

Differential effects of female and male candidates on system justification:

Can cracks in the glass ceiling foster complacency?

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Abstract

Despite women's increasing representation in elected offices across a range of countries, women remain a minority of elected officials (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012). Although greater gender equality in political leadership may be assumed to promote gender equality in other domains, the presence of female candidates might ironically facilitate attitudes associated with legitimizing gender inequality. Using experimental methods, we demonstrate that the presence of a female political candidate, relative to a male political candidate, leads to greater beliefs that the sociopolitical system is just (Experiment 1), greater legitimacy of the gender status hierarchy (Experiment 2), and greater implicit preference for stability (Experiment 3). Ironically, within a context in which women are generally underrepresented as political leaders, the increasing presence of women as political candidates might lead to stronger legitimization of the current sociopolitical system, potentially inhibiting social change.

KEY WORDS: GENDER, SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION, POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Can cracks in the glass ceiling foster complacency?

Although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it. And the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time.

- Hillary Clinton (2008)

In the 2008 Democratic primary, Hillary Clinton became the first widely supported female contender for the United States Presidential nomination. Though she eventually conceded defeat, her candidacy itself was groundbreaking. In her concession speech, Clinton noted that her candidacy led to the “sure knowledge” of progress toward gender equality. Despite women’s increasing representation in elected offices across a range of countries, women remain a minority of elected officials (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012). Although it may generally be assumed that greater gender equality in political leadership will promote efforts toward gender equality in other domains, the presence of female candidates might ironically facilitate attitudes associated with legitimizing gender inequality. The current research examines whether the presence of a female political candidate, relative to a male political candidate, leads to the ironic consequence of increased legitimization of the current sociopolitical system.

According to system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), individuals are motivated to believe that their sociopolitical system is legitimate, fair, and just (Jost, Pietrazak, Liviatan, Mandisodza, & Napier, 2008). Such system justification beliefs can have great power because they are maintained both consciously and nonconsciously (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002) and are widely shared, even among groups who do not directly benefit from the current system (e.g., Jost & Burgess, 2000).

Psychological tendencies to justify a particular sociopolitical system can be reflected in beliefs and attitudes that support the current status quo. Inhibition of social change can occur through attitudes and cognitions focused on both the legitimacy and the stability of the current system (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Endorsement of system justifying ideologies leads to a variety of consequences, including support for social change, support for the redistribution of resources, and the perceived legitimacy of public figures and institutions (Jost & Hunyady, 2005).

Particularly important in justifying a particular system is the belief that the system is legitimate and just. For instance, benevolent sexism is associated with increased beliefs supporting of the legitimacy of the gender hierarchy (Glick & Whitehead, 2010), increased beliefs that the current sociopolitical system is just (Jost & Kay, 2005), and women's intended and actual engagement in collective action (Becker & Wright, 2011).

The tendency to justify a particular system is also related to the perceived stability of that system: For example, the tendency to believe that group hierarchy is generally inevitable (i.e., social dominance orientation) is associated with reduced positivity toward policies that promote equality, such as support for women's rights (e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Furthermore, when an environment is perceived as unstable, as opposed to stable, there is increased interest in improving one's own groups' status (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990). Indeed, Tajfel (1981) proposed that social change will be most likely to occur when individuals believe that the current sociopolitical system is both illegitimate and unstable.

Given the tendency to justify the current system, an especially important outcome to consider is an individual's *preference* for change or stability. The most basic prediction of system justification theory is that legitimization and stability perceptions will foster preferences for the continuation of the current

system. Thus, this research will explore the outcome of implicit preferences for stability or change, to test the fundamental prediction that a female candidate will foster preferences for stability.

Cues to Legitimacy and Stability

A critical question is what aspects of a social system lead to beliefs that the system is legitimate and stable. One key feature is the ability of individuals from disadvantaged groups to attain status. The literature on tokenism suggests that the inclusion of a minimal number of underrepresented group members can reduce the likelihood that social change will occur (Wright, 2001). For instance, members of “outsider” groups who achieve leader status can lead to an underestimation of the barriers that remain for other group members (Wright & Taylor, 1998). Indeed, the presence of only one token female hire results in similar meritocracy beliefs as the presence of equality in hiring (Danaher & Branscombe, 2010). Furthermore, the presence of a few token women causes individuals to perceive gender egalitarianism within the current environment (Schmitt, Spoor, Danaher, & Branscombe, 2009).

Even the mere perception of efforts toward diversity within a particular system is enough to increase beliefs that the system is fair and just. For example, Kaiser, Major, Jurcevic, Dover, Brady, and Shapiro (2012) demonstrated that the mere presence of diversity programs increased beliefs that the business environment was fair, regardless of whether promotion of minorities was depicted as equal or unequal. Because individuals perceived companies with diversity programs as more fair, the presence of diversity programs decreased support for discrimination litigation for underrepresented groups and decreased the perception of discrimination against minorities.

Furthermore, the election of leaders from underrepresented groups can be used to legitimize the current sociopolitical system. The election of President Obama as the first African-American President of the U.S. reduced beliefs pertaining to the existence of racial inequalities, reduced support for policies that promote racial equality, boosted beliefs that racial equality was being attained, and

increased beliefs supporting the Protestant Work Ethic. Furthermore, increased beliefs legitimizing the current sociopolitical system emerged regardless of whether or not participants voted for President Obama (Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, & O'Brien, 2009), consistent with the idea that increased legitimization beliefs will be widespread because of underlying motives to maintain the overarching system. In short, the election of the first African-American President led to an upsurge in several beliefs associated with legitimizing racial inequality in the U.S. Kaiser and colleagues' (2009) research highlights the ironic effects that occur when a member of a traditionally underrepresented group attains a prominent leadership position. In the current studies, we used experimental methods to explore whether such system legitimization effects occur for another chronically underrepresented group, namely female political candidates.

Overview of the current research. In the current studies, we explored whether the mere candidacy of a female politician can increase perceptions of legitimacy and stability, as well as the general preference for stability by employing experimental methods. Experimentally manipulating candidate sex allows for us to move beyond the longitudinal results of the previous research (Kaiser et al., 2009) to make the causal inference that a candidate from an underrepresented group can increase system legitimization. Furthermore, the use of a novel candidate with fairly little information provides an illustration of the minimal conditions necessary for members of underrepresented groups to foster system justification.

In the current studies, we examined if the mere presence of a fictional female political candidate elicits beliefs that legitimize the current sociopolitical system and general preferences for stability. In our experiments, participants were randomly assigned to evaluate a male or a female candidate; then participants completed a measure of system justification. To fully explore effects on perceived legitimacy, perceived stability, and the critical outcome of preference for system change, we include a

range of dependent measures across experiments. Experiments 1 and 2 include different measures of perceived legitimacy, and Experiment 2 includes a measure of future perceived stability. Finally, Experiment 3 moves away from perceptions to the critical measure of attitudinal preference for change or stability.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Forty-three psychology students (17 female) from a midwestern university participated in a laboratory experiment for partial course credit. The majority (69.05%) were European American, and they ranged in age from 18 to 22, with a median of 19 years. Three participants were eliminated for failing to correctly identify the candidate's sex; thus only 40 participants were analyzed (17 female; 71.79% European American, ages 18-22; median age = 19).

Participants read about a male or female candidate running for a leadership position. After which, participants rated their support for the candidate as well as their support for the sociopolitical system. Demographic information was collected.

Independent Variables

Variables were manipulated in a 2 (candidate sex) × 2 (participant sex) between-subjects design.¹ Participants were randomly assigned to read about either a male or female candidate (Brian or

¹ Experiments 1 and 3 included an additional between-subjects manipulation of threat (participants wrote about university problems or watching television). The task did not significantly influence the dependent measures (i.e., Experiment 1, no main effects or interactions with threat emerged, $ps > .19$; Experiment 3, no main effects or interactions with threat emerged for the IAT, $ps > .26$ and only a marginal main effect emerged for candidate support, $p = .08$, reflecting marginally more

Karen Johnson; candidate names were selected for matched attractiveness, competence, and age, Kasof, 1993). The target was a candidate for the state House of Representatives and espoused three neutral policy stances that were held constant across conditions. To reinforce the manipulation of candidate sex, gendered pronouns were repeated seven times during the task (for a similar manipulation of candidate sex, see Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011; Eagly, Diekmann, Schneider, & Kulesa, 2003; see Appendix A). No additional candidate information was provided.

Dependent Measures

Participants rated how much they would *support* and *vote for* the candidate in response to the following prompt: “Before you give your impressions of this candidate, please consider whether you would be likely to vote for him [her]. Would the information you have been given about encourage you to support this candidate and vote for him [her]?” Responses were made on scales ranging from 1 (*Definitely not support/ Definitely not vote for*) to 7 (*Definitely support/ Definitely vote for*). These items were averaged to form a *voting* index ($\alpha = .82$).

Participants also rated their agreement (1= *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*) with 8 statements about the justness of the current system taken from Kay and Jost (2003) (“In general, I find society to be fair;” “In general, the American political system operates as it should;” “American society needs to be radically restructured” (reverse-coded); “The United States is the best country in the world to live in;” “Most policies serve the greater good;” “Everyone has a fair shot at wealth and happiness;” “Our society is getting worse every year” (reverse-coded); and “Society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve”). Responses were averaged to create a *justness* index ($\alpha = .71$).

Demographic questions. Participants indicated their age, sex, ethnicity, and political party.

support for the candidate in the threat than the control condition). Thus, we omitted the threat manipulation from further analyses.

Manipulation and suspicion checks. Participants identified the sex of the candidate and reported their beliefs about the experiment's purpose.

Results and Discussion

Dependent measures were submitted to a 2 (candidate sex) \times 2 (participant sex) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). Throughout the paper, we note all significant and marginal effects ($p \leq .10$).

Justness beliefs. As predicted, participants considered the sociopolitical system as more just after evaluating a female candidate ($M = 5.87, SD = 0.86$) than a male candidate ($M = 5.11, SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 36) = 5.47, p = .03, d = .75$ (see Figure 1). No other effects or interactions emerged, $ps \geq .66$.²

Voting. We examined whether candidate sex influenced voting, and whether voting was related to justness beliefs. No effect of candidate sex emerged; a marginal effect of participant sex reflected a tendency toward greater support for the candidate among women ($M = 5.29, SD = 0.79$) than men ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 36) = 3.89, p = .06, d = .66$. Consistent with the findings of Kaiser et al. (2009), support did not significantly relate to justness beliefs, either across conditions, $r(38) = .22, p = .18$, within the female candidate condition, $r(18) = .08, p = .72$, or within the male candidate condition, $r(18) = .33, p = .16$.

Discussion. Individuals who considered a female candidate were more likely to perceive the sociopolitical system as just and fair than those who considered a male candidate. This experiment demonstrated that the mere candidacy of a member of a nontraditional group, relative to the candidacy of a member of a traditional group, can foster beliefs that the system is just. Consistent with the idea

² In Experiments 1 and 3, a 2 (candidate sex) \times 2 (participant sex) \times 3 (political party: Republican, Independent, Democrat) ANOVA revealed no significant effects or interactions of political party on justness beliefs or stability preferences.

that motivations to support the current sociopolitical system are widespread, the justness effect was independent of support for the female candidate.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 sought to extend the initial findings of divergent consequences of male versus female candidates by replicating our findings by examining perceptions of both legitimacy and future stability. Because the status quo is maintained through beliefs that the system is legitimate and stable (e.g., Tajfel, 1981), we sought to examine if exposure to a female as opposed to male candidate increased beliefs pertaining to the perceived legitimacy and future stability of the gender hierarchy. To test these ideas, we adopted a measure that differentiates beliefs about the legitimacy of the gender hierarchy from beliefs about the future stability of the gender hierarchy (Glick & Whitehead, 2010).

We hypothesized that, relative to a male candidate, the presence of a female candidate would *increase* the perceived legitimacy of the system, replicating Experiment 1. For perceptions of future stability, however, competing hypotheses are possible. On one hand, a salient nontraditional exemplar might increase the perception that the system will be unstable in the future. This finding would be consistent with previous research showing that perceptions of legitimacy and stability tend to align (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). On the other hand, perceived instability and perceived legitimacy may not be so closely aligned in the domain of gendered political power, given the widespread and consensual beliefs that are already held about women's gains in political power (Diekmann, Goodfriend, & Goodwin, 2004). In this case, a female candidate might increase perceived legitimacy of the system without having a noticeable effect on perceived future stability of the system.

Method

Participants

Ninety introductory psychology students (43 female, 68.97% European American, ages 18-22, median age = 19) from a midwestern university participated in a laboratory experiment for partial course credit. Four participants were eliminated for failing to correctly identify the candidate's sex, and 17 were eliminated because of suspicion (i.e., mention of how candidate sex influences ratings, gender bias). Thus, sixty nine introductory psychology students (34 female, 72.73% European American, ages 18-22, median age = 19) were included in the analyses.³

Procedure

As in Experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to read about a male or female candidate, and then they completed the dependent measures. The voting measure ($\alpha=.83$), demographics, and manipulation and suspicion checks were identical to Experiment 1.

The critical dependent measures assessed beliefs about *legitimacy* and *future stability* and were taken from Glick and Whitehead (2010). On scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*), participants rated several items that assessed perceptions of legitimacy and stability. The perceived legitimacy scale included five items ("By far the most important reason that men, on average, make more money than women is that men and women tend to choose different career paths;" "Realistically, when couples have young children, it probably works between to have mothers (as compared to fathers) take time out from their careers to nurture the children;" "Overall, our society currently treats women less fairly than it treats men" (reverse-coded); "The main reason there are few

³ The suspicion rates increased noticeably from Experiment 1 to Experiment 2, and 11 participants failed the manipulation check in Experiment 3. These issues likely emerged because some of the data for Experiments 2 and 3 was collected at the end of the semester, and that as the semester progressed students became less attentive to subtle manipulations and less naïve due to greater exposure to study methodology and the use of deception in studies.

female chief executive officers of major corporations is that there is an unfair bias against having women in charge” (reverse-coded); and “For the most part, there are legitimate and fair reasons for current differences in men’s and women’s positions in society”). The *perceived future stability* scale included six items (“A few decades from now, the number of female (as compared to male) chief executive officers of major corporations is likely to be about equal” (reverse-coded); “A few decades from now, the average salary for women will continue to be significantly lower than the average salary for men;” A few decades from now, women will be treated as equals to men in all areas (e.g., socially, politically, economically)” (reverse-coded); “A few decades from now, it will still be rare for husbands (as compared to wives) to put their careers on hold to stay at home and raise the kids;” “A few decades from now, there is likely to have been at least one female President of the United States” (reverse-coded); and “Over the next few decades, the current differences in the positions of men and women in society are likely to remain stable”). An additional item from the original legitimacy scale was excluded due to low item-total correlations ($r(67) = -.02$). The included items were averaged within each scale ($\alpha = .67$ for legitimacy; $\alpha = .71$ for future stability).

Results and Discussion

Dependent measures were submitted to 2 (candidate sex) \times 2 (participant sex) ANOVAs.

Perceived legitimacy and future stability. As shown in Figure 1, the presence of a female candidate ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.54$), relative to a male candidate ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.13$), fostered beliefs that the gender hierarchy was legitimate, $F(1, 65) = 4.07, p = .05, d = .46$. In addition, legitimacy beliefs were more strongly endorsed by men ($M = 5.45, SD = 1.48$) than women ($M = 4.33, SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 65) =$

14.03, $p < .001$, $d = .90$. In contrast, candidate sex did not influence beliefs about whether the future gender hierarchy would be stable, $p = .71$, $d = .08^4$

Voting. Women ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.98$) were marginally more likely than men ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.12$) to support the candidate, $F(1, 65) = 3.40$, $p = .07$, $d = .45$. Again, support was not associated with beliefs about legitimacy or future stability, either when examined across conditions (legitimacy: $r(67) = -.04$, $p = .72$, future stability: $r(67) = .10$, $p = .43$), within the female candidate condition (legitimacy: $r(33) = -.13$, $p = .47$, future stability: $r(33) = .13$, $p = .46$), or within the male candidate condition (legitimacy: $r(32) = .11$, $p = .54$, future stability: $r(32) = .05$, $p = .80$).

Discussion. Participants who viewed a female candidate were more likely than those who viewed a male candidate to endorse beliefs that the current gender hierarchy is legitimate, but they were not differentially likely to perceive the future gender hierarchy as stable. Again, legitimacy beliefs were unrelated to candidate support, which is consistent the idea that system justification motives occur across a range of candidate preferences. On the other hand, the presence of a single female candidate may not be sufficient to change beliefs about future gender role change. Indeed, beliefs about

⁴ We examined if political party moderated the effect of candidate sex on beliefs supporting the legitimacy of the status quo. A main effect of political party, $F(2, 55) = 4.89$, $p = .01$ emerged, with Republicans ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.41$) supporting the status quo more than Democrats ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.16$), $p < .05$, $d = .72$. Independents ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.51$) did not differ from either Republicans or Democrats, $ps > .05$, $ds < .36$. This main effect was marginally qualified by participant sex; the interaction, $F(2, 55) = 2.38$, $p = .10$, reflected that effect of political party appeared for male participants, $p = .007$, but not female participants, $p = .45$. Among male participants, Republicans ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.35$) supported the status quo more than Democrats ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.97$) and Independents ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.81$), $ps < .05$, $ds < 1.06$, and Democrats did not differ from Independents, $p > .05$, $d = .08$.

gender differences in political power are strong and consensual (Diekman, Goodfriend, & Goodwin, 2004), and thus multiple, repeated exemplars may be required to change beliefs about the future stability of the gender hierarchy.

Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we move to the critical outcome of preferences for continuation of the societal system by examining implicit *preferences* for stability or change (following Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). After all, the key prediction of system justification theory is that cues to system legitimacy will lead to contentedness with the current system and maintenance of the status quo. We elected to examine implicit preferences because of implicit measures have been argued to assess individuals' legitimization and system support with decreased demand effects (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Given the increased suspicion rates in Experiment 2, including an implicit measure of preference for stability also allows us to include a stronger measure to assess whether exposure to a female as opposed to a male candidate influences preferences associated with maintaining the current sociopolitical system. Consistent with the justness and legitimization effects in Experiments 1 and 2, we hypothesized that participants would implicitly prefer stability over change when they considered a female as opposed to a male candidate.

Method

Participants

Ninety-five psychology students (41 female, 86.32% European American, ages 18-27, median age = 19) from a Midwestern university participated in a laboratory experiment for partial course credit. Eleven participants were eliminated for incorrectly identifying the candidate's sex. Thus, eighty-four psychology students were included in the analyses (38 female, 85.71% European American, ages 18-27, median age = 19).

Procedure

The candidate presentation was identical to previous experiments except that the candidate was described as running for the House of Representatives (likely assumed to be the U.S. House of Representatives among our U.S. sample; see Appendix A). Participants completed the voting items ($\alpha=.91$), followed by an Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) measuring preferences for change and stability (modified from the stability/flexibility IAT by Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008; used by Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011). The good words were *happy, joy, laughter, love, peace, pleasure, and wonderful*. The bad words were *agony, awful, evil, failure, horrible, nasty, and terrible*. The stability words were *same, familiar, unchanging, steady, fixed, enduring, and permanent*. The change words were *shifting, new, different, variable, changing, novelty, and fluctuate*.

The IAT required participants to classify words in terms of the categories change/stability and good/bad. Participants completed the IAT in five blocks. The critical blocks were Block 3 (classifying items as stability/bad or change/good) and Block 5 (classifying items as stability/good or change/bad). Participants classified words by pressing E (word corresponded with the left category heading) or I (word corresponded with the right category heading).

The IAT scores were computed following the recommendations of Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003). Trials with latencies larger than 10,000 ms and participants who completed more than 10% of trials with latencies below 300 ms were omitted from the analysis, resulting in the exclusion of 1 additional participant. Additionally, each error was replaced with its block mean + 600 ms. We subtracted the reaction times from Block 5 from reaction times from Block 3 and divided by its associated pooled-trial SD. Positive scores indicate a stronger stability/good association, whereas negative scores indicate a stronger change/good association.⁵

Results

⁵ Similar effects emerged when standardization was not used.

All data were submitted to a 2 (candidate sex) × 2 (participant sex) ANOVA.

Implicit associations. The marginal effect of candidate sex, $F(1, 79) = 3.74, p = .057, d = .42$, reflected stronger implicit preferences for stability after evaluating the female candidate ($M = .13, SD = .44$) than the male candidate ($M = -.05, SD = .43$; see Figure 2).

Voting. Only a marginal Candidate Sex × Participant Sex interaction emerged, $F(1, 80) = 3.07, p = .08$, with each sex showing greater support for the same-sex candidate. Support for the candidate was not related to the implicit preference for stability, either across conditions, $r(81) = -.11, p = .34$, within the female candidate condition, $r(40) = -.11, p = .49$, or within the male candidate condition, $r(39) = -.03, p = .86$.

Discussion. Experiment 3 demonstrated that exposure to a female as opposed to a male candidate marginally increased implicit preferences for stability as opposed to change. Implicit preferences for stability were unrelated to candidate support. These findings, in addition to the findings of Experiments 1 and 2, suggest that individuals are motivated to support the current sociopolitical system when they are exposed to a female as opposed to male candidate.

General Discussion

These experiments provide initial evidence of an ironic consequence of women's increased prominence as contenders for leadership positions. The presence of a female candidate, relative to a male candidate, led to stronger justness beliefs ($d = .75$; Experiment 1), stronger beliefs that the current gender hierarchy is legitimate ($d = .46$; Experiment 2), and increased implicit preferences for stability ($d = .42$; Experiment 3).

A striking aspect of these findings is that in these experiments, merely placing a woman "on the ballot" was sufficient to foster system justification, even though this particular candidate's success is not yet determined. In fact, the mere candidacy of a nontraditional figure, regardless of the respondent's

endorsement of her, was enough to increase support for the current sociopolitical system. This effect of a female candidate's presence is especially intriguing when considered along with the increase in satisfaction with the racial status quo that followed President Obama's election (Kaiser et al., 2009). Our studies provide a further contribution by demonstrating that increased system legitimization can occur (1) in the more minimal context of an experimental setting with a novel candidate; (2) with a candidate who is nontraditional in terms of gender, rather than race; and (3) for candidates rather than elected leaders. These findings thus suggest that the presence of underrepresented group members, even in a fairly minimal context, can have a range of important consequences that might undermine efforts toward social justice.

Consistent with the idea that motivations to support the current system transcend individual differences in candidate preferences and participant demographic variables, across three studies, we find that system justification is unrelated to candidate support, and the differential effects of a female versus a male candidate on status quo support systematically emerged across important participant demographics, such as sex and political party. We hope that this initial demonstration provides impetus for future research that examines the mechanisms underlying the effect. In particular, system justification theory includes both motivational components (e.g., a motivated defense of the sociopolitical system) as well as cognitive components (e.g., beliefs that bolster the system). Delineating how these motivational and cognitive components intersect to produce this effect is an intriguing prospect for future research.

Our experiments documented differential outcomes after considering male versus female candidates. The interpretation presented here focuses primarily on how the nontraditional candidate might influence beliefs and preferences about the status quo, given that most U.S. political offices are held by men (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012) and that male-typical qualities more closely align with

the politician role (e.g., Huddy, 1994; Huddy & Capelos, 2002). Thus, there are strong reasons to consider male politicians as the default case. This paper focused on the initial step of documenting differential outcomes of viewing female versus male candidates, which is a critical question because candidates belong to one of these two readily visible categories. However, another interesting perspective is that traditional candidates might influence beliefs and preferences by *decreasing* support for the status quo. Traditional candidates might serve as a reminder that inequalities that still exist. If this is the case, traditional candidates might ironically spur social change by increasing the desire for more equality within the sociopolitical system.

As we noted in the beginning of this paper, we propose that female candidates have a particular effect because they are currently underrepresented in the political context in the U.S. Extending our findings to domains in which women are overrepresented relative to men (e.g., medical and health services managers; United States Department of Labor, 2010), we would predict that male candidates would be the underrepresented group whose candidacy might elicit system justification. Future research should examine how support for the current system increases as members of underrepresented groups increase their representation within the system. In domains in which men are overrepresented in leadership positions (such as politics), our findings should be replicated with participants being more likely to support the current sociopolitical system when exposed to a female versus a male candidate. However, in domains in which women are overrepresented in leadership positions (medical and health services managers; United States Department of Labor, 2010), participants should be more likely to support the current sociopolitical system when they are exposed to a male versus a female candidate.

In the current research, we found consensual responses across participants of different sexes and different political parties. However, a useful direction would be to examine whether individual differences in system justification attitudes predict differential sensitivity to the presence of traditional

versus nontraditional candidates. Previous research suggests that individuals who are high in system justification, as opposed to low in system justification, are especially sensitive to threat cues within the current sociopolitical system (e.g., Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011). Because illegitimacy beliefs threaten the current status quo by creating opportunities for social change (e.g., Tajfel, 1981), individuals high in system justification might be especially sensitive to legitimacy cues. More specifically, individuals high in system justification might be especially likely to endorse system justifying beliefs when exposed to a nontraditional as opposed to a traditional candidate. Thus, individual differences in system justifying beliefs might be important considerations in determining when exposure to a nontraditional candidate is especially likely to inhibit social change.

Although these studies indicate that exposure to a nontraditional candidate increases beliefs and preferences supporting the current sociopolitical system, an important step would be to examine the long-term effects of such “outsider” candidates. Presumably, increased satisfaction with the status quo would facilitate opportunities for political candidates who themselves represent the status quo (and thus restrict opportunities for nontraditional candidates). Social change might be less likely when individuals are satisfied with the current sociopolitical system and thus less likely to support a nontraditional leader. Moreover, the current experiments focus only on candidates whose outcomes remain unspecified, and thus cannot speak to the consequences of an outsider candidate’s failed candidacy. Such a failure might highlight the need for change and thus lead to a decrease in support for the current sociopolitical system.

This research presents the first experimental demonstrations that support for the status quo is increased in the presence of a female versus a male candidate. In short, the perception that the glass ceiling is beginning to crack does not necessarily mean that efforts toward gender equality should

pause; instead, those who wish to see the “highest, hardest glass ceiling” shattered need to guard against the complacency that might result from initial successes.

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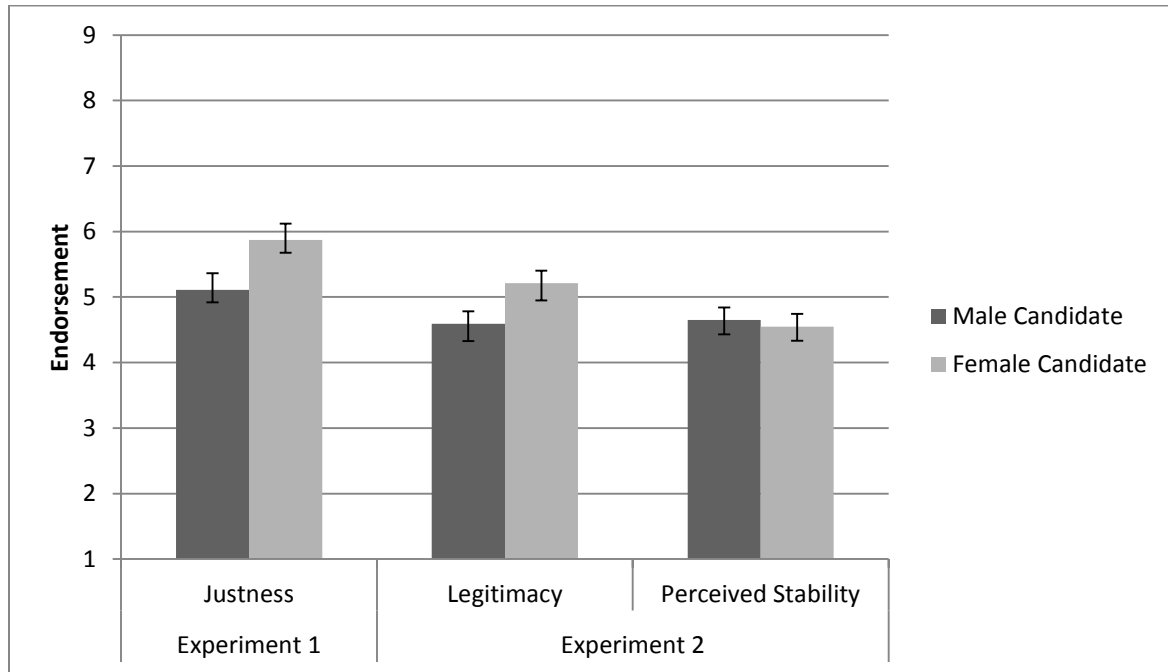
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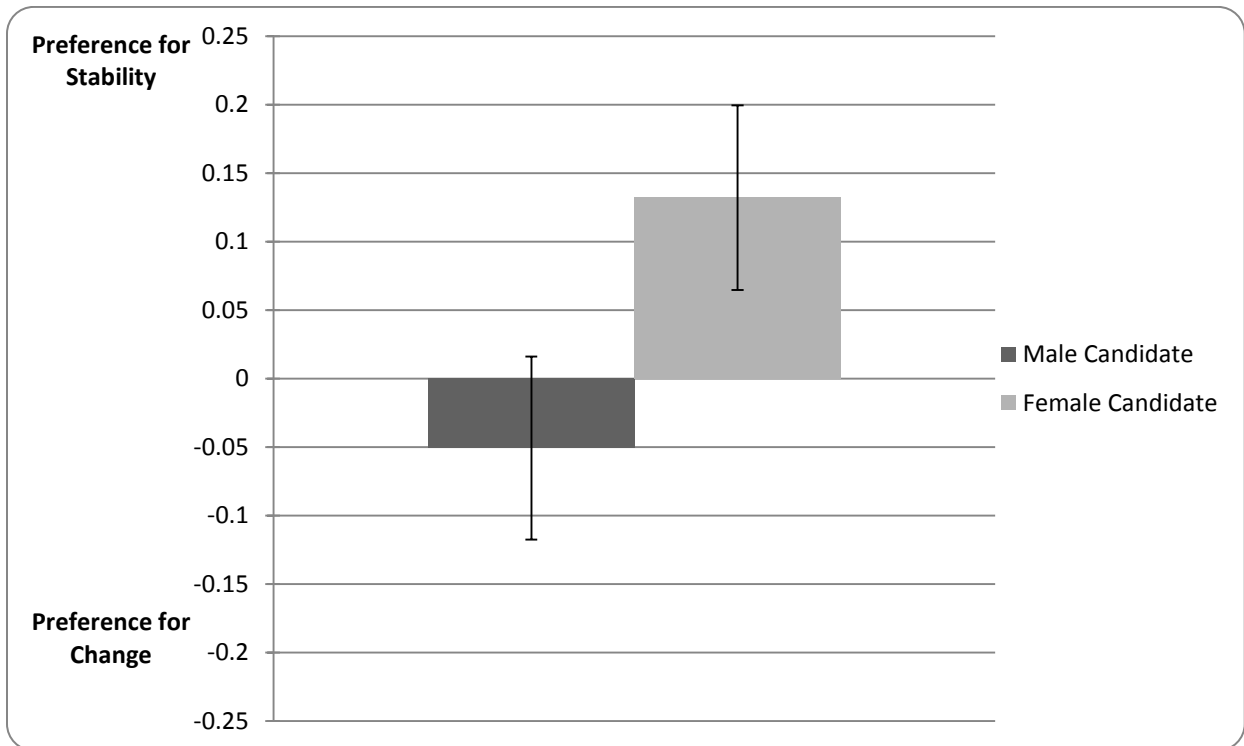
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Figure 1. The effect of candidate sex on system justification, legitimacy of the gender hierarchy, and future stability of the gender hierarchy: Experiments 1 and 2.



Note. Endorsements of justness beliefs, gender hierarchy legitimacy, and future gender hierarchy stability were made on 9-point scales. The error bars represent standard errors.

Figure 2. The effect of candidate sex on implicit preferences for stability: Experiment 3.



Note. Positive scores indicate stronger stability/good and change/bad associations and negative scores indicate stronger change/good and stability/bad associations. The error bars represent standard errors.

Appendix A.

Candidate Sex Manipulation for Experiments 1 and 2

Directions: This is a survey of how people form impressions of political candidates. Assume that the man [woman] described below is a potential political candidate running for office. Please read through the information provided about him [her]. Then, based on the information that you have received, answer the questions that follow by using the rating scales provided.

Brian [Karen] Johnson is a candidate for the House of Representatives in the state of Ohio. In his [her] campaign, he [she] has expressed that as a leader he [she] will fight to:

Reduce taxes

Create new jobs for the state of Ohio

Make Ohio a better place to live for all of its citizens

Candidate Sex Manipulation for Experiment 3

Directions: This is a survey of how people form impressions of political candidates. Assume that the man [woman] described below is a potential political candidate running for office. Please read through the information provided about him [her]. Then, based on the information that you have received, answer the questions that follow by using the rating scales provided.

Brian [Karen] Johnson is a candidate for the House of Representatives. In his [her] campaign, he [she] has expressed that as a leader he [she] will fight to:

Reduce taxes

Create new jobs

Make the country a better place to live for all of its citizens

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