



Is there cross-national evidence that voters prefer men as party leaders? No

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ABSTRACT

To what extent does party leaders' sex influence how voters evaluate them? Despite a burgeoning literature on gendered biases and institutional barriers that women face in politics, this question has received little systematic attention. We address this question using the first large-scale cross-national analysis of voters' party leadership evaluations. Using three waves of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) from 1996 to 2016, we find that voters evaluate female party leaders more positively than male party leaders. In addition, we find a gender affinity effect exists for female but not male respondents. These findings have important implications for the study of party leadership and women in politics as well as practical implications for political parties considering promotions and leadership contests.

1. Introduction

Party leaders play an outsized role in shaping parties, candidate selection, and voters' perceptions, often outweighing the role of local candidates in influencing vote choice. In fact, there is a recent body of work that suggests that leaders are more important than previously thought when it comes to shaping both political behaviour and attitudes (Garzia, 2012; Costa and Silva, 2015; Silva and Costa, 2019). Men have disproportionately occupied positions of political leadership for decades and the concept of leadership itself is inherently intertwined with gendered assumptions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, research on party leadership evaluation has largely focused on seemingly gender-neutral factors such as partisanship, personality traits, and contextual factors (Garzia, 2012; Bittner, 2015, 2018; Formichelli, 2015). However, as the number of women in political office and positions of leadership has markedly increased in recent years, studies have started examining how gender affects recruitment of women, access to party leadership, and voters' evaluation of electoral candidates (O'Brien, 2015; Bell and Kaufmann, 2015; Butler and Preece, 2016; Ladam et al., 2018; Schwindt-Bayer et al., 2017). Considering these recent trends, the intertwined nature of gender and leadership, as well as the importance of party leaders, we set out to examine the role of sex in how voters evaluate party leaders.

There is a surprising amount of ambiguity regarding the effect of politicians' gender¹ on citizens' preferences. Some studies on gender bias and institutional barriers suggest that women face an uphill bat-

tle, not only in becoming party leaders but also in retaining the position (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2011; O'Brien, 2015). Others suggest that gender is less important for citizens when evaluating candidates or deciding who to vote for (Dolan, 2010, 2014; Hayes, 2011; Sevi et al., 2018). Others find that while there is no outright bias or hostility, voters' preferences for traditional household profiles limits women's political opportunities (Teele et al., 2018). Research on the importance of activation of gender stereotypes (Bauer, 2015) would suggest female party leaders are at a disadvantage in the context of the gendered discussions surrounding leadership evaluations. While more recent research indicates that feminine stereotypes and partisanship jointly influence voters' perceptions (Bauer, 2018).

Studies on the evaluation of women as politicians and leaders have almost exclusively been single country or relatively small comparative case studies (Hayes and Ian McAllister, 1997; Smith et al., 2007; Dolan, 2014; Barnes et al., 2016) and we have little systematic cross-national evidence regarding the role that sex and gender play for voters' evaluation of politicians. Combined with different ways of operationalizing the concept of candidate evaluations this results in an inconclusive empirical picture. We offer a solution to this problem by using a standardized like-dislike scale. This enables us to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference in how citizens evaluate leaders of different sex over multiple elections and countries. We contribute to the literature by filling this gap with a cross-national analysis of the effects of a leader's sex on voters' evaluation of them. To our knowledge, a cross-national study on this topic has not been done before on this scale.

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Using three waves of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) from 1996 to 2016, we find that citizens evaluate female party leaders more positively than male party leaders. In addition to this, we find a gap in how female and male respondents evaluate leaders, with the preference for female leaders being more pronounced for women. To contextualize these findings, we present this research note. We first assess the literature on leaders and then more specifically how this intersects with gender politics. Based on this we then develop our expectations. Second, we discuss our data and methodological approach. Finally, we place our contribution within the wider literature on public opinion and offer some suggestions for future research.

2. Leader evaluations and sex

Evaluating political leaders can be a relatively easy cognitive task. There is a well-established literature in psychology on person perception that highlights the use of stereotyping: targets are not just judged on their own merits but based on preconceived ideas (Bittner, 2011; Ellemers, 2018). In politics, citizens' evaluations of leaders are intertwined with their political affinities. The strong correlation between how an individual identifies with or evaluates a party demonstrates the extent to which this informs evaluation of the party's leader (Schoen, 2007; Garzia, 2012). Studies also show that there are factors beyond the party that are important, even though they are usually shown to have less predictive power. These include, but are not limited to: leaders' personality traits, demographic factors, and election and country-specific effects (Bittner, 2011; Garzia, 2012; Laustsen and Bor, 2017).

Turning to the literature on gender more specifically, a substantial body of work suggests that voters ascribe different stereotypical characteristics and policy preferences to female and male political candidates and officeholders. Voters view women generally as more honest, compassionate, expressive, and better equipped to work with constituents than men. However, voters perceive men as more decisive, stronger leaders, more competent, and better able to handle crises (Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Dolan, 2010, 2014; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993a; Lawless, 2004, 2009; Paul and Smith, 2008). Additionally, voters frequently evaluate women who defy their traditional feminine role expectations more negatively (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Gervais and Amy Hillard, 2011; Eggers et al., 2018). On top of this, recent research suggests that voters do not necessarily ascribe positive feminine stereotypes, such as empathy, to female politicians while also denying them stereotypical male qualities (Schneider and Bos, 2013). Combined, this presents female politicians with a catch-22 of gendered leadership expectations.

An important aspect of gendered stereotypes of women politicians is that voters support or oppose a particular candidate based on assumed abilities and competencies inherent to female and male candidates. Voters' gender stereotypes contribute to their refusal to see women candidates as possessing the appropriate skills and policy interests to be leaders (Alexander and Andersen, 1993; Fox and Smith, 1998; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993b; Lawless, 2004). This is particularly relevant for issues of security, foreign affairs, and defense, in which the public scrutinizes women more heavily and men continue to occupy the most powerful positions (Barnes and O'Brien, 2018; Lawless, 2004; Towns and Niklasson, 2016). These issues activate gender stereotypes associating male politicians

with 'leadership', which in turn can negatively impact voters' evaluations of female politicians (Bauer, 2015).

There are no consistent findings regarding a gender affinity effect for male voters, however, numerous studies provide evidence that female respondents generally prefer female politicians (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 2004; Briens, 2005). For instance, a recent study from the US by Barnes et al. shows that female Democratic respondents viewed female Democratic challengers more favourably (2016, p.40). Comparative research also demonstrates an alignment on issues between female voters and representatives in Sub-Saharan Africa (Clayton et al., 2019a, 2019b). However, this affinity effect is not applicable in all cases. There is evidence that it is limited by partisan loyalty. Dolan shows that whilst female respondents feel more positively about female candidates from their own party than men do, this does not transfer to their feelings about candidates from the opposite party (Dolan, 2008). On the role of partisanship in conjunction with gender stereotypes, Bauer (2018) shows it plays a role in evaluations of female candidates as Democratic female candidates receive more favorable evaluations and Republican female candidates more critical ones.

The literature on the influence of gender stereotypes on evaluating political candidates is ambiguous. There is a strong argument that gendered biases and institutional barriers impede women's advancement in politics, which a number of studies support (O'Brien, 2015; Lawless, 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993b). Yet, there is also the recent body of work that challenges these findings suggesting that partisanship is more important than gender in explaining voters' electoral decisions (Dolan, 2010, 2014). Recent research demonstrates that partisanship and the activation of gender stereotypes play important roles in shaping voters' perception of female candidates (Bauer, 2015, 2018). This picture is further complicated when evaluating leadership, which is associated with preconceived gendered notions of who is suited to be a leader.

Much of what we know about evaluations based on sex comes from the US, as evidenced above (Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Dolan 2004, 2008; Briens, 2005; Bauer, 2018). This is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, the US tends to have much higher levels of partisanship than most other democracies (Lupu, 2015) with signs that this is increasing (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). Secondly, in presidential systems such as the US, individuals are often more important electorally than in parliamentary systems (Curtice and Lisi, 2015). Given this, it is difficult to generalize from a US-specific perspective the impact of leaders' sex on how voters evaluate them. Recent work has expanded beyond the US to examine how gender affects electoral politics in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa (Clayton et al., 2019a, 2019b; Schwindt-Bayer et al., 2017). Building on these recent efforts we contribute an important cross-national perspective in this paper.

Before outlining our expectations it is worth noting that we do not expect sex to explain a large part of the variation in how people evaluate party leaders. We acknowledge that, as previous studies have found, how people view a party is the biggest determinant of how they view the leader of that party (Bittner, 2011). Nonetheless, there is enough evidence from studies that focus on both sex of leader and sex of respondent to suggest that both play a role in party leader evaluations. The disproportionate number of male compared to female leaders has been well noted. Equally, almost all legislatures in the world have a majority of men (UN Women, 2019). As such, this disparity is so great that it is likely that citizens are socialized to notice differences based on sex. Coupled with entrenched gender stereotypes, we hypothesize sex will have an effect on how leaders are evaluated. Despite research showing gender playing an inconsequential role for voters' electoral decisions compared to partisanship (Dolan, 2010, 2014) we hypothesize that asking voters to

¹ We define gender as the broad spectrum of personal expressions relating to socially constructed ideas about biological sex and acknowledge the inadequacy of thinking in binary terms. However, given the paucity of information on both politicians and respondents' gender identification our discussion centers on cis-gendered men and women as identified through the CSES.

evaluate leadership activates gendered stereotypes which put female leaders at a disadvantage. In short, we propose it is likely that voters view female party leaders less favourably than their male counterparts.

3. Data and methods

We use three waves of the CSES covering the time period between 1996 and 2016 to identify trends in leader evaluation across countries. Our analysis includes 133 elections from 50 countries, displayed in Table 1. The CSES is a dataset composed of post-election surveys administered in a wide range of democracies asking a common set of questions. As such, this dataset is well-suited for the pur-

Table 1
Countries and elections included in study.

Country	Election Years
Argentina	2015
Australia	1996, 2007, 2013
Austria	2013
Belarus	2001
Brazil	2006, 2010, 2014
Bulgaria	2014
Canada	1997, 2008, 2011, 2015
Chile	2009
Croatia	2007
Czech Republic	1996, 2006, 2010, 2013
Denmark	1998, 2007
Estonia	2011
Finland	2007, 2011, 2015
France	2007, 2012
Germany	1998, 2005, 2009, 2013
Greece	2009, 2012, 2015
Hong Kong	1998, 2000, 2012
Hungary	1998
Iceland	1999, 2007, 2009, 2013
Ireland	2007
Israel	1996, 2006, 2013
Japan	2007, 2013
Kenya	2013
Latvia	2010, 2011, 2014
Lithuania	1997
Mexico	1997, 2000, 2006, 2009, 2012
Montenegro	2012
Netherlands	1998, 2006, 2010
New Zealand	1996, 2008, 2011, 2014
Norway	1997, 2005, 2009, 2013
Peru	2011, 2016
Philippines	2010, 2016
Poland	1997, 2005, 2007, 2011
Portugal	2009, 2015
Romania	1996, 2009, 2012, 2014
Russia	1999
Serbia	2012
Slovakia	2010, 2016
Slovenia	1996, 2008
South Africa	2009, 2014
South Korea	2000, 2008, 2012
Spain	1996, 2000, 2008
Sweden	1998
Taiwan	1996, 2006, 2014
Thailand	2007
Turkey	2011, 2015
Ukraine	1998
United Kingdom	1997, 2015
United States	2008, 2012
Uruguay	2009

pose of this study because it presents uniform measures across time and location, enabling us to directly compare leadership evaluations as well as other measures of political attitudes and demographic characteristics in a variety of political contexts.

To measure leader evaluations across countries and party families, we have 'stacked' the dataset so that each respondent appears as many times as the number of leaders in that particular election (Eijk and Franklin, 1996). This means that countries where there are fewer leaders are underrepresented in the dataset, but it enables an analysis of grouped leader evaluations. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for all variables included in the study. It shows, as expected, that the vast majority of leaders who stand in elections are men, at a rate of 84%. The sample contains 552 leaders who are men and 106 leaders who are women. Gender has been coded independently for each election, so this count measures leader-election pairs rather than individual leaders. Additionally, on average, men constitute 74% of the seats in legislatures included in this study.

3.1. Dependent variable

For the dependent variable, the CSES has one question on leader evaluation for all countries, which measures how much respondents like a candidate on a scale of 0–10 where '0 means you strongly dislike that candidate and 10 means that you strongly like that candidate'.

3.2. Independent variable and controls

Our key independent variable is *Leader Male*. This is a binary variable measuring whether the leader is a man (1) or a woman (0). Following this, we employ controls that have been used in previous studies and shown to be determinants of leader evaluations.

First, we have included four measures of association with a leader's party. *Party Evaluation*, like *Leader Evaluation*, is a like-dislike scale and captures short-term attitudes towards a party. *Party ID* measures the strength of respondents' identity and is captured by a question that asks the degree of closeness a respondent feels towards a particular party. The higher the score the closer a respondent feels, from not at all close to extremely close. This variable captures attitudes that tend to be more long-term. With *Proximity* we measure a respondent's ideological placement on left-right scale subtracted from their placement of the leader's party on the same scale. This variable is then recoded so that 0 signifies no proximity and 10 total proximity. Finally, *Party Extremism* measures how ideologically extreme respondents believe a party to be from 0 to 5. As there is evi-

Table 2
Descriptive statistics.

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Leader Evaluation	656,496	4.50	2.98	0	10
Leader Male	656,496	0.84	0.38	0	1
Respondent Male	656,496	0.52	0.50	0	1
Party Evaluation	656,496	4.37	2.96	0	10
Party ID	656,496	1.21	0.64	1	4
Proximity	656,496	7.10	2.55	0	10
Party Extremism	656,496	2.41	1.72	0	5
Age	656,496	47.36	16.82	15	102
Education	656,496	2.27	1.19	0	4
Gender Imbalance	649,587	26.68	10.89	5.9	47.3
Gender Quota	656,496	0.19	0.40	0	1
Electoral System	656,496	2.08	0.59	1	3
ENP	509,009	4.05	1.19	2.11	7.84
Election Year	656,496	2007.42	6.02	1996	2016

dence that female leaders often come from smaller parties, this variable is intended as a proxy for how mainstream a party is (O'Brien, 2015). The higher the score the more the party is deemed to deviate from the political centre-ground.

Secondly, we control for a variety of demographic characteristics. *Respondent Male* measures whether a respondent has identified as a man (1) or a woman (0). This is primarily included to uncover whether there is a gender affinity effect: do respondents prefer leaders of the same gender as them? *Education* is a scale that measures the level of formal schooling a respondent has received, from none to university level. We also control for *Age*, measured in years. Both are ubiquitously used when modelling the determinants of behaviour and attitudes towards leaders (see Blais et al., 2000; Karvonen, 2010; van Holsteyn et al., 2010; Garzia, 2013; Daoust et al., 2019) Although studies have shown demographic effects to be limited, there is some evidence that older and more educated respondents view leaders more favourably (Bittner, 2011; Tverdova, 2010).

Thirdly, we control for relevant contextual effects. *Gender Imbalance* represents the degree of gender parity in a country's legislature in any given election year by measuring the percentage of female politicians. This accounts for how common it is for a country to elect female politicians. For this we have used data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union which collects data on parliaments across the world. *Gender Quota* is a binary variable that measures whether a country legislates for a minimum requirement of the proportion of female members in its legislature. This has been added to the dataset using the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's gender quota database. Several studies show both variables to have an impact on political attitudes and behaviour regarding political candidates of

different sex (Karp and Banducci, 2008; Clayton, 2014; Górecki and Kukołowicz, 2014).

Finally, we control for *Electoral System*, the effective number of parties (*ENP*), and *Election Year*. Again, these have been shown to alter attitudes towards leaders (Curtice and Lisi, 2015; Daoust et al., 2019), and as a result it is important to take them into account when modelling the potential effects of leaders' sex in order to rule out alternative explanations.

4. Results

To model our analysis, we use multilevel mixed effects linear regression in order to account for cross-national variation but also due to the nature of the stacked dataset. Our approach gives due weight to within-respondent variation (Schakel, 2013) which is important given that we are testing for whether respondents make different choices dependent on a leader's sex. This is a three-level model where observations are nested in respondents, which in turn are nested in countries (Aaldering, 2018). Model 1 includes just individual-level variables, model 2 adds contextual variables, and model 3 adds an interaction between *Respondent Male* and *Leader Male*. There is a 23% reduction in sample size for models 2 and 3 due to lack of data for the *ENP* variable.

As expected, in Table 3, the sex of a leader does have an impact on how respondents evaluate them, and the coefficient is significant at the 0.001 level. Interestingly, our results indicate that voters evaluate women leaders more positively than men. At first glance, this finding seems to contradict the substantial literature documenting challenges women face in politics (Bauer, 2015, 2018; Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2011; O'Brien, 2015). Our results suggest that respondents are predicted to evaluate men more negatively at a magnitude of 0.08 on the scale of 0–10. Considering that we account

Table 3
Determinants of leader evaluations, mixed effects hierarchical regression.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Individual Level						
Intercept	1.24***	(0.04)	2.76	(1.74)	2.88	(1.74)
Leader Male	-0.08***	(0.01)	-0.12***	(0.01)	-0.20***	(0.01)
Respondent Male	-0.01	(0.001)	-0.008	(0.01)	-0.13***	(0.01)
Leader Male x Respondent Male					0.15***	(0.01)
Party Evaluation	0.71***	(0.001)	0.72***	(0.001)	0.72***	(0.001)
Party ID	0.25***	(0.004)	0.24***	(0.005)	0.24***	(0.005)
Proximity	0.10***	(0.001)	0.08***	(0.001)	0.08***	(0.001)
Party Extremism	0.03***	(0.002)	0.02***	(0.002)	0.02***	(0.002)
Age	0.003***	(0.0002)	0.004***	(0.0002)	0.004***	(0.0002)
Education	-0.01*	(0.003)	0.003	(0.003)	0.002	(0.003)
Country Level						
Gender Imbalance			-0.01***	(0.001)	-0.01***	(0.001)
Gender Quota			-0.24***	(0.02)	-0.24***	(0.02)
Electoral System						
Proportional			-0.01	(0.15)	-0.01	(0.15)
Mixed			-0.27	(0.20)	-0.27	(0.20)
ENP			-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.01)
Election Year			-0.001	(0.001)	-0.001	(0.001)
Random Effects						
Intercept (Level 2)	0.37	(0.004)	0.33	(0.004)	0.33	(0.004)
Intercept (Level 3)	0.09	(0.02)	0.09	(0.02)	0.09	(0.02)
Residual	3.06	(0.01)	2.94	(0.01)	2.94	(0.01)
Model Fit						
Log Likelihood	-1329741.5		-1018917.8		-1018852.2	
ICC (Level 2)	0.13		0.12		0.12	
ICC (Level 3)	0.03		0.03		0.03	
Observations	656,496		509,009		509,009	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Standard errors in parenthesis. Reference category for electoral system is majoritarian.

for party evaluation, identity, and ideological proximity here, and how important they usually are when people form political attitudes, this has at least two implications. First, although the effect size is small, respondents do see a difference between male and female leaders and evaluate them accordingly. Second, it supports previous research that finds factors beyond partisanship play a role in how voters form attitudes about party leaders.

As expected, the variables that measure an individual's attitudes towards a party, whether through evaluation, identification, or ideological proximity are all significant. The more closely a respondent identifies with a leader's party, the more likely they are to view that leader favourably. It is clear, therefore, that leaders are still largely associated with the party they represent.

Controlling for contextual variables in model 2 has little effect on the coefficients included in model 1. There is some change in the coefficient for *Leader Male* from -0.08 to -0.12 . All other variables that were significant in the first model remain so and in the same direction, apart from education. This suggests that this pattern exists across different countries even when accounting for fluctuations in political context.

The results concerning gender are contrary to our expectations. One possible explanation for our finding is what is commonly referred to as the *gender affinity effect* - the notion that female voters are more likely to support female candidates (Dolan, 2008; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill, 2011). A related explanation could be that female party leaders are perceived as role models for women (Ladam et al., 2018), which leads to more positive evaluations from them. To examine this possibility, in model 3, we analyze the interaction between sex of party leader, *Leader Male*, and sex of respondent, *Respondent Male*.

We find a significant and positive interaction effect indicating that female respondents evaluate female leaders more positively. This can be seen in Fig. 1, which displays the predictive margins of a leader's sex on how they are evaluated. Both sexes evaluate women more highly than men. However, the difference between male respondents' predicted evaluation of a male leader compared to a female leader is much smaller than that of a female respondent, though still statistically significant. In short, this suggests a gender affinity effect, which results in voters viewing female leaders more favourably than male leaders overall. This indicates our overall results capture a real phenomenon and not a statistical artefact, because the break down by male and female respondent indicates gender affinity is driving the results. The results also show that this affinity effect does not drop off even when we control for partisanship and indicators of the level of gender parity in politics such as quotas, legislatures' gender ratios, and year of election.

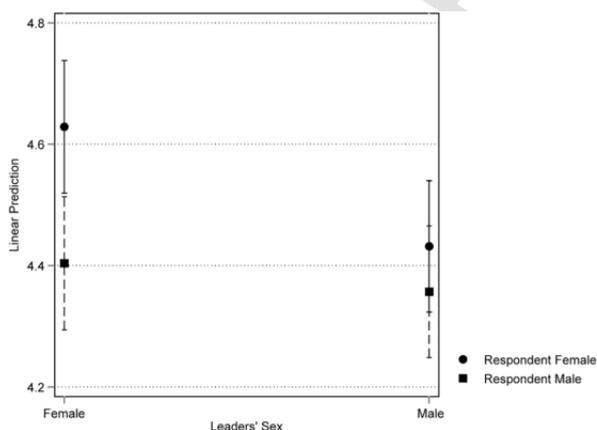


Fig. 1. Predicted leader evaluation score by Leaders' Sex.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Party leaders shape their parties' positions, policies, candidate selection, strategy, and public image (Aldrich, 2018). Parties' fate is often directly tied to their leaders' popularity and leaders of major parties often aspire to lead the national government. Notwithstanding the inherent importance of this position, only a few studies have examined its gendered nature. A substantial body of literature, anecdotal, and case study evidence suggests that women leaders have to face and overcome numerous societal and institutional obstacles to succeed in politics - gendered stereotypes about leadership being just one of them. In this research note, we present the counterintuitive finding that voters actually evaluate women party leaders more positively than men. The effect size is small, suggesting that further research is needed to understand how this impacts electoral politics.

There are reasons to suspect that there is variation between countries and regions. For example, voters have elected six women to lead Latin American countries (Schwindt-Bayer and Reyes-Housholder, 2017) and the most recent Finnish election brought about a five-party coalition government in which women lead each of the five parties (North, 2019). Meanwhile other countries and regions are lagging behind, for example, it was not until Hillary Clinton's nomination in 2016 that a woman had been the nominee for a major political party in the US. These regional differences likely contribute to the differences in leadership evaluations. To unpack the average cross-national effect we find, future research should include single-country analysis and case study comparison that moves beyond the US. That being said, coupled with a gender affinity finding, we are confident to conclude that voters differentiate leaders based on their sex and there is no cross-national evidence that they prefer men. Simultaneously, given the gendered nature of political institutions and leadership, we do not make claims regarding voters' preferences for or against 'masculine' leadership.

Using the CSES data covering 50 countries from 1996 to 2016, we find that voters evaluate women party leaders more positively than men and that women largely drive this effect. There are several reasons why women might be more likely to favor leaders of the same sex. These include: group solidarity, increased focus on certain issues, and a desire for more descriptive representation (Dolan, 2008). In future research, we will further investigate both the role gender affinity plays and the importance of role model effects (Ladam et al., 2018).

Considering the substantial body of research documenting gender biases against women in politics, our results seem counterintuitive. In light of our contrary expectations, we tentatively propose a three-fold theoretical explanation for our findings: First, we would argue voters evaluate women party leaders more positively because women are perceived to prioritize social welfare spending and 'everyday issues' such as health care, poverty reduction, and women's rights (Bolzendahl and Brooks, 2007; Clayton et al., 2019a, 2019b). Second, we would contend voters recognize that women have to be exceptional to become party leaders (Anzia and Berry, 2011; Fulton, 2012), whereas men can afford to be mediocre, which is why voters evaluate women leaders more positively than men. Based on the observed interaction effect we hypothesize that gender affinity plays a substantial role in these two explanations (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007; Ladam et al., 2018). Third, voters might evaluate women party leaders more positively because they perceive women party leaders as less corrupt (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019) and a legitimizing presence in party politics (Clayton et al., 2019a, 2019b). Building on the empirical findings presented in this research note, we will pursue this theoretical puzzle in future research to delineate the causal mechanism at work and examine the extent to which each of these potential theoretical arguments helps us ex-

plain this intriguing finding. Future research should also investigate the link between political knowledge and evaluations based on sex. One potential limitation of our findings is that we cannot be completely certain that respondents always know the sex of the leader they are evaluating. We know from previous research that respondents are still inclined to comment on leaders whom they say they know nothing (Blais et al., 2000). Therefore, future research should also aim towards a comparative approach that uses datasets with comparable questions on knowledge about particular leaders without losing a wide-ranging large-n perspective.

Generally, the findings underscore the need for continued research on gender, political parties, and leadership. There is a substantial body of research on women as individual candidates and members of the legislative and executive branch. However, parties and party leaders play an outsized role in determining who runs and occupies which office, including cabinet and prime minister positions. The close link between party leaders and parties reinforces the importance of voters' evaluations of party leaders. This study contributes to our understanding of these dynamics and suggests that parties might benefit from selecting more women as leaders.

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