better able to move forward on issues.

Flip-flopping is a catchy term, and one that is heard fairly regularly across news sources to describe changes of opinion that range from full and abrupt reversals to policy modifications to changes that have taken place decades apart. While these characteristics do not provide a particularly clear picture of what constitutes as flip-flopping, the general implication of a policy change is clear. However, the specifics of time, modification, and evolution are debated by politicians and pundits alike. Research on flip-flopping has mainly involved hypothetical scenarios with clear position changes on singular issues that happen over a defined period of time. Recent research by Doherty, Miller, and Dowling focused on the time span of flip-flopping

¹ Julian Zelizer, "Why we should elect flip-floppers," November 9, 2011, CNN.com, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/09/opinion/zelizer-flip-floppers/> and Z. Byron Wolf, "Flip-Floppers Make Better Presidents and Great Flip-Flops in History," October 27, 2011, AbcNews, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/flip-floppers-make-better-presidents-and-great-flip-flops-of-all-time/>

and how this affects voter evaluations. In the study, both a twenty year policy change and a one year policy change were presented as flip-flops.² In research by Tomz and Van Houweling, the flip-flop is a policy reversal that takes place after two years.³ Much of the research on the topic of flip-flopping steers clear of the flip-flopping label, and focuses instead on the underlying assumptions that the name rests on; candidate repositioning, changes in position, changes of mind, and candidate inconsistency.⁴

Research on flip-flopping, though not exhaustive, so far shows us that voters do punish candidates who change their policy stances. This includes experimental data and theories, as well as concrete data. Debacker analyzed roll call voting data from the US Senate, and found that flip-flopping senators do indeed face significant electoral costs.⁵ Negative evaluation of flip-flopping is affected by issue type and issue importance, and voters punish candidates on valence (personality) characteristics, as well as perceiving policy stances differently. Personality characteristics are a very important part of how voters view their politicians, and one consideration people take into consideration when voting. A July 2015 Quinnipiac University National Poll found that, in identifying the most important quality in voting for President, 37% want a President who is “honest and trustworthy,” 37% want a President who “cares about their needs and problems,” and 26% want a President with “strong leadership qualities.”⁶ In other words, character traits and perception of empathy are very influential in vote choice. While personality evaluations of a candidate may be impacted by flip-flopping, flip-flopping as a political behavior can be broken down into multiple smaller components and related theories to understand how it is viewed by voters. This chapter will consider first general research on how and if repositioning is punished by voters (including questions of risk and voter expectations, and character traits), then how issue proximity factors into voter reactions to flip-flopping, next how specifics such as issue type, issue importance, rationale for flip-flopping, and candidate gender play a role in that evaluation, and finally how ambiguity serves as a possibly rewarding alternative to flip-flopping.

² David Doherty, Conor M. Dowling, and Michael G. Miller, “When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence,” *Political Behavior*, October 26, 2015, 1–30, doi:10.1007/s11109-015-9321-9.

³ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Conjoint Analysis. August 2014. <https://web.stanford.edu/~tomz/working/TomzVanHouweling-2014-08-15.pdf>

⁴ Ibid., and Sarah E. Croco and Scott Sigmund Gartner, “Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support,” *International Interactions* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 1–24, doi:10.1080/03050629.2013.863195.

⁵ Jason Matthew Debacker, “Flip-Flopping: Ideological Adjustment Costs in the United States Senate,” *Economic Inquiry* 53, no. 1 (January 2015): 108+, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12114. 108.

⁶ Quinnipiac, “QU Poll Release Detail,” *QU Poll*, accessed April 18, 2016, <https://www.qu.edu/news-and-events/quinnipiac-university-poll/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2264>.

Punishing flip-flopping

Research supports the idea that flip-flopping is generally punished by voters, and affects evaluations of both policy and character.⁷ Tomz and Van Houweling, who have conducted substantial research on flip-flopping, have found that candidate repositioning brings significant electoral costs no matter the issue type (although the trait “strong leader” suffers more when a candidate repositions on abortion than on taxes), and in fact this cost is larger than effects of sharing a candidate’s race, gender, or religion.⁸ Looking at the issues of taxes and abortion in particular, Tomz and Van Houweling found large penalties for flip-flopping.⁹ Candidates in their study who stayed firm on taxes received 57.5% of the vote, whereas those who repositioned received 46.2% of the vote. On abortion, candidates who stood firm received 56.8% of the vote, and those who repositioned received 46.6% of the vote.¹⁰ The average cost for repositioning was a loss of six points.¹¹ Doherty, Miller, and Dowling also found that, controlling for other factors, flip-flopping is seen negatively on a broad array of job competence and personality assessments.¹² In research particularly focused on the circumstances surrounding the repositioning, Hummel found that flip-flopping that takes place from primaries to general elections provides an exception from the punishment that usually accompanies repositioning. Hummel interprets this finding as a result of “moving middle” strategy being an accepted campaign move.¹³ Debacker found that candidates in close elections face larger fixed costs for repositioning, and these fixed costs make it smarter for a candidate to be a flip-flopper (i.e. make big changes in a short time span) than a wishy-washy candidate (i.e. one who makes smaller changes over a longer span of time).¹⁴

In a conjoint analysis, Tomz and Van Houweling found that public opinion on an issue must be at 70/30 for repositioning to be an effective strategy for a candidate.¹⁵ As they describe, this drastic cut off is in direct opposition with the commonly held Downsian equilibrium, that candidates will move on a position if more than 50% of people agree with something. Tomz and

⁷ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis, July 2012, https://web.stanford.edu/~tomz/working/TomzVanHouweling_PoliticalRepositioning.pdf, 5.

⁸ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Conjoint Analysis, 2,3. Tomz and Van Houweling, “Candidate Repositioning,” 21.

⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Conjoint Analysis, 13.

¹² Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, “When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence,” 16.

¹³ Patrick Hummel, “Flip-Flopping from Primaries to General Elections,” *Journal of Public Economics* 94, no. 11–12 (December 2010): 1020–27, doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.08.006. 1023, 1025.

¹⁴ Debacker, “Flip-flopping: Ideological Adjustment Costs,” 126.

¹⁵ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Conjoint Analysis, 3.

Van Houweling found large repositioning costs for moving to the middle in the general election, but minute costs to candidates who moved to more extreme positions in the primaries.¹⁶

Doherty, Miller, and Dowling's research on flip-flopping has produced similar data that is also in opposition to the Downsian equilibrium, despite some moderating effects of issue agreement and issue type. Specifically, they found that the net effect of flip-flopping is not positive for a candidate until 83% of the public supports the new position, and is in fact only a significant positive effect (distinguishable from 0) when 95% of the public supports the new position.¹⁷

Tomz and Van Houweling explain that this skewed equilibrium has huge implications for the operation and quality of our government; voters' dislike for flip-flopping contributes to polarization and gridlock, with politicians unwilling to risk changing their opinion even when more than a majority of the country prefers a different policy.¹⁸ In fact, through their experimental study, Tomz and Van Houweling found that attack on the alleged flip-flopper that focused on his or her honesty were more effective than ones that focused on predictability or leadership, which Tomz and Van Houweling hypothesized was because attacks of honesty target both perceptions of character and policy.¹⁹

Character evaluations

Research that finds negative implications for flip-flopping has highlighted the importance of character traits and personality evaluations, and how these are significantly impacted when a candidate flip-flops on an issues. Tomz and Van Houweling found that candidates who reposition suffer negative evaluations for strong leadership and honesty, and a small positive evaluation for open-mindedness.²⁰ McCaul found that respondents value consistency, and politicians themselves consider consistency to be more important than agreeing with constituents.²¹ In his research, however, as well as in research by Hoffman and Carver, voters preferred candidates who agreed with them over ones who were merely consistent.²² The double package, consistent candidates with similar views, were seen as more knowledgeable on current events, the most desirable as political leaders, and were seen more positively on personality traits

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, "When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence," 21.

¹⁸ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Conjoint Analysis, 3.

¹⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 23.

²⁰ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Candidate Repositioning," 21, 22.

²¹ Kevin D. McCaul et al., "Appraisals of a Consistent versus a Similar Politician: Voter Preferences and Intuitive Judgments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68, no. 2 (February 1995): 292, 297.

²² Hoffman, Hillary S. and Charles S. Carver, "Political Waffling: Its Effects on the Evaluations of Observers." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. 14, no. 4 (August 1984): 375-385, 375.

McCaul et al., "Appraisals of a consistent versus a similar politician: Voter preferences and intuitive judgments," 298.

such as decisiveness, sincerity, stability, reliability, and strength.²³ Tomz and Van Houweling found that flip-flopping negatively affects voters' perceptions of a candidate's character, and this is evident from the case studies of politicians like John Kerry and Mitt Romney, who were constantly described as dishonest, insincere, and incompetent.²⁴ Tomz and Van Houweling found that in presidential debates, attacks of flip-flopping are often accompanied by the adjectives "dishonest, uninformed, and unpredictable."²⁵ In recent research by Doherty, Miller, and Dowling, politicians who flip-flopped experienced negative personality outcomes, specifically on traits such as trustworthiness and honesty.²⁶ As past research (involving hypothetical scenarios as well as analysis of real debates) and the case studies in chapter 3 demonstrate, flip-flopping is often turned into a "character flaw," and can be used as a repeated label and insult to describe all sorts of policy changes.²⁷

Flip-flopping as a voting risk

Voters may also punish flip-flopping because it presents a sort of risk, which confuses voter expectations. Research has shown that voters focus on what a candidate will do in office, not what their specific policy position at the time puts forward.²⁸ Research, though disagreeing on if all or some voters are risk-averse or not, has found that a calculation of risk, closely relating to voter expectations, is at play in vote choice. Shepsle defines voting as a choice between risky alternatives, and found that flip-flopping therefore poses a risk dilemma for voters as it makes it difficult for them to determine outcomes and assess potential risk.²⁹ If voters are risk-averse, previous literature demonstrates that flip-flopping makes a candidate a much more risky and unpredictable option.³⁰ Bernhardt and Ingberman found that this risk quality can explain incumbency advantage; a well-known and established politician presents much less of a risk than a newcomer.³¹ In fact, Bernhardt and Ingberman use this theory to explain the closeness of Presidential elections, wherein both candidates are so well known that neither poses much more

²³ Hillary S. Hoffman, "Political Waffling and Voter Perception," Dissertation, (1982), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/docview/303245383/abstract/C75F974C258D40CBPQ/1.2>.

²⁴ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Candidate Repositioning," 7, 21.

²⁵ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 21.

²⁶ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, "When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence," 9.

²⁷ Michael Lempert, "On 'flip-Flopping': Branded Stance-Taking in U.S. Electoral politics," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 223–48, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9841.2009.00405.x. 230.

²⁸ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, "Candidate Positioning and Voter Choice," *The American Political Science Review* 102, no.3 (Aug., 2008): 303-318. doi:10.1017/S0003055408080301, 315.

²⁹ Kenneth A. Shepsle, "The Strategy of Ambiguity: Uncertainty and Electoral Competition," *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 2 (June 1972): 555–68, doi:10.2307/1957799. 560.

³⁰ Michael Tomz and Robert P. Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity," *The American Political Science Review*. 103, no.1 (February 2009): 83-98. doi:10.1017/S0003055409090066, 85.

³¹ M. Daniel Bernhardt and Daniel E. Ingberman, "Candidate Reputations and the 'incumbency Effect,'" *Journal of Public Economics* 27, no. 1 (June 1, 1985): 47–67, doi:10.1016/0047-2727(85)90028-3. 49.

risk than the other.³² Whether or not voters are risk-averse, a candidate who flip-flops makes it difficult for a voter to know what to expect when that candidate makes it to office. Tomz and Van Houweling found that voters do not discount all past policy positions when a candidate repositions, and instead blends together these stands.³³ Voters, even when a candidate flip-flops to a clearly unpopular stance that is against public opinion, are unsure if the candidate will follow through on his or her new opinion.³⁴

Flip-flopping and issue proximity

Issue proximity has been a source of conflict within the literature on flip-flopping. Croco and Gartner in their analysis of flip-flopping, gender, and foreign policy, found that voter policy preference is more significantly dependent on the candidate's current policy position. In their research, issue proximity was more important to voters than was party affiliation or consistency.³⁵ These findings are supported by more recent research by Croco, which also found that citizens base their willingness to vote more on policy position on the issue, and that in fact politicians who only recently flipped to the citizen's preferred policy stance was evaluated the same as a politician who had held that view over time.³⁶ Even when candidates flip-flop, McCaul found that agreeing with the candidate's final issue stance had the strongest effect on voting outcome.³⁷ In addition, in research by Hoffman and Carver similarity of voter position and candidate position had the strongest effect on candidate evaluations.³⁸ However, further research by Tomz and Van Houweling demonstrates the inaccuracy of a purely proximity based theory. Voters reacted not only to issue proximity, but also reacted negatively to flip-flopping itself.³⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling found that voters who share issue position with members of the party they identify with have stronger reactions to repositioning by that candidate.⁴⁰ They assert that out-of-step voters are not as invested and interested in these policies and policy changes, and therefore not bothered by repositioning.⁴¹ This finding builds off of an earlier study by Tomz and Van Houweling, that found that for voters who considered the issue more important, issue

³² Ibid., 57, 58.

³³ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 7.

³⁴ Michael Tomz and Robert Van Houweling, "Candidate Inconsistency and Voter Choice," Draft, August 2009, <http://web.stanford.edu/~tomz/working/TomzVanHouweling-2009-08.pdf>, 6.

³⁵ Croco, Sarah E. and Scott Sigmund Gartner. 2014. "Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support," 12.

³⁶ Sarah E. Croco, "The Flipside of Flip-Flopping: Leader Inconsistency, Citizen Preferences, and the War in Iraq," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, April 1, 2016, doi:10.1093/fpa/orw006.

³⁷ McCaul et al., "Appraisals of a consistent versus a similar politician: Voter preferences and intuitive judgments," 295, 298.

³⁸ Hoffman, Hillary S. and Charles S. Carver. "Political Waffling: Its Effects on the Evaluations of Observers," 375.

³⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Candidate Inconsistency and Voter Choice," 8,9.

⁴⁰ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Conjoint Analysis, 16, 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.,16, 17.

proximity was more important than repositioning.⁴² Hoffman and Carver found that initially dissimilar candidates, that is those who, before repositioning disagreed with the voters, were rated more harshly by respondents, who rated the consistently disagreeing politician as more decisive and better adjusted than the politician who repositioned closer to the respondent's preferred policy stance.⁴³ Doherty, Miller, and Dowling found that agreement on policy position has a large effect on how voters evaluate that candidate, and that politicians who changed opinions were regarded more favorably than those with whom voters disagreed. However, the study still found that, controlling for other factors, political repositioning is costly, seen negatively, and affects a broad range of assessments on job performance, personality traits, and worthiness of electoral support.⁴⁴

Similar to the concept of issue proximity is the element of party affiliation. Tomz and Van Houweling also found that party affiliation can moderate the negative effects of flip-flopping, and that proximity has a strong effect on vote choice.⁴⁵ In general in their study, voters rated candidates of the same party better on traits and expected better policy representation. Democrats were punished more for flip-flopping, and voters rated candidates of the opposite party more negatively for flip-flopping.⁴⁶ Candidates who, to begin with, held a view contrary to their party's position stance and then changed their opinion to match their party were seen as more credible flip-floppers.⁴⁷ Additionally, Croco and Gartner found that along with issue proximity, party affiliation was a very significant factor in voters' perceptions of candidates.⁴⁸ *Specifics within flip-flopping; Issue importance, issue type, rationale, and candidate gender*

There are several key factors that past literature has considered when it comes to candidate flip-flopping or repositioning, which include issue importance, issue type, rationale given for flip-flopping, and the gender of the candidate in question. These subfields give us further insight into how voters interpret flip-flopping, and in what circumstances it is more easily accepted or less harshly punished. Understanding these nuances may give politicians a better comprehension of when is best to listen to new information or a changing constituency and change their position.

⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴³ Hoffman and Carver, "Political Waffling: Its Effects on the Evaluations of Observers," 381.

⁴⁴ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, "When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence," 9,10, 16

⁴⁵ Tomz and Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity," 89.

⁴⁶ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 2, 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁸ Croco and Gartner. "Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support," 11, 12.

Issue importance has provided interesting findings in the realm of political repositioning research. While it isn't exactly clear if all issues are equal when it comes to flip-flopping, Tomz and Van Houweling found that a very important factor in voter evaluations of candidate flip-flopping is how important the issue is to the voter. Contrary to practical assumption, Tomz and Van Houweling found that the more important the issue is to the voter, the less that voter punishes flip-flopping. These voters also put less weight on valence considerations.⁴⁹ In their study, voters who considered the taxes to be a more important to them punished repositioning by seven points, and those who did not punished repositioning by fifteen points. On abortion, voters who considered the issue important to them punished repositioning by eight points, and those who did not punished repositioning by twelve points.⁵⁰ A possible explanation of these findings is that when voters view an issue as more important to them, they are more likely to think that a change in position on that issue has been the result of hard thinking and sincere changes of heart. If the issue is less important, voters might consider political flip-flopping to be more pandering and calculating. Slightly different than issue importance, Hoffman and Carver found in contrast that on the issue of gun control "emotionality" about the issue did not have a significant effect on how voters viewed the candidates in the study.⁵¹ Candidates of high and low emotionality both rated the initially dissimilar candidate lowest.⁵²

Research on flip-flopping has also presented conflicting findings on how issue type affects voter evaluations of candidates. Tavits, through a focus on pragmatic versus principled issues and data collected on 23 "advanced democracies" across 40 years, found that candidates were rewarded for repositioning on pragmatic issues (and seen as "getting things done"), but punished for repositioning on principled issues (seen as inconsistent and lacking credibility).⁵³ Although Tomz and Van Houweling were not specifically testing for issue type difference along this particular division, their research did not show a strong effect of issue type. Voters were just as likely to punish flip-flopping on abortion as flip-flopping on taxes, because of the moderating effect of issue importance (more voters consider abortion an important issue).⁵⁴ Investigating more closely, due to this moderating effect of issue importance, repositioning on taxes is higher

⁴⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Candidate Repositioning," 23, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵¹ Hoffman and Carver, "Political Waffling: Its Effects on the Evaluations of Observers," 384.

⁵² Hillary S. Hoffman, "Political Waffling and Voter Perception," 22.

⁵³ Margit Tavits, "Principle vs. Pragmatism: Policy Shifts and Political Competition," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (January 2007): 151–65. 151, 152.

⁵⁴ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Candidate Repositioning," 3, 15, 22.

than repositioning on abortion, although repositioning on abortion bears more negative valence ratings.⁵⁵ Within each issue, there were slight variations. The gap in punishment of flip-floppers, between voters who felt strongly about the issue versus those who didn't, was larger for taxes than it was for abortion (8pts for taxes, 4pts for abortion).⁵⁶ Issue type, based on research by Tomz and Van Houweling, seems to play an important role because of its link to issue importance, something Tavits' research did not investigate.

In recent research on flip-flopping and issue type, the focus has been on issue understanding and voter confidence on the issue. Doherty, Dowling, and Miller found that issue type matters in that when voters consider themselves more confident on a certain issue, they evaluate a flip-flopping politician more negatively. Voters were also quicker to punish politicians who flip-flop on issues voters see as easy to understand. In essence, voters expect politicians to be consistent on fairly straightforward issues, in this study abortion or Social Security, and allow some leeway for opinion change on more complex and complicated ones, such as sending troops to combat ISIS or positions on nuclear power plants.⁵⁷

Research has not gone into much detail as to how the rationale candidates give for flip-flopping affects how voters evaluate them. When it comes to scandals in general, Smith, Powers, and Suarez found that the types of responses candidates provide after the scandal has a significant impact on how he or she is judged. Justification was the most effective type of account, denial a close second, and excuses were shown to be weak responses.⁵⁸ Tomz and Van Houweling assert from their analysis of presidential debates and an experimental study, that candidates cannot use rhetoric to completely shed themselves of negative evaluations, however, different rhetorical attacks can influence how negatively that candidate is viewed.⁵⁹ McCaul found that issue proximity was the best marker of initial vote choice, regardless of the reason candidates gave for their reposition.⁶⁰ Tomz and Van Houweling, while they did not test rationale in their experiments, found through their analysis of presidential debates that the rationales candidates most often gave were pragmatic (i.e. explaining the switch based on adaptation to new circumstances) or they provided a moral justification. Tomz and Van

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, "When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence," 13,14,15.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth S. Smith, Ashleigh Smith Powers, and Gustavo A. Suarez, "If Bill Clinton Were a Woman: The Effectiveness of Male and Female Politicians' Account Strategies Following Alleged Transgressions," *Political Psychology* 26, no. 1 (2005): 115–34, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792501>, 127.

⁵⁹ Tomz and Van Houweling. "Political Repositioning." Detailed Synopsis, 3,23.

⁶⁰ McCaul et al., "Appraisals of a consistent versus a similar politician: Voter preferences and intuitive judgments," 295, 298.

Houweling did not find any candidate in a debate that offered the explanation that public opinion had changed.⁶¹ More generally speaking, McGraw found that politicians present themselves through explanatory tactics, or accounts. The most effective accounts are justifications, rather than excuses, with the most effective and common justifications involving mitigating circumstances or a focus on morals and norms.⁶² Interestingly, she found that voters evaluated the representative most positively when he or she offered no explanation; a finding in line with research that has found benefits in ambiguity and vague policy stances.⁶³

Another variable that has been only briefly touched on in the literature on flip-flopping is how the gender of the candidate factors into how he or she is evaluated when repositioning. Still, in 2016, we are nowhere close to gender parity in the House and Senate, despite the fact that women fare just as well as men in campaigns.⁶⁴ Research discussed in Part II of this chapter presents specifically how gender stereotypes are alive and well in how the media reports on political candidates, as well as considers the conflicting research to date on the level of impact gender stereotypes have on voter evaluations of candidates. Tomz and Van Houweling did not delve into this realm of research, but they did manipulate demographic variables and found that women respondents provide approximately five percentage points more support to a female candidate over an identical male candidate. However, the effects of demographic variables such as gender, race, and religion, did not come close to the effects of proximity and party.⁶⁵ Croco and Gartner's research focuses on female candidates evaluations of flip-flops on foreign policy; foreign policy being a stereotypically masculine arena in sharp contrast to stereotypically female strengths and attributes. Their research defies conventional knowledge on the topic, as Croco and Gartner found that respondents in their experiment did not punish politicians who change their minds about a conflict, no matter the gender (instead, current policy is the most important aspect to respondents). The only arena where gender did reveal some effect was considering character traits as a result as flip-flopping. Respondents considered female senators who flip-flopped to be weaker leaders than male senators.⁶⁶ Studying foreign policy

⁶¹ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 21.

⁶² Kathleen M. McGraw, "Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 04 (December 1991): 1133–57, doi:10.2307/1963939. 1133, 1137, 1141.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1150.

⁶⁴ Kira Sanbonmatsu, "Women Candidates and their Campaigns," Political Parity, accessed April 19, 2016, <https://www.politicalparity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Parity-Research-Full.pdf>

⁶⁵ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Conjoint Analysis, 9.

⁶⁶ Croco and Gartner, "Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support," 1, 14.

flip-flops provide a very targeted and specific lens through which to understand the interaction of flip-flopping and gender, and gender may still have an effect on how candidates are evaluated for abortion, a woman's issue, versus taxes, an economic and sometimes stereotypically masculine issue.

Alternatives to flip-flopping

While research shows that voters punish flip-flopping, studies have concurrently found that ambiguity may be a rewarding strategy for politicians to adopt. However, Tomz and Van Houweling have identified possible downfalls of ambiguity, such as a possible negative rating on strong leadership.⁶⁷ Risk averse voters, and those who were very sure of their own position on the topic were also less likely to choose an ambiguous over a precise candidate.⁶⁸

Even so, Tomz and Van Houweling found in their study that ambiguity does not significantly cost candidates in any situations, accounting for party affiliations. Voters equally preferred precise and ambiguous candidates.⁶⁹ Additional literature has shown what Tomz and Van Houweling recently confirmed, that far from being punished like flip-flopping, ambiguity can provide a solid strategy for politicians.⁷⁰ Tomz and Van Houweling found that when candidates appeal to their own party, ambiguity is a particularly attractive strategy.⁷¹ Voters chose their own party 84% of the time when candidates took precise stances, and 94% of the time when ambiguous statements were made.⁷² They hypothesized that this may be a result of partisan optimism, whereby voters of the same party of the candidate project their own values and policy positions onto the candidate, which they found is a more powerful influence than partisan pessimism.⁷³ In fact, despite the rise in political pledges, ambiguity is prevalent in political debates of today.⁷⁴ Page found that often candidates do not take specific stances on topics, and if they do, they take them in "obscure forums," where these specific stances do not reach the larger public.⁷⁵ Page explains this phenomenon with the emphasis allocation theory,

⁶⁷ Tomz and Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity," 85, 89.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁰ Benjamin I. Page, "The Theory of Political Ambiguity," *The American Political Science Review* 70, no. 3 (September 1976): 742–52, doi:10.2307/1959865. 743, 749.

Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 3, 25.

⁷¹ Tomz and Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity," 90.

Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 27.

⁷² Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 27.

⁷³ Tomz and Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity," 93.

⁷⁴ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis, 27.

⁷⁵ Benjamin I. Page, "The Theory of Political Ambiguity," *The American Political Science Review* 70, no. 3 (September 1976): 742–52, doi:10.2307/1959865. 743, 645, 749.

whereby politicians must choose which issues and groups they must focus their time and resources on.⁷⁶

Although Shepsle, whose research has focused on risk and lottery political systems, has found that ambiguity is not always a winning strategy, he did find that under some conditions it may be rewarding and is often employed by candidates.⁷⁷ Tomz and Van Houweling delve into the reasons that ambiguity is a favorable alternative to flip-flopping, particularly because it allows the voter to project his or her own views onto the candidate. Partisan optimism can solidify this effect, and in essence ambiguity is a risk-neutral option for voters, who take into account policy histories and therefore are not completely sold on new, specific policies that a candidate may present.⁷⁸ Similarly, Fenno who focused extensively on candidate and voter relationships, communication, and trust, demonstrated that ambiguity is the safest bet for a politician, and that Congressmen work hard not to be seen as flip-floppers.⁷⁹ This makes sense considering how the media and political opponents are quick to portray flip-flopping negatively. This interaction between theory of representation and negative reactions to flip-flopping has significant implications; if we as voters prefer when our candidates do not elaborate on their policy positions, does this give them free reign when in office? Or rather, it may be a positive in that politicians provide themselves with more space to compromise and consider outside and new information when they actually arrive in office and start making decisions.

Ambiguity might also prove a helpful general strategy because of a “reputational” spillover effect suffered by flip-flopping candidates, an effect shown in the research of Tomz and Van Houweling and more recently Doherty, Miller, and Dowling.⁸⁰ This effect describes how, when a candidate flip-flops on one issue, voters become unsure of his or her policy stances on unrelated issues and question the candidate’s likelihood of consistency on those other issues.⁸¹ Tomz and Van Houweling found that voters were more skeptical of candidates who repositioned on taxes than of those who stood firm, and that repositioning on abortion undermined candidates’ credibility on taxes. When the candidate was firm on both issues, 26% of respondents doubted

⁷⁶ Ibid., 748.

⁷⁷ Shepsle, “The Strategy of Ambiguity: Uncertainty and Electoral Competition,” 560, 567.

⁷⁸ Tomz and Van Houweling, “The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity,” 83.

Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis, 27.

⁷⁹ Fenno, Richard F. Mar 1986. “Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics.” *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 1 (March 1986): 3-15, doi:10.2307/1957081, 9.

⁸⁰ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis.

Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, “When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence.”

⁸¹ Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis, 11.

the candidate's final position. When the candidate had repositioned on abortion, 36% of respondents doubted the candidate's final position. Interestingly, this spillover only occurred when the candidate stood firm on taxes, not when he or she repositioned on taxes as well as abortion.⁸² Research by Doherty, Miller, and Dowling has also found this spillover effect, which is amplified if the candidate is perceived as very likely to change his or her opinion on the initial issue in question. Interestingly, however, their research also found a positive spin to this spillover effect; voters who disagreed with the initial policy position of the candidate rated that candidate more favorably when they believed that it was likely the candidate would change his or her mind on the issue.⁸³ This potentially posits more support for the positive effect ambiguity might have for politicians, particularly concerning contentious issues where specific policy stances may alienate large portions of voters. The spillover effect in prior research is not only important in considering how ambiguity provides an alternative to flip-flopping, but also in assessing the real-life effects of repositioning, which often is not contained to a single issue in a candidate's campaign.

Conclusion

Research on flip-flopping, though limited, demonstrates to some extent we observe in the media; voters do not like flip-flopping and punish candidates who reposition. This punishment is meaningful, and has huge implications for the quality of representation that we imply is desired. As Tomz and Van Houweling demonstrate found, candidates would not find it in their best interest to reposition until public opinion is lopsidedly in favor of a different position, or that they should (as many do) offer ambiguous platforms.⁸⁴ Ambiguity as an alternative can be dangerous and uninformative, but may also provide more opportunity for compromise once a candidate reaches office. Flip-flopping is never the same among candidates and does not play out in the same contexts, therefore it is necessary to consider how reactions to flip-flopping differ depending on different variables: rationale given, issue type, issue proximity, issue importance, and race and gender, which research so far has not investigated.

II. Gender Stereotypes in Politics

⁸² Ibid., 11.

⁸³ Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, "When Is Changing Policy Positions Costly for Politicians? Experimental Evidence," 17.

⁸⁴ Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Conjoint Analysis.

Tomz and Van Houweling, "The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity."

While women only represent 19.4% of the current Congress, their representation in politics has been increasing at a slow, but steady, rate. An increased presence in the public eye has brought along with it many questions about gender stereotypes, particularly if and how female politicians are evaluated or perceived differently by voters. While gender stereotypes are a persistent topic of discussion in campaigns involving women, women fare just as well as men in political campaigns.⁸⁵ However, this success does not discount the existence of gendered candidate evaluations and current research shows that male and female politicians are not always treated equally with regard to certain issues or in certain contexts. The election of 2008, with Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin getting closer to a potential presidency than any woman to date, showed us that gender stereotypes are alive and well in America, though the extent and nuances of their effects are not definitively established. Consistently, however, it has been shown that female politicians are more likely to receive media coverage and commentary that focuses on appearance, feminine traits, and their ability to handle women's issues.⁸⁶ Congresswomen vote and sponsor more bills relating to women's issues, but when congresswomen sponsor bills, they receive more scrutiny, debate, and hostile testimony.⁸⁷ Media coverage of women also disproportionately focuses on personality traits and appearance.⁸⁸

Since gender preferences and stereotypes could affect how candidates are evaluated for flip-flopping on an issue, I will be focusing on how women are perceived in terms of their personality and relationship to particular issues. Flip-flopping has the ability to affect how a voter views his or her politician's stance on issues as well as on personality, two spheres of evaluation that are affected by gendered stereotypes. Although not all research agrees that gender ultimately does influence vote choice, flip-flopping may be an area where gender differences matter and influence voter evaluations of politicians.

When looking at the research of gender stereotypes, the data and literature can be broken down into roughly three categories to understand their nuanced impact; baseline gender preference and gender trait stereotypes and gender belief stereotypes.⁸⁹ First, I will consider the

⁸⁵ Kira Sanbonmatsu, "Women Candidates and their Campaigns," 1.

⁸⁶ Jennifer L. Lawless, "Sexism and Gender Bias in Election 2008: A More Complex Path for Women in Politics," *Politics & Gender* 5, no. 1 (March 2009): 70–80, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/10.1017/S1743923X09000051>. 71.

Johanna Dunaway et al., "Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races," *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (September 2013): 715–26. 719.

⁸⁷ Pamela Paxton, Sheri Kunovich, and Melanie M. Hughes, "Gender in Politics," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, (August 2007): 263–284, doi:[10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131651](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131651), 274.

⁸⁸ Dunaway et al., "Traits versus Issues: How Female Candidates Shape Coverage of Senate and Gubernatorial Races," 719.

⁸⁹ Baseline gender preference term developed by Kira Sanbonmatsu, "Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice," *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no.1, (January 2002): 20–34. doi:[10.2307/3088412](https://doi.org/10.2307/3088412).

literature on the existence of the “baseline gender preference,” or the premise that without taking into account other factors, voters already have a gendered preference when it comes to politics.⁹⁰ Second, I will present the research on trait stereotypes, or that male and female politicians do and should possess different personality qualities. Third, I will look at belief stereotypes, the idea that male and female politicians are better suited to handle different issues. Finally, I will consider specific research on gender stereotypes as it relates to power seeking, emotionality, and the post 9/11 political climate to see how gender stereotypes in politics may have nuanced effects in specific circumstances.

Baseline gender preference

Regarding the existence of a baseline gender preference, a wide selection of literature shows that voters partly rely on gender stereotypes when making their decisions, but further research also puts forth the finding that these stereotypes may be overwhelmed by influences of incumbency and political party.⁹¹ Even so, gender stereotypes can provide an important cue or heuristic for voters, especially in low-information races. Therefore, studies that involve hypothetical scenarios and whose results demonstrate a gender bias may be more accurate in reflecting the outcomes of low-information races.⁹² A 2002 study by Sanbonmatsu identified the existence of what she calls a baseline gender preference, and demonstrates through probabilities how this baseline preference for a male or female candidate stems from gender stereotypes. Her research falls into what she calls the gender schema theory, whereby voters have baseline gender preferences that are explained by gender stereotypes and the gender of the respondent, and that these preferences affect vote decision, particularly in low information contexts.⁹³ Sanbonmatsu found that 62% of women are likely to state a preference, with 62% of those with a preference preferring female candidates. Of the sample 51% of men stated a preference, with 68% of them preferring a male candidate.⁹⁴ Although social desirability always must be taken into account, Sanbonmatsu shows that even social desirability does not explain why still roughly 33% of men 25% of women expressed a preference for a male candidate. If anything, social desirability

Division between gender and trait stereotypes identified by Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” *American Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (February 1993): 119–47, doi:10.2307/2111526. 119.

⁹⁰ Sanbonmatsu, “Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice.”

⁹¹ Kathleen Dolan, “Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?,” *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (March 2014): 96–107. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23612038>, 102, 105.

Dolan and Lynch, “It Takes a Survey Understanding Gender Stereotypes, Abstract Attitudes, and Voting for Women Candidates,” 666.

⁹² Dolan and Lynch, “It Takes a Survey: Understanding Gender Stereotypes, Abstract Attitudes, and Voting for Women Candidates,” 660.

⁹³ Kira Sanbonmatsu, “Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 1 (January 2002): 20–34, doi:10.2307/3088412. 21.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, 23.

underrepresents the existence of a baseline gender preference.⁹⁵ Additionally, Lawless found in a 2002 study that only 65% of voters said they would vote for a woman president even if she was qualified and shared party with the voter.⁹⁶

In contrast to the research done by Sanbonmatsu, Lawless, and Dolan has found that political gender stereotypes do not play a huge role in voter choice, and that political party has the strongest and most significant impact in House races.⁹⁷ Fridkin and Kenney also found through their own experiment that focused on senators, that the gender of the senator did not have an independent influence on people's likelihood of voting for the sitting senator.⁹⁸ If we assume, however, that there might be a baseline preference even if it does or does not interact enormously with ultimate vote choice, we must turn next to gender trait stereotypes. Research that finds that women are seen as more honest and compassionate, whereas men are seen as more experienced and tough inform how these gender preferences develop and are applied to candidate evaluations and possibly vote choice.⁹⁹ While much of this research focuses on general elections, there is still relatively little known about how gender stereotypes and baseline preferences might affect voter evaluations in primaries.

Trait stereotypes

Accepting debate on the existence of a clear gender baseline preference or voting outcome effect, much of the literature on gender stereotypes suggest that traditional gender trait stereotypes impact how political candidates are evaluated and perceived. Fridkin and Kenney describe these trait stereotypes as part of "strategic stereotype theory," whereby people have expectations of gender roles and appropriate behavior for each role. These expectations can be divided into descriptive (what you do possess), and prescriptive (what you should possess) attributes.¹⁰⁰ Traits such as strong leadership, assertiveness, and experience are considered masculine, and traits such as emotiveness, honesty, and compassion are considered feminine.¹⁰¹ Research finds that men are rated more likely to have masculine traits, and women are rated

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁶ Jennifer L. Lawless, "Women, War, and Winning Elections: Gender Stereotyping in the Post-September 11th Era," *Political Research Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2004): 479–90, doi:10.2307/3219857. 485.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 666.

⁹⁸ Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 153.

⁹⁹ Lawless, "Women, War, and Winning Elections: Gender Stereotyping in the Post September 11th Era," 480, 482. Kathleen Dolan, "Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?" 2. Huddy and Terkildsen. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates," 121.

¹⁰⁰ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 15,16.

¹⁰¹ Kathleen Dolan and Timothy Lynch, "It Takes a Survey: Understanding Gender Stereotypes, Abstract Attitudes, and Voting for Women Candidates," 658.

more likely to have feminine traits. This simple differentiation is important, since masculine traits are considered more important for every level of political office.¹⁰² All kinds of “good” politicians are seen as more masculine than feminine, and in a study by Huddy and Terkildsen, traditional masculine traits were more beneficial to a candidate seeking national office.¹⁰³ Fridkin and Kenney find that incumbent senators, male or female, mention “male” or agentic traits more on the campaign trails. Female incumbent senators spend even more time highlighting these traditionally male traits than their male counterparts.¹⁰⁴ Despite the stereotypes accorded to women and men in politics, research has shown that women are able to overcome feminine stereotypes by emphasizing their masculine traits, although still a double bind exists in their efforts to do so.¹⁰⁵

While emphasizing masculine traits may play to their advantage in some arenas, voters may punish a female politician who does not play to the strengths of feminine gender stereotypes. Fridkin and Kenney found that communal and agentic norms are pervasive and pose a real problem to women in a career setting. Women are not perceived as possessing the qualities of a strong leader- strength, assertiveness, and independence, yet when they highlight these agentic qualities instead of focusing on communal, feminine, ones, they violate prescriptive beliefs of women’s behavior and may be evaluated negatively.¹⁰⁶ In essence, female politicians cannot completely shed their perceived femininity and the traits and perceived issue competency that come along with their gender. Brooks, however, in *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, posits an alternative to the double bind theory, which her research shows is no longer applicable to female politicians. This is perhaps because women politicians are seen differently than women in the general population, as well as the fact that there has been an increasing number of female politicians in our government. Brooks dubs her theory the “leaders-not-ladies” theory, and found that women politicians are viewed more as politicians than women and evaluated based on those qualities of good leadership.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Beth Ann Martin, “Gender Role and Political Office,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (March 1989): 77-85, doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.1989.tb00986.tb00986.x, 77.

¹⁰³ Huddy and Terkildsen. “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 121.

¹⁰⁴ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Christine Banwart, “Gender and Candidate Communication: Effects of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 54, no. 3 (November 1, 2010): 265–83, doi:10.1177/0002764210381702, 269.

¹⁰⁶ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Deborah Jordan Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 39, 31.

Brooks found in her research that women and men politicians are not seen as less capable leaders, and that women are not negatively evaluated for acting “tough.”¹⁰⁸ In the few cases where there were small differences between trait evaluations of men and women politicians, these differences favored the women politicians; for example, inexperienced women were seen positively (possibly because women are seen as ‘natural outsiders’) compared to inexperienced men.¹⁰⁹ While some gender differences did arise in Brooks’ research, they were only among individual and specific traits; there was no gender difference in general evaluations of favorability, Senate effectiveness, and presidential effectiveness.¹¹⁰

Belief and issue stereotypes

Gender stereotypes in politics do not stop at personality traits. Research has shown that voters believe male candidates are more likely to share their views.¹¹¹ In a study of the 2008 election conducted by Mary Christine Banwart, men were seen as more competent on military and economic issues, whereas women are rated with equal competence on all issues.¹¹² Sanbonmatsu in her 2002 research similarly found that men were perceived as better able to handle crime and foreign affairs.¹¹³ However, research by Huddy and Terkildsen shows that gender traits have no impact on perceived competence on economic issues, complemented by the research of Fridkin and Kenney.¹¹⁴ Fridkin and Kenney additionally found that female senators were rated higher for their ability to deal with health care, a communal issue.¹¹⁵ They found that female candidates were perceived as more liberal, more Democratic, and more competent on women’s issues, even more so when they adopt masculine traits of toughness and assertiveness.¹¹⁶ Research has found that women, regardless of their party, are judged to be more liberal. In fact, Republican women are seen as more liberal than male politicians of either party.¹¹⁷ Revisiting part of the foundation of strategic stereotype theory, Fridkin and Kenney explain how persistent gender trait and belief stereotypes are; they force politicians to emphasize

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 72, 75.

¹¹⁰ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, 80.

¹¹¹ Banwart, “Gender and Candidate Communication: Effects of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election,” 268.

¹¹² Ibid., 274.

¹¹³ Sanbonmatsu, Kira. “Gender Stereotypes and Vote Choice,” 23.

¹¹⁴ Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 122.

Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 149.

¹¹⁵ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 149.

¹¹⁶ Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 122, 132.

Banwart, “Gender and Candidate Communication: Effects of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election,” 279

¹¹⁷ Banwart, “Gender and Candidate Communication: Effects of Stereotypes in the 2008 Election,” 279.

Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 122.

stereotypical strengths in certain messages, while revising stereotypical weaknesses in others to maximize their chances of reelection.¹¹⁸ In fact, they found that female senators are more likely to focus on communal issues on their campaign websites, while male senators highlight competitive issues.¹¹⁹ While innate gender stereotypes may effect how voters view female candidates, these gender stereotypes are combatted by females in politics, in fact emphasizing differences between how male and female politicians feel they need to, and how they do, present themselves to the public.

Effects of gender stereotypes on voter evaluations of candidates

While important to consider how gender stereotypes affect general favorability perceptions of candidates, specifics of how gender stereotypes may be enhanced or diminished for certain personality attributes or certain actions must also be understood. If there exist such nuances, then gender stereotypes may be influential when voters see short news clips or articles about a candidate that involve these specific attributes, even if we do not see their effects when these voters consider a candidate overall.

Brooks in “Testing the Double Standard for Candidate Emotionality” explores the popular but under-researched assumption of a double standard of emotionality, which many politicians themselves have identified as a prime example of the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes in politics. However, Brooks found that there is no double standard overall for candidate emotionality, although the results of her study do show that women judge female candidates more harshly for crying. This may be explained by a distancing effect, whereby women attempt to distinguish themselves from group members who are perpetuating negative stereotypes.¹²⁰ Male and female candidates were penalized the same for exhibiting anger and tears, and it was the gender of the respondent that played a role in differing evaluations.¹²¹ In fact, later research conducted by Brooks supports the lack of effect of gender stereotypes in instances of crying and found that there was no difference between perceived strengths and weaknesses of the candidates and no double standard theory at play. Similarly, Brooks found no overall difference in how respondents viewed male and female politicians’ expressions of anger, with only small negatives for women across the adjectives “unemotional,” “assertive,” and “acts

¹¹⁸ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 15.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹²⁰ Deborah Jordan Brooks, “Testing the Double Standard for Candidate Emotionality: Voter Reactions to the Tears and Anger of Male and Female Politicians,” *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 2 (May 13, 2011): 597–615, doi:10.1017/s0022381611000053. 598.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 598.

appropriately.”¹²² Brooks finds that women politicians minimally benefit in specific cases from trait stereotypes, but that overall gender does not interact with voter evaluations of candidates.¹²³

While Brooks considers the political, perhaps mistake, of crying, Smith, Powers, and Suarez investigate scandals. They consider how gender affects how a politician is evaluated after a scandal, in response to the Clinton and the Monica Lewinsky affair. They find that male and female candidates were evaluated more favorably (or punished less) when involved in cross gender scandals, and in fact that female respondents evaluated political scandals more harshly than men.¹²⁴ Alternatively, Brooks finds in recent research that the gender of the candidate does not affect how voters evaluate candidates involved in “knowledge gaffes” (while not scandals, these could be similarly categorized as important campaign blunders).¹²⁵

In 2010 research, Okimoto and Brescoll did not find evidence of a clear baseline gender preference, however they did identify nuanced differences in the evaluation of male and female candidates. Looking at the issue of power seeking, which may be a perceived intention of flip-flopping candidates, Okimoto and Brescoll found that female candidates were penalized more for power-seeking desires.¹²⁶ Interestingly, as more information was added to the female candidate’s story, she was penalized further.¹²⁷ Additional information actually helped the male candidate’s evaluation in instances of perceived power seeking.¹²⁸

Lawless shows that the preference for masculine traits might be finding renewed energy in a post 9/11 world, as citizens prefer men’s leadership and characteristics, and deem men more capable of legislating on national security, military crises, and new obstacles of a post 9/11 world. In fact, voters were not willing to switch party due to 9/11, but even so favor males for president, demonstrating that gender stereotypes can actually have a stronger impact than party identification.¹²⁹

Conclusion

Although there is conflicting evidence about how much gender stereotypes do influence vote choice, it is clear that in some situations such as power-seeking and scandals, men and

¹²² Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, 103.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 80,143.

¹²⁴ Smith, Powers, and Suarez, “If Bill Clinton Were a Woman,” 124, 126.

¹²⁵ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, 139.

¹²⁶ Tyler G. Okimoto and Victoria L. Brescoll, “The Price of Power: Power Seeking and Backlash Against Female Politicians,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 7 (July 1, 2010): 923–36, doi:10.1177/0146167210371949. 931.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 931.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 931.

¹²⁹ Lawless, “Women, War, and Winning Elections; Gender Stereotyping in the Post September 11th Era,” 487.

women are evaluated by different criteria. Overall past gender stereotype theories suggest that women and men politicians are seen to have different traits, and considered to have different strengths and weaknesses, however recent research has suggested a diminishing impact of these stereotypes. Research by Brooks has shown an important movement away from the harmful effects of gender stereotypes, perhaps due to the increasing normality of female politicians in government. In fact, Brooks found that in the few cases where gender stereotypes do come into play, women politicians benefit from those stereotypes.¹³⁰ Fridkin and Kenney also found that the impact of gender trait stereotypes in politics is not as straightforward as it is made out to be, since candidates often try to emphasize cross-gender traits in their campaigns.¹³¹

Research on flip-flopping has highlighted negative voter evaluations, specifically ones that call into question a candidate's character. If men and women are believed to have different character traits to begin with, it is possible that voters will react differently to a male politician who flip-flops versus a female politician who flip-flops. If women are seen as more honest, flip-flopping may not be punished as harshly and the change in opinion pushed aside since it is out of character (assuming that flip-floppers are seen as dishonest in general). However, an out of character move like flip-flopping may garner more negative attention and stand in stark contrast to the expectation of behavior by female candidates. If Brooks' "leaders-not-ladies" theory holds true as the replacement for the double standard theory in politics today, there may not be any gender difference between voter evaluations of flip-flopping candidates; both may be rated equally harshly and be seen as poor leaders. However, flip-flopping is a charged accusation that reveals many specific character attacks linked to power-seeking, which may make this political action more susceptible to gender stereotyped evaluations on the part of voters.

¹³⁰ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, 80,143.

¹³¹ Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 150.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

In this thesis, I seek to answer the question of how voters respond to candidates who flip-flop. More specifically, I consider how these responses may be affected by the gender of the candidate and by the candidate's rationale for flip-flopping. These hypotheses are tested in two ways; one qualitative and one quantitative.

Qualitatively, in this chapter I discuss four case studies to illustrate how the media discusses flip-flopping in order to demonstrate the filter through which we as voters receive information about how we should react when presented with a candidate who flip-flops. These case studies also provide insight into the reactions we assume voters have in response to flip-flopping, and how flip-flopping can become a label attached to character flaws of candidates. Through qualitative analysis of media coverage of candidates who were labeled flip-floppers, I seek to answer four main questions about flip-flopping: how gender played into evaluations of their flip-flops, character evaluations, perceived candidate competency, and any attempts at explaining their flip-flops. These aspects were evaluated through the case studies of John Kerry during the 2004 presidential campaign, Kristen Gillibrand as she moved from the House to the Senate in 2009, Mitt Romney during the 2012 presidential campaign, and Hillary Clinton during the beginning of her 2016 presidential campaign. I look for these four aspects when reviewing online news articles, as well as a few scholarly articles and campaign ads, where available.

Flip-flopping is not a new insult on the political scene, nor is it one that is rigidly defined. While a strict definition of flip-flopping concerns quick and abrupt reversals of opinion, the label is thrown at politicians who change their opinions, often no matter the time frame. While opinion change can reveal positive character traits such as flexibility and open-mindedness, a review of the media's usage of the term during political campaigns demonstrates that the term is used as an insult, to target that politician as insincere, untrustworthy, or unserious. In fact, the definition used by an article in *The Guardian* defines flip-floppers as, "candidates who made U-turns on issues to ride advantageous political winds, politicians who would do or say anything to be elected. In short, leaders you couldn't trust, who didn't share 'my values' – politicians you didn't want to vote for."¹ In recent elections there has been one candidate who is labeled a flip-flopper, while the other, though not a rigid goalpost for his or her ideas or morals, does not receive

¹ Alex Slater, "Why Mitt Romney's going down as the 'Flip-Flopper' in 2012," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2012, sec. US news, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/03/mitt-romney-flip-flopper-2012>.

specific scrutiny relating to his or her changes of opinion.² Media attention shows how the candidate who receives this label of flip-flopper has trouble shaking it; the attack could become a label and a persona that has the potential to negatively affect the campaign. Indeed, the losers in recent presidential campaigns have been the ones who received the label of flip-flopper.

The American public, as the media promotes and crafts it, is invested in political consistency at a level that has never really been tolerated before. A 2015 article in *Time Magazine* titled “In Defense of Flip-flopping” and a 2015 article on *Slate.com* titled “America’s Best Presidents Have Been Flip-Floppers” explains how great politicians of the past have committed major flip-flops (for example, Lincoln on slavery, and Woodrow Wilson on war), but have not been punished.³ Both suggest that the sincerity of the politician is not of prime importance, rather their current views and what they plan to do with those views moving into the future. While critical of flip-floppers, we as voters have “flip-flopped,” on all major issues, particularly gay marriage, as the article in *Time Magazine* remarks.⁴ These articles find some consensus on the fact that a politician should lead from some middle ground between resolute and flexible; neither extreme is beneficial to the country.

Going back through U.S. presidential campaigns, there are countless examples of politicians changing their opinions and garnering attention and critique for doing so; to add to the relevancy of my potential data findings and understand those findings within the context of today, I will be focusing on four case studies from the 21st century. These include: John Kerry in the 2004 presidential campaign, Kristen Gillibrand as she moved from the House of Representatives to the Senate in 2009, Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential campaign, and Hillary Clinton as she enters the 2016 presidential campaign. Three of these four case studies were chosen for their high profile in the news and wealth of articles concerning candidate flip-flopping, and Kristen Gillibrand was chosen as she presents an interesting case study for how voter response to flip-flopping may differ depending on the political arena where the flip-flopping takes place. All four case studies present insightful commentary and examples on how negative flip-flopping is seen, what it implies for voters in terms of the candidate’s personality, voter expectation, how candidates respond to accusations of flip-flopping, and general values of

² Ibid.,

³ Ibid, and David O. Stewart, “In Defense of Flip-Flopping,” *Time*, May 15, 2015, <http://time.com/3860133/in-defense-of-flip-flopping/>. And Slater, “Why Mitt Romney’s Going down as the ‘flip-flopper’ in 2012,” *The Guardian*.

⁴ David O. Stewart, “In Defense of Flip-Flopping,” *Time*.

representation held by the American people (or what the media considers those values to be). Not only do the four represent unique cases where flip-flopping has been a large part of the dialogue surrounding the politician, but as a group consisting of two female and two male politicians, the case studies start the paint a larger picture of how flip-flopping is used and understood depending on the candidate's gender.

My first case study will focus on John Kerry during the 2004 presidential campaign. Throughout the 2004 presidential campaign Kerry came under criticism for changing his positions on multiple issues, from the Iraq war, to the death penalty, to affirmative action.⁵ A case study of Kerry during this campaign reveals that flip-flopping as a label helped to create an image of Kerry that was laughable, and called into question how he would govern if elected. Interesting as part of a more specific analysis of John Kerry and his flip-flops is how adjectives describing Kerry and his changing positions were often stereotypically feminine, playing into conceptions of elitism and French-ness that were used by his opponents during the campaign to link Kerry to anti-French sentiment at the time.

My second case study will look at Senator Kristen Gillibrand as she moved from the House of Representatives to the Senate via a special election in 2009. News articles concerning Gillibrand's former constituents at the time of her move to the Senate reveal strong negative reactions to her policy repositioning, and suggest that many saw these changes as indicative of a fundamental character flaw. As a member of her former district in New York, I was intrigued by how some could feel betrayed by her policy shifts, while I saw them as indicative of good leadership that evolves depending on the views of the people Gillibrand was accountable to in each respective position.

My third case study focuses on Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential campaign. During his campaign, Romney suffered from a barrage of news articles pinning him as a flip-flopper as he gained traction in the primary and began taking positions contrary to those he held as governor of Massachusetts. Attacks on Romney's flip-flopping painted him as confused, poll pandering, and insincere. Interesting components of Romney's flip-flopping include the incentive he may have had from the vocal members of the Republican Party to change some of his more moderate policy positions, as well as the accessibility to his past policy remarks that made his flip-flops easy to compare and contrast in visual and audio form.

⁵ Joel Roberts, "Kerry's Top Ten Flip-Flops," CBSNews.com, September 29, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/kerrys-top-ten-flip-flops/>.

Lastly, my fourth case study focuses on Hillary Clinton and her current campaign for President. Clinton's 2016 campaign presents an interesting case study, as reporters and the public have been accusing her of flip-flopping since the early 2000s. Indeed, going into the 2016 presidential campaign Clinton has a long history of policy statements that differ from the ones she holds today. Media coverage of Clinton's changing positions still use the label of "flip-flopping" even when the previous position was one she held before her four years as Secretary of State. Clinton has always combatted the female stereotypes of women in politics and emphasized masculine attributes of strong leadership; therefore it is interesting to evaluate flip-flopping attacks and how they intersect with those stereotypes.

Collectively, these case studies illustrate that taking new policy positions is a difficult move for politicians to make without receiving the negative label of flip-flopping, a label that carries with it a perception of negative personality traits as well as questions of what voters are to expect from the politician if elected. These case studies also show that politicians do attempt to respond to accusations of flip-flopping, often by either explaining how the move was not exactly a flip-flop but rather issue evolution, or how their new position is in fact compatible with the present. There are rarely long explications of their movements; rather, a focus on what their new position is at the moment. Gender stereotyping does play a role in flip-flopping evaluations, as is particularly evident in the case studies of John Kerry and Kristen Gillibrand. While not explicitly present in the cases of Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton, one may find evidence of gender stereotypes through general use of adjectives and the existence of other gendered articles regarding Clinton's clothing style. One common theme worth noting is how, with the exception of the Gillibrand case study, in these other situations there was not a lot of discussion as to the changing constituency and how that may affect representation and therefore lend itself positively to flip-flopping.

These case studies provide support for the integral role that trust plays in representative relationships, as Fenno noted in his research. Many charges of flip-flopping launched against Kerry, Gillibrand, Romney, and Clinton have been negative ones that seem to make voters and the media uneasy. These attacks raise questions about the candidates' character, which helps establish trust through the presentation of self, according to Fenno, as well as voter expectation which can be a more direct measurement of trust for voters and representatives. The negativity and questionable associations surrounding flip-flopping accusations seen through these four case

studies suggest that as voters we value consistency, and that consistency is less confusing and more admirable, and flip-flopping less honest. If we have negative reactions to flip-flopping and a candidate is perceived to have flip-flopped to an extreme degree, as apparent in the case studies, one must think that the candidates are punished electorally. While the case study of Gillibrand might suggest that we value trustee style representation more than delegate representation, the other case studies are less clear on their implications for trustee delegate debates. Many of the explanations candidates gave for flip-flopping, if they gave rationales at all, did not tie back to a changing electorate or changing opinion based off of changing American values (with the exception of Hillary Clinton's gay marriage flip-flop). Perhaps some find these flip-flops unpalatable because of the lack of robust explanation that conveys a sense of presentation of self that can continue to foster a sense of trust for the candidate.

John Kerry 2004:

A very notable and not easily forgotten attack ad from the 2004 presidential campaign was a video produced by the Bush campaign titled "Windsurfing," which used footage of John Kerry windsurfing and overlaid a calm voice explaining his many flip flops as he turned against the wind. At the end of the ad, the voiceover delivers the ultimate jab at this aloof windsurfing character and says "John Kerry, whichever way the wind blows."⁶ A 2008 article in the *The Washington Post* considering Romney's own flip-flops calls this ad, "one of the most devastating TV ads of the 2004 presidential campaign."⁷ Kerry was painted as elitist, inconsistent, poll pandering, and lacking in backbone through this ad, which targeted a flip-flopping theme already being capitalized upon since the beginning days of the campaign.

Kerry during the 2004 political campaign was branded as a "flip-flopper", as a CNN 2011 article called, "one of the dirtiest names in American politics." Kerry received this label despite there being ample evidence for flip-flops by his opponent, George W. Bush. In fact, in an article in *The New York Times* from the time of the 2004 campaign interestingly brings up that flip-flopping may be more tolerated when it plays into America's tradition and love of

⁶ "Windsurfing," Museum of the Moving Image: The Living Room Candidate, Presidential campaign commercials 1952-2012, 2004, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2004>

⁷ Michael Dobbs, "Dancing With GOP Stars: McCain, Romney Do Flip-Flop Waltz," *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2008, sec. Politics, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/04/AR2008020402806.html>.

reinventionism and religion.⁸ However, Republicans managed to paint Kerry as flopping back and forth on his statements, lacking principles, and changing his tune depending on his audience. His opponents highlighted prime media moments where it was clear that Kerry's opinion had changed, such as the famous "I voted against the \$87 billion before I voted for it." Kerry was accused of flip-flopping on a large range of issues, from the war in Iraq, the Patriot Act, and affirmative action.⁹ The significance of Kerry's flip-flops and how they became a weapon against him during the campaign is two-fold; these accusations of flip-flops targeted his character but also highlighted a policy and voter expectation of risk if Kerry were to achieve presidential office.

Character attacks

The label of flip-flopper may have detrimentally affected Kerry's image and political prospects in part because of all of the character implications that came along with it; flip-flopper did not just mean inconsistent on one issue, it had translated into a character flaw.¹⁰ Ads targeting Kerry painted him as aloof, confused, and inconsistent, as was prominently seen with the windsurfing ad. These character attacks became especially apparent as Bush crafted his own image as one of "core values" and "fixed, firm beliefs," further highlighting the implications on Kerry's character that accusations of flip-flopping were making.¹¹ News articles from the campaign season demonstrate that this label of flip-flopping and its implication played a large role in the campaign and political debate. A 2004 article in *The New York Times* quoted the Republican response to Kerry's defense of his \$87 billion statement, as asking Kerry to let the American people know where he really stands.¹² The now infamous quote "I actually did vote for the \$87 billion for our troops before I voted against it," was in reference to Kerry's vote on a Democratic bill that would have paid for the war via reducing Bush's tax cuts, while later Kerry voted against the final part of the bill.¹³ This subtle attack of asking the audience "where he really stands," implies that Kerry has been lying, and covering up his true intentions. Some news

⁸ Damien Cave, "Flip-Flopping Slip-Slides Into the Debate," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/19/fashion/flipflopping-slipslides-into-the-debate.html>.

⁹ Joel Roberts, "Kerry's Top Ten Flip-Flops," *CBS News*.

¹⁰ Lempert, Michael. "On 'flip-flopping': Branded stance-taking in U.S. electoral politics," *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 13, no. 2 (March 2009): 223-248, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9841.2009.00405.x, 230.

¹¹ Richard Cohen, "Who's the Flip-Flopper?," *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2004, sec. Editorial; A19, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/lncui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?lni=4D1B-GRK0-TW87-N2WH&csi=270944,270077,11059,8411&hl=t&hv=t&hnsd=f&hns=t&hgn=t&oc=00240&perma=true>.

¹² David M. Halbfinger, "Kerry Says Flip-Flop Image 'Doesn't Reflect the Truth'," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/30/politics/campaign/kerry-says-flipflop-image-doesnt-reflect-the-truth.html>.

¹³ Mike Roselli, "Kerry discusses \$87 billion comment," CNN.com, September 30, 2004. <http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/09/30/kerry.comment/>

articles promoted an idea that once stuck with the label, margin for flip-flopping without punishment is even smaller.¹⁴ In a sense, once a flip-flopper always a flip-flopper. Many attacks on Kerry, as evident in a 2004 online article in the *Salon.com* titled “Can John Kerry climb back?” used the war in Iraq and Kerry’s flip flops on this issue to specifically attack his “credibility and character.”¹⁵ Kerry’s opponents were already painting him as an elitist politician with many ties abroad, and attacks of flip-flopping made him seem even more like an untrustworthy man and politician in contrast to the everyday American profile George W. Bush had crafted for himself.

Voter expectation

Perhaps part of what made the label “flip-flopper” a sticking point in the 2004 campaign came from its ability to call into question Kerry’s plans for presidential office, if he were to make it there. The “Windsurfing” ad opens with a voice that asks, “In which direction would John Kerry lead?” Although the voice is not in and of itself alarming, it plays upon a wartime context where this kind of inconsistent aloofness is far from comforting to voters who want to know the shape of their future is safe in the hands of the man they elect. Cheney labeled Kerry as, “someone who lacks the resolve, the determination, and the conviction to prevail in this conflict,” all characteristics specifically targeted through accusations of flip-flopping.¹⁶ Research by Lempert that classified ads and articles of the time demonstrating their focus on Kerry’s lack of resolve and weakness in leadership.¹⁷ Flip-flopping served as one of the several examples of weak character that is fear inducing when, in wartime particularly, we want to know how our future leader would act. Fear based appeals like this one reveal an underlying assumption that voters are risk averse and that currently policy proximity is not necessarily the most important determinant for vote choice, as we may be quick to assume. The Bush campaign spokesperson spoke to the windsurfing ad and comments made by Cheney and Giuliani around the same time as part of a coordinated attack, and said, “This is part of a tougher line on ‘flip-flop’ that goes deeper and gets into what a flip-flopper would do in the White House- change his mind when the going gets tough.”¹⁸

Rationale for flip-flopping

¹⁴ Joel Roberts, “Kerry’s Top Ten Flip-Flops,” CBS News.

¹⁵ Tim Grieve, “Can John Kerry Climb Back?” *Salon*, September 8, 2004, http://www.salon.com/2004/09/08/kerry_ohio/.

¹⁶ Anne E. Kornblut, “Bush ad plays on Kerry windsurfing,” *Boston.com*, September 23, 2004. http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2004/09/23/bush_ad_plays_on_kerry_windsurfing/?page=full

¹⁷ Lempert, Michael, “On ‘flip-flopping’: Branded stance-taking in U.S. electoral politics,” 223.

¹⁸ Anne E. Kornblut, “Bush ad plays on Kerry windsurfing,” *Boston.com*.

While considering the attacks on Kerry during the 2004 campaign, we must look at how Kerry responded to these accusations of flip-flopping, and if his responses may have mitigated, encouraged, or had no effect on those accusations. In a 2004 CNN article, Kerry describes his \$87 gaffe as “one of those inarticulate moments,” later explaining both votes for and against parts of the bill in order to demonstrate how differing circumstances led to seemingly contradictory stances, but not flip-flopping.¹⁹ Kerry emphasized that his votes reflected the “truth” of the situation. In terms of his flip-flop on the Iraq war, which he voted for in the Senate but then said that he did not believe it was the right option as he campaigned in 2004, Kerry explained this new statement through new information. He stated, “Knowing there was no imminent threat to America, knowing there were no weapons of mass destruction, knowing there was no connection of Saddam Hussein to al Qaeda, I would not have gone to war. That’s plain and simple.”²⁰ Kerry explained his policy changes on the war in Iraq, and Bush’s No-Child-Left-Behind Policy based on a general changing of circumstances that he could not have anticipated at the moment he took the vote for these positions.²¹ Kerry’s responses to accusations of flip-flopping were either defensive, or explanations of how circumstances had changed since he articulated his previous position.²²

Gender and flip-flopping

A unique element of the 2004 presidential campaign and the branding of John Kerry as a flip-flopper involve the Republican Party’s attempt to feminize Kerry, partly through anti-French sentiment at the time.²³ While seemingly a whole other line of attack, attributing French and feminine qualities to Kerry allowed more descriptions of Kerry as indecisive and a weak leader; qualities also attacked through accusations of flip-flopping. Kerry was portrayed by his opponents as femininely French, attributed with elitist qualities are devalued in American political culture, and in one particular NRA ad, portrayed as a poodle wearing a pink bow.²⁴ Fahey identifies the main components of hegemonic masculinity in American culture to be physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship, and

¹⁹ Roselli, “Kerry discusses \$87 billion comment,” CNN.com.

²⁰ Joel Roberts, “Kerry’s Top Ten Flip-Flops,” CBS News.

²¹ David M. Halbfinger, “Kerry’s Shifts: Nuanced Ideas or Flip-Flops?” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/06/us/kerry-s-shifts-nuanced-ideas-or-flip-flops.html>

²³ Anna Cornelia Fahey, “French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 132–50, doi:10.1080/07393180701262743.

²⁴ Scott Dadich, “What You See Is What You Get,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/09/opinion/what-you-see-is-what-you-get.html>.

Susan Milligan, “Kerry criticized for French connection,” Boston.com, April 12, 2004.

http://www.boston.com/news/politics/president/kerry/articles/2004/04/12/kerry_crititized_for_french_connection?pg=full

heterosexuality.²⁵ This indication of feminization demonstrates the valorization of male qualities for political office, which has the potential to affect female candidates, especially those who flip-flop, very differently. Kerry was attacked for acting in a cross-gendered way, for being stereotypically feminine in his indecisiveness on issues.

While Kerry received negative scrutiny for acting in stereotypically feminine ways, are female candidates who flip-flop punished less harshly for acting within the confines of gender stereotypes? Or will voters assume without flip-flopping, that she is indecisive, and therefore punish her doubly if she flip-flops? While the attacks on Kerry during the 2012 campaign did not directly combine the French femininity with the accusations of flip-flopping, the two were major lines of attack during the campaign and together helped to craft an image of Kerry. Research has shown that female candidates spend much more time highlighting masculine qualities (such as strong leadership, assertiveness, decisiveness) on the campaign trail than male candidates, in an effort to overcome weaker, feminine stereotypes.²⁶ When negative attacks are automatically stereotypically feminine qualities, will female candidates suffer more serious electoral and character evaluation blows? Or does the emphasis female candidates put on masculine qualities put them on even footing with male candidates? In other words, if Kerry were a woman, perhaps he would have crafted his image into one that was more “masculine” and therefore not inherently more susceptible to negative attacks than male candidates.

Kirsten Gillibrand 2009:

What constitutes a flip-flop versus a legitimate evolution of opinion is not perfectly defined, certainly not when it comes to political attacks and attempts at discrediting the opponent. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s move from the House of Representatives to the US Senate via special election in 2009 provides an interesting study of the reasons behind changing opinion, how flip-flopping is understood and labeled by voters, and context for how we distinguish between evolutions of opinion versus flip-flopping. Senator Gillibrand represented New York’s 20th district in the House of Representatives from 2007 to 2009, a primarily rural district in upstate New York. While serving, she was a member of the “blue-dog” Democratic coalition; holding fairly conservative views on matters of gun control, immigration, and gay marriage. After being elected to the Senate through a special election when Clinton was named

²⁵ Fahey, Anna Cornelia, “French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race,” 134

²⁶ Fridkin and Kenney. *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 137.

Secretary of State, Gillibrand essentially did a 180 on her stances on these three issues, aligning more evenly with her Democratic colleagues and the party line. While previously earning an “A” rating from the NRA, she now is in favor of tightening gun sale loopholes. While previously against drivers licenses for illegal immigration, she now supports more comprehensive immigration reform. While previously in support of states’ marriage rights, has now pushed for anti-discrimination legislation.²⁷ New York Assemblyman and currently State Senator Jose R Peralta described a reasonable explanation for her change on immigration policy after her move to the Senate, stating, “She understands she not longer represents a small Congressional district upstate.”²⁸ Gillibrand’s multiple and clear cases of repositioning allow a glimpse into how the public views such matters outside of such intense and highly charged campaign atmospheres. Although her changing constituency can draw a clear explanation for Gillibrand’s flip-flopping, news articles demonstrate that changing opinions still settle uneasily with many in the public. However, these negative reactions from constituents may not necessarily be reactions linked solely to the act of flip-flopping; all of Gillibrand’s flip-flops moved her policy positions further from the positions of many in her old district. Perhaps flip-flopping matters more to these constituents because of the final outcome of her positions, not because of the flip-flop itself.

Character attacks

Present in several news articles, Gillibrand’s former constituents main complaints seem to fall into mainly one realm; that her change in opinion was troublesome character-wise. Interwoven with straightforward character concerns were discussions of insincerity and a perception of her repositioning as a calculated poll-pandering move. Her former constituents are troubled by this lack of honesty. Ruane and Cerulo find that honesty is a paramount value in folklore in American political culture, even though we are also socialized to tolerate “normal” white lies.²⁹ In a 2009 article in *The New York Times*, one voter in her old congressional district said, “She’s like all politicians. Either she was lying then, or she’s lying now. Either way, she’s lying.” It is clear that for this particular voter, there aren’t flip-flops or issue evolutions, there are beliefs and lies. This idea of trust, principles, and values is one that is very central to attacks on Gillibrand’s flip-flopping. In the same article, the author Halbfinger describes Gillibrand’s

²⁷ S.E. Cupp, “The Flip-Flopping Nature of Kirsten Gillibrand,” MSNBC, March 12, 2013, <http://www.msnbc.com/the-cycle/the-flip-flopping-nature-kirsten-gillibrand>.

²⁸ Michael Powell, “Gillibrand Hints at a Change of Mind on Immigration,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/02/nyregion/02kirsten.html?_r=0.

²⁹ Janet M. Ruane and Karen A. Cerulo, “The Forum: Second Thoughts on Presidential Politics,” *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 2008): 852–60, doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00097.x. 856, 857.

former constituents as being concerned of her “abandonment of principles,” after her shifts on immigration and gay marriage. These attacks bring a very personal element to Gillibrand’s flip-flops that demonstrate how trust and consistency are linked, and both are very important to many voters. Still, some constituents were happy to have a trustworthy representative who helped them out, regardless of her current positions. One constituent declared she, “wasn’t dumping her yet,” as she was “proud to have another woman in the Senate.”³⁰

Gillibrand’s former constituents and other opponents also targeted Gillibrand’s repositioning negatively because of how it represented politics as usual; a manipulative campaign move. One constituent said, “I don’t think it’s right when you say one thing and do something else... If you have a position, and this is what you feel, why would you change it just because you got a new job?”³¹ This constituent’s description puts forward an idea of representation that fits more closely with an independent model, that politicians are their own people with strong beliefs, and shouldn’t be pandering to the voters. Edmund Burke championed this definition of representation, arguing that representatives should act as trustees; using their own judgment to come to decisions for their people.³² In contrast, work and theory by Richard Fenno showed that actual representatives keep their constituencies in mind, but with the key assumption that, “the constituency a representative reacts to is the constituency he or she sees.”³³ This perception of the constituency may not always be an accurate representation of the actual community, which may influence how costly representatives perceive flip-flopping to be. In fact, this constituent and others went on to describe Gillibrand’s changing positions as weak leadership, following party leaders instead of her own beliefs. In response to changes in Gillibrand’s immigration stances, City Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito said that her voting record had caused, “great dismay. She talked of ‘reconsidering’ and ‘revising’ and we’ll see what that means.” Mark-Viverito in this statement connected Gillibrand’s flip-flopping to elements of risk and voter expectations, connections that we see more prominently with flip-flopping that takes place during campaigns.

Gender and flip-flopping

³⁰ David M. Halbfinger, “To Some in Gillibrand’s Old District, Her Evolution is Betrayal,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/09/nyregion/09district.html>

³¹ *Ibid.*,

³² Nadia Urbinati and Mark E. Warren, “The Concept of Representation in Contemporary Democratic Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (June 2008): 387–412, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053006.190533. 400.

³³ Fenno, *Home Style: House Members in Their District*, xxvii.

In contrast with the perspectives of Gillibrand's former constituents were several spotlight features in elite magazines and prominent new channels, that focused on Gillibrand's "makeover" (a very gendered term), both referencing her role as mother and also a political makeover that was, according to the writers of these pieces, "necessary". In a 2009 article in *The New York Times* titled "Gillibrand Hints at a Change of Mind on Immigration", journalist Michael Powell explains how Gillibrand faced a new reality, which called for new positions.³⁴ In a piece featured in *New York Magazine* titled "The Reintroduction of Kirsten Gillibrand," Gillibrand's policy flip-flops are painted as very specific, one time changes.³⁵ The articles highlight underlying explanations: party pressure, past mistakes, a need to recreate her political image, and the need to better represent her new constituency. The series of articles in *New York Magazine* focus on her new image as Senator after a rough first 100 days "marred by policy flip-flops," and almost every other paragraph makes reference to her small children, "preppy, blonde, short, and athletic," figure or her sensitivity when it comes to "the baby weight she has yet to shed."³⁶ She is also described as a "dedicated mother," and a whole subsection of "The Reintroduction of Kirsten Gillibrand," series is titled "How being a mother helps her connect with constituents."³⁷ While in the case of John Kerry his feminine qualities were emphasized and connected to negative stereotypes such as weak leadership and indecisiveness, references to feminine stereotypes and images in the case of Kirsten Gillibrand seem to cast her in a positive light. It appears that these very gendered depictions of Gillibrand's new image soften the aggressive immediate reaction we may have to flip-flopping, by emphasizing stereotypically female qualities such as honesty and reinforcing this honesty and trustworthiness through a depiction of Gillibrand as an approachable and relatable mother.

Rationale for flip-flopping

While several articles lament the fact that Gillibrand did commit these policy flip-flops, the changes are explained as necessary with a very strong undertone of permanence. The underlying permanence and acceptance of these switches contrasts sharply with campaign portrayals of flip-flopping politicians; one of the main attacks is an inability to decipher what the politician will do once in office. In a 2009 article in *The New York Times* titled "Senate Choice:

³⁴ Michael Powell, "Gillibrand Hints at a Change of Mind on Immigration," *The New York Times*, February 2, 2009, sec. New York Region, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/02/nyregion/02kirsten.html>.

³⁵ Stephen Rodrick, "The Reintroduction of Kirsten Gillibrand," *New York Magazine*, June 7, 2009, <http://nymag.com/news/politics/57197/>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Folksy Centrist Born to Politics,” this sentiment is echoed, that Gillibrand’s contrasting stances were very directly tied to the constituents she represented. Indeed, in a 2009 article in *The New York Times* titled “To Some in Gillibrand’s Old District, Her Evolution is Betrayal,” Gillibrand herself is quoted as having described her shift on immigration as “broadening her position,” and in another 2009 article explained, “In a lot of these issues, it’s a case of learning more and expanding my view.”³⁸ Gillibrand’s former constituents see this evolution as towing the party line and giving up strong leadership, while others on the national level interpret it positively as a good political move.

While not her own reasoning for flip-flopping, several articles have highlighted the role that party pressure played in her political flip-flops. A 2013 *msnbc.com* article titled “The flip-flopping nature of Kirsten Gillibrand,” reflects on her 2009 flip-flops, and explains that, “Suddenly, the moderate Gillibrand of 2006 needed a makeover, and quick, if she was going to make it in Bloomberg’s New York. . . . So a new- and-improved Gillibrand, one that was more politically palatable to New York liberal elites, was born, practically overnight.” The author goes on to cite other Democratic candidates who found themselves in similar positions, explaining “[Gillibrand] is hardly the only Democrat forced to the far left of her party by an increasingly aggressive purification effort.”³⁹ Gillibrand herself, after having voted against the Bush bailout bill in the House, sought to qualify her stance on big banks as she fundraised for her campaign. She acknowledged her new job, stating, “I used to represent a rural, conservative Republican district. Now I represent all of New York, and I have to represent all New Yorkers. I know the difference.”⁴⁰ In a campaign video responding to constituent questions on flip-flopping, Gillibrand reiterated this reason for changing her opinion. She said, “I represented a district in Upstate New York that had a very specific focus,” adding, “now that I represent the whole state, many issues I’ll be focusing on are far broader and far more diverse. And I think I will represent the state as well as I represented my district.”⁴¹ An article in *The New York Times* in 2009 focused on criticism Gillibrand was drawing for her stances on immigration, describes Gillibrand’s thinking as one of a true representative considering her constituents. “She

³⁸ David M. Halbfinger, “To Some in Gillibrand’s Old District, Her Evolution Is a Betrayal,” *The New York Times*. Michael Powell, “Gillibrand Hints at a Change of Mind on Immigration,” *The New York Times*.

³⁹ S.E. Cupp, “The flip-flopping nature of Kirsten Gillibrand,” MSNBC.com.

⁴⁰ Stephen Rodrick, “The Reintroduction of Kirsten Gillibrand,” *NY Magazine*.

⁴¹ “Are you a flip-flopper?” *Kirsten Gillibrand: Democrat for U.S. Senate*, last modified 2014. <http://www.kirstengillibrand.com/video/are-you-a-flip-flopper>

acknowledged that she had an obligation to revisit some of these questions as she now ‘represents the whole state’.”⁴²

For Gillibrand’s future ambitions, establishing these flip-flops as one time issue evolution could help her avoid future attacks on her consistency and character. Gillibrand may have escaped specifically negative campaign ads since her flip-flopping did not take place during a campaign, but opposition to her opinion changes were clear in news articles during 2009, and reappeared to some extent in 2012. However the references to flip-flopping in 2012 articles were about changes in positions that Gillibrand made immediately once she got to the Senate, not accusations of new flips.⁴³ Perhaps Gillibrand’s experience suggests that even multiple flip-flops, if defended properly and made all at one distinct moment will not necessarily tarnish a political reputation or create a ‘flip-flopper’ persona that does not lend itself easily to political success.

Romney 2012:

Flip-flopping attacks returned and ran wild during the 2012 campaign, this time with the aloof flip-flopper as the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney. Political opponents of Romney throughout the campaign, starting even in the Republican primary, cleverly highlighted his changes in opinion, mostly from his time as governor of liberal Massachusetts from 2003-2007. Romney suffered from attacks of flip-flopping during his 2008 primary run, but these political shifts remained an issue into the 2012 campaign; as Kranish and Helman described in *The Real Romney*, “the tag of inauthenticity remained a serious risk as Romney charged deeper into the 2012 race.”⁴⁴ Romney was accused on changing his opinion on health care, abortion, immigration, climate change, and his tax plan.⁴⁵ Romney’s flip-flops called into question his character, as well as voter expectations, similarly to Kerry in 2004. Interestingly, part of the concern was focused on how conservative Romney had presented himself in the primaries, and

⁴² Kirk Semple, “Drawing Fire on Immigration, Gillibrand Reaches Out,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2009, sec. New York.

⁴³ Nathan Guttman, “How New York’s Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand Split on Iran Deal,” *Forward.com*, August 19, 2015. <http://forward.com/news/319404/how-chuck-schumer-and-kirsten-gillibrand-split-on-iran-deal/>

Jonathan Capehart, “Obama Must Make Romney Own Flip-Flops,” *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/mitt-romneys-flip-flop-character-flaw/2012/10/16/6b9158de-17ad-11e2-8792-cf5305eddf60_blog.html.

S.E. Cupp, “The flip-flopping nature of Kirsten Gillibrand,” *MSNBC.com*.

⁴⁴ Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 333.

⁴⁵ Amy Bingham, “Mitt Romney’s Top 5 contradicting Comments,” *Abcnews.com*, October 25, 2011. http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/mitt-romneys-top-contradicting-comments/story?id=14805513&nfo=/desktop_newsfeed_ab_refer_google_politics.

how moderate he was before, and trying to become in the general election race.⁴⁶ This clean slate approach was wonderfully highlighted by Romney's senior advisor, who stated of Romney's direction after the primaries, "Everything changes. It's almost like an Etch a Sketch. You can kind of shake it up and we start all over again."⁴⁷ While this quote provides a clear opportunity for attacks of flip-flopping, previous research by Hummel has found that flip-flopping from primaries to general elections is a somewhat expected campaign move and therefore is not punished as much by voters.⁴⁸ Perhaps Romney tested this limit too much. Romney's opponents quickly picked up on this "etch a sketch" gaffe and produced attack ads that emphasized a poll-pandering, confused, and untrustworthy Mitt Romney. A *Seattle Times* article described Romney's important flip-flops as his "biggest political liability."⁴⁹ The flip-flopping attacks on Romney during the 2012 campaign seemed to focus on character flaws, but also, as seen with Gillibrand, were interpreted as very poll-pandering political moves.

Character attacks

When it comes to character flaws, Romney suffered many political attacks that linked his changing opinions and contradictory statements to a lack of consistency and suspect core beliefs, elements already being scrutinized due to his Mormon faith and general personality. Perhaps a reason that flip-flopping attacks gained traction against Mitt Romney was because his identity was already one of an opportunistic, calculative politician. As Kranish and Helman describe, Romney struggled throughout his political career with appearing personable and likeable, and in fact was at first "more focused on details than in what he believes."⁵⁰ Even starting in 2008, Romney's flip-flops started to produce feelings among voters of disappointment, frustration, anger, and wistfulness.⁵¹ As one 2012 article in the *Washington Post* put it, Romney was seen to have "ideological promiscuity," and to have made so many policy reversals that he himself must have been confused.⁵² This concept of confusion and malleability reappeared in other news articles in 2012; Romney had so many flip-flops that voters could not be sure if he was changing his mind, or changing his story. In one analysis of Romney's campaign, author Frank Rich states

⁴⁶ Jonathan Capehart, "Obama must make Romney won flip-flops," *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2012., http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/post/romney-flip-flop-character-flaw/2012/10/16/6b9158de-17ad-11e2-8792-cf5305eddf60_blog.html

⁴⁷ E. J. Dionne Jr, "Mitt Romney's Etch a Sketch Speech," *The Washington Post*, August 31, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ej-dionne-jr-mitt-romneys-etch-a-sketch-speech/2012/08/31/eb381452-f321-11e1-892d-bc92fee603a7_story.html.

⁴⁸ Hummel, "Flip-Flopping from Primaries to General Elections."

⁴⁹ Charles Babington, "Romney Confronts Flip-Flop Charges in Dem Ads," *The Seattle Times*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/romney-confronts-flip-flop-charges-in-dem-ads/>.

⁵⁰ Michael Kranish and Scott Helman, *The Real Romney*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 110, 170, 175.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 159

⁵² Jonathan Capehart, "Obama must make Romney won flip-flops," *The Washington Post*.

that, “[his] missing human core, that inauthenticity and inability to connect, has been a daily complaint about Romney.”⁵³ In a prominent campaign video created by the Democratic National Convention, Romney is pitted against himself in a battle of “Mitt v. Mitt”. The ad cleverly and humorously connected flip-flopping to insincerity, making Romney appear less of a person, less relatable, and less like a strong leader.⁵⁴ As described in a 2012 article in the *Washington Post*, the head of the Pew Research Center found voters did not rate Romney highly on traits such as likability, credibility, and empathy.⁵⁵ A article in *The Guardian* from 2012 described Romney as “wooden, sometimes appears disingenuous.”⁵⁶ Indeed, while not linked directly to small gaffes and ups and downs of the campaign, Romney was rated significantly lower than Obama on measures such as likability and empathy, and Americans believed Romney was less likely to “care about” them.⁵⁷ In June of 2012, a Gallup poll showed that 60% of Americans believed Obama was “honest and trustworthy,” with 50% of Americans feeling the same way about Romney.⁵⁸

Attacks on Romney’s flip-flopping highlighted his willingness to “say anything” to get elected. After the Etch-a-Sketch comment, Rick Santorum said that Romney would “say anything to get elected,” he added that the American people are “looking for someone who writes what they believe in stone and stands true to what they say.”⁵⁹ Romney was painted not only as insincere, inconsistent, and confused, but also as a calculated politician “constantly rewriting of his past,” in order to get as many votes as possible.⁶⁰ In the ad “Cameras,” and “Romney Debate Strategy,” Romney was not only painted as confused and aloof, but also as conniving and working the cameras, saying what he wanted to get elected. A *Washington Post* Opinion piece from 2012 interpreted the vagueness of Romney’s statements and “trust-me” strategy as an insulting ploy aimed at voters.⁶¹ While described as confused and aloof, attacks of

⁵³ Frank Rich, “Who in God’s Name Is Mitt Romney?” *Best American Magazine Writing 2013*, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.7312/asme16225.6.pdf?acceptTC=true>. 38.

⁵⁴ The Democrats, *DNC TV AD: “Trapped,”* accessed April 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUOM9QvhG5I>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁶ Slater, “Why Mitt Romney’s going down as the ‘flip-flopper’ in 2012,” *The Guardian*.

⁵⁷ John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, *The gamble: choice and chance in the 2012 presidential election*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 113, 127.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Likability Top Characteristic for Both Romney and Obama,” *Gallup.com*, June 26, 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155351/Likability-Top-Characteristic-Romney-Obama.aspx>.

⁵⁹ Bingham, Amy. 21 March 2012. “‘Etch A Sketch’ Latest Gaffe From Romney Campaign,” *Abcnews.com*, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/etch-sketch-latest-gaffe-romney-campaign/story?id=15973099>

⁶⁰ Saletton, William. August 2012. “The Conversion: How, when, and why Mitt Romney changed his mind on abortion,” *Slate*,

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_conversion/2012/02/mitt_romney_s_abortion_record_flip_flop_or_conversion_.html

⁶¹ Jonathan Capehart, “Obama must make Romney won flip-flops,” *The Washington Post*.

flip-flopping also described him as a politician more than a regular person, extending this image as an out of touch member of the 1%.

A 2012 *Slate* article titled “The Conversion” described Romney as being talented at reframing his issue stances, and changing positions depending on the exact group he is addressing at the time.⁶² This line of political attack not only paints politicians as unaffable robots, but also can also highlight a level of immorality and reinforce a stereotype of character flaws in politicians who flip-flop. Republican primary opponent Newt Gingrich explained, “It’s wrong to go around and adopt radically different positions based on your need of any one election.”⁶³ There seems to exist a duality in “willing to say anything” political flip-flopping attacks. On the one hand, as we have seen through media responses to flip-flopping by Kerry and Romney, flip-flopping can be understood as a cold and manipulative political calculation. However, the rapidity of Romney’s changes seemed to lend themselves also to another very negative image, that of a confused politician, whereas Kerry’s flip-flops during the 2004 campaign were presented as more calculated and poll pandering.⁶⁴

Perhaps the image of a calculated politician was created in part by the focus on Romney as a businessman, an angle that shaped many personal exposés at the time. A 2012 article in *The New York Times* noted that which other politicians prove empathy producing “crisis narratives,” this was not an element of Romney’s public image, possibly making it harder to emphasize with and find him likeable.⁶⁵ Several articles taking the angle that an article in *The Guardian* proposed; Romney as a “pragmatic businessman,” and highlighted characteristics that made him a good boss.⁶⁶ He was referred to as “deliberate,” “a planner,” and a problem identifier eager to solve complex and detailed problems.⁶⁷ A *Vanity Fair* profile on Romney featuring multiple quotes from sources who knew Romney from his business days suggests that his business partners assumed that Romney had political ambitions and apparently often appeared concerned for his political profile. “‘I always wondered about Mitt, whether he was concerned about the blemishes from a business perspective or from a personal and political perspective,’ one partner

⁶² Saleton, “The Conversion: How, when, and why Mitt Romney changed his mind on abortion,” *Slate*.

⁶³ Babington, “Romney confronts flip-flop charges in Dem Ads,” *The Seattle Times*.

⁶⁴ Taegan Goddard, “Is Hillary Clinton Flip-Flopping or Just Evolving?,” *The Week*, May 11, 2015, <http://theweek.com/articles/554077/hillary-clinton-flipflopping-just-evolving>.

⁶⁵ Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Romney in Crisis: Two Dark Spots in Fortunate Life,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/25/us/politics/romney-in-crisis-two-dark-spots-in-fortunate-life.html>.

⁶⁶ Slater, “Why Mitt Romney’s going down as the ‘flip-flopper’ in 2012,” *The Guardian*.

⁶⁷ Stolberg, “Romney in Crisis: Two Dark Spots in Fortunate Life,” *The New York Times*.

and Lesley Clark, “How Mitt Romney Wielded Power as Massachusetts’ Governor,” *Mclatchydc.com*, March 28, 2012, <http://www.mclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/election/article24726895.html>.

said years later. The partner concluded it was the latter. Whereas most entrepreneurs accepted failure as an inherent part of the game, the partner said, Romney worried that a single flop would bring disgrace. Every calculation had to be made with care,” the profile describes.⁶⁸ While perhaps critiqued for his business style leadership while running for office in how it brought out unsympathetic personality characteristics, while a businessman Romney was perceived as a bit too political and concerned with political appearances, an observation that would continue to stick during the campaign for the presidency.

Voter expectation

Attacks on Mitt Romney’s flip-flopping played into the voter expectation and risk calculation that Tomz and van Houweling, among others, identified as important components of candidate evaluations. One attack ad in response to the etch a sketch comments, titled “Mitt Romney: An Unshakable Record” opened with the sentence, “Mitt Romney’s Hoping for a Convention Reinvention,” reminded voters that you cannot shake away all of the past; in other words you cannot discount all of a politicians’ past statements just because he many have new ones.⁶⁹ A substantial portion of the attacks that came after the etch-a-sketch comment seemed to play off of this risk-aversion, and the necessity to predict the candidate’s policy for the future. The Democratic National Committee ad “Mitt Romney: Some Things You Can’t Shake Off,” suggests Romney cannot let go so easily of his past policy positions, even if he promises new ones.⁷⁰ The attack ads put forth by Romney’s political opponents beg the question, if Romney will just wipe all of his past positions away after the primary, what will he do after the general election? As governor of Massachusetts he enacted a healthcare plan with many similarities to the one put together by the Obama administration, yet was a harsh opponent of Obamacare. As the attack ad argues, Romney went from cautious support of status quo abortion restrictions, to the other extreme of wanting *Roe v. Wade* overturned. These extreme positions, without reference to his past ones, leave voters wondering what the truth is, and what they should expect of this candidate if he were to find himself in office. Interestingly, while rationale for flip-flopping often focuses on the move from past policy position to current, Romney’s senior advisor Eric Ferhnstrom may have attempted to address the voter expectations concerns that flip-

⁶⁸ Scott Helman and Michael Kranish, “The Dark Side of Mitt Romney,” *Vanity Fair*, January 4, 2012, <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/politics/2012/02/mitt-romney-201202>.

⁶⁹ “Obama Campaign Launches Attack Ad Based on ‘Etch A Sketch’ Remark,” *Newsmax*, August 30, 2012, <http://www.newsmax.com/TheWire/obama-campaign-ad-election/2012/08/30/id/450390/>.

⁷⁰ DemRapidResponse, *Mitt Romney: Some Things You Can’t Shake Off*, accessed April 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKtNYmsarUE>.

flopping was raising as well, in stating on a *Frontline* interview, “Well, look, politically, I think the governor feels that the most important thing he can do is fulfill the campaign promises he’s made.”⁷¹ Although contradictory to Ferhnmstrom’s Etch-a-Sketch comment, this explanation is interesting in that it focuses on the future as a way to combat policy, rather than trying to assuage changes made from the past.

Rationale for flip-flopping

Throughout much of his campaign, Romney was accused of flip-flopping on many key issues, and his manner of responding to such criticism varied. Some were defensive and denial, as Romney at one point on Fox News said, “And there’s no question, but that people are going to take snippets and take things out of context and try and show that there are differences,” at another time remarking, “the nature of politics is that you try and find some edge to characterize your opponent and beat him over the head, and that is if you don’t have a optimistic or positive message of your own.” Did his responses aid in the continuation of this narrative of “Mitt v. Mitt”? An April 2012 article in *The Guardian* reported that Romney had done little to respond to accusations of flip-flopping, despite how vicious those attacks were reported to be.⁷² However, an article in *The Seattle Times* from 2011 described Romney’s swift and defensive reactions to flip-flopping attacks as a sign at how serious those accusations were.⁷³

Throughout his campaign, Romney denied some flip-flops, offered “new information” explanations for some and moral explanations for others. According to a 2012 article in *The Guardian*, Romney attempted to downplay some large leaps of opinion, while attributed others to, “heartfelt changes of opinion.”⁷⁴ In defending his flip from believing in upholding *Roe v. Wade* to being more strongly pro-life, Romney explained this change by referencing a change in heart, and the true role of a leader, “Well, Ronald Reagan was also pro-choice and then became pro-life. And George Herbert Walker Bush was pro-choice and became pro-life. And they became pro-life as they took the responsibility of — of leading,” adding, “they could not simply sign up for the taking of unborn life.”⁷⁵ However, when defending other flip-flops he referenced new information as a reason for changing opinions, stating, “in the private sector, if you don’t

⁷¹ “Romney as a Leader,” *FRONTLINE*, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/oral-history/choice-2012/romney-as-a-leader/>.

⁷² Slater, “Why Mitt Romney’s going down as the ‘flip-flopper’ in 2012,” *The Guardian*.

⁷³ Babington, “Romney confronts flip-flop charges in Dem Ads,” *The Seattle Times*.

⁷⁴ Slater, “Why Mitt Romney’s going down as the ‘flip-flopper’ in 2012,” *The Guardian*.

⁷⁵ Matthew Yglesias, “Mitt Romney Defends Abortion Flip-Flop By Noting That Ronald Reagan And George H.W. Bush Did It Too,” *ThinkProgress*, June 8, 2011, <http://thinkprogress.org/yglesias/2011/06/08/239326/mitt-romney-defends-abortion-flip-flop-by-noting-that-ronald-reagan-and-george-h-w-bush-did-it-too/>.

change your view when the facts change, you'll get fired for being stupid.” In response to accusations that Romney had flip-flopped on climate change, his campaign spokesperson fought back, insisting that, “This is ridiculous. Governor Romney's view on climate change has not changed. He believes it's occurring, and that human activity contributes to it, but he doesn't know to what extent. He opposes cap and trade, and he refused to sign such a plan when he was governor. Maybe the bigger threat is all the hot air coming from career politicians who are desperate to hold on to power.”⁷⁶ Romney also took a defensive edge when attempting to explain away the several shifts in policy by calling out Democrats for trying to pull attention away from a slow economy.⁷⁷ While difficult to judge how successful or unsuccessful certain explanations would have been in comparison to others, Romney's explanations do not appear to have been that constructive and did little to steer the narrative away from one of him as a flip-flopping, pandering yet confused politician.

Gender and flip-flopping

Gender stereotyping is not explicitly apparent in the analysis of accusations of Romney flip-flopping, as it is in the case of John Kerry, who was feminized and compared to a feminine French poodle. However, that is not to say media coverage and language surrounding Romney's campaign and campaign gaffes did not interact involve elements of gender stereotypes. In his book *A Republic of Men*, Kann discusses the meaning of manhood and masculinity in the founding of America, and how those original hierarchical definitions of manhood, leadership, and citizenship pervade much of our political dialogue today.⁷⁸ Lockhart and Mollick argue that the very label of “leader” has been normalized as a masculine term, and continues to be portrayed as such by our usages of “woman leader” and “woman president.”⁷⁹ Therefore, even if explicitly feminine stereotypes do not make their way into political attacks, perhaps gender stereotypes do still factor into media portrayal of candidates and our interpretations of their actions.

Romney was not explicitly feminized in the election coverage of his campaign and in critiques raised by his opponents. In fact, the focus on Romney's business capabilities, a

⁷⁶ Frank James, “Mitt Romney Criticized For Slow Motion, Climate-Change ‘Flip Flop,’” *NPR.org*, October 28, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2011/10/28/141803099/mitt-romney-criticized-for-slow-motion-climate-change-flip-flop>.

⁷⁷ Babington, “Romney confronts flip-flop charges in Dem Ads,” *The Seattle Times*.

⁷⁸ Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language and Patriarchal Politics*, (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 151.

⁷⁹ Michele Lockhart and Kathleen Mollick, eds., 2013. *Political Women: Language and Leadership*, (United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2013), 59.

stereotypically considered to be a sign of strength, suggests that his flip-flops did not promote a feminine image, and rather that he was perceived in stereotypically masculine ways. Articles from the campaign season reference Romney's business past and leadership, an arena and characteristic more readily attributed to men.⁸⁰ How that perception of leadership in conjunction with his uncharismatic and empathetic side paint an interesting picture of the male stereotypes that may have been attributed to Romney and interacted with criticisms of flip-flopping. Some articles suggest that Romney during the 2012 campaign had trouble representing himself with the male qualities needed to be successful in the political arena, but that were at odds with Mormon values of masculinity. In a 2012 *Salon* article, the author explains that Romney's seemingly indecisive political stances may be due in part to Mormon men exuding "a kind of humble authority that might strike other people as disingenuous."⁸¹ While Mormonism was a question during the campaign, it did not often result in particularly gendered articles in relation to Romney's self presentation that would suggest it having a large effect on how his Mormonism could have interacted with flip-flopping in a unique and gendered way.

While John Kerry was attacked for French, elitist, and ultimately feminine qualities, and Gillibrand was the subject of several exposés highlighting her gender and role as a mother and woman, Romney in 2012 was not subject to such explicit gender politics. However, the lack of clear remarks does not discount the existence of gender stereotypes nonetheless, stereotypes that perhaps worked more subtly to contribute to problems Romney had to craft a strong, dominant image that was in contrast with his personal characteristics. However, it is notable that, moving on in history from John Kerry and Kirsten Gillibrand, in 2012 Romney's indecisiveness and weak leadership were not evaluated in the particularly gendered ways that they seemed to be for previous candidates. Perhaps what Romney's case study shows is that flip-flopping and gender do necessarily go hand in hand, and that linked characteristics of flip-flopping and gender may hold less gendered weight especially when there are not female candidates prominently involved in the race or in direct competition with the flip-flopping politician.

Hillary Clinton 2016:

While many years have been declared the "year of the flip-flopper," it seems the favorite insult has not been worn out yet. Since the formative stages of her 2016 presidential campaign,

⁸⁰ "Romney as a Leader," *FRONTLINE*. And Clark, "How Mitt Romney Wielded Power as Massachusetts' Governor," *Mcclatchydc.com*,

⁸¹ Naomi Zeveloff, "The Ultimate Mormon Male," *Salon*, February 5, 2012, http://www.salon.com/2012/02/05/the_ultimate_mormon_male/.

Hillary Clinton has been on the receiving end of many attacks on her changing policy positions, such as her stances on the criminal justice system, banks, and immigration.⁸² In fact, she has been receiving these sorts of political attacks since she came to the forefront of the political eye. Clinton presents a rich case study in the realm of flip-flopping, as she has had decades to form, change, and evolve in her policy stances.

Recently, she has changed her position on the Trans Pacific Partnership, the Keystone XL pipeline, same-sex marriage, and immigration reform. If one were to look farther into her history as a political figure, there is evidence of opinion changes on criminal justice, the war on drugs, and her feelings about abortion. Is it still considered a flip-flop after major world events have taken place? Or when a politician changes political office, as seen with Senator Gillibrand? How much time has to be between changes of opinion in order for it to not be considered a flip-flop? The question of time and changing constituencies are both deeply in play in Clinton's situation and provide us with more context into how voters view flip-flopping. As previous case studies have explored and the experimental survey investigates, Clinton also provides many instances of how candidates who flip-flop defend their actions, something that is revealing of political and public perceptions of flip-flopping and the values of democratic leadership.

Rationale for flip-flopping

It is notable to look at how Clinton has combatted accusations of flip-flopping; which Romney and Kerry were unsuccessful at doing in previous campaigns. A recent article in *New York Magazine* proposes that politicians of today have found a successful way to combat the negative label of flip-flopper, by explaining how their stance has "evolved."⁸³ According to a *Business Insider* article in 2015, Clinton has tried to frame her flip-flops as necessary due to changing contexts that have given her further insight into certain problems. She attempts to show that past stances are not incompatible with present ones.⁸⁴ Clinton has explained many of her flip-flopping positions, on gay marriage or the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), Keystone XL Pipeline, and on the Iraq War, as reactions to new information. In response to a question about her position on the TPP, Clinton highlights how its progression was not what was expected in

⁸² Jamelle Bouie, "Our Best Presidents Are Flip-Floppers," *Slate*, May 20, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/05/america_s_best_presidents_have_been_flip_floppers_scott_walker_and_hillary.html.

⁸³ Mark Leibovich, "You and I Change Our Minds. Politicians 'Evolve,'" *The New York Times*, March 10, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/15/magazine/you-and-i-change-our-minds-politicians-evolve.html>.

⁸⁴ Colin Campbell, "It Seems Hillary Clinton Has Already Flip-Flopped on 2 Major Issues," *Business Insider*, April 16, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/hillary-clinton-gay-marriage-and-immigration-flip-flops-2015-4>.

terms of job creation.⁸⁵ In terms of the Iraq war, Clinton admits her mistake and argues that the results and direction of the war were not the ones she had hoped for.⁸⁶

Many have been adamant about labeling her evolutions as flip-flops, and in an interview with NPR's Terry Gross, Clinton vigorously defended the accusation that she had changed her position on same sex marriage simply for political reasons. She said, "I think you [Terry Gross] are trying to say that I used to be opposed and now I am in favor and I did it for political reasons. And that's just flat wrong. So let me just state what I feel like I think you are implying and repudiate it. I have a strong record. I have a great commitment to this issue and I am proud of what I've done and the progress were making."⁸⁷ Clinton emphasizes the sincerity behind her changing opinion, rebuking the idea that that she did it for political reasons. She notes change by using the word "progress," but highlights her "strong record," and "commitment." In doing so, Clinton seems to combat the negative stereotypes of weak leadership and indecisiveness that I hypothesize will suffer in evaluations of flip-flopping candidates, while also highlighting good characteristics possibly associated with flip-flopping such as "open-mindedness" and "flexibility." These traits, in light of accusations of flip-flopping, have recently been defended by former editor of *The New York Times*, Jill Abramson who asserts that Clinton is "fundamentally honest," implying we challenge our notion that opinion change and honesty are mutually exclusive.⁸⁸ Clinton herself insists on the characteristic of commitment when asked in the first Democratic presidential debate, "Will you say anything to get elected?" Clinton responded, "Well, actually, I have been very consistent over the course of my entire life, I have always fought for the same values and principles, but, like most human beings- including those of us who run for office- I do absorb new information. I do look at what's happening in the world."⁸⁹

Specifically regarding her position change on the Keystone XL Pipeline, and her lack of formal stance as Secretary of State, Clinton stated, "I feel now I've got a responsibility to you

⁸⁵ Michael A. Cohen, "Hillary Clinton's Move Left Is No Flip-Flop - The Boston Globe," *BostonGlobe.com*, accessed February 26, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2015/10/09/hillary-clinton-move-left-flip-flop/sNZiv5hqP0kvSeFbrtg2uL/story.html>.

⁸⁶ Source: Guardian, "Hillary Clinton's Flip Flops: From Same-Sex Marriage to TPP – Video," *The Guardian*, October 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/oct/13/hillary-clinton-flip-flops-same-sex-marriage-tpp-video>.

⁸⁷ Terry Gross, *Hillary Clinton: The Fresh Air Interview*, Fresh Air, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/programs/fresh-air/2014/06/12/321394776/fresh-air-for-june-12-2014>.

⁸⁸ Jill Abramson, "This May Shock You: Hillary Clinton Is Fundamentally Honest," *The Guardian*, March 28, 2016, sec. Opinion, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/28/hillary-clinton-honest-transparency-jill-abramson>.

⁸⁹ Chris Cillizza, "Why it's tough for Hillary Clinton to explain away her flip-flops," *The Washington Post, The Fix*, October 15, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/10/15/hillary-clinton-gave-the-exact-right-answer-to-explain-her-flip-flops-it-still-might-not-work/>

and the other voters who ask me about this.”⁹⁰ While Clinton emphasized her leadership and issue evolution when defending her gay marriage flip-flop, when explaining her change of opinion on the Keystone XL Pipeline her answer seems to conform with a constituency based response that I hypothesize will be least liked by voters. While noting responsibility to a new constituency, a valid component of representation, she also opens herself up to accusations of pandering, something that when defending her gay marriage flip-flop she tries hard to distance herself from. When discussing her policy reversal on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) that she sung high praise of as Secretary of State, Clinton offered a different explanation, discussing how new circumstances brought about this reasoned and thoughtful change. She stated on PBS’s News Hour, “As of today, I am not in favor of what I have learned about it [TPP].”⁹¹ In 2012 Clinton had said of the potential TPP, “this Trans Pacific Partnership sets the gold standard in trade agreements to open free, transparent, fair trade, the kind of environment that has the rule of law and a level playing field.”⁹² Clinton qualified her reversal stating, “I still believe in the goal of a strong and fair trade agreement in the Pacific as part of a broader strategy both at home and abroad, just as I did when I was secretary of state.”⁹³ Clinton campaign coordinator and *Media Matters* founder David Brock offers the positives of issue evaluation as he sees it, “So she evaluated this issue and took her time. She came up with a decision that I think will show her to be what I believe is the real progressive champion in the race,” he stated on MSNBC’s *All In with Chris Matthews* in October 2015.⁹⁴

Tomz and Van Houweling have found that voters do not discount past policy positions, so it may prove to be a good strategy for Clinton to address her past positions and why they have changed.⁹⁵ Clinton seems to recognize that voters might initially focus too much on her past policy positions, and so far in her campaign has focused on the future, not her past, which is a long one.⁹⁶ In fact, Democratic strategist Steve Elmendorf has argued that, “There are levels of

⁹⁰ Monica Alba and Carrie Dann, “Hillary Clinton: I Oppose the Keystone XL Pipeline,” *NBC News*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/hillary-clinton-n431781>.

⁹¹ Post Wires, “Hillary Flip-Flops on Asia-Trade Treaty,” *New York Post*, October 8, 2015, <http://nypost.com/2015/10/08/hillary-flip-flops-on-asia-trade-treaty/>.

Chuck Todd, Mark Murray, and Carrie Dann, “Why Clinton’s Trade Flip-Flop Is So Unbelievable,” *NBC News*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/first-read-why-clintons-trade-flip-flop-so-unbelievable-n440831>.

⁹² Ben Jacobs, Lauren Gambino, and Sabrina Siddiqui, “Hillary Clinton Breaks with Obama to Oppose Trans Pacific Partnership,” *The Guardian*, October 7, 2015, sec. US news, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/07/hillary-clinton-opposes-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp>.

⁹³ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁴ Alex Griswold, “David Brock Admits Hillary Will Likely Flip-Flop Some More,” October 8, 2015, <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/david-brock-admits-hillary-will-likely-flip-flop-some-more/>.

⁹⁵ Tomz and Van Houweling. “Political Repositioning: Detailed Synopsis,” Detailed Synopsis, 7.

⁹⁶ Eric Bradner, “Hillary Clinton’s Campaign: 8 Things We’ve Learned so Far,” *CNNPolitics.com*, June 14, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/13/politics/hillary-clinton-8-things-weve-learned/index.html>.

flip-flops. There are issues where people change because the world changes, circumstances change. As long as you explain what you are doing and why, that's fine."⁹⁷

Character attacks

Despite the ability Clinton may be showing to redefine some of her opinion changes, she is still coming under fire for those changes, and the attacks are, as we have seen with Kerry, Gillibrand, and Kerry, focused on character traits and personality attributes. In an October 2015 article in *The New York Times*, columnist David Brooks acknowledges that positives may exist for Clinton's flip-flops under what he calls an "Opportunist Solution." However, he explains that one major downside to her seemingly constant flip-flopping is that this type of campaigning ignores that voters might vote on the basis of "authenticity and trustworthiness," and cannot solely rely on the commitment of interest groups.⁹⁸ A Quinnipiac University Poll found that a majority of Americans do not view Clinton as "trustworthy." In fact, almost the same percentage of voters find Clinton and Trump "honest and trustworthy" (57% and 58%, respectively).⁹⁹ How much of the reactions to Clinton's flip-flopping are because Clinton is stepping outside of the stereotyped image we have of the honest woman? It is difficult to quantify how severe the attacks are compared to say Mitt Romney or John Kerry, which is why future hypothetical experiments can be helpful. Not only may Clinton's gender add an additional element to evaluations of flip-flopping, but also her long history of experience and presence in the political realm. A poll conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* found that 59% of voters view Hillary Clinton as trustworthy given her "experience and background."¹⁰⁰ A recent Gallup Poll found that, unprompted, 21% of respondents described Hillary Clinton as "dishonest/liar/don't trust her/poor character." Only 9% first reacted with a description of "strong."¹⁰¹ It may pose a challenge for Clinton to emphasize her experience, without remaining tied to her past policy positions and thereby highlighting any discrepancy between those past positions and her new ones.

⁹⁷ Sean Sullivan and Jenna Johnson, "GOP Candidates Are Flip-Flopping to Please the Base. That Could Hurt Later On.," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/its-flip-flop-season-as-presidential-hopefuls-move-to-cater-to-the-base/2015/05/21/5f281ca4-ff45-11e4-8b6c-0dce21e223d_story.html.

⁹⁸ David Brooks, "Hillary Clinton's Opportunist Solution!" *The New York Times*, October 9, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/09/opinion/hillary-clintons-opportunist-solution.html>.

⁹⁹ Quinnipiac University, "QU Poll Release Detail."

¹⁰⁰ Jessica Glenza, "Hillary Clinton on Course to Win Presidential Election, Poll Says," *The Guardian*, June 23, 2015, sec. US news, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/23/hillary-clinton-presidential-election-poll>.

¹⁰¹ Chris Cillizza, "1 in 5 Americans Say Hillary Clinton Is 'dishonest' or a 'liar.' Here's Why That's a Big Problem.," *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/24/hillary-clintons-trust-problem-continues-to-dog-her/>.

Character attacks that have focused on Hillary Clinton's flip-flopping positions have highlighted how these flip-flops play into her persona of a poll-pandering career politician, as well as how she is as a leader. Clinton experienced some of these flip-flopping attacks in 2007, when she was depicted in a similar way to Kerry in 2004; poll pandering and searching for political gain. After a Democratic debate an editorialist in the *Boston Herald* wrote "She has managed to out Kerry John Kerry himself," declaring that, "Hillary is FORGAINST!" Post debate coverage on *Hardball* referenced the pulls of primary and general election differences to predict future and continued opinion changes on the part of Clinton.¹⁰² Even in 2005, Clinton underwent scrutiny for her flip-flops, as journalists tried to discern if her opinion changes on abortion, the Iraq war, and health care were issue evolutions and or instances of poll-pandering flip-flopping.¹⁰³ However, Croco and Gartner classify her 2008 opinion changes as examples of issue evolution, since it was clear her new position had been developing as new information became available.¹⁰⁴ Some articles are calling Clinton out for flip-flopping out of "convenience," while others highlight the time difference between her positions, and how she is merely reacting to changing times.¹⁰⁵ Martin O'Malley, who has been critical of Clinton's flip-flops, stated in response to her Keystone XL pipeline flip, "Leadership is about stating where you stand on critical issues, regardless of how they poll or focus group."¹⁰⁶ As Sanders and Clinton have started to compete head to head, Sanders also has questioned what Clinton's "evolutions" on ideas say about her ability to lead.¹⁰⁷

While receiving scrutiny from the media and other politicians, perhaps in the long run Clinton's flip-flops could prove to be beneficial if final policy position is more important to voters than the act of flip-flopping or past policy positions. A recent *Washington Post* article contrasts Clinton's search for the Democratic party base to the number of Republican candidates flip-flopping to appeal to their conservative base in the primaries, and argued that the latter will be much more costly.¹⁰⁸ In a *Fortune.com* video covering Clinton's flip-flop on the TPP, the

¹⁰² Lempert, "On 'flip-flopping': Branded stance-taking in U.S. electoral politics," 224.

¹⁰³ Raymond Hernandez and Patrick D. Healy, "The Evolution of Hillary Clinton," *The New York Times*, July 13, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/13/nyregion/the-evolution-of-hillary-clinton.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Croco and Gartner, "Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support," 9.

¹⁰⁵ Greg Sargent, "Is Hillary a Populist of Convenience?," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/plum-line/wp/2015/04/21/is-hillary-a-populist-of-convenience/>.

Jeff Zeleny and Dan Merica, "Flip-flop or not: Hillary Clinton's 8-year political evolution," *CNN politics*.

¹⁰⁶ Alba and Dann, "Hillary Clinton: I Oppose the Keystone XL Pipeline," *Nbcnews.com*

¹⁰⁷ S.A. Miller, "Bernie Sanders, Vermont Senator, Hits Hillary Clinton's 'evolution' on Tough Issues," *The Washington Times*, November 8, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/nov/8/bernie-sanders-vermont-senator-hits-hillary-clinto/>.

¹⁰⁸ Sullivan and Johnson, "GOP candidates are flip-flopping to please the base. That could hurt later on," *The Washington Post*.

commentator suggests a political nature to her reversal, stating, “It will also earn her political points with the powerful labor unions.”¹⁰⁹ Jeb Bush’s campaign has attacked Clinton’s flip-flops on immigration, suggesting that Clinton “will say anything to get elected.”¹¹⁰ O’Malley, again, said in relation to Clinton’s flip-flops that, “leadership is about making the right decision and the best decision before sometimes it becomes entirely popular.”¹¹¹

Gender and flip-flopping

Research demonstrates that women are seen as more honest than men, but also more indecisive.¹¹² There also exist stereotypes in how we expect female politicians to talk, and what issues we expect them to address and be knowledgeable on.¹¹³ As long as she has been in the public eye, Hillary Clinton has been a symbol of a strong female politician, but this image comes with many troublesome connotations. Detailed in her article “The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary,” there is a history of “Hillary hating,” that Karlyn Kohrs Campbell attributes to the existence of general gender stereotypes that restrict how female politicians can act and speak in public without repercussions.¹¹⁴ These restrictions are difficult for women to conform to since while masculine qualities are seen as better for political office, as a society we do not condone crossing over stereotypical actions. Campbell explains, “What can be summed up as “feminine rhetorical style” were strategic responses by nineteenth-century women to two competing sets of cultural norms: gender norms for the performance of femininity and rhetorical norms governing public advocacy. Put simply, women speakers were expected to reaffirm their womanliness discursively at the same time that they demonstrated the ordinary rhetorical competencies—coherent argument, clarity of position, offering compelling evidence, and responding to competing views—that were gender-coded as masculine.”¹¹⁵ She argues, as other research has shown as well, that this problem is still pervasive for female politicians today.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ “Hillary Clinton flip-flops on TPP,” Video, 8 October 2015. Fortune.com, <http://fortune.com/video/2015/10/08/hillary-clinton-flip-flops-on-tpp/>

¹¹⁰ Ed O’Keefe, “Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton Accuse Each Other of Flip-Flopping on Immigration — and They’re Both Right,” *The Washington Post*, July 8, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/07/08/jeb-bush-and-hillary-clinton-accuse-each-other-of-flip-flopping-on-immigration-and-theyre-both-right/>.

¹¹¹ Jeff Zeleny and Dan Merica. “Flip flop or not: Hillary Clinton’s 8-year political evolution,” CNNPolitics.com.

¹¹² Lawless, “Women, War, and Winning Elections; Gender Stereotyping in the Post September 11th Era,” 480, 482.

Dolan, “Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?” 2.

Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 121.

¹¹³ Huddy and Terkildsen. “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates.”

Fridkin and Kenney, *The Changing Face of Representation; The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*, 149.

¹¹⁴ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1998): 1–20, doi:10.1353/rap.2010.0172. 4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

Part of the phenomenon of “Hillary-hating” that Campbell analyzes, may in part be due to the absence in many cases of feminine rhetoric in her speeches.¹¹⁷ Articles over the years have focused on Clinton’s physical makeover; her clothing choices and hair lightening to name a few specifics. While not explicitly linked to Clinton’s flip-flops on specific issues, how do articles about her image makeover reinforce this idea that she may be wishy-washy and succumb to change in other areas of her life? Lawrence and Rose in their analysis of Hillary Clinton’s candidacy in the 2008 campaign discuss how the idea of “change” that Obama latched onto during the race is one that is tougher for women to adopt without be associated with inexperience, incompetence, and calling attention to women as outsiders in the political arena.¹¹⁸

Clinton has always been a strong female politician, and as Campbell described, not one who has conformed well to female stereotype expectations. In her article calling Clinton “fundamentally honest,” despite her flip-flops, Abramson accuses the media of engaging in a gendered double standard in their obsession with Clinton’s flip-flops. All candidates change their opinions, she argues, and the concentration on Clinton more than any other candidate reveals how, “we expect purity from women candidates.”¹¹⁹ Carroll, in an analysis of Clinton’s 2008 campaign, draws upon past research by Eagly and Carli in 2003 to explain that, “Men are particularly likely to devalue women who occupy traditionally masculine leadership roles.” In addition, women “encounter more dislike and rejection than men do for showing dominance, expressing disagreement, or being highly assertive or self-promoting.”¹²⁰ Research has shown that flip-flopping brings with it concerns of power-seeking and poll pandering that may be more acceptable as male attributes than female ones.¹²¹ Hillary Clinton has received criticism for being too feminine and too masculine, as well as too power-seeking, a dimension of her character established amidst the Lewinsky scandal and Hillary Clinton’s strong defense of her husband.¹²² Power-seeking can be a negative attribute associated with flip-flopping, and perhaps this attribute will be central to flip-flopping attacks on Clinton since it is an image already cultivated by her past political actions. Research has shown that female candidates are viewed even less favorably than their male counterparts for moves seen as power-seeking.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁸ Regina G. Lawrence and Melody Rose, *Hillary Clinton’s Race for the White House*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 43.

¹¹⁹ Jill Abramson, “This may shock you: Hillary Clinton is fundamentally honest,” *The Guardian*.

¹²⁰ Susan J. Carroll, “Reflections on Gender and Hillary Clinton’s Presidential Campaign: The Good, the Bad, and the Misogynic,” *Politics & Gender* 5, no. 01 (March 2009): 1–20, doi:10.1017/S1743923X09000014. 5.

¹²¹ Okimoto and Brescoll. “The Price of Power,” 931.

¹²² Lawrence and Rose, *Hillary Clinton’s Race for the White House*, 125, 92, 85.

¹²³ Okimoto and Brescoll. “The Price of Power,” 931.

Looking forward into 2016

What is intriguing is that in 2004 and 2012 the candidates who became branded flip-floppers could not shake the label, and whether a direct result of this label or not, were unsuccessful in their bid for the presidency. Was it in part because they could not assure their voters of their sound character, and in addition not able to convince voters of what they would actually do once in office? Hillary Clinton is already a famous name without campaigning; how much will a brand of flip-flopper be able to define her? Or does her long career make it more likely that someone will always be able to dig up past positions and paint her as a flip-flopper?

One of the interesting elements that Ruane and Cerulo identify as an important component of flip-flopping is the direction of the flip-flops. When politicians, such as LBJ on the Voting Rights Act or Barry Goldwater, flip-flop to an unpopular position it is seen as a moral move, a sacrifice to do what's right. However, when the flip-flops accommodate self-interest or special interest groups, this is evaluated much more negatively, as seen with Obama on campaign laws and Obama and McCain on offshore drilling.¹²⁴ Clinton still has a long campaign to run before she makes it to the general election, when many of the hard-hitting attacks on flip-flopping have taken place in past presidential elections. Her flip-flops now beg the question as to what she will do if successful in the primary; will she have to flip-flop back to appeal to the general electorate? How will this double flip-flopping play out, or would it not be as big of a deal as her flip-flops now, since Hummel has shown that opinion change from the primaries to general elections are expected and tolerated (to some extent) by voters?¹²⁵ In terms of the focus of the experimental survey, how will Clinton's gender and attempts to defend against accusations of flip-flopping affect her electability in the primary, and possibly in the general election?

Conclusion

What is evident from these case studies is that "flip-flopper" is a damaging label that candidates try to avoid, and that their opponents use to discredit them both on the basis of character traits and voter expectation. There is no evidence of voters actively attributing positive character traits like "flexible," and "open-minded," to politicians who reposition and are labeled as flip-floppers, despite how an accusation of flip-flopping may in fact highlight these positive qualities. Unfortunately for these candidates, when hammered hard enough and in the right ways,

¹²⁴ Ruane and Cerulo, "The Forum: Second Thoughts on Presidential Politics," 854, 855.

¹²⁵ Hummel, "Flip-flopping from primaries to general elections," 1023, 1025.

the negative label of “flip-flopper” can stick. As a 2004 article in *The New York Times* described, the term has come to mean the “antithesis of leadership,” and not only is it a catchy phrase, but it is also easily molded into an absorbable visual. As noted in these case studies, candidates who change their opinions are attacked for being untrustworthy, unpredictable, and too focused on political gain.

When trying to respond to attacks of flip-flopping, Kerry and Romney were seemingly not very successful in changing America’s mind, once the negative label stuck. Kerry tried to clarify that these were simply inarticulate moments and pointed out Bush’s flip-flops, and Romney tried to underscore his current remarks. A 2009 article from *The New York Times* titled, “Nuance Is Fine Until It’s a Flip-Flop,” details possible flip-flops that Obama has made, but the general lessons may be applied to other politicians. The author stresses that nuance in policy positions will only be accepted by the American public in small doses, and that Obama in particular crafted an image of his complex stances and careful explanations that allowed him more leeway. Perhaps Romney and Kerry were not successful at crafting a more complex image, or maybe were not given the chance to do so as they were not ultimately successful in their bids for the presidency. It is also possible that their longer political and public careers provided more possibilities of flip-flopping than did Obama’s past experiences.

From these four select case studies, it is not immediately evident that female candidates, here Gillibrand and Clinton, are treated and evaluated radically differently for flip-flopping than male candidates, here Kerry and Romney. However, there are clear examples of gender stereotypes in how John Kerry’s weak leadership played into attempts to feminize his image, and there were numerous articles revolving around Gillibrand and Clinton’s makeovers and reinventions of their images. In several articles, Gillibrand’s political rebranding is interwoven with descriptions of changes in personal style, coming from a rural district to chic DC. When discussing her rapid policy changes they are described as a “makeover,” a very feminine term which is clear in *Vogue* and *New York Magazine* articles on Kristen Gillibrand and her changing image, which was discussed not only with respect to her policy positions, but also her weight loss and dress choices. What is striking and compelling is that much of the language in these articles is gendered language, diction that is more immediately linked to our culture’s perceived images of femininity. As explored in the case study of Kerry, the Bush campaign painted him as a feminine French poodle, delicate, pretentious, weak and indecisive. Romney was accused in

one article as having “ideological promiscuity¹²⁶,” “promiscuity” being a word mostly reserved to describe women. All four politicians, regardless of their gender, suffered from questions of their character as a result of flip-flopping, as well as questions of expectation for their future policy stances. Without statistics compiling word usage or number of articles published about each candidate, it is hard to draw a conclusive picture from these four case studies about how voters’ response to flip-flopping may differ depending on the gender of the candidate. However, it is apparent that flip-flopping, gender, and rationale, all played roles in how these four politicians were depicted in the media.

¹²⁶ Jonathan Capehart, “Obama must make Romney won flip-flops,” *The Washington Post*.

Chapter 4: Experiment Methodology

Quantitatively, I have designed an experimental survey along the lines of a Goldberg paradigm scenario, whereby respondents are given a short and fabricated news article and asked questions afterwards about the candidate they read about. The works of Tomz and Van Houweling, Hoffman and Carver, Croco and Gartner, on candidate repositioning, and Deborah Jordan Brooks, on gender stereotypes, involve these types of hypothetical scenarios and informed the construction of the fake news excerpt I created.¹ The excerpts presented a candidate now running for the presidency, who in 2010, as a Senator, had opposed the Dream Act to creating a pathway towards citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Now, in 2015, the candidate (if he or she has flip-flopped) is quoted offering a more liberal opinion in support of immigration reform. This opinion is either justified on principles, what the candidate's constituents wanted, or no rationale is provided. There are also control conditions of candidates who do not flip-flop. One excerpt reads as follows:

Five years ago, Senator Michelle Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for her campaign for the presidency, Senator Michelle Smith stated that she now supports immigration reform aimed at creating a pathway towards citizenship. "America needs to act on immigration. We can no longer wait when there are so many undocumented people in this country who are living in the shadows," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

In this scenario, the candidate is a woman who flip-flops without providing a rationale. For about half of the respondents, Michelle Smith was changed to Michael Smith, and the identifying pronouns were changed. The other dimension on which the experimental conditions varied involves rationale. For some respondents, the candidate provided no reason, as shown above. For other respondents, the candidate offered a moral rationale, stating, "America needs to act on

¹ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*. Tomz and Van Houweling, "Political Repositioning," Detailed Synopsis. Croco and Gartner, "Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support."

immigration. While I voted against the DREAM Act, I've thought long and hard about what is right. I've seen how hard immigrants work, and have come to realize that it would be wrong for us to kick people out who only come here looking for a better life for their children; looking for the American dream." For still other respondents, the candidate offered a constituency-based rationale, claiming, "America needs to act on immigration. My job is to do the will of the people. As senator, I listened to the people of my state when I voted against the DREAM Act. But as president, I will listen to the American people as a whole. Americans want a solution so that all are treated with dignity and can work for the American dream, making our country and our economy better." Finally, some respondents saw a news excerpt in which the candidate did not change his or her stance on the DREAM Act.

The full survey text can be found in Appendix 1. The questions after the news excerpt focus on vote choice, favorability, trait evaluations, and spill-over effects of flip-flopping. For example, the question concerned with measuring a spill-over effect reads, "Recently this candidate has expressed a change of opinion on the issue of gun control. How likely do you find it that this candidate will stick to this new stance if elected President?" and asked to rank likelihood on a seven scale from "very unlikely" to "very likely." The survey also included three manipulation checks to know if the respondent had actually read the excerpt and absorbed the essential information of gender and flip-flopping. Therefore the respondent was asked to identify the gender of the candidate he or she just read about and the political action taken by that candidate (if he or she changed opinion, and why). The results revealed that respondents did indeed read and absorb the information presented in the fake news excerpts (see chapter 5).

The results of the experimental survey are analyzed via STATA, and more detail on the methods of analysis and specific regressions used can be found within Chapter 5, which discusses results. While the obvious pitfalls of hypothetical scenarios apply here, in that these fabricated circumstances may have limited external validity, there is much to be gained from isolating factors and seeing if in certain circumstances there are significant differences in how people respond to different situations.

The survey was created and administered via Qualtrics, and respondents were recruited through Facebook postings on Tufts-only groups, emails to political science classes, pre-law, and on-campus political groups, as well as in-person tabling in Tufts University's Campus Center. The total sample size is 439, with particular analyses limited to fewer respondents, depending on

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the variables in question. The experimental survey benefits from the fact that it does not stand alone, and is accompanied by four case studies that will be able to compare and contrast with possible trends that arise from the experimental survey.

Chapter 5: Results

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, part of this thesis involves quantitative data analysis of the responses to an experimental survey conducted amongst Tufts undergraduates from September-December 2015. There were 439 responses; however, as answers were not forced, for most regressions there were around 290-360 responses to analyze. The main part of the experimental survey included a small “news” excerpt concerning a candidate and his or her stance on immigration policy. The full text of the experiment can be found in Appendix 1. The factors manipulated in these vignettes were candidate gender, whether the candidate flip-flopped or held a steady position on immigration policy, and what rationale the candidate gave for flip-flopping (morals, principles, or no rationale). In addition to these independent variables, I also asked how much trust respondents have in the government to handle immigration policy, how important the issue is to them, how knowledgeable they are on the topic, and their gender, political affiliation, and preferred policy stance on immigration. After reading about the candidate in the short news excerpt, respondents were asked a series of questions. These questions constitute the dependent variables. Most of these were questions concerning trait evaluations, and respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one to ten how applicable the traits were to the candidates. The adjectives they rated the candidates on included: leader, honest, trustworthy, open-minded, flexible, willing to compromise, believes what he or she says (sincerity), believes what he or she thinks voters want to hear (pandering), and ambitious. These characteristics were chosen in order to highlight the possible negatives and positives associated with flip-flopping. In addition, respondents were asked to rate candidate favorability on a one to seven scale, identify what the candidate’s likely policy position would be if he or she were elected, rate the likelihood that the candidate would flip-flop on gun control, and finally if they would vote for the candidate.

Based off of previous literature on the topics of flip-flopping and gender stereotypes, I hypothesized that flip-flopping would result in negative candidate evaluations. I hypothesized that female candidates who flip-flopped, and candidates who flip-flopped based on changing constituency desires, would be rated least favorably by voters. In addition, I thought that candidates who gave no reason for flip-flopping would be rated more favorably than candidates

who give a moral or constituency-based reason. In the end I find that flip-flopping did bring with it negative candidate evaluations, and respondents reacted more favorably to moral explanations. However, I was too quick to anticipate the negative evaluations of female candidates as well as the positive perception of ambiguity (or giving no rationale for flip-flopping).

The data displaying these results, which I discuss in more detail in the following sections, can be found in the tables at the end of the chapter. Ordinary least squares regression models are used throughout the analysis. In twelve tables that present the data, the dependent variables are listed in columns and the independent variables in the rows. The models in the tables below represent regressions to understand the effect of specific independent variables. For the sake of further reference, model 1 refers to a regression run with the flip-flopping variable, model 2 with two dummy rationale variables (comparing a candidate who provides a moral rationale to one who provides no rationale, and comparing a candidate who gives a constituency based rationale to one who provides no rationale), model 3 with a dummy no rationale variable that compares a candidate who provides no rationale to one who provides some sort of rationale for flip-flopping, model 4 with a candidate gender variable, model 5 with a female flip-flopping variable (comparing female flip-floppers to male flip-floppers). Model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate, in order to see how female respondents versus male respondents might evaluate female candidates differently. As shown in the tables, in all regressions I controlled for trust in government to handle immigration policy, issue importance, knowledgeableability on the issue, and the gender of the respondent. A positive coefficient indicates that the trait rating has become more appropriate to describe the candidate. For instance, a positive coefficient means that the candidate became more favorable, more honest, or more likely to flip-flop on the issue of gun control.¹ Favorability was measured on a scale of zero to six, while the other trait evaluations were measured on scales of one to ten.

Flip-flopping (model 1)

In instances of candidates flip-flopping, the candidate changed positions from opposing the DREAM Act of 2010 to favoring more comprehensive and liberal-leaning immigration reform. A manipulation check shows that the experimental stimuli were read as intended. Among

¹ While the appendix shows that the coding of favorability and vote choice ran in the opposite direction of the other variables, I created new "flipvote" and "flipfavorable" variables when running regressions in STATA so that the variables could be understood in the same direction as the others.

the respondents who received a flip-flopping candidate vignette, 21.54% still thought that this candidate would support a policy position that advocated for labeling undocumented immigrants as felons. A majority, 57.45%, thought that the candidate would advance a guest-worker policy if elected, while 21.01% thought that the candidate would promote an amnesty policy. Out of the sample of 439 respondents, 96 (21.87%) received news excerpts where the candidate did not flip-flop on his or her opinion, but rather maintained his or her position against progressive immigration reform. This distribution matches well to the perceived policy stances, indicating that people who took the survey did take time to read the news excerpts and understood the policy position of the candidate in question. The fact that a majority of people thought that the candidate would advance a guest-worker policy while only 21.01% thought that the candidate would promote an amnesty policy is indicative of support for prior research that found that people are likely to blend together past and present policy positions. However, this is not necessarily the case, since the news excerpts did not explicitly detail support for an amnesty program as the candidate's new position in cases where that candidate flip-flopped.

It was hypothesized that flip-flopping would elicit negative voter reactions. In fact, how favorably the candidate was perceived, whether or not the respondent wanted to vote for the candidate, and how likely the respondent thought it was that the politician would flip-flop on gun control were each affected when the candidate flip-flopped on his or her position on immigration policy (model 1, Table 12). The candidates were also rated differently on character traits when they flip-flopped. However, these results were not as straightforward as hypothesized. Most surprising, upon first glance, is that favorability increased by one and a half points on a seven-point scale when the candidate flip flopped on immigration. This result was statistically significant, and can be located in model 1 of Table 1. A substantial majority of respondents identified as Democrats, and in the vignettes politicians switched from a conservative view on immigration to a more liberal one. It is important to keep in mind that the average favorability rating was low (the lowest of all trait ratings), at 2.66 on a scale of one to seven, and 3.03 for flip-flopping candidates. The finding of increased favorability ratings for candidates who flip-flopped suggests that final policy stance was more important to respondents than the act of flip-

flopping. This is supported by previous flip-flopping research by McCaul and Croco and Gartner.²

This positive favorability rating is not in and of itself indicative of overall favorable perceptions of flip-floppers. In terms of other character traits, respondents still rated candidates negatively on several character traits even if the policy stances of these candidates closely matched their own. The act of flip-flopping produced statistically significant results on how candidates were evaluated on honesty, sincerity, pandering, open-mindedness, flexibility, and willingness to compromise. As represented by model 1 in the tables at the end of this chapter, these candidates were seen as less honest, less sincere, and more likely to be pandering. In fact, the trait “says what he or she thinks voters want to hear,” had the highest average rating from respondents, as the average for all candidates was 7.78 and for flip-flopping candidates was 8.12 on a scale from one to ten. It is interesting to note that flip-flopping did not affect how respondents evaluated candidates on the traits of leadership, ambition, or trustworthiness, all characteristics that seem tied to accusations of flip-flopping. Respondents were also not more likely to anticipate the candidate changing his or her position on gun control just because he or she flip-flopped on immigration policy. However, as discussed in the section below on gender, respondents did perceive an increased likelihood that female politicians who flip-flop would change their stance on gun control, when specifically comparing male and female flip-floppers.

While the negative character evaluations saw significant effects along the ten-point rating scale, so did the competing positive characteristics that one could ascribe to flip-flopping. Although flip-flopping seemed to carry with it the negative connotations of dishonesty and pandering, these candidates got very large boosts on the traits of open-mindedness and flexibility (model 1, Tables 5 and 6). Candidates who flip-flopped as opposed to those who did not benefited from nearly a three point increase in perceived open-mindedness, and a three and a half point increase in perceived flexibility. Perhaps these positive boosts were so large because of the final policy position and positive party sentiments projected onto the candidate. Even if this is the case, it is significant to note that respondents were able to hold both negative and positive perceptions of the candidate in question, and even final policy stance did prohibit some negative character evaluations of flip-flopping.

² Croco and Gartner. “Flip-Flops and High Heels: An Experimental Analysis of Elite Position Change and Gender on Wartime Public Support,” 12.
McCaul et al., “Appraisals of a consistent versus a similar politician: Voter preferences and intuitive judgments,” 295, 298.

Flip-flopping rationale (models 2 and 3)

The results also indicate that the specific rationale given for flip-flopping did have an effect on how respondents evaluated candidates, however not precisely in the ways in which I envisioned. I hypothesized that candidates would be rated more harshly for providing a constituent based reason for flip-flopping, since this type of justification would play into the stereotype of a poll-pandering politician only concerned with winning votes. Concurrently, I anticipated that the moral argument we find so often in politics today would seem more authentic and would be better received by respondents initially troubled by the switch in policy stance. Based on previous literature in the area, I hypothesized that ambiguity, or no explanation, would be more popular among respondents, who could then inject partisan optimism onto the candidate's evolution.

When compared to a candidate who provided no reason for flip-flopping, a candidate who provided a moral explanation were seen more favorably (model 2, Table 1), while there was no analogous effect for providing a constituent response. In her 1991 research, McGraw found that, among types of explanations for changing opinion, the most effective tactics are justifications that involve morals and norms.³ Compared to candidates who did not provide a rationale, candidates who gave a moral response were also seen as more honest, stronger leaders, more trustworthy, more open-minded, more flexible, more likely to compromise, and more sincere. As seen in model 2 of Table 9, candidates who provided a moral response as opposed to no response were also perceived as less pandering. When compared to candidates who provided no rationale for their flip-flop, those who gave a moral explanation received more of the hypothetical vote from respondents as well (Model 2, table 11). These findings support the hypothesis that justifications based on principles will be seen favorably by voters, and in fact the boost in evaluations of "good" character traits and lack of and increase among the negative characteristics like pandering or spillover effect indicate that perhaps providing moral explanations could be a method for combatting the negative aspects of flip-flopping that the results earlier demonstrated.

When compared to candidates who flip-flopped and gave no rationale, the only statistically significant character evaluations of those who gave a constituency response was

³ McGraw, "Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts," 1133, 1137, 1141.

honesty. Candidates who appealed to their job as representative in representing the peoples' ideas were seen as slightly more honest than those who gave no rationale for flip-flopping.

These results support the initial hypothesis, that providing a moral rationale would be produce more favorable character evaluations for a candidate than if that candidate were to provide a constituency-based rationale (at least when compared to no rationale). In other words, in trait and favorability evaluations, and even in vote choice, the rationale a candidate gives for flip-flopping does matter. As seen in the results, explaining a change of opinion based off of the desires of one's constituency does little to affect character evaluations. The results indicate that it may be a politically expedient choice, when flip-flopping, to defend that flip-flopping off of principles. Perhaps this explanation combats the negative effects of flip-flopping since it appeals to a type of moral commitment to principles even if the overall context of flip-flopping connotes indecisiveness.

In order to investigate further the effect of rationale, I compared the effect of receiving any rationale for a candidate's flip-flop to the effect of receiving no rationale explaining a candidate's flip-flop. While I had hypothesized that ambiguity would be the most favorable option (compared to either type of rationale a candidate could give in the experiment), the results in fact showed negative respondent reactions to ambiguity compared to giving some type of explanation for flip-flopping. As represented by model 3 in the tables at the end of the chapter, candidates who gave no rationale for flip-flopping were rated less favorably and were seen as weaker leaders, less honest, less trustworthy, less open-minded, less flexible, less willing to compromise, and less sincere. These candidates also appear to suffer when it comes to vote choice, although this result was not statistically significant (model 3, Table 11). These results suggest that respondents prefer explanations for changes in candidates' policies, and as previously discussed, respondents preferred explanations that justify the change based on what the politicians personally sees as the wrong or right thing to do. While I previously believed that ambiguity would be rewarding because voters are able to project their own favorable interpretations of change onto the candidate in question, one could also understand why ambiguity may provoke an image of a poll-pandering, insincere flip-flopping politician. Perhaps the lack of rationale for flip-flopping makes candidates look less transparent, as if they have something to hide, or as if they are flip-flopping solely for political gain. If voters are going to put their trust into a candidate to carry out specific policy platforms, one would expect that those

voters would want to know why or if a candidate believes what he or she says, especially if what he or she says has recently changed.

Tomz and van Houweling in 2009, McGraw in 1991, and Fenno in 1986, found in their research that ambiguous policy statements could be a safe or even rewarding option for politicians.⁴ It is possible that the constraints of this experiment distorted how voters may actually respond to flip-flopping candidates who give no reason for their position change. Here, the vignettes presented to respondents were very brief and abbreviated; in real life even if politicians give no explanation for flip-flopping the action is still part of a much larger story and dialogue that provide more insight into the perceived reason for flip-flopping, even if it is not explicitly stated. However, it is still significant to note that, on its face, ambiguity is not a tactic definitively favored by voters. Instead, what produces favorable candidate evaluations is the moral explanation for flip-flopping. A politician saying “I think it is the right thing to do,” may appeal to character traits that are diminished by the stereotype of flip-flopping by implying a deeper level of character and introspection that one might connect naturally to honesty, trustworthiness, and moral leadership. On the other hand, while changing a belief because of constituency desires may in fact represent one valid form of representation, it also fits neatly into the image of poll-pandering and political gamesmanship.

Gender stereotypes (models 4 and 5)

It was also hypothesized that a candidate’s gender would have a significant impact on voter evaluations of candidates, however this link was not as apparent. The results from the experimental survey reinforce some of the more recent literature on gender stereotypes in politics, particularly by Deborah Jordan Brooks.⁵ There were only three instances in which the candidate’s gender significantly affected how respondents evaluated the candidate; these were favorability, ambition, and spillover effect. Female candidates were seen as more ambitious than their male counterparts (model 4, Table 10), and in fact received a boost in favorability over male candidates. However, the results pertaining to the spillover effect do suggest that the negative stereotype of indecisiveness comes into play for female candidates; as simply going from a male

⁴ Kathleen M. McGraw, “Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts,” 1150.

Tomz and Van Houweling, “The Electoral Implications of Candidate Ambiguity,” 83.

Tomz and Van Houweling, “Political Repositioning,” Detailed Synopsis, 27.

Fenno, “Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics,” 9.

⁵ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*.

candidate to a female candidate increased perceived possibility that the candidate will flip-flop on the issue of gun control (model 4, Table 12). This increase was also statistically significant when looking more narrowly and comparing female flip-flopping candidates to male flip-flopping candidates (model 5, Table 12).

There are several possible explanations for why we do not see major implications for candidate gender on trait evaluations. As Brooks suggests, political women may be seen as a different subcategory of women, are therefore not subject to the same gender stereotypes that still pervade our society at large. Where Brooks found small differences between trait evaluations of male and female politicians, these differences favored female politicians. In particular, inexperienced women were seen positively (possibly because women are seen as ‘natural outsiders’) compared to inexperienced men.⁶ It is also possible, however, that these stereotypes exist and do influence voters in real life, and that the constraints of this experiment with a small vignette did not accurately represent how a voter would learn about male and female candidates. Perhaps the way in which the media covers politicians is gendered, in turn gendering our perceptions of male and female politicians. In the vignettes I provided, they were exactly the same except for pronouns and names.

I also ran regressions to see how gender might play into candidate evaluations particularly for candidates who flip-flopped, not just all of the candidates. To do this I used a dummy variable: 0 for male flip-floppers and 1 for female flip-floppers, represented by model 5 in the tables at the end of the chapter. Going from male flip-flopping candidates to female flip-flopping candidates produced evaluations that were more favorable for the female flip-flopping candidate. In general, gender seemed to play more of a role in candidate evaluations in circumstances of flip-flopping as opposed to any candidate scenario, flip-flopping or not. Respondents were more likely to assume the flip-flopping female candidate would change her stance on gun control. While this spillover effect may be the result of negative female stereotypes such as indecisiveness, it appears that overall gender stereotypes may actually benefit women in cases of flip-flopping. Female flip-floppers were rated more positively on favorability, leadership, trustworthiness, willingness to compromise, and seen as more ambitious than male flip-floppers. Women are stereotypically seen as more honest and compassionate, and when compared to men in instances of flip-flopping, voters seem more likely to view a female flip-

⁶ Ibid., 72, 75.

flopper as authentic compared to a male flip-flopper. However, gender stereotypes also ascribe strong leadership and assertiveness to males, yet respondents in this survey were more likely to perceive a female flip-flopper as more ambitious and a stronger leader than her male counterpart. This finding suggests that if gender stereotypes do effect evaluations of politicians, positive trait stereotypes are stronger than negative ones.⁷

If, as previous literature suggests, representation is based at least partly on trust, thinking that female candidates are more likely to “say what he or she believes” (sincerity) could be a very important component of overall candidate evaluation. It could be possible that these female candidates receive this boost because they are seen as natural outsiders and are benefitting from the female stereotype of honesty, traits that Brooks finds may be favorable to women when comparing inexperienced male and female politicians.⁸ The place of female politicians is possibly understood outside of the immediate political world; not inherently tied to an image of a power-hungry, poll-pandering member of the Washington elite. The fact that gender played more of a role when the candidate flip-flopped suggests that while gender stereotypes may not be apparent in general, certain situations may provoke underlying assumptions about gender and character traits. This begs the question of how candidates are evaluated in other specific instances. Will gender play more of a role in scandals, or flip-flopping on certain issues and not others? In this experiment the issue in question was immigration policy, and research has found that gender stereotypes extend to what types of issues male and female candidates are considered more capable of handling (with women better able to deal with issues like education and health care, and men better able to handle issues of crime and foreign affairs). Perhaps when flip-flopping on a more immediately gendered issue, male and female candidates would be perceived in different ways for flip-flopping than they are for flip-flopping on immigration.

Looking further into the possible effects of candidate gender, I investigated how the respondent’s own gender may have influenced evaluations of candidates, represented in all of the models in the tables at the end of the chapter, as I controlled for its effect in every model. In specific instances, such as when regressions were run for only female candidates, respondent gender affected how these candidates were evaluated on ambition, trustworthiness, honesty, leadership, and vote choice. Female respondents were more likely to be critical of candidates

⁷ Lawless, “Women, War, and Winning Elections; Gender Stereotyping in the Post September 11th Era,” 480, 482.

Dolan, “Gender Stereotypes, Candidate Evaluations, and Voting for Women Candidates: What Really Matters?” 2.

Huddy and Terkildsen, “Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates,” 121.

⁸ Brooks, *He Runs, She Runs: Why Gender Stereotypes Do Not Harm Women Candidates*, 72,75.

when evaluating them on these characteristics. Across all models, respondent gender produced statistically significant results for how likely respondents thought it was that the candidate in question would flip-flop on gun control (Table 12). In terms of the negative perception of leadership of female candidates by female respondents, and the negative favorability rating of female candidates by female respondents, perhaps women feel as though there is an inherent favorable bias they must work against, and therefore react with harsher evaluators to counteract a perceived but perhaps nonexistent bias.

Knowledge, issue importance, and trust in the government

There were three other independent variables that were included in the survey as possible predictors of how candidates. These were how important the issue of immigration was to the respondent, how knowledgeable the respondent was on the issue of immigration policy, and how much trust the respondent had in the government to handle immigration policy. These three independent variables were also controlled for in all regressions; therefore appear in all models in the tables at the end of the chapter.

Not surprisingly, having less trust in the government contributed to overall negative favorability ratings of the candidate in all models. However for model 6, run only for female candidates, having less trust in the government fail to produce statistically significant effects on any of the candidate dependent variables. Controlling for flip-flopping, trust in government decreased perceived likelihood of flip-flopping, and decreased evaluations of sincerity, willingness to compromise, flexibility, open-mindedness, trustworthiness, and honesty. Trust in the government still had statistically significant effects on the character traits of open-mindedness, flexibility, willingness to compromise, and sincerity, when, instead of flip-flopping, type and existence of rationale were controlled for. Leadership, pandering, and ambition were not affected by trust in the government. In addition, vote choice was not influenced by how much trust the respondent has in the government to handle immigration policy, and neither was the spillover effect. This makes sense; even if we do not trust that change will occur, we may still vote for the lesser of two evils with a sliver of hope.

How important the issue of immigration was to respondents also had significant effects on many evaluations. Across almost all models, as immigration policy became less important to respondents, they rated candidates more favorably, as stronger leaders, more trustworthy, more open-minded, more flexible, more willing to compromise, and less pandering. Respondents to

whom immigration policy was a less important issue were also more likely to vote for the candidates in question. The only trait evaluations not at all affected by issue importance was candidate sincerity. Issue importance only produced statistically significant results for honesty when the regression was run for only flip-flopping candidates (as issue importance decreased the candidate was seen as more honest), and ambition was only affected when the regression was only run for female candidates (as issue importance decreased the candidate was seen as less ambitious). What we can draw from this is that perhaps people who consider an issue important are more likely to have strong opinions, and to not understand how a politician's opinion could not be as grounded and change so easily. People who consider the issues less important to them are quicker to defer to authority and understanding to politicians who deal with issues these citizens are not invested in.

Knowledge on the issue of immigration policy also had some significant effects, but not as many as importance or trust. When controlling for male or female flip-flopping, knowledgeable affects evaluations of leadership. For regressions run only for female candidates, as respondents feel less knowledgeable on immigration policy they are more likely to perceive the female candidate as sincere, flexible, trustworthy, and honest. Again, female candidates benefit in terms of character traits when compared to male candidates. If respondents were more likely to view female candidates positively the less those respondents knew about immigration policy, this suggests that people have an easier time trusting the knowledge and actions of a female candidate. Knowledgeability has the most affect on the character evaluation of honesty, as perceived honesty of candidates increased as respondents felt less knowledgeable on the topic of immigration policy (models 2, 3, 5, and 6; Table 3). These results indicate that when people feel less knowledgeable on an issue they are less critical of the policy stances of politicians. Perhaps flip-flopping is not always costly for politicians, and politicians can flip-flop more easily on complex issues that a majority of people either do not feel invested in or do not know a lot about.

Conclusion

As discussed, there were many statistically significant findings from this experimental survey that point to the fact that flip-flopping does affect character evaluations and that the rationale a candidate gives for flip-flopping can also change those evaluations. Ambiguity was

not the winning strategy as I had predicted, but the moral rationale did, as expected, help to perhaps mitigate some of the negative effects of flip-flopping, as those candidates who provided moral rationales as opposed to no rationale were rated not only higher by respondents on positive character traits but also lower by respondents on negative character traits.

The other main focus of my survey was to determine how candidate gender would play a role in candidate evaluations, in situations of flip-flopping and of no flip-flopping. While across all scenarios female candidates did not receive statistically significantly different evaluations except for spillover effect and honesty (playing into two female stereotypes), the female flip-flopper experienced more variation in evaluations than the male flip-flopper. However, the results show that in fact the point of departure between the two actually has small positives for female candidates who flip-flop. While candidate gender did not produce many strong effects on candidate evaluations, the gender of the respondents, especially in cases where the candidate was female, did have several significant effects on how the candidate was evaluated. Concerning female candidates, female respondents were harsher than male respondents on their evaluations of the candidate. Unless there is a need to appeal to a largely majority female voting base, these results are interesting but not that important. What is most consequential is the general effects produced by flip-flopping, rationale for flip-flopping, and candidate gender. The results suggest that policy position may be more important than mere flip-flopping, however flip-flopping brings with it negative and positive candidate evaluations. When flip-flopping, candidates might find it worthwhile to appeal to a moral explanation rather than provide no explanation or a constituency based one. Female candidates should not immediately assume gender stereotypes will harm them specifically in the context of flip-flopping.

TABLES

Table 1: Favorability

Mean: 2.66

Standard deviation: 1.43

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	1.53***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.64***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.03	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.35**	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.28*	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.33**	--
Trust in government	-.24***	-.26**	-.26**	-.23**	-.26**	-.19
Issue importance	.20**	.21**	.19*	.20**	.18*	.26*
Knowledge of issue	.12	.12	.10	.14	.15	.03
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.17	-.10	-.09	-.25*	-.07	-.30
constant	1.57	2.84	3.26	2.58	2.88	2.97
R ²	.2641	.1100	.0723	.0645	.0722	.0595
N	384	292	292	384	292	195

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 2: Leadership

Mean: 4.95

Standard deviation: 1.76

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	-.04	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.78***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.39	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.59***	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.25	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.40*	--
Trust in government	-.16	-.16	-.16	-.15	-.15	.18
Issue importance	.39***	.36***	.36***	.37***	.36***	.25
Knowledge of issue	.17	.19	.17	.19	.23*	.20
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.20	-.26	-.25	-.21	-.22	-1.08***
constant	4.62	4.20	4.83	4.42	4.30	4.83
R ²	.0615	.1050	.0960	.0661	.0834	.1181
N	337	260	260	337	260	164

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 3: Honest

Mean: 2.70

Standard deviation: 2.19

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	-.80***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	1.77***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.57*	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.19***	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.28	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.33	--
Trust in government	-.36**	-.08	-.09	-.33*	-.08	.05
Issue importance	.19	.25	.22	.17	.26	-.12
Knowledge of issue	.17	.36**	.30*	.20	.35*	.50**
Female respondent vs. male respondent	.02	.00	.05	.04	.20	-1.03***
constant	5.35	2.82	4.17	4.51	3.36	4.60
R ²	.0504	.1684	.1120	.0301	.0484	.0677
N	324	247	247	324	247	159

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 4: Trustworthy

Mean: 4.12

Standard deviation: 1.92

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	-.16	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	1.17***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.37	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.78***	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.31	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.50**	--
Trust in government	-.36**	-.26	-.27	-.34**	-.26	.01
Issue importance	.34**	.31**	.29**	.32**	.30**	.12
Knowledge of issue	.18	.23	.19	.20	.25	.50**
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.33	-.26	-.22	-.35	-.17	-1.05***
constant	4.33	3.34	4.22	4.00	3.54	3.86
R ²	.0665	.1262	.0936	.0716	.0730	.1055
N	318	244	244	318	244	153

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 5: Open-minded

Mean: 5.33

Standard deviation: 2.48

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	2.98***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.73**	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.24	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.50*	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.17	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.40	--
Trust in government	-.37**	-.51***	-.51***	-.28	-.50**	-.02
Issue importance	.48***	.29*	.28*	.49***	.28*	.48*
Knowledge of issue	-.16	-.13	-.16	-.18	-.11	-.40
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.32	-.29	-.28	-.37	-.25	-.48
constant	3.55	6.57	7.12	5.78	6.63	6.03
R ²	.2656	.0675	.0582	.0447	.0556	.0472
N	326	264	264	326	264	163

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 6: Flexible

Mean: 5.73

Standard deviation: 2.38

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	3.49***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.75**	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.18	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.47*	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.38	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.33	--
Trust in government	-.32**	-.35**	-.35**	-.34*	-.35**	-.48
Issue importance	.37***	.29*	.28*	.41**	.29*	.44*
Knowledge of issue	-.22	-.23	-.25	-.19	-.21	-.47*
Female respondent vs. male respondent	.13	.09	.10	.07	.14	.02
constant	3.41	6.76	7.29	6.01	6.86	7.17
R ²	.3656	.0616	.0467	.0369	.0414	.0528
N	325	262	262	325	262	157

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 7: Willingness to compromise

Mean: 5.56

Standard deviation: 2.32

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	3.12***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.72**	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.44	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.58**	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.38	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.47*	--
Trust in government	-.28*	-.29*	-.29*	-.27	-.28	-.26
Issue importance	.39***	.31**	.31**	.42**	.31**	.36
Knowledge of issue	-.13	-.11	-.12	-.14	-.06	-.32
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.12	-.14	-.14	-.21	-.11	-.33
constant	3.46	6.25	6.86	5.81***	6.29	6.65
R ²	.3212	.0559	.0521	.0271	.0469	.0367
N	333	267	267	333	267	162

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 8: Sincere (says what he or she believes)

Mean: 5.18

Standard deviation: 2.46

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	-2.57***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	1.10***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	-.06	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.55*	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.39	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.34	--
Trust in government	-.64***	-.48**	-.47**	-.58***	-.45**	-.46
Issue importance	.17	.19	.15	.11	.16	-.08
Knowledge of issue	.02	-.01	-.06	.08	-.02	.49*
Female respondent vs. male respondent	.29	.05	.09	.40	.12	-.35
constant	7.80	4.76	5.41	5.46	4.92	5.55
R ²	.2422	.0892	.0406	.0444	.0329	.0493
N	330	247	247	330	247	162

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 9: Panders (says what he or she thinks voters want to hear)

Mean: 7.78

Standard deviation: 1.97

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	1.46***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	-.46*	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.16	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	.16	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.13	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.07	--
Trust in government	.18	.20	.20	.19	.19	.22
Issue importance	-.30**	-.29**	-.28*	-.31**	-.29**	-.36*
Knowledge of issue	.07	.10	.13	.07	.14	.02
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.03	.19	.17	-.09	.15	.04
constant	6.55	7.88	7.65	7.63	7.68	7.79
R ²	.1187	.0478	.0282	.0207	.0270	.0331
N	352	269	269	352	269	173

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 10: Ambitious

Mean: 6.74

Standard deviation: 2.09

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	.14	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.24	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.15	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.19	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.51**	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.46*	--
Trust in government	-.08	.08	.08	-.07	.07	.03
Issue importance	-.20	-.21	-.21	-.22	-.24	-.51***
Knowledge of issue	-.05	-.07	-.07	-.01	-.01	.00
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.01	-.10	-.10	-.06	-.12	-.71**
constant	7.13	6.95	7.15	6.93	6.77	8.00
R ²	.0090	.0115	.0112	.0226	.0205	.0703
N	344	263	263	344	263	169

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 11: Vote Choice

Mean: 1.29

Standard deviation: .46

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	.24***	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.22***	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	-.03	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.10	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.02	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.06	--
Trust in government	-.02	-.04	-.04	-.02	-.04	.02
Issue importance	.11***	.11***	.10***	.11***	.10***	.05
Knowledge of issue	-.02	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.01	.03
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.02	-.03	-.02	-.03	-.02	-.17**
constant	1.08	1.27	1.39	1.26	1.31	1.26
R ²	.0932	.0952	.0494	.0433	.0435	.0524
N	360	275	275	360	275	177

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped

⁺⁺model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Table 12: Spillover effect (likelihood of flip-flopping on gun control)

Mean: 2.34

Standard deviation: 1.25

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2 ⁺	Model 3 ⁺	Model 4	Model 5 ⁺	Model 6 ⁺⁺
Flip flop vs. no flip flop	-.19	--	--	--	--	--
Moral rationale vs. no rationale	--	.08	--	--	--	--
Constituency rationale vs. no rationale	--	.09	--	--	--	--
No rationale vs. rationale	--	--	-.09	--	--	--
Female vs. male candidate	--	--	--	.26**	--	--
Female flip-flopper vs. male flip-flopper	--	--	--	--	.32**	--
Trust in government	-.17*	-.13	-.13	-.16*	-.13	-.06
Issue importance	.15*	.20**	.20**	.14	.18*	.11
Knowledge of issue	.00	-.05	-.05	.02	-.01	.05
Female respondent vs. male respondent	-.33**	-.40**	-.40**	-.34**	-.42***	-.54***
constant	2.84	2.61	2.70	2.52	2.46	2.74
R ²	.0472	.0617	.0616	.0540	.0770	.0603
N	356	271	271	356	271	176

***p<.01

**p<.05

*p<.1

⁺ models 2, 3, and 5 were run only for respondents who had candidates who flip-flopped⁺⁺ model 6 was run only for respondents who had a female candidate

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Flip-flopping is an accusation that is not going away, as we can see from its prominent usage in the ongoing 2016 presidential campaign. It is an interesting attack; one that often hides the nuances of opinion changes and issues and tends to focus on the act of changing an opinion itself and what that reveals personality and character-wise as a politician. Flip-flopping during the 2004, 2012, and 2016 presidential campaigns became an insult mainly targeting one candidate in particular (John Kerry, Mitt Romney, and Hillary Clinton, respectively) that raised questions about their honesty, trustworthiness, leadership capabilities, and authenticity. The case study of Kirsten Gillibrand highlights well the strong character implications that flip-flopping carries with it; as the mere action of changing her ideas once in office, though accompanied by succinct explanations about a changing constituency, caused people in her district to feel betrayed and lied to. The results of the experimental survey also indicate negative reactions to flip-flopping, despite overall favorability ratings that are positively correlated to flip-flopping, most likely because of final position stance. However, the positive characteristics respondents also associated with flip-flopping, such as flexibility and open-mindedness, suggest that the work representatives do to explain their votes, which Fenno finds to be an integral part of representation, could serve as a crucial way to combat the negative character implications of flip-flopping and play upon the positive ones.¹ In addition, if a representative's well established trust and presentation of self among a constituency could be linked to some positive characteristics of a flip-flop or evolution of opinion then perhaps that politician need not avoid flip-flopping at all costs for fear of the negative character trait ramifications.

While the character implications of flip-flopping accusations exist, flip-flopping also carries with it strong implications and questions for policy, and can pose legitimate concerns for voters, who as Fenno showed, have to have some amount of trust in candidates in order to vote for them and the policies they want enacted.² As shown through the case studies of Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton in particular, there has been and currently is a real concern as to what these politicians would do once in office based on what they had done in the past and what they say they will do in the future. If flip-flopping is a move made for political expedience and to win votes this may tell us that the candidate will stick to those new positions while in office in order

¹ Fenno Jr., Richard F. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Longman Classics in Political Science: New York. Pg. 141

² *Ibid.*, pg. 144, 149, 151.

to please those majority of voters, however it is also possible that if flip-flopping is a result of political expedience and effort to get to office, the desire to stick to those new positions will be lessened once the candidate actually reaches the office he or she is running for, especially if flip-flops take place in the primary and general elections. The results of the survey show that flip-flopping does bring with it some spillover effects, indicative of these ramifications and confusion it can cause for voters, especially if flip-flopping takes place on many issues, which the case studies illustrate is often the case. Again, perhaps explanations can play an important role here, which is certainly supported by the results of the experimental survey. However these results indicate that candidates are regarded more favorably when offering moral explanations for their flip-flops, which hardly offers that much insight into the flop, although it does offer some concept of a commitment to values, combatting perceived flippancy of a flip-flop.

There is still much left to understand about flip-flopping and the concept of issue evolution, and in an every changing and evolving society as well as political landscape there are many opportunities to better investigate this action, how voters react to it, and what it reveals about representation in terms of delegate and trustee models, as well as the presentation of self and elements of trust that Fenno almost three decades ago found so engrained in the representative system. While I found rationale to have many statistically significant effects, I did not test how voters might react to candidates giving a rationale based on new information becoming available. This is certainly a legitimate rationale and one that we see playing out right now with the Clinton campaign. While my experimental survey did not find many significant negative consequences for women candidates who flip-flopped, the case studies point to suggestions of gendered treatment by the media of female politicians. Flip-flopping in the real world does not act in a vacuum from persistent female stereotypes. Studies combining case study approaches and experimental surveys that enable real names to be used may reveal more accurately biases that have been crafted by the media, or are pushed to the surface when the gender is more on display than simply a few pronouns and a name in a short article.

Lastly, the short excerpt provided in the survey focused solely on the one candidate and his or her statement, or lack thereof, for flip-flopping on his or her immigration stance. But how might responses to flip-flopping be altered by the attacks thrown at these candidates, if explanations they themselves give do matter? Are some attacks on flip-flopping more potent than others, and how do explanations and attacks work together to combat or strengthen accusations

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of flip-flopping? While important in understanding baseline preferences and general reactions, this type of experimental survey naturally lacks many of the nuances and complications of real-life politics that could alter some of the findings. Nevertheless, the case studies and survey indicate that voters do react to flip-flopping in political and personal character evaluations. That said, our distaste for flip-flopping is not necessarily an intractable preference. This study has helped provide a nuanced picture of what we value in our representatives when it comes to consistency, explanations, and changing positions on the issues.

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Appendix I: Qualtrics Survey Text

q1 STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IMPORTANT: IF YOU ARE UNDER 18, YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. In order to research public opinion concerning political campaigns and politicians' perceived character traits, you will be asked to answer a few questions, then read a short excerpt from a newspaper article describing a candidate for the Presidency. Following the excerpt, there will be another brief series of questions such as whether the candidate would make a good President and how much you like the candidate. The excerpt and questions will take about 10 minutes to complete, and your participation will qualify you to enter a raffle to win one of five \$25 gift cards to Amazon.com, iTunes, or the Tufts bookstore (there will be a link once you have finished the survey). Your responses will help provide valuable information about how the American electorate responds to political campaigns. All of your responses will be kept thoroughly confidential and anonymous. Each set of data will be given an identification number that will not be associated with your name in any way. If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a study participant, please do not hesitate to contact the investigator, Sophie Laing (sophie.laing@tufts.edu), her supervisor, Professor Deborah Schildkraut (Deborah.schildkraut@tufts.edu), or the Tufts IRB Operations Manager Lara N. Sloboda, Ph.D. (Lara.Sloboda@tufts.edu or 617-627-3417). Your participation in this study is purely voluntary, and you may stop participating at any time for any reason without penalty. There are no risks to you for participating, and not participating will have no affect on your coursework or grades. Thank you very much for your participation.

q2.1 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Independent (3)

Answer If Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent? Independent Is Selected

q2.2 Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Neither (3)

Answer If Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent? Republican Is Selected

q2.3 Would you call yourself a strong Republican, or not a very strong Republican?

- Strong (1)
- Not very strong (2)

Answer If Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent? Democrat Is Selected

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q2.4 Would you call yourself a strong Democrat, or not a very strong Democrat?

- Strong (1)
- Not very strong (2)

q3 Select your gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer not to say (3)

q4 Which comes closest to your view about what government policy should be toward undocumented immigrants in the United States?

- Make all unauthorized immigrants felons and send them back to their home country. (1)
- Have a guest worker program that allows unauthorized immigrants to remain in the United States to work, but only for a limited amount of time. (2)
- Allow unauthorized immigrants to remain in the United States and eventually qualify for U.S. citizenship only if they meet certain requirements like paying back taxes and fines, learning English, and passing background checks. (3)

q5 How important is the issue of immigration to you?

- Very important (1)
- Somewhat important (2)
- Neither important nor unimportant (3)
- Somewhat unimportant (4)
- Very unimportant (5)

q6 How knowledgeable on the issue of US immigration policy do you consider yourself?

- Very knowledgeable (1)
- Knowledgeable (2)
- Somewhat knowledgeable (3)
- Not very knowledgeable (4)

q7 How much trust do you have in elected officials to handle immigration policy?

- A lot of trust (1)
- Some trust (2)
- A little trust (3)
- No trust (4)

q8 Next, you will receive an excerpt from a recent news article covering a candidate's campaign for the presidency. After you have read the excerpt, there will be several questions asking you about your feelings towards the candidate in question. In order to eliminate the possibility that you will have preconceived notions about the candidate, the candidate's name and identifying career information have been changed.

q9.1 Five years ago, Senator Michelle Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for her campaign for the presidency, Senator Michelle Smith stated that she now supports immigration reform aimed at creating a pathway towards citizenship. "America needs to act on immigration. We can no longer wait when there are so many undocumented people in this country who are living in the shadows," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.2 Five years ago, Senator Michelle Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for her campaign for the presidency, Senator Michelle Smith stated that she now supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. "America needs to act on immigration. While I voted against the DREAM Act, I've thought long and hard about what is right. I've seen how hard immigrants work, and have come to realize that it would be wrong for us to kick people out who only come here looking for a better life for their children; looking for the American dream," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.3 Five years ago, Senator Michelle Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for her campaign for the presidency, Senator Michelle Smith stated that she now supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. "America needs to act on immigration. My job is to do the will of the people. As senator, I listened to the people of my state when I voted against the DREAM Act. But as president, I will listen to the American people as a whole. Americans want a solution so that all are treated with dignity and can work for the American dream, making our country and our economy better," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.4 Five years ago, Senator Michelle Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for her campaign for the presidency, Senator Michelle Smith reaffirmed her support for tougher restrictions on illegal immigration. "America needs to act on illegal immigration. I believe we must protect our borders and not grant amnesty to those who come here illegally," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.5 Five years ago, Senator Michael Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for his campaign for the presidency, Senator Michael Smith stated that he now supports immigration reform aimed at creating a pathway towards citizenship. "America needs to

act on immigration. We can no longer wait when there are so many undocumented people in this country who are living in the shadows," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.6 Five years ago, Senator Michael Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for his campaign for the presidency, Senator Michael Smith stated that he now supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. "America needs to act on immigration. While I voted against the DREAM Act, I've thought long and hard about what is right. I've seen how hard immigrants work, and have come to realize that it would be wrong for us to kick people out who only come here looking for a better life for their children; looking for the American dream," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.7 Five years ago, Senator Michael Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for his campaign for the presidency, Senator Michael Smith stated that he now supports a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. "America needs to act on immigration. My job is to do the will of the people. As senator, I listened to the people of my state when I voted against the DREAM Act. But as president, I will listen to the American people as a whole. Americans want a solution so that all are treated with dignity and can work for the American dream, making our country and our economy better," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q9.8 Five years ago, Senator Michael Smith, chair of the Foreign Relations committee, was in favor of tough restrictions on illegal immigration, and voted against the DREAM Act which would have created a pathway to permanent residency for young undocumented immigrants. At a recent rally for his campaign for the presidency, Senator Michael Smith reaffirmed his support for tougher restrictions on illegal immigration. "America needs to act on illegal immigration. I believe we must protect our borders and not grant amnesty to those who come here illegally," Senator Smith said. On Monday, Senator Smith travels to Iowa to deliver a speech as well as host an informal press conference.

q10 How favorable do you feel towards this candidate?

- Very favorable (1)
- Favorable (2)
- Somewhat favorable (3)
- Neither favorable or unfavorable (4)
- Somewhat unfavorable (5)
- Unfavorable (6)
- Very unfavorable (7)

q11 Which policy do you think this candidate would most likely advance as president?

- Make all unauthorized immigrants felons and send them back to their home country. (1)
- Have a guest worker program that allows unauthorized immigrants to remain in the United States to work, but only for a limited amount of time. (2)
- Allow unauthorized immigrants to remain in the United States and eventually qualify for U.S. citizenship only if they meet certain requirements like paying back taxes and fines, learning English, and passing background checks. (3)

q12 Rank, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being most descriptive, 1 being least) how well you think these adjectives describe the candidate.

- _____ Strong leader (1)
- _____ Honest (2)
- _____ Trustworthy (3)
- _____ Open-minded (4)
- _____ Flexible (5)
- _____ Willing to compromise (6)
- _____ Says what he or she believes (7)
- _____ Says what he or she thinks voters want to hear (8)
- _____ Ambitious (9)

q13 Would you vote for this candidate?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

q14 Recently, this candidate has expressed a change of opinion on the issue of gun control. How likely to you find it that this candidate will stick to this new stance if elected President?

- Very Unlikely (1)
- Unlikely (2)
- Somewhat Unlikely (3)
- Undecided (4)
- Somewhat Likely (5)
- Likely (6)
- Very Likely (7)

q15 Which statement most closely describes the position of the candidate you just read about?

- Held a steady position over the years on immigration policy. (1)
- Changed opinion over the years on immigration policy. (2)
- Do not remember. (3)

q16 Which statement most closely describes the political action of the candidate you just read about?

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- Changed opinion on immigration policy based on principles. (1)
- Changed opinion on immigration policy based on what constituents wanted. (2)
- Changed opinion on immigration policy based on new information that became available. (3)
- Changed opinion on immigration policy without offering an explanation. (4)
- Did not change opinion on immigration policy. (5)

q17 What was the gender of the candidate you just read about?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Do not remember (3)

q18 While reading about the candidate, did you think that the candidate was a Republican, a Democrat, or did you not think about the candidate's party?

- Republican (1)
- Democrat (2)
- Did not think about the candidate's party (3)

q19.1 Thank you for finishing the survey! If you would like to be entered into a raffle for the chance to win a \$25 gift card to Amazon.com, iTunes, or the Tufts Bookstore, please follow the link below to enter your information. The link is completely separate from this survey, and entering the raffle will in no way allow us to identify the responses that you just provided. https://tufts.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bygeINkNhoUI75z

q19.2 While the study you have completed was related to political campaigns, the focus was more nuanced. The experiment was designed to test how voters react to candidates who flip-flop on their opinions. It tested two independent variables; how gender of the candidate and the rationale given for flip-flopping affect those reactions. There were eight possible scenarios for you to receive; a male candidate who does not provide a reason for flip-flopping, a male candidate whose rationale for flip-flopping is based off of morals, a male candidate whose rationale for flip-flopping is based off of constituency desires, a male candidate who does not flip-flop (the control group), and the analogous scenarios but with a female candidate. Your responses will be used to determine whether the rationale given or gender of the candidate impacted the reactions of participants overall. Just because I am studying the potential influence of gender demographics and stereotypes does not mean that your judgments were necessarily influenced by such matters- many factors shape people's opinions of politicians, and my objectives are not to identify conclusive evidence of bias among individuals but rather to look for generalized differences across the aggregated data. Please do not share this information with your friends at Tufts, since I am still collecting data. I would like to ensure that those who might participate in this study but have yet to do so are able to report honest reactions to the experiment materials. Thank you very much for your participation! It is greatly appreciated.