

Gendered Issues or Partisan Priorities?

The Policy Priorities of Men and Women at Partisan Think Tanks

E.J. Fagan

Andrea Manning

University of Illinois at Chicago

Paper Presented at the 2023 Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between gender, partisanship, and authorship of partisan think tank reports. Scholars often observe a gendered dimension to issues, where women are associated with issues related to child-rearing, education, and social welfare while men are associated with issues related to violent state action, such as foreign policy and crime. However, these studies are often limited by the confounding variable of partisanship, where political parties tend to prioritize certain issues, and gender gaps between parties. We introduce a new dataset of 15,589 authors of 9,944 reports from the American Enterprise Institute, Center for American Progress, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and Heritage Foundation. We find that while women elites tend to prioritize issues often associated with women in both parties, prioritization of issues by sex is more complicated than much of the literature suggests.

Keywords: agenda setting, women's issues, think tanks, issue ownership

Introduction

Phyllis Schlafly reached the height of her fame and political influence in the Republican Party while working to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s. Just a few years after the amendment passed Congress with minimal opposition and conservative and liberal states both raced to ratify it, Schlafly's Eagle Forum effectively reversed the tide of support for the ERA among elites and grassroots activists in the Republican Party (Wolbrecht 2000). Schlafly spent much of the remainder of her career working on women's issues such as anti-feminism, opposition to abortion, and support for traditional gender roles. However, Schlafly did not begin her career working on women's issues. Before shifting toward women's issues, Schlafly worked mostly on national security issues such as anti-communism and opposition to arms control treaties at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank that is closely aligned with the Republican Party. Indeed, her first book, *A Choice Not an Echo*, which sold 3 million copies in 1964, argued that Republicans should select Barry Goldwater as their presidential nominee in 1964 because of his extreme hawkish foreign policy positions. Her first eight books, ending with *Ambush at Vladivostok* in 1976, were all addressed Cold War foreign policy. None of the eighteen subsequent books that she would publish before her death in 2016 would be about foreign policy. Schlafly saw her career in the elite foreign policy community, dominated by men, stall. Despite her decades of expertise on foreign policy, she pivoted toward issues more often associated with women. During the second phase of her career, Schlafly founded the Eagle Forum in opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, feminist public policy and abortion rights.

Schlafly's initial path is an outlier in research about female candidates and women's descriptive and substantive representation. Political scientists frequently observe that when more women are elected to office, policy outcomes tend to change on issues traditionally associated with women, such as child care (Bratton and Ray 2002). Indeed, many issues are considered to have a strong gendered dimension, or a strong association with feminine or masculine issue priorities. In distinguishing "women's issues" from other issues, researchers, like members of the mass public, tend to rely on traditional gender roles

and stereotypes, conceptions of feminism, or both. In nearly every published study of gender-stereotyped beliefs about political candidates and officials, involvement and competency in issues related to women's domestic and public roles as caregivers and nurturers—anything having to do with children, families, education, health care, the welfare of the poor and needy, and the environment—are much more likely to be attributed to women than to men (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Leeper 1991; Rosenwasser et al. 1987; Sapiro 1981).

Just as the partisan issue ownership literature expects candidates to emphasize issues that their party is perceived by the public as being better at handling than the opposition (Petrocik 1996), women on the campaign trail are hypothesized to strategically “run as women” by adopting platforms and policy priorities that are congruent with voters' expectations about feminine traits. If voters use gender-based stereotypes to assess female and male candidates (McDermott 1997), women may receive a boost by highlighting “compassion” issues or policies related to women's traditional roles as mothers and caregivers (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003).

Less literature studies stereotypes about men or “men's issues” (although, see Alexander and Andersen 1993; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). Insofar that many any scholars are interested in if and how women's representation matters in a context where women achieved suffrage much later than men and continue to be underrepresented among elected officials, men's political attitudes and behaviors are often understood as the baseline from which women are assumed to deviate. In many cases, men's issues are not explicitly defined or, by default, are assumed to be those that are not otherwise categorized as women's/feminine issues. But when political issues get defined in terms of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, people do tend to associate certain issues with men's traditional interests and activities.

An additional confounding factor that makes it difficult to conceptualize men and women's issues is partisanship. The issues that tend to be prioritized or “owned” by left and right political parties are often the same issues that are associated with women or men. That is, women's issues are typically left-leaning party priorities, while men's issues or issues associated with masculinity are owned by right-

leaning parties. If men or women select into political parties for other reasons than issue prioritization of gendered issues, partisanship may cause us to observe a spurious relationship between gender and issue prioritization. To make matters worse, gender gaps in partisanship often skew the composition of party elites so that an election of a left or right party can move a legislature's gender balance toward either.

We take a novel approach in measuring the issue priorities of men and women elites by observing the policy content of partisan think tank reports in the United States. U.S. political parties do not have formal party think tanks but do hold close associations with several large non-profit think tanks that perform many of the same functions (Campbell and Pedersen 2014; Fagan 2019). Partisan think tank employees form the party's core policymaking apparatus, serving both as close advisors to legislators and shadow governments for the opposition party (Brown 2011; Rich 2005; Weidenbaum 2011). Fagan (2019) analyzed 9,944 reports from the four largest partisan think and coded them for their policy content using the Comparative Agendas Project topic coding system. We added to these data by collecting 15,589 authors and co-authors of each report and coding them for gender. Because the think tanks are associated with either the Republican or Democratic parties, we can examine within-party variation in the policy topics that men and women tend to author.

We find that some of the issues often associated with women tend to be prioritized by female party elites, such as education and social welfare policy, in both parties. However, we find a more complicated relationship between gender and partisan priorities on other issues. Democratic men tend to prioritize issues often associated with men, but we see no such gender imbalance in Republican think tanks. We find that many issues scholars often do not categorize as gendered, such as space, science and communication, and macroeconomics, are heavily skewed toward men. We conclude that these results suggest further study is needed to understand the complexities of how issues are gendered within political parties.

Gender and Issue Prioritization

Several lines of research within the gender and politics literature contribute to the notion that some issues are “women’s” or “feminine” issues. We will refer to these issues as “women’s” and their counterparts as “men’s,” even though the literature rarely discusses “men’s” issues, but rather refers to issues with a more masculine association. Although scholars indeed find that certain issues are associated with women, the current literature lacks agreement on how these issues are defined, conceptualized, and measured. Even as most existing work on women’s issues is underpinned by questions about if and how women’s substantive and descriptive representation matters, different types of questions have led to variations in how scholars think about feminine issues.

Scholars often note that for women’s substantive representation to matter, women’s policy concerns must be distinct from men’s, leading to examinations of gender-based differences in opinion among the electorate (e.g., Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). A second branch of studies asks whether women’s underrepresentation in political office can be explained, in part, by gender-based stereotypes voters use to evaluate women candidates on the campaign trail (McDermott 1997). These typically involve experimental designs that assess the issue competencies voters assign to male and female candidates (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Leeper 1991; Rosenwasser et al. 1987; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988; Sapiro 1981). Relatedly, researchers examine whether stereotypes about women’s issue competencies variably shape their attention to issues on the campaign trail (Dolan 2005; Hayes and Lawless 2016; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Kahn 1996; Schneider 2014). Finally, studies that aim to link substantive and descriptive representation ask if gender gaps found in the electorate are echoed by elites (Reingold 2000; Thomas 1994) and whether female politicians are more likely than their male counterparts to prioritize issues that matter to women voters or have a disproportionate impact on women (Bratton 2005; Osborn 2012; Thomas 1991).

Scholars often understand women’s issues by drawing on public opinion data, indicating that there are gender gaps in preferences for several issue areas. Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) compare men’s and women’s responses to policy questions asked in six nationally representative public opinion surveys

fielded between 1952 and 1983.¹ These authors identify disparities by gender in levels of support for “use of force and violence” issues, “compassion” issues, and issues related to “traditional values.” Regarding force/violence issues, for example, they find that women on average are far more supportive of stricter gun laws than men while being less supportive of capital punishment. The compassion issues include spending on social welfare, education, health, programs to assist blacks, poor states, and central cities, and inflation and unemployment policies. Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) show that women are more supportive than men of a guaranteed annual income, wage-price controls, equalizing wealth, guaranteeing jobs, government-provided health care, student loans, and rationing to deal with scarce goods. To a lesser degree, women are shown to be more conservative, or less supportive than men, of policies dealing with pornography, drug use, prayer in schools, sex education, providing birth control for teens, and homosexuality. These authors don't define women's issues per se. Yet, subsequent studies go on to use Shapiro and Mahajan's (1986) categorizations and related findings to deem policies as masculine or feminine. One key problem is that using these public opinion data to conceptualize gendered issues is that doing so conflates preferences with priorities.

Another way scholars conceptualize “women's” and “men's” issues is to rely on voters' perceptions of the kinds of policies they think women or men are “better at handling” than members of the opposite sex are. Since women have historically been associated with motherhood and the home, they are assumed to possess traits like warmth, compassion, and communion. Meanwhile, men have been typically associated with leadership and the public sphere, so they are assumed to be agentic, competent, and assertive (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Eagly et al. 2020). Scholars, therefore, theorize that voters use these gendered schemas to evaluate candidates, particularly in the context of low-information campaigns. Among the first to test the impact of candidate sex on voter evaluations, Sapiro (1981) conducts an experiment in which participants are randomly assigned to read a passage describing either a

¹ General Social Survey (1972-1983); Gallup Polls (1964-1983); Harris Survey Yearbooks (1970-1973); Surveys done for the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations by the Opinion Research Corporation and the Survey Research Center (1973-1982); American National Election Studies (1952-1978).

male or female presidential candidate, who discusses a single issue—the economy. Respondents then go on to assess the candidate’s likely effectiveness on 13 issue dimensions. Sapiro (1981) finds that only three issues show statistically significant differences based on the candidate’s gender: improving our educational system, maintaining honesty and integrity in government, and dealing with health problems. While Sapiro (1981) does not explicitly define these as women's issues, she comments that they represent those “areas in which women are traditionally seen as relatively competent” (69).

Experimental designs often show different associations of competence when the policymaker is male or female. Rosenwasser et al. (1987) design a similar experiment in which respondents read a short biography of a hypothetical presidential candidate: “Jill” or “John.” The bio is devoid of policy information, so the participants are asked to infer the candidate’s level of competence for dealing with 10 issues and presidential duties. They find that men were viewed as more competent on issues perceived as more masculine, such as dealing with terrorism, a military crisis, enduring a military defense system, and acting as Commander-in-Chief of a country’s armed forces, while women were rated as more competent on all issues perceived as more feminine, such as dealing with problems in the education system, guaranteeing the rights of racial minorities and the disabled, and solving problems related to aging. Leeper (1990) conducts a similar experiment that taps respondents’ evaluations of candidate issue competencies based on sex, finding that respondents were inclined to evaluate the woman candidate more favorably in “traditionally female areas of strength,” such as maintaining honesty and integrity in government, improving education, assisting the poor, encouraging the arts, and dealing with health concerns (254). Interestingly, Leeper (1990) finds no statistically significant difference between assessments of the male and female candidate for handling “traditionally male areas of strength,” including dealing with crime and strengthening the economy (254). Finally, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) use a two-by-two design in which both candidate traits and sex are manipulated. Participants are randomly assigned to read about either a male or female candidate who is either described as “compassionate, trustworthy, and family oriented with strong people skills” (stereotypically feminine

traits) or as “tough, articulate, and ambitious with strong leadership skills” (stereotypically masculine traits) (127). After receiving one of the four experimental treatments, participants rate the candidate on their ability to handle four issue domains: 1) a police or military crisis; 2) compassion issues (a four-item scale on handling the aged, the poor, child welfare, and childcare); 3) the economy (a three-item scale on handling the budget, business leaders, and the savings and loan crisis); and 4) “women’s issues” (a two-item scale on the candidate's ability to handle abortion and reduce the gender-based wage gap). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) show that, whether women candidates express feminine or masculine traits, they are seen as having greater competence in handling education, health care, poverty, the abortion issue, and the wage gap. Meanwhile, men candidates are assessed as better at dealing with the military, defense, and economic policy.

Later studies draw on these experimental findings to test the hypothesis that women candidates will strategically prioritize the campaign issues that are congruent with perceptions of their areas of competence (Dolan 2005; Hayes and Lawless 2016; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Kahn 1996; Schneider 2014). Rather than hypothetical candidates and campaigns, this line of research typically employs content analysis of campaign communications to examine variation in issue attention by actual women and men running for public office. These studies often cite the experimental stereotyping literature, the public opinion work on gender gaps in issue preferences, or one another when developing their coding schemes for designating issues women’s issues. The trouble is that researchers seem to cherry-pick or alter their coding schemes depending on whether they are dealing with hypothetical or actual candidates and legislators or to accommodate new issues or changes in issue salience over time.

Schneider (2013) derives her definition of women’s issues by citing the experimental stereotyping literature outlined above (Alexander and Andersen 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Leeper 1991; Rosenwasser et al. 1987; Sapiro 1981). Without directly citing the aforementioned studies, Khan (1996, 142-143) explains in a footnote that she uses “the stereotyping literature to divide issues into ‘male’ and ‘female’ issues. ‘Male’ issues include those where men are considered more competent (e.g., foreign

policy, defense, economics, and agriculture. ‘Female’ issues are those where women are considered more competent (e.g., minority rights, the environment, abortion, school prayer, drugs, and social programs).”

In her study of women’s and men’s issue attention on their campaign websites, Dolan expects women to campaign on education, healthcare, Social Security/Medicare, the environment, family issues, women’s issues, abortion, and ethics/government reform. Dolan (2005) assumes men focus on small government, the economy, jobs, taxes, the budget, defense, crime, agriculture, and guns. Dolan is among the first to include small government as a “men’s issue,” which she justifies based on studies finding that women are assumed by the public to be more liberal than men (Hayes 2011; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; King and Matland 2003).² Based on her analysis of men’s and women’s campaign websites, Dolan finds few gender-based differences in issue attention and concludes that any differences that do emerge are better explained by party than by candidate sex.

From a theoretical standpoint it is important to note that gender differences in campaign agendas might be more about strategic self-representation than about true priorities (or preferences, for that matter). So, scholars have also examined the tendency of women to champion “women’s” issues in Congress and state legislatures. Of course, there is also an electoral incentive for legislators to vote in accordance with the preferences of their district or party, which may also obscure individuals’ priorities. Many scholars interested in representation, therefore, examine sex-based differences in bill sponsorship and committee membership either instead of, or in addition to roll call votes (Bratton 2005; Osborn 2012; Reingold 2000; Swers 2002; Thomas 1991, 1994). A handful conduct elite interviews or surveys to gauge women legislators’ policy preferences as well as their top issue priorities (Reingold 2000; Thomas 1994).

The concept of women’s issues often takes on another dimension in this strand of the literature because researchers are not only interested in how stereotypes and women’s traditional roles as caregivers

² Herrick (2016) borrows Dolan’s (2005) coding scheme in her paper about gendered themes in state legislative candidates’ websites.

inform women's political interests but also think of women's issues as "bills that are particularly salient to women because they seek to achieve equality for women; they address women's special needs..." (Swers 2002, 34–35). Thomas (1994) defines women's legislative issues as those that embrace both feminist and traditional concerns of women. These include abortion access and the ERA, as well as policies that deal with women, children, and families, such as childcare, elder care, domestic violence, spousal rape, teen pregnancy, parental leave, flexible work hours, job sharing, sexual harassment. Similarly, Osborn (2012) includes what she calls "traditional" (education, children's issues, healthcare, social welfare) and "specific" areas of women's concern (abortion, gender discrimination, marriage, divorce, child custody, child support, women's health, affirmative action, wage gap, sexual assault, and domestic abuse).

But while many studies include both "traditional" women's issues and policies by which women are disproportionately affected, others take a decidedly feminist stance when defining "women's issues." Bratton (2002), for example, content-coded measures in the lower chambers of six states and defined women's interest legislation as legislation that would decrease discrimination or counter the effects of discrimination, or would improve the social, economic, or political status of women. These involved measures addressing the health of women; measures addressing the social, educational, and economic status of women; and measures addressing the political and personal freedom of women. A small number of measures were identified as contrary to women's interests; these included measures to limit access to birth control and abortion, and measures to reduce levels of child custody and child support. For Saint-Germain (1989), who conducted a case study of the Arizona state legislature, women's interest policies must not only have a more immediate and direct impact on significantly larger numbers of women than men but must also be "aimed at gaining equality for or improving the status of women" from a feminist perspective (960).

Since most of this body of work is interested in linking women's descriptive representation to their policy priorities, it is less concerned with defining "men's issues." Reingold (2000) does examine

the tendency of men and women in the Arizona and California state legislatures to prioritize issues that “belong” to the opposite gender. First, she measures levels of commitment to and leadership activity on “women’s issues,” which include (1) issues that are about women exclusively (e.g., abortion, sex discrimination) or almost exclusively (e.g., domestic violence, breast cancer); and (2) issues that reflect women’s traditional areas of concern, including children, families, education, health, poverty, and the environment. She defines men’s issues as anything dealing with business, finance, and commerce; state budget and taxes; and agriculture.

In summary, the literature on gendered issue priorities gives us some broad takeaways, even if it is muddled. There are consistent associations between gender and issues. These associations go beyond issues that directly impact women’s civil rights, such as equal pay or abortion. Women tend to be associated with, and prioritize in campaigns or in government, several issues often connected with nurturing, child-rearing, or other forms of care. The literature on men’s issues is less clear but tends to be associated with issues of strength or physical violence, such as defense, foreign policy, and crime.

Partisan Priorities as a Confounding Variable

A similar, but largely unconnected, literature examines the policy priorities of political parties. Early scholars observed that political parties tend to emphasize different issues in electoral campaigns, rather than offering different positions on similar issues (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen 2003). Public opinion surveys find a consistent and stable set of issues that the public trusts one party to handle over the other, known as issue ownership (Banda 2019; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Walgrave, Tresch, and Lefevere 2015). At the same time, we find that political parties prioritize the same issues when in government (Egan 2013; Green and Jennings 2017). Scholars disagree about the origins of issue ownership and the relationship between owned issues and priorities in government. Parties may either strategically prioritize issues in government where they have an advantage with voters,

or the priority may derive from the party's relationship with core constituencies and interest groups (Egan 2013). Similar parties prioritize similar issues across party systems, adding support for issue ownership being derived from the structure of parties rather than short-term factors like media attention or performance (Seeberg 2017). Left-leaning parties tend to prioritize redistributive social policy issues like health care and social welfare policy, as well as education, labor, and the environment. Right-leaning parties tend to prioritize issues related to foreign policy and defense, crime, and taxes.

There is considerable overlap between gendered issue priorities and the issue priorities of political parties. Most issues that are traditionally prioritized by women are also associated with left-leaning parties, such as health care, education, and social welfare policy. Most issues that are traditionally prioritized by men are also associated with right-leaning parties: defense, foreign policy, and crime. Thus, partisan issue ownership represents a potential confounding variable when considering gendered differences in issue priorities. Men and women may select into political parties for other reasons and then adopt the policy priorities of the parties. When predicting the issue priorities of women elites, we must control for political party.

Research Design

To study the issue priorities of women, we observe the issue priorities of party elites at partisan think tanks.³ These organizations are close advisors to political parties and elected officials (Rich 2005). They engage in policy entrepreneurship (Stone 1996), strategic planning (Halpin and Fraussen 2019), and legislative subsidies (Hall and Deardorff 2006) to assist their allies in making policy decisions. They are

³ Non-profit think tanks in the U.S. are incorporated as 501(c)3 non-profit organizations. They cannot legally identify with a political party. Technically, they are non-partisan think tanks with an ideological mission. However, they often perform explicitly partisan activities performed by formal party organizations (see (Campbell and Pedersen 2014; E. J. Fagan 2022)). We refer to them here as "partisan" think tanks for shorthand and identify them with their allied political party, but it would be equally valid to refer to them as ideological and identify them as progressive or conservative.

useful to measure gendered issue priorities in a few ways. First, they are partisans, allowing us to separate gendered priorities from partisan priorities when analyzing gendered issue priorities. Second, while they are public figures, partisan think tank researchers are not candidates or elected officials who may need to act strategically to meet the gendered expectations of their constituents. Most think tanks, even those more strategically set their agenda like the Heritage Foundation, allow their employees significant discretion about what issues to publish reports on (McGann 2016). Thus, their observed issue priorities are likely much closer to their true issue priorities than other party elites.⁴

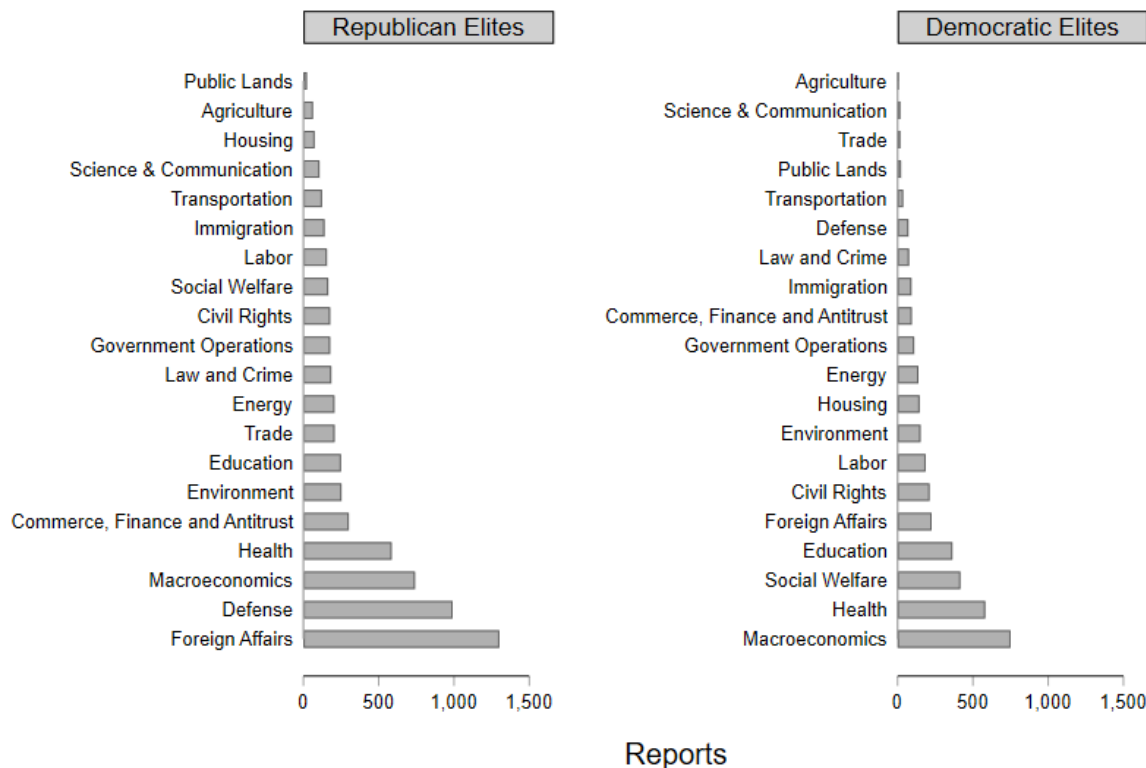
Drawing on data from Fagan (2019), we observe the policy content of white papers posted on the websites of the four largest partisan think tanks between 2007 and 2017. Table 1 shows the four organizations represented in the dataset and how many reports are drawn from each. On the Republican side, we include the Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute. On the Democratic side, we include the Center for American Progress and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. These data were previously coded for their policy content using the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) topic coding system. CAP assigns each policy output to one of 20 major topic areas, such as defense, energy, or education policy. CAP is commonly used by scholars studying attention to issues, including numerous studies of party politics (Fagan 2019; Fagan 2018; Fagan, McGee, and Thomas 2019; Froio, Bevan, and Jennings 2017; Wolbrecht and Hartney 2014). A trained research assistant read each report's title and any available summary, abstract and metadata. They then assigned the report to one of 20 major topics.⁵ The partisan think tanks published reports on a wide variety of topics, but there is also tremendous variation in the amount of attention received by each (Figure 1). Attention to policy by partisan think tanks is largely driven by their party's core priorities (Fagan 2019). Issues that the party's coalition and elite care

⁴ There are still potential sources of bias, where think tank researchers are pushed toward issue priorities. For example, employers may discriminate against researchers specializing on issues associated with the other gender.

⁵ Two trained research assistants read the same text and coded a sample of these data. They agreed on 86% of observations.

intensely about receive more attention than issues relative to the formal agenda than issues that are not prioritized.

Figure 1. Distribution of Attention in Partisan Think Tank Reports



We then collected the authors of each report and identified their gender. Using web scraping programs, we identified all authors on the think tank’s website for each report.⁶ A research assistant identified the gender that each author presented as. Names that are traditionally associated with male or female genders, such as “Matthew” or “Emily” were assigned to their corresponding gender. When names were ambiguous or uncertain, the research assistant used internet searches to find a biography with pronouns or a picture of the report’s author. If we were unable to ascertain the author’s gender or they

⁶ 459 papers listed either no author or the author was identified generically, such as “staff.”

identified as non-binary or if the report had no author, we dropped the observation.⁷ This yielded 15,589 author-report pairs.

Next, we calculated the proportion of female authors of each report. The average report contained 1.60 authors, with many containing more than four or five authors. For example, a report with five authors, two men and three women, would receive a value of 0.60. Overall, women represented 29% of authors, but with significant differences between parties (Figure 2). Women represented 42% of the authors of Democratic partisan think tank reports but only 19% of Republican partisan think tank reports. These differences have grown between 2007 and 2017 (Figure 3). The female share of Republican report authors remained constant at about 20% during the period. Women reached a majority of Democratic partisan think tank report authors by the end of the period.

⁷ Two authors in the sample identified as non-binary, both at the Center for American Progress. They authored two reports as the sole author and two reports as coauthors.

Figure 2: Female Authorship by Party

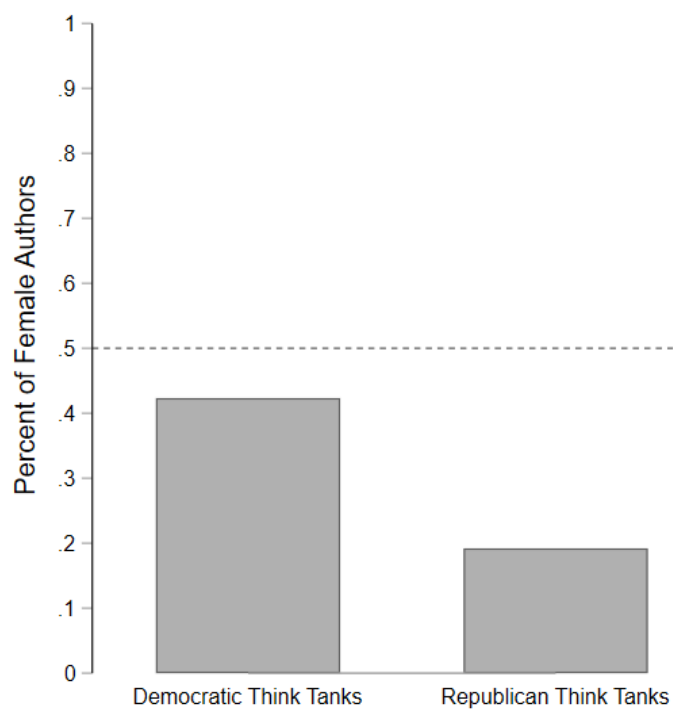
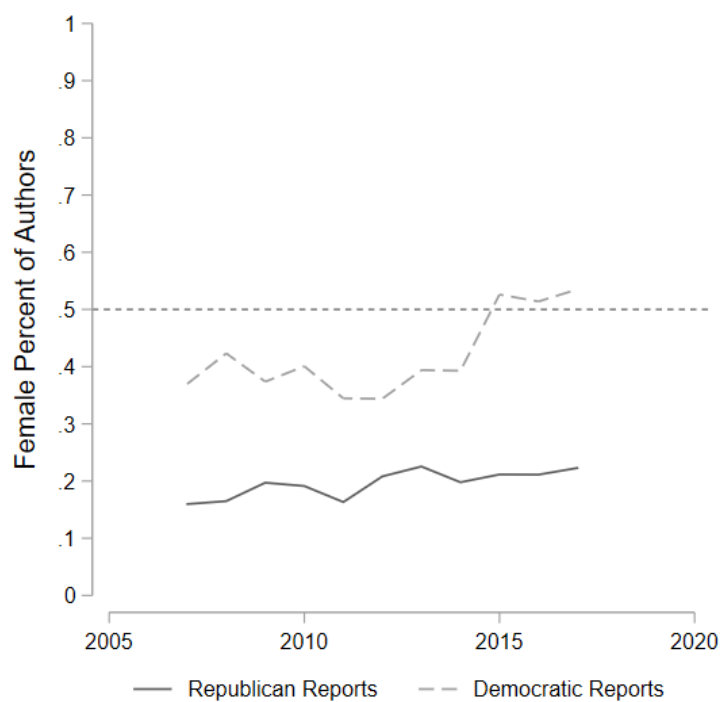


Figure 2: Female Authorship of Partisan Think Tank Reports, 2007-2017



We assigned each of the Policy Agendas Project major topics to categories based on the literature on partisan priorities and gendered issues. Following Fagan (2019) and Seeberg (2017), we assigned the redistributive domestic social policy areas of health care, labor, housing, and social welfare policy as well as environmental and education policy to the Democratic Party. We assigned the three foreign policy subtopics, defense, foreign affairs, and trade as well as law and crime to the Republican Party. Finally, we assigned health care, education, and social welfare policy to the feminine category and defense, foreign affairs, and law and crime to the masculine category.

Table 2: Gendering and Partisan Priorities of Issues

Policy Topic	Gendering	Partisanship
Macroeconomics	Neither	Neither
Civil Rights	Neither	Neither
Health Care	Feminine	Democratic
Agriculture	Neither	Neither
Labor	Neither	Democratic
Education	Feminine	Democratic
Environment	Neither	Democratic
Energy	Neither	Neither
Immigration	Neither	Neither
Law and Crime	Masculine	Republican
Social Welfare	Feminine	Democratic
Housing	Neither	Democratic
Commerce, Finance and Anti-Trust	Neither	Neither
Defense	Masculine	Republican
Space, Science and Communication	Neither	Neither
Trade	Neither	Republican
Foreign Affairs	Masculine	Republican
Government Operations	Neither	Neither
Public Lands	Neither	Neither

Notes:

We test six related hypotheses. First, we test if men and women have different policy priorities overall, regardless of party. We expect considerable between-party variation in the issues that men and women write reports on. Men will write more reports on issues associated with masculinity, while women

will write reports on issues associated with femininity. We also test the hypothesis that attention to topics without strong gendered associations will not significantly differ by gender.

H1a: Women will prioritize feminine issues relative to men

H1b: Men will prioritize masculine issues relative to women

H1c: Men and women will equally prioritize issues that are not associated with gender

Next, we examine the impact of gender on elite priorities within each party. We expect the same relationship within-party, where men and women prioritize the issues that are associated with their gender, but no differences on other issues.

H2a: Democratic men will prioritize masculine issues relative to Democratic women

H2b: Republican men will prioritize masculine issues relative to Republican women

H3a: Democratic women will prioritize feminine issues relative to Democratic men

H3b: Republican women will prioritize feminine issues relative to Republican men

H4a: Democratic Men and women will equally prioritize issues that are not associated with gender.

H4b: Republican Men and women will equally prioritize issues that are not associated with gender.

Results

First, we test our first three hypotheses by examining the relationship between the gender of authors and the gendering of issues. The unit of analysis for these models is one report, and the dependent variable is the proportion of female authors on it. Table 3 shows the estimated relationship between the dependent variable and whether the issue is classified as a women's issue or men's issue and whether it is a partisan priority. We find that a report on a women's issue has a 18% higher proportion of female authors when compared to non-women's issues ($p < 0.001$), while a report on a men's issue has a 9% lower

proportion of female authors ($p < 0.001$). These results allow us to reject our first two hypotheses, supporting the literature's assumptions about what issues are prioritized by men and women.

Table 3: OLS Estimates of Female Percent of Authors, All Think Tanks

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Women's Issue	0.18*** (0.01)	
Men's Issue		-0.09*** (0.01)
n	9,735	9,735
r ²	0.04	0.01

Standard errors in parentheses *

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

Next, we turn to examining within-party variation in female authorship by issue (Table 4). We find that both Democratic and Republican-aligned think tanks tend to have more female authors on reports assigned to women's issues, although the magnitude of the differences are larger for the Republican Party. Democratic reports on women's issues are about 5% more female than the average Democratic report ($p < 0.05$), while Republican reports are about 16% more female than the average Republican report ($p < 0.001$). These results strongly support our hypotheses, suggesting that women elites prioritize women's issues over other issues. However, our results are more complicated for issues associated with men. Democratic-aligned think tank reports contain significantly fewer female authors when they are classified as a men's issue ($p < 0.01$), but Republican reports are not significantly different. Indeed, Republican-aligned think tank reports on Republican owned issues, which include both traditionally masculine issues as well as commerce and trade, contain more female authors than other reports. We can reject the null hypothesis on the hypothesis that Democratic men will prioritize men's issues but fail to reject the null on the hypothesis that Republican men will do the same. Similarly, Democratic-aligned think tank reports on Democratic partisan priorities, which include the issues associated with women but also other core Democratic issues like labor, housing, and the environment,

also contain more female authors than other issues ($p < 0.001$). In both parties, women elite prioritize not just women's issues, but most partisan priorities.

Table 4: OLS Estimates of Female Percent of Authors, Within Party

Independent Variable	Democrats	Republicans
Women's Issue	0.05* (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)
Masculine Issue	-0.07** (0.02)	-0.0004 (0.02)
Democratic Priority	0.13*** (0.02)	
Republican Priority		0.05*** (0.02)
n	3,520	6,215
r ²	0.05	0.01

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$
*** $p < 0.001$

Next, we can observe these dynamics in more depth by examining gender differences on individual policy topics. Table 5 shows difference of means tests for reports on each major topic, compared with the average report, which contained 42% female authors. Seven of twenty issues contain significantly more female authors than average. Four are core Democratic priorities: social welfare (60% female authors, $p < 0.001$), education (55% female authors, $p < 0.001$) and labor (55% female, $p < 0.001$) reports contain considerably more women authors than the average report, while environmental and health care policy each have slightly more female authors than the average report. Civil rights and law and crime also have significantly more female authors than the average report. Seven issues have significantly fewer female authors than average. These include both the two foreign policy issues associated with men and also issues but also issues like immigration, space, science, and communication, transportation, and macroeconomics. We fail to reject the null hypothesis that Democratic men and women are equally likely to author reports on issues not associated with either gender.

Table 5: Difference of Means Tests, Female Authorship, Democratic Reports

Policy Topic	% Female	t	n
Social Welfare	0.60***	8.44	371
Education	0.55***	5.87	354
Civil Rights	0.58***	5.33	212
Labor	0.55***	4.48	183
Law and Crime	0.53*	2.62	75
Environment	0.48*	2.00	147
Health Care	0.45*	1.98	537
Agriculture	0.58	1.08	6
Public Lands and Native American Affairs	0.51	1.02	23
Energy	0.38	-1.24	138
Housing	0.37	-1.36	126
Trade	0.27	-1.62	18
Government Operations	0.35	-1.76	108
Immigration	0.33*	-2.07	92
Space, Science and Communication	0.21*	-2.49	18
Commerce and Finance	0.29**	-3.28	92
Transportation	0.20***	-3.73	37
Defense	0.20***	-5.51	72
Foreign Affairs	0.23***	-8.38	226
Macroeconomics	0.30***	-8.50	685

Notes: Two-tailed test. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Mean for all reports = 0.417

Finally, we examine Republican think tank reports on each issue (Table 6). Women were just 19.5% of the authors of Republican-aligned think tank reports. Four issues had significantly more women authors than average. Education (52%, $p < 0.001$) had 2.7 times the average proportion of female authors. Social welfare policy (36%, $p < 0.001$) had 1.8 times the average Republican. The most female-authored Democratic issue, social welfare policy, was only 1.4 times the average Democratic report. However reports on defense policy, an issue often associated with men, also had significantly more women authors than average, as well as trade policy. There were huge gender disparities on the other end as well, with women representing just 4% of authors of science, technology and communication reports and 5% of labor reports ($p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Difference of Means Tests, Female Authorship, Republican Reports

Policy Topic	% Female	t	n
Education	0.38***	6.41	247
Social Welfare	0.34***	4.48	163
Defense	0.25***	4.42	989
Public Lands and Native American Affairs	0.43*	2.43	22
Trade	0.25*	2.11	206
Immigration	0.25	1.76	140
Civil Rights	0.24	1.5	175
Health Care	0.21	1.31	584
Agriculture	0.23	0.77	61
Transportation and Infrastructure	0.2	0.32	122
Law and Crime	0.18	-0.44	184
Domestic Commerce and Finance	0.16	-1.45	300
Government Operations	0.15	-1.77	176
Foreign Affairs	0.17*	-2.81	1,298
Housing	0.09*	-3.24	73
Labor	0.10**	-3.94	155
Environment	0.13***	-4.24	252
Energy	0.09***	-5.46	205
Macroeconomics	0.13***	-5.63	740
Space, Science and Communication	0.06***	-6.49	106

Notes: Two-tailed test. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Mean for all reports = 0.192

Discussion

Our results suggest that issues remain gendered even after partisanship is accounted for. Many of the issues that scholars have traditionally associated with women, such as education and social welfare policy, are indeed prioritized disproportionately by women of both parties. However, our results also suggest that issue gendering is more complicated and may interact in interesting ways with partisanship. Reports on foreign affairs and defense, which are often associated with men, are overwhelmingly authored by men in the Democratic Party, but not the Republican Party. Macroeconomics and space, science and communication show a strong male bias in both parties.

There are a few key flaws in these data that we must address. First, the results in this paper included reports from just one Republican-aligned think tank, the Heritage Foundation. We plan to merge

in additional data on American Enterprise Institute reports promptly. Next, and more importantly, we need to further disaggregate the Policy Agendas Project policy topics. At least five important issues often associated with women make up a portion of major topics that are not coded as women's issues at the moment: family leave policy is in labor, abortion and gender discrimination are under civil rights and some child tax credits and domestic violence are in law and crime. Unfortunately, the data are currently only coded at the major topic level. To properly test our hypotheses, we need to identify these issues and include them under the women's issue variable.

References

- Alexander, Deborah, and Kristi Andersen. 1993. "Gender as a Factor in the Attribution of Leadership Traits." *Political Research Quarterly* 46(3): 527–45.
- Banda, Kevin K. 2019. "Issue Ownership Cues and Candidate Support." *Party Politics*: 1354068819869901.
- Bélanger, Éric, and Bonnie M. Meguid. 2008. "Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, and Issue-Based Vote Choice." *Electoral Studies* 27(3): 477–91.
- Bratton, Kathleen A. 2005. "Critical Mass Theory Revisited: The Behavior and Success of Token Women in State Legislatures." *Politics & Gender; Cambridge* 1(1): 97–125.
- Bratton, Kathleen A., and Leonard P. Ray. 2002. "Descriptive Representation, Policy Outcomes, and Municipal Day-Care Coverage in Norway." *American Journal of Political Science* 46(2): 428–37.
- Brown, Heath. 2011. "Interest Groups and Presidential Transitions." *Congress & the Presidency; Washington* 38(2): 152–70.
- Budge, Ian, and Dennis Farlie. 1983. *Party Competition : Selective Emphasis or Direct Confrontation? : An Alternative View with Data*. <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/41171> (November 9, 2018).
- Campbell, John L., and Ove K. Pedersen. 2014. *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*. Princeton University Press.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2005. "Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issues Priorities on Campaign Websites." *Political Research Quarterly* 58(1): 31–44.
- Eagly, Alice H. et al. 2020. "Gender Stereotypes Have Changed: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of U.S. Public Opinion Polls from 1946 to 2018." *American Psychologist* 75(3): 301–15.
- Egan, Patrick J. 2013. *Partisan Priorities: How Issue Ownership Drives and Distorts American Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fagan, E. J. 2018. "Marching Orders? U.S. Party Platforms and Legislative Agenda Setting 1948–2014." *Political Research Quarterly* 71(4): 949–59.
- . 2022. "Elite Polarization and Partisan Think Tanks." *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 3(3–4): 395–411.
- Fagan, E. J., Zachary A. McGee, and Herschel F. Thomas. 2019. "The Power of the Party: Conflict Expansion and the Agenda Diversity of Interest Groups." *Political Research Quarterly*: 1065912919867142.
- Fagan, EJ. 2019. "Issue Ownership and the Priorities of Party Elites in the United States, 2004–2016." *Party Politics*: 1354068819839212.
- Froio, Caterina, Shaun Bevan, and Will Jennings. 2017. "Party Mandates and the Politics of Attention: Party Platforms, Public Priorities and the Policy Agenda in Britain." *Party Politics* 23(6): 692–703.

- Green, Jane, and Will Jennings. 2017. "Party Reputations and Policy Priorities: How Issue Ownership Shapes Executive and Legislative Agendas." *British Journal of Political Science*: 1–24.
- Hall, Richard L., and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy." *American Political Science Review* 100(1): 69–84.
- Halpin, Darren R., and Bert Fraussen. 2019. "Laying the Groundwork: Linking Internal Agenda-Setting Processes of Interest Groups to Their Role in Policy Making." *Administration & Society* 51(8): 1337–59.
- Hayes, Danny. 2011. "When Gender and Party Collide: Stereotyping in Candidate Trait Attribution." *Politics & Gender; Cambridge* 7(2): 133–65.
- Hayes, Danny, and Jennifer L. Lawless. 2016. *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era*. Cambridge University Press.
- Herrnson, Paul S., J. Celeste Lay, and Atiya Kai Stokes. 2003. "Women Running 'as Women': Candidate Gender, Campaign Issues, and Voter-Targeting Strategies." *The Journal of Politics* 65(1): 244–55.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Nayda Terkildsen. 1993. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(1): 119–47.
- Kahn, Kim Fridkin. 1996. *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kaufmann, Karen M., and John R. Petrocik. 1999. "The Changing Politics of American Men: Understanding the Sources of the Gender Gap." *American Journal of Political Science* 43(3): 864–87.
- King, David C., and Richard E. Matland. 2003. "Sex and the Grand Old Party: An Experimental Investigation of the Effect of Candidate Sex on Support for a Republican Candidate." *American Politics Research* 31(6): 595–612.
- Leeper, Mark Stephen. 1991. "The Impact of Prejudice On Female Candidates: An Experimental Look at Voter Inference." *American Politics Quarterly* 19(2): 248–61.
- McDermott, Monika L. 1997. "Voting Cues in Low-Information Elections: Candidate Gender as a Social Information Variable in Contemporary United States Elections." *American Journal of Political Science* 41(1): 270–83.
- McGann, James. 2016. *The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks, Public Policy, and Governance*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Osborn, Tracy L. 2012. *How Women Represent Women: Political Parties, Gender, and Representation in the State Legislatures*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, with a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40(3): 825–50.
- Petrocik, John R., William L. Benoit, and Glenn J. Hansen. 2003. "Issue Ownership and Presidential Campaigning, 1952–2000." *Political Science Quarterly* 118(4): 599–626.
- Reingold, Beth. 2000. *Representing Women: Sex, Gender, and Legislative Behavior in Arizona and California*. Chapel Hill, UNITED STATES: The University of North Carolina Press.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uic/detail.action?docID=413399> (March 25, 2020).

- Rich, Andrew. 2005. *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenwasser, Shirley M. et al. 1987. "Attitudes toward Women and Men in Politics: Perceived Male and Female Candidate Competencies and Participant Personality Characteristics." *Political Psychology* 8(2): 191–200.
- Rosenwasser, Shirley M., and Jana Seale. 1988. "Attitudes toward a Hypothetical Male or Female Presidential Candidate: A Research Note." *Political Psychology* 9(4): 591–98.
- Sapiro, Virginia. 1981. "If U.S. Senator Baker Were A Woman: An Experimental Study of Candidate Images." *Political Psychology* 3(1/2): 61–83.
- Schneider, Monica C. 2014. "Gender-Based Strategies on Candidate Websites." *Journal of Political Marketing* 13(4): 264–90.
- Seeberg, Henrik Bech. 2017. "How Stable Is Political Parties' Issue Ownership? A Cross-Time, Cross-National Analysis." *Political Studies* 65(2): 475–92.
- Shapiro, Robert Y., and Harpreet Mahajan. 1986. "Gender Differences in Policy Preferences: A Summary of Trends From the 1960s to the 1980s." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 50(1): 42–61.
- Stone, Diane. 1996. *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*. London ; Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Swers, Michele L. 2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. 1st edition. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Thomas, Sue. 1991. "The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies." *The Journal of Politics* 53(4): 958–76.
- . 1994. *How Women Legislate*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walgrave, Stefaan, Anke Tresch, and Jonas Lefevere. 2015. "The Conceptualisation and Measurement of Issue Ownership." *West European Politics* 38(4): 778–96.
- Weidenbaum, Murray L. 2011. *The Competition of Ideas: The World of the Washington Think Tanks*. Paperback ed. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers.
- Wolbrecht, Christina. 2000. *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions, and Change*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Wolbrecht, Christina, and Michael T. Hartney. 2014. "'Ideas about Interests': Explaining the Changing Partisan Politics of Education." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(03): 603–30.