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Happy reading! -Regina

Strategic Discrimination

by

Regina Bateson

Visiting Professor
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
and Faculty of Law, Common Law Section

University of Ottawa

gina.bateson@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: Why are women and people of color underrepresented in US politics? This paper offers a new explanation: strategic discrimination. Strategic discrimination occurs when an individual discriminates against a candidate out of concern that *others* will object to the candidate's identity. In a series of three experiments, I find that strategic discrimination exists, it matters for real-world politics, and it can be hard to overcome. The first experiment shows that Americans consider white male candidates more electable than equally qualified black and white women, and to a lesser extent, black men. These results are strongly intersectional, with black female candidates rated less electable than either black men or white women. The second experiment shows that anti-Trump voters weigh Democratic candidates' racial and gender identities when deciding who is most capable of beating Donald Trump in 2020. The third experiment finds that although some messages intended to combat strategic discrimination have no effect, diverse candidates can increase their perceived electability by showing they have a path to victory. I conclude by arguing that strategic discrimination is especially salient in contemporary US politics due to three parallel trends: increasing diversity among candidates, heightened societal awareness of sexism and racism, and extreme political polarization.

When women and people of color run for office in the United States, they fare well. Female candidates win their elections as just often as male candidates (Smith and Fox 2001; Lawless and Pearson 2008; Dolan 2014; Anastasopoulos 2016), and some recent research even suggests that all else being equal, voters may prefer female candidates (Schwarz, Hunt, and Coppock 2018; Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018).² And while earlier studies found evidence of racial bias by voters (e.g., Sigelman and Welch 1984, Terkildsen 1993), today racial animus appears to play little role in determining the outcomes of most elections (Highton 2004; Abrajano and Alvarez 2005;

² This is not to say that sexism plays no role in US politics. Gender bias and stereotypes certainly shape candidates' experiences, and they affect the way voters perceive and evaluate candidates (e.g., Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Streb et al. 2008; Burden, Ono, and Yamada 2017; Ditonto 2019; Glick 2019). Nonetheless, women do not systematically perform worse than men in US elections, perhaps because the women who choose to run for office are more qualified than their male counterparts (Pearson and McGhee 2013).

Mas and Moretti 2009; Juenke and Shah 2016). Indeed, in the 2018 midterm elections, female and nonwhite candidates won at rates that equaled or exceeded their white male counterparts (Reflective Democracy Campaign 2019).

So if bias at the ballot box is not to blame, why do women and people of color remain under-represented in US politics? The candidate emergence literature suggests this disparity may originate in the pre-primary period, when prospective candidates test the waters, decide to run, and establish their viability (e.g., Shah 2014; Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019). During this critical time, even slight headwinds can derail a nascent campaign—and as compared to white men, women and people of color³ must navigate a rockier path to candidacy, with more bumps and off-ramps along the way.

In addition to overt harassment⁴ and disparities in financial resources (Crowder-Meyer 2013), party recruitment (Niven 1998; Lawless and Fox 2010; Crowder-Meyer 2013; Butler and Preece 2016), personal and professional networks (Fox and Lawless 2008; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Crowder-Meyer 2013), and political ambition⁵ and self-efficacy (Lawless and Fox 2010; Fox and Lawless 2011), this paper identifies another challenge facing diverse candidates in the pre-primary period: strategic discrimination.

³ For women of color, the process of becoming a candidate is intersectional (e.g., Holman and Schneider 2018). Yet as Simien (2007) points out, political science research on race and gender is largely bifurcated into two unconnected literatures: one on race, and one on gender (see also Hancock 2007). This balkanization is problematic because minority women candidates' motivations, perspectives, and experiences are simultaneously shaped by both race and gender, making them distinct from white women and men of color (Frederick 2013; Bejarano 2013; Holman and Schneider 2016; Brown and Gershon 2017; and Silva and Skulley 2019).

⁴ Candidates sometimes face overt harassment ranging from racial slurs (e.g. Itkowitz 2019) to sexualized comments and inappropriate touching (e.g., Graham 2018; Cotton 2020). On gender-based harassment of and violence toward politicians, see Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2019).

⁵ On average, women express less political ambition than men. However, this varies by race. Black women tend to be more politically ambitious than white women (Frederick 2013).

Strategic discrimination occurs when an individual hesitates to support a candidate out of concern that *others* will object to some aspect of the candidate's identity. The problem is not animus toward the candidate. In contrast to direct bias, strategic discrimination is motivated by the belief that a candidate's identity will cause *other people* not to donate, volunteer, or vote for him or her.

Strategic discrimination is closely related to the idea of electability. In the run-up to a primary election, party leaders, donors, and activists want to recruit and support a well-qualified candidate who shares their policy preferences. But they also need a candidate who will be capable of winning the general election. This motivation requires party gatekeepers and primary voters to guess how others will react to a prospective candidate. Will the candidate be able to raise the money necessary to run an aggressive campaign? Will he or she attract positive media coverage? And ultimately, will enough general election voters support the candidate, or will they be reluctant to vote for him or her?

In this “futures market” of politics (Bai 2004), diverse candidates are at a disadvantage. This paper's first experiment finds that when presented with profiles of hypothetical candidates, Americans consider white men more electable than equally qualified black women, white women, and less significantly, black men. These tendencies have real-world consequences, which I illustrate in the context of the 2020 Democratic presidential primary. In the second survey experiment, I show that anti-Trump voters consider candidates' racial and gender identities when making strategic calculations about who is best positioned to beat Donald Trump. When subjects are

primed to think about the strategic importance of male and white voters, they evaluate female and black candidates as significantly less competitive vis-à-vis Trump.

Candidates seeking to overcome strategic discrimination have limited options. My third experiment shows that informing subjects about the true, low levels of bias against female and black candidates has no effect. Neither does identifying strategic discrimination as a problem and discouraging subjects from engaging in it. More promisingly, when subjects read a message emphasizing the strategic importance of black voters, they see black candidates' as more competitive. A priming message about the success of a black female congressional candidate in a majority-white, Trump-leaning district has similar if smaller effects for both female and black candidates. Rather than attempting to change voters' and activists' misperceptions of others' biases, diverse candidates may be better served by emphasizing their own strategic advantages.

Taken in combination, these experiments demonstrate that strategic discrimination exists, it matters, and it can be tricky to combat. As in many areas of politics, when it comes to candidate emergence, the rules of the game are both raced and gendered (on Congress as a raced-gendered institution, see Hawkesworth 2003; on feminist institutionalism, see Krook and Mackay 2011 and Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2011). In addition to doing all the normal work of being a candidate, women and people of color must also convince party leaders, donors, and primary voters to place their bets on a new, different type of candidate whose prospects for success may feel uncertain.

A NEW THEORY OF DISCRIMINATION IN POLITICS

Shortly after Abdul El-Sayed began running in the 2018 Democratic primary for governor of Michigan, the former Rhodes Scholar had a discomfiting experience:

I had, we'll just say, very powerful people who call a lot of the shots in the party sit me down and say, "We think you're great. You just, you know, it's not that we're racist. It's just that we think that people outside of Southeast Michigan are racist, and so you can't win. See? It makes sense" (quoted in Culham 2018).

El-Sayed was not alone. When former Rep. Katie Hill started running in California's 25th district, key gatekeepers – including a member of the Democratic House leadership – told her that they didn't think a woman could beat incumbent Steve Knight (Kitchener 2019). A few districts over, California Democratic Party delegates told congressional candidate Omar Siddiqui he was "too brown to win" (Fox News 2018). Similarly, in Alabama, a Democratic party official told congressional candidate Adia Winfrey, "You can't win because you're black" (Gontcharova 2018). And in Georgia, some longtime allies of Stacey Abrams did not support her gubernatorial campaign because "they did not believe a black woman could win" (Chira 2019).

In Michigan's 11th district, Suneel Gupta encountered both overt racism and another sort of speculative, anticipatory bias during his 2018 primary campaign.

Reflecting on his experience, Gupta concluded that there are

two types of biases. One is the type of bias that you face with [a] person directly. We talk about the type of bias that person has towards you. Then there's another bias that we don't talk about enough, which is the bias of, "I'm not racist, but my neighbor *is* racist, right, and therefore I don't think you would be a strong candidate, not because I wouldn't vote for you, but because my neighbor would have a tough time voting for you." And I think that the second is much harder to address, because it's not talked about enough. And that is ultimately the thing that I think holds a lot of candidates down (First We Marched 2019).

I call this second type of bias *strategic discrimination*. Strategic discrimination occurs when an individual discriminates against someone out of concern that *others* will object to some aspect that person's identity. Even individuals who value diversity may

consciously or unconsciously engage in strategic discrimination if they believe that other people are biased.

As in strategic voting, individuals engaged in strategic discrimination support candidates for strategic reasons, rather than according to their true preferences. Yet strategic discrimination also involves behaviors other than voting, such as donating to candidates, volunteering, and making endorsements. These activities shape the field early in a primary, determining who is on the ballot come election day.

Strategic discrimination poses significant obstacles for diverse candidates. If key gatekeepers begin with the presumption that they are less electable, then women and people of color have to work harder to establish themselves as real contenders. For example, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation has found that female candidates have to

wage two campaigns with donors, voters, and the media: a “campaign of belief” convincing people that it is possible for them to win, and a traditional campaign to actually be successful in the election (2019, 6).

For candidates, strategic discrimination also increases the mental load and frustration associated with running for office, as Deval Patrick experienced during his primary for governor of Massachusetts. “The hardest part [of running],” Patrick said,

is dealing with a political establishment who says things to me like, “Your politics are my politics. You are the better candidate. You would be the better governor. But are you electable?” (quoted in Monahan 2005)

Theoretically, strategic discrimination can affect any candidate who is outside the norm due to his or her sexual orientation, class, age, religion, national origin, parental status, or other aspects of their identity. In this paper, however, I focus on gender and race because these are especially salient aspects of a candidate’s identity, and there is a robust literature on racial and gender discrimination in politics.

Canonical works (e.g., Blank et al. 2004, 56-65) commonly delineate four types of discrimination: intentional or explicit discrimination; subtle or unconscious discrimination; statistical discrimination (aka profiling); and structural or institutional discrimination. Strategic discrimination is fundamentally different from all these forms of discrimination. The first three types all involve an individual directly discriminating against another individual (whether consciously or not); the fourth type identifies structures, institutions, and procedures that unfairly disadvantage some groups while privileging others. Strategic discrimination, by contrast, occurs when an individual makes a judgment or takes an action in anticipation of discrimination by *other* people.

Intriguingly, strategic discrimination has some parallels to customer-driven discrimination in the labor market. Becker (1971) proposed that taste-based discrimination could originate with employers, coworkers, or customers. Becker's model implies that customer discrimination should be the most difficult for the market to eradicate, and indeed, racial discrimination is most significant in hiring for jobs requiring direct contact with customers (Nunley et al. 2015), especially when a business's customers are of a different race than an applicant (Holzer and Ihlanfeldt 1998). However, customer discrimination is driven by the actual actions of customers. Strategic discrimination, by contrast, is more centrally motivated by beliefs about the inferred biases of other people, whether or not those biases really exist.⁶

Because strategic discrimination in contemporary US politics is based on incorrect beliefs about others' willingness to vote for diverse candidates, it has strong

⁶ Holzer and Ihlanfeldt (1998) measure employers' perceptions of customers' biases, not customers' *actual* biases – which the authors characterize a flaw in their research design (863). The study is framed as being about *actual* discrimination by customers, not employers' (potentially erroneous) perceptions of customers' attitudes.

similarities to the concept of pluralistic ignorance (Weisz 2020). Pluralistic ignorance occurs when individuals privately hold a belief, but they incorrectly assume that others think differently, misperceiving the aggregate norm (Allport 1924, Katz and Allport 1931, O’Gorman 1986, Miller and Prentice 1994). For example, a group of individuals may each personally oppose racial segregation while erroneously thinking others in the group support it (as in O’Gorman 1975, Fields and Schuman 1976, and O’Gorman and Garry 1976). Such misperceptions, in turn, shape individuals’ behavior and perpetuate unpopular norms. Though rarely referenced in political science (for an important exception, see Mildemberger and Tingley 2019), social psychologists have found evidence of pluralistic ignorance in realms as varied as alcohol consumption (Prentice and Miller 1993), sexual behavior (Lambert, Kahn, and Apple 2003), and use of paternity leave policies (Miyajima and Yamaguchi 2017).

When it comes to attitudes on race and gender, the pluralistic ignorance literature consistently shows that Americans over-estimate others’ levels of intolerance (O’Gorman 1975, Fields and Schuman 1976, O’Gorman and Garry 1976, Do et al. 2013, Sobotka 2020a). This reflects the “conservative lag” of pluralistic ignorance: even after individuals have changed their beliefs, they may not realize that others have also updated their attitudes (Miller and Prentice 1994: 543). Pluralistic ignorance can thus act as a “brake on social change” (Miller and Prentice 1994: 543), anchoring decision-making in past patterns of prejudice.

This dynamic explains why doubts about the electability of women and people of color persist even as voter bias against female and black candidates has declined sharply (Burden, Ono, and Yamada 2017; McCarthy 2019; Gallup 2019). Today, Americans are

themselves comfortable with the idea of a female president, but they doubt that *others* are ready (King, Elbeshbishi, and della Cava 2019).⁷ In the first survey experiment reported in this paper, for example, a nationally representative sample of US adults estimates that on average 47% of other Americans would not vote for a woman for president, and 42% of other Americans would not vote for a black person for president. Though not precise measures of US public opinion, these estimates are notable because they are orders of magnitude too high.⁸ And when people think others are biased, conditions are ripe for strategic discrimination.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF STRATEGIC DISCRIMINATION

Study I: Strategic Discrimination in the Abstract

For decades, the idea of electability has been explicitly tied to race and gender. In 1971, for example, leading Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Edmund Muskie said he would not consider a black running mate, because “in [his] judgment such a ticket was not electable” (quoted in Naughton 1971).

Today, many commentators argue that the term electability is still code for “white and male” (e.g., Bacon 2018, Zhou 2019), which is consistent with anecdotes from candidates. But are these candidates’ experiences reflective of a broader trend? Does identity continue to play a role in determining who is considered electable? To find out, I designed an experiment in the tradition of the Goldberg paradigm (1968) to determine if

⁷ In earlier research, Williams (1990) documents a similar pattern. In reality, 5% of Williams’ white subjects said they would not vote for a qualified black candidate for mayor. But 54% of both black and white subjects believed that “most whites” would not vote for a qualified black candidate.

⁸ Polls show that less than 10% of Americans would not vote for a black or female president (McCarthy 2019). Based on a list experiment, Burden, Ono, and Yamada (2017) estimate 13% of Americans would not vote for a woman for president. In an older list experiment, Streb. et al. (2008) estimate that 26% of Americans would be angry or upset about a female president.

white male candidates are considered more electable than equally qualified female and black candidates.⁹

Methodology

Study I was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,947 US adults on May 23-27, 2019. The implementing vendor (Lucid) constructed the sample to match the census on key demographics. While not the same as probabilistic sampling, Lucid samples have been shown to return experimental results that correspond closely to results from random samples (Coppock and McClellan 2019).

The experiment was part of a collaborative survey fielded by MIT's Political Experiments Research Lab (PERL). After answering demographic questions, an attention check question, and questions about political ideology and knowledge, subjects were instructed to "please evaluate the following candidate profiles."

Next, the subjects saw a series of three profiles of hypothetical¹⁰ gubernatorial candidates.¹¹ The profiles appeared in random order, one at a time, on separate screens.

As described in Table 1.1, each profile listed the candidate's current position, prior

⁹ The Goldberg paradigm is a simple yet compelling experimental design that is frequently used to test for discrimination, as in Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004). Subjects rate pieces of work, profiles, resumes, or other similar materials that are identical but for the identities assigned to the authors. If their ratings vary across these randomly assigned identities, that is evidence of discrimination.

¹⁰ Hypothetical candidate experiments are a powerful tool because they allow researchers to isolate the causal effects of candidates' identities (for recent examples, see Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth 2018 and Doherty, Dowling, and Miller 2019). However, such experiments can feel artificial. To mitigate this shortcoming, this paper pairs Study I with Studies II and III, which evaluate whether candidates' racial and gender identities contribute to perceptions of competitiveness during an ongoing primary election.

¹¹ I chose to use hypothetical gubernatorial candidates because discussing race and gender at the presidential level invariably invokes comparisons to Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and 2020 presidential contenders, which is not ideal for an abstract experiment. I considered using hypothetical congressional candidates, but House races vary considerably: some districts are majority-minority; while other seats have been held by the same incumbent for decades. By contrast, the dynamics of gubernatorial races are reasonably similar across the country: both major parties consistently run candidates, there are no multi-decade incumbent governors, and state boundaries cannot be gerrymandered. Additionally, gubernatorial candidates are running for executive office, so they are at least somewhat comparable to the presidential candidates in Studies II and III.

offices held, education, profession, age, race [black/white], and gender [male/female]. Race and gender were randomized so 25% of the profiles were white female candidates, 25% were white male candidates, 25% were black female candidates, and 25% were black male candidates.

Dependent Variables

Below each profile, the subjects were asked, “If this candidate ran for governor in your state, how electable would [he/she] be?” with a 4-point response scale ranging from very electable (4) to very unelectable (1). Based on the answers to this question, I construct two dependent variables: an electability score (*Electability*), and a binary variable indicating whether each candidate profile is considered “very electable” (*VeryElectable*).

Table 1.1 Candidate Profiles: Study I

	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3
Current Position	State Attorney General	Lieutenant Governor	CEO
Prior Elected Offices	State Senator; District Attorney	Mayor; School Board Member	None
Education	BA; JD	BA	BA; MBA
Profession	Lawyer	Educator	Entrepreneur
Gender	[Female/Male]	[Female/Male]	[Female/Male]
Race	[Black/White]	[Black/White]	[Black/White]
Age	55 years old	48 years old	52 years old

Hypothesis

H1: white male candidates will be evaluated as more electable than otherwise identical white female, black female, and black male candidates.

Results

The unit of analysis for this experiment is the profile.¹² Table 1.2 reports the main experimental results. On average, when candidate profiles are labeled as black women, white women, and black men, they receive lower electability scores than when the same profiles are labeled as white men. This effect is statistically significant for black female ($p < 0.001$) and white female candidates ($p < .05$), but not for black male candidates.

Similarly, as compared to white male candidates, subjects are less likely to consider black women, white women, and black men “very electable.” Candidate profiles identified as white men are rated “very electable” 37% of the time. For black male candidates, this number is 35%; for white women, 32.5%; and for black women, 30.4%. The differences between white men and white women and white men and black women are statistically significant ($p = 0.015$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively), but the difference between black men and white men is not statistically significant ($p = .283$).

¹² Because each subject analyzed three profiles, the N is over 5700.

Table 1.2. Variation in Electability by Candidate Race and Gender

	Electability	Very Electable
<i>White Woman</i>	-0.062* (0.031)	-0.044* (0.018)
<i>Black Woman</i>	-0.140*** (0.033)	-0.066*** (0.018)
<i>Black Man</i>	-0.034 (0.033)	-0.020 (0.018)
<i>Constant (White Man)</i>	3.13*** (0.023)	0.370*** (0.014)
<i>N</i>	5736	5736

All models are OLS. Robust standard errors clustered by respondent are in parentheses.

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.001$, *** = $p < 0.001$

Robustness Checks and Quality Control

The results reported in Table 1.2 are substantively the same if estimated with ordered probit (*Electability*) or probit (*VeryElectable*), and they are robust to the inclusion of profile fixed effects (Appendix Tables 1.1-1.3).

Low-quality responses do not appear to be responsible for Study I's findings. Dropping subjects who failed an attention-check question increases the magnitude and significance of the results, and the difference in electability scores for black male candidates becomes statistically significant ($p < 0.05$; see Appendix Table 1.4). Similarly, the results are not driven by politically disengaged respondents who would be unlikely to participate in a primary election (Appendix Tables 1.12-1.13). To the contrary, subjects with higher levels of political knowledge tend to show stronger responses to the experimental manipulation (Appendix Tables 1.5-1.10).

Strategic Discrimination and Direct Discrimination as Possible Mechanisms

What explains the results of Study I?¹³ Theoretically, subjects may be rating white male candidates as more electable than other types of candidates due to *both* the subjects' own biases (direct discrimination) *and* their estimates of others' biases (strategic discrimination). First, regarding direct bias: I do not have a measure of each subject's own level of racism or sexism,¹⁴ but the available data suggests that subjects' own biases are unlikely to be *solely* responsible for the pattern of discrimination documented here. Study I's results are strongest among subjects with 4-year university degrees and postgraduate degrees (Appendix Tables 1.14-1.15), and the results do not show any clear generational trends (Appendix Tables 1.16-1.17).¹⁵ These patterns are puzzling because older and less educated Americans typically hold the least egalitarian views on race and gender (Heerwig and McCabe 2009; Parker, Graf, and Igielnik 2019).

More promisingly, sub-group analysis suggests that subjects' responses to Study I may have been shaped by their estimates of others' levels of bias. After completing the candidate evaluation exercise, Study I asked subjects to estimate the percentage of other Americans who would not vote for a woman for president and the percentage who would not vote for a black person for president.

¹³ The risk of experimenter demand effect is low (Mummolo and Peterson 2019), and even if subjects deduced that this was an experiment about race and gender, social desirability bias would presumably cause them to rate female and black candidates favorably – which would run *contrary* to the results reported here.

¹⁴ More research is needed to fully understand the relationship between individuals' own biases and their views of candidates' electability.

¹⁵ Strangely, Study I has the strongest effect among Gen Xers, no effect for Millennials, and modest effects for subjects from Gen Z, Boomers, and the Silent Generation.

Figure 1.1. Histogram of subjects' estimates of others' unwillingness to vote for a female presidential candidate.

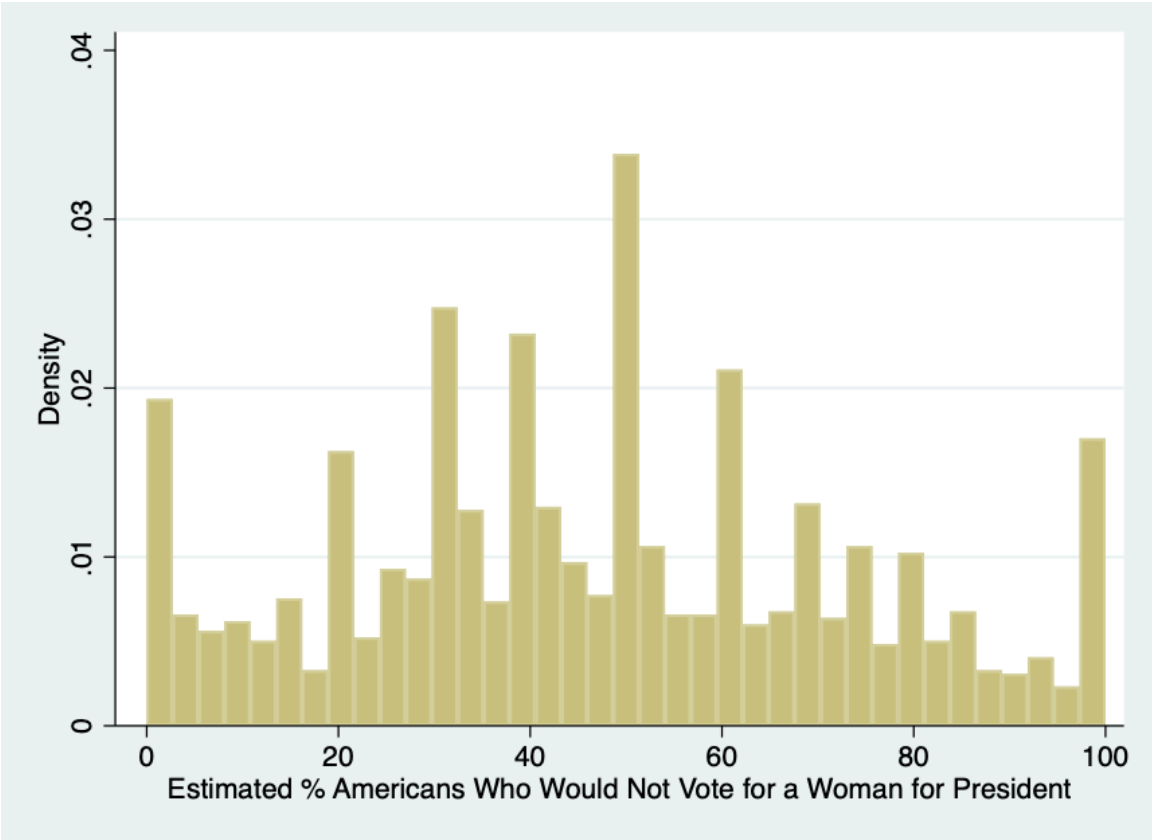
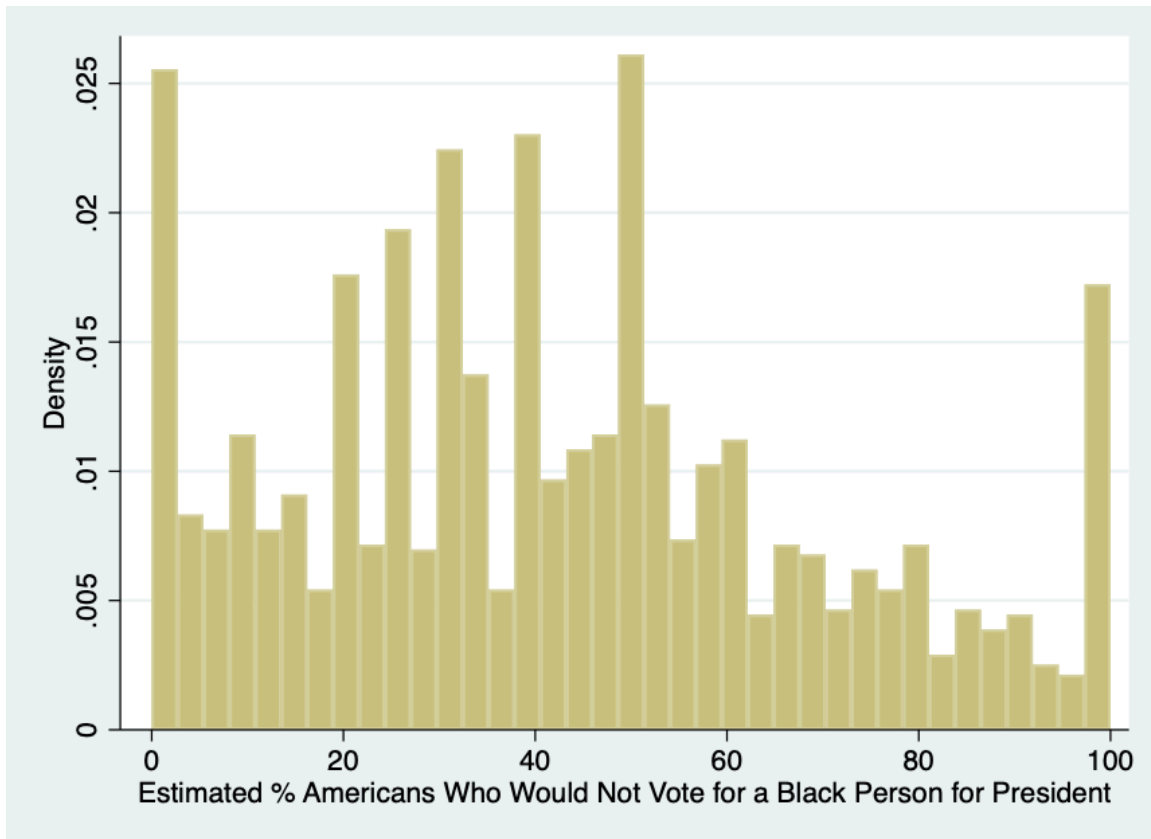


Figure 1.2 Histogram of subjects' estimates of others' unwillingness to vote for a black presidential candidate.



As illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2, the majority of subjects over-estimate others' levels of sexism and racism. These "over-estimators" are driving the results of Study I. Among subjects who over-estimate others' biases, Study I's main findings are greater in magnitude and statistical significance (Appendix Tables 1.19-1.29), with the results for black male candidates reaching conventional levels of statistical significance (Appendix Tables 1.24-1.29). By contrast, among subjects who have accurate or low estimates of others' levels of bias, Study I generally produces null effects (Appendix Tables 1.19-29). In some model specifications, subjects with accurate or low estimates of others' racism actually rate black men as significantly *more* electable than white men (Appendix Tables 1.24 and 1.27).

Though not a smoking gun, these results suggest that concern about others' biases could be causing individuals to doubt the electability of diverse candidates. But are subjects' estimates of others' levels of racism and sexism simply a reflection of their own beliefs?

Research on pluralistic ignorance finds that individuals' estimates of others' views are simultaneously shaped by two biases: "looking glass bias" and "conservative bias" (Fields and Schuman 1976). Individuals do project their own views onto others. Yet at the same time, they also tend to assume that others' beliefs are more conservative than they really are. Taken in combination, these two biases typically produce a weak positive correlation between subjects' own beliefs and their estimates of others' beliefs (as in Mildemberger and Tingley 2019 and Sobotka 2020b).¹⁶ Of particular relevance, in studies of racism and sexism, even highly tolerant subjects have been shown to over-estimate others' levels of intolerance (Fields and Schuman 1976, O'Gorman 1975, O'Gorman and Garry 1976, Do et al. 2013, Sobotka 2020b). This may explain why in Study I, subjects' estimates of others' levels of bias are not correlated with known predictors of racism and sexism (see Appendix Table 1.33).

To summarize, sub-group analysis suggests that strategic discrimination is a plausible mechanism for the results of Study I, though direct discrimination could simultaneously play a role as well. Disentangling these two different mechanisms offers an exciting avenue for future research.¹⁷ As Mildemberger and Tingley (2019) note,

¹⁶ For example, Sobotka (2020a) asked male subjects to complete the Modern Sexism Scale for themselves, and for "most men." Subjects' own scores do not fully predict their estimates of others' scores (Sobotka 2020b).

¹⁷ A number of complex dynamics could be influencing individuals' second-order beliefs about racism and sexism. For example, the subjects could be ascribing discriminatory views to others in order to make themselves feel morally superior. Fully exploring this question is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is an intriguing possibility that merits further investigation.

political science has largely ignored second-order opinions,¹⁸ yet Study I suggests that beliefs about others' beliefs can play an important role in political decision-making.

Partisan cues as an alternative mechanism?

Do subjects rate female and black candidates less electable because of their racial and gender identities, or because gender and race are cues for partisanship? To evaluate this possibility, I re-analyzed Study I for two sub-groups: subjects from states that had Democratic governors at the time of the experiment, and subjects from states that had GOP governors. For white female and black female candidates, the results are largely consistent across the two sub-groups. Black male candidates, however, are rated less electable only by subjects from states with GOP governors (see Appendix Table 1.18). This suggests that inferred partisanship could be driving Study I's (limited) findings regarding black male candidates. By contrast, black and white female gubernatorial candidates are seen as less electable even in states with Democratic governors.

Discussion and context

Study I finds that perceptions of electability vary according to candidates' racial-gender identities. The perceived electability gap is especially severe for black women, suggesting a need more intersectional research on public opinion toward black female candidates.¹⁹ Compared to an identical white man, a black female gubernatorial candidate

¹⁸ First-order beliefs are an individual's own beliefs. Second-order beliefs are an individual's beliefs about *others'* beliefs. Sobotka (2020) further distinguishes between an individual's beliefs about the beliefs of others in a defined group (which he calls second-order beliefs), and an individual's beliefs about the beliefs of other people in general (which he calls third-order beliefs).

¹⁹ Shockingly, I am unable to find a single national poll or survey that has ever asked, "Would you vote for a black woman for president?" Black women candidates are similarly ignored in the experimental political science literature on race and gender in politics (e.g., Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth; Doherty, Dowling, and Miller; Heerwig and McCabe 2009; Streb. et al. 2008). This oversight is especially unfortunate given the ease of incorporating intersectionality into research designs involving hypothetical candidate profiles.

is about 20% less likely to be rated “very electable.” The numbers are even worse when considering only data from subjects who are attentive, politically knowledgeable, and ideologically motivated; they rate black female candidates “very electable” 27.5% of the time, as compared to 37.7% for white male candidates.

These results are large enough to be substantively important. Yet in actual elections, people form opinions about candidates based on many different factors. The next experiment assesses whether strategic discrimination is significant enough to affect the perceived competitiveness of real-world candidates.

Study II: Strategic Discrimination in the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary

In the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, electability is a top concern for voters (Quinnipiac 2019) – and many commentators and activists have explicitly linked electability to race and gender. As MSNBC host Joy Reid said at an April 2019 candidate forum,

a lot of women of color say that after the experience of 2016, we don’t have confidence that the electorate will elect a woman president. There’s a fear that they might need to flee to the safety of a white, male candidate (quoted in Weigel 2019).

Yet even as they reference candidates’ racial-gender identities, debates about electability also invoke candidates’ policy positions, qualifications, and other attributes.

Consider this statement from South Carolina State Sen. Dick Harpootlian:

This is do-or-die, and Joe Biden is the best candidate to go against Trump in November. Would Joe Biden be running if he thought any of these other folks could beat Donald Trump? No way. We can’t risk this thing with someone who has not done this before, who is unchallenged, who is untested. There is something to be said for two old white guys going at it. The African-Americans in the State Senate with me are going to be with him overwhelmingly. Because this is a pragmatic year. This isn’t a battle of ideologies or identity or Medicare for All

or Green New Whatever. It's all about who can stop this juvenile narcissist from getting a second term (quoted in Hamby 2019).

Harpoonian weaves together multiple arguments, ranging from Biden's experience to the apparent desirability of seeing "two old white guys going at it." How can we disentangle these factors?

To deal with this challenge, I conducted a survey experiment that exposes some subjects to priming messages that cue the strategic importance of white or male voters. If the subjects exposed to these treatments consider black and female candidates less competitive than the control subjects, then we can conclude that strategic concerns about race and gender play a role in shaping assessments of real-world candidates' competitiveness.²⁰

To be clear, Study II does not seek to measure actual levels of bias organically present in the 2020 Democratic primary, nor can Study II determine what role sexism and racism played whittling a historically diverse field of candidates down to two white men. Rather, this experiment simply seeks to establish that a candidate's race and gender can affect perceptions of their competitiveness, even in the noisy, multi-dimensional context of an ongoing election.

Methodology

The survey experiment was fielded on mTurk from May 6-11, 2019. High-quality mTurk workers who live in the US were eligible to participate. Out of 3,386 people who took the initial screening questions, just under 50% were screened out. 1,702 subjects met

²⁰ Though somewhat oblique, this research design is the best option for evaluating whether strategic discrimination occurs in a real-world context. I cannot randomize real candidates' racial-gender identities. Nor can I randomize subjects' underlying beliefs, which are endogenously determined. The best that I can do is to use priming to randomize the salience of strategic thinking about race and gender.

the criteria for inclusion: they stated that they voted in the 2016 presidential election, they did not vote for Donald Trump, and they do not support Donald Trump’s re-election in 2020.

The 1,702 subjects who completed the survey experiment are evenly divided between women and men and women. In 2016, Democratic primary voters were 58% female (Brownstein 2019a), so women are under-represented in the subject pool as compared to the Democratic primary electorate. The subjects are also less racially diverse (70% white) than Democratic primary voters (who were 62% white in 2016 (Brownstein 2019)). Finally, the subjects are younger than the Democratic primary electorate, with a modal age range of 25-34 years. Appendix Table 1.34 contains a full demographic profile of the subjects.

Control and Treatment Groups

The subjects who were screened into the full survey were randomly divided into four equal groups. All subjects were told that a large number of Democrats are competing to run against Donald Trump in 2020. Then they saw the names, titles, and photos of the top eight Democratic presidential contenders, based on current polls at the time of the experiment. The candidates appeared one at a time, in a random order.

Table 2.1. Democratic Presidential Candidates in Study II

Former Vice President Joe Biden
Sen. Bernie Sanders
Sen. Elizabeth Warren
Sen. Kamala Harris
Mayor Pete Buttigieg
Former Rep. Beto O’Rourke
Sen. Cory Booker
Sen. Amy Klobuchar

After viewing the candidates, the control group proceeded directly to a screen where they were asked which candidates had the best chance of beating Donald Trump in 2020. They were given a list of the eight candidates in a random order, and they were asked to drag and drop the top three candidates with the best chances into a box on the right-hand side of the screen. The instructions specified that the candidate in the #1 position should be the person with the best chance of beating Trump, the candidate in the #2 position should have the second-best chance, and the candidate in the #3 position should have the third-best chance of beating Trump. After this exercise, the control group proceeded to a concluding module with demographic questions.

Before doing the ranking exercise described above, the subjects randomized into the “Male Voters” treatment group read a priming message emphasizing the strategic importance of winning male voters in 2020. Another treatment group (“White Voters”) read a priming message emphasizing the strategic importance of winning white voters in 2020. Both messages were condensed from actual narratives circulating in late 2018 and early 2019 (ex: Hohman 2018, Brownstein 2019b, Riccardi 2019), and the full text of the messages is in Appendix Table 1.36.

The third treatment group (“Estimate Bias”) was informed that to beat Donald Trump in 2020, the Democratic presidential nominee needed to be able to win key swing states. Then, these subjects were asked to estimate the percentage of swing-state voters who would not vote for a woman for president and the percentage who would not vote for a black person for president. Most respondents over-estimated swing state-voters’ biases; on average, they estimated that 38.5% of swing state-voters would not vote for a woman, and 37.4% would not vote for a black candidate.

Hypotheses

H2: When subjects are told that winning the support of male voters is key to victory in 2020, they will evaluate female candidates as being less capable of beating Trump.

H3: When subjects are told that winning the support of white voters is key to victory in 2020, they will evaluate black candidates as being less capable of beating Trump.

H4: When subjects are asked to estimate the percentages of swing state-voters who will not vote for female and black presidential candidates, they will evaluate female and black candidates as being less capable of beating Trump.

Dependent variables

The main dependent variables are binary measures of whether or not each subject's list of the top three candidates with the best chances of beating Trump included at least one woman (*IncludeWoman*) or at least one black candidate (*IncludeBlack*).

Because there are multiple ways of interpreting the ranking exercise, I also code four additional dependent variables. Two are binary measures of whether a female (*TopWoman*) or black (*TopBlack*) candidate occupies the #1 position in a subject's list. The others are the total number of black (*TotalBlack*) and female (*TotalWomen*) candidates included in the subject's list of the top three most competitive candidates.

In some extensions of the analysis, I also code dependent variables that measure outcomes for specific candidates, including binary measures of whether each candidate was included among the top three most competitive candidates, and whether each candidate occupied the top position.

Results – Strategic Messaging Treatments

All results are average treatment effects (ATEs). Each ATE is the difference in the means of the control group and a treatment group, estimated using Welch’s t-test.

Male Voters Treatment

When subjects are told that winning male votes is the path to victory in 2020, they are less likely to say that female candidates are well positioned to beat Donald Trump. In the control group, 70.5% of subjects include at least one woman in their list of the top three most competitive candidates. In the male voters treatment group, 56.4% of subjects do so. This effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, subjects in the male voters treatment group include fewer women in their top three list, and the treatment reduces the probability that a subject lists a female candidate as having the best chance of beating Trump (7.72% vs. 15.6% in the control group, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2.3. Average Treatment Effects, Male Voters Treatment

	Control Group (N=424)	Male Voters Treatment Group (N=427)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.705	0.564	-0.141***	< 0.000
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.156	0.0773	-0.0784***	< 0.000
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.854	0.639	-0.214***	< 0.000

White Voters Treatment

In the control group, 49% of subjects include at least one black candidate in their list of the top three most competitive candidates. Among subjects told that white voters are the key to beating Trump, that percentage decreases to about 41% ($p = 0.0144$). Subjects in the white voters treatment group are also less likely to say that a black

candidate has the best chance of beating Trump (4% vs. 9.2%, $p=0.0023$), and they include fewer black candidates in their “top three” lists ($p=0.0487$).

Table 2.4. Average Treatment Effects, White Voters Treatment

	Control Group (N=424)	White Voters Treatment Group (N=425)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.491	0.407	-0.0835*	0.0144
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.0920	0.0400	-0.0520**	0.0023
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.545	0.464	-0.0813*	0.0487

Candidate-specific Results

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 show the average treatment effects by candidate. Each arrow shows the differences between the control group and the treatment group. Black arrows have p -values < 0.1 ; gray arrows are statistically insignificant.²¹

Compared to the control group, the male voters treatment group is markedly less optimistic about Elizabeth Warren’s and Kamala Harris’s chances of beating Donald Trump.²² In the control group, 7.5% of subjects say Harris has the best chance of beating Trump, compared with 3.5% in the male voters treatment group ($p=0.010$). Warren experiences a similar decline from 7.1% to 3.3% ($p=0.0125$). Both Warren and Harris also see their chances of being considered among the top three most competitive candidates decrease by about ten percentage points.

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine why some white male candidates benefitted from the priming messages about white and male voters, and others did not. Future researchers may want to investigate the question of who benefits from strategic discrimination, and why.

²² Effects for Amy Klobuchar are negative but statistically insignificant because so few subjects rated her as competitive in the control group.

Kamala Harris is also penalized again by the message about the strategic importance of white voters. Harris's probability of being rated most competitive falls from 7.5% in the control group to 2.6% in the white voters treatment group ($p=0.001$).²³ Figures 2.1 and 2.2 highlight the importance of intersectionality. While Booker is unharmed by (and may even benefit from) the male voters treatment, and Warren is unaffected by the white voters treatment, Harris's perceived competitiveness erodes significantly in *both* treatment conditions.

[Figure 2.1 here]

[Figure 2.2 here]

²³ The white voters treatment effect for Cory Booker is negative but smaller in magnitude and not statistically significant, largely because few members of the control group perceive Booker as competitive.

Figure 2.1. Average Treatment Effects by Candidate, Male Voters Treatment

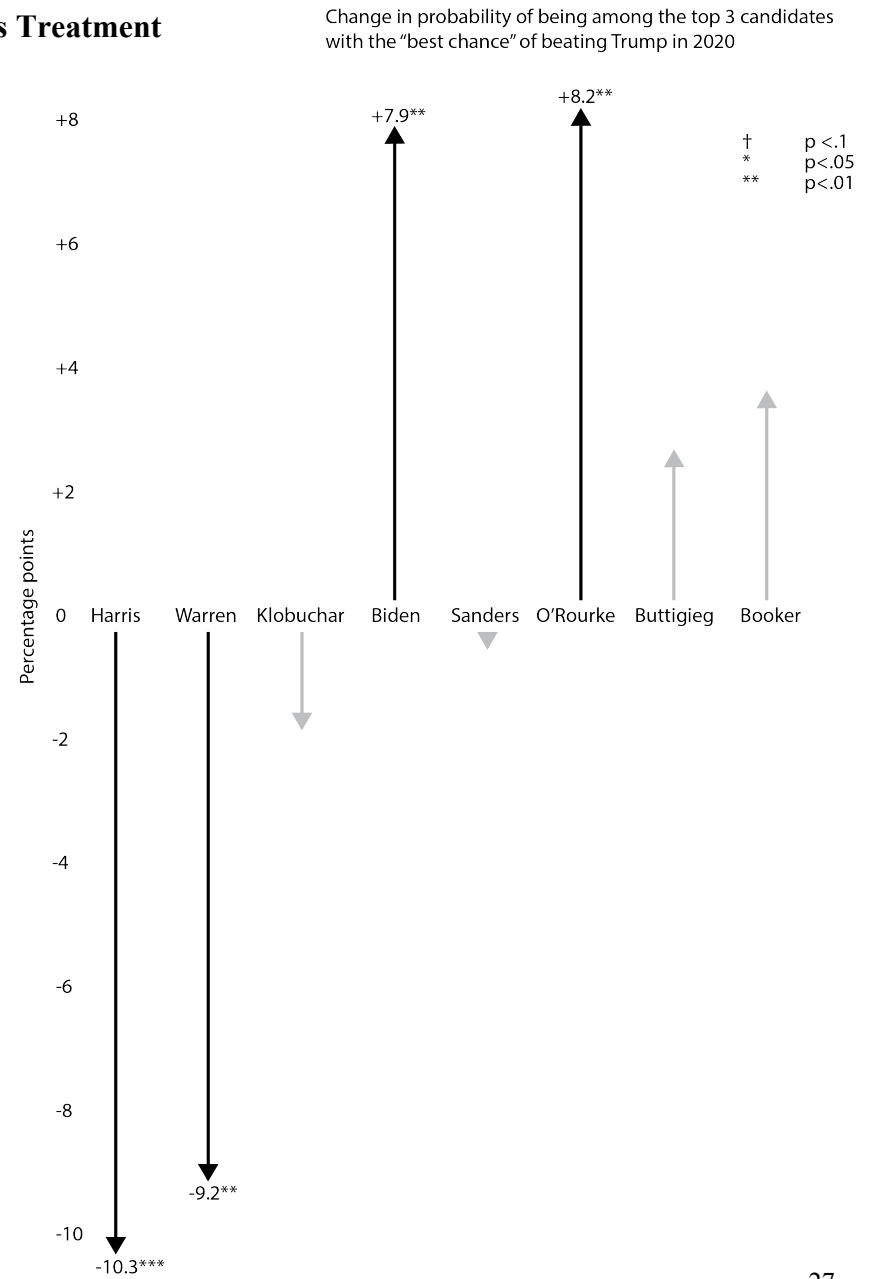
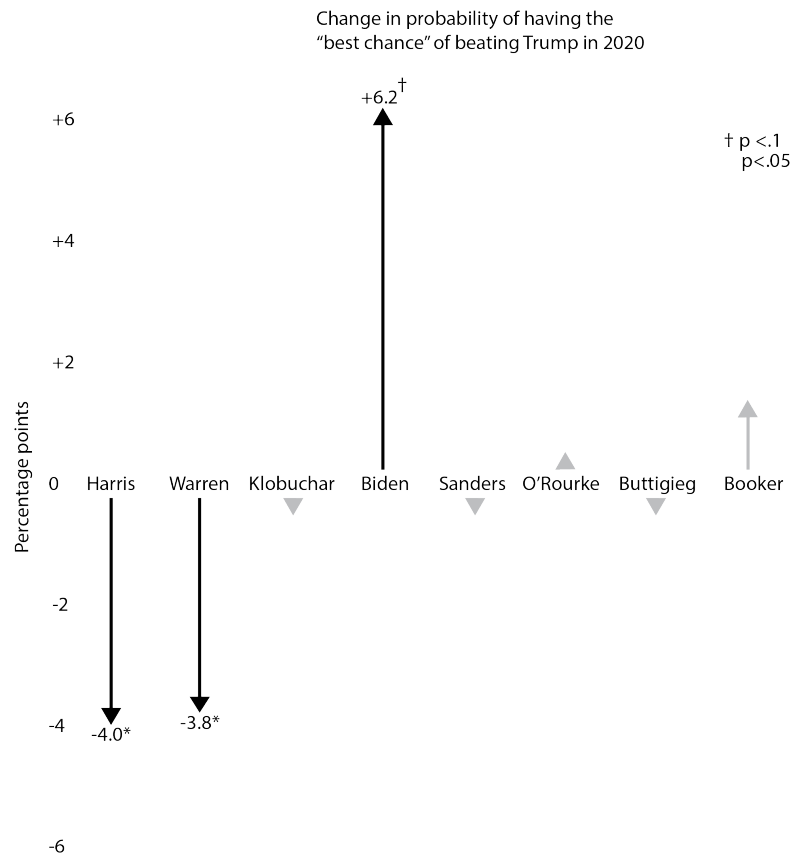
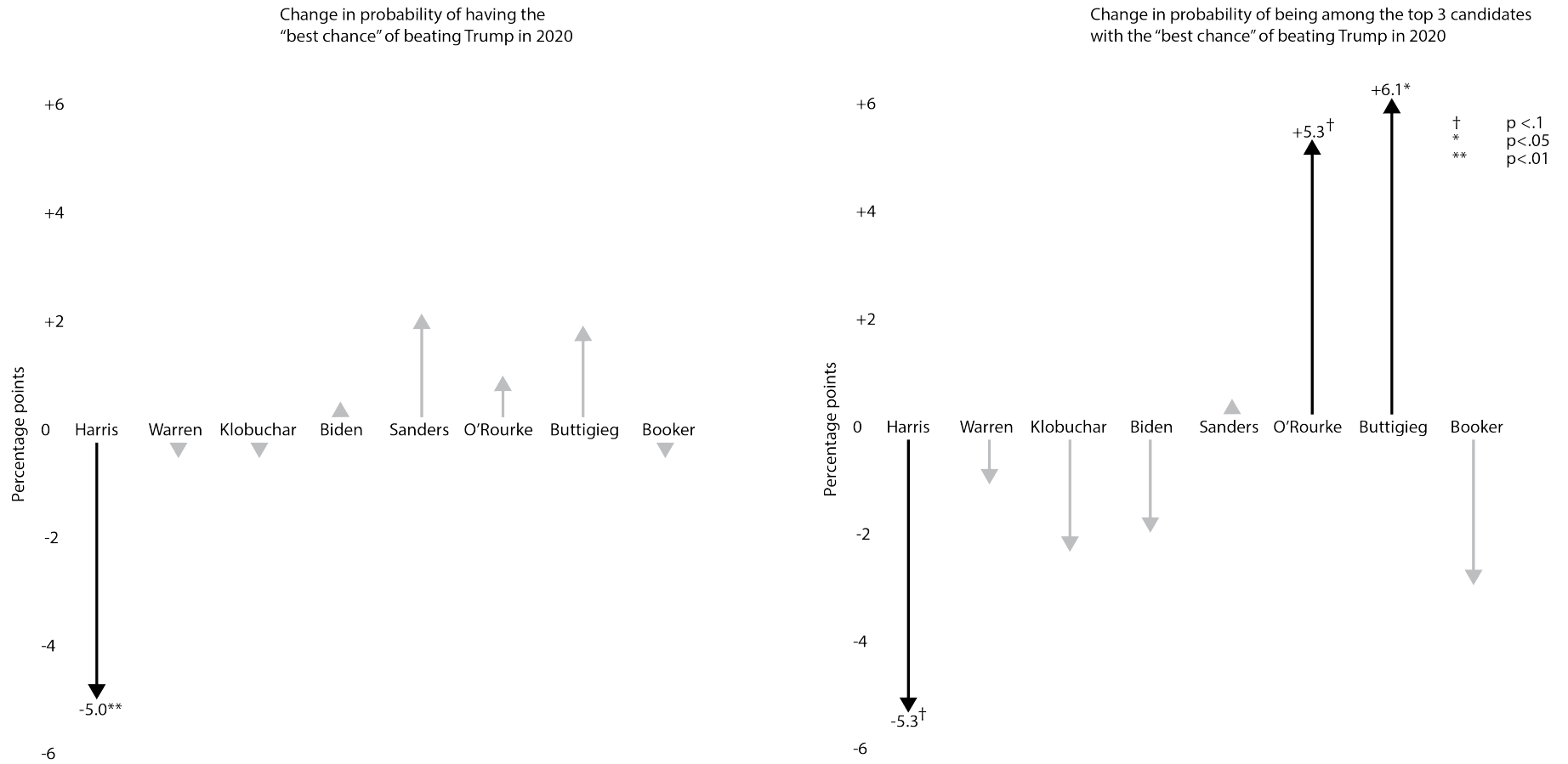


Figure 2.2. Average Treatment Effects by Candidate, White Voters Treatment



Results – Estimating Sexism and Racism Treatment

Before they rated the candidates’ competitiveness, a third treatment group was asked to estimate the percentage of swing-state voters who would not vote for a woman for president, and the percentage of swing-state voters who would not vote for a black person for president. As reported in Table 2.5, the effects of this treatment are statistically insignificant – though the negative effects for *TotalBlack* and *IncludeBlack* are close to conventional levels of statistical significance (p=0.116 and p=0.132, respectively).

Table 2.5. Average Treatment Effects, Estimate Others’ Biases Treatment

	Control Group (N=424)	Estimate Others’ Biases Treatment Group (N=426)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.705	0.673	-0.0315	0.322
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.156	0.129	-0.0266	0.269
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.854	0.805	-0.0486	0.278
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.491	0.439	-0.0516	0.132
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.0920	0.0728	-0.0192	0.309
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.545	0.481	-0.0636	0.116

These results may be statistically insignificant because subjects responded to the treatment heterogeneously. Most subjects over-estimate others’ biases, while about a quarter of subjects have accurate or low perceptions of others’ racism and sexism. As compared to the subjects who have low estimates, subjects who over-estimate others’ biases are more likely to construct all-male or all-white lists of candidates best able to beat Trump, and on average they include fewer black and female candidates on their lists.

These correlations are consistent with the theory of strategic discrimination, though it is important to note that they are *correlations*, not evidence of a causal effect.²⁴

Discussion and Context

Study II uses an unconventional research design to make an important point: under some circumstances, partisan subjects can be induced to consider real-world candidates' racial-gender identities as they decide who would be most competitive in a general election. Study II also suggests that media coverage and analysis from pundits can have a surprisingly large effect on the perceived competitiveness of candidates of different races and genders.

It is admittedly unorthodox to use real candidates in a survey experiment, and this choice presents some trade-offs. On the one hand, Study II avoids the air of artificiality that dogs Study I. But on the other hand, Study II is highly-context dependent. Study II cannot be replicated, because the circumstances that made the experiment possible no longer exist. Readers should also be careful not to generalize too broadly from an experiment that was conducted with specific candidates at a specific time, in the wake of Hillary Clinton's 2016 loss to Donald Trump and within recent memory of the Obama presidency.

Study III: Combatting Strategic Discrimination

In 1990, former Charlotte mayor Harvey Gantt (D) nearly unseated Jesse Helms (R) in North Carolina's US Senate race. By 1996, Gantt was ready for a rematch (Sack

²⁴ It would be inadvisable to compare only the over-estimators in this treatment group with the control group, because the control group includes both subjects who (if asked) would have had low estimates of others' sexism and racism, and subjects who (if asked) would have had high estimates of others' sexism and racism.

1996). As Gantt liked to say, “I’m six years older, six years wiser, six years grayer, six years tougher – and ready to fight” (quoted in Grove 1996; see also Ahearn and Alexander 1996).

Having already weathered racially charged attacks from Helms,²⁵ Gantt was mentally prepared for a bruising general election campaign. But in 1996, Gantt’s race was also an issue in the Democratic primary. Gantt’s primary opponent was white pharmaceutical executive Charlie Sanders, who ran on the slogan, “the one Democrat who can beat Jesse Helms” (Germond 1996). Sanders “made electability the primary rationale for his campaign,” and electability was widely understood as “subtle code for race” (Sack 1996) – “the idea that a black candidate could not defeat Helms” (Ahearn and Alexander 1996).²⁶ Even among black voters, “there [was] a strong feeling that white North Carolinians [would] not let a black man beat somebody like Jesse Helms” (Sack 1996). As one black pastor said, “Harvey can’t beat Jesse [Helms]. No black can. It’s sad. This is a great country, but it’s not perfect” (quoted in Germond 1996).

Gantt and his advisors were initially surprised by this racialized discussion of electability, but Gantt “mov[ed] firmly to bring the racial issue into the open so he [could] combat it on his own terms” (Sack 1996).²⁷ As he told one majority-black audience,

I think it’s wrong for anybody, four years from the 21st century, whether from my opponent or on their own, to suggest that we can’t win because of the

²⁵ Helms’ 1990 ad, “White Hands,” was “one of the most notorious race-baiting ads of modern American politics” (James 2012).

²⁶ As Gantt’s campaign manager argued, “I have never known electability to be a dominant factor in an election. In this case, it’s code for something else” (quoted in Germond 1996).

²⁷ Asked how a black Democrat was realistically going to beat Jesse Helms, Gantt responded to a journalist, “What you’re basically saying is, ‘How in the hell’re you going to win this race, boy? Boy, you can’t win this race! Don’t you know who you are? Don’t you think you’re getting out of your place?’ That’s what you’re asking me” (quoted in Grove 1996).

pigmentation of our skin. That is a corrosive and damaging argument (quoted in Sack 1996).

Gantt ultimately prevailed in his primary, but his experience raises an important question: when candidates encounter strategic discrimination, how can they best respond? Should they adopt Gantt's strident, moralistic tone? Or would another approach be more effective?

To evaluate strategies for combatting strategic discrimination, I designed a follow-up experiment (Study III) based on Study II.

Methodology

The structure of the follow-up experiment is identical to Study II, except instead of treatments designed to induce strategic discrimination, the follow-up experiment evaluates four treatments intended to mitigate or counter-act strategic discrimination.

The follow-up experiment was fielded on MTurk from May 28-June 2, 2019. The recruitment procedure was identical to Study II, but for the fact that MTurk workers who had already participated in Study II were ineligible for Study III. 4,561 subjects took the screening questions for Study III, and 2,219 completed the full experiment. Full demographics are reported in Appendix Table 1.35.

Dependent Variables and Control and Treatment Groups

The dependent variables for Study III are identical to those in Study II, and Study III includes the same candidates. As in Study II, the control group subjects proceeded directly to ranking the top three Democratic presidential candidates with the best chance of beating Donald Trump in 2020.

Before evaluating the Democratic presidential candidates, the first treatment group ("Correct Information") was told that levels of bias against female and black

candidates are at historically low levels, and the vast majority of Americans are willing to vote for a female or black president.

The second treatment group (“Naming and Shaming”) was told that some Democrats think they need to nominate a white man to win in 2020. They were told that this type of thinking is called strategic discrimination, and it unfairly advantages white male candidates. They were also told that even people who value diversity can unintentionally engage in strategic discrimination.

The third treatment group (“Role Model”) was told that to win in 2020, Democrats should consider what worked in 2018. They were then provided with a short vignette about Rep. Lauren Underwood, an African-American woman who beat a white, male GOP incumbent in a majority white district that voted for Trump in 2016. The vignette included an official portrait of Underwood.

The fourth treatment group (“Black Voters”) saw a message emphasizing the strategic importance of black voters. The text closely paralleled the messages about white and male voters used in Study II.

The full text of all these treatments can be found in Appendix 1.37.

Hypotheses

H5: When subjects are informed of the true low levels of bias facing female and black candidates, they will evaluate female and black candidates as being more capable of beating Trump.

H6: When subjects are informed that strategic discrimination advantages white men and unfairly harms female and black candidates, they will evaluate female and black candidates as being more capable of beating Trump.

H7: When subjects are primed with a vignette about a successful female African-American congressional candidate, they will evaluate female and black candidates as being more capable of beating Trump.

H8: When subjects are told that high black turnout is the key to beating Trump, they will evaluate black candidates as more capable of beating Trump.

Results

All results reported in Tables 3.2-3.5 are average treatment effects (ATEs) estimated using Welch's t-test. I find support for H7 and H8, but not H5 or H6.

Correct Information Treatment

For the correct information treatment in this experiment, we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no effect. Contrary to Dowling and Miller (2015), I find no evidence that facts change subjects' beliefs about the competitiveness of female or black candidates. Instead, my findings are consistent with a broader literature suggesting that when it comes to politics, misperceptions are sticky (Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Berinsky 2017).

Naming and Shaming Treatment

The results of the naming and shaming treatment are also statistically insignificant. Even when subjects are explicitly told that strategic discrimination is a problem that unfairly disadvantages female and black candidates, they do not meaningfully increase their assessments of female and black candidates' competitiveness against Donald Trump. This null effect suggests that merely calling out strategic discrimination is not a promising strategy for combatting it.

Role Model Treatment

When subjects are primed with the vignette about Lauren Underwood, they rate black and female presidential candidates as significantly more competitive against Donald Trump. Subjects in the role model treatment group include more women and African-Americans in their lists of the top three most competitive candidates, they are more likely to put a female candidate in their #1 position (21.7% vs. 12.8% in the control group; $p < 0.001$), and they are more likely to say that a black candidate has the best chance of beating Donald Trump ($p = 0.001$).

These results are largely driven by subjects' perceptions of Kamala Harris. 7.8% of the subjects in the "role model" treatment group list Kamala Harris as having the best chance of beating Trump (vs. 2% in the control group, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, 39.7% of the treatment group includes Harris in their top 3 lists, as compared to 27.9% of the control group ($p < 0.001$).

Black Voters Treatment

When subjects are told that black voters are the key to victory in 2020, they rate black candidates as more competitive against Donald Trump. As compared to the control group, subjects in the black voters treatment group are more likely to list a black candidate as having the best the chance of beating Trump in 2020 (4.94% vs. 15.9%, $p < 0.001$). They are more than 14 percentage points more likely to include at least one black candidate in their list of the top three most competitive candidates ($p < 0.001$), and on average they include more black candidates on their lists ($p < 0.001$).

Both Kamala Harris and Cory Booker benefit significantly from this treatment. As compared to the control group, Harris's chances of being rated most competitive against

Trump increase from 2% to 8.1% ($p < 0.001$), while Booker's chances increase from 2.9% to 7.8% ($p = 0.001$). Similarly, both candidates see large jumps in their chances of being included among subjects' top three most competitive candidates, from 27.9% to 42.1% for Harris ($p < 0.001$) and from 18% to 26.8% for Booker ($p = 0.002$).

Table 3.2. Average Treatment Effects, Correct Information Treatment

	Control Group (N=445)	Correct Information Treatment Group (N=443)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.757	0.738	-0.019	0.512
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.128	0.165	+0.037	0.122
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.874	0.901	+0.027	0.530
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.420	0.458	+0.038	0.254
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.049	0.079	+0.030	0.073
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.458	0.510	+0.052	0.187

Table 3.3. Average Treatment Effects, Naming and Shaming Treatment

	Control Group (N=445)	Naming and Shaming Treatment Group (N=446)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.757	0.780	+0.023	0.417
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.128	0.166	+0.038	0.111
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.874	0.930	+0.056	0.165
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.420	0.435	+0.015	0.657
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.049	0.074	+0.025	0.128
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.458	0.482	+0.024	0.542

Table 3.4. Average Treatment Effects, Role Model Treatment

	Control Group (N=445)	Role Model Treatment Group (N=438)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.757	0.806	+0.049	0.080
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.128	0.217	+0.089***	<0.001
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.874	1.032	+0.158***	<0.001
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.420	0.530	+0.110**	0.001
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.049	0.107	+0.059**	0.001
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.458	0.582	+0.124**	0.002

Table 3.5. Average Treatment Effects, Black Voters Treatment

	Control Group (N=445)	Black Voters Treatment Group (N=447)	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
	Mean	Mean		
<i>IncludeWoman</i>	0.757	0.785	+0.279	0.321
<i>TopWoman</i>	0.128	0.186	+0.058*	0.018
<i>TotalWomen</i>	0.874	0.946	+0.072	0.076
<i>IncludeBlack</i>	0.420	0.566	+0.146***	<0.001
<i>TopBlack</i>	0.049	0.159	+0.109***	<0.001
<i>TotalBlack</i>	0.458	0.689	+0.231***	<0.001

Discussion and Context

Study III suggests that for candidates trying to overcome strategic discrimination, it is most productive to make the case that fielding diverse candidates advances the goal of winning elections. By contrast, calling out strategic discrimination and attempting to correct subjects' misperceptions about others' biases had no statistically significant effect. However, it is important to note that Study III used written priming messages,

rather than videos or interactive exercises that might be more compelling. A different strategy for communicating these ideas might yield different results.

Additionally, in real elections, candidates seeking to overcome strategic discrimination often use a strategy that it was not possible to evaluate in Study III: they out-perform the competition, proving viability by shattering fundraising records, winning debates, and notching up victories in straw polls, caucuses, and primaries.

To be clear, a strategy of out-performing the competition is an imperfect, individual-level approach to deal with strategic discrimination, *not* a means of solving the broader problem. It is neither reasonable nor equitable to say that if women and people of color want to be taken seriously as candidates, they must be exceptional. Not everyone can be Barack Obama.

Nonetheless, it is worth learning from Obama's path to the White House. Early in his candidacy, Obama faced significant skepticism about his electability. As a young black voter in South Carolina exclaimed, "Personally, I don't think he has a chance in hell. All those white people? Come on!" (quoted in Helman 2007). In 2007 and 2008, these doubts were widespread, as many people—including African-Americans²⁸—looked at Obama's candidacy and wondered, "Is America ready to elect a black president?" (e.g., Crowley and Johnson 2007; *60 Minutes* 2008, min 4:40 and 6:48).

Obama ultimately overcame these concerns by showing he could win over the very voters who were expected to oppose him. His campaign deployed white surrogates

²⁸ Obama directly addressed these doubts at an NAACP dinner in Sumter, SC in early 2008. "I've heard that some folks in the barber shops, beauty shops—you know better than I—say to themselves, 'I like Obama, but I'm just not sure America's ready. I'm not sure other folks are ready. I'm not sure he can win.' Don't go around telling me I can't do something! Because if you're telling me I can't do something, that means you're telling your child they can't do something. That means you're telling yourself you can't do something. I don't believe that I can't" (quoted in Helman 2007).

to speak on his behalf (Zengerle 2008), they put “diverse but mostly white faces” on the risers behind him at campaign events (Zengerle 2008), and they produced videos that intentionally included footage of white audiences applauding enthusiastically (Zeleny 2008).²⁹ Obama later gained crucial momentum when he won the Iowa caucuses and proved that yes, a black man could win even in the whitest corners of America.

CONCLUSION

This paper introduces a theory of strategic discrimination and presents empirical evidence from three large experiments, finding that strategic discrimination exists, it matters, and it can be challenging to combat. While problematic for white women and black men, the experimental results show that strategic discrimination poses particularly steep challenges for black female candidates.

But why is strategic discrimination so salient at this particular moment in US history? The answer may lie in three parallel trends: increasing diversity among candidates, increasing awareness of racism and sexism in society, and increasing political polarization.

First, a historic surge of women and people of color is flooding into politics, particularly on the Democratic side. It is natural that their progress would prompt a reaction, spurring active conversations about concerns that people may have only theoretically considered in the past. Put simply, without many black candidates running

²⁹ Interestingly, these videos were intended to win over African-Americans. Per David Axelrod, “The greatest barrier to breaking through in a big way was the skepticism among African-American voters that white voters would embrace a black candidate” (Zeleny 2008). Obama strategist David Binder similarly remembers, “The biggest problem we had with African Americans would be that they didn’t think he could ever win. That all changed with Iowa. The Iowa results proved to many African-Americans that Obama had broader-based appeal and was not just someone who was going to be a token African-American candidate” (Ambinder 2009).

in majority-white districts, and without many women running period, there was little reason to contemplate whether diverse candidates were electable. Now such concerns are more relevant and tangible.

Second, from Black Lives Matter to the 2016 election to #MeToo to the Women's March to "shithole countries" to Charlottesville to the Kavanaugh hearings, issues of race and gender are front and center in contemporary American political discourse. The percentages of Americans naming racism and sexism as "very big" national problems have increased markedly in recent years, especially since 2016 (Neal 2017; Hartig and Doherty 2018). Strategic discrimination may be an unexpected side effect of these changes in public opinion. If Americans are increasingly concerned about the prevalence and severity of racism and sexism, they may conclude that sexism and racism will keep female and nonwhite candidates from winning general elections.

Finally, political polarization may encourage strategic discrimination. Hayes and Lawless (2016) contend that heightened polarization levels the playing field for female candidates, because general election votes are cast purely according to partisanship, with little room for a candidate's identity to matter. But under conditions of extreme polarization, primary races often revolve around perceptions of candidates' electability, which is a raced and gendered concept. As this article demonstrates, even if female and black candidates *objectively* win their elections at the same rates as white men, diverse candidates are *perceived* as less electable. Consequently, as polarization makes partisans increasingly desperate to win general elections, donors, party activists, and voters may gravitate toward white, male primary candidates who seem like a safe bet, rather than taking a risk on a woman or a person of color. That's strategic discrimination in action.

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APPENDIX
for “Strategic Discrimination”

PART 1. Supplemental Tables

1.1 Study I: Main models with candidate profile fixed effects

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
White Female Candidate	-0.0609* (0.0297)	-0.0443* (0.0176)
Black Female Candidate	-0.143*** (0.0324)	-0.0670*** (0.0176)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0401 (0.0311)	-0.0202 (0.0179)
Lt. Gov. Profile	-0.117*** (0.0196)	-0.0851*** (0.0127)
CEO Profile	-0.564*** (0.0243)	-0.254*** (0.0129)
Constant	3.359*** (0.0246)	0.483*** (0.0155)
Observations	5736	5736

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.2 Study I: Main models estimated with ordered probit (“Electability” DV) and probit (“Very Electable” DV)

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
White Female Candidate	-0.0887* (0.0411)	-0.120* (0.0492)
Black Female Candidate	-0.182*** (0.0432)	-0.181*** (0.0497)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0523 (0.0430)	-0.0530 (0.0494)
Constant		-0.333*** (0.0357)
Observations	5736	5736

Standard errors in parentheses
Standard errors clustered by subject
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.3 Study I: Main results analyzed as t-tests (Welch’s)

	White Male Profile Mean	Black Male Profile Mean	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
<i>Electability</i>	3.13	3.09	-0.039	0.217
<i>Very Electable</i>	.370	.304	-0.020	0.268
	White Male Profile Mean	Black Female Profile Mean	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
<i>Electability</i>	3.13	2.99	-0.140***	<0.001
<i>Very Electable</i>	.370	.304	-0.066***	<0.001
	White Male Profile Mean	White Female Profile Mean	Difference	Two-tailed P-value
<i>Electability</i>	3.13	3.07	-0.0616*	0.0468
<i>Very Electable</i>	.370	.325	-0.044*	0.0125

1.4 Study I: Main models excluding subjects who failed an attention-check question

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0912* (0.0399)	-0.0359 (0.0224)
White Female Candidate	-0.102** (0.0378)	-0.0501* (0.0222)
Black Female Candidate	-0.204*** (0.0410)	-0.0797*** (0.0218)
Constant	3.140*** (0.0276)	0.359*** (0.0165)
Observations	3762	3762

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.5 Study I: Main models including only subjects who answered two constitutional knowledge questions correctly

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.131** (0.0493)	-0.0582* (0.0292)
White Female Candidate	-0.130** (0.0482)	-0.0570* (0.0290)
Black Female Candidate	-0.284*** (0.0518)	-0.116*** (0.0278)
Constant	3.190*** (0.0341)	0.373*** (0.0217)
Observations	2355	2355

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.6 Study I: Main models including only those subjects who passed the attention check question and answered two constitutional knowledge questions correctly

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.217*** (0.0561)	-0.106** (0.0340)
White Female Candidate	-0.206*** (0.0553)	-0.0904** (0.0339)
Black Female Candidate	-0.372*** (0.0596)	-0.151*** (0.0327)
Constant	3.261*** (0.0387)	0.410*** (0.0259)
Observations	1806	1806

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.7 Study I: Main models including only subjects who correctly identified Nancy Pelosi and Steve Mnuchin

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.106 (0.0658)	-0.0227 (0.0390)
White Female Candidate	-0.0291 (0.0605)	-0.0169 (0.0396)
Black Female Candidate	-0.237*** (0.0654)	-0.0839* (0.0369)
Constant	3.202*** (0.0437)	0.365*** (0.0294)
Observations	1362	1362

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.8 Study I: Main models including only subjects who passed an attention check question and correctly identified Nancy Pelosi and Steve Mnuchin

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.183* (0.0747)	-0.0482 (0.0440)
White Female Candidate	-0.0846 (0.0692)	-0.0343 (0.0456)
Black Female Candidate	-0.369*** (0.0738)	-0.134** (0.0411)
Constant	3.250*** (0.0485)	0.384*** (0.0340)
Observations	1041	1041

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.9 Study I: Main models including only attentive, ideological, and at least somewhat knowledgeable subjects (subjects who passed an attention check question, did not state that they “haven’t given much thought” to their political ideology, and answered at least one political or constitutional knowledge question correctly).

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.110* (0.0449)	-0.0454 (0.0252)
White Female Candidate	-0.116** (0.0421)	-0.0648** (0.0248)
Black Female Candidate	-0.247*** (0.0459)	-0.102*** (0.0244)
Constant	3.169*** (0.0309)	0.377*** (0.0187)
Observations	3030	3030

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.10 Study I: Main models including only attentive, ideological, and highly knowledgeable subjects (subjects who passed an attention check question, did not state that they “haven’t given much thought to their political ideology, and answered at least three political or constitutional knowledge questions correctly).

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.110* (0.0449)	-0.0454 (0.0252)
White Female Candidate	-0.116** (0.0421)	-0.0648** (0.0248)
Black Female Candidate	-0.247*** (0.0459)	-0.102*** (0.0244)
Constant	3.169*** (0.0309)	0.377*** (0.0187)
Observations	3030	3030

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.11 Study I: Main results including only subjects who failed an attention check question

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0584 (0.0561)	0.0128 (0.0323)
White Female Candidate	0.0146 (0.0546)	-0.0299 (0.0314)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0106 (0.0571)	-0.0332 (0.0320)
Constant	3.114*** (0.0408)	0.389*** (0.0232)
Observations	1974	1974

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.12 Study I: Main results including only subjects who answered all four constitutional and political knowledge questions incorrectly

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0584 (0.0561)	0.0128 (0.0323)
White Female Candidate	0.0146 (0.0546)	-0.0299 (0.0314)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0106 (0.0571)	-0.0332 (0.0320)
Constant	3.114*** (0.0408)	0.389*** (0.0232)
Observations	1974	1974

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.13 Study I: Main results including only subjects who said they “haven’t given much thought” to their ideology

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.101 (0.0897)	0.0244 (0.0456)
White Female Candidate	0.0582 (0.0934)	-0.00708 (0.0470)
Black Female Candidate	0.0754 (0.0913)	0.00876 (0.0462)
Constant	2.867*** (0.0655)	0.246*** (0.0328)
Observations	783	783

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.14 Study I: Are the results driven by subjects with low levels of education? (I)

	Estimated with subjects with a high school degree or less	Estimated with subjects who have some	Estimated with subjects with a 4-year college degree or postgraduate
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0573 (0.0329)	0.0248 (0.0293)	-0.0487 (0.0340)
White Female Candidate	-0.0481 (0.0321)	-0.0283 (0.0283)	-0.0654 (0.0345)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0716* (0.0328)	-0.0271 (0.0278)	-0.117*** (0.0340)
Constant	0.350*** (0.0238)	0.328*** (0.0209)	0.450*** (0.0256)
Observations	1752	2235	1749

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.15 Study I: Are the results of driven by subjects with low levels of education? (II)

	Estimated with subjects with a high school degree or less	Estimated with subjects who have some	Estimated with subjects with a 4-year college degree or postgraduate
	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)
Black Male Candidate	-0.107 (0.0582)	0.00492 (0.0543)	-0.0468 (0.0565)
White Female Candidate	-0.0541 (0.0561)	-0.0583 (0.0511)	-0.0794 (0.0541)
Black Female Candidate	-0.147* (0.0603)	-0.100 (0.0547)	-0.197*** (0.0587)
Constant	3.096*** (0.0406)	3.062*** (0.0371)	3.264*** (0.0415)
Observations	1752	2235	1749

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.16 Study I: Are the results driven by older subjects? (I)

	Estimated with subjects (1)	Estimated with subjects (2)	Estimated with subjects (3)	Estimated with subjects (4)	Estimated with subjects aged 71+. (5)
	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)	Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0684 (0.0512)	0.0349 (0.0338)	-0.0749* (0.0381)	0.00241 (0.0374)	-0.0337 (0.0609)
White Female Candidate	-0.121* (0.0509)	-0.0312 (0.0328)	-0.0606 (0.0393)	-0.00631 (0.0348)	-0.0333 (0.0601)
Black Female Candidate	-0.138** (0.0497)	0.00732 (0.0345)	-0.112** (0.0374)	-0.0491 (0.0345)	-0.102 (0.0562)
Constant	0.413*** (0.0378)	0.359*** (0.0239)	0.427*** (0.0286)	0.319*** (0.0266)	0.321*** (0.0452)
Observations	774	1659	1398	1422	483

Standard errors in parentheses
Standard errors clustered by subject
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.17 Study I: Are the results driven by older subjects? (II)

	Estimated with subjects aged 25-40	Estimated with subjects aged 41-60	Estimated with subjects aged 61-70	Estimated with subjects aged 71+	Estimated with subjects aged 71+
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Electability (4 pt. scale)	Electability (4 pt. scale)	Electability (4 pt. scale)	Electability (4 pt. scale)	Electability (4 pt. scale)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0570 (0.0968)	0.0988 (0.0621)	-0.196** (0.0646)	-0.0311 (0.0633)	-0.0570 (0.103)
White Female Candidate	-0.0740 (0.0898)	-0.0223 (0.0611)	-0.119 (0.0615)	-0.0317 (0.0570)	-0.114 (0.111)
Black Female Candidate	-0.167 (0.0939)	-0.0119 (0.0678)	-0.251*** (0.0652)	-0.134* (0.0623)	-0.229* (0.107)
Constant	3.130*** (0.0710)	3.059*** (0.0450)	3.265*** (0.0424)	3.106*** (0.0430)	3.071*** (0.0771)
Observations	774	1659	1398	1422	483

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.18 Study I: Do results vary across subjects in states with Democratic and GOP governors?

Models estimated with subjects from states that had a Democratic governor at the time of the experiment.

Models estimated with subjects from states that had a GOP governor at the time of the experiment.



	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0294 (0.0435)	0.00158 (0.0252)	-0.117* (0.0491)	-0.0441 (0.0272)
White Female Candidate	-0.0648 (0.0424)	-0.0532* (0.0243)	-0.0585 (0.0463)	-0.0348 (0.0274)
Black Female Candidate	-0.107* (0.0467)	-0.0524* (0.0250)	-0.178*** (0.0480)	-0.0809** (0.0261)
Constant	3.135*** (0.0321)	0.383*** (0.0182)	3.124*** (0.0333)	0.355*** (0.0202)
Observations	3087	3087	2637	2637

Standard errors in parentheses
 Standard errors clustered by subject
 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.19 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' sexism? (10% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 10% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 10% of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.141 (0.107)	0.0558 (0.0571)	-0.0601 (0.0342)	-0.0286 (0.0195)
White Female Candidate	0.0530 (0.0986)	-0.0299 (0.0553)	-0.0753* (0.0329)	-0.0461* (0.0192)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0153 (0.105)	0.00134 (0.0539)	-0.155*** (0.0353)	-0.0738*** (0.0191)
Constant	2.967*** (0.0793)	0.314*** (0.0414)	3.150*** (0.0240)	0.376*** (0.0142)
Observations	585	585	5151	5151

Standard errors in parentheses
Standard errors clustered by subject
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.20 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' sexism? (15% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 15% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 15% of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.120 (0.0913)	0.0694 (0.0499)	-0.0633 (0.0349)	-0.0334 (0.0199)
White Female Candidate	0.106 (0.0832)	0.00536 (0.0482)	-0.0872** (0.0336)	-0.0516** (0.0196)
Black Female Candidate	0.0365 (0.0892)	0.0327 (0.0466)	-0.167*** (0.0361)	-0.0809*** (0.0195)
Constant	2.964*** (0.0681)	0.292*** (0.0360)	3.156*** (0.0244)	0.382*** (0.0145)
Observations	759	759	4977	4977

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.21 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' sexism? (20% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 20% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 20% of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0751 (0.0760)	0.0233 (0.0428)	-0.0640 (0.0361)	-0.0293 (0.0205)
White Female Candidate	0.0851 (0.0708)	0.00285 (0.0419)	-0.0947** (0.0347)	-0.0547** (0.0201)
Black Female Candidate	0.0296 (0.0745)	0.0171 (0.0408)	-0.176*** (0.0373)	-0.0838*** (0.0201)
Constant	3.027*** (0.0568)	0.326*** (0.0310)	3.153*** (0.0251)	0.379*** (0.0149)
Observations	1041	1041	4695	4695

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.22 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' sexism? (25% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 25% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 25% of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0621 (0.0687)	0.0211 (0.0382)	-0.0667 (0.0371)	-0.0310 (0.0211)
White Female Candidate	0.0536 (0.0657)	-0.00292 (0.0385)	-0.0940** (0.0354)	-0.0557** (0.0205)
Black Female Candidate	0.00262 (0.0691)	-0.00461 (0.0379)	-0.178*** (0.0381)	-0.0822*** (0.0205)
Constant	3.045*** (0.0522)	0.332*** (0.0286)	3.154*** (0.0256)	0.380*** (0.0152)
Observations	1254	1254	4482	4482

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.23 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' sexism? (30% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 30% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 30% of
other Americans would
not vote for a woman

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0411 (0.0579)	0.0435 (0.0330)	-0.0712 (0.0394)	-0.0453* (0.0222)
White Female Candidate	0.00165 (0.0564)	-0.00350 (0.0326)	-0.0876* (0.0374)	-0.0603** (0.0218)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0293 (0.0581)	0.00966 (0.0324)	-0.185*** (0.0406)	-0.0965*** (0.0216)
Constant	3.077*** (0.0426)	0.324*** (0.0243)	3.152*** (0.0273)	0.388*** (0.0161)
Observations	1701	1701	4035	4035

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.24 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (5% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 5% or less of other
Americans would not
vote for a black person

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 5% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.281* (0.115)	0.140* (0.0630)	-0.0703* (0.0340)	-0.0350 (0.0193)
White Female Candidate	0.0719 (0.104)	-0.0183 (0.0565)	-0.0756* (0.0327)	-0.0469* (0.0191)
Black Female Candidate	0.0571 (0.114)	0.0604 (0.0588)	-0.161*** (0.0350)	-0.0792*** (0.0190)
Constant	2.928*** (0.0801)	0.288*** (0.0410)	3.152*** (0.0240)	0.378*** (0.0142)
Observations	525	525	5211	5211

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.25 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (10% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 10% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 10% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.166 (0.0912)	0.0857 (0.0503)	-0.0723* (0.0349)	-0.0367 (0.0199)
White Female Candidate	0.00861 (0.0804)	-0.0393 (0.0465)	-0.0732* (0.0338)	-0.0448* (0.0197)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0733 (0.0923)	-0.0265 (0.0470)	-0.151*** (0.0359)	-0.0726*** (0.0196)
Constant	3.014*** (0.0639)	0.327*** (0.0353)	3.150*** (0.0246)	0.377*** (0.0146)
Observations	822	822	4914	4914

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.26 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (15% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 15% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 15% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.127 (0.0785)	0.101* (0.0438)	-0.0752* (0.0358)	-0.0460* (0.0203)
White Female Candidate	-0.0197 (0.0703)	-0.0462 (0.0408)	-0.0703* (0.0348)	-0.0430* (0.0202)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0797 (0.0778)	-0.0269 (0.0401)	-0.153*** (0.0371)	-0.0746*** (0.0202)
Constant	3.038*** (0.0555)	0.317*** (0.0309)	3.151*** (0.0253)	0.382*** (0.0149)
Observations	1053	1053	4683	4683

Standard errors in parentheses
Standard errors clustered by subject
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.27 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (20% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 20% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 20% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.140* (0.0664)	0.112** (0.0375)	-0.0929* (0.0373)	-0.0596** (0.0211)
White Female Candidate	0.0176 (0.0614)	-1.58e-15 (0.0359)	-0.0854* (0.0362)	-0.0572** (0.0210)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0407 (0.0657)	0.00726 (0.0349)	-0.170*** (0.0388)	-0.0884*** (0.0210)
Constant	3.032*** (0.0473)	0.300*** (0.0264)	3.161*** (0.0263)	0.391*** (0.0156)
Observations	1383	1383	4353	4353

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.28 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (25% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 25% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 25% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0663 (0.0579)	0.0644 (0.0329)	-0.0819* (0.0394)	-0.0543* (0.0222)
White Female Candidate	0.0200 (0.0559)	0.00716 (0.0330)	-0.0949* (0.0375)	-0.0649** (0.0216)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0365 (0.0589)	0.00367 (0.0320)	-0.182*** (0.0405)	-0.0943*** (0.0218)
Constant	3.055*** (0.0422)	0.312*** (0.0240)	3.161*** (0.0274)	0.393*** (0.0162)
Observations	1704	1704	4032	4032

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.29 Study I: Do results vary across subjects who under- and over-estimate others' racism? (30% cutoff)

Models estimated with
under-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that 30% or less of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

Models estimated with
over-estimators:
subjects who estimate
that more than 30% of
other Americans would
not vote for a black

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)	(3) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(4) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0255 (0.0519)	0.0282 (0.0297)	-0.0759 (0.0418)	-0.0475* (0.0235)
White Female Candidate	-0.0149 (0.0506)	-0.0129 (0.0300)	-0.0879* (0.0395)	-0.0617** (0.0227)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0652 (0.0525)	-0.0234 (0.0288)	-0.183*** (0.0432)	-0.0903*** (0.0231)
Constant	3.080*** (0.0377)	0.333*** (0.0218)	3.159*** (0.0290)	0.390*** (0.0170)
Observations	2166	2166	3570	3570

Standard errors in parentheses
Standard errors clustered by subject
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.30 Study I: Main models including only subjects in states that have had a female governor in the past 30 years

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.0342 (0.0516)	-0.0144 (0.0286)
White Female Candidate	-0.0352 (0.0505)	-0.0314 (0.0289)
Black Female Candidate	-0.140** (0.0528)	-0.0658* (0.0275)
Constant	3.097*** (0.0366)	0.348*** (0.0209)
Observations	2337	2337

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.31 Study I: Main models including only subjects in states that had a female governor at the time of the experiment

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	0.0158 (0.112)	-0.0415 (0.0605)
White Female Candidate	0.0748 (0.117)	-0.0171 (0.0642)
Black Female Candidate	-0.0898 (0.112)	-0.123* (0.0591)
Constant	3.009*** (0.0889)	0.350*** (0.0462)
Observations	495	495

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

1.32 Study I: Main models including only subjects in states that have had a black male governor in the past 30 years³⁰

	(1) Electability (4 pt. scale)	(2) Very Electable (binary)
Black Male Candidate	-0.157 (0.0928)	-0.0894 (0.0573)
White Female Candidate	-0.118 (0.0852)	-0.103 (0.0533)
Black Female Candidate	-0.171 (0.0958)	-0.0838 (0.0567)
Constant	3.315*** (0.0654)	0.485*** (0.0429)
Observations	681	681

Standard errors in parentheses

Standard errors clustered by subject

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

³⁰ Three states have had a black governor in the past 30 years: Virginia, New York, and Massachusetts. Those governors were all male. The US has never had a black female governor.

1.33 Studies I and II: Average estimates of others' biases, by subject demographics

	Study I		Study II	
	Estimated % who would not vote for a woman for president	Estimated % who would not vote for a black person for president	Estimated % who would not vote for a woman for president	Estimated % who would not vote for a black person for president
<i>Female Subjects</i>	47.6	41.4	42.2	40.7
<i>Male Subjects</i>	46.0	43.1	35.1	34.0
<i>White Subjects</i>	46.6	41.9	37.3	34.9
<i>Black Subjects</i>	49.2	47.9	42.6	45.1
<i>Hispanic Subjects</i>	45.0	40.1	43.3	42.7
<i>Asian/Pacific Islanders</i>	48.9	42.5	39.4	41.6
<i>Subjects under 35</i>	45.7	41.3	39.6	37.5
<i>Subjects 35-54</i>	49.7	44.7	36.2	35.8
<i>Subjects 55+</i>	44.8	40.4	40.1	41.3
<i>High school or less</i>	46.6	39.7		
<i>Some college</i>	45.5	41.4		
<i>4-year degree</i>	46.1	41.6		
<i>Graduate degree</i>	58.3	56.6		
<i>Liberals</i>	46.6	45.4		
<i>Moderates</i>	46.4	41.3		
<i>Conservatives</i>	47.8	40.7		
<i>Democrats</i>	47.8	44.3		
<i>Independents</i>	43.4	39.2		
<i>Republicans</i>	48.6	42.4		

1.34 Study II: Subject demographics

A total of 1,702 subjects completed the full survey experiment.

	Number	Percent of total subjects
GENDER		
Male	845	50.35%
Female	847	49.76%
Other	10	0.006%
RACE		
White / Caucasian	1,188	69.80%
Black / African-American	184	10.81%
Hispanic / Latino	68	4.00%
Asian / Pacific Islander	152	8.93%
Other (ex: multi-racial)	110	6.46%
AGE		
18-24 years	146	8.58%
25-34 years	713	41.89%
35-44 years	431	25.32%
45-54 years	215	12.63%
55-64 years	138	8.11%
65-74 years	54	3.17%
75 years and older	5	0.29%

1.35 Study III: Subject demographics

A total of 2,219 subjects completed the full survey experiment.

	Number	Percent of total subjects
GENDER		
Male	931	41.96%
Female	1266	57.05%
Other	22	0.99%
RACE		
White / Caucasian	1,522	68.59%
Black / African-American	246	11.09%
Hispanic / Latino	138	6.22%
Asian / Pacific Islander	144	6.49%
Other (ex: multi-racial)	169	7.62%
AGE		
18-24 years	290	13.07%
25-34 years	951	42.86%
35-44 years	543	24.47%
45-54 years	240	10.82%
55-64 years	141	6.35%
65-74 years	48	2.16%
75 years and older	6	0.27%

1.36 Study II: Control and Treatment Groups

Group	N	Treatment
Control	424	<i>none</i>
Male Voters	427	“In 2016, the majority of men voted against Hillary Clinton. To beat Donald Trump in 2020, the Democratic presidential nominee must be able to win the support of these male voters. That’s the path to victory in key swing states.”
White Voters	425	“In 2016, the majority of white Americans voted against Hillary Clinton. To beat Donald Trump in 2020, the Democratic presidential nominee must be able to win the support of these white voters. That’s the path to victory in key swing states.”
Estimate Bias	426	“To beat Donald Trump in 2020, the Democratic presidential nominee needs to be able to win key swing states. Please estimate the percentage of swing-state voters who would not be willing to vote for the following types of candidates. We realize this is difficult to estimate, but please make your best guesses: Would not vote for a woman for president [<i>slider from 0 to 100</i>]; Would not vote for a black person for president [<i>slider from 0 to 100</i>].”

1.37 Study III: Control and Treatment Groups

Group	N	Treatment
Control	445	<i>none</i>
Correct Information	443	“When women and people of color run for office in the US today, they typically do just as well as white men. Social scientists find very little if any discrimination against female and minority candidates in modern US elections. More than 90% of Americans say they are open to voting for a female or black candidate for president. These are the highest numbers ever recorded in US history.”
Naming and Shaming	446	“When Democrats think about the 2020 presidential election, they sometimes worry that a female or black candidate won’t be able to beat Donald Trump. Some people even say that if the Democrats want to win in 2020, they need to nominate a white man. This type of thinking is called, ‘strategic discrimination.’ [screen break] Strategic discrimination gives white male candidates an unfair advantage, while harming women and people of color. If people think that only a white man can win an election, this makes it harder for female and minority candidates to launch their campaigns and establish their viability. Strategic discrimination is a subtle form of bias. Even people who value diversity sometimes unintentionally engage in strategic discrimination.”
Role Model	438	“As Democrats think about how to beat Donald Trump in 2020, they should learn from the 2018 midterms. In 2018, the Democrats won control of the US House of Representatives. Thirty GOP incumbents lost their House seats to Democratic challengers. Many of these successful challengers were women and people of color who won in districts that had voted for Donald Trump in 2016. [screen break] For example, Lauren Underwood won in Illinois’ 14 th District, a traditionally Republican area. Illinois’ 14 th District is 86% white, and in 2016 local voters supported Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton. [Portrait of Underwood.] In 2018, Underwood ran a smart campaign that harnessed national energy while also focusing on local issues. She beat incumbent Congressman Randy

Hultgren, and she is now a member of Congress. Underwood's victory shows that when the Democrats run strong candidates, they can win – even in places that voted for Trump in 2016.”

Black Voters 447 “In 2016, the majority of African-Americans voted for Hillary Clinton. To beat Donald Trump in 2020, the Democratic nominee must be able to keep these black voters engaged and energized. High African-American turnout is the path to victory in key swing states.”

PART II: Additional Information about Studies I, II, and III

2.1 Screenshots from Study

Here are several screenshots that give a sense of what subjects saw while taking Study I:

Please consider the following candidate profile:

Current Position	CEO
Prior Elected Offices	None
Profession	Entrepreneur
Education	BA; MBA
Gender	Male
Race	Black
Age	52 years old

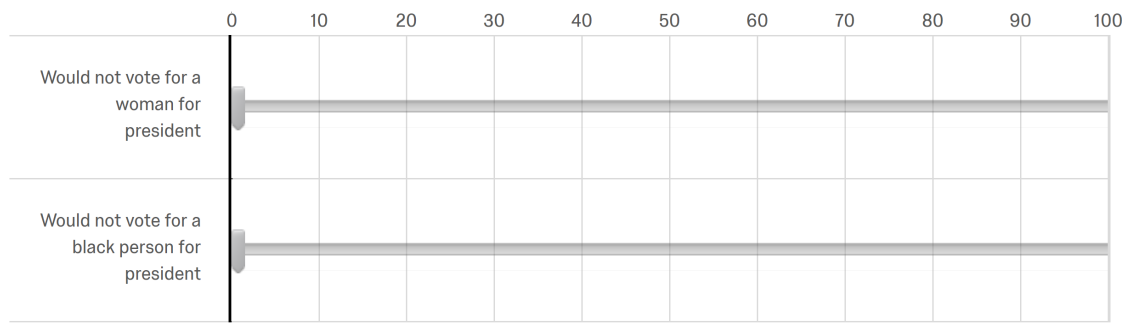
If this candidate ran for governor in your state, how electable would he be?

- Very electable
- Somewhat electable
- Somewhat unelectable
- Very unelectable

Q188

Please estimate the percentage of Americans who would **not** be willing to vote for the following types of candidates for president.

We realize this is difficult to estimate, but please make your best guesses.



2.2 Screenshot from Study II/Study III

Studies II and III used the exactly same setup online, just with different priming messages.

This screenshot is an example of the candidate ranking exercise that provided the data for the dependent variables in both studies. Subjects were able to drag and drop candidates into the response box, where their choices were clearly labelled #1, #2, and #3. They could re-order and swap candidates until they were satisfied with their answer. Then, they clicked to continue to the last module of the survey, where they answered some basic demographic questions.

In your opinion, which Democratic candidates have the **best chance** of beating Donald Trump in 2020?

Please drag and drop your top three candidates into the box on the right. The top candidate should be the person you think has the best chance of beating Trump. The next candidate has the second-best chance of beating Trump. The third candidate has the third-best chance of being Trump.

Items	
Sen. Elizabeth Warren	1 Sen. Cory Booker
Sen. Kamala Harris	2 Former Rep. Beto O'Rourke
Mayor Pete Buttigieg	3 Sen. Amy Klobuchar
Former VP Joe Biden	
Sen. Bernie Sanders	