

The Effect of Candidate Gender on Campaign Strategy

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Spring 2015

Abstract

Gender differences and stereotypes are embedded in our society, and these differences and stereotypes often influence the way political candidates present themselves to voters. My study looked at television advertisements from two Senate races in 2014 to explore the influence gender of the candidate has on campaign strategy and agenda. I found that gender is not a significant variable in messaging strategy, and that political party is, in fact, the most significant predictor of how a candidate will frame their candidacy and prioritize issues. This study highlights the strength of political parties for candidate strategy rather than candidate gender, suggesting the normalization of female political candidates.

Introduction

The political system of this country is dominated by men. There is currently a record-setting number of 100 women in Congress, but still, women hold less than 20% of the total seats (Center for American Women and Politics 2015). It is not surprising, then, that in a system that has traditionally only involved male participants, gender can play a large role in the voters' perception of political candidates, especially when the contender is female. In turn, candidates are concerned with how voters perceive them and judge their ability to be a political leader, and so candidates craft their messaging accordingly. Gender of the candidate is one variable that may affect how political candidates choose to appeal to their constituents.

In my research, I explored the effect of the candidate's gender on campaign messaging. More specifically, I sought to determine how the inclusion of a female competitor in a political race affects the amount of women-targeted messaging and advertising from both candidates. I set out to see how candidates may or may not use voters' stereotypes of gender in their campaign strategy. Previous studies have shown that voters view candidates through gendered lens, but there are differing ideas about how these perceptions of gender influences campaign strategy, if it does at all. Additionally, little research has been done on the effect of female candidates on the types of messaging prioritized during an election. However, the existing literature has agreed that women voters have been found to care more about both "compassion" issues concerning social welfare and women's issues, and make them a higher priority when voting (Mueller 1991; Chaney, et al. 1998; Kauffman 2002). Furthermore, voters have been found to associate women with being better at handling these same type of "compassion" issues (Fridkin, et al. 2009; Paolino 1995; McDermott 1998). Therefore, in my own research, I expected to find that female

candidates run on “compassion” issues more than male candidates and try to make these types of issues a focal point in the election. Additionally, because women voters care more about social and women’s issues, and voters perceive female candidates to be strong on these issues, I expected to see an increase in women-targeted advertising when a female candidate was running. Lastly, male candidates are also thought to alter their campaign strategy when faced with a female candidate because they believe they must behave in a certain way when running against a woman (Fox 1997). Dolan (2005) suggested that if male candidates did indeed alter their behavior, it would be seen in their issue focus, so in this case, I also expected to find more social issues in the race between a female and male candidate.

To carry out my research, I looked at a sample of television advertisements from the 2014 Senate races in North Carolina and Arkansas. I chose these Senate races because of the similarities in geographic location, political climate, and competitiveness. The most significant difference in these races is that North Carolina had a female and male candidate, and Arkansas had two male candidates. Additionally, Senate races are larger and more publicized, and I specifically chose competitive races because there are more resources from the national partisan committees (Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee) allocated for these candidates, allowing for more carefully crafted campaign messages. Television commercials remain the most effective way to both convey candidates’ messaging and influence voters (Huber, et al. 2007; Panagopoulos 2009), so they will allow me to gain a complete picture of the ideas and issues the candidate intended to convey to voters.

In the end, I found that the gender of the candidate does not matter when candidates choose which issues to focus on or which messages they convey to voters. Instead, I found that

political party is the determining factor in issue priority and messaging strategy. This finding contributes to the current debate about the effect of candidate gender on their political strategies. It weakens any perceived importance of candidate gender in campaign strategy, and instead suggests that political parties are a much more influential and powerful force in campaign strategy.

Literature Review

How candidates set their agenda and convey their message

In a country where men have historically been in nearly all positions of political leadership, female candidates often face challenges simply due to their gender. The public tends to perceive men as better leaders (King, et al. 2000), and “masculine” traits like aggressiveness and assertiveness are considered more desirable by the voting public (Huddy, et al. 1993). Female candidates are left with the challenge of figuring out how to appeal to voters. There has been a lot of research previously done on the ways that campaigns strategize when creating messages, the effectiveness of these messages, and what issues matter to women, but there has been less agreement on the effect of the inclusion of a female candidate on the types of messaging central to the election. Understanding the effect of their inclusion is important because it helps shed light on how voter perceptions about gender influence campaign strategy for both candidates.

Candidates choose to strategize and prime issues based on voter perceptions of the candidate and of the issues. The strategy of choosing what issues to focus on is referred to as the agenda-setting theory (Abbe, et al. 2003). This strategy works especially well when the candidate and the voter agree on what issues are most important during that election season (Abbe, et al.

2003). Druckman, et al. (2004) found that issue priming is shaped by public opinion on issue competence, candidate characteristics, and external events surrounding the campaign. When deciding whom to vote for, voters often choose the candidate that better demonstrates competence on the issues that were discussed most frequently during the campaign (Abbe, et al. 2003). Thus, in line with the agenda-setting theory, candidates will seek to set the agenda for the campaign by choosing to focus on issues that voters already perceive them or their party to handle well (Miller, et al. 2000). For example, Republicans feel more confident about issues dealing with the military and the federal budget, while Democrats are perceived to have a better handle on social issues like education and health care.

In terms of candidate characteristics, previous findings have illustrated that the four most appealing traits a candidate can possess are competence, strength, warmth, and trust (Funk 1999), and so candidates must work to demonstrate in their messaging that they have these qualities. And lastly, the current political climate must be taken into consideration by the candidates (Druckman, et al. 2004). Circumstances beyond their control will shape the agenda of their campaign. For example, in the 2014 midterm elections, the media storm about ISIS and Ebola took precedence over other issues, and both candidates felt it necessary to address those issues.

Once a candidate chooses the issues they want to highlight in their messages, they need to convey them to voters. Televised political advertisements have been found to be effective in increasing the likelihood that the voter is aware of what issues the candidate wants to focus on (Druckman 2004; Kahn, et al. 2001) and is therefore the most valuable way of conveying political messages. There is a cycle related to the agenda-setting theory involved in the

relationship between candidate and constituent: the ads emphasize issues that the candidate wants people to think about, and the voters in turn come to think of those issues as the most important (Kahn 1993). While political advertisements are essentially useless when it comes to getting people to go out and vote, they are successful at persuading them to support a certain candidate (Huber, et al. 2007). Furthermore, political advertising is found to be much more effective in contested races than in noncompetitive ones, since there are more resources given to candidates running in competitive races (Panagopoulos 2009). Due to their effectiveness, candidates pour resources into television commercials, which is why I am looking specifically at TV advertisements to understand candidate messaging.

Gender differences in issue preference

When choosing issues to communicate to voters, candidates have noticed that during the past few decades, women have emerged as a voting block that seems to have “persisting value, attitude, and policy” preferences (Mueller 1991, 36). There are a few different explanations for why this occurs. One is the socio-psychological theory of gender differences, which is that the gender differences on issues originate from the psychological differences and socialization of men and women (Chaney, et al. 1998). For example, women are taught to prioritize “care and connection” while men are taught the values of “individualism and self-mastery” (Chaney, et al. 1998, 315). These differences translate into different policy preferences: women, for example, are found to care more about the overall state of the economy whereas men are more concerned about their personal financial situation (Chaney, et al. 1998). Another theory explores the importance of group-salience issues, which states that people prioritize issues related to personal

experience (Paolino 1995). For example, women care more about issues like abortion, unequal pay, insufficient childcare, and crime because they feel the effects of these issues directly, and so are more likely to vote based on them (Carpini, et al. 1993; Center for American Women in Politics 2012).

Irrespective of why gender differences occur, the core of these differences revolve around social issues (Kauffman 1999; Carpini, et al. 1993; Manza, et al. 1998; Chaney, et al. 1998, Center for American Women in Politics 2015). Women voters tend to more strongly support domestic issues like health care, education, and social welfare programs (Carpini, et al. 1993, Chaney, et al. 1998, Center for American Women in Politics 2015). This is seen in both voting preferences as well as legislating differences. Female state legislators were found to be more liberal on welfare policy issues than their male colleagues (Poggione 2004) and were also found to introduce more legislation relating to education, health care, welfare, and children's issues (Bratton, et al. 1999). Swers (1998) also found that congresswomen are more likely to vote for bills that are directly related to women's issues than congressmen. "Women-targeted" advertising in my research was partially defined by the inclusion of social issues like these. Using this information, I am able to look for specific issues in advertisements and identify them as tactics to target female voters.

Male voters, on the other hand, have been found to be less committed to social equality than women (Kauffman 2002). They tend to be more conservative, less egalitarian, and more traditionally moral (Kauffman 2002). This translates to more opposition to social welfare spending and less support for the government's role in providing social programs and safety nets.

These gender differences also come into play when candidates run for office. Voters perceive female candidates to be more passive, gentle, honest, and good (King, et al. 2000). Other feminine traits, as perceived by voters, include being a good listener, being kind/warm/gentle/caring, being likable and easy to get along with, and being compassionate and generous (Winter 2010). Women are assumed to be better at handling “compassion” issues (Fridkin, et al. 2009). “Compassion” issues include health care, education, children, family, senior citizens, and the environment (Paolino 1995; Fridkin, et al. 2009). Male candidates, on the other hand, are perceived to be stronger on issues like business, crime, the economy, the budget, taxes, agriculture, and foreign affairs. They are found to be more likely to run on these type of “masculine” issues (Fridkin, et al. 2009).

Candidates and gender perceptions

How candidates manage these perceptions is disagreed upon in the literature, which relates directly to my research question. Herrnson, et al. (2003) found that women who campaign on traditional women’s issues and target female voters are more successful as candidates and benefit from capitalizing on gender stereotypes. Thus, women are more likely to emphasize these types of issues when they run for office and highlight issues like education and social policy (Kahn 1993). Furthermore, Schaffner (2005) found that women’s issues resonate more strongly with women, which makes it more likely that female voters would vote based on them. In order to support these findings, the female candidate in my research would focus on women’s issues and social issues in most of her advertisements. In addition, because women are more successful when they bring women’s issues to the forefront of their campaign, men might also run on issues

associated with “compassion” when faced with a female candidate in order to win over female voters (Fox 1997, Dolan 2005). To find evidence for this suggestion, the race with a female and male candidate would have more women-targeted advertising released by both candidates than the race with two male candidates.

Other research has found that women fight against these stereotypes. Women might decide to run on issues that make them appear more masculine, like issues dealing with the economy, defense, or foreign policy (Fridkin, et al. 2009). Masculine traits are found to be more commonly associated with the skills necessary to be a successful politician (Rey 2005). Female candidates make a conscious attempt to appear tougher and more aggressive, since they believe voters associate them with traits like passivity and gentleness instead of more favorable masculine traits (Huddy, et al. 1993). By rejecting feminine traits, female candidates have been found to be better able to win elections (Huddy, et al. 1993). This is demonstrated in advertising where the female candidate presents herself as tough or strong, or appears in an ad to discuss the issue herself (Sapiro, et al. 2011). When female candidates are seen as competent in issues like the economy or foreign policy, they gain broader support, which suggests that women candidates should capitalize on masculine issues and neutralize gender stereotypes (Witt, et al. 1994). If this is the case, I would find the female candidate campaigning mostly on issues not associated with “compassion,” and instead campaigning on issues associated with toughness, like taxes or foreign policy, and associating herself with more masculine traits in her advertisements.

Ideology

Some research dismisses gender as a variable at all in messaging strategy, so I also explored ideology as another independent variable. The studies dismissing gender as a significant factor argue that what appears to be sex differences are actually simply party differences (Dolan 2005, Brians 2005, Hayes 2011). Hayes (2011) found that party stereotypes are more influential than gender stereotypes for candidates, and that gender stereotypes of a candidate are confined by their party.

Additionally, women tend to run as Democrats, and Democrats are more likely to campaign on issues that are important to women, like social and women's issues. Bratton and Haynie (1999) found that Democrats introduce more measures concerning childcare, health care, and welfare policy, and Swers (1998) concluded that ideology is the strongest predictor of how politicians will vote on women's issues. She also found that while women's issues were supported by all Democrats in her study, women's issues were the driving factor in instances when Republican women deviated from the rest of their party to join Democratic votes, demonstrating that Democrats traditionally support issues that are important to women. The Democratic Party is also associated with feminine traits, while the Republican party is associated with masculine ones (Winter 2010). Positive feminine traits associated with the Democratic Party are compassionate, kind, and egalitarian, while negative feminine traits are weak and gullible. Positive masculine traits linked to the Republican Party are practical, tough, and hardworking, while negative characteristics include greedy and self-interested.

Voters are also more likely to describe Democrats as "middle class" and "minorities" than they are Republicans, who are more commonly associated with the terms "big business" and

“rich people” (Green, et al. 2002). These associations suggest that women and other marginalized groups gravitate towards the Democratic Party. In addition, Bastedo, et al. (1980) found that voters associate Democrats with the phrases “favors labor unions,” “favors poor,” and “more welfare spending,” while they associate Republicans with phrases like “favors big business,” “more military spending,” and “tough on crime.” These associations help to demonstrate how voters perceive Democrats to be stronger on social issues than Republicans. To support the idea that party is more significant than gender, my results would show that Democratic candidates, regardless of gender, campaigned more on social issues.

In a nutshell, candidates are strategic about how they choose their messages and how they communicate their messages, but the role that gender plays in the strategy of choosing messaging is still unclear. Researchers are unsure how female candidates craft messaging based on voter perceptions, or if they take gender into account at all. My study looked at a recent case to help illuminate how voter perceptions of gender may or may not affect the messaging and advertising strategy of female candidates.

Methodology & Cases

To determine whether or not the presence of a female candidate has an influence on the amount of women-targeted advertisements, I compared the television advertisements of two battleground Senate races from the 2014 midterm elections. The states I focused on are Arkansas and North Carolina. My independent variable was the gender of the candidate, and my dependent variable was the presence of female-targeted advertising.

I chose to look at Arkansas and North Carolina because Arkansas had two male candidates running, and North Carolina had one male candidate and one female candidate, which makes them fit for comparison. The Democratic candidate in North Carolina was female, while the Democratic candidate in Arkansas was male, which controls for the influence of party ideology influencing ad content, rather than gender of the candidate. All four of the candidates were white, which controls for any impact of racial stereotypes. I also chose these states because they are the most culturally and politically similar of the competitive Senate races, so I was able to best control other possible independent variables and isolate the dependent variable as much as possible. Arkansas and North Carolina are both considered Southern states, which means that the voters have comparable values and attitudes. Residents of Southern states are found to be more conservative than residents of other parts of the country (Medoff 1997), which means the voters have similar preferences. My decision to look at culturally similar states controls for the effect of candidates using social issues or women's issues as a tactic to appeal to a more liberally-minded constituency.

They are also both states that have recently transitioned from a mostly Democratic government to a mostly Republican government. Historically, Arkansas has been a mostly Democratic state, both on a state and federal level. But in 2010, Arkansas politics changed dramatically. Republicans took all statewide offices, all Congressional seats, and took control of both chambers of the state legislature. North Carolina has a similar history. It is traditionally Democratic on the state-level and Republican on a federal level, but by 2012 the political climate changed, and Republicans gained all elected statewide offices. To control for the potential effect of these changes, I look at two races with Democratic incumbents and Republican challengers. In

both races, the Democrat incumbent had to account for the conservative swing of the voters' attitudes and adjust their messaging accordingly.

I also chose North Carolina and Arkansas because they were both competitive races, which means they both had large amounts of funding available to spend on creating and conveying their messages. Because of the competitive nature of the races, candidates were heavily involved with trying to persuade voters. I determined that both the North Carolina and Arkansas races were competitive using the *Cook's Political Report's* assessment of the most competitive races in 2014. Both races were considered "toss-ups" throughout the entire months of September, October, and right up until Election Day.

Additionally, both North Carolina and Arkansas have evidence of a gender gap in voter preferences in Senate races. In North Carolina, the average gender gap for Senate elections between 2004 and 2012 is 17.5%: Democratic candidates have won women's votes by an average of percentage 7.5%, and have lost men's votes by 10 percentage points (Kondik, et al. 2013). In Arkansas for the same time period, Democrats have won women's votes by an average of 1 percentage, while they have lost men's votes by 11.5 points, for a total gap of 12.5% (Kondik, et al. 2013). Female voters have leaned towards the Democratic party, indicating that they have different preferences than men. Since female voters have historically shown a different voting pattern than men, candidates in these states both have incentive to appeal to women voters and focus on issues that they have been demonstrated to prioritize.

And lastly, neither state had issues directly related to women on the ballot, such as bills related to abortion, contraception, or equal pay. Commercial mentions of women's issues are therefore unrelated to measures on the ballot. However, Arkansas did have a ballot measures

relating to social policy (increasing the minimum wage), so my results may be affected by this, especially if the advertisements focus on or mention the minimum wage.

Because political advertisements have been found to be the most effective at conveying campaign messages, I looked at the advertisements of the Arkansas candidates, Democrat incumbent Mark Pryor and Republican challenger Tom Cotton, and the North Carolina candidates, Democrat incumbent Kay Hagan and Republican challenger Thom Tillis. Both Democratic candidates are incumbents, which controls for any incumbency advantage and differences in messaging strategy, as incumbents are typically able to benefit from name recognition. In North Carolina, there was a third candidate on the ballot, Libertarian Sean Haugh, but neither candidate acknowledged Haugh throughout the campaign, and he only achieved 3.7% of the votes on Election Day. His advertisements were not included, as they were not a significant factor in either Tillis's or Hagan's campaign messaging strategy.

I collected the advertisements from the respective candidate's official YouTube channel, where the campaign uploads candidate-endorsed ads. It is clear which videos were TV advertisements - either the phrase "TV ad" appears in the video's title or its playlist, if one had been created within the channel, or the video is a length between 31-33 seconds, the typical length of a TV commercial. There is a risk that these commercials intended for TV were not actually aired, or that other advertisements aired but were not uploaded to their respective channel. However, because all the ads on their YouTube channel are officially endorsed by the candidate and included in their campaign's social media presence, they are a representative sample of the messages the candidate intended to convey throughout the campaign. In addition, Dulio (2009) found that online campaign content does not differ significantly in terms of issue

content from television advertisements. There is a total of 27 available advertisements from the North Carolina race, 8 from Thom Tillis and 19 from Kay Hagan, and a total of 56 from the Arkansas race, with 25 from Tom Cotton and 31 from Mark Pryor. Interestingly, both incumbents ran more advertisements than their challenger, which could be an indication of the competitiveness of the race. They indeed did not seem to rely on name recognition as an advantage.

Once the advertisements were collected, I utilized the findings from my literature review to determine which were female-targeted. Researchers have found that women tend to be more concerned about social welfare issues than men. Based on the socio-psychological theory (Chaney, et al. 1998), I counted mentions of the following issues as strategically women-targeted:

- Education
- Health care
- Social Security/Medicare
- Environment
- Senior citizens

I defined “mention” as a specific reference by the ad narrator to one of these issues no matter how brief. For example, I scored for these issues when the actual words “education” or “health care” were stated by the narrator, or if direct references to these issues were included, like “teachers” and “schools” for education, or “health services” or “health coverage” for health care. In line with this, I did not count mentions of “Obamacare” as health care, because the term “Obamacare” was used in my sample as an attack on President Obama, not a statement about how the candidate would approach the health care system.

Additionally, based on the group-salience theory (Paolino 1995), I also looked for issues that directly affect women, or that are seen as traditional women's issues. Again, I only counted these issues when the narrator explicitly used these words or made a direct reference to the issue:

- Abortion
- Domestic violence
- Equal pay
- Children/childcare
- Women's health/Reproductive health

In addition to the specific issues mentioned in the ads, I looked at how the candidates presented themselves and their campaign. It is expected that women-targeted advertising will be demonstrated by evidence of feminine characteristics attributed to the candidate, incorporation of a representative of a social or women's issue regardless of gender (i.e. teacher or senior citizen), and a more personal tone (Herrnson, et al. 2003; Sapiro 2011). Guided by Sapiro (2011) and Winter's (2010) models, I looked for specifics in appeals and candidate traits:

Appeals

- Children in ad
- Senior citizens in ad
- Teacher/student in ad
- Family member in ad
- Female speaker

Candidate Traits

- Mention of candidate's family-oriented background
- Mention of being caring/understanding/sensitive

I coded each advertisement in terms of these issues, strategic appeals, and mentions of candidate traits. For an advertisement to be counted as including a spokesperson for a social or women's issue, I required that they speak at some point during the ad to either endorse the candidate or discuss the issue. A mention of a family-oriented background meant that, for

example, the candidate discussed their time as a member of their local PTA, described how they were raised on a farm, or talked about how they were brought up with certain family values. These are all descriptions of a candidate's background that incorporate family, as opposed to a candidate talking about his or her time spent in the military. And lastly, I was more flexible with how I counted mentions of being caring, understanding, or sensitive, since it was not common that a candidate would explicitly tell the voters "I am a caring person." Instead, I counted mentions as when the candidate alluded to these traits, like for example, if a candidate was described as a good listener or highlighted their love of puppies to make themselves seem more likable.

If multiple elements overlapped, I counted each one individually. For example, Tom Cotton's mother, who is a senior citizen, a woman, and a family member, spoke in one of his ads to support his positions on senior citizen issues and Social Security/Medicare. I gave this ad a score of 7: 1 for incorporating a family member, 1 for incorporating a female speaker, 1 for incorporating a senior citizen, 2 for senior citizen issues, and 2 for Social Security/Medicare. The candidate strategically picks who they want to appear in these advertisements, and they are aware that having appeals from someone who can speak to multiple issues is probably more beneficial to their campaign than someone who can relate to a smaller group of constituents.

Each time a social or women's issue was mentioned, I gave the ad a score of 2, based on a method used by Dulio and Trumbone (2009) and Dolan (2005). However, to give appropriate balance to a single but dominant issue, I gave it a score of 4 if the issue was discussed throughout the entire duration of the advertisement. Each time another element was incorporated (appeal or candidate trait), I added 1 point. I decided to give appeals and candidate lower scores because the

issue focus is the most important element of the ad, and the most important aspect of how voters choose to vote for a candidate. Then, each ad received an individual score to indicate how women-targeted it was. After each ad for their respective candidate was coded, I found the median and average scores to get a sense of how strongly their advertisements targeted female voters.

Results

As illustrated in Table 1, both Democratic candidates had similar high average scores for their advertisements and the same median scores. They also were both significantly higher than the Republican candidates' scores. Both the Republican candidates had similarly low average scores and also had the same median scores. These findings demonstrate that the biggest difference between candidates was not gender, but political party. I break down each candidate and their score below.

Table 1: Candidate Scores

	# of ads	Average score	Median score	Lowest score	Highest score
Kay Hagan (D)	19	4.32	5	0	7
Mark Pryor (D)	31	4.71	5	0	11
Thom Tillis (R)	8	1.37	1	0	4
Tom Cotton (R)	25	1.96	1	0	7

Democrat Kay Hagan's overall average score was 4.32 and her median score was 5. Her highest scoring ad "Important Issues" received a score of 7. By coding the above mentioned elements, it is clear that this ad was created with a female audience in mind. Three different

issues were mentioned throughout the ad, and the narrator was female. For the sake of space and clarity, I omitted the categories where the ad scored a 0 because it didn't incorporate that specific element. In "Important Issues," issues concerning family, equal pay, and reproductive health were each mentioned for a score of 2 each, and the female speaker added another point. The ad begins with a female narrator saying, "For women and families, Speaker Thom Tillis has a record you should check" and continues with claims that he "cut funding for cancer screenings and birth control" and "killed equal pay for women legislation." The ad ends by saying that he is "not someone our women and families can trust."

Table 2: Highest Scoring Ad, "Important Issues"

	Family	Equal Pay	Reproductive health	Female speaker	Total
KH - "Important Issues"	2	2	2	1	7

Kay Hagan had 3 ads (out of 19) that scored a 0. "Low" is an example of one of these ads. In this ad, a male narrator defends Hagan's time on the Armed Services Committee and says that she "leads hearings on eradicating terrorists like ISIS, supporting airstrikes and counterterrorism operations." It ends with an attack on Tillis's lack of a plan to handle ISIS and his absence from key votes in the State House in order to fundraise for his campaign. The ad focuses on defense and foreign policy, both thought of as more masculine issues.

Republican Thom Tillis had a much lower average score of 1.38, with a median score of 1. His highest scoring ad "PTA" focused entirely on education, a social issue, thus was given a score of 4. In this ad, Tillis talks about his work increasing teacher salaries and school funding

and ends the same way he closed almost every ad, with the reminder that Hagan voted with President Obama 96% of the time.

Table 3: Highest Scoring Ad, “PTA”

	Education	Total
TT - “PTA”	4	4

Three of Tillis’s ads (out of 8) scored a 0. One of these ads was titled “Cocktails.” This ad begins with a male narrator stating that President Obama “refer[ed] to the Islamic State as a JV team” and then criticizes Hagan for missing a hearing on “new global threats” to attend a “cocktail party.” It ends with the double attack: “While ISIS grew, Obama did nothing. Senator Hagan did cocktails.” The issues highlighted here were defense and foreign policy issues, as well as capitalizing on President Obama’s low approval ratings, none of which are associated with female-targeted advertising. An interesting aspect of this ad is the slightly gendered nature of the attack. Cocktails are commonly regarded as more feminine alcoholic drinks, with their bright colors, sweet taste, and presentation in smaller, more delicate glasses. The accusation that Hagan “did cocktails” and hosted a “cocktail party” instead of focusing on terrorism is a slight attack on her identity as a woman and suggests that her femininity is a flaw. Gendered attacks are easy, as masculine traits are already associated with better leadership ability.

Down in Arkansas, Democrat Mark Pryor’s average score for all his ads was a 4.71, and, like Hagan, his median score was 5. His ad “Running” received a score of 11, the highest of all four candidates. In this ad, five social or women’s issues were mentioned, each receiving a score of 2, and it was also narrated by a woman, which added another point. This ad focuses on criticizing Cotton’s record in Congress. The female narrator states that Cotton “wants to turn

Medicare into a voucher system” and “privatize, cut benefits, and raise the retirement age” for Social Security. She then states that Cotton “voted against cutting interest rates for student loans, voted against the Violence Against Women Act, voted against equal pay for equal work, and Cotton would let insurance companies deny coverage for preexisting conditions.” Each social or women’s issue received a quick, but notable mention.

Table 4: Highest Scoring Ad, “Running”

	Education	Health care	Social Security/ Medicare	Domestic violence	Equal pay	Female speaker	Total
MP - “Running”	2	2	2	2	2	1	11

Pryor had 6 ads (out of 31) that scored a 0. “American Jobs” is one of them. In this ad, Mark Pryor narrates and opens by criticizing the fact that many products are made in China and Mexico, and that we are dependent on oil from the Middle East. He then says he wants to “end the tax break corporations get for sending American jobs overseas” and supports “new tax incentives for companies that bring manufacturing jobs back home to Arkansas.” Issues like taxes, foreign affairs, and jobs/economy are associated with masculinity, and so this ad received a score of 0.

Republican Tom Cotton had an average score of 1.96, and his median score was 1 also significantly lower than Pryor’s. His highest scoring ad, called “Indoor Plumbing” was given a score of 7. This ad features Cotton’s mother as a representative for senior citizen issues. Cotton begins by saying, “When Mom was a girl, her family didn’t have indoor plumbing,” and she charmingly points at him and says, “That’s right! You had it easy.” Cotton continues by explaining how he’s supportive of Social Security and Medicare for seniors “like Mom” and

talks about the importance of continuing the hard work of their generation. I gave it a score of 2 for his mention of Social Security/Medicare and another 2 for specifically highlighting that his actions will benefit senior citizens. His mother was featured as a senior citizen, family member, and female speaker, each of which earned 1 point.

Table 5: Highest Scoring Ad, “Indoor Plumbing”

	Social Security/Medicare	Senior citizens	Senior citizen in ad	Family member in ad	Female speaker	Total
TC - “Indoor Plumbing”	2	2	1	1	1	7

Cotton had 8 (out of 25) ads that received a score of 0. For example, Cotton narrates “Toe the Line” and talks about how Mark Pryor voted for Obamacare and voted with Obama 90% of the time. He ends it by saying that he will stand up to President Obama. This ad’s focus is President Obama’s unpopularity in Arkansas and aims to link Pryor and Obama together. It was absent of any elements of a female-targeted ad, and so it earned 0 points.

In the end, my findings did not support my main hypothesis that a female candidate would influence the messages conveyed to voters. As evidenced above, although Kay Hagan did have a significantly higher average score than her Republican opponent, she not have a higher average score than Mark Pryor, the other Democratic candidate. Both she and Pryor had a similar agenda emphasizing social issues and women’s issues. Instead, my findings supported Dolan (2005), Brian (2005), and Hayes’s (2011) conclusion that political party, not gender, is the driving force for a candidate’s campaign strategy.

Kay Hagan focused strongly on “compassion” issues and women’s issues, and incorporated many more elements of female-targeted advertisements than her male opponent. 16 out of her 19 (84%) advertisements had at least one element of a female-targeted advertisement. However, Mark Pryor, the male Democratic candidate, incorporated a similar amount of social and women’s issues in his campaign. 25 out of his 31 (81%) advertisements included at least one aspect of a female-targeted ad. His slightly percentage is lower, but both Pryor and Hagan had the same median score, indicating that they had very similar levels of female-targeted advertising.

Issues

Both Democratic candidates highlighted “compassion” and women’s issues much more than their Republican opponents. In the North Carolina race, Kay Hagan brought issues such as education, Social Security, and women’s issues like reproductive health and equal pay to the forefront of her campaign. Her most popular issues were education and family, which were both mentioned in 7 advertisements. Education alone was the dominant focus in 5 ads. Equal pay and women’s reproductive health also had multiple mentions, at 2 and 4 respectively, and 2 of her advertisements focused solely on women’s reproductive health.

Democrat Mark Pryor, like Hagan, embraced a variety of “compassion” and women’s issues. His range of these issues was even larger than Hagan’s. In his ads, he talked about education, family, Social Security/Medicare, health care, senior citizens, domestic violence, equal pay, and childcare. His most popular mentions was of Social Security/Medicare, which was focused on in 12 of his advertisements, followed by domestic violence, childcare, senior citizens,

and health care, which each received attention in 6 ads, and then equal pay which was discussed in 4 ads. Clearly, both Democrats Pryor and Hagan campaigned heavily on “compassion” issues and women’s issues to target female voters, and so I do not have any evidence to support my hypothesis that female candidates are more likely to target female voters.

On the other side, Republican Thom Tillis tried to take the focus away from social issues and prioritized attacking the Obama administration, mentioning President Obama in almost all of his advertisements in order to benefit from the president’s unpopularity. Education and family were the only “compassion” issues that Tillis incorporated into his campaign. Education was only brought up to be used as a defense to Hagan’s attacks on his record handling these issues, evident by the way these issues were introduced in his ads. In his ad “PTA,” Tillis begins by reacting to Hagan’s previously aired ads: “One of my first elections happened in a public school: President of the PTA. Senator Hagan’s ads don’t tell you that. Her whole campaign is built on falsehoods.” Furthermore, Tillis did not once mention any women’s issue. The fact that he only campaigned on a “compassion” issue as a defensive strategy might support the idea that male candidates increase their focus on these issues when faced with a female candidate who emphasizes them in her campaign (Dolan 2005, Fox 1997).

Republican Tom Cotton had elements of a female-targeted ad in most of his advertisements, but like Tillis, focused most of his ads on Pryor’s ties to President Obama. Five of his advertisements brought up Social Security/Medicare, three incorporated family, and senior citizens and health care each received two mentions. The only mention of a women’s issue was one ad that touched on childcare. Unlike Tillis, Cotton incorporated “compassion” issues into his campaign without being on the defense. The opposing strategy of Tillis and Cotton’s campaigns

runs in contradiction to existing theories that male candidates are more likely to focus on these types of issues when faced with a female candidate, so I cannot credit Tillis's own defensive behavior to the gender of his opponent.

Additionally, the issue priorities in each race were different, which provides support for Sapiro's (2011) assertion that candidates, in addition to selecting issues that highlight their strengths, base their agenda on what they believe is also important to the constituents. In North Carolina, education was a central issue, and both candidates dedicated a significant proportion of their messaging to education. In Arkansas, Social Security was a major topic for both candidates. Interestingly, neither Republican candidate ever addressed a woman's issue that their Democratic opponent repeatedly attacked them on. The most striking example is the issue of domestic violence in the Arkansas race. Democrat Mark Pryor mentioned domestic violence in six of his advertisements and dedicated three full ads to attacking Republican Tom Cotton on the issue, but Cotton never released a rebuttal or mentioned the issue in any of his ads. This also lends support to Abbe's (2003) agenda-setting theory, which states that candidates will try to set the agenda for the campaign by selecting issues that highlight their strengths and their opponent's weakness. It could also suggest that another way to set the campaign's agenda is to ignore attacks that the candidate is not willing to discuss, or it could be that Cotton was simply unwilling to discuss the particular issue of domestic violence.

Furthermore, while all candidates had some focus on "compassion" issues, both of the Republican candidates linked their Democratic opponent to President Obama in many of their advertisements as a main strategy, and also talked more about foreign policy, the federal budget, and taxes, while the Democratic candidates focused more on "compassion" and women's issues.

This indicates two things. First, party differences are the determining factor between differences in messaging rather than gender, and second, in line with Abbe's (2003) agenda-setting theory, Republicans are more comfortable discussing issues dealing with foreign policy and the federal budget whereas Democrats prefer highlighting social issues.

Overall, the Democratic candidates both had a similarly high focus on "compassion" and women's issues, and the Republican candidates had similarly low focus on these issues. These findings support the theory that Democrats are more enthusiastic about "compassion" and women's issues (Bratton, et al. 1999). They also support the agenda-setting theory, which states that candidates will seek to craft an agenda that tailors to voter perceptions of issue competence (Abbe, et al. 2003). Democrats are perceived to handle social and women's issues better, and so they are more likely to campaign on them (Miller, et al. 2000). The issues each candidate chose to focus on provided support for Sapiro's (2011) theory that issue importance to constituents is also a factor in how candidates craft their agenda. And lastly, my findings show that gender has little to do with issue focus and agenda setting. Political party is the best indicator for campaign strategy.

Appeals

Both Democratic candidates also incorporated more representatives of "compassion" and women's issues than did the Republican candidates. Included in Hagan's ads were people identifying themselves as a teacher, student, mother, or women's health care doctor to talk about a particular issue, and most of the speakers were women. Representatives of both sexes appeared in 7 of her 19 advertisements. Again, if this finding stood alone, it would indicate that female

candidates are more likely to target female voters. However, both Mark Pryor and Tom Cotton incorporated issue representatives of both sexes, so it cannot be used to support my hypothesis. Pryor used representatives of social and women's issues in 12 of his 31 ads and Cotton used them in 9 of his 25. All three of these candidates had a spokesperson for a "compassion" or women's issue in about a third of their advertisements.

Tillis did not have any representatives in his advertisements. This further runs contrary to the idea that male candidates are more likely to emphasize "compassion" and women's issues when faced with a female candidate, because Cotton had senior citizens and family members in his advertisements when faced with a male candidate, and Tillis had no spokespeople at all when faced with a female candidate.

Hagan and Pryor used a female speaker in about two thirds of their ads, and Cotton had a female narrate a third of his ads. Tillis, however, only included a female speaker in one of his ads. Because having a female narrator is an indicator of a female-targeted ad, this adds further support to the theory that political party is a stronger factor in predicting which candidates will target female voters. Both Democrats had a majority of their ads narrated by a woman, while the Republican candidates had a majority of their ads narrated by men.

Candidate Traits

I found that, regardless of party, all three male candidates made attempts to humanize themselves and appear humble, caring, and gentle. Efforts to humanize themselves were made through descriptions of their family-oriented backgrounds and feminine character traits.

Tillis often mentioned his background and upbringing to paint himself as a humble man who worked hard to achieve his success. He talked about his background as a newspaper delivery boy and as president of his local Parent Teacher Association. In one ad, he also talked about the need for a Senator with a “conscience” and reminded voters that neither he nor Hagan is a bad person.

Cotton, like Tillis, emphasized his own background and upbringing. He brought in one of his parents or his wife in seven advertisements to stress his humble beginnings and family values. His highest scoring ad uses his mother to talk about Social Security, senior citizens, and family values. He also made a point to convey to voters that he is an understanding, caring, and sensitive person. Another advertisement dedicated to this message talked about Cotton’s acceptance of his wife’s dog and ended with Cotton saying, “I approve this message, and I do love puppies.”

Mark Pryor similarly utilizes this strategy. He attempted to paint himself as a man with family values and a sensitive side. Pryor has two advertisements, “North Star” and “Heart,” where he talks about how much his faith means to him and guides him in his decision-making. After declaring his faith and devotion to the Bible, he says, “This is who I am and what I believe.” Another ad describes him as a politician who “listens to us and hears our concerns.” Pryor wanted voters to think of him as caring, honest, and gentle. His father appears with him in another ad to discuss Pryor’s battle with cancer, and Pryor says, “My family and my faith helped me through the rough times.” In this ad, he attempts to highlight the importance of family and faith to his personal life to make him more likable to voters.

The fact that Cotton and Pryor are running against each other, but still put so much emphasis on these traits normally associated with femininity, demonstrates that it is not necessarily the presence of a female candidate that causes male candidates to humanize themselves to the voters. Therefore, attempts by Tillis to appear humble and caring cannot be attributed to the fact that his opponent was a female. Additionally, the three male candidates are tailoring these appeals to their southern audience by emphasizing their faith and humble roots, so this could also be interpreted as a cultural appeal rather than a gendered strategy.

While the three male candidates emphasized feminine traits, Kay Hagan did not capitalize on gender stereotypes in terms of her image and background. She did not make many attempts to personalize herself or talk about her own family and upbringing. She instead dedicated an entire ad called “Punches” to painting herself as a tough, strong candidate. In the ad, she described how special interest groups are attacking her and said, “I am tough enough to keep taking the punches.” She then went on to describe how she “fights” and “stands up for” North Carolinians. In another ad, she discussed the threat of terrorists and described herself as “clear and decisive,” and supportive of “aggressive tactics to eradicate them.” These findings support previous studies from Fridkin (2009) and Huddy (1993), which have found that female candidates make a conscious effort to appear more aggressive and strong in order to gain broader support.

Overall, I found that all the candidates made an effort to demonstrate characteristics not typically associated with their gender, regardless of the gender of their opponent. The three male candidates made it a point to portray themselves as humble, caring, and kind, all traits associated with femininity. Hagan, however, emphasized more masculine traits like being tough, strong, and assertive. She did not highlight feminine traits in any of her advertisements. While this finding

supports Fridkin's (2009) theory that female candidates want to fight against gender stereotypes, these findings also suggests that this also applies to male candidates. Regardless of the gender of their opponent, candidates want to present themselves as having characteristics not stereotypically associated with their gender.

Conclusion

I began with three hypotheses: 1) Female candidates run on "compassion" and women's issues more than male candidates, 2) Female candidates target female voters more than male candidates, and 3) A race between a male and female candidate will include more "compassion" and women's issues than a race between two male candidates. I compared two competitive Senate races, one in North Carolina with a female Democrat and male Republican, and one in Arkansas with a male Democrat and male Republican, to determine whether or not my hypotheses would hold up. Through this comparison, I found that all three predictions were unsupported. Instead, my findings pointed me to a very different conclusion: Political party, not gender, is the biggest predictor of issue agenda and strategy. First, Democrats, not necessarily women, are more likely to run on "compassion" and women's issues. Second, Democrats are more likely to target female voters. And third, a race between any two candidates regardless of gender includes a similar amount of "compassion" and women's issues if one of the candidates is a Democrat.

I was unable to support my first two hypotheses because, while I found that the female candidate in my study did indeed highlight more "compassion" and women's issues in her campaign and target female voters more heavily than her male opponent, the male Democrat

emphasized these issues just as strongly and targeted female voters just as heavily. My third hypothesis was unsupported because while there were many “compassion” and women’s issues incorporated into the North Carolina race with a female and male candidate, there were a similar amount of “compassion” and women’s issues in the Arkansas race with two male candidates. These findings support the conclusions of Dolan (2005), Hayes (2011), Brians (2005), and Swers (1998), who all argue that party differences are more significant and influential than gender differences.

My findings also lend support to the idea that party differences incorporate gendered undertones. If gender does play a part, they are evident only in polarization of the political parties, not necessarily in the candidates. So, altogether, my findings suggest that partisan differences are stronger than gender differences of candidates in campaign strategy. An implication of these findings is that candidates and campaign strategists have deemed gender stereotypes not significantly influential in voter perception of candidates, suggesting that female political candidates are being increasingly normalized in the political world. Instead of focusing on their own gender, Democratic candidates, regardless of gender, need to prove their toughness or strength, while Republicans, regardless of gender, need to demonstrate that they are sensitive and caring. It would be interesting to next examine how another variable like race affects campaign strategy, and to see if party stereotypes trump racial stereotypes, or if assumptions about race are stronger than ones about gender.

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