Evangelical Protestantism and Bias Against Female Political Leaders*

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Objective. Gender and politics scholars have paid little attention to religion as a source of individual-level biases against female politicians. We begin to address this gap by modeling the relationship among evangelical Protestantism, partisanship, and the beliefs that males are better issue advocates and political leaders than women. Methods. We employ logistic regression models with data from a 2008 survey administered by the Pew Social and Demographic Trends Project. Results. We find that evangelical Protestantism, but not religious attendance more generally, is a strong predictor of whether Americans will hold biases against female political leaders. The effect of evangelical Protestantism is especially pronounced within the Republican Party. Conclusions. These findings suggest a potential cause of the underrepresentation of women in the political world. They further underscore the need to control for religious denomination in future studies of gender stereotyping.

Scholars of religion have uncovered strong evidence that many evangelical Protestants hold views and behave in ways that undermine gender equality (e.g., Brint and Abrutyn, 2012; Mead, 2006; Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2006). Despite these findings and considerable evidence that religious affiliation can guide political attitudes and behavior in other contexts (e.g., Putnam and Campbell, 2012; Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2006; Wilcox and Williamson, 2007), gender and politics researchers have paid scant attention to whether an individual’s religiosity or religious denomination translates into views that limit female political representation. This study begins to fill that gap. We find that evangelical Protestants are significantly more likely than other Americans—including weekly religious service attendees—to believe that male politicians better represent their interests and are superior political leaders. The effect of evangelical Protestantism is especially pronounced for Republicans, but quite modest for Democrats.

Gender Biases and Evangelical Protestantism

Gender and politics scholars have demonstrated that citizens view female politicians differently than their male counterparts (see detailed summaries by Dolan, 2013; Fulton, 2013; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Male leaders are presumed to be more competent on “hard” issues such as crime and national defense, while women are viewed as best equipped to address “soft” social issues such as education and healthcare (e.g., Burrell, 1994; Huddy

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Women, further, are perceived as empathetic and compassionate, while men are understood to be strong, decisive, and assertive. The characteristics generally attributed to men are more congruent with the core traits Americans most value in their political leaders. Thus, it is often easier for men to enter into the political world (Eagly, 2007; Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Gender biases also result in serious consequences at a number of stages of the electoral process. These include candidate entry, the issues raised in campaigns, and the types of female candidates who win elections. Women are less inclined than similarly situated men to see themselves as qualified to run, and political elites are much less likely to recruit them (Fox and Lawless, 2010; Lawless and Fox, 2010; Niven, 1998). When women do run, they must overcome biases in news coverage, which still disproportionately focuses on women’s personal traits rather than policy positions (Dunaway et al., 2013). Those who defy traditional gender stereotypes face voter backlash unless they reduce the aggressiveness of their rhetoric and negativity of their campaigns (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes, 2003; Okimoto and Brescoll, 2010). While the electorate’s heavy reliance on party cues enables women to do as well as men in national, general elections (Dolan, 2013; Dolan and Lynch, 2013), female candidates face higher levels of competition in primary elections (Fox and Lawless, 2010; Lawless and Fox, 2010), and must be stronger candidates to win in close races (Fulton, 2012, 2013). Thus, even with record numbers of women running for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010, women were just 19 percent of Democratic candidates and 12 percent of Republicans (Center for American Women and Politics, 2010; Federal Election Commission, 2010).

An individual’s baseline assumptions about the capacity of women leaders may be accentuated or mitigated by an individual’s social connections. Specifically, researchers have demonstrated that a reliance on gender biases as a heuristic among individuals with multiple, meaningful, social identities is influenced by the degree to which these social attachments provide consistent and reinforcing cues (Hayes, 2011; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). Biases against female candidates are, therefore, more pronounced for individuals who identify with multiple groups that exhibit gender biases. In contrast, biases against women are less pronounced for individuals who have connections to two or more groups that offer cross-pressuring views on the appropriate role of women in society.

Shortcomings of the Extant Scholarship

We still understand relatively little about how variations in political socialization or social connections shape perceptions about women political leaders (Fox, 2011). Recent studies of the relationship between partisanship and gender stereotyping show that Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to question women’s leadership abilities (Hayes, 2011; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009; Winter, 2010), but this work alone cannot explain where, how, and when negative appraisals of female leaders begin to disproportionately take root among Republicans. One particularly problematic issue in attributing gender biases to party-level dynamics is that studies of adolescent attitudes and behaviors indicate that the formation of gender role and trait stereotypes typically predates the acquisition of meaningful partisan attachments (Campbell and Wohlbrecht, 2006; Trevor, 1999).

Surprisingly, the vast majority of previous studies of gender stereotypes and prejudice against female candidates completely ignore a source of early life socialization that may be central to a preference for leaders who conform to traditional expectations regarding gender roles and traits: religious affiliation. The handful of gender bias studies that have
included any variable examining religion operationalize the concept with a measure of church attendance (Lawless, 2004; Sanbonmatsu, 2002) or frequency of prayer (Dolan, 1998). Researchers, however, have not considered how a person’s affiliation with a religious denomination that espouses the maintenance of traditional roles for women and the superiority of male leadership may influence the probability that an individual holds gender stereotypes.

**Evangelical Protestantism and Biases Against Women as Political Leaders**

The lack of attention to the relationship between specific religious traditions and biases against female politicians is especially problematic as a consequence of the disproportionate influence that one of these traditions—evangelical Protestantism—has on the selection of American political candidates. Approximately, a quarter of Americans self-identify as evangelical Protestant (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008; Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2006), and the political power of this group is magnified by its unparalleled influence within the Republican Party. In 2012, a majority of voters in Republican primaries and caucuses self-identified as evangelical (Edsall, 2012). During the general election, evangelical Protestant turnout topped 27 percent, reflecting a targeted get-out-the-vote effort that included over 100 million voter contacts and the distribution of 30 million voter guides at over 100,000 churches (Murashko, 2012).

The centrality of evangelicals to the Republican base catapults their issues and concerns to the top of the party’s agenda (Sheets, Domke, and Greenwald, 2011:464). As noted by Brint and Abrutyn (2012:331), scholars have found that evangelicals are much more likely than members of other religious denominations to favor “strict father” models of public policy that emphasize “tough love” in foreign and domestic affairs and “controlling unnecessary spending on social welfare.” Surveys also reveal that evangelicals are more likely than nonbelievers (i.e., atheists, agnostics, and secular unaffiliated individuals) or members of other religious traditions to prefer “a smaller government that provides fewer services” and to believe that “the best way to ensure peace is through military strength” (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008).

With respect to female candidates, the evangelical tradition distinguishes itself from mainline Protestantism in significant part due to doctrinal differences regarding the appropriate role of women in the family and in society (Brint and Abrutyn, 2012; Putnam and Campbell, 2012; Wilcox, 1989; Wilcox and Williamson, 2007). Its central teachings urge believers to maintain a “divinely sanctioned gender order.” This “has two central components: patriarchal authority and a division of family labor based on the separate spheres ideology under which wives remain at home and tend to the private affairs of the family, while husbands provide leadership in the family and public affairs” (Wilcox, 2004:57; see also Brint and Abrutyn, 2012). These gender roles may have significant implications for the political process, particularly within the Republican Party.

**Hypotheses, Data, and Measurement**

Previous research and the doctrinal assumptions of evangelical Protestantism lead us to hypothesize that Protestants who identify as evangelicals should be more likely than other individuals to see male politicians as better defenders of their interests and to believe that men are more effective political leaders than women. Reflecting previous scholarship showing
that Democrats place a disproportionately high priority on women’s political equality, while many Republicans lament the erosion of traditional institutions, we anticipate that evangelical biases toward women leaders will be further affected by partisanship. We test these hypotheses using public opinion data from a 2008 survey sponsored by Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends Project (Pew Research Center, 2008), which focused on attitudes toward female political and business leaders. The survey sampled 2,250 individuals using a nationally representative pool of adults in the continental United States.

Our first hypothesis posits that a congruence between gender competency stereotypes and the policy priorities of evangelical Protestants will make evangelicals more inclined to believe that men better represent their interests. In particular, widely held stereotypes of men as better leaders on crime and national security (Burrell, 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Fox and Oxley, 2003), coupled with evangelicals’ disparate emphasis on these issues (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008), may make evangelical Protestants especially likely to believe that men are the best advocates for their political concerns. This belief may be further compounded by the disproportionately held belief among evangelical Protestants that men are best equipped to speak for the family in society (Wilcox, 2004; Brint and Abrutyn, 2012).

H1: Evangelical Protestants will disproportionately believe that male leaders represent their interests better than women.

Evangelical leaders’ emphasis on patriarchy and belief that men alone are equipped to be the family’s leader and conduit to public life (Brint and Abrutyn, 2012; Putnam and Campbell, 2012; Wilcox, 1989; Wilcox and Williamson, 2007) may also affect evangelicals’ views on leadership more generally. Thus, we anticipate that evangelical Protestants will be more likely to believe that men are superior political leaders:

H2: Evangelical Protestants will be more likely than other individuals to believe that men make better political leaders than women.

Our final hypothesis builds on previous research suggesting that attachments to social groups that offer conflicting or reinforcing messages about the desirability of women leaders will affect an individual’s likelihood of gender stereotyping (Hayes, 2011; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). Thus, evangelical Protestants who identify with groups that are supportive of female leadership—such as the Democratic Party—should be less inclined than other evangelical Protestants to hold biases against women leaders. Conversely, evangelicals who identify with social groups that exhibit pro-male biases—such as the Republican Party—should disproportionately favor male politicians:

H3a: Republican evangelical Protestants will be considerably more likely than other Republicans to favor men in positions of political leadership.
H3b: Evangelical Democrats will be only somewhat more likely than other Democrats to favor men in positions of political leadership.

Dependent Variables

We are primarily interested in the factors that lead to the creation and formation of individuals’ gender stereotypes. Thus, instead of using gender stereotypes as independent variables that predict a political outcome—for example, voting behavior, political efficacy, or political ambition—our analyses use use gender stereotypes as dependent variables. While less prevalent in recent American politics literature, using gender stereotypes as
dependent variables is a common approach in the comparative politics literature (e.g., Morgan and Buice, 2013).

Our first dependent variable is an indicator measuring the belief that male politicians are better issue advocates than women. This variable allows us to examine the underlying factors that drive evangelicals' preference for male leaders. It is based on an item that asked which gender is “better at representing the interests of people like you.” Respondents who thought that men were more capable were coded 1. Individuals who thought that women were equally or more capable were coded 0.

We also examined an individual's preference for leaders of a particular gender. The most appropriate survey question asked: “Which one of the following statements comes closest to your opinion about men and women as political leaders?” Responses were coded 0 for those who said that “women generally make better leaders” or “women and men make equally good leaders” and 1 for respondents who said “men generally make better leaders.” This variable captures a different dimension of leadership than our representation variable; including both variables in our analysis allows us to differentiate between these two factors, which may not always align. For example, a middle-class voter may feel that a middle-class blue-collar worker might best represent his or her interests. However, when called upon to cast a ballot, the individual may vote for a wealthy, white-collar candidate, believing that person is better equipped to lead.

**Independent and Control Variables**

Examining multiple elements of religious affiliation is essential because our hypotheses contend that a distinct doctrinal perspective on gender—and not just general religiosity—shapes the socialization of evangelical Protestants. Thus, our models include measures of both denomination and religious service attendance. If our hypotheses are correct, there should be a substantial difference in the prevalence of gender stereotypes among evangelical Protestants and other individuals, even after controlling for religious service attendance.

Studies exploring links between religious identity and social behaviors should ideally employ multidimensional measures of belonging, beliefs, and behavior (Lewis and Huysen de Bernardo, 2010:112; Smith, 1998). With respect to our measurement of belonging and believing, we coded respondents as evangelical Protestants only if they both self-identified as adherents of one of the denominations classified by Pew as being part of the Protestant tradition and they considered themselves to be a “born again or evangelical Christian.” Just over a quarter of the survey’s respondents (25.1 percent, \( n = 548 \)) met these criteria, closely mirroring the findings of Pew's 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, which reported that 26.3 percent of American adults are active members of evangelical Protestant churches (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008).

To distinguish between evangelical Protestantism and religiosity, our analyses consider an individual’s frequency of attending religious services. This variable ranges from 1 to 4, reflecting whether an individual attends religious services (1) never or seldom, (2) a few times a year, (3) one or twice a month, or (4) at least once weekly. Two-thirds of the evangelical Protestants in this study reported attending religious services weekly, and just over half (55.7 percent) of the weekly attendees said that they attended services more than once a week. Among nonevangelical Protestants, just under a quarter of respondents (22 percent) said they attended services at least weekly, with a third of this group attending more than once a week.
Our final hypothesis asks whether partisan identities reinforce or mitigate evangelical preferences for male leaders. Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be a “Republican, Democrat, or Independent.” Our analyses include two binary variables that distinguish self-identified Republicans and Democrats from other respondents, who either initially indicated that they were independents, had no preference, or identified with another party. These indicators were coded 1 if a respondent was a Republican (Democrat) and 0 if a respondent did not identify as a Republican (Democrat).

In addition to testing our final hypothesis, these measures of partisanship serve to isolate the effects of evangelical Protestantism in tests of our first two hypotheses. Previous research—most of it done with no controls for the role of religion—finds that Republicans are considerably more likely than independents or Democrats to express biases against female candidates and women in office (Dolan, 2010; Hayes, 2011; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). Yet, a plurality (37 percent) of evangelical Protestants self-identify as Republicans, so our analyses need to consider the alternative hypothesis that a high rate of Republican Party identification accounts for evangelicals’ pro-male biases.

As in previous studies, we also control for other factors that might influence gender stereotypes. These include level of education (1 = did not complete high school, 2 = high school graduate, 3 = college graduate, 4 = some graduate education), age (years), race (1 = non-Hispanic white, 0 = other primary racial identification), and gender of the respondent (1 = female, 0 = male). We also control for the gender of the survey interviewer (1 = female, 0 = male).

Findings

Table 1 reports summary statistics for our measures of gender bias across several variables of interest. We compare each of these groups to evangelical Protestants, denoting where the proportions holding the belief are statistically distinguishable from the proportion of evangelicals who share that opinion. The percentage of evangelicals holding pro-male biases is distinguishably higher than all groups except for Republicans. This finding would seem perhaps to justify researchers’ practice of ignoring religious variables completely and assuming that partisan indicators largely capture religious differences. However, measures of bivariate association indicate that Republicans, weekly church attendees, and evangelical
Evangelical Protestantism and Female Political Leaders

TABLE 2
Determinants of the Preference for Male Political Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Better Represent People Like Me</th>
<th>Men Make Better Political Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>1.786***</td>
<td>2.100***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.246)</td>
<td>(0.265)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious attendance</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>1.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partisanship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>1.487**</td>
<td>1.626***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.227)</td>
<td>(0.226)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>0.623**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.140)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.756***</td>
<td>0.829**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.008*</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.118)</td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.400***</td>
<td>0.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.099)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female interviewer</td>
<td>0.785*</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.189</td>
<td>0.371***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.256)</td>
<td>(0.098)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>2.029</td>
<td>2.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudo R²</strong></td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries are odds ratio estimates with standard errors in parentheses. 
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001, two-tailed test of significance.

Protestants are clearly distinct groups. The overlap between Republican identifiers and evangelicals is not especially strong (Cramér’s $V = 0.12$). In fact, 33 percent of evangelicals indicated that they were Democrats and another 20 percent reported being independents. Similarly, while two-thirds of evangelicals said they attend religious services each week, 57 percent of weekly church attendees were not evangelical Protestants (Cramér’s $V = 0.33$).

Isolating the impacts of evangelical Protestantism and partisan identification requires multivariate analyses similar to those typically utilized in studies of gender stereotypes (e.g., Dolan, 2010; Fulton, 2013; Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). The models summarized in Tables 2 and 3 list exponentiated logit coefficients. These coefficients are estimates of how a one-unit increase in the independent variable changes the odds that a respondent will agree with the statement assessed in the model, holding all other variables constant at their mean.

Table 2 reports logistic regression models that test Hypotheses 1 and 2 by estimating how evangelical Protestantism impacts the odds than an individual will hold biases against female political leaders. While frequently attending religious services has no discernible impact on whether a respondent sees men as better representatives than women, evangelical Protestantism has a strong correlation with this pro-male bias, even after controlling for the effect of partisanship. After accounting for controls, approximately one of four evangelicals says that men better protect their interests; this is 8 percentage points higher...
### TABLE 3

Determinants of the Preference for Male Political Leaders by Respondent’s Political Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Better Represent People Like Me</th>
<th>Men Make Better Political Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>Republicans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>1.845* (0.464)</td>
<td>1.880** (0.386)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious attendance</td>
<td>0.955 (0.089)</td>
<td>1.014 (0.083)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.789 (0.105)</td>
<td>0.732** (0.087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.012* (0.006)</td>
<td>1.008 (0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.658 (0.151)</td>
<td>0.767 (0.198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.428*** (0.096)</td>
<td>0.423*** (0.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female interviewer</td>
<td>1.131 (0.261)</td>
<td>0.759 (0.141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.268* (0.138)</td>
<td>0.707 (0.311)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo $R^2$</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries are odds ratio estimates with standard errors in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

than nonevangelicals. This effect may be attributable to evangelicals’ emphasis on “hard,” traditionally “male,” issues such as crime and national security. It may also be the result of the patriarchy and traditional gender roles maintained in many evangelical families and churches.

The table’s second model further highlights the importance of religious socialization in shaping gender stereotypes. Even after controlling for partisanship, evangelicals are nearly twice as likely ($pr = 0.30$ versus $0.17$ for other respondents) to believe that men make better political leaders than women. By contrast, identifying as a Republican correlates with a more modest 7 percentage point increase in the probability of favoring male leaders, and being a woman only decreases it by 3 percentage points. Weekly worshippers have no discernible differences in their level of pro-male bias.

Both of the models in Table 2, thus, report findings that are consistent with the expectation that doctrinal differences between evangelical Protestantism and other religious traditions play an important role in determining baseline levels of support for female politicians. These models also illustrate that evangelical Protestants’ support for male leadership is not one dimensional; evangelicals believe that men both better represent their interests and function more effectively in leadership roles. The fact that these relationships are both in opposition to female political leaders underscores the significance of these stereotypes in the political world.

However, previous research indicates that the dynamics of gender stereotyping vary among Democrats and Republicans, with the latter being significantly more likely to exhibit biases against female politicians. The models summarized in Table 3 and illustrated
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FIGURE 1
Predicted Probabilities of Support for Male Political Leaders by Respondent's Political Party

in Figure 1 build on that work by testing the effect of evangelical Protestantism across the two major parties. Taken together, the models confirm the hypothesis that Republicans who have ties to other groups that question the role and capacity of women in positions of political leadership will be significantly more inclined than other Republicans to see men as superior leaders. After controlling for frequency of service attendance and other factors, about 18 percent of nonevangelical Republicans believe that men better represent the interests of people like them. For otherwise similar evangelical Protestants, however, the estimated probability of favoring a male representative rises by 12 percentage points, to 30 percent. Even more powerful results are visible in the models examining whether men make better political leaders. Just over 22 percent of nonevangelical Republicans favor male leaders. Evangelical Republicans, however, have an estimated probability of preferring male leaders that is nearly twice that amount, or 43 percent.

These analyses also demonstrate support for Hypothesis 3b, which anticipates that evangelical Democrats will only be modestly more supportive of male leaders. About 18 percent of Democratic evangelicals believe that men better represent the interests of people like them. Otherwise similar nonevangelical Democrats have an estimated probability that is 7 percentage points lower. A similar pattern is visible for the models examining whether men make better political leaders. Although these differences are not statistically significant, the direction and strength of the coefficients provide some basis to believe that evangelical Democrats may be modestly more biased against women leaders than other Democrats.

The results of this analysis underscore the roles of reinforcing and competing social group attachments. In each case, nonevangelical Democrats, who face little pressure to
exhibit a bias against women leaders, have the lowest predicted probability of supporting a male leader. Democratic evangelicals and nonevangelical Republicans are somewhat more likely—but modestly so—to exhibit biases against women in positions of political leadership. Only evangelical Republicans who are members of multiple social groups that have traditionally been less receptive to women in positions of political leadership have predicted probabilities of favoring male leaders that are over 30 or 40 percent.

Conclusions

For several decades, gender and politics scholars have struggled to understand why women remain so dramatically underrepresented in positions of political leadership. This gender gap persists even as female candidates have proven that women are capable of winning partisan general elections at approximately the same rate as men. Most of the research examining the conundrum of female underrepresentation initially focused on the role that gender stereotyping plays in influencing attitudes and perhaps voting behavior toward women. More recent researchers, however, have begun to explore questions about where gender biases originate, why they are more influential among some groups and not others, and how they impact the recruitment and political ambition of potential female candidates.

The analysis presented here contributes to our understanding of gender stereotyping and the assessment of female political leaders in several ways. Specifically, the findings provide considerable evidence that scholars who fail to consider the impact of religion—and especially denominational influences—on gender biases in politics are ignoring a key, distinct variable. Evangelical Protestants are a large, nationally distributed subgroup within American society. They are distinguished by their traditional views on women’s roles in society and their unparalleled influence on the rhetoric, candidate recruitment, and policy priorities of the Republican Party. When one considers that evangelical Protestants made up 27 percent of the national electorate in 2012 and a much larger share of the Republican base responsible for recruiting and selecting the party’s nominees, it is striking that even recent studies of gender stereotyping still include no controls for religion (e.g., Dolan, 2013; Dolan and Lynch, 2013; Fulton, 2013). No other social or political group remotely comparable in influence to evangelical Protestants is regularly omitted from multivariate analyses of gender bias.

Our analysis also contributes to the burgeoning literature exploring how differences in partisan and other social attachments can impact an individual’s assumptions about female politicians. The findings indicate that scholars should look more closely at the relationship between religiosity and partisanship when accounting for the wide interparty gap in fielding women candidates. While numerous studies have shown that Republicans tend to hold deeper biases against female candidates than Democrats, little attention has been paid to the source or persistence of this bias. Our findings confirm that a substantial portion of evangelical Protestant Republicans—just shy of half of them—believe that men are better leaders than women. By comparison, evangelical Democrats express, at most, modest bias against female politicians, and have little leverage on the party’s rhetoric or candidate selection. Partisan differences in the rate of female candidacies, therefore, may be linked to the centrality of evangelical Protestantism in shaping candidate recruitment, rhetoric, and issue positions within the Republican Party; this is a question ripe for future research.

The analysis also identifies several other questions that should be addressed in future studies. Most importantly, scholars should more carefully consider if and how variations
in religious socialization influence evangelicals’ voting behavior and evaluations of actual candidates. We should also strive to better understand how gender stereotypes influence the public images and campaign strategies cultivated by women candidates. In particular, evangelical women may be uniquely equipped to stress their faith and patriotism to appeal to voters that are suspicious of female leadership. Yet the appeal of these candidates to voters outside of the evangelical tradition may be limited. How women candidates and political leaders—such as Sarah Palin or Michele Bachmann—balance these competing concerns and constituencies is a question ripe for further analysis.

More systematically including controls for religiosity in future studies will also help researchers to better specify the influence of nonreligious determinants of gender bias. Because evangelicalism is correlated with Republican Party identification, there is some basis to believe that the exclusion of measures of religiosity in most extant gender and politics literature may have overestimated the extent to which Republicanism influences gender bias. As important, our research clearly shows that something other than evangelical Protestantism explains much of the pro-male bias held by many Republicans. That is, even after the effects of evangelical Protestantism and frequency of worship are taken into account, Republicans remain more likely than Democrats to prefer male political leaders.

REFERENCES


