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Pantsuits and Public Opinion: An Analysis of Media Coverage of U.S. Female Political Candidates

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Abstract

Although women comprise over half of the population of the United States, they are vastly underrepresented in all levels of American government. This paper seeks a possible explanation for the small number of females in American political leadership positions. Some scholars have suggested that media portrays female candidates negatively, which influences public opinion negatively. This paper examines the extent to which this is the case, analyzing articles about Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Nikki Haley, Wendy Davis, and their male opponents from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* for examples of media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes. In this paper, I also analyze public opinion polls concerning perceived electability and likability of the candidates to gauge public opinion. My analysis finds examples of media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes in every article about the female candidates, and that these were applied to female candidates at higher rates than to their male counterparts. Additionally, for Clinton, Palin, and Davis, perceived electability and likability decreased over time. Media about Haley contained the fewest examples of negative media portrayal and her poll numbers were more positive.

Introduction

In America, women only hold between 15 and 25 percent of the offices at any level of government (Wolbrecht, Beckwith, and Baldez 2000, 2), and there is reason to believe that female representation in government will not increase in the near future because voter bias against female candidates has increased in recent years (Heldman and Wade 2011, 161). Many scholars suggest that the way that the media portrays female political candidates may negatively influence public opinion of female candidates, which may explain why women occupy so few political leadership roles in America.

With these facts in mind, the focus of this paper will be on the media coverage of female political candidates and public opinion. My research question is twofold: First, how does the media portray female political candidates, and second, how does the media portrayal of female candidates affect public opinion? To answer these questions I will examine theories of media bias, media framing, and reporting using gender stereotypes to explain how the media portrays female political candidates. I will then look at public opinion theory to explain how media framing, media bias, and use of gender stereotypes in reporting on female political candidates influences public opinion of the media consumers. My analysis will combine media theory and public opinion theory to find out if media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes are used in media coverage of female political candidates and how this influences public opinion of female candidates.

Finding an answer to these questions is important because if people are aware of the ways the media portrays female candidates they can be more informed consumers, and this may change public opinion of female candidates. If there is a relationship between media portrayal of female candidates and negative public opinion about those candidates, then media portrayal may

be a part of the reason why female candidates are often not seen as electable and likeable. This paper will argue that the media use framing, bias, and gender stereotypes to portray female candidates negatively, which negatively affects public opinion of female candidates.

Literature Review

Media Theory

Scholars differ in their views of how the media portrays women candidates. There are three dominant theories in the field that explain ways in which the media covers female candidates differently than male candidates. These theories are media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes. Media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes can be used independently and together by the media to send important messages to the readers or viewers about the news subject.

Media Framing

Some scholars believe that media framing influences the way that female candidates are portrayed in the media, though scholars rely on different definitions of gendered media framing. Burke and Mazzarella define media framing as the overall discourse in news stories that construct meaning about a particular issue (2008, 397). Media frames organize the world for reporters and news readers (Burke and Mazarella 2008, 397). They also found that media frames can be used to "gender" news, which means making gender a focus of news coverage (Burke and Mazarella 2008, 396). Framing uses language, placement, repetition, and source selection to promote a gendered view of news subjects (Burke and Mazarella 2008, 402).

Devitt defines media framing as "journalistic descriptions embedded in news stories to create different depictions of news subjects" (2002). This definition of media framing is the one that will be used in this paper because it focuses on news subjects, and this paper will focus on female candidates as news subjects. Several frames can appear in the same story because media

frames sometimes only affect a certain element in a news story (Devitt 2002). Media framing can be evaluated as a way to research the differences in media coverage of male and female political candidates (Devitt 2002).

Media use several techniques of framing when reporting on female political candidates. One method of media framing in coverage of female political candidates that many scholars have written about is that the media are more likely to include personal information in their stories about female candidates than male candidates. The media are more likely to include personal information about female candidates and omit information about their status and power (Burke and Mazarella 208, 396). Research shows that the media are more likely to include information about female candidates' gender, marital status, children, age, personality and appearance than male candidates (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 240). Another study suggests that newspaper readers are more likely to read about female candidates' personality or appearance and male candidates' stance on policy issues (Devitt 2002). The coverage of female candidates' personalities and physical attributes that are unrelated to the position they are running for is so common that female candidates and scholars who have studied them have named it the "hair, hemlines, and husbands" problem or the "lipstick watch" (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 63).

Along with increased media coverage of female political candidates' personal information, there is also reduced media coverage of female candidates' positions on policy issues. When female candidates receive issue coverage, the media tends to focus on "female issues", such as family planning, education or healthcare (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 240). Other studies have found that there is often less media coverage of female candidates' positions on policy issues, even though female politicians often focus their campaign around policy issues (Devitt 2002).

Language choice is another tool used in media framing that scholars argue can influence female candidates' political campaigns and election outcomes. Verb choice is one way that the media frames female candidates differently (Burke and Mazarella 2008, 399). Reporters are more likely to use speech verbs that contain emotional overtones when describing female candidates. These verbs are seen by the viewers as more negative and aggressive. For example, female politicians are often described as "attacking", "complaining", "shrieking" and "boasting" more than male candidates (Burke and Mazarella 399).

The choice of name by which the media refers to female candidates is also a method of media framing using language choice. Reporters often refer to female candidates by their first names rather than their formal titles (Uscinski and Goren 2011, 886). The choice to refer to female candidates by their first names shows bias by the reporters because doing so detracts from female candidates' power and legitimacy and undermines their authority (Uscinski and Goren 885-886). Certain government titles are commonly associated with men, so by neglecting to refer to female candidates by their formal titles, the media are reinforcing the stereotype that men are more fit for government leadership. Studies have shown that people feel that female candidates are inferior when they are only referred to by their first name (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 12).

Another way that media framing by language choice can affect female political candidates' campaigns is the "novelty" frame. Reporters use the "novelty" frame by focusing on the uniqueness of a woman running for political office (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 119). It is a common framing technique for the media to report on the novelty of a woman trying to achieve political power (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 38). Every woman who ran for president before Hillary Clinton was referred to as a first. This observation was often not true, and it also

conveyed to voters that it is unusual for a female to run for president and there is not a good chance of female candidates winning (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 38).

One final way that some scholars believe that media framing through language choice occurs is through calling them "women candidates". Many journals and media sources refer to female candidates specifically as "women candidates." The fact that the media refers specifically to "women candidates" shows that candidate sex is important only if they are a woman (Dolan 2004, 153). It is very rare that the media would refer specifically to a man as a "male candidate". This further reinforces the idea that male political leaders are the norm.

Media Bias

Along with media framing, media bias can affect the media portrayal of female candidates and public opinion. Media bias can occur any time media displays a pervasive pattern of prejudice. Media bias can occur in terms of race, sex, religion, nationality, or other similar factors. Media bias can include individual news stories, commentators, or news outlets exhibiting pervasive patterns of sexism or other prejudice (Lawrence and Rosen 2010, 14).

One indicator of media bias against female political candidates is providing different volumes of coverage for male and female candidates. Many scholars have conducted studies that found that female political candidates receive less media coverage than male candidates (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 240). Also, races with male candidates receive more media attention than races with female candidates (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, 185). Other scholars argue that volume of coverage differs depending on the type of race. One study found that female gubernatorial candidates receive about the same amount of coverage as male candidates (Devitt 2002). Another study found that female candidates for governor received more media coverage than male candidates, but the coverage they received was focused on their viability, appearance,

personality, and marital status (Bahwart, Bystrom and Robertson 2003). A different study found that female candidates for Senate receive less media coverage than male candidates for Senate (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 119). Kahn found that the differences between male and female media coverage was greater in senate races, but female candidates still received less coverage than male candidates in gubernatorial races (1994, 154). Lawrence and Rose found that female candidates in general receive less media attention than male candidates (2010, 59).

Media coverage that focuses on female candidates' viability is another form of media bias against female candidates. A lot of coverage that female candidates receive in the media revolves around their electoral viability (Atkeson and Krebs 2008). Male political candidates are often portrayed by the media as being more competitive candidates with a greater chance of winning, while female candidates are portrayed as being less competitive candidates with a low chance of electoral victory (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 188). Kahn found that in Senate races, the media tends to focus on female candidates' viability more than their male counterparts (1994, 154). Lawrence and Rose also found that female presidential candidates are often covered as "losers" (2010, 5). The majority of scholars believe that media tends to cover female candidates' viability negatively, but some scholars believe that there is not a viability bias against women (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 119). Another study found that in the coverage of primary elections, female candidates' viability was evaluated equally with male candidates (Bahwart, Bystrom and Robertson 2003).

A lot of the scholarship finds that the media depicts female candidates more negatively in general. Female candidates are more likely to be covered negatively by the media based on their gender. This is known as a negative gender distinction, which is a reference to one's gender that is described as a hindrance (Devitt 2002). The coverage of female candidates tends to be

negative, emphasizing their low chances of electoral victory (Bahwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2003).

<u>Reporting Using Gender Stereotypes</u>

Another way that the media reports differently on female political candidates is describing them using gender stereotypes. There are two main categories of gender stereotypes: gender-belief stereotypes and gender-trait stereotypes. Gender-belief stereotypes are beliefs that genders have different positions on policy issues (Dolan 2004, 8). The media often reports that female candidates are better at handling "feminine issues," such as healthcare, education, and women's rights issues (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 239). Male candidates are portrayed as being better able to handle "masculine issues," such as foreign policy and crime (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 239). When journalists report on male and female candidates using these gender stereotypes, it advantages male candidates because they are described as having the "masculine" traits that are traditionally associated with the leadership role, such as strength, rationality, and independence (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 239). Gender-belief stereotyping disadvantages female candidates among voters who believe that crime or economic issues are the most important because female candidates are typically not portrayed by the media as being able to handle these types of issues (Dolan 2004, 153).

Many scholars believe that the media uses gender stereotypes in their reporting when reporting on the characteristics of male and female candidates. Gender-trait stereotypes are stereotypes of gender personality traits. Male candidates are portrayed as being more viable, a stronger leader, and better able to deal with military issues. Female candidates are portrayed as being more compassionate and better able to deal with health issues (Kahn 1992, 208). . The media portrays male candidates as being able to handle the "tough issues" like economy and

foreign policy, while women are better at dealing with the "compassion" domestic policy issues like education and welfare (Devitt 2002). Male candidates are portrayed as strong, while female candidates are portrayed as sensitive (Devitt 2002).

Another form of gender stereotyping in reporting is objectification. Heldman and Wade define objectification as "a strong emphasis placed on women's appearance (2011, 156). Heflick and Goldenberg define objectification as "making a person into an object, devoid of humanity (2011, 150)." People that are objectified are not seen as being competent, capable of a full emotional range or moral capacity (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 150). They argue that female objectification is increasingly common in the United States, which has led to its normalization (Heldman and Wade 2011, 157). Female political candidates are often objectified by the media (Heldman and Wade 2011, 161).

Public Opinion Theory

Public opinion theory explains how the media portrayal of female political candidates influences public opinion of media consumers. There is some debate in the field as to the extent that media influences public opinion and also how media influences public opinion. Many scholars argue that media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes leads to different coverage of female candidates and male candidates. They argue that this different coverage ultimately disadvantages female candidates because it negatively influences public opinion on female candidates. Other scholars argue that the different coverage of female candidates has no effect on public opinion or may even cause a more positive public opinion of female candidates.

There is a great deal of literature explaining the substantial impact that media has on public opinion. Schlehofer writes the media has a strong priming effect on people's' attitudes and

opinions on political candidates (2011, 70). The media has the power to shape voter's opinions

of candidates, so if the media portrays a candidate favorably it is more likely that people will

vote for that candidate (Schlehofer 2011, 71). Because most voters will not get a chance to meet

political candidates in person, they rely on the media to inform them about candidates (Kahn

1994, 154).

The media has an especially large impact on influencing voters' perceptions of female

candidates. The way that the media covers male and female candidates differently influences the

success of female candidates' campaigns (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 180). Studies have shown

that the media influences the information that voters get about candidates and the way that voters

evaluate candidates (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 181). The media often uses stereotypes when

covering male and female candidates, which leads to differences in coverage. This leads people

to evaluate male and female candidates differently, which often leads to a harsher evaluation of

female candidates (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 181).

<u>Media Framing</u>

The media theory literature explained that media framing of female political candidates

manifests itself in greater coverage of female candidate's personal information and decreased

coverage of female candidate's positions on policy issues. Public opinion theorists argue that

media framing in the form of an increased ratio of personal to issue coverage influences public

opinion about female candidates. The media's focus on female candidates' personal information

and appearance has an important impact on voter evaluations of female candidates. Studies have

found that focusing on female candidate's' appearance leads some people to view them as less

competent, less likeable, and less trustworthy (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 150). Perceived

competence and integrity are important to voters when choosing which candidate to vote for.

These perceptions can be influenced by focusing on appearance (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 152).

Heflick and Goldenberg argue that in America women's value is determined by their appearance, while men's are not (2011, 152). They cite research that found that people judged candidates' competence by looking at their appearance, and these judgments predicted their voting behavior (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 152). The research also found that people choose who to vote for based on their perceptions of the candidate's' moral character and values (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 153). The reduced perceptions of competence and trustworthiness caused by a focus on women candidates' appearances influenced voter's choice to not vote for the female candidates (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 153).

There are several other theories concerning the effect of media framing through the increased personal coverage and decreased issue coverage on female candidates' campaigns and public opinion. Burke and Mazarella argue that without knowledge of a candidate's positions on policy issues, the public has no basis for determining whether the candidate is qualified for office (2008, 398). Devitt agrees with this view, arguing that by focusing on a female candidates' clothes or marital status, the media may cause the public to lack an understanding of where she stands on policy issues or if she is qualified for political office at all (2002). Atkenson and Krebs argue that the increased coverage of female candidates personal issues and decreased coverage of policy positions has a negative effect on female candidates' campaigns because it may cause voters to see gender as the main consideration in evaluating the female candidate rather than her position on policy issues (2008, 240). Kahn and Goldberg found that the lack of policy issue coverage of female candidates may lead voters to rely on female candidates' personalities and viability when evaluating them rather than their position on policy issues (1991, 191). Other

scholars found that the media's emphasis on female candidates' personalities leads many female candidates to avoid displaying emotion during their campaigns because they believe that the media will cover any show of emotion as being stereotypically feminine and weak (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 63).

Another form of media framing discussed by media theorists is a difference in volume of coverage for male and female candidates. Many scholars argue that there is a greater volume of media coverage for male candidates than female candidates, especially at lower levels of political office. Public opinion theorists argue that the difference in volume of media coverage for male and female candidates has consequences for public opinion and voter behavior. Atkeson and Krebs argue that the low volume of media coverage for women makes it more difficult for voters to recognize female candidates. Voters rarely vote for a candidate that they do not recognize, so voters will be less likely to vote for female candidates that they have not heard about in the media (Atkeson and Krebs 2008, 186). Other scholars argue that if voters cannot recognize a candidate, they will rely on perceived viability when choosing who to vote for (O'Connor 2001, 81).

Media Bias

Media theory explains that there are several forms of media bias used in the reporting on female political candidates. Public opinion theorists argue that media bias in the reporting of female candidates influences public opinion about those candidates. Media bias occurs when female candidates' viability is reported on more negatively than male candidates. There are consequences to the media's negative coverage of female candidates' viability. The negative media coverage of female candidates' viability may lead voters to negatively evaluate female

candidates and their chances of winning the election, serving as an obstacle to electoral victory (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 196).

An overall negative depiction is another form of media bias in the reporting on female political candidates. Public opinion scholars argue that there are negative consequences to public opinion of female candidates when media bias causes them to be depicted negatively. Studies have found that the ability to offer at least one favorable comment about a candidate has a large impact on voter choice. People are more likely to vote for a candidate if they can name something favorable about them (O'Connor 2001, 93). Watching television news coverage increases the chances of viewers being able to name something favorable about a male candidate. However, female candidates do not receive this same benefit from media coverage, which disadvantages female candidates (O'Connor 2001, 94).

<u>Gender Stereotypes</u>

The media often reports on female candidates using gender stereotypes. These gender stereotypes of male and female candidates' traits and characters have a large influence on public opinion and voter behavior. Research has shown that relying on the media's portrayal of gender stereotypes for female candidates may be an influencing factor in the decision to vote against them(Dolan 2004, 9). Voters often rely on the media's stereotypical portrayal of female candidates, especially when they lack other information about the candidates (O'Connor 2001, 80). Studies have shown that people believe that a good politician should have "masculine" traits (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 116). Masculine traits are deemed even more important as the level of race rises from local to national (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 116).

Female candidates that are portrayed as being stereotypically feminine would lose the support of some voters who think that male traits are necessary for political leadership

(Lawrence and Rose 2010, 33). One study found that female candidates are perceived as less qualified than male candidates, even if they have the same credentials. The media typically portrays male candidates as having greater expertise, even when that is not the case (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 35). A 2000 study found that one-third of respondents believed that "there are general characteristics about women that make them less qualified to serve as president, and 51 percent of people in this study also believed that a man would do a better job in a time of crisis (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 34).

While many scholars argue that reporting on female candidates correlates with negative public opinion, some scholars argue that there can be positives to media gender stereotyping for female candidates. Kahn and Goldberg argue that in races that involve female candidates, the media may spend more time reporting on the "feminine" compassion issues. This will may lead voters to think that these issues are more important and evaluate female candidates more positively (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, 194). Other scholars have also found that women candidates are portrayed as being better at handling issues like sexual harassment, abortion and women's rights. When these issues are deemed as important in an election, this may advantage female candidates, especially among women voters (Wolbrecht, Beckwith and Baldez 2008, 116). Also, female candidates are sometimes stereotyped by the media as being more interested in honest government than male candidates, so this can cause voters who hold honest government as a priority to vote for female candidates (Dolan 2004, 9).

Debate

Many scholars use the theories of media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes to study negative portrayal of female political candidates by the media. However, there is some debate as to the degree of discrimination against female political candidates in the

media, or if it is even happening at all. One scholar critiqued the idea of objectification put forth by Heflick and Goldenberg. He wrote that coverage of political campaigns tends to focus on appearance for both female and male candidates (Budesheim 2011, 166). He cites a study of media covering the 2000 campaigns for U.S. Senate and governor that found that men and women were equally likely to be discussed in terms of appearance, personality, warmth, and competence, and they had an equal volume of coverage to male candidates (Budesheim 2011, 166). However, the study cited by Budesheim found that female candidates were more likely to have the media refer to their children, marital status and their gender than the male candidates. Budesheim also argued that once women choose to run for office, they are just as likely to be elected as men. He argues that even though Sarah Palin was subject to more mentions of her appearance than her male counterparts, it is because she was an atypical candidate and received a lot of media coverage in general.

I argue that Budesheim misses the point in many ways. Even the study that he cited showed that female candidates were subject to reporting using gender stereotypes. The female candidates in that study were also subject to media framing in the form of a higher ratio of personal coverage than the male candidates. Arguing that female candidates will have as great a chance of winning as male candidates may be misguided. It is impossible to know how many capable women decided not to run for office because of fear of the way that the media would report on them. Also, the argument that women are as likely to win elections does not explain why there are so few women holding political office compared to men. The study cited in the critique also focuses on lower levels of offices, and research has shown the levels of media bias against female political candidates rises as the level of office rises.

Another media study conducted by Hayes and Lawless found that women did not receive more hostile media coverage than men (2015, 95). They argue that factors such as a candidates' incumbency, partisanship, and ideology have more of an influence on voter behavior than sex (Hayes and Lawless 2015, 95). Although this study would seem contrary to the other research, it is not focusing on the type of candidate I will be analyzing. The study focused on local newspaper coverage of female House of Representative candidates in 2010. I will be examining female candidates running for a higher level of office, which research states are subject to more prejudice based on sex. I will also be examining mainstream media, which does not include local newspapers. The study conducted by Hayes and Lawless also stated that male and female candidates received the same amount of issue coverage, however it did not account for the fact that the issues covered may have been decided because of the candidates' gender. The authors even state that there is only one other analysis of media covering female candidates that found the same results (that candidate sex does not affect voter choice) (Hayes and Lawless 2015, 106). They also state that female candidates competing for higher-level offices would be subject to more sexism and stereotypes than local newspapers (Hayes and Lawless 2015, 107). Incumbency and partisanship do influence voter behavior. I am not arguing that they do not. I am arguing that sexist media coverage is one important factor in influencing public opinion.

Although there is a critique of the idea that media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes are used to disadvantage female candidates in the media, these arguments are shortsighted; an overwhelming majority of scholars argue that media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes are often used in media coverage to disadvantage female candidates, so these are valid theories with which to answer my research questions. In this paper, I will not be trying to settle the debate because most scholars agree that media framing, media bias, and gender

stereotypes occur in media coverage of female candidates and can have negative effects on public opinion. I will be applying these theories to contemporary political races to see if they are true in the media coverage of those races.

Analytic Framework

In order to evaluate how the media portrays female political candidates and how the media portrayal of female political candidates affects public opinion, I will be conducting an analysis of media and public opinion polls. In order to analyze the media, there are several important variables I will be looking for in the articles about the female political candidates. Drawing on the literature, the main variables of this paper are media framing, media bias, gender stereotypes, and public opinion.

Media Variables

This paper will define media framing as journalistic descriptions embedded in news stories to create different depictions of news subjects (Devitt 2002). This definition of media framing is the one that will be used in this paper because it focuses on news subjects, and this paper will focus on female candidates as news subjects. There are several different indicators of media framing that I will be looking for in the news articles. One of the indicators of media framing is the ratio of personal coverage to issue coverage in a piece. Personal coverage includes information about the candidate's gender, marital status, children, age, personality, and appearance. Issue coverage includes information about the candidate's position on political policy issues.

A second indicator of media framing is language choice. This paper will use verb choice as an indicator of media framing. Media framing occurs when reporters use speech verbs containing emotional overtones when describing female candidates. Examples include

"attacking", "complaining", or "boasting". Another indicator of media framing by language choice is describing female candidates using sexist terms, such as shrill, feisty, frumpy, bitch, spinster, emotional, bossy, or unpleasant. These terms are defined as sexist by this paper because they are very rarely used to describe male candidates, and they are associated with a stereotypically negative aspect of being female. Media framing by language choice also occurs when female candidates are referred to by their first names rather than by their formal titles. Lastly, the novelty frame will be used as an indicator of media framing. The novelty frame focuses on the uniqueness of a woman running for political office and is used when reporters report on female candidates as a "first" or mention the small number of female candidates that have preceded a candidate.

Another variable that will be used in this paper to analyze media coverage is media bias. This paper defines media bias as individual news stories, commentators, or news outlets exhibiting pervasive patterns of sexism or other prejudice (Lawrence and Rose 2010, 14). Media bias will be analyzed in terms of sexism because it allows an analysis of how media bias is used against female candidates in a way that it is not used against male candidates. One indicator of media bias is negative mentions of female candidate's viability. An example of this is portraying female candidates as less competitive candidates with lower chances of electoral victory than a male opponent. Negative mentions of viability also include covering female candidates as if they have already lost the election before the election takes place. An overall negative depiction of female candidates is another indicator of media bias. An overall negative depiction includes negative gender distinction, which describes female candidates' gender as a hindrance. An example of this would be a report stating that a female candidate's emotional feminine nature would make her unfit to lead in a time of crisis. An overall negative depiction also occurs when

there are more negative than positive mentions of a female candidate in an article. Negative

coverage includes describing a female candidate as unlikable or unelectable. Positive coverage

includes describing a female candidate as likeable and highlighting her chances of electoral

victory.

Gender stereotypes in reporting are another variable I used in this paper. Lawrence and

Rose offer the following definition of gender stereotypes in reporting:

> When reporters use gender stereotypes, they attribute to men and women different tendencies, characteristics and areas of competence. The gendering of media is evident whenever there is criticism of a candidate's gender attributes-when a candidate is criticized for behaving in a way that is unfitting of her sex or when she is criticized for behavior that is insufficiently masculine for the presidency. Because our culture expects that femininity implies a certain set of assumptions, gender bias is present when the media draw critical attention to a candidate for having either confirmed gender stereotypes or having strayed too far from gender norms. (2010, 13)

There are several indicators that I will use in my analysis to identify reporting using gender

stereotypes. One indicator of reporting using gender stereotypes is when gendered mediation is

used. Gendered mediation is the idea that "political media coverage reflects men's traditional

dominance of political life and, in turn, implies that women in politics are atypical and their very

presence needs to be softened, minimized, or trivialized"(Kaneva and Ibroscheva 2014, 3).

Examples of gendered mediation in reporting include when female candidates are

underrepresented in political media and when female candidates' positions on traditionally

masculine issues, such as the economy or the military are not represented in the media.

Role congruity theory explains an additional indicator of gender stereotypes in reporting.

This theory states that people are evaluated positively when their characteristics are consistent

with their social roles. When a person's behavior does not match their social roles, this may lead

to prejudice. Role congruity theory suggests that female political candidates may face prejudice

because their female gender role does not match the leader role, which is usually seen as male (Gervais and Hillard 2011, 233). Examples of role congruity theory include when Hillary Clinton is chastised for the "unfeminine" wearing of pants suits or advocating for war or when Sarah Palin is chastised for being "too feminine" for the political leader role because she is a "hockey mom" who dresses femininely.

Objectification is also an indicator of gender stereotypes in reporting. The definition of objectification is a "strong emphasis placed on a woman's appearance, making a person into an object devoid of humanity" (Heflick and Goldenberg 2011, 150). Objectification occurs when there is a focus on a specific body part of a female candidate (examples: bad hair, nice legs, etc.) rather than a focus on the candidate as a whole person with agency and ideas.

The use of gender-belief stereotypes in reporting are an indicator of reporting using gender stereotypes. Gender-belief stereotypes are beliefs that genders have different positions on policy issues (Dolan 2004, 8). An example of reporting using gender-belief stereotypes is the media reporting that female candidates are better at handling "feminine issues" such as healthcare, education and women's rights. Domestic issues, especially issues dealing with children or caring, such as education or healthcare, are stereotypically associated with femininity. Male candidates are portrayed at being better able to handle "masculine issues" such as foreign policy, crime, and the economy. Foreign policy issues and issues that are seen as requiring a "tough" leader, such as crime or military, are stereotypically associated with masculinity.

Use of gender-trait stereotypes in reporting are another indicator of reporting using gender stereotypes. Gender-trait stereotypes are stereotypes of gender personality traits (Kahn 1992, 208). Reporting using gender-trait stereotypes occurs when reporters use stereotypical

masculine personality traits to describe male candidates and stereotypical feminine personality traits to describe female candidates. Examples of stereotypical masculine personality traits include independent, non-emotional, aggressive, competitive, strong, active, self-confident, hard, and aggressive. Examples of stereotypical feminine personality traits include dependent, emotional, passive, sensitive, quiet, innocent, weak, nurturing, soft, submissive, and accepting.

Public Opinion

The last variable to be defined is public opinion. For the purposes of this paper, I define public opinion as an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of the community. In this paper, public opinion will be gauged using polls concerning the female political candidates' perceived likability and electability. This paper seeks to evaluate media framing, media bias and gender stereotypes in media coverage of female candidates and how this relates to negative opinions of likability and electability for the female candidates. A chart explaining information about all the variables to be examined in this paper, their definitions and indicators can be found in Table 1 in the appendix.

Methods

This paper will be a comparative case study, analyzing the media coverage of four female political candidates: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Nikki Haley, and Wendy Davis in their respective runs for office. The media coverage of these candidates will also be compared to their male opponents, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Vincent Sheheen and Greg Abbott. Hillary Clinton was competing to be the Democratic nominee for president in 2008. Her opponent, Barack Obama, ended up winning the primary in a competitive race. Barack Obama faced John McCain in the 2008 presidential election. McCain chose former Alaskan governor Sarah Palin as his running mate. Coverage of Palin quickly saturated the media. The 2008 vice presidential debate

between Sarah Palin and Joe Biden had a record number of viewers. Tina Fey's impersonations

of Palin became a favorite feature on Saturday Night Live. Nikki Haley became the first non-

white, female governor of South Carolina when she beat opponent Vincent Sheheen in 2009. An

eleven-hour-long filibuster catapulted Texas State Senator Wendy Davis into the spotlight. She

used her momentum to run for governor of Texas in 2014. Davis ended up losing to opponent

Greg Abbott.

These cases were chosen because all of the female candidates are prominent political

figures, so it was possible to find a lot of media coverage about them. Hillary Clinton and Sarah

Palin both ran against male candidates in 2008. This will allow an examination of the difference

between Clinton and Palin and their male counterparts. The fact that Clinton and Palin were

running in the same year also controls for the affect different presidential races might have on

opinion. Media coverage of Nikki Haley and Wendy Davis will be examined to see if there is a

difference in the coverage of female political candidates at different levels of political office. The

literature stated that there is more negative bias against female candidates at higher levels of

political office, so comparing two national candidates with two gubernatorial candidates will

allow this paper to see if there is in fact more bias at higher levels of political office. I am also

comparing two Democratic candidates and two Republican candidates in this paper. This way, I

can control for differences in opinion that stem from party differences among voters.

For my media analysis, I will be analyzing ten articles each for Hillary Clinton, Sarah

Palin, Nikki Haley, and Wendy Davis. I will also be analyzing ten articles each for their male

opponents, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Vincent Sheheen, and Greg Abbott. Five articles for each

candidate will come from *The New York Times*, and five articles for each candidate will come

from *The Washington Post*. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were chosen because

The New York Times is one of the largest newspapers in America both in terms of circulation and readership, and *The Washington Post* is the premier newspaper for political reporting. Articles were randomly selected. For Clinton and Palin, I conducted a search on the database LexisNexis. The candidate's name was searched within a set period of time of a major campaign event, in this case I chose periods of time around debates. Every fifth article was selected for analysis from the generated list of articles. For Haley and Davis, I also conducted a search on LexisNexis using their names. However, the set period of time for the gubernatorial candidates was from the announcement of their candidacy to election because there were fewer articles about them in general. Then every third article was selected for analysis. Articles about the male opponents were found by searching their names in LexisNexis using the same time frame as their female opponents. From the generated list of articles about Obama, Biden, and Abbott, I selected every third article for analysis. I selected all of the articles in order about Vincent Sheheen because there were only six articles generated from the *New York Times* search and five total articles generated from the *Washington Post* search.

I read and analyzed each article for ratio of personal to issue coverage, verb choice, sexist terms, referring to candidate by first name, novelty frame, negative mentions of viability, overall negative depiction, gendered mediation, role congruity, objectification, gender belief stereotypes, and gender trait stereotypes. See Appendix A for a complete list of variables and operationalized indicators. I recorded the number of occurrences of each variable in each article on an excel spreadsheet. Then I calculated the percentage of articles that each variable occurred in per candidate, per state races, per national races, and in total.

Public opinion polls concerning the electability and likability of Clinton, Palin, Haley, and Davis will be analyzed to discover public opinion. This will be a mixed-method analysis

including qualitative and quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis will be used to analyze the polls. Qualitative analysis will be used to examine the media for ratio of personal to issue coverage, verb choice, describing the candidates' using sexist terms, referring to female candidates by their first names, use of the novelty frame, negative mentions of viability, an overall negative depiction and reporting using gender stereotypes. The indicators of these variables can be found in Table 1 in the appendix.

My analysis of media coverage of four female candidates, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Wendy Davis, and Nikki Haley, will combine media theory and public opinion to examine how the media covers female political candidates and how that coverage influences public opinion. If the media theory proves to be true, then my analysis will find that media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes will be used in the coverage of female political candidates. We will see a greater volume of personal coverage and a decreased amount of policy issue coverage for the candidates. I would also expect to see a difference in verb choice when reporting on female candidates, female candidates being described by sexist terms, female candidates being referred to by their first names more than male candidates, and the novelty frame used when describing female candidates' campaigns. I also expect to see media bias in the coverage of the four candidates including less coverage of female candidates (especially at the state level), negative coverage of the female candidates' viability and an overall negative depiction of the female candidates. If the literature holds true, I also expect to see gender stereotypes used when reporting on female candidates.

If the public opinion literature holds true, I expect to see a connection between the media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes used in reporting on the female candidates and negative trends in likeability and electability polls. I hypothesize that if media framing, media

bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes occur over a period of time in media coverage of the female candidates, then the candidates perceived likability and electability will decrease over the same period of time. The greater amount of personal coverage of the female candidates should connect with the candidates being seen as less competent, and therefore less electable. The decreased volume of issue coverage for the female candidates should also lead to a decrease in perceived electability because people don't want to elect someone if they can't figure out their position on policy issues. The use of the novelty frame and the use of the female candidates'' first names should also lead to decreased perceived electability because they could lead to female candidates being seen as less serious competitors. The smaller volume of coverage for the female candidates at the state level should also lead to decreased perceived electability because people do not want to vote for someone that they don't know. I would also expect to see the negative coverage of the female candidates' viability correlating with decreased perceived electability. I also expect to find that the overall negative depiction of the female candidates and the reporting using gender stereotypes will result in negative trends in electability and likeability.

Analysis

Hillary Clinton vs. Barack Obama

Hillary Clinton is arguably one of the most well-known female politicians. There has been a large volume of media coverage about her. After analyzing selected articles about Clinton, I found that the most common occurrence in coverage was overall negative depiction followed by higher ratio of personal to issue coverage and role congruity. There was an overall negative depiction of Clinton in sixty percent of the articles because they contained more negative than positive mentions (Traub 2007, Zeleny 2007, Bumiller 2007, Vargas 2007, "The Claim"). Overall negative depiction includes describing a candidate as unlikable or unelectable.

There were many articles that described Clinton as unlikable or as more unlikable than her opponent Barack Obama (Traub 2007, Iacoboni 2007, Vargas 2007). Because there was a higher ratio of personal to issue coverage in the articles about Clinton, there were several examples of different types of personal details. The most common example of personal coverage in these articles is mentions and details about Hillary Clinton's husband, Bill Clinton (Traub 2007, Vargas 2007, Balz 2007, "The Rules for Female Candidates"). Various articles talked about how Bill Clinton would influence his wife's campaign and possibly presidency (Traub 2007, Vargas 2007, Balz 2007). There was another article that was completely focused on Hillary Clinton's reactions to Bill Clinton's alleged affair with Monica Lewinsky (Burleigh 2007). The percentage of articles that included occurrences of my variables can be seen in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: News Coverage of Clinton and Obama
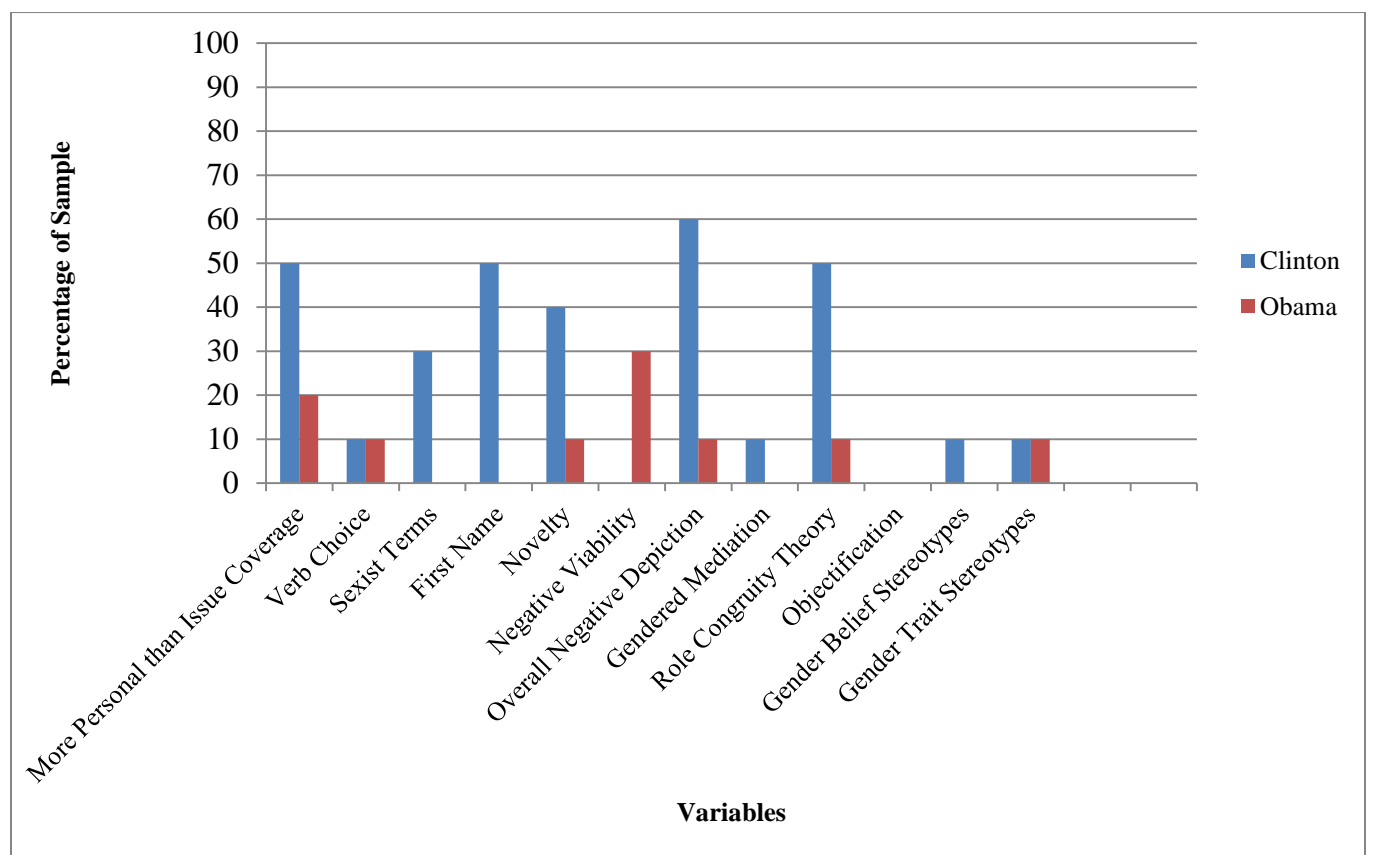
There were a few examples in speeches of verbs with emotional overtones used to describe Clinton. These include words like "lashed," "shot," and "mocked," all of which carry the connotation of the speaker being angry (Traub 2007). Sexist words used in the articles to describe Clinton include "cold fish" and "bimbo" (Burleigh 2007). In fifty percent of the articles analyzed, Clinton is referred to by her first name more often than her male counterpart. Forty percent of the articles analyzed used the novelty frame. That Clinton was the lone woman running for president was a fact often emphasized (Burleigh 2007).

Role congruity theory states that people are analyzed positively when their actions and personalities conform to their ascribed social roles and analyzed negatively when their actions and personalities do not conform to perceived social roles. For example, war is seen as masculine, so Clinton is criticized for supporting the Iraq War (Traub 2007). Clinton being taken to task in another article for complaining of mistreatment in a debate by male counterparts is further evidence of role congruity theory. In this case, Clinton's role as a woman protecting herself from male "aggressors" did not fit with the masculine leader role.

Examples of gender trait stereotypes and gender belief stereotypes are also found in the articles about Clinton. For example, an article that described Clinton as "very comfortable in the kitchen" reflects gender trait stereotyping (Bumiller 2007). In describing Clinton this way, the author relied on gender stereotypes that women are nurturing and the ones doing the cooking. Gender belief stereotyping implies that female candidates can only be focused on "feminine issues." We see one of the only articles that referred to any of Clinton's positions on policy issues, only mentioned women's issues (Burleigh 2007).

Hillary Clinton's opponent, Barack Obama, ended up winning the Democratic nomination and ultimately the presidency in 2008. A comparison of media coverage of Obama

and Clinton shows that media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes occurred in fewer articles about Obama then Clinton. Eight of the variables, higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, sexist terms, first name, novelty frame, overall negative depiction, gendered mediation, role congruity theory, and gender belief stereotypes occurred in a higher percentage of articles about Clinton than Obama. It is especially interesting to note that the novelty frame occurred in more articles about Clinton than Obama because even though Clinton would be the first female president, which is a novelty, Obama was the first African American president, which was also considered a novelty.

Two of the variables occurred in equal percentages of the articles covering Clinton and Obama: verb choice and gender trait stereotypes. It makes sense that speech verbs containing emotional overtones were used equally to describe Clinton and Obama because these verbs are often used to describe the speech of politicians regardless of gender. Although gender trait stereotyping occurred in an equal number of the articles about Clinton and Obama, I argue that gender trait stereotyping disadvantaged Clinton and advantaged Obama. Gender trait stereotyping was used to describe Clinton as "comfortable in the kitchen" (Bumiller 2007). This coverage likely disadvantaged Clinton because it may have led readers to believe that Clinton's proper place as a woman was in the home rather than in political office. Obama was described in one article as giving "fist bumps and male hugs" (Traub 2007). This is an example of gender trait stereotyping because it describes Obama as exhibiting traditionally male behavior. This would not disadvantage him because the role of president in America is traditionally seen as masculine, so Obama being described in traditionally masculine terms may lead readers to see him as fitting the president role. Only one variable, mentions of negative viability, occurred in more articles about Obama than Clinton. This can be explained by the fact that Clinton was leading Obama in

the polls at the time the articles were written. It is also worth mentioning that thirty percent of the articles about Obama contained no examples of media framing, media bias, and reporting using genders stereotypes, while all of the articles about Clinton contained at least one example.

The polling data concerning Clinton's perceived likability and electability match the predictions I made based on the effects of negative media portrayal of a candidate on public opinion. I analyzed articles about Clinton between the dates of October 30 and November 22, 2007. A Gallup poll taken between October 12 and 14, 2007 illustrates that the percentage of people rating Clinton as unfavorable was forty-four percent. The percentage of people rating Clinton as unfavorable rose to forty-five percent between November 2 and 4 2007 and rose again to fifty percent between November 30 and December 2 2007 ("Favorability: People in the News"). Clinton's perceived electability also decreased over time. A Gallup poll showed that twenty-nine percent of Democrats said that the main reason that they would not support Clinton is that they did not believe she could win a presidential election (Saad 2007). Perceived negative electability was the largest reason that the Democrats polled said that they would not support Clinton.

The fact that there were negative trends in perceived likability and electability for Clinton supports my hypothesis that negative media portrayal of female candidates may lead to negative public opinion. Based on the literature, there are several ways that the variables found by my media analysis could correlate with negative trends in perceived electability and likability. The increased ratio of personal to issue coverage for Clinton may have led readers to not be able to determine her position on policy issues and therefore find her less electable since people do not want to vote for someone if they do not know their position on the issues. The increased references to Clinton by her first name rather than her formal title compared to her male

counterpart could correlate with decreased perceptions of competence. The use of novelty frame

may have correlated to negative trends in perceived electability because the novelty frame can

cause decreased perceptions of viability for female candidates.

Sarah Palin vs. Joe Biden

Sarah Palin received a high volume of coverage both from real news sources and satirical

ones. An analysis of the articles about Palin found the most common occurrence in straight news

coverage was an overall negative depiction, followed by an increased ratio of personal to issue

coverage. Seventy percent of the articles about Palin contained more negative than positive

mentions. Negative mentions included referring to Palin as unintelligent, inexperienced, and

unqualified to be Vice President. Personal information about Palin in the articles included

information about her appearance (Leibovich 2008), her role as a mother (Herbert 2008, Ballz

2008), and her hobbies (Bosman 2008). Articles used verbs with emotional overtones to describe

Palin's speech including "scolding" (Shakes 2008) and "mocking" (Bacon 2008). Forty percent

of the articles described Palin using sexist terms including "perky" (Leibovich 2008, Shakes

2008), "bubbly" (Herbert 2008), "feisty and spirited" (Nagourney 2008), "airhead" and "mom-

next-door" (Shakes 2008). None of these words, or any similar words, were or used to describe

male candidates.

Although it may seem that Sarah Palin was constantly in the news in 2008, she was

actually underrepresented in some works of media. Gendered mediation occurs when females are

underrepresented in political media. This occurred in thirty percent of the articles about Palin. In

two articles about the 2008 vice presidential debate, Biden was mentioned more often than Palin

(Blow 2008, Schalet 2008). In another article about Palin's debate performance, John McCain

was mentioned more often than Palin (Nagourney 2008). An example of role congruity theory occurred in one article where the author questioned if Sarah Palin the "hockey mom" could even understand political issues (Herbert 2008). In this case, Palin was being criticized because her feminine mother role did not fit with the masculine role of president. Gender belief stereotyping occurred in forty percent of the articles because Palin's views were only included on political issues that are seen as traditionally feminine, including sexual assault, education, and contraception (Bosman 2008, Herbert 2008, Schalet 2008). Moreover, Palin's views on what are seen as masculine issues, such as military or the economy were not included in any of the articles. Gender trait stereotyping occurs when the media describes a female candidate using stereotypically feminine traits, and this occurred when Palin was described in one article as an airhead because women are stereotyped as being less serious than men (Shakes 2008). The results of the media analysis of articles about Sarah Palin and Joe Biden can be seen in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: News Coverage of Palin and Biden
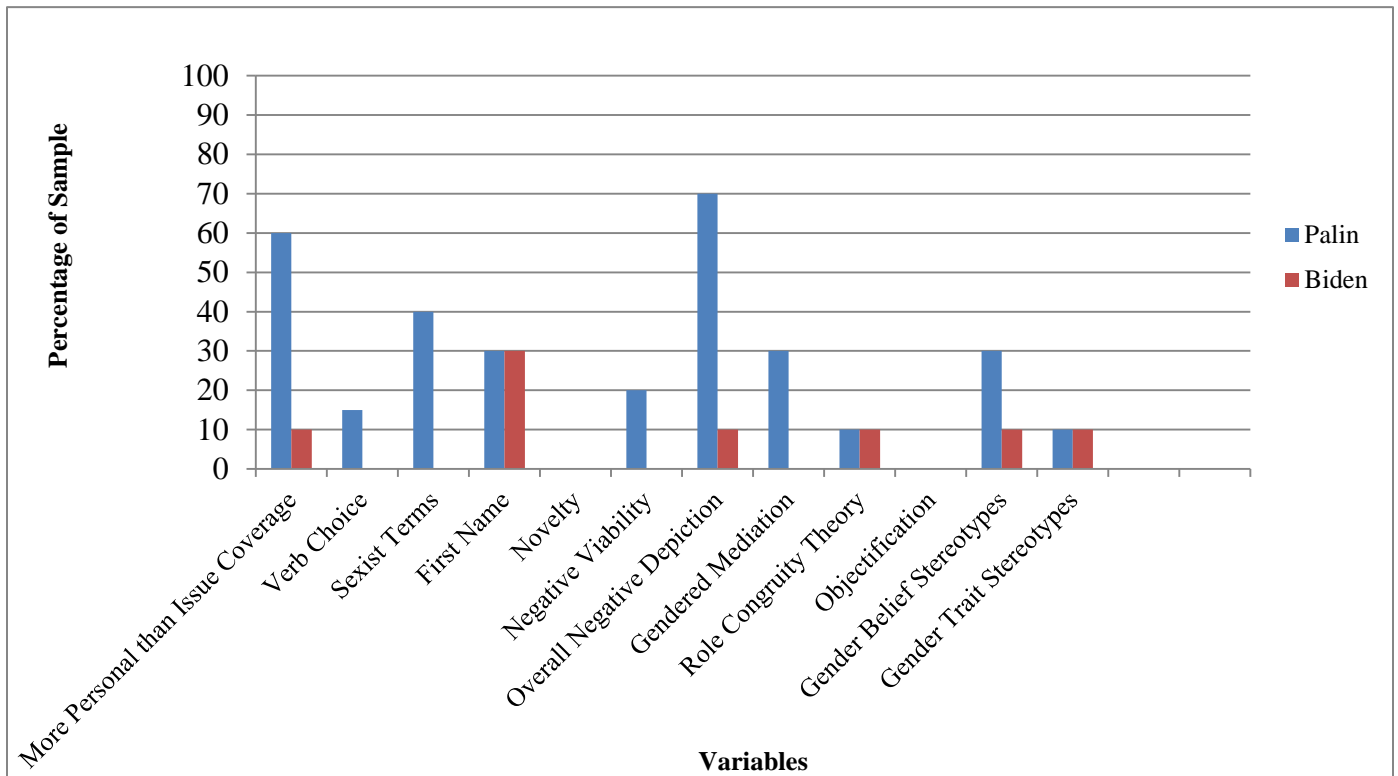
Joe Biden ultimately became the Vice President when Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008. This comparison of articles about Biden and Palin shows that seven of the variables of interest can be observed more often in articles about Palin than in articles about Biden. These variables are higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, verb choice, sexist terms, negative viability, overall negative depiction, gendered mediation, and gender belief stereotypes. Three variables-first name, role congruity theory, and gender trait stereotypes-occurred in equal numbers of articles for Palin and Biden. There may have been increased mentions of Biden's first name because I searched for articles around the time frame of the vice presidential debate. During that debate, there was a line where Palin said to Biden, "Can I call you Joe?", and this line was repeated in a few of the articles, which led to increased references to Biden by his first

name. An example of role congruity theory occurred in one article where Biden was described as "emotional" when he was explaining how his daughter and wife died in a car crash (Shales 2008). The description of Biden as emotional does not match up with the role of political leader, which is seen as requiring a serious person that is mostly devoid of emotion. While gender trait stereotyping probably disadvantaged Palin, it may have advantaged Biden. Gender trait stereotyping occurred when Biden was called strong, authoritative, confident, and intelligent (Blow 2008). Confidence, leadership, strength, and intelligence are stereotypically male traits. However, they are also traits that many people look for in a political leader, so being described this way may have increased Biden's perceived electability. There were no variables that occurred in more articles about Biden than Palin. Additionally, fifty percent of the articles about Biden contained no examples of media framing, media bias, or reporting using gender stereotypes. All of the articles about Palin contained at least one example.

According to the literature, the media's use of framing, bias and use of gender stereotypes may correlate with the negative trends in likability and electability for Sarah Palin. I analyzed articles between the dates of October 2 and October 9, 2008 for Palin. Between September 5, 2008 and October 5, 2008, the percentage of people rating Palin as unfavorable rose from twenty-eight to forty-one percent. The percentage rose again to forty-nine percent by November 2, 2008 ("Favorability: People in the News"). Another poll conducted in October of 2008 found that most people polled doubted Palin's qualifications (Cohen and Agiesta 2008). The same poll found that fifty-eight percent of respondents believed that Palin was insufficiently experienced. Based on the literature, the overall negative media portrayal of Palin suggests a correlation to decreased likability. There were also negative mentions of viability in 20 percent of the articles, which could correlate with the negative trends in perceived electability. The focus on Palin's

appearance with a lack of information about her positions on policy issues may have correlated with voters perceiving her as less competent and qualified.

When comparing Clinton and Palin I found that they received about equal levels of occurrences of the variables of interest, with Palin receiving a little bit more. For media coverage on both candidates, the most commonly occurring variables were a higher ratio of personal to issue coverage and an overall negative depiction. The criticisms of Clinton and Palin were different in nature, based on the type of woman they are. Clinton was often criticized for being too aggressive for the female gender role, while Palin was often criticized for being too feminine for the political leader role. These criticisms illustrate the double bind that female candidates face in America.

Nikki Haley vs. Vincent Sheheen

Nikki Haley was elected as the first female governor of South Carolina in 2010. The media coverage of the campaign leading up to that election contained media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes. The most common occurrences in the articles about Haley was higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, which occurred in one-hundred percent of the articles (Dewan and Brown 2010, Zeleny 2010, Dewan 2010, Brown 2009, Hulse 2010, Gardner 2010, Cilliza 2010, Rucker 2010). Some of the personal issues covered in the articles included Haley's past participation in beauty pageants (Dewan and Brown 2010), her race (Dewan and Brown 2010, Zeleny 2010, Brown 2009, Cilizza 2010), her parents (Dewan and Brown 2010, Rucker 2010), her alleged infidelity in her marriage (Dewan and Brown 2010, Zeleney 2010, Dewan 2010, Hulse 2010, Gardner 2010, Cillizza 2010, Rucker 2010), her religion (Dewan and Brown 2010, Zeleney 2010, Gardner 2010Cillizza 2010), her children (Dewan and Brown 2010, Dewan 2010, Gardner 2010, Cilizza 2010), her husband (Dewan and Brown 2010, Gardner 2010,

Rucker 2010, Cillizza 2010), and her clothes (Dewan and Brown 2010, Rucker 2010). The results of the analysis of news articles about Nikki Haley and her opponent Vincent Sheheen can be found below in Figure 3:

Figure 3: News Coverage of Haley and Sheheen
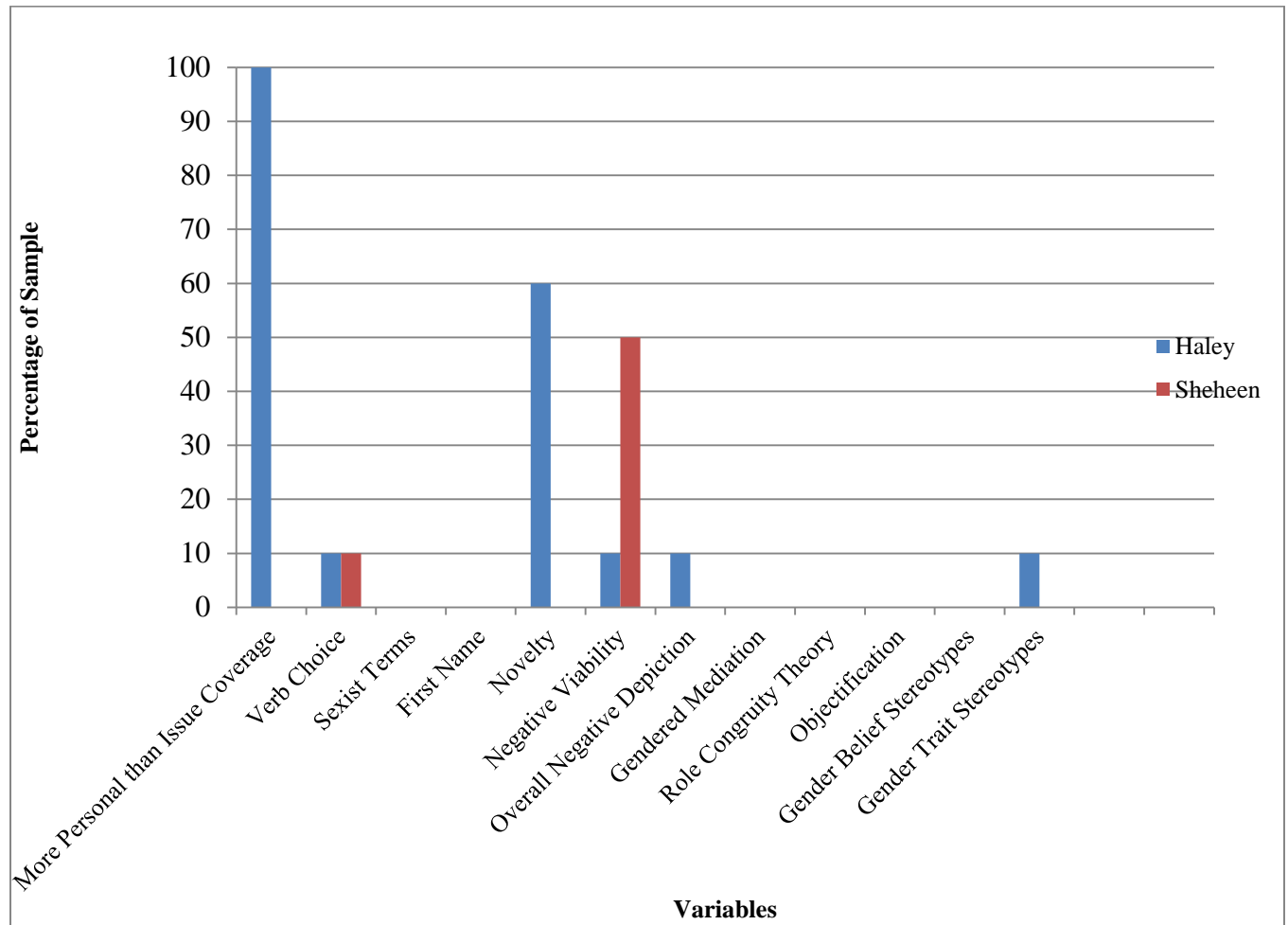
An example of media framing through language choice occurred by verb choice in 10 percent of the articles about Haley. Haley's speech was described as "slamming" in one article, which is a verb with emotional overtones (Rocker 2010). Sixty percent of articles contained the novelty frame. These articles mentioned that if elected, Haley would be the first non-white, female governor of South Carolina (Dewan and Brown 2010, Zeleney 2010, Dewan 2010,

Brown 2009, Cillizza 2010, Rocker 2010). Gender trait stereotyping occurred when an article described Haley as "the candidate who gives speeches in stiletto heels with leopard-print detail" (Rocker 2010). This line reduced Haley to feminine shoes, rather than focusing on her as a person.

I also analyzed articles about Haley's opponent, Vincent Sheheen. There were more occurrences overall of media framing, media bias, and gender stereotypes in articles about Nikki Haley. Four variables-higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, novelty frame, overall negative depiction, and gender trait stereotypes-can be observed in a higher percentage of articles about Haley than Sheheen. There were, however, equal occurrences of speech verbs containing emotional overtones in articles about Haley and Sheheen. As mentioned earlier, this is probably because politicians' speech, regardless of gender, is described using this type of verb. One variable, negative mentions of viability, was used in a greater percentage of articles about Sheheen than Haley. This is likely because South Carolina is a primarily Republican state, making Sheheen's path to victory difficult as a Democrat. Fifty percent of the articles about Sheheen did not contain any variables of interest, while all of the articles about Haley contained at least one variable of interest.

In the case of Nikki Haley, the polls did not match up with my hypothesis. In this case, Haley's poll numbers increased in favorability over time (RealClearPolitics). The positive poll numbers may be because Haley received the fewest occurrences of the variables that lead to negative media portrayal of female candidates of any of the candidates I analyzed. The literature states that several factors of media coverage could correlate to negative public opinion of perceived likability for female candidates. These factors include a higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, a choice of verbs containing emotional overtones, sexist terms, an overall

negative depiction, and gender stereotypes. Only four of those variables actually occurred in the media coverage of Nikki Haley, and three of them occurred in only ten percent of the articles. Importantly, the one we do not see is overall negative depiction, which occurred the most for both Clinton and Palin. The literature also stated that there are several factors that can occur in media coverage of female candidates that may lead to negative trends in perceived electability of the candidates. These factors include use of first name rather than formal title, novelty frame, mentions of negative viability, and role congruity theory. Only half of those variables actually occurred in the articles about Nikki Haley. Because media bias, media framing, and gender stereotypes in reporting can lead to negative trends in public opinion, it would make sense that Nikki Haley would have more favorable ratings in public opinion polls because many of those variables did not occur in media coverage about her.

Wendy Davis vs. Greg Abbott

Wendy Davis caught the media's attention in June of 2013, with her eleven-hour long filibuster on the floor of the Texas State Senate to try to block a bill that would restrict abortion access. This filibuster put Wendy Davis on the map and gave her the momentum to run for governor of Texas in 2014. And yet, media analysis of the articles covering Wendy Davis found occurrences of media framing, media bias, and use of gender stereotypes. The most frequently occurring variable in the articles about Davis were gender belief stereotyping, followed by negative mentions of viability, followed by a higher ratio of personal to issue coverage.

Davis received the highest total percentage of occurrences of the variables of any of the candidates I analyzed. Half of the articles I analyzed about Davis contained a higher ratio of personal to issue coverage. Examples of types of personal issues mentioned in the articles about

Davis include information about Davis' clothes (Draper 2014, Sullivan 2014, Reese 2014, Henderson 2014), her parenting (Draper 2014), her husbands (Draper 2014, Henderson 2014), her status as a single mother (Draper 2014, Sullivan 2014, Henderson 2014), her status as a teen mom (Reese 2014), her children (Draper 2014, Sullivan 2014, Reese 2014, Henderson 2014), her divorce and child custody arrangements (Draper 2014), her parents (Draper 2014), her boyfriend (Draper 2014), her appearance (Sullivan 2014), and her past abortions (Henderson 2014).

One article described Davis as "attacking" an opponent, which is a speech verb with an emotional overtone (Reese 2014). Forty percent of articles that described Davis used sexist terms, including "unflattering" (Sullivan 2014), and "abortion Barbie" (Henderson 2014). Sixty percent of articles contained negative mentions of viability, such as describing Davis as "the Democratic party's sacrificial lamb" (Draper 2014) and a "long shot" (Henderson 2014). Role congruity theory is evident in twenty percent of the articles. One of the more overt examples cited was an article whose authors questioned whether Davis could be both a good mother and good politician (Draper 2014, Sullivan 2014). The authors clearly did not think that the feminine role of mother was congruent with the masculine role of political leader.

There were numerous examples of reporting that used gender stereotypes in the articles about Wendy Davis. Seventy percent of the articles employed gender-belief stereotypes in reporting. Articles about Davis' positions on policy issues primarily focused on traditionally "feminine" domestic issues including abortion, education, same-sex marriage, Medicaid, veteran's support, and disability rights (Draper 2014, Chozick 2014, Kenny 2014, Ramsey 2014, Henderson 2014, Reese 2014, Cillizza 2014). Gender-trait stereotypes in reporting are used in thirty percent of articles about Davis, describing Davis as a "hardworking mother", a stereotypical feminine label describing motherhood (2014). One reporter questioned Davis' self-

sufficiency, which is an example of gender-trait stereotyping because women are stereotyped as not being self-sufficient and being dependent on men (Draper 2014). Sullivan also used gender-trait stereotyping in reporting that described Davis as "warm", which is a stereotypical feminine trait. One article criticized Davis for making an attack ad, which is an example of gender-trait stereotyping because traditionally women are not supposed to be on the attack; they are supposed to be submissive (Reese 2014). The full results of the media analysis of articles about Wendy Davis and her opponent Greg Abbott can be found below in Figure 4.

Figure 4: News Coverage of Davis and Abbott
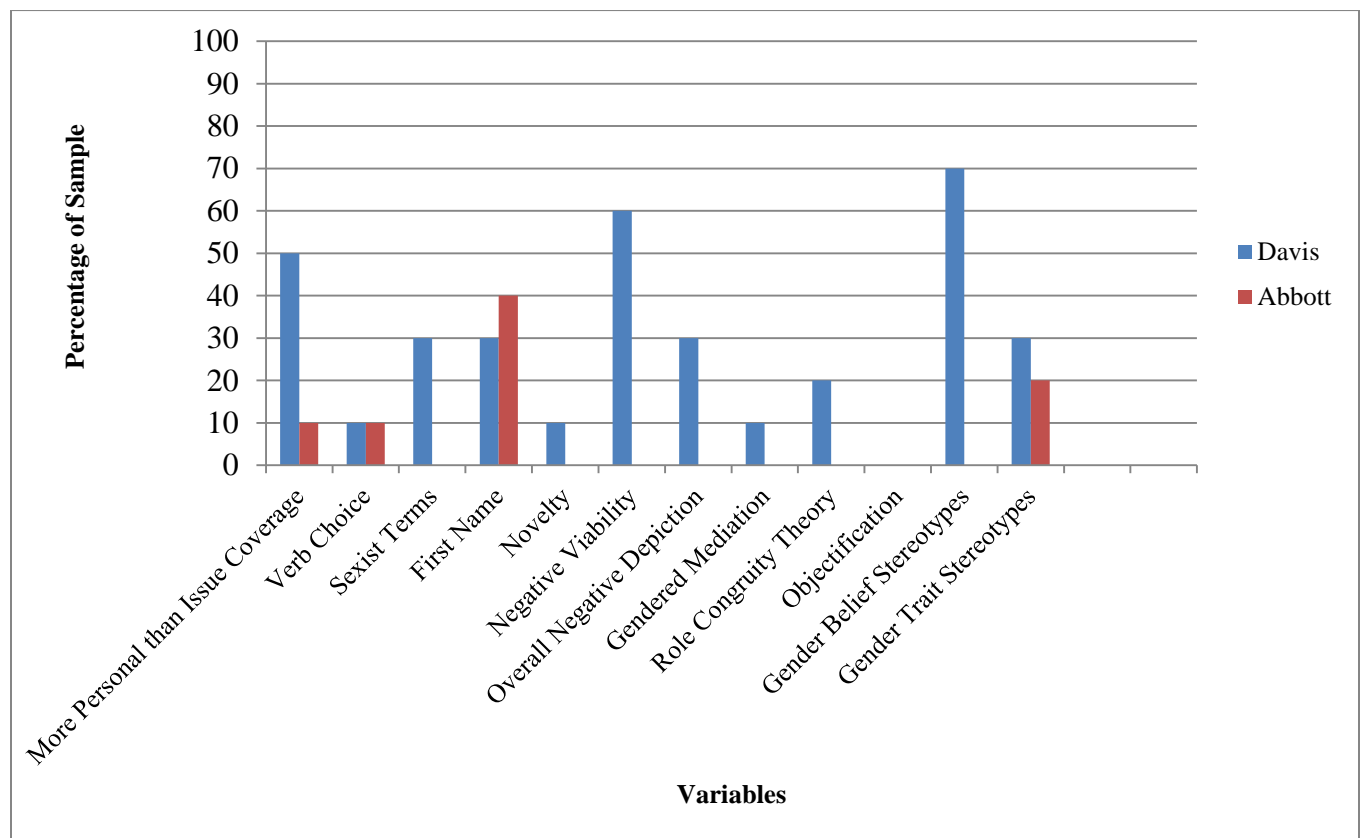
Greg Abbott beat his opponent Wendy Davis in the race for governor of Texas. An analysis of news articles about Abbott revealed that there was an overall lower occurrence of the variables of interest in those articles compared to articles about Wendy Davis. This may suggest

a correlation between Abbott's more positive media coverage and his election win. There were

nine variables that occurred in a higher percentage of articles about Davis than articles about

Abbott: higher ratio of personal to issue coverage, sexist terms, novelty frame, negative viability,

overall negative depiction, gendered mediation, role congruity theory, gender belief stereotypes,

and gender trait stereotypes. Speech verbs containing emotional overtones were used to describe

Abbott and Davis in an equal percentage of articles. The one variable that occurred in a higher

percentage of articles about Abbott is referring to a candidate by first name rather than formal

title. Forty percent of the articles about Abbott contained no example of media framing, media

bias, or reporting using gender stereotypes. All of the articles about Davis contained at least one

example.

The poll numbers for Wendy Davis seem to confirm my hypothesis that negative media

portrayal of a candidate correlates to negative trends in public opinion. Davis received the most

negative media portrayal of any candidate I analyzed and her poll numbers continued to decline

until she eventually lost her election by a large margin (RealClearPolitics). The increased ratio of

personal to issue coverage may have led to potential voters not knowing Davis' positions on

policy issues, and that could be a possible reason voters chose to vote against her. The focus on

Davis' appearance in some articles may have caused some people to perceive her as less

competent. The negative mentions of viability in sixty percent of the articles suggest a

correlation with decreased trends in perceived electability.

State Races vs. National Races Men vs. Women

The literature suggests that there is a higher level of media framing, bias, and gender

stereotypes in media coverage of female candidates as the level of office rises. To test this

hypothesis, I combined the occurrences of the variables in media coverage of Clinton and Palin

to calculate total percentages of occurrences of the variables in both national races. I also

combined the occurrences of the variables in the media coverage of Haley and Davis to calculate

total percentages of occurrences of the variables in both state races. Calculating the percentages

for the national and state races allowed me to compare with the percentages for the state races

and see if there is the difference that the literature predicts. The results show that there was a

higher total occurrence of the variables in the national races. This is consistent with the literature.

Both the national and the state races had the same variable as the most commonly occurring:

higher ratio of personal to issue coverage.

Figure 5: State Races
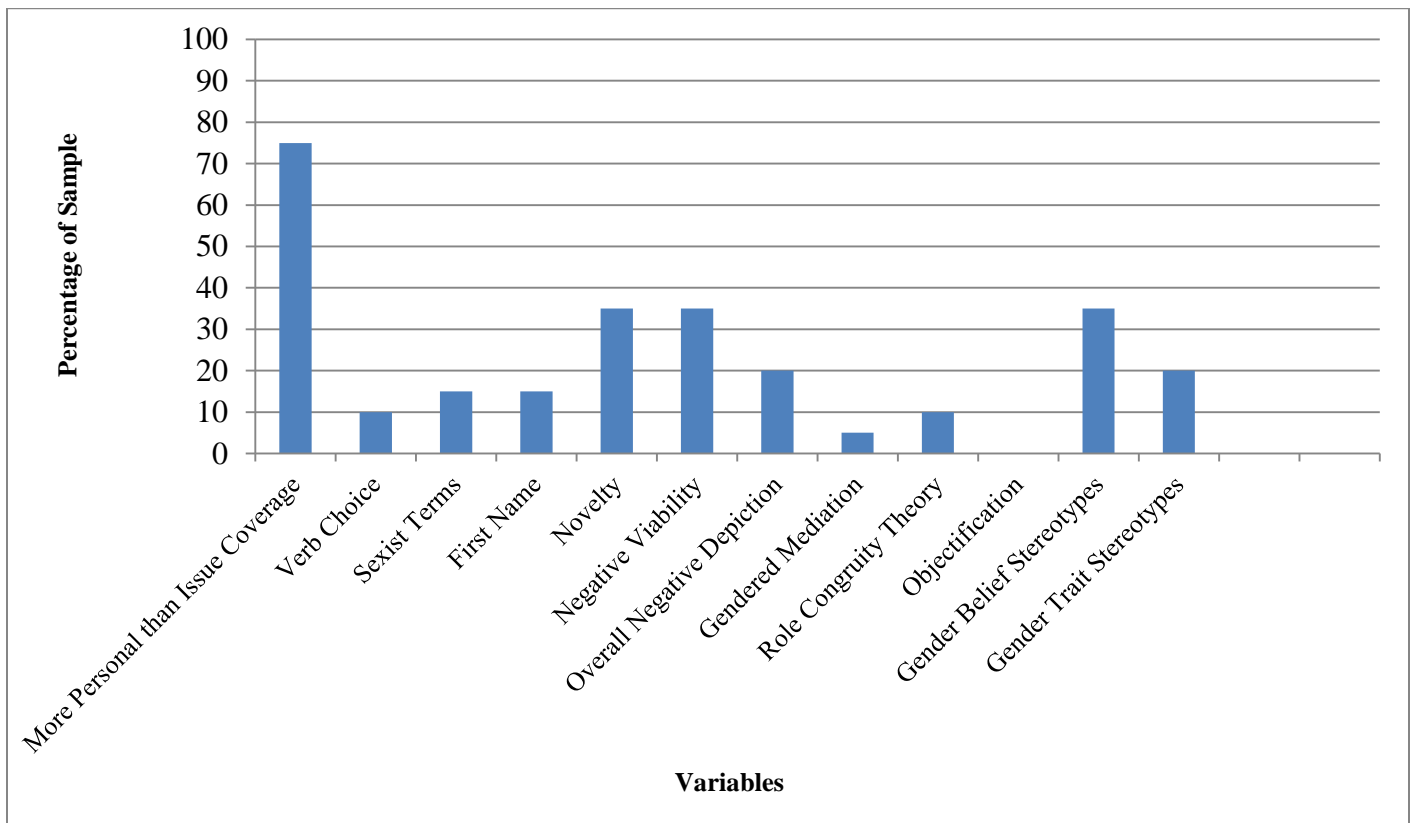
Figure 6: National Races
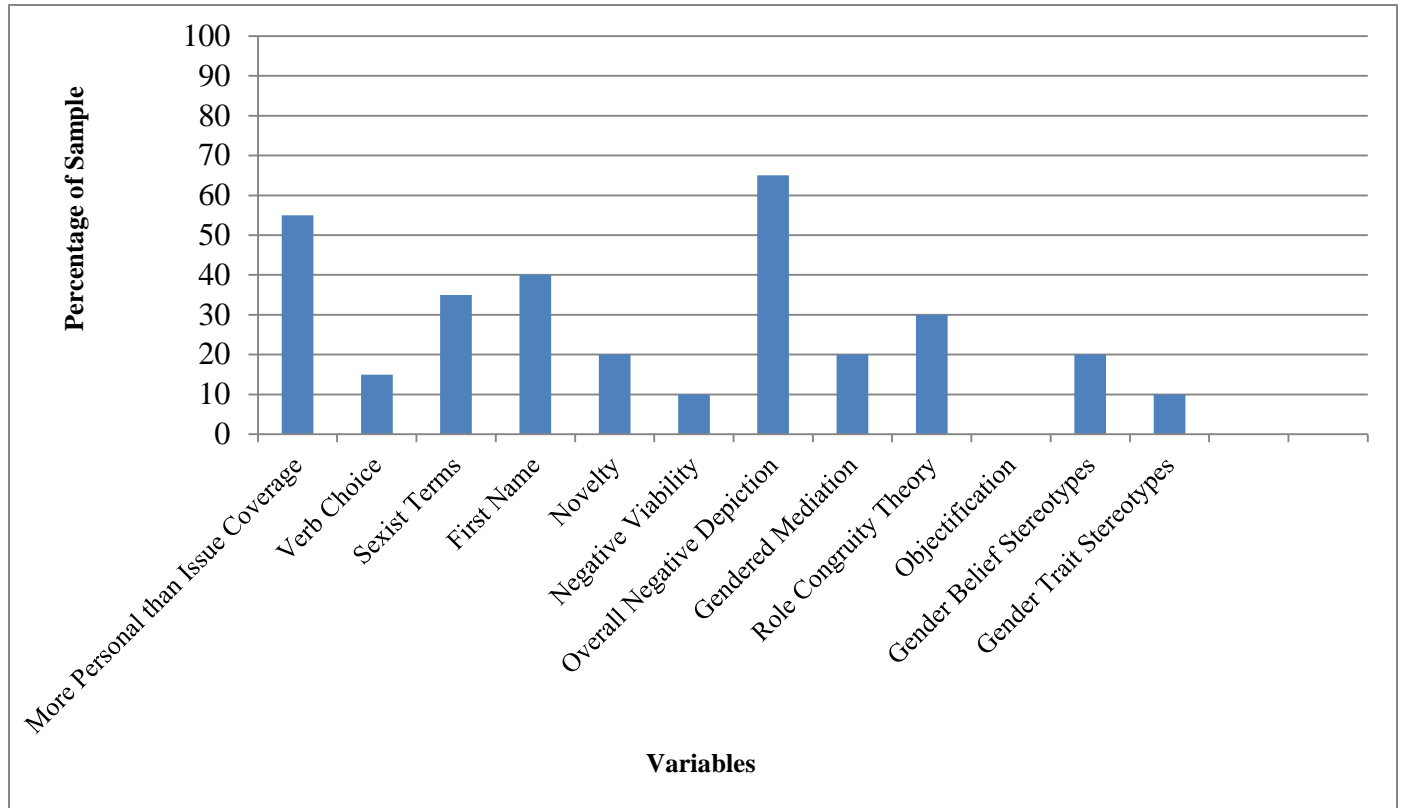
I also calculated the total percentages of occurrence of the variables for all the female and male candidates combined. Even using a small sample size, I found occurrence of every variable except objectification in every article about Clinton, Palin, Haley, and Davis. The results I found in the media analysis confirm the idea presented in my literature that the media uses framing, bias, and gender stereotypes to portray female candidates negatively. The comparison to the male opponents demonstrates that female candidates are depicted differently than male candidates, and this depiction is overall more negative. For all of the candidates except for Haley, I argue that the negative media portrayal correlated with negative trends in public opinion.

Figure 7: All Races
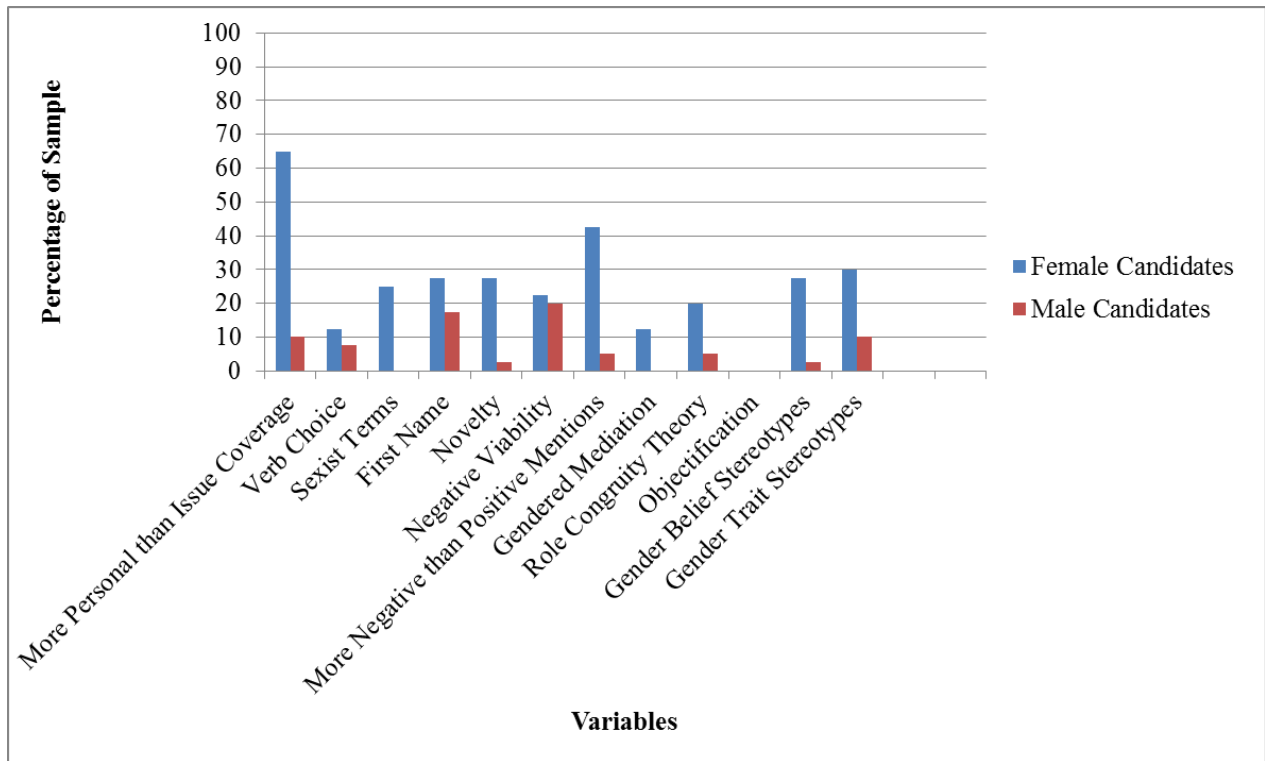
Conclusion

The topic of this paper is particularly important because 51 percent of the U.S. population

is women and yet there are consistently low numbers of female politicians in the United States.

There have been several high-profile female political candidates in the last few years. While this

seems like a step in the right direction, the media coverage of female political candidates may be

impeding the success of these candidates. My hypothesis was that the media's portrayal of

female candidates is largely negative and this negative media portrayal may lead to negative

trends in public opinion. From the literature, I determined that media framing, media bias, and

reporting using gender stereotypes are the three main theories that can help to demonstrate how

the media covers female political candidates negatively.

I chose several indicators of my variables of interest to examine in news coverage of female candidates. I found that there is clearly sexism in media coverage of female political candidates. A lengthier look at my analysis illustrates that, even from a small sample of articles, there was not one article about any of the female candidates that did not include at least one example of media framing, media bias, or reporting using gender stereotypes. The articles contained examples of every indicator that I was looking for except for objectification. Moreover, there were also more examples of media framing, media bias, and reporting using gender stereotypes in articles about the female candidates than about the male candidates.

The hypothesis I made about public opinion also seems supported by my evidence here. I hypothesized that negative media portrayal of female candidates correlates to negative public opinion of those candidates. I analyzed public opinion polls about perceived likability and electability for the female candidates to gauge public opinion. I found that poll numbers on perceived likability and electability became increasingly negative over time for all of the candidates I analyzed, except for Haley. This suggests a correlation between the negative media portrayal of Clinton, Palin, and Davis and their increasingly negative poll numbers.

Although women comprise more than fifty percent of the American population, they continue to be underrepresented in political leadership positions. This paper illustrates that the media portrayal of female political candidates may be partly to blame for this. If news readers are educated about the sexism that is present in media coverage of female candidates, then they may become more informed consumers. Hopefully, this could lead to a group of more informed voters that would be more likely to vote for female political candidates.

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Appendix

Table 1: Variables, Definitions, and Indicators

Factor	Definition	Indicators
Public Opinion	An aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community	Public opinion will be gauged using polls concerning the candidates' perceived likeability and electability

Media Framing	Journalistic descriptions embedded in news stories to create different depictions of news subjects	1. Ratio of personal to issue coverage (personal coverage includes information about the candidates' gender, marital status, children, age, personality, and appearance. Issue coverage includes information about the candidate's position on political policy issues)
		 2. Language Choice
		    a. Verb Choice- media framing occurs when reporters use speech verbs containing emotional overtones when describing female candidates. Examples include attacking, complaining, and boasting.
		    b. Describing female candidates using sexist terms, such as shrill, feisty, frumpy, bitch, spinster, emotional, bossy, or unpleasant
		    c. Media framing occurs when female candidates are

		referred to by their first names rather than their formal titles d. Novelty Frame focuses on the uniqueness of a woman running for political office
Media Bias	Individual news stories, commentators, or news outlets exhibiting pervasive patterns of sexism or other prejudice	1. Media bias occurs when there are negative mentions of female candidates' viability a. For example: portraying female candidates as less competitive than male candidates b. Covering female candidates as if they have already lost the election before the election takes place 2. Overall negative depiction a. Includes negative gender distinction, which is reporting that describes a female candidate's gender as a hindrance b. Emphasis on low chances of electoral victory c. More negative than positive mentions of a female candidate in an article
Reporting Using Gender Stereotypes	When reporters use gender stereotypes, they attribute to men and women different tendencies, characteristic and areas of competence. The gendering of media is evident whenever there is criticism of	1. Gendered Mediation- The gendered mediation theory holds that political media coverage reflects men's traditional dominance of political life and, in

	a candidate's gender attributes-when a candidate is criticized for behaving in a way that is unfitting of her sex or when she is criticized for behavior that is insufficiently masculine for the presidency. Because our culture expects that femininity implies a certain set of assumptions, gender bias is present when the media draw critical attention to a candidate for having either confirmed gender stereotypes of having strayed too far from gender norms.	turn, implies that women in politics are atypical and their very presence needs to be soften, minimalized or trivialized
		
		   a. Female candidates are underrepresented in political media
		   b. Female candidates' positions on traditionally masculine issues, such as the economy or military, are not represented in the media
		
		2. Role Congruity Theory-People are evaluated positively when their characteristics are consistent with their social roles. When a person's behavior does not match their social roles, they may lead to prejudice. Role congruity theory suggests that female political candidates may face prejudice because their female gender role does not match the leader role, which is usually seen as male
		
		   a. Example: Hillary Clinton is chastised for "unfeminine" wearing pantsuits or advocating for war. Palin is chastised as being "too feminine" for the political leader role

because the is a "hockey mom" who dresses femininely

3. Objectification- A strong emphasis placed on a woman's appearance, making a person into an object devoid of humanity
   a. Example: When there is a focus on a specific body part of a female candidate (bad hair, nice legs, etc.) rather than a focus on the candidate as a whole person with agency and ideas

4. Gender Belief Stereotypes- Beliefs that genders have different positions on policy issues
   a. The media often reports that female candidates are better at handling "feminine issues" such as healthcare, education and women's rights issues. Male candidates are portrayed as being better able to handle "masculine issues" such as foreign policy, crime, and the economy

5. Gender Trait Stereotypes-stereotypes of gender personality traits
   a. Male candidates are portrayed as being

		more viable, a stronger leader, and better able to deal with military issues. Female candidates are portrayed as being more compassionate and better able to deal with health issues. Male candidates are portrayed as strong, while female candidates are portrayed as sensitive and emotional. b. Stereotypical female personality traits include dependent, emotional, passive, sensitive, quiet, innocent, weak, nurturing, soft, submissive, and accepting c. Stereotypical male personality traits include non-emotional, aggressive, competitive, strong, active, self-confident, hard, and aggressive