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The 2022 Arkansas Gubernatorial Election and the Impact of High-Profile Conservative Women on Gender Perceptions

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The 2022 Arkansas Gubernatorial Election and the Impact of High-Profile Conservative Women on Gender Perceptions.

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I. Abstract: How does the presence of a high-profile female candidate impact citizen gender perceptions about women in politics, specifically conservative candidates? Studies aimed at finding which common identities voters will align with, whether it be gender or political party, have found that voters will be more likely to align with their party rather than gender. In *The Clinton Effect? The (Non)Impact of a High-Profile Candidate on Gender Stereotypes* it was found that voters primed for Clinton did not experience a difference in gender perceptions as compared to those not primed. Voters still carry biased views as they define appropriate attributes of a woman differently, but will the introduction of a *conservative* candidate make any difference? I predict that exposure to high-profile candidates will cause voters to have more egalitarian gendered perceptions. Data was collected in the 2021 Arkansas Poll, a statewide representative survey made up of 800 respondents. I tested the hypotheses by priming half of the survey respondents to approve or disapprove of Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Leslie Rutledge before answering a group of gender perception questions, the latter to which all respondents answered. The results were consistent with the Clinton study in that there was not a significant impact on gender perceptions with the introduction of a high-profile conservative candidate. The findings display how partisan voters experience high-profile, conservative, female candidates and add to discussions on the impact of women in elections.

II. Introduction

In the 186 years Arkansas has been a state, its citizens have yet to elect a woman to the highest office. Although it was the first state to send a woman to the United States Senate, I believe Arkansans are waiting on the right candidates to emerge. The 2022 Gubernatorial race presented two Republican frontrunners: Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Leslie Rutledge. Both are equipped with extensive resumes and have even shared some of the same experiences.

As more and more women take office, the idea of a woman reaching the highest office is often considered. In the wake of the 2016 election when Hillary Clinton became the closest any woman has ever been to taking the position, many questions arose as to how she lost. One study looks to how people are experiencing gender perceptions about candidates running for office. In *The Clinton Effect? The (Non)Impact of a High-Profile Candidate on Gender Stereotypes* by Dr. Mileah Kromer and Dr. Janine Parry, it was found that exposure to a particular candidate (even one as controversial as Clinton) did not influence one's gender perceptions one way or another. My study seeks to expand on this idea by examining high-profile conservative women running for office.

High-profile candidates are those who are well known before their campaign cycle, whether by previous political success or other personal successes. Both women examined in the survey have had their share of the spotlight on the national political stage, whether it be as the White House Press Secretary or leading the charge in legal battles against the 2020 Presidential Election results.

III. Literature Review

A. Gendered Perceptions Among Partisan Women

Gendered perceptions are constantly evolving as the number of women taking political office increases. Evidence suggests that the majority of men and women do not experience gendered perceptions when it comes to holding a political office (Pike and Galinsky, 2021) but when examining perceptions towards members of the same gender but of people of a different party, evidence suggests there is more bias between those relationships. There is evidence that the number of women who run and take office in a geographic area does not increase the participation of women, but rather the candidacies and elections of role model candidates are responsible for those increases (Brockman, 2014, Costa and Wallace, 2021, Fabrizio, 2015). This is especially true in Arkansas, as women participating in Arkansas politics is not uncommon, but women still make up marginal percentages of public office holders in the state, slightly less than 1/4th of the Arkansas General Assembly are women (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). Sanders is a role model candidate and so it is expected that usual suspects of less egalitarian gendered perceptions will respond differently.

One study conducted by Samara Klar (2018) examines the gender perceptions amongst a common identity group by measuring levels of distrust between women of different political parties. Klar disputes the idea that women are likely to cross party lines to support other women. This idea comes from the common ingroup identity model (CIIM), which suggests people of a prominent, common identifier are less likely to have bias against an intergroup. The model is successful when the specific conditions are met, but this presents a limit to the model in that each intergroup does not define the common group in the same way.

Specifically, Klar claims Republican women and Democratic Women define what it means to be a woman differently, such as disagreeing on the typical roles one should take in society. Smith and Winter (2002) found a partisan divide between attitudes on feminism, with Republicans holding more negative views and the opposite holding true for Democrats. Not only does this difference in definition cause the model to fail, but it causes increases to levels of distrust among the common group (Rutchick and Eccleston, 2010). Similarly, Costa and Wallace (2021) suggest that women are significantly more likely to consider running for office when primed with information about women candidates of their own party, supporting partisan common identities rather than gender common identities. This is the case for this study, in which people of different political parties likely define attributes of womanhood differently.

This evidence combined with the extensive careers both candidates have had within Republican politics will support the hypotheses that Republican men will not experience gendered perceptions whereas Democratic women might experience more when presented with these candidates. Republicans and Democrats share more of a common identity of gender perceptions than do members of the same gender identity.

B. Conservative Common Identities

Melissa Deckman goes in depth upon the type of woman these candidates appeal to, or their common identity group, throughout her book *Tea Party Women: Mama Grizzlies, Grassroots Leaders, and the Changing Face of the American Right*. The women leading the right in politics are equipped with education and professional experience, which shows women can be independent in their careers but also hold strong conservative values (248-249). She also examines the evolving trends of modern conservatives that allow much greater space for women who have robust beliefs to take political power. Some prominent examples of this are Marjorie

Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert, both junior Congresswomen holding national attention for their strong views. Conservatism often empowers these women.

Deckman also discusses statements made by prominent liberal figures that were perceived to put down women who decide to raise their families rather than have an everyday job. Hillary Clinton made a statement during her husband's presidential run that diminished the work that stay-at-home mothers do, as well as one of President Obama's aids during his second presidential run (176-177). These examples promote one of the hypotheses that primed Democratic women the experience higher gendered perceptions towards the particular candidates, due to their conservative values.

Liberal policy has also influenced modern feminism, and conservative women are trying to take that aspect out of their feminism, according to Deckman. Policy to increase access to abortion and workplace equity don't align with conservative values. Many conservative feminists hold the belief that policy intending to address women's issues promotes reliance on the government. They also believe promoting issues about women in the workplace can make women less viable candidates to employers. Because of the strong correlation between Democrats and modern feminism, conservative women are reluctant to call themselves feminists. The inability of conservative women to label themselves as feminists is a great example as to why the CIIM fails in this scenario.

C. Common Identities among Candidates

Sarah Huckabee Sanders has a successful record within Republican politics since her emergence into the sphere. As the daughter of former governor Mike Huckabee, she was raised in the world of politics and even took part in a lot of his campaigning throughout his candidacies,

including his presidential run. After that, she also played major roles in the success of Arkansas senate races in which John Boozman and Tom Cotton won their seats.

Sanders most prominent role in politics was serving as the White House press secretary under President Trump. First hired as the deputy press secretary, she was promoted to the lead position to replace Sean Spicer. Sanders faced a considerable amount of criticism during her term as the press secretary, ranging from her actual job performance to personal attacks on her appearance. Sanders exited her White House position to pursue other career aspirations, with Trump hinting at a possible gubernatorial run while discussing her exit. Sanders moved to Little Rock and announced her candidacy on January 25th, 2021 and received Trump's endorsement the next day (DeMillo and Hoyt, 2021).

Leslie Rutledge is also successful within Republican politics, but her work has not taken place in such a public light. Her career has encompassed the legislative and judicial aspect of politics and government, as she served as a clerk and counsel to many Republican entities, which included the Republican National Committee and Mike Huckabee's Presidential Campaign. Rutledge now serves as the Arkansas' 56th Attorney General and is the first woman to hold that title. She is in her second term as Attorney General. Rutledge announced her candidacy before Sanders and was likely hoping for a Trump endorsement, as much of her early campaigning embraced Trump's politics.

Rutledge and Sanders fall into the same political category of high-profile conservative women. They have made names for themselves within the political sphere with things like their strong support for protecting the 2nd amendment and President Trump. Both have also been influential figures in building the power of Arkansas Republicans within the last two decades by working for successful candidates and becoming public officials themselves.

Because of their success and power, these women will likely not face restrictive gender perceptions. Using the Power Shield Hypothesis, these women have risen above that sphere. They are allowed a wider range of socially acceptable behavior which relays into the agency of their positions. Powerful women are able to be more assertive and aggressive in the public eye without facing criticism. Also with preexisting power, they are more opportune to future, higher positions of power and more favorable evaluations (Pike and Galinsky, 2021).

I expect to find higher levels of gendered perceptions amongst Democratic women who have been primed towards the particular Republican women candidates, and less levels of gendered perceptions amongst Republican men. Those who have not been primed will likely not experience higher gendered perceptions.

IV. Methods

Data collected from the 2021 Arkansas poll will be analyzed to compare the approval of high-profile, female, conservative candidates. The polling was conducted by phone during October 2021 and consisted of simple surveys to Arkansans that measured a variety of public opinions. 800 Arkansans were interviewed. Leslie Rutledge and Sarah Sanders were chosen because of their prominence in Arkansas politics, the Arkansas Republican Party, and nationwide politics. As of November 9th, 2021, Rutledge has exited the governor's race and will run for lieutenant governor. The polling took place well before this announcement, so her data is still relevant, but will not be considered in processing as to display the most real-world observations.

V. Hypotheses

Like the study conducted about Hillary Clinton, I hypothesize that respondents receiving the primed questions will be more likely to express support for a high-profile woman than those who are not primed. Both women are extremely supportive of former President Donald Trump,

as well as express strong conservative values across their platforms; this, combined with the

support Arkansas expressed for Trump as well as the CIIM failures factor into these hypotheses.

This is also true for the third hypothesis, in that people who are not likely supportive of Trump

will not be as likely to be enthusiastic about electing these women to office.

H1: Respondents receiving the Sanders primer will be less likely to experience gendered

perceptions.

H2: Respondents who are Republican will be more likely to experience more egalitarian

gendered perceptions when receiving the Sanders primer.

H3: Respondents who are Democratic will be more likely to experience gendered

perceptions when receiving the Sanders primer.

Table 1 Variable Hypotheses

	Variable Values	Minimum/ Maximum	Average Value	Hypothesized Relationship to W in P Index
Party	1 = Democrat 2 = Independent 3 = Republican	1, 3	1.97	- for Democrats + for Independents + for Republicans
Educational Attainment	1 = No high school 3 = High school graduate 5 = College graduate 7 = Graduate	1,7	4.28	+for higher level of attainment -for lower level of attainment
High Profile Candidate Primer	0 = Not Primed 1 = Primed	0, 1	.45	+ overall + for Republicans and Men - for Democrats
Gender Identity	1 = Male 2 = Female	1, 2	1.5	+for men +for women
Political Ideology	1 = Liberal 2 = Moderate 3 = Conservative	1, 3	2.38	-for liberals +for moderates +for conservatives

Table 1: This table displays the coding, minimum/maximum values, average values, and the hypothesized relationships to the Women in Politics Index.

VII. Experiment

Each respondent of the Arkansas Poll received a series of questions in order to measure gender perceptions of women who hold office, or the Women in Politics Index (WPI). The battery has been validated and used in a number of previous studies to measure gender perceptions of politicians (Kromer and Parry 2019). They were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, in which 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree, 5 = don't know.

Q1: Male politicians are typically better at handling most political issues

Q2: Female politicians often let their emotions influence their political decisions

Q3: I have some reservations about electing a female to the presidency

Q4: Female politicians do not have the expertise to deal with foreign policy issues, like wars.

Q5: Male politicians are generally better communicators through speeches and media

The primed respondents received questions about their approval of Sanders and Rutledge, respectively, before answering the gendered perceptions battery. Respondents' approval of the candidates was rated on a different scale than the battery, where 1 = Approve, 2 = Disapprove, 8 = Don't Know, 9 = Refused. The data for both sets of questions was recoded to make more comparable means, in which the "don't know" and "refused" responses were treated as missing responses. Again, Rutledge's data was collected but not included in the processing.

These questions were chosen by examining early and contemporary research regarding gender perceptions of voters. Although attitudes about women in office have become very egalitarian, but this does not relay into the actual voting booth. (Kromer and Parry, 2019). There is also evidence about the significance in the order of questions when measuring data like this.

Respondents who receive questions about specific people before answering something like the gender battery will be primed to think of those people.

A. Variables

The dependent variable in this experiment is the gendered perceptions total score of each respondent. The independent variables in this experiment are primed and unprimed respondents, as well as other factors like partisan identification, gender identification, political ideology, and education attainment that further influence the responses of the primed and unprimed. These factors often influence gendered perceptions according to the literature, so they are important to compare.

VIII. Data

To measure the sample's gender perceptions, each respondent was given an average score as to how they responded to the battery with the responses listed previously in this section. The code of the responses are the "points" that make up the respondent's total score. In this case, lower scores represent more gendered perceptions, whereas higher scores represent more egalitarian perceptions.

Table 2 WPI Battery Frequencies

	Strongly Agree	Agree	TOTAL AGREE	Disagree	Strong Disagree	TOTAL DISAGREE	Don't Know
Men Better Handling	3.3	17.8	**21.1**	56.8	15.5	**72.3**	6.8
Emotional Influence	5.5	21.1	**26.6**	49.9	16.0	**65.9**	7.5
Reservations Electing Woman President	6.6	21.6	**28.2**	46.3	17.5	**63.8**	8.0
Women lack policy expertise	3.5	14.9	**18.4**	54.3	20.3	**74.6**	7.1
Men Better Communicators	2.4	20	**22.4**	53.4	16.9	**70.3**	7.4

Table 2: This table contains the percentages of responses to the gendered perception questions. The percentages come from a sample of 800 respondents. The scores are made of "points" that correlate to 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Higher scores represent more egalitarian perceptions. Don't know and refused responses were not included.

Table 3 WPI Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Median	Maximum	Minimum	Skew	SE	n
Handling	3.05	3	5	1	0.246	0.086	746
Emotional	2.99	3	5	1	0.165	0.086	740
Reservations	2.99	3	5	1	0.113	0.086	736
Expertise	3.13	3	5	1	0.081	0.086	743
Communicate	3.07	3	5	1	0.086	0.086	741

Table 3: This table displays the descriptive statistics for how the sample responded to the gendered perception battery. The scores are made of "points" that correlate to 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Don't know and refused responses were not included.

Table 4 WPI Battery Score Frequency

Range	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20
Frequency (%)	2.5	15.7	61	20.4

Table 4: This table contains the frequencies of the sample's scores. The scores are made of "points" that correlate to 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Higher scores represent more egalitarian perceptions. Don't know and refused responses were not included.

The data in table 4 shows that the highest percentage of respondents primarily disagree with the gendered perception battery. The state is rather split when it comes to gender perceptions of women in public office. In order to not inflate the average scores, responses of

"don't know" and "refused" were treated as missing values when calculating the scores. The next table displays the average scores of the battery across different categories of respondents. The categories chosen will aid in answering the specific hypotheses.

Table 5 Gendered Perceptions Battery Average Score

Independent Variable	*Average Battery Score*
Gender Identity	
Male	13.358
Female	13.640
Ideology Identity	
Liberal	14.893
Moderate	14.035
Conservative	12.986
Party Identity	
Democrat	14.172
Independent	14.030
Republican	12.802
Questionnaire Version	
Not Primed	13.269
Primed	13.828
Education Level	
No high school	12.600
High school graduate	12.352
Bachelor's or Trade	14.036
Graduate degree	14.155

Table 5: This table displays the gender perception battery average scores across demographics of respondents. The scores are made of "points" that correlate to 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Higher scores represent more egalitarian perceptions. Don't know and refused responses were not included.

Perhaps the most important section to examine is whether or not respondents were primed or not to think of Sanders before responding to the battery. Respondents who were primed to consider the specific women experienced more egalitarian perceptions with a score of 13.828 whereas those who weren't primed scored on average 13.269. Compared with one another through an independent sample t-test, it was found that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant with a t-score of .026.

There are only slight differences in scores among party identities, with Republican and Conservative respondents scoring slightly lower than Democrat and Liberal respondents. This is not out of the ordinary, as described by studies that show neither party promotes one gender identity over the other (Dolan and Hansen, 2018). There is also a trend that shows the extreme success of conversative women in recent election cycles, and they have great success due to their education and professional experience, along with grassroots organizing (Deckman, 2016).

However, like discussed in the literature review, people of different political identities define appropriate qualities of women differently, which may explain the significance between party identification and one's total score. Although slight in difference among score, a multivariate regression test was run to analyze the true difference.

Table 6 Multivariate Regression

	B	***SE***	**Sig.**
Primed	.943	.203	.227
Party	-.480	.190	.062
Primed x Party	-.060	.334	.857
Gender Identity	.380	.258	.141
Political Ideology	-.660	.203	.001
Education	.398	.089	.001
(Constant)	11.858	1.898	.000
n	644		
Adjusted r²	.088		

Table 6: This table displays the unstandardized Beta coefficients of the Sanders Multivariate Regression results. It also presents interactions between primed respondents and their political party. The Dependent variable is the Gendered Perceptions score (Low Values = Gendered, High = Egalitarian). The Primed x Party variable represents an interactive effect between party identity and score. Party scores were recoded from Republican = 1, Democrat = 2, Independent = 3 to Democrat = 1, Independent = 2, Republican = 3 to better display a negative or positive relationship between the variables. Primed respondents were coded 0 = not primed, 1 = primed.

A multivariate regression test was used to measure the significance certain identifications had on one's gendered perceptions total score. The results are displayed in Table 6. Using a significance level of .05, only two variables proved to be significant when impacting the total score. These were Political Ideology and level of educational attainment. Those that were not statistically significant are Gender Identity, and Party Identification, and the primed respondents.

The Primed x Party variable represents the interaction between being primed and one's party. There is a negative relationship between the variables. The more Democratic one is, the more likely one is to disapprove of Sanders as well as the more Republican one is, the more likely they are to approve of Sanders. The negative relationship between political ideology and one's total score also supports this.

Table 7 Average WPI Battery Score

Type of Respondent	Average WPI Score	Std. Deviation
All Republicans	12.802	3.315
Primed Republicans	13.542	3.144
Not Primed Republicans	12.444	3.452
All Independents	14.030	3.345
Primed Independents	14.628	3.473
Not Primed Independents	13.698	3.235
All Democrats	14.1720	3.468
Primed Democrats	14.825	3.344
Not Primed Democrats	13.734	3.440

Table 7: This table shows the average Women in Politics index score across parties. The parties were coded Democrats =1, Independents = 2, Republicans = 3. The W in P battery scores are made of "points" that correlate to 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Higher scores represent more egalitarian perceptions.

X. Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

The data presented is consistent with the Clinton study in that those respondents who are exposed to a particular female candidate did not experience lesser egalitarian gender stereotypes. It differed in that it actually caused a slight increase in egalitarian perceptions, rather than having no impact on the perceptions. Republicans who received the primer scored higher than those who

were not primed, as well as Democrats. Some figures presented statistic significances, but the overall group presented that Sanders did not have an impact on voters' gender perceptions on women in politics.

Although there is strong evidence from the candidates examined across similar studies, there have simply not been enough candidates of this nature to make overarching claims about women who run for office. The few that have fit the standard are so well known that their gender identity is not influential to their perception. It would be interesting to conduct this experiment where both a male and female exemplar candidate are present. Also, due to the overwhelming support for Trump in Arkansas, voters are in a sense already primed for candidates like Sanders which takes away from the experiment's strength.

The study will be able to add to further projects examining similar candidates, with the intention to understand women's impacts on elections rather than just their presence within them (Kromer and Parry, 2019). The research indicates that women are political in the United States, and they are well represented across parties and platforms, meaning their impacts are more than just their gender identity.

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