

# Voter Sex, Party, and Gender-Salient Issues: Attitudes about Sexual Harassment and Brett Kavanaugh in the 2018 Elections

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## Abstract

Since the election of President Trump and the dawning of the #MeToo movement, gender-salient issues have had a primary place in recent American politics. This was particularly evident in 2018 in the wake of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings amid accusations that he has sexually assaulted a classmate. Previous research suggests that women should be more concerned about issues like sexual harassment and mobilized to participate in elections in which these issues are prominent. Yet, American politics has become more polarized in the last 25 years, requiring us to re-examine the impact of gender-salient issues on women's electoral behavior. Employing data from a 2018 ANES pilot study, we examine the relative impact of gender and party on attitudes toward sexual harassment, Brett Kavanaugh, and participation in the 2018 elections. We find that, while gender plays some role in 2018, partisanship is still the dominant influence in these elections.

## Keywords

gender-salient issues, public opinion, sexual harassment, #MeToo

As the result of a confluence of forces, attention to gender-salient issues has achieved a prominent place in contemporary political life in the United States. The #MeToo movement brought attention to the widespread sexual harassment and assault of women in a range of industries. At the same time, the presidential election of 2016 and the election of Donald Trump focused attention on the treatment of women in our society. This attention continued with President Trump's nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, himself accused of sexual assault, to the Supreme Court. The cumulative impact of these events has been to highlight gendered issues in election campaigns in a way that is unique in recent times. Here we examine the degree to which these gender-salient issues had an impact on the 2018 elections by observing the relationship between voter sex, attitudes about sexual harassment and Brett Kavanaugh, and participation in the elections.

Given the particular importance of these issues of sexual harassment and assault to women, we might expect women will be more supportive of the efforts to highlight sexual harassment and will be less likely to support the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh. We also consider the impact of being sexually harassed on women's positions on these issues and on willingness to participate in the elections. Instead of finding evidence for differences between women and men in these attitudes, we demonstrate that the continued intertwining of issue position and partisanship in American politics extends to these gendered issues. We find that sex does not

distinguish position on attitudes about appropriate attention to sexual harassment issues or Brett Kavanaugh, but instead that partisanship is the most important influence, with Democratic and Republican women taking different positions on these issues, even when we account for individual experiences of sexual harassment. This project finds evidence that partisanship continues to trump sex as an influence on political issues, even on issues where we would expect sex and gender to have a significant impact.

## Gender-Salient Issues in 2018

The election of 2018 was one in which there was significant attention to gender-salient issues in the campaign. Attention to these issues began in earnest in the 2016 presidential election, as Donald Trump's derogatory language, past treatment of women, and behavior toward Hillary Clinton in the debates drew attention. In October of 2016, the airing of the Access Hollywood tape in which Trump described assaulting

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women reinvigorated attention to issues of sexual harassment and assault. Trump's election was met by waves of protest from women and took the form of a nation-wide movement of protest marches and a historic number of women candidates for office in 2018. In October of 2017, the publication of charges of sexual harassment and assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein kicked off the #MeToo movement and its attention to decades of mistreatment of women. Within a few months, several prominent men from a wide range of industries had been accused of sexual harassment and assault, opening the floodgates to the scope and depth of the problem.

It was in this charged environment, in July 2018, that President Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. His nomination proceeded in the typical fashion until September, when news broke of sexual assault accusations leveled against Kavanaugh by Christine Blasey Ford. Shortly after, two other women came forward to accuse Kavanaugh of inappropriate sexual behavior. These accusations culminated in dramatic nationally televised hearings at which Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh testified about an alleged incident in 1982. Issues of sexual harassment, assault, and the #MeToo movement received significant coverage until Kavanaugh was confirmed by the Senate in October, just a month before the midterm elections of 2018.

Public opinion polling at the time clearly supported the notion that these gender-salient issues were more important to women than men. Women are, of course, more likely to experience sexual harassment and assault than are men, making the issues more salient to their lives (Jackson & Newman, 2004; Uggen & Blackstone, 2004; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). In the run-up to the midterm elections, women were more likely than men to say that sexual harassment was a major problem in society, 70 percent to 53 percent, and more likely than men to believe Blasey Ford's accusations against Kavanaugh, 52 percent to 37 percent. Women were also more likely than men to disagree with the idea that the #MeToo movement had gone too far, 36 percent to 51 percent, (Brenan, 2019; Montanaro, 2018).

Previous research on the impact of gender-salient issues has found that women are often moved by the gendered dynamics of an election campaign. A recent modern example of this was the election of 1992, the so-called "Year of the Woman." President George Bush's vetoes of the Family and Medical Leave Act, the Senate testimony by Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas around Thomas' nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court and his alleged harassment of Hill, and the dramatic underrepresentation of women in Congress brought both sexual harassment and the unequal power of women and men to the forefront of political discussions. As a result of these issues, more women ran for and were elected to Congress than ever before and women voters were more engaged in that election than they were in subsequent years when gender-salient issues

were less visible. (Dolan, 1998, 2004; Hansen, 1997; Paolino, 1995; Sapiro & Conover, 1997).

This literature suggests that women's attitudes and behaviors can be shaped by gender-salient issues, but these issues may not be present in all election campaigns. The conditions in the election of 2018 were similar to those of 1992. Given the seriousness of the issues raised in the accusations against Kavanaugh, the attention to sexual harassment in general, the continuing concerns about President Trump's treatment of women, and the historically large number of women candidates campaigning, the 2018 election should be a particularly good opportunity for us to examine whether gender-salient issues continue to influence the attitudes and behaviors of American women.

### **The Complexity of Gender-Salient Issues as an Influence on Women Voters**

Assuming that women's attitudes and behaviors in the 2018 election will be moved by issues around sexual harassment stems from literature that demonstrates women taking consistently different positions from men on a range of policy issues, particularly those considered to be more central to women's lives, such as family leave, domestic violence, and access to contraception (Cassese & Barnes, 2018; Cassese et al., 2015; Lizotte, 2015; Strolovitch, 1998; Swers, 2002). These patterns of gender difference extend to attitudes toward sexual harassment and sexual violence. Numerous studies find that women are less tolerant of sexual harassment and define a wider range of behaviors as harassment than men, positions motivated, in part, by experience and by individual women's sense of gender identity (Murrell & Dietz-Uhler, 1993; Rotundo et al., 2001; Russell & Trigg, 2004). Given the persistent gender gap in attitudes toward sexual harassment, it would seem reasonable to expect women in the 2018 elections to be less supportive of Brett Kavanaugh and likely to be motivated to participate in the elections by their positions on him and on sexual harassment in society more broadly.

At the same time, there is evidence that suggests attitudes around harassment are as complex as any other, indicating times when gender is less central than other influences on women's attitudes and behaviors (Cassese & Holman, 2017.) Attitudes about traditional gender roles and both benevolent and hostile sexism can influence women's political beliefs and behaviors in ways that override the impact of their sex alone (Cassese & Holman, 2017; Deckman, 2016). One of the key factors here is the lack of a strong sense of gender consciousness among women. In general, women do not exhibit a strong sense that they share commonalities with other women based on sex and gender-based experiences (Cassese & Barnes, 2019; Cassese & Holman, 2016; Huddy, 2003). Some women, particularly white and Republican

women, are less likely to support group-based identities than, say, racial groups and are more likely to focus on their intimate connections and relationships with men (Cassese & Barnes, 2019; Deckman, 2016; Seltzer et al., 1997).

### The Increasing Importance of Partisanship—An Alternative Hypothesis

Given the potential limitations of gender identity as an influence on women's attitudes toward sexual harassment and Brett Kavanaugh, we must consider whether the increasing importance of partisanship on all aspects of political behavior extends to these gender-salient issues. Though partisanship has long been an important force in shaping behavior, recent times have seen this influence strengthen dramatically (Bartels, 2000; Carsey & Layman, 2006; Layman & Carsey, 2002). As American politics becomes more polarized, scholars find evidence that partisanship is more closely intertwined with individual-level ideology and issue positions (Jacobson, 2013). Beyond this, scholars find that partisanship has become more closely intertwined with social identity, creating an environment in which affective polarization thrives to create opposing "teams" of partisans (Mason, 2015; Miller & Conover, 2015). Thus, while the gender politics literature would suggest that the gender gap among women and men on issues is motivated by social roles and life experiences, we need to consider the possibility that party sorting by women and men is driving positions on issues, even those deemed to be most gender-salient. Since partisan polarization is so much stronger today than it was in years past, such as 1992, hypotheses about the political impact of gender-salient issues should be reexamined in light of this change (Barnes & Cassese, 2017; Deckman, 2016).

This consideration of the impact of partisanship on attitudes toward sexual harassment and Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 is particularly important given how bitter and partisan judicial nominations have become in the current political climate. In general, work on judicial nominations finds that the traditional influences of nominee qualifications and presidential strength have diminished in importance in shaping outcomes, having been replaced by the steadily increasing emphasis on ideology and partisanship. Senators are much more likely to vote along party lines when considering nominees for the federal bench (Cottrill & Peretti, 2013; Shipan, 2008). In specific, Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court led to one of the most virulent and partisan battles over a Court nominee in recent memory. Blasey Ford's testimony and Kavanaugh's angry rebuttal drove partisans to their corners, with Democrats calling Kavanaugh unfit for the bench and Republicans digging in to fight for the President's nominee, which is consistent with the increase in partisan anger and hostility permeating current

political society (Miller & Conover, 2015). Kavanaugh's confirmation was a high-stakes, highly political process that served to mobilize partisans on both side of the divide and certainly mobilized some number of voters in the 2018 election.

### Hypotheses

In order to investigate the role that gender-salient issues had on attitudes toward Brett Kavanaugh and participation in the elections of 2018, we examine possible gender differences in these attitudes while also considering the impact of party identification.

Given the accusations of sexual harassment and assault made against Kavanaugh during his confirmation hearings, we anticipate that women will be less supportive of his nomination. However, given the centrality of partisan leanings to politics in general and to judicial nominations in particular, we examine whether partisanship will be more important to feelings about Kavanaugh, with Democrats feeling negatively and Republicans feeling positively, regardless of sex.

Since previous literature suggests that gender-salient issues can increase women's political engagement in elections, we examine whether women were motivated by these issues to take part in political activities during the 2018 elections. Finally, since support for addressing sexual harassment and opposition to Kavanaugh were associated with the Democratic party during the elections, we examine whether these variables had an impact on congressional vote choice. Given the presence of gender-salient issues in the 2018 election, women should be more likely to participate in campaign activities and be more likely to vote for Democratic congressional candidates.

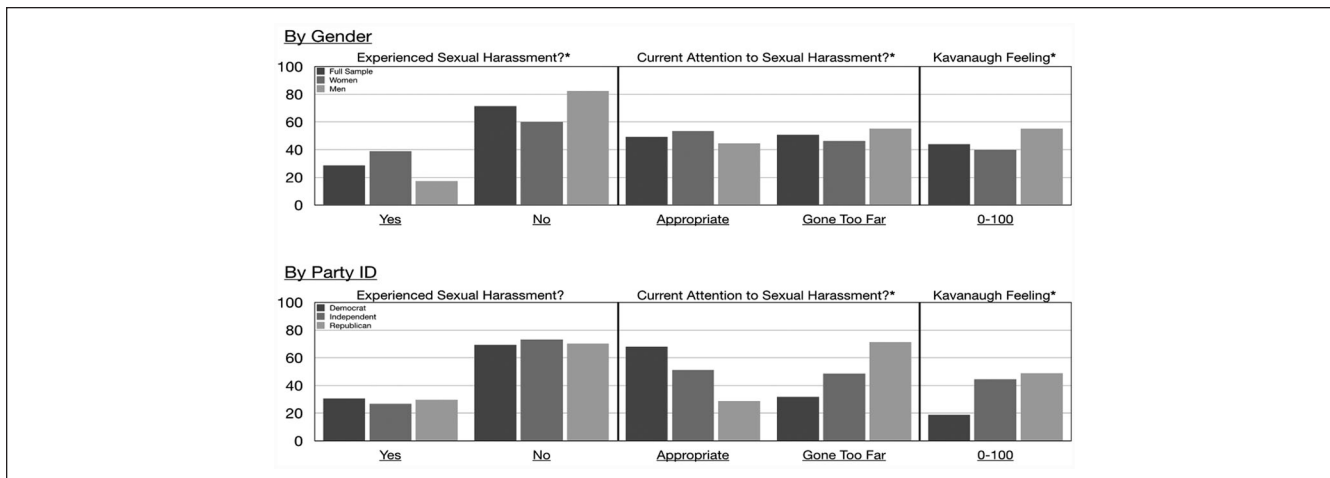
### Data and Methods

#### Data

The data utilized in the analysis come from the 2018 American National Election Study (ANES) Pilot Study. An important strength of these pilot study data is that they provide the most up-to-date academic measures of attitudes toward Brett Kavanaugh, sexual harassment, and vote choice in the 2018 midterm election season. Conducted post-election in December 2018, the pilot study surveyed 2,500 respondents.

#### Dependent Variables

We examine several dependent variables. To measure attitudes toward Brett Kavanaugh, we employ a feeling thermometer, which is a continuous measure where 0 = most negative feeling to 100 = most positive feeling. To determine whether gender-salient issues mobilize women's political participation, we examine whether respondents took part



**Figure 1.** Descriptive statistics sexual harassment experience, attitudes toward current attention, and feeling towards Kavanaugh. Note. Descriptive statistics calculated with survey weights applied.

\*indicates a statistically significant difference at  $p < .05$ ; bivariate models estimated through logit or ordered logit.

in protest activity, donated money, or voted in the congressional elections in 2018. Each participatory act is measured as 0 = did not engage in the act, 1= did engage in the act. Finally, vote choice in the 2018 midterm election in the U.S. House and Senate is measured as 0 = Republican vote, 1 = Democratic vote.

### Independent Variables

The independent variables in the multivariate analysis include the traditional demographic considerations of respondent age, sex, education, income, and race.<sup>1</sup> In terms of political influences, we include ideology, party identification, and political interest. Given the context of the election, we include two measures that tap the relevant gender-salient issues—whether the respondent has ever been a victim of sexual harassment and whether the respondent believes that current attention to the issue of sexual harassment in American life has gone too far.<sup>2</sup>

To predict feelings toward Kavanaugh, we estimate linear regression.<sup>3</sup> We estimate models for the full sample as well as models with the sample split by respondent sex, and models with the sample split by party identification. Finally, we conduct multivariate logistic regression modeling to predict participatory acts and vote choice in the 2018 midterm election in the U.S. House and Senate.

### Analysis

To establish the presence of the gender-salient variables of interest in our analysis, Figure 1 presents descriptive and bivariate statistics for respondents' experience with sexual harassment, attitudes toward current attention to sexual harassment, and feeling thermometer reactions to Brett Kavanaugh. Overall, 28 percent of respondents indicated

that they have experienced sexual harassment at work. In addition, we see that women are more than twice as likely to say that they have experienced sexual harassment at work than are men (top panel), but that there are no significant differences in experience with sexual harassment based on party identification (bottom panel).

When exploring attitudes about current attention to sexual harassment, we see that respondents in the sample closely split in their positions. Overall, 49 percent of respondents indicate that they believe the current levels of attention to sexual harassment is appropriate, while 51 percent say that the current attention has gone too far. Again, we see a statistically significant bivariate difference between men and women, with women being less likely than men to think that the current attention to sexual harassment has gone too far. At the same time, only a slim majority of women (54 percent) say that current attention to sexual harassment is appropriate, with 46 percent of women saying attention to harassment has gone too far. Interestingly, while we did not find statistically significant partisan differences in respondent's reporting of experiencing sexual harassment, we do find significant partisan differences in attitudes toward the current attention to sexual harassment. Democrats are less likely (32 percent) than Independents (48 percent) or Republicans (71 percent) to say they believe that the current attention to sexual harassment has gone too far. The partisan gap is quite large, with over twice as many Republicans responding that they think the current attention has gone too far when compared to Democrats, indicating a potentially central role for partisanship over gender in shaping this attitude.

Finally, the overall sample mean for feelings toward Kavanaugh is 44.07 on the 100-point scale, which indicates more negative feelings than positive in the sample. The descriptive statistics and bivariate results indicate that there are both statistically significant sex and partisan differences.



**Table 1.** Predicting Feeling Toward Brett Kavanaugh.

	Full	Women	Men
(Intercept)	30.57* (5.21)	36.94* (5.58)	24.03* (7.69)
Education	-0.79 (0.51)	-0.93 (0.67)	-0.71 (0.75)
Sex	-1.76 (1.52)		
Age	0.14* (0.05)	0.10 (0.06)	0.20* (0.07)
Race	0.70 (1.73)	-1.89 (2.12)	3.72 (2.68)
Income	0.11 (0.21)	0.11 (0.29)	0.12 (0.31)
Political Ideology	-4.98* (0.62)	-5.45* (0.76)	-4.62* (0.95)
Party ID - Independent	12.47* (2.63)	13.21* (3.13)	10.87* (4.16)
Party ID - Republican	36.66* (2.50)	36.02* (3.22)	36.49* (3.78)
Political Interest	2.28* (1.07)	2.07 (1.30)	2.19 (1.67)
Sexually Harassed	-2.01 (1.45)	-3.88* (1.76)	1.38 (2.47)
Sex harassment attention has gone too far	9.50* (1.84)	7.77* (2.23)	10.20* (2.84)
N	2026	1111	915
AIC	19028.85	10356.51	8663.44
BIC	19298.31	10577.08	8875.47
Log Likelihood	-9466.43	-5134.26	-4287.72

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; \*indicates statistical significance at  $p < .05$ ; survey weights utilized.

While the ratings by both women and men are below 50 percent, women's feelings are nine points lower than men's, 40.01 to 48.8. The partisan differences in feeling toward Kavanaugh demonstrate much larger gaps. The mean feeling toward Kavanaugh for Democrats is 18.88, for Independents it is 44.63, and for Republicans it is 78.90. The gap between Democrats and Republicans in regards to feeling toward Kavanaugh is very large at 60 points.

### Predicting Feeling Toward Brett Kavanaugh

The results from the analysis predicting respondent feeling toward Brett Kavanaugh are presented in Table 1. Here, the analysis is conducted for the full sample and then for women and men separately. In the full sample, several findings stand out. First, despite the bivariate relationship between respondent sex and feeling toward Kavanaugh displayed in Figure 1, the regression analysis indicates that women and men do not have statistically significant differences in their feeling toward Kavanaugh, which means that women do not rate Kavanaugh lower than men. In addition, previous experience

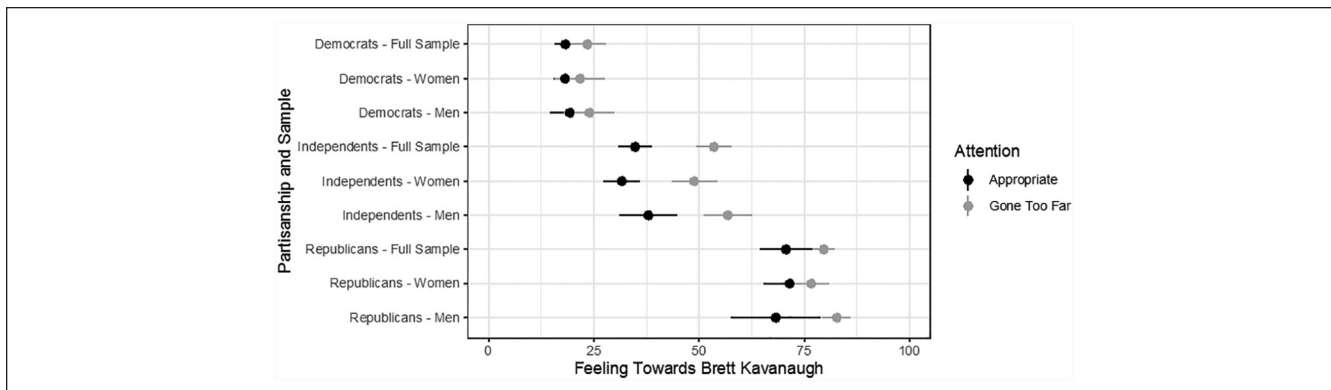
being sexually harassed does not have a relationship with feeling toward Kavanaugh. On the other hand, as expected, partisanship has a statistically significant impact on feeling toward Kavanaugh. In particular, Independents feel about 18 points, and Republicans feel 36 points, more positively toward Kavanaugh when compared to Democratic respondents.

In examining the different determinants of feeling for Kavanaugh among women and men, we see some important differences. Among women, demographic characteristics do not appear to shape reaction to Kavanaugh, while among men, older men are significantly more likely to have positive feelings toward Kavanaugh than younger men. In terms of political influences, ideology and party identification work in the same way for women and men—liberals give Kavanaugh lower ratings than do conservatives and Republicans and Independents are significantly more positive than are Democrats. This finding that partisanship differentiates between women is in line with other recent work on the political diversity among women and suggests that partisanship is central to women's identity in the same way it is to men's (Barnes & Cassese, 2017). Finally, as we might expect, women who have experienced sexual harassment have significantly lower ratings of Kavanaugh than other women. Harassment status is not related to men's ratings. Both women and men who believe that current attention to sexual harassment has gone too far are significantly more likely to have higher ratings of Kavanaugh than those who disagree.

The finding that women and men do not offer significantly different ratings of Kavanaugh in the aggregate runs counter to the hypothesis that women's life experiences should reduce their support for a judicial nominee accused of sexual assault. At the same time, we do see evidence that women who have experienced sexual harassment offer lower ratings of Kavanaugh than other women, which supports the notion that life experience can influence political attitudes. Further, in the models in Table 1, it is clear that partisan identity is the strongest influence on Kavanaugh rating among both women and men.

To examine whether there are gender gaps within each partisan identity grouping, we estimate models predicting feeling toward Kavanaugh with the sample split by respondent sex and partisanship and focus here on the gender-salient variables (See Supplemental Table A5 for full model results). In this analysis, we see that there are no statistically significant differences between women and men in any of the categories of partisanship. This is another piece of evidence that gender is less central than partisanship in shaping even gender-salient attitudes. Beyond this, we also see no impact of experience with sexual harassment on feelings toward Kavanaugh for women or men in either party. Instead, the only gender-salient variable that is related to attitude toward Kavanaugh in the sex and party analysis is attitude on whether attention to sexual harassment has gone too far.<sup>4</sup>

For ease of presentation, Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities for the coefficients for the variable measuring



**Figure 2.** The impact of attitudes on current attention to sexual harassment on feeling towards Brett Kavanaugh (by Party and Gender).

Note. Predicted probabilities calculated holding variables at survey weighted means.

attitude toward attention to sexual harassment in society. Among all three party groups, respondents who believe that attention to harassment has gone too far have warmer feelings for Kavanaugh than do those who believe that the level of attention being paid to these issues is appropriate. As Figure 2 demonstrates, there is no gender difference among Democrats. Among Independent identifiers, concerns about excessive attention to sexual harassment only increases feelings toward Kavanaugh among men. Among Republicans, we see that this concern is significantly related to greater support for Kavanaugh among both women and men identifiers.

*Predicting Participation and Vote Choice*

To this point, multivariate analysis has provided more support for the idea that attitudes toward attention to sexual harassment and Brett Kavanaugh are driven more by partisanship than a person’s sex or their experience with harassment. This is counter to the findings of past literature on gender-salient issues, which predicted an important role for women’s experiences in shaping their political views (Dolan, 2004; Manza & Brooks, 1998; Paolino, 1995). Our final analysis tests additional findings from previous research that suggest the presence of gender-salient issues in an election can spur women to greater participation and can shape vote choice decisions (Hansen, 1997; Paolino, 1995; Sapiro & Conover, 1997; Schaffner, 2005).

In Table 2, we present results from multivariate logistic regressions predicting whether respondents took part in protest activity, donated money, or voted in the congressional elections. For each participatory act, we estimate a full model and models with the sample split by sex. Various control variables—age, education, income, Independent identification, and political interest—all work in the long-established and expected ways. Our attention, however, is on the impact of the gender-salient issues—feeling toward Kavanaugh, sexual harassment status, and attitude on whether attention to

sexual harassment in society has gone too far - on the participation of women and men. Here there is limited support for our hypothesis that women would be more engaged in the 2018 election because of these issues and, at the same time, limited evidence that men were motivated to participate by these issues as well. With regard to Kavanaugh, there is no evidence that women were motivated to participate at higher levels because of their feelings toward him. Instead, we see that men who had more positive feeling toward Kavanaugh were significantly more likely to donate money and vote in the 2018 elections. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to be mobilized by their experience with sexual harassment, with women who reported being sexually harassed at work being significantly more likely to take part in a protest and to vote in the 2018 elections than women who had not experienced harassment. This finding supports the notion that the issue of sexual harassment animated women’s engagement. At the same time, however, we see that men who experienced sexual harassment were significantly more likely to donate money to candidates and campaigns than men without this experience. This would suggest that the issue of sexual harassment in the campaigns animated people who had experienced harassment regardless of their sex and reminds us that, when considering the impact of gender-salient issues on political attitudes and behaviors, we need to consider the reality that men can be influenced by these issue as easily as women can.

Finally, since the Kavanaugh hearings became a partisan election issue, particularly in Senate races, we present results from multivariate logistic regressions predicting respondent vote choice in House and Senate elections (Table 3). Given the attention to sexual harassment and assault during the election campaign and the Kavanaugh confirmation hearings, we would expect that those who believe attention to harassment has gone too far and those with positive feelings toward Kavanaugh should be less likely to vote for Democratic House and Senate candidates. Also, given that Democrats usually take tougher positions on harassment, we

**Table 2.** Predicting Participatory Acts.

	Protest			Donated			Voted		
	Full	Women	Men	Full	Women	Men	Full	Women	Men
(Intercept)	-4.43*	-4.34*	-4.34*	-6.01*	-6.99*	-5.71*	-5.59*	-4.54*	-7.27*
	(0.92)	(1.12)	(1.34)	(0.68)	(0.83)	(0.97)	(0.63)	(0.74)	(0.99)
Education	0.07	-0.01	0.16	0.19*	0.25*	0.17*	0.63*	0.52*	0.76*
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.13)
Sex	-0.07			-0.60*			0.12		
	(0.27)			(0.15)			(0.21)		
Age	-0.03*	-0.03*	-0.04*	0.01	0.02*	0.00	0.05*	0.05*	0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
White	-0.08	-0.70*	0.52	-0.33	-0.16	-0.48	-0.01	0.17	-0.40
	(0.31)	(0.34)	(0.54)	(0.18)	(0.23)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.27)	(0.37)
Income	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.07*	0.09*	0.05	0.12*	0.14*	0.12*
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Political ideology	0.25*	0.35*	0.13	0.22*	0.14	0.26*	0.03	-0.04	0.17
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.11)
Party ID - Independent	-0.20	-0.24	-0.25	-0.77*	-0.67	-0.83*	-1.38*	-1.69*	-0.87*
	(0.45)	(0.61)	(0.70)	(0.25)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.26)	(0.32)	(0.42)
Party ID - Republican	-0.17	0.41	-0.75	0.09	-0.12	0.23	-0.27	-0.88*	0.63
	(0.52)	(0.52)	(0.96)	(0.30)	(0.42)	(0.43)	(0.35)	(0.41)	(0.55)
Political interest	1.05*	0.97*	1.10*	1.09*	1.11*	1.08*	0.97*	0.75*	1.30*
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.31)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.29)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.18)
Kavanaugh feeling	-0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01*	0.00	0.00	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Sexually harassed	0.78*	0.70*	0.89	0.56*	0.17	0.91*	0.17	0.45*	-0.43
	(0.27)	(0.30)	(0.46)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.25)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.43)
Sex harassment attention gone too far	-0.05	0.06	-0.11	-0.25	-0.05	-0.50	0.16	0.20	0.21
	(0.32)	(0.37)	(0.45)	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.28)	(0.22)	(0.28)	(0.34)
N	1008	558	450	2026	1111	915	1970	1083	887
AIC	673	364	322.8	1735.4	847.1	879.7	1299.1	716.5	570
BIC	928.4	571.6	520	2027.3	1087.7	1111.0	1589.5	955.9	799.8
Log likelihood	-284.4	-134	-113.4	-815.7	-375.5	-391.9	-597.5	-310.2	-237

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; \* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .05$ ; survey weights utilized.

expect those who have experienced harassment should be more likely to choose Democratic candidates. Table 3 presents full models predicting vote choice in the House and Senate, along with models with the sample split by sex.

Here we see limited and predictably partisan results. Partisanship is, as expected, the most important influence on voting for Democratic candidates. The most influential of the gender-salient variables is, not surprisingly, feeling toward Kavanaugh, which is significantly and negatively related to voting for Democratic candidates in House and Senate races for all respondents and for the models for women and for men. Given the intense partisan nature of the battle over Kavanaugh's confirmation, it is not surprising that those who supported him were more likely to favor Republican candidates and those who reported lower ratings were more likely to vote for Democrats. Interestingly, sexual harassment status was not related to support for Democratic candidates among women or men, which might be surprising, given the strong stand most Democrats took in opposition to sexual harassment. Finally, men who believed that current attention to

sexual harassment issues in society was appropriate were more likely to vote for Democratic candidates in House races, no doubt in response to greater attention to these issues among Democratic candidates.<sup>5</sup>

## Discussion

The 2018 elections were contested in an atmosphere of significant attention to gender and gender-salient issues. The #MeToo movement trained a spotlight on sexual harassment in society, Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings played out amidst accusations that he had assaulted a classmate years before, and President Donald Trump's behavior toward women continued to be an issue. Previous research on the impact of these kinds of issues on women voters suggested that we should have seen women be animated by these issues and more engaged in the election. In examining the impact of gender-salient issues on women, we find that attitudes toward current attention to harassment, feelings about Kavanaugh, and the experience of being sexually

**Table 3.** Vote Choice in the House and Senate (0 = Republicans; 1 = Democrats).

	Full		Women		Men	
	House	Senate	House	Senate	House	Senate
(Intercept)	2.14 (1.11)	4.33* (1.45)	2.74* (1.34)	4.35* (1.48)	2.97* (1.47)	4.83* (2.28)
Education	0.39* (0.14)	0.13 (0.13)	0.26 (0.17)	-0.01 (0.20)	0.55* (0.24)	0.23 (0.20)
Sex	0.32 (0.33)	0.16 (0.37)				
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
White	-0.97* (0.36)	-0.88* (0.37)	-1.79* (0.49)	-1.20* (0.50)	0.24 (0.61)	-0.62 (0.64)
Income	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	0.04 (0.10)
Political ideology	0.48* (0.14)	0.14 (0.14)	0.35* (0.13)	0.06 (0.14)	0.72* (0.25)	0.28 (0.23)
Party ID - Independent	-2.43* (0.39)	-2.42* (0.43)	-2.22* (0.50)	-2.74* (0.61)	-3.33* (0.73)	-2.42* (0.69)
Party ID - Republican	-4.76* (0.43)	-4.64* (0.47)	-4.47* (0.46)	-4.53* (0.55)	-5.84* (0.76)	-5.14* (0.79)
Political interest	0.28 (0.22)	0.03 (0.28)	0.52* (0.23)	0.40 (0.28)	-0.55 (0.42)	-0.61 (0.57)
Kavanaugh feeling	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Sexually harassed	-0.12 (0.35)	0.22 (0.36)	-0.04 (0.38)	0.47 (0.44)	-0.28 (0.61)	-0.19 (0.54)
Sex harassment attention gone too far	-0.66* (0.32)	-0.60 (0.40)	-0.44 (0.41)	-0.13 (0.51)	-1.32* (0.50)	-1.15* (0.58)
N	1475	1122	797	607	678	515
AIC	334.11	374.74	202.48	227.93	133.36	147.64
BIC	609.52	635.93	427.17	439.54	350.28	351.36
Log likelihood	-115.05	-135.37	-53.24	-65.97	-18.68	-25.82

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; \* indicates statistical significance at  $p < .05$ ; survey weights utilized.

harassed take a back seat to the more central and traditional influence of partisanship. Even though bivariate analysis suggested women are more likely than men to experience harassment, believe that current attention to harassment is appropriate, and have more negative feelings toward Kavanaugh, these attitudes and experiences had limited impact among the swirl of other, more traditional, political influences. Regression analysis demonstrated that, among our respondents, there was no significant gender difference in attitudes toward Brett Kavanaugh in the aggregate or within partisan identity groups. Women who had experienced sexual harassment were more likely to rate Kavanaugh lower than other women, but this impact was only significant among Independent women identifiers. In terms of participation, women victims of sexual harassment were more likely to take part in protests and vote in 2018. However, for each occurrence of an impact for gender-salient issues on women’s attitudes and behaviors, we see these issues influencing men as well. Men who had experience with sexual

harassment and believed that attention to harassment in society had gone too far were more likely to rate Kavanaugh higher than other men and those men with higher ratings of Kavanaugh were more likely to donate money and vote in the elections. These findings suggest that we err when we assume that only women are influenced by gender-salient issues and fail to recognize that men can be mobilized by these issues, whether in the same direction as women or in opposite directions (Cassese & Holman, 2019).

Given that partisan identification is the strongest influence in the analyses we conduct, these results provide additional evidence that the current polarization of American politics continues to strengthen the impact of party identification over other potential considerations, including sex and gendered considerations (Dolan, 2014). In our within-partisan analysis, women and men were much more similar than different and there were relatively few times when the gender-salient issues operated differently in influencing co-partisans (Barnes & Cassese, 2017).



In the end, data from the 2018 elections offer some support for the hypotheses that women's attitudes and behaviors will be significantly shaped by the presence of gender-salient issues. That gender is not an overwhelming influence on attitudes and behaviors may surprise some. But this general finding does fall in line with a growing body of work that questions the assumption of the centrality of gender to contemporary elections. There is ample evidence from elections that gender shapes behavior less often than assumed - women and men candidates campaign in similar ways (Dolan, 2014; Hayes & Lawless, 2016), voters approach women from less stereotyped perspectives (Brooks, 2013; Dolan, 2014; Dolan & Hansen, 2018), relying on more traditional influences on vote choice like incumbency and partisanship when they are faced with women candidates (Dolan, 2014; Hayes, 2011; Huddy & Capelos, 2002). More directly related to the investigation here, recent research also challenges the assumption that women voters are mobilized to take part in elections by gendered considerations, namely the opportunity to seek representation by voting for women candidates (Broockman, 2014; Dolan, 2006; Wolak, 2015, 2019). This growing body of work that finds a weaker influence for gender-salient considerations, taken in concert with the strong evidence that partisan polarization is on the rise, should point future research in the direction of refining our assumptions about the role of gender in contemporary American elections for both women and men.

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### Notes

1. The coding scheme for all of the variables not discussed specifically in the text is included in the Supplemental Appendix.
2. Since we employ data from an ANES pilot study module, we do not have a full compliment of measures as we might from a regular ANES survey. But the ability to get timely reactions to Kavanaugh and the issues around sexual harassment outweigh the limits of having access to fewer items. Specific question wording for the questions about sexual harassment and attention to sexual harassment are provided in the Supplemental Appendix.
3. All descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, and multivariate analyses are conducted with the use of survey weights.
4. Readers might wonder whether selection effects—women bothered by the Kavanaugh nomination and sexual harassment having left the Republican party—influence the findings here. To examine this, we explored conservative, non-Republican woman as a robustness check. While the analysis contains only a limited number of observations, we do not find any relationship between attitudes towards attention to sexual harassment and Kavanaugh feeling.
5. Output from mediation analysis is presented in the Supplemental Appendix (Table A6). The output indicates that gender has a mediating effect on the relationship between feeling towards Kavanaugh and vote choice in the House of Representatives. While the point estimate indicates that the proportion of the variance explained by the mediating effect is notable at 0.26, the 95% confidence intervals around the proportion of the variance explained in vote choice by the mediating effect are extremely large. Therefore, the precise mediating effect is unknown. Further, the results indicate that there is no substantive mediating effect between gender and feeling towards Kavanaugh on predicting Senate vote choice or between gender and attitudes towards current handling of sexual harassment on predicting vote choice in either chamber.

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