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Women, War, and Winning Elections: Gender Stereotyping in the Post-September 11th Era

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Scores of political science studies reveal that female candidates fare as well as their male counterparts. But the percentage of citizens willing to support a woman presidential party nominee has significantly decreased over the last two years. Based on the results of a *Knowledge Networks* national random sample survey, this article offers the first empirical examination of the manner in which the atmosphere of war might affect women candidates' electoral prospects. I find that citizens prefer men's leadership traits and characteristics, deem men more competent at legislating around issues of national security and military crises, and contend that men are superior to women at addressing the new obstacles generated by the events of September 11, 2001. As a result of this gender stereotyping, levels of willingness to support a qualified woman presidential candidate are lower than they have been for decades. These findings carry broad implications for the study of women and politics. If women fare as well as men when the political climate is dominated by issues that play to women's stereotypical strengths, but are disadvantaged when "men's issues" dominate the political agenda, then we must reconsider the conclusion that winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate.

The events of September 11, 2001, profoundly affected Americans. At the mass level, the terrorist attacks led to citizens' "near unanimous support for military action" (Wattenberg 2003: 90). At the elite level, the divisive partisanship that plagued the first eight months of the Bush administration disappeared as Democrats and Republicans joined for a congressional rendition of "God Bless America" on the steps of the Capitol. Although bipartisan cooperation quickly waned, military crises, national security concerns, and efforts to curb terrorism continue to dominate the political climate. The President, his Cabinet, and members of Congress have stated that the "war on terrorism" may last indefinitely. Voters' attitudes about candidate suitability to hold high-level office in an environment dominated by foreign policy concerns, therefore, could affect the composition of our governing bodies for the foreseeable future.

For gender politics scholars, this atmosphere of war raises questions about prospects for women candidates' electoral viability for high-level office. On the one hand, two decades of research concludes that the electoral system is unbiased against women candidates. Individual accounts of women who face overt gender discrimination once they enter the public arena are no longer commonplace (Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994). Further, in terms of vote totals and fundraising, investigators find that women fare at least as well as their male counterparts (e.g., Fox 2000; Burrell 1994, 1998; Dolan 1997; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994).

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But a decade of research also convincingly argues that gender stereotyping, linked to traditional sex roles, continues to pervade the electoral environment (Niven 1998; Flammang 1997; Fox 1997; Kahn 1996; Alexander and Andersen 1993). Depending on the issue domain at hand, voters attribute differential levels of expertise to men and women candidates and elected officials. Men and women are also viewed differently in terms of the traits and characteristics they bring to the political arena. Gender politics scholars are concerned, therefore, because the consensus in the literature is that voters are more likely to perceive men than women as strong, assertive, confident foreign policy experts. These very traits and areas of expertise are particularly relevant in a political context dominated by fighting terrorism, deploying troops, protecting national security, and brokering peace agreements.

Despite anecdotal evidence (e.g., Fox 1997; Burrell 1994) and the intuitive appeal of the logic that women candidates are disadvantaged when "men's issues" dominate the political agenda, empirical studies of gender stereotyping tend not to be linked to specific electoral conditions. Experimental studies do find that individuals invoke candidate sex as a cue about policy expertise or politically relevant characteristics. These investigations, however, tend to be conducted on college students in non-political settings (e.g., Fox and Smith 1998; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). Although these experiments are useful in determining whether an individual is predisposed to stereotype on an abstract level or in a hypothetical set of circumstances, they shed little light on how voters assess candidates in particular atmospheres.

This article, which presents the results of a *Knowledge Networks* national random sample survey, offers the first empirical examination of the manner in which the atmosphere of war shapes voters' attitudes about men and women as candidates for high-level office. I find that a clear bias

favoring male candidates and elected officials accompanies the “war on terrorism.” Citizens prefer men’s leadership traits and characteristics, deem men more competent at legislating around issues of national security and military crises, and contend that men are superior to women at addressing the new obstacles generated by the events of September 11, 2001. As a result of this stereotyping, levels of willingness to support a qualified woman presidential candidate are lower than they have been in decades. These findings carry broad implications for the study of women and politics. If women fare as well as men when the political climate is dominated by issues that play to women’s stereotypical strengths, but are disadvantaged when “men’s issues” dominate the political agenda, then we must reconsider the conclusion that “winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate” (see Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997: 79). In addition, we must consider the extent to which women’s substantive interests can be represented by governing bodies that may be overwhelmingly dominated by men for years to come.¹

**GENDER STEREOTYPING:
SEX-ROLE SOCIALIZATION, RESEARCH QUESTIONS,
AND THE DATA SET**

As we enter the twenty-first century, many of the barriers to women’s advancement in formerly male fields are drastically changing. Women now enter law schools and MPA programs at equal levels with men (McGlen and O’Connor 1998). Women’s presence in the fields of business and law has increased dramatically (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). And the conception of a rigid set of sex roles has dissipated with the increasing number of two career families (McGlen and O’Connor 1998: 244). But even if the notion of women entering the political arena is far more commonplace than it may have been a couple of decades ago, patterns of traditional sex-role socialization that have historically resulted in men’s entry into the public world of politics and women’s relegation to the private realm of the home continue to persist (Conover and Grey 1983).

Empirical analyses reveal that women and men who enter politics continue to be perceived differently in terms of their ideologies, characteristics, and policy expertise. First, women candidates and office-holders are generally perceived as more liberal than men candidates of the same party (Koch 2000; McDermott 1997, 1998; Alexander and Andersen 1993). Second, citizens tend to view women and men candidates and office-holders differently in terms of the characteristics and traits they bring to the electoral arena. Citizens are more likely to identify men as assertive, active,

and self-confident, while they identify women as more compassionate, willing to compromise, and “people-oriented” (Burrell 1994; Leeper 1991; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; 1993a; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). Third, men candidates are often perceived as more competent than women in terms of legislating in the areas of military crises, crime, the economy, and agriculture. Women tend to garner more perceived expertise when the issues at hand are gender equity, education, health care, and poverty (Burrell 1994; Alexander and Anderson 1993; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; 1993b; Leeper 1991; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989; Sapiro 1981/1982). In each case, the issues and traits associated with women are linked to the traditional domain of the family, whereas the policy expertise and characteristics linked to men tend to be visible in the public sphere.

This kind of gender stereotyping is relevant not only because it demonstrates the degree to which traditional gender roles and expectations continue to exist in contemporary society, but also because it carries implications for the selection and evaluation of politicians. Citizens tend to pay only passing attention to politics, retain only minimal amounts of political information and, oftentimes, lack the ability to organize the limited amount of political information they do have (Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Accordingly, in order to assess candidates, individuals invoke myriad heuristics, of which gender serves as one of the most straightforward (McDermott 1997: 271). Voters can simply transfer their stereotypical expectations about men and women to male and female candidates (see Dolan 2004).

In many cases, the use of such heuristics is normatively attractive, as it offers a mechanism by which voters can make political choices that resemble those they would have made under conditions of fuller political information and interest. In the current political context, however, gender stereotyping might also depress women candidates’ electoral fortunes. Sanbonmatsu (2002) finds, for instance, that nearly half of the respondents in her sample of Ohio voters are predisposed to vote for or against women because of gender stereotypes about traits, beliefs, and issue expertise. Because voters’ baseline predispositions to vote for or against women interact with specific policies and issues, women candidates may be less likely to succeed when issue salience favors men’s stereotypical characteristics and expertise.²

¹ Women are more likely than men to promote legislation geared to ameliorate women’s economic and social status (e.g., Swers 2002; Burrell 1998; Dodson 1998; Thomas 1994). Many scholars also conclude that there is something wrong with a political system that produces governing bodies dominated by men, when, in fact, women comprise the majority of the population (Thomas 1998; Tolleson-Rinehart 1994).

² Evidence from the 2002 elections seems to corroborate not only the speculation that women might be disadvantaged by the atmosphere of war, but also that our post-Cold War emphasis on domestic policy issues may have led us to take women’s electoral successes for granted. In 2002, a record number of women ran for governor, senator, and member of the House of Representatives. Yet this was one of only two elections in the last 20 years that did not result in an increase in women’s presence in Congress; the number of women members of the House remained at 59 and the number of women in the Senate held steady at 13. The record number of women gubernatorial candidates yielded only one gain in the total number of women governors. Whereas the elections throughout the 1990s brought significant increases to the number of women elected to high-level office, the most recent election suggests a plateau in women’s numeric representation.

Previous stereotyping studies, coupled with the atmosphere of war, leave us with three basic questions. Foremost, does gender stereotyping continue to influence citizens' assessments of male and female politicians' competence? If so, do these assessments affect citizens' perceptions of whether men or women candidates and elected officials are better able to handle the "war on terrorism?" Finally, might women be disadvantaged at the polls because of gender stereotyping?

In order to gain a firmer grasp on the degree to which gender stereotyping is prevalent in the current political atmosphere, I administered, through *Knowledge Networks*, a stand-alone survey to a random sample of United States citizens. *Knowledge Networks* recruits its research panel using probability-sampling techniques. Accordingly, no remarkable socio-demographic, geographic, or political differences distinguish the sample from the general population, although post-stratification weighting corrects for minor variations. The survey asked about political attitudes, preferred characteristics in high-level office-holders, and attitudes about women and men's roles, traits, and issue expertise (see Appendices A and B for a description of the research design and sample).

From August 23 to September 11, 2002, *Knowledge Networks* administered the survey to 2,859 of its members. The results that follow are based on responses from the 2,119 panel members (1,104 women and 1,015 men) who completed the survey (for a 74 percent response rate). The sample of respondents, coupled with the current atmosphere of war, allows for a nuanced examination of the manner in which citizens engage in gender stereotyping when assessing candidates and electing high-level office holders.³

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Foreign policy and military concerns have not played a particularly central role in political campaigns over the course of the last several election cycles (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002). All of that changed on September 11, 2001. Now, nearly 80 percent of the sample respondents assert that foreign policy is "important" or "very important" in determining their vote choice; 43 percent of respondents state that foreign policy was more important in 2002 than it was in 1998 or 2000. This brings the importance of foreign policy on par with issues such as abortion,

health care, the economy, and crime.⁴ Regardless of sex, race, or party identification, an overwhelming majority of Americans deem foreign policy concerns as critical when making decisions about candidates.

Foreign policy is important to voters not only in abstract terms, but also regarding specific policy preferences. When asked about the detailed policies the United States should pursue in an attempt to minimize terrorism, overwhelming majorities of citizens hold relatively clear-cut, consistent preferences. As would be expected, citizens' attitudes about combating terrorism vary. Whereas approximately one half (49 percent) of the sample respondents favor declaring war on nations that harbor terrorists, or capturing and executing foreign leaders who harbor terrorists, only about one-third (37 percent) of the sample supports deploying troops to occupy nations linked to terrorist activities or torturing suspected terrorists to gain information about future attacks. Perhaps more important than the policy cleavages that emerge, though, is the fact that, over a wide range of issues, at least two-thirds of the respondents identify clear preferences; the "unsure" category never constitutes more than 33 percent of the sample.

As we proceed with our analysis of gender stereotyping, therefore, we must keep in mind that the respondents care about foreign policy, hold opinions about the manner in which the United States should proceed in attempting to squelch terrorist threats, and now appear to rely heavily on their foreign policy concerns when casting votes.

Are We Still Stereotyping? Traits, Issue Expertise, and the "War on Terrorism"

The first question we must explore is the degree to which gender stereotyping continues to pervade the political sphere. Over the course of the last two decades, women's presence in the public sphere, across parties, has increased (CAWP 2003b). Women in Congress have had increasing opportunities to demonstrate the degree to which they can handle a broad array of social, economic, and military policies. Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice serve as clear examples of women rising to high-ranking foreign policy leadership roles. It is possible that the findings from the experiments of the late 1980s and early 1990s are outdated, since the last decade has afforded voters an opportunity to experience the manner in which women political elites govern.

³ The study was conducted in the weeks leading up to, and including, the first anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks (following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, but preceding the war in Iraq). While we must be cautious in making generalizations because the war was so salient, it is important to emphasize that the long term effects of the terrorist attacks will continue to receive widespread coverage and will continue to serve as the context in which citizens evaluate policies, candidates, and elected officials. In fact, tracking of public attentiveness to new stories from 1986 to 2002 reveals that since September 11, 2001, terrorism and the war in Iraq have *steadily* dominated the "most closely followed" new stories of the last fifteen years (Pew Research Center 2003).

⁴ Gallup polls conducted throughout 2002 indicate that war and terrorism trumped all other issues when Americans stated, in an open-ended question, the most important issue facing the country (30 to 50 percent stated that issues associated with the "war on terrorism" occupied the forefront of their own political agendas and concerns). To put these numbers in perspective, from the end of the Cold War until the September 11th attacks, fewer than 10 percent of public opinion survey respondents named defense or foreign policy as the most important problem facing the United States (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002). This issue prioritization continued well into 2003; only in June did the economy regain its status as the biggest problem facing the nation.

≡ TABLE 1
GENDER STEREOTYPING OF CANDIDATES' CHARACTERISTICS, TRAITS, AND ISSUE EXPERTISE

	Deem Men Candidates and Office-Holders More Likely to Possess Trait or Competency to Deal with Issue	Deem Women Candidates and Office-Holders More Likely to Possess Trait or Competency to Deal with Issue	Deem Men and Women Candidates and Office- Holders Equally Likely to Possess Trait or Competency to Deal with Issue
"Masculine" Traits			
Self-Confident	21%	7%	72%
Assertive	35	12	53
Tough	46	6	48
Aggressive	42	6	53
"Feminine" Traits			
Compassionate	2	58	40
Compromising	11	40	49
Sensitive	1	56	43
Emotional	2	58	40
"Men's Issues"			
Handle a Military Crisis	61	3	36
Handle Corporate Crime	25	10	65
Reduce the Deficit	15	23	61
"Women's Issues"			
Resolve Abortion Controversy	7	42	51
Assist the Poor	4	46	50
Improve Children's Welfare	2	62	36

Note: Cell entries represent the percentage of respondents who fall within each category, based on a sample size of 2,119. Differences in perceived trait and issue expertise of women and men candidates and office-holders are significant at $p < .01$ for all traits and issues.

The first way in which gender stereotyping can manifest itself centers around the traits and characteristics citizens tend to identify with men and women. Previous research finds that voters deem "masculine" characteristics as more important than "feminine" traits in politics, regardless of the level of office at stake (e.g., Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). This is hardly surprising; traits ordinarily considered "masculine," such as assertiveness and self-confidence, are virtual prerequisites for campaigning and fundraising (Burrell 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a, 1993b; Leeper 1991; Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). Characteristics such as sensitivity or willingness to compromise tend not to bear, at least as directly, on prospects for political success.

Similar to those in previous investigations, the *Knowledge Networks* respondents were presented with a list of four stereotypical "masculine" traits (self-confident, assertive, tough, aggressive) and four stereotypical "feminine" traits (compassionate, compromising, sensitive, and emotional). When asked to choose the four traits most important in political candidates and office-holders, respondents slotted "masculine" traits in three of the top four positions. Seventy percent of the respondents named self-confidence as one of the four most important qualities in an elected official. This characteristic was followed by assertive (chosen by 63 percent of respondents), compassionate (63 percent of the sample), and tough (41 percent of the sample). Of the top

four traits, then, "feminine" characteristics were prioritized less frequently than "masculine" traits.

This does not, necessarily, mean that women candidates and office-holders are disadvantaged. The nature of the political arena may mean that the people who select into it tend to possess the traits and qualities deemed most suitable for a political career. Table 1 reveals, however, that levels of stereotyping continue to exist. More than one-quarter of respondents do not believe that men and women in politics are equally likely to be self-confident. About 50 percent think that men and women are not equally assertive and tough. And nearly 60 percent contend that men are not as likely as women in politics to be compassionate. Respondents, in essence, rate men as more likely to possess "masculine traits" and women as more likely to possess "feminine" traits. Since respondents include three times as many masculine as feminine traits in their lists of important characteristics for political leaders, the overall advantage accrues to men.

The tendency to stereotype regarding policy expertise is also quite apparent in the sample. Similar to the findings in previous research that conclude men and women are perceived differently in terms of their ability to legislate competently around particular issues, the respondents in this sample tend to offer a gendered assessment of men and women in politics. The data presented in the bottom half of Table 1 indicate that majorities believe that men and women

are equally competent when it comes to dealing with corporate crime, deficit reduction, abortion, and assisting the poor. But, as we might expect, when gender stereotyping does occur, women receive an edge on the “women’s issues,” such as aiding the poor and handling the abortion controversy; men’s perceived expertise is seen on the issue of corporate crime. The most striking finding to emerge from Table 1, however, is not the wide array of issues on which men and women are perceived as equally competent, but rather, the gender gap in perceived issue expertise when we turn to competence to handle a military crisis. Almost two-thirds of the respondents do not believe that men and women officeholders are equally suited to deal with military affairs. And of the 64 percent of respondents who gender stereotype around this issue, 95 percent contend that men are better able than women to deal with military crises.

Having uncovered an overwhelming gender gap in terms of the sex of the politician respondents believe is more competent to deal with military crises, it is hardly surprising to find that citizens also stereotype about the very specific issues and policies that have evolved with the “war on terrorism.” Gender differences in perceived competence in political leaders is smaller when we turn to the specific issues involved in curbing terrorism, but a wide gap certainly persists. More than 35 percent of sample respondents assert that men are more competent than women when it comes to punishing those responsible for the September 11th attacks. Forty percent believe that men are better able than women to protect the United States from future attacks. And 30 percent of the individuals in the sample contend that men in politics are superior to women when it comes to bringing about peace in the Middle East. Among the members of the sample who do not believe men are more competent than women in these realms, almost all of them (nearly 97 percent) perceive men and women as *equally* competent. In other words, only a negligible portion of the sample evaluates women as more competent than men to deal with these issues.

Hence, in answering the first question driving this analysis—Does gender stereotyping continue to affect citizens’ assessments of politicians’ levels of competence?—the data indicate that the answer is a resounding “yes.”

Does War Matter? The Effects of Foreign Policy Preferences and Salience on Stereotyping

To conclude that respondents engage in gender stereotyping around military issues is not to conclude that the current political environment drives these stereotypes. We know that members of the sample have a propensity to stereotype broadly in terms of characteristics and issue expertise. Perhaps attitudes about whether men or women are best suited to handle war-related issues are merely an outgrowth of these general assessments. Alternatively, foreign policy’s salience, coupled with specific individual-level policy preferences, might account for respondents’ biases toward male elected officials. Even after controlling for a

general predisposition to stereotype, citizens might assess men as better able to govern in an atmosphere of war.

In order to examine whether the atmosphere of war raises the salience of this particular aspect of gender stereotyping, I performed four logistic regression equations. The dependent variables are dichotomous indicators of whether the respondent deems men more competent than women to handle military crises, punish terrorists, prevent future attacks, and orchestrate peace in the Middle East.⁵ Each equation includes as its main predictor the respondents’ preferences for the policies the United States should pursue in dealing with terrorism and national security. The intuition behind the inclusion of this independent variable is that citizens who support more hawkish means in the “war on terrorism” will be more likely to deem men preferable leaders, both because women have not had ample opportunity to appear competent in these circumstances and because women are perceived as more liberal than men. Citizens who think that ground troops need not be deployed, or who believe that the United States should not capture, execute, or torture suspected terrorists, on the other hand, might be less likely to deem men more competent to handle the issues that have emerged and gained publicity since September 11th. I also include as independent variables two gauges of foreign policy’s issue salience: respondents’ levels of exposure to the local and national news, and the degree to which foreign policy is important to respondents when they vote. We might expect individuals who are more interested in foreign policy to hold a higher level of political knowledge about war-related issues. Subsequently, these individuals may be less likely to engage in gender stereotyping, since studies find that individuals with more political information are less likely to rely on gender as a cue for political attitudes and behaviors (e.g., McDermott 1998, 1997). The equations control for respondents’ levels of trait and general issue stereotyping, as well as a series of sociodemographics, political attributes, and regions of residence.

The logistic regression coefficients presented in Table 2 suggest that, for each of the four dependent variables, stereotyping about war-related issues is driven, in large part, by specific political preferences. Even after controlling for sex, age, race, party, political ideology, and levels of trait and broad issue stereotyping, individuals who favor a more aggressive military policy in the “war on terrorism” are more likely to give male political elites an edge on handling terrorism.⁶

Turning first to the most general of the four dependent variables—whether the respondent believes that men are

⁵ I also performed these equations using multinomial logistic regression, since the respondents could deem women more, less, or equally competent. Levels of statistical and substantive significance remain virtually unchanged, in large part because so few respondents considered women more competent than men in these realms.

⁶ Interactive effects between the sex of the respondent and various combinations of the independent variables, as well as interactive effects between foreign policy salience and baseline gender stereotyping, are not statistically significant.

≡ TABLE 2
ARE MEN BETTER SUITED TO HOLD HIGH-LEVEL OFFICE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF WAR?
LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS (AND STANDARD ERRORS) PREDICTING CITIZENS' BIASES TOWARD MALE CANDIDATES

	Men are Better at Handling Military Crises	Men are Better at Punishing those Responsible for the Terrorist Attacks	Men are Better at Protecting the United States from Future Attacks	Men are Better able to Bring about Peace in the Middle East
Prioritize and Stereotype "Masculine"				
Traits	.23 (.08)**	.16 (.07)*	.14 (.07)*	.21 (.07)**
Stereotype on Policy Issues	.57 (.04)**	.59 (.04)**	.54 (.04)**	.33 (.04)**
Hawkish Attitudes about "War on Terrorism"	.09 (.02)**	.10 (.02)**	.09 (.02)**	.07 (.02)**
Importance of Foreign Policy when Voting	-.17 (.09)	-.00 (.09)	-.03 (.09)	-.08 (.09)
Frequency of Watching the News	.09 (.04)*	.04 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.04 (.04)
Sex (Female)	-.57 (.13)**	-.77 (.13)**	-.41 (.12)**	-.38 (.12)**
Republican	.40 (.20)*	.40 (.20)*	.93 (.19)**	.15 (.19)
Democrat	-.07 (.18)	-.44 (.19)*	-.00 (.19)	-.24 (.19)
Independent	.20 (.21)	.07 (.22)	.16 (.22)	-.09 (.22)
Political Ideology (Conservative)	.38 (.08)**	.33 (.08)**	.29 (.07)**	.40 (.08)**
Age	.10 (.04)*	.07 (.04)*	.13 (.04)**	.18 (.04)**
Black	-.27 (.22)	-.45 (.29)	-.26 (.23)	.28 (.23)
Latino/a	.17 (.23)	-.69 (.26)**	.09 (.23)	.35 (.23)
Education	-.08 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.06 (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Income	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.04 (.02)*
Marital Status (Married)	.25 (.14)	-.07 (.15)	.08 (.14)	.08 (.14)
Religiosity	.06 (.04)	.09 (.04)*	.06 (.04)	.06 (.04)
Constant	-4.29 (.55)**	-5.63 (.58)**	-4.73 (.54)**	-5.04 (.56)**
Pseudo-R ²	.36	.37	.34	.23
Percent Correctly Predicted	75.9	75.5	73.8	74.2
N	1704	1700	1703	1700

Notes: The results presented yield from regression equations with fixed effects that control for region of residence. Significance Levels: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

better than women at handling military crises—we see that, on average, men and women who favor an aggressive military policy are 30 percentage points more likely than those who can be classified as “doves” to deem men better suited than women to handle a military crisis.⁷ This effect is consistent across the various indicators of suitability to govern in the “war on terrorism.” *Ceteris paribus*, “hawks” are 31 percentage points more likely than “doves” to assess men as better able than women to punish those responsible for the terrorist attacks, 32 percentage points more likely to believe that men are better suited to protect against future attacks, and 24 percentage points more likely to contend that men are better able to bring peace to the Middle East.

These substantive effects overpower all other significant predictors, with the exception of the two variables that capture the predisposition to stereotype. The best predictors, across equations, of whether an individual will assess men as more competent than women, are the degree to which

the individual engages in “masculine” trait stereotyping and the total number of general policy issues on which he/she gender stereotypes. An otherwise “average” male respondent who does not prioritize “masculine” traits (and who does not think men are more likely than women to possess these traits) or stereotype around general policy issues, for example, has a 0.20 likelihood of deeming men better than women at handling military crises. If that same individual stereotypes at the mean level of the sample, his likelihood of preferring men to women increases to 0.61. A male respondent who stereotypes to the utmost extent has a 0.91 predicted probability of deeming men more suitable than women to handle military crises. Even in this case, though, aggressive military preferences have an added effect and increase the probability to 0.96.

In a similar example, we can consider an “average” woman’s likelihood of preferring men to women on the issue of punishing those responsible for the terrorist attacks. If she does not stereotype in terms of traits or issue expertise, an average woman’s likelihood of believing men are superior to women at punishing the attackers is only about 0.06. This predicted probability increases to 0.26 if she stereotypes at

⁷ These predicted probabilities are calculated by setting the continuous variables to their means and the dummy variables to their modes. Party identification is coded as “Independent.”

the mean level, and 0.69 if she stereotypes at the maximum level. Once again, though, the effects of specific military policy preferences are substantial; the 0.69 probability increases to 0.82 as the individual increases her preferences for aggressive military policies. Comparable substantive effects emerge from the regression equations predicting the likelihood of believing that men are better than women at protecting the United States from future attacks, as well as deeming men superior to women at bringing about peace in the Middle East. The specific preferences respondents hold regarding the policies the United States should pursue to combat terrorism, therefore, play a central role in determining whether individuals engage in gender stereotyping.

The data do not support the expectation that increased levels of political information lessen the likelihood of gender stereotyping. Respondents for whom foreign policy concerns are particularly salient are no less likely to stereotype than are citizens who do not rate foreign policy as an important issue. The same is true, for the most part, when we turn to the frequency with which respondents follow the news. This lack of statistical significance is important, though, since we hypothesized that familiarity with foreign policy might work to depress levels of gender stereotyping. Of course, in the current political environment, there is little variation in the extent to which individuals are exposed to the “war on terrorism.”

Looking back at the second question driving this analysis—Do attitudes about war affect citizens’ likelihood of gender stereotyping?—the evidence leads us to an affirmative answer.

A Woman in the White House? Probably Not

Considering that voters stereotype regarding war-related policies, should we be concerned about women candidates’ prospects to attain high-level office? As previously mentioned, empirical studies find that women candidates perform at least as well as their male counterparts. None of these studies, however, links electoral outcomes to gender stereotyping. Further, none of these analyses is based on data gathered in an atmosphere of war.⁸ We know, then, only that women are as likely as men to win elections when domestic policy and issues on which women are perceived as the stereotypical experts occupy the political agenda. The question, therefore, remains: Are voters as willing to elect women when military issues occupy the political agenda?

At the abstract level, citizens contend that it is important to elect women to positions of political power. Seventy-four percent of respondents say it would be a good thing if more women held political office, in large part because laws and policies would look different. Gauging more specific levels of support for women candidates for high-level office, how-

ever, is complicated because of methodological limitations. Ideally, we would like to know if voters are now less likely to express willingness to vote for women congressional and gubernatorial candidates than they were before the terrorist attacks occurred. Panel data from *Knowledge Networks* on these questions do not exist; but time series data can shed light on women’s electoral prospects.

Since 1937, national random samples have answered the question: “If your political party nominated a woman for president, would you be willing to vote for her if she were qualified for the job?” Willingness to elect a woman president may be lower than willingness to elect women to other high-level positions, especially in an atmosphere of war. Nevertheless, the question serves as a reasonable gauge for the change in citizens’ overt biases against women elected officials. Whereas majorities of Americans were unwilling to vote for a woman presidential nominee in the 1930s and 1940s, levels of support increased throughout the next several decades. By the 1980s, more than 80 percent of survey respondents expressed willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate. And by the late 1990s, nearly 95 percent of those surveyed voiced willingness to vote for a woman for president. Perhaps because of the lack of variance in responses, the National Opinion Research Council did not include this question in the battery for its 2000 or 2002 General Social Survey.

The 2002 *Knowledge Networks* survey results stand in stark contrast to those from the 1990s; only 65 percent of respondents are sure they would be willing to vote for a woman for president, even if she were qualified and their political party’s nominee. Although levels of direct bias against women are about the same as they have been since the mid-1990s (7 percent), 28 percent of sample respondents state that they are unsure whether they are willing to vote for a woman, which is a substantial shift away from an unequivocal willingness to support a woman presidential nominee.⁹

In order to determine whether the willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate is linked to gender stereotyping around issues related to the “war on terrorism,” I regress the

⁸ The Iran hostage crisis played a significant role in the 1980 presidential campaign. Most studies that examine gender bias in elections, however, begin with data post-1980 and, as a result, are based on elections dominated by domestic policy issues.

⁹ The shift in opinion is not merely an artifact of the sample or sampling technique. When asked whether they felt that women were as emotionally suited as men to hold public office, 76 percent of respondents answered “yes,” and 24 percent responded “no.” This result is comparable to the percentages obtained by the National Opinion Research Council’s (NORC) General Social Survey. That said, the result is due, at least in part, to *Knowledge Networks*’ (KN) in-house effects. KN reports that its surveys generate at least 6 percent more “don’t know” responses than do in-person interviews conducted by the NORC (Dennis and Li 2002: 1). The “don’t know” option is often not read aloud by the NORC. In addition, there is no concern for producing the socially desirable answer when completing a survey on-line. Because of this concern, KN re-fielded the question to a random sample of 1,539 citizens, half of whom were presented with yes/no/unsure option and half of whom were presented with the yes/no option. The results indicate that when the “don’t know” option is not provided 80 percent of respondents express a willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate and 20 percent assert an unwillingness to do so. Still, the evidence indicates a relatively large shift away from willingness to vote for a qualified woman presidential party nominee.

≡ TABLE 3
 LOGISTIC REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS (AND STANDARD ERRORS)
 PREDICTING CITIZENS' WILLINGNESS TO VOTE FOR A PARTY-NOMINATED, QUALIFIED WOMAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

	Binary Logistic Regression (Dependent Variable: 0 = no or don't know; 1 = yes)	Multinomial Logistic Regression (Dependent Variable: Omitted Category = yes, willing to vote for a woman)	
		Unwilling to Vote for Woman	Unsure if Willing to Vote for Woman
Preference for Men regarding War Issues	-.41 (.05)**	.47 (.10)**	.39 (.05)**
Prioritize and Stereotype "Masculine" Traits	-.08 (.06)	-.07 (.12)	.13 (.07)*
Stereotype on Policy Issues	.07 (.04)	-.01 (.07)	-.08 (.04)
Hawkish Attitudes about "War on Terrorism"	.00 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.00 (.02)
Importance of Foreign Policy when Voting	-.03 (.08)	-.31 (.15)*	.12 (.09)
Frequency of Watching the News	.20 (.04)**	-.17 (.08)*	-.20 (.04)**
Sex (Female)	.37 (.12)**	-.84 (.24)**	-.29 (.13)*
Republican	.36 (.18)*	.69 (.35)*	-.54 (.19)
Democrat	.48 (.18)**	-.09 (.37)	-.53 (.18)**
Independent	.63 (.21)**	-.93 (.56)	-.59 (.21)**
Political Ideology (Conservative)	-.28 (.08)**	.29 (.14)*	.27 (.08)**
Age	.01 (.04)	-.05 (.08)	-.00 (.04)
Black	.61 (.25)*	.17 (.44)	-.75 (.27)**
Latino/a	.46 (.23)*	.17 (.38)	-.68 (.25)**
Education	.20 (.04)**	-.37 (.08)**	-.17 (.05)**
Income	.00 (.02)	.02 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
Marital Status (Married)	.20 (.14)	-.07 (.27)	-.17 (.14)
Religiosity	-.02 (.04)	.10 (.07)	-.00 (.04)
Constant	.27 (.53)	-1.44 (1.02)	-.87 (.57)
Pseudo-R ²	.23	.23	.23
Percent Correctly Predicted	72.7		
N	1684	1684	1684

Notes: The results presented yield from regression equations with fixed effects that control for region of residence. Significance Levels: *p < .05; **p < .01.

respondents' willingness to vote for a qualified woman presidential nominee on measures of gender stereotyping. The left-hand column in Table 3 presents the results from a binary logistic regression equation, in which the dependent variable is coded as whether the respondent is willing to vote for a woman, as opposed to being unwilling or unsure.

The logistic regression coefficients indicate that respondents who believe men are better able than women to handle the issues and policies that accompany the "war on terrorism" are significantly less willing to vote for a woman presidential candidate. Even among Democrats, who are the most willing to vote for a woman presidential nominee, gender stereotypes pertaining to the "war on terrorism" depress voters' likelihood of expressing a willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate. The average female Democrat's predicted probability of being willing to vote for a woman for president drops by 31 percentage points (from 0.87 to 0.56) as she becomes increasingly likely to deem men more competent at handling the obstacles generated by the "war on terrorism." The substantive impact is slightly greater for a male Democrat, whose likelihood of expressing

willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate falls from 0.82 to 0.47 as he increasingly deems men more competent than women to legislate in an atmosphere of war.

This finding is important because a preference for men to govern in a time of war is the only gender-stereotyping variable that achieves conventional levels of statistical significance. General issue and trait stereotypes, as well as individual-level policy preferences about the war, do not exert an independent, direct effect on the willingness to vote for a woman president. These variables are significant predictors of assessing men as more competent than women to handle the obstacles associated with governing in a political context dominated by war (Table 2).¹⁰ But it appears that stereotypes about specific events are required to bias one's voting behavior.

Dichotomizing the willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate into those who are unequivocally willing versus those who are either unwilling or unsure certainly

¹⁰ In no case does the correlation between any of the independent variables in the equation exceed 0.40. Thus, multi-collinearity is not a problem.

sketches a substantively reasonable picture. Methodologically, however, the technique might obscure any differences between citizens who are unwilling to vote for a woman, versus citizens who are unsure if they are willing to vote for a woman. In order to shed light on these potential differences, I perform a multinomial logistic regression with a trichotomized dependent variable. The middle and right-hand columns of Table 3 present the results, which are largely consistent with the binary logistic regression equation findings. Respondents who deem men more competent than women to govern in an atmosphere of war are more likely to be unwilling or unsure if they are willing to vote for women presidential nominees. A general tendency to stereotype about issue expertise does not affect the willingness to vote for a woman, although preferences for masculine traits in high-level office-holders increase the likelihood of being unsure.

These findings are more remarkable if we consider them in light of the fact that the events of September 11th appear to have reinforced respondents' party identification loyalty in terms of vote choice. Thirty-five percent of Democrats, for instance, assert that the "war on terrorism" has made them more likely to vote for Democrats for high-level office; 42 percent of Republicans claim that the terrorist attacks increased their likelihood to vote Republican (differences significant at $p < .01$). Nearly all of the remaining Democrats and Republicans state that the "war on terrorism" has not altered their party loyalty. Because the question about willingness to vote for a woman controls for party congruence between the respondent and the potential presidential nominee, respondents, in essence, are being asked whether gender stereotypes are stronger than their reinforced party identification attachment. For a significant portion of the sample, the answer is "yes."

Together, the regression equations presented in Table 3 provide evidence that the current "war on terrorism" may work to the detriment of women candidates, at least at the presidential level. Stereotyping about candidate competence to govern in a political context dominated by war decreases the willingness to vote for a qualified, party nominated woman presidential candidate, and gives pause to respondents who might otherwise be willing to vote for a woman.¹¹

CONCLUSION

The results from this study reveal that gender stereotyping in the political arena continues to exist, both in terms of general traits and issue expertise that citizens accord to men and women candidates and office-holders, and regarding quite specific policy expertise associated with curbing terrorism. Although this is the first empirical analysis that

assesses the degree to which gender stereotyping continues to pervade the electoral environment in a post-September 11th era, the general results comport well with those of previous studies. Citizens prefer "masculine" traits and characteristics in their leaders and believe that men are more likely than women to possess these qualities. Moreover, voters continue to deem men more qualified to handle military crises, whereas women receive an edge when the issues at stake revolve around poverty, women, and children.

Moving beyond previous empirical work, I find that stereotypes pertaining to men and women's competence to combat terrorism are not merely an outgrowth of more basic stereotypes; policy preferences about current events play a significant role in shaping these stereotypes. The language of war is tough, aggressive, and uncompromising. The rhetoric of "invasion," "regime change," and "deployment" must be spoken with decisiveness. Male leaders have dominated war rhetoric in every conflict in U.S. history. Presidents have made the case for war, and generals and cabinet secretaries, virtually all of whom have been male, have voiced support for presidents' positions. Citizens are accustomed to the words of war belonging to men. As a result, citizens with policy preferences for invading nations, executing those who harbor terrorists, or torturing suspected terrorists are more likely to deem men more competent than women to govern.

These results are important not only because they demonstrate that gender stereotypes continue to exist in contemporary society, but also because they may work to the detriment of women candidates for high-level political office. Individuals who deem men more competent than women to curb terrorism and lead in a time of military crisis are significantly less likely to be willing to vote for a qualified woman presidential candidate who garners the political party's nomination. The general predisposition to stereotype does not affect the willingness to vote for a woman presidential candidate. Thus, a political climate dominated by foreign policy and military concerns appears to account for a large part of the reason that overall willingness to elect a woman president is as low as it was three decades ago, long before women made their entrée into the political sphere and demonstrated their ability to legislate. The evidence from this analysis suggests that we may want to qualify our general conclusion that winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate. Perhaps winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate as long as domestic policy issues comprise the political agenda. Perhaps we were too narrow-sighted when we concluded that the electoral arena is unbiased against women candidates.

APPENDIX A

KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS' SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Using high quality probability sampling techniques, and not limiting itself to current Web users or computer owners, *Knowledge Networks* (KN) recruited the first online research panel that is representative of the U.S. population. The panel recruitment methodology utilizes list-assisted random

¹¹ A June 2003 Gallup poll revealed that 87 percent of survey respondents are willing to vote for a qualified woman presidential party nominee; 12 percent are unwilling. This support level is lower than it is for a Jewish (89 percent), Black (92 percent), or Catholic (93 percent) well-qualified candidate nominated by the respondent's political party (Jones and Moore 2003).

digit dialing sampling techniques on a sample frame that is updated quarterly and consists of the entire United States telephone population. The sample preparation system excludes confirmed disconnected and non-residential telephone numbers, as well as the numbers of the 6 to 8 percent of the United States population who are not located in the WebTV Internet Service Provider network.

Telephone numbers for which KN is able to recover a valid postal address (about 50 percent) are sent an advance mailing informing the household member that he/she has been selected to participate in the panel. Interviewers then phone all households sent an advance mailing, as well as 50 percent of the numbers not sent an advance mailing. Interviewers inform the household member that he/she has been selected to join the panel and that, in return for completing a short survey weekly, the household will receive WebTV and free monthly Internet access.

To ensure consistent delivery of survey content, each household is provided with identical hardware, thereby allowing surveys to be administered using a Web browser. All new panel members are sent an initial survey to confirm equipment installation and familiarize them with the WebTV unit. Demographics such as gender, age, race, income, education, and prior computer and Internet usage are collected for each participant to create a member profile. Once recruited and profiled, panel members become eligible for specific surveys. The specific survey sample is drawn from eligible members and uses an implicitly stratified systematic sample design. When assigned to a survey, members receive a notification email on their WebTV, alerting them to the fact that a new survey is available for them to take. Email reminders are sent to uncooperative panel members. If email does not generate a response, a phone reminder is initiated.

≡ APPENDIX B
VARIABLE DESCRIPTION

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coding
DEPENDENT VARIABLES				
Men are Better at Handling Military Crises	0, 1	.61	.49	Indicates whether respondent believes men are better than women at handling military crises (1) or not (0).
Men are Better at Punishing those Responsible for the Terrorist Attacks	0, 1	.35	.48	Indicates whether respondent believes men are better than women at punishing those responsible for the terrorist attacks (1) or not (0).
Men are Better at Protecting the United States from Future Attacks	0, 1	.40	.49	Indicates whether respondent believes men are better than women at protecting the United States from future attacks (1) or not (0).
Men are Better able to Bring about Peace in the Middle East	0, 1	.29	.45	Indicates whether respondent believes men are better able than women to bring about peace in the Middle East (1) or not (0).
Willingness to Vote for a Qualified, Party-Nominated Woman Presidential Candidate	0, 1	.65	.48	Indicates whether respondent is willing to vote for a woman presidential candidate if she were qualified and nominated by respondent's political party (1) or not (0).
Willingness to Vote for a Qualified, Party-Nominated Woman Presidential Candidate	1-3	2.58	.62	Indicates whether respondent is willing (3), unsure (2), or unwilling (1) to vote for a woman presidential candidate if she were qualified and nominated by respondent's political party.
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES—STEREOTYPING AND FOREIGN POLICY SALIENCE				
Prioritize and Stereotype on "Masculine" Traits in Politicians	0-4	2.09	.94	Number of "masculine" traits respondent prioritized and ranked men who hold high-level office more likely to possess.
Stereotype on Policy Issues	0-5	2.37	1.77	Number of policy issues on which respondent stereotyped (i.e., preferred women to men or men to women).
Hawkish Attitudes about "War on Terrorism"	8-24	16.77	4.41	Extent to which respondent believes the U.S. should pursue military means, deploy troops, capture and execute heads of state, and limit U.S. citizens' civil liberties in the "war on terrorism." Higher numbers represent more hawkish attitudes.

≡ APPENDIX B
VARIABLE DESCRIPTION (continued)

Variable	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coding
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES—STEREOTYPING AND FOREIGN POLICY SALIENCE (continued)				
Preference for Men regarding War-Related Issues	0-4	1.64	1.49	Total number of the following areas in which respondent deems men more competent than women: dealing with a military crisis, punishing those responsible for the terrorist attacks, protecting against future attacks, bringing about peace in the Middle East.
Importance of Foreign Policy when Voting	1-4	3.03	.81	Degree to which respondent considers foreign policy when casting a ballot. Ranges from "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (4).
Frequency of Watching the News	2-8	3.73	1.63	Frequency with which respondent watches the local and national news. Ranges from "very rarely" (2) to "daily" (8).
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES—TRADITIONAL SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONTROLS				
Sex (Female)	0, 1	.52	.50	Indicates whether respondent is a woman (1) or a man (0).
Republican	0, 1	.25	.43	Indicates whether respondent self-identifies as a Republican (1) or not (0).
Democrat	0, 1	.35	.48	Indicates whether respondent self-identifies as a Democrat (1) or not (0).
Independent	0, 1	.14	.35	Indicates whether respondent self-identifies as an Independent (1) or not (0).
Political Ideology (Conservative)	1-5	3.14	.93	Ranges from "very liberal" (1) to "very conservative" (5).
Age	1-7	3.62	1.64	Indicates respondent's age category. Ranges from 18-24 (1) to older than 75 (7).
Black	0, 1	.12	.32	Indicates whether respondent is Black (1) or not (0).
Latino	0, 1	.10	.30	Indicates whether respondent is Latino/a (1) or not (0).
Education	1-9	3.99	1.66	Indicates respondent's highest level of completed education. Ranges from less than high school (1) to doctoral degree (9).
Income	1-17	9.61	3.98	Indicates respondent's annual household income. Ranges from under \$5,000 (1) to more than \$125,000 (17).
Marital Status	0, 1	.63	.48	Indicates whether respondent is married (1) or not (0).
Religiosity	1-6	3.43	1.68	Indicates respondent's frequency of church attendance. Ranges from "never" (1) to "more than once a week" (6).

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