

When do voters support corrupt candidates for public office?

Preliminary Version: This paper is under active development. Results and conclusions may change as research progresses. *

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When will voters support a political candidate they suspect is corrupt? The results of prior research are complex and do not clearly explain voter support for corrupt candidates in recent elections. We use a conjoint survey experiment to study the link between candidate corruption and voter support in an American presidential primary election. Respondents view biographical vignettes with randomly selected characteristics for two candidates from their party, then choose which they would prefer as their party's presidential nominee. We are interested in (1) whether respondents (American registered voters) will react to media reports of a candidate's corruption, (2) whether partisanship leads respondents to value a candidate who can win the general election more than an honest candidate, (3) whether some forms of corruption (bribery, embezzlement, sextortion, or vote-buying) lead to greater loss of support than others, and (4) whether a candidate's gender changes the way that voters evaluate allegations of candidate corruption. We find that voters of all parties strongly prefer honest candidates, even if those candidates are less likely to win general elections, and react less to corruption allegations against women.

Keywords: corruption, experiment, gender

Introduction

When does a voter choose to support a candidate for public office who they suspect is involved in corruption? The literature provides some theoretical guidance, but empirical support has been mixed. Generally speaking, surveys and survey experiments find strong public antipathy to corrupt candidates even where corruption is endemic. Field experiments and observational studies typically find a negative effect of corruption on candidate support, albeit a smaller and more uncertain effect than in survey experiments. This work also identifies situations under which voters choose to support corrupt politicians. This is more likely when corruption is widespread (so that few non-corrupt alternatives

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are available), when politicians can provide individual and/or collective clientelistic benefits to their supporters, in cases where information about a politician's involvement in corruption is unreliable, or when the politician is highly competent (e.g., provides strong economic growth and ample public goods) but also corrupt.

These theories do not seem to explain recent events. Consider the case of Donald Trump, the once and future President of the United States. Since first taking office in 2016, Trump has been repeatedly implicated in corruption or related activities. One of these activities, the attempted exchange of military aid to Ukraine for (real or invented) dirt on a political rival, led directly to Trump's first impeachment. Another, his attempt to pressure Republican elected officials in Georgia to "find" the votes he needed to win the state in the 2020 general election, resulted in his indictment by a grand jury in Fulton County. The facts of these incidents are not in serious dispute, and in the latter case Trump was actually caught on audiotape. Yet he remained the Republican party's candidate in 2020 and 2024, defeating several primary challengers in 2024. He was competitive throughout both general election campaigns and won re-election to the Presidency in 2024.

The United States is a country with moderately low corruption according to comparative indicators; for example, in 2023 it ranked 24th out of 180 countries in control of corruption according to the Transparency International Corruption Perception index (International, 2023). In all of Trump's campaigns, including the 2024 Republican primary campaign and the general election, suitably qualified alternatives without a history of corruption allegations were available yet not chosen. There is little evidence that Trump provided clientelistic benefits to voters and no allegation of large-scale vote buying. Economic growth was robust in the early part of his term, but the Trump administration's handling of the most substantial challenge of his term—the global coronavirus pandemic that began in late 2019—led to widespread unemployment during his last year in office. Thus, none of the typical explanations for why voters might support a corrupt candidate is clearly applicable.

Donald Trump's case is distinctive, but not unique: politicians in democratic countries around the world have maintained public support alongside substantially worsening corruption, in some cases despite demonstrable personal involvement in that corruption. Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, and his Fidesz party have maintained high levels of public approval through 2022 (Nezopont Intezet, 2021; Clancy, 2022) despite a dramatic increase in government corruption since taking office in 2010 (Transparency International, 2023a); Orbán has won re-election three times over this period. Similarly, Turkey's corruption levels dramatically increased during the administration of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Transparency International, 2023b) but he continues to win elections and retains substantial popular support despite declining satisfaction with his regime (Clancy, Poushter and Hernandez Ramones, 2024). In Brazil in 2022, voters chose a President (Luiz Inácio da Silva) who had actually been imprisoned for corruption committed during his last term in office (Da Silva Marques, 2022); the overturning of his conviction on technical grounds opened the door for Lula's re-election.

In this paper, we propose and test several explanations for voter support of corrupt politicians using a survey experiment fielded among American registered voters during the summer of 2024. The experiment asked respondents to choose between two candidates in a Presidential primary election for their preferred party, thus eliminating partisanship as an influence. First, we examine whether American voters respond to journalistic reports of a candidate's involvement in corruption by reducing their support for that candidate. Given rising skepticism of the media in the United States, it may be that voters (and especially Republicans) simply do not react to allegations of corruption that are uncovered by journalists. Second, we test the possibility that ideological polarization has made voters prioritize gaining power for their co-partisans above the regular and impartial administration of government. If voters think that winning is all-important, they may choose to support a corrupt candidate with the highest probability of winning the general election over a clean candidate with a lesser chance of victory. Third, we inves-

tigate whether voters facing a choice among corrupt candidates might prefer candidates accused of some forms of corruption more than others. Finally, we examine whether voters use identity characteristics like gender as a shortcut for assessing the corruptibility of candidates, either by holding women to a higher standard (by withholding support from corrupt women more than corrupt men) or by discounting allegations of corruption among female candidates (compared to men accused of the same misconduct).

We find that registered voters in a conjoint survey experiment strongly prefer honest candidates to those accused of any form of corruption when choosing between them in an American presidential primary election, regardless of the voter's partisanship. Respondents are at least 25 percentage points more likely to support a candidate with a reputation for honesty and integrity compared to candidates accused of bribery, sextortion, embezzlement, or vote-buying. We also find that moral turpitude not constituting corruption (viz., marital infidelity) is treated more leniently: our respondents are between 16 and 85 percentage points more likely to support a candidate who cheated on their spouse compared to a candidate accused of corruption, even when that corruption involves sexual misconduct (viz., sextortion). Among the four forms of corruption we study, sextortion (demanding sexual favors in exchange for employment) and embezzlement (appropriation of campaign funds for personal uses) are marginally more stigmatized than bribery or vote-buying. Our respondents prefer candidates more likely to win the general election, particularly when both candidates have the same reputation for corruption, but the negative effects of corruption on support are many times stronger than the positive effects of general election viability. Finally, we find that the effect of corruption allegations on vote support is slightly *smaller* for women candidates compared to men, particularly for respondents who are Democrats or female: corrupt women candidates enjoy between 3 and 7 percentage points greater support compared to equivalent men.

Background and Theory Development

Survey respondents in most countries report disliking corruption, even in democratic countries where corruption is widespread. This presents a puzzle: why don't voters choose candidates who are less corrupt? In survey experiments, where respondents choose among hypothetical candidates in a simulated election, they typically do. This literature is extremely large, and a full accounting of all these findings would require its own paper. However, in his meta-analysis of eighteen recent survey experiments, Incerti (2020) finds that participants in these experiments are typically 32 percentage points less likely to support candidates accused of corruption. Incerti's finding is a good representation of the typical, very large effect of corruption on voter support that these experiments find.

Evidence from field experiments where information about candidate corruption is randomly assigned to voters in a real election is less sanguine. Incerti's meta-analysis of eight such field experiments finds that "the effect of providing information about incumbent corruption on corruption vote share in field experiments is approximately zero" (p. 761). Still, some field experiments do find an effect. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2008) study the effect of randomly assigned federal audits of municipalities in Brazil; when these audits occur before an election, they find that corruption reduces incumbent re-election rates by at least seven percentage points more than comparable municipalities audited after the election.¹ Using a regression discontinuity design—not a field experiment, but with random assignment to treatment created by natural conditions—Klašnja (2015, p. 938) finds that a roughly 26 percentage point incumbency disadvantage (in probability of winning the election) faced by mayors in Romania is attributable to greater corruption among mayors with a greater legal incentive to be corrupt (*viz.*, lower mayoral pay for smaller constituencies). On the other hand, Chong et al. (2015) found that ran-

¹This estimate is based on comparing election results from 2004 in municipalities with two corruption violations audited before the election to those audited after the election.

domly assigning some voters to receive information about incumbent corruption in the 2009 Mexican municipal elections decreased voter support for both incumbents *and* challengers, reflecting not a punishment for corruption but a disengagement with electoral politics. Similarly, a field experiment conducted during the 2008 mayoral runoff election for São Paulo, where both candidates had been accused of corruption, found that “informing voters about the incumbent’s record had no effect” on support for the incumbent (de Figueiredo, Hidalgo and Kasahara, 2023, p. 728).

Observational studies more consistently find a small, negative relationship between corruption and voter support. For example, Peters and Welch (1980) find that incumbents in Congress between 1968 and 1978 accused of corruption lost between 6 and 11 percentage points of vote share; Welch and Hibbing (1997) found a effect of similar magnitude for Congressional incumbents between 1982 and 1990. Bågenholm (2013) found a somewhat smaller effect of corruption in European elections between 1981 and 2011, with parties implicated in corruption in elections that highlighted the scandal losing roughly four percentage points of voter support compared to clean parties (p. 603). In their study of the 1992 House of Representatives check-kiting scandal, Dimock and Jacobson (1995) find that incumbents who wrote bad checks suffered vote share losses in proportion to the extent of their malfeasance (p. 1148). More recently, Costas-Pérez, Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro (2012) finds that incumbents formally charged with corruption and with wide press coverage of the scandal lost more than 12 percentage points of vote share in the 2007 Spanish municipal elections (p. 477). Another study of Spanish local elections in 2011 finds that “parties affected by corruption lost an average of 1.8 percentage points” of vote share (Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero, 2016, p. 12). In his study of the 2009 House of Commons expenses scandal, Eggers (2014) finds that incumbents involved in the scandal lost about 2.5 percentage points of vote share on average compared to those not implicated (p. 14).

Based on the long history of survey experimentation throughout the world, **we ex-**

pect our respondents to decisively prefer clean candidates over corrupt ones when presented with head-to-head comparisons. However, we also have reasons to believe they may choose not to do so, or that they will be less likely to do so under some conditions. These *moderators* of anti-corruption voting are an important focus of our experiment.

Moderators of voter punishment for corruption

The long history of research in this field finds many factors that moderate or enhance the effect of corruption on voter support for candidates. We consider four such factors: a lack of corrupt alternatives, co-partisanship with a corrupt politician, a corrupt politician able to deliver economic benefits and public goods, and a lack of reliable information about a politician's involvement with corruption. All of these factors have been found to blunt the impact of corruption on voter support.

Lack of non-corrupt alternatives

Voters may not choose to vote against corrupt incumbents when they do not believe they have non-corrupt alternatives to whom they can switch support. This is essentially the finding of both de Figueiredo, Hidalgo and Kasahara (2023) and Chong et al. (2015), where disseminating information about incumbent corruption in mayoral elections tends to decrease voter turnout overall (but not relative support for the incumbent) because all major candidates are considered to be corrupt. Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego (2016) finds no effect of a lack of clean alternatives on voter intention to support the incumbent mayor, but their study does not distinguish between switching to alternatives and abstention; the latter would be compatible with prior findings. A later survey experiment, also conducted in Spain, finds that voters prefer a clean mayoral candidate to a corrupt candidate even when the corrupt option is an ideal match to the voter's political preferences; however, when both candidates are corrupt, many voters (up to 20 percentage points) are willing to support a corrupt candidate rather than abstain (Agerberg, 2020, pp. 267-270).

Survey evidence from Brazil in 2007, supplemented with a 2016 survey experiment in the United States, indicates that tolerance for corruption among elected officials rises as the availability of clean alternative candidates falls (Pavão, 2018). Vera (2022) also analyzes a combination of observational panel survey data from Latin America and a survey experiment in Colombia and Peru, finding that a lack of “clarify of alternatives” (a stable and competitive electoral system) is associated with higher country-level corruption and greater individual-level support for corrupt candidates. However, Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker (2021) find that corrupt candidates in a survey experiment receive substantially reduced support from voters compared to clean candidates, even when corruption is widespread in the system (p. 166).

In the modern American context, we expect that voter usually have the opportunity to support a non-corrupt candidate. This is particularly true in party primary elections, where multiple candidates compete to win the party’s nomination to compete in a (generally one-on-one) general election. When we present them with this opportunity in a survey experiment, we expect them to strongly prefer that option. However, we are also interested in what they do when they do *not* have that option. In particular, we are interested in whether voters may be more willing to overlook some forms of corruption more than others. We return to this issue in our discussion of trade-offs for corruption below.

Ideological congruence and co-partisanship

We consider two reasons why voters might be less willing to abandon a corrupt politician with whom they share a party or ideology. First, the voter may perceive a simple trade-off between ideological and policy benefits provided by such a candidate against the corruption they will also bring. This tendency was found in survey experiments from the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s (Rundquist, Strom and Peters, 1977). In those experiments, respondents were shown information about two Congressional candidates and asked which they preferred. Then, the experimenters revealed that “a prominent

member of their candidate's own party had withdrawn his endorsement... because of alleged illegal activities by the candidate while holding a previously elected position" (p. 957). Respondents were much less likely to switch their support to the other candidate if their initial (corrupt) choice shared their affiliation, domestic policy preferences, and especially their opinion about continuing the Vietnam War (p. 958). That basic finding has been repeatedly confirmed in many countries and over many time periods (e.g., Davis, Camp and Coleman, 2004; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2012; Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz, 2013; Eggers, 2014; Klašnja, 2017; Breitenstein, 2019; Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker, 2021; Jankowski, Juen and Lewandowsky, 2023; Jha, 2023). There has been at least one report of co-partisans being punished *more* for corruption than out-partisans, in a 2013 survey experiment from Greece (Konstantinidis and Xezonakis, 2013); this may have occurred because the corruption involved asking the respondent for a bribe, which might be perceived as violating the terms of client-patron relationships in that country (p. 559).

At a systemic level, overall political polarization has sometimes been advanced as a force that reduces corruption. The idea is that a moderate level of polarization increases the ideological threat presented by loss of control over government, which in turn raises the incentive that parties have to monitor and report their competitors for corruption (Brown, Touchton and Whitford, 2011; Melki and Pickering, 2020). By contrast, when all parties are ideologically similar, the benefits of colluding in a corrupt system (even as a part of a minority party) can outweigh the ideological or policy benefits of control over governance. On the other hand, high polarization can change the incentives of voters so much that they value partisan control over government so highly that they would prefer corrupt members of their own party above clean members of the opposition (Eggers, 2014; Aarslew, 2023).

We believe that ideological polarization among American voters—having risen steadily since the 1950s—may have reached a level where “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing” (Overman, 1999). If this is true, we would expect voters to strongly, perhaps even

lexicographically, prefer the candidate with the highest probability of winning in the general election. Thus, when presented with an honest candidate from their own party with a lower chance of winning, **we anticipate that voters will prefer a corrupt candidate from their own party with a higher chance of winning.**

Second, voters may perceive information about corruption among co-partisans as being untrustworthy or itself motivated by partisan bias. For example, Beaulieu (2014, p. 24) finds that “individual concerns for [electoral] fraud are shaped [by] a desire for their preferred candidate to win” in survey data from the 2011 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. (Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz, 2013) finds substantially more support for a corrupt incumbent in a 2011 survey experiment in Catalonia when the accused incumbent receives the backing of their own party compared to when the party withdraws support, indicating that “partisans are much more willing to support a politician charged with corruption if the party signals that the accusation is a partisan trick devised by the opposition” (p. 609). In the United States, skepticism and distrust of media has become so widespread that voters may discount information about political corruption that they receive from journalists. If this is true, then allegations of corruption that result from investigative journalism may not change voter support because the voters do not believe it. The corruption information we present in our survey experiment is attributed to journalists, and we are interested in whether this information will be effective in reducing voter support for candidates despite the attribution. We are also interested in whether partisanship moderates this relationship, as partisan attacks on the media have become commonplace in American politics. We therefore investigate whether **partisanship moderates respondents’ willing to sanction corrupt politicians** on the basis of journalistic evidence provided in our experiment.

Trade-offs for corruption and relative harm

Voters might be willing to support a corrupt candidate if they receive something from that candidate that they cannot get from alternative clean candidates. Direct payoffs and preferential access to public goods and services are one option, and voters have been shown to support leaders from whom they receive such benefits through client-patron relationships (Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Weschle, 2016). But widespread clientelism has not been a substantial influence on American voters since the middle of the twentieth century. They might also be willing to support corrupt politicians who are exceptionally competent, able to provide sound economic management and ample public goods (Konstantinidis and Xezonakis, 2013; Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga, 2013; Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero, 2016; Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego, 2016; Breitenstein, 2019; Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker, 2021; Zhu and Yang, 2023), although not every study has found voters willing to make this tradeoff (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013). In particular, voters in low-corruption countries seem less willing to tolerate corruption in exchange for economic performance (Klašnja and Tucker, 2013).

We leave it to others to determine whether American voters in 2024 chose Donald Trump because they prioritized competence over corruption. However, we *are* interested in whether voters perceive some forms of corruption—corruption that does not directly harm them—as less important than forms with a greater negative impact. Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero (2016) found that corruption that benefits or is neutral toward the public good does not damage voter support as much as corruption that harms the public; they identify fraud in procurement, embezzlement, illegal hiring of municipal personnel, and blackmail (p. 9) as welfare-decreasing forms of corruption. In addition to bribery-centered procurement fraud and embezzlement, we consider vote-buying and sextortion as two forms of corruption that are less directly harmful to the public. Vote-buying is a form of corruption that directly benefits at least those voters who received payment and does not directly infringe on voter autonomy (Mares and Visconti, 2020,

p. 315). Sextortion, while harmful to the target of the abuse, is a relatively “private” transaction that does not directly impact the wider public. Our survey experiment studies **whether voters will be more strongly dissuaded to support candidates by forms of corruption compared to others.**

Lack of reliable information

In order to punish corrupt politicians, it is necessary (although not sufficient) for voters to know which politicians are corrupt (De Vries and Solaz, 2017). Prior studies have highlighted the importance of reliable, targeted information about corruption in enabling voter punishment of corrupt governments. For example, Ferraz and Finan (2008) finds that the effect of randomized municipal corruption audits on Brazilian mayoral elections is strongly contingent on the presence of a local radio station that can publicize the results. Chang, Golden and Hill (2010) attributes the 1994 electoral ousting of corrupt politicians in Italy (after decades of voters supporting corrupt candidates) on a consistent, long-term media focus on corruption scandals that enabled voters to coordinate on voting out implicated members of parliament. Costas-Pérez, Solé-Ollé and Sorribas-Navarro (2012) finds a similar effect of media coverage and judicial sanction in Spanish municipal elections. Subsequent research has repeatedly verified the importance of information in enabling voter punishment of corrupt politicians at the ballot box (e.g., Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego, 2016; Klačnja, 2017; Mares and Visconti, 2020).

In the absence of definitive evidence, voters might instead rely on stereotypes or other informational short-cuts to infer whether corruption allegations are credible. For example, if they believe women are generally less corrupt than men, they may tend to favor women candidates when all options seem corrupt. On the other hand, perhaps the electorate will punish corruption more harshly when it violates gender stereotypes compared to when it is consistent with those stereotypes; in this instance, we would expect voters to be less likely to support a corrupt female politician compared to an equivalent corrupt

man. Observational studies of aggregate corruption in a country find that it is negatively associated with participation of women in government, but only in democracies (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013) and particularly in democracies that strongly link outcomes to identifiable political actors (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). These findings suggest that women politicians are less involved with corruption because voters will hold them to a higher standard than men. However, the results of direct studies of voter behavior are decidedly mixed. Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner (2018) finds that male voters treat corrupt politicians of both genders equally, but female voters punish corrupt female politicians more strongly. But while studying voters in Latin America, Le Foulon and Reyes-Housholder (2021) find that corrupt female candidates may actually be *preferred* to corrupt men in some instances; in most cases, they find no gender difference. Schwindt-Bayer, Esarey and Schumacher (2018) find no difference at all in how voters in the United States or Brazil treat corrupt male and female candidates.

Consequently, we have uncertain expectations about the effect of a candidate's gender in our survey experiment. We do believe that **voters will react differently to corruption allegations depending on the candidate's gender**, and we have some reasons to expect that **this reaction may be contingent on the respondent's own gender**, but the literature provides inconsistent guidance on what relationships we might expect.

Summary of theoretical expectations

Based on this prior literature and our own observations of recent elections, we summarize our expectations for the behavior of American voters in presidential primary elections as follows:

1. Voters will prefer the candidate with the highest chance of winning the general election.
2. Voters will prefer candidates with a reputation for honesty and integrity over those alleged to be involved with corruption.

3. Voter support for a hypothetical presidential candidate of their party will differ depending on the nature of the corruption in which the candidate is alleged to be involved.
4. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the gender of the candidate.
5. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the gender of the voter.
6. Voters lexicographically prefer candidates with a higher probability of winning the general election, regardless of their other characteristics.
7. The effect of corruption on voter support for a candidate will differ depending on the partisanship of the voter.

We now move onto an empirical examination of voter behavior in a conjoint survey experiment.²

Research Design

We conducted an online conjoint survey experiment using the Qualtrics XM platform and related randomization software created by Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014).³ Participants were asked to choose between two candidates for their party's nominee for the United States Presidential election based on short biographical profiles of each candidate. The survey was taken by a sample of 1010 adult United States residents who were also registered voters. Dynata advertised our survey to members of their online panel in proportion to their age, gender, and race/ethnicity so that the sample would approximate the demographic characteristics of registered voters in the November 2020 Current Population Survey. The experiment was fielded during the summer of 2024. Our experiment

²Hypotheses 1 through 6 were pre-registered prior to fielding the survey (Esarey and Linker, 2024). Hypothesis 7 was noted as an "exploratory analysis" in the pre-registration plan.

³Gender was not randomly assigned via the Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) software, but was instead randomly chosen by the Qualtrics platform. Two identical vignettes were prepared for each candidate, one male and one female, and one was randomly selected to be shown to the survey respondent.

was designed to measure how voters react when potential candidates are engaged in corruption, and also how these choices are influenced by the gender of the candidate and the probability that the candidate wins the general election. We randomly assigned many features of the candidates' biographical profiles for each respondent, most crucially:

1. whether they were allegedly involved in corruption (and if so, what kind);
2. the candidate's probability of winning the general election if they were selected; and
3. the candidate's gender.

The survey began with three screening questions ensuring that each participant was an adult resident of the United States who is registered to vote; those who did not pass this screening were excluded from further participation. The next page of the survey asked a series of demographic questions about gender, age range, income range, race, political party affiliation, and education. Then, participants were shown a series of three pairs of candidate biographical profiles with randomly assigned characteristics. For each pair of candidates, participants were asked an attention check question pertaining to a piece of information from one of the profiles. Finally, they were asked which of the two candidates they would prefer to be their party's nominee for President. Other than the screening questions, respondents could leave responses blank but would be prompted to confirm they wanted to skip the question if they did so. The full survey instrument (with randomly assigned characteristics for the candidate profiles in place) can be found in the appendix.

As noted above, each candidate profile has seven randomly assigned characteristics. A sample pair of candidate profiles is shown in Figure 1. The primary focus of the experiment was on the three characteristics enumerated above: a candidate's alleged involvement in corruption, their probability of winning the general election, and their gender. The full set of possibilities for these three characteristics is shown in Table 1. We also randomly assigned information about each candidate's education, political experience,

profession, and home state (with candidates never from the same state). A full list of options for all randomized characteristics is also available in the appendix.

Figure 1: **A sample pair of candidate profiles.** Highlights and superscripts correspond to the randomized attributes within each candidate’s biographical vignette. These are: (1) involvement in corruption; (2) probability of winning the general election; (3) gender; (4) education; (5) political experience; (6) profession; (7) home state of the first candidate; (8) home state of the second candidate. The full list of possibilities for each randomized characteristic is available in an appendix.

<p>Candidate 1: Charles³ Johnson is a 55 year old physician⁶ from Arizona⁷ who graduated from MIT⁴. In addition to his³ career as a physician⁶, Charles³ has also served as their state's Governor⁵.</p> <p>Journalists investigated Charles's³ background when he³ announced his³ candidacy. These investigations revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity¹.</p> <p>Election forecasters predict that Charles³ has an 80%² chance of winning the general election if he³ is the party's nominee.</p>
<p>Candidate 2: Elizabeth³ Smith is a 53 year old lawyer⁶ from Florida⁸ who graduated from Yale University⁴. In addition to her³ career as a lawyer⁶, Elizabeth³ has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate⁵.</p> <p>When Elizabeth³ announced her³ intention to run for office, journalists investigated her background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars¹.</p> <p>Election forecasters predict that Elizabeth³ has a 20%² chance of winning the general election if she³ is the party's nominee.</p>

The experiment presents both candidates as members of the respondent’s party, competing in a primary election. We designed the experiment this way to minimize the impact of in-group/out-group or partisan preferences on respondent’s behavior. Previous work has indicated that a shared partisan affiliation and an ability to provide direct benefits can blunt the negative effect of involvement with corruption on a voter’s preference

for that candidate. Our experiment focuses on the trade-off that voters make between a candidate's alleged involvement with corruption and their ability to win office; we can therefore measure the degree to which voters value the benefits of political victory over the costs associated with condoning corruption at the highest level of office.

Every candidate's biographical vignette included one of six corruption-related pieces of information. This information is preceded with a sentence saying that journalists had investigated the background of the candidate in connection with their presidential candidacy. Each vignette then says "These investigations revealed..." followed by one of six possible descriptions, which we list verbatim below followed by a short description in brackets:

1. the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity [**HONESTY**]
2. allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies [**BRIBERY**]
3. allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars [**EMBEZZLEMENT**]
4. allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate has paid voters in exchange for their support at the ballot box [**VOTE-BUYING**]
5. a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship [**SEXTORTION**]
6. allegations of recent marital infidelity by a former lover [**INFIDELITY**]

The first five possibilities are forms of corruption (or, in the case of the first possibility, no involvement with corruption). The random assignment of these five treatments allows us to compare how voters react to allegations of different forms of corruption against a candidate when choosing to support them. It also allows us to measure how damaging each form of corruption is by comparing voter support in each corruption treatment to the honesty control. The sixth possibility (marital infidelity) is not a form of corruption

per se, as it does not involve abuse of public office. However, this treatment allows us to compare voters' reaction to corruption with a sexual component (sextortion) to potentially unethical sexual conduct with no such component (infidelity).

We are also interested in whether voters will overlook some (or all) types of corruption when choosing to support a candidate simply because that candidate has a higher chance of winning the general election. As noted above, prior studies find that some voters are willing to accept that a candidate is involved with corruption if that candidate can deliver political or economic benefits to the voter. Our experiment randomly assigns each candidate a probability of winning the general election of 20%, 50%, or 80%. This feature allows us to see whether the tendency to trade off individual benefits against the collective damage of corruption applies equally to different types of corruption. By examining subsets of cases where election win probability is different, we can measure how much corruption matters for voter support when this trade-off is present.

Last, we want to know how candidate gender and corruption interact when influencing voters' support of allegedly corrupt candidates. To accomplish this, we compare the effect of corruption and electoral win probability treatments among male candidates to the same effects among female candidates; each candidate's gender is randomly assigned. We believe that some forms of corruption (e.g., sextortion) may have a larger impact on voter support for a candidate when that candidate is a woman. By collecting information about the respondent's gender, we can also determine whether men and women voters weigh corruption differently in their decision making.

The conjoint survey design facilitates a relatively straightforward analysis of the data. The average marginal component effect (AMCE) of each treatment can be discerned with a simple ordinary least squares regression populated with dummy variables corresponding to each treatment. We omit the baseline category (honest, female candidates with a 50% chance of winning the general election) if we wish to estimate this AMCE. We can include the baseline category (and exclude the constant intercept) if we wish to present

Table 1: **Primary candidate characteristics.** This table shows the options available for a candidate’s corruption involvement, probability of winning the general election, and their gender. One selection from each list was randomly assigned to the candidate’s biographical vignette as shown to survey respondents.

1. Corruption Types	
a	the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity
b	allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies
c	allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars
d	allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate has paid voters in exchange for their support at the ballot box
e	a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship
f	allegations of recent marital infidelity by a former lover
2. Probability of Winning	
a	20%
b	50%
c	80%
3. Gender	
a	Male
b	Female

estimates of the average probability of supporting a candidate in a particular treatment condition. Because each respondent saw three different choice tasks, we speculate that there may be unmodeled residual correlation in their responses; we therefore estimate a regression using a CR2-type clustered variance-covariance matrix using `lm_robust` in the `estimatr` library (Blair et al., 2024).

Results

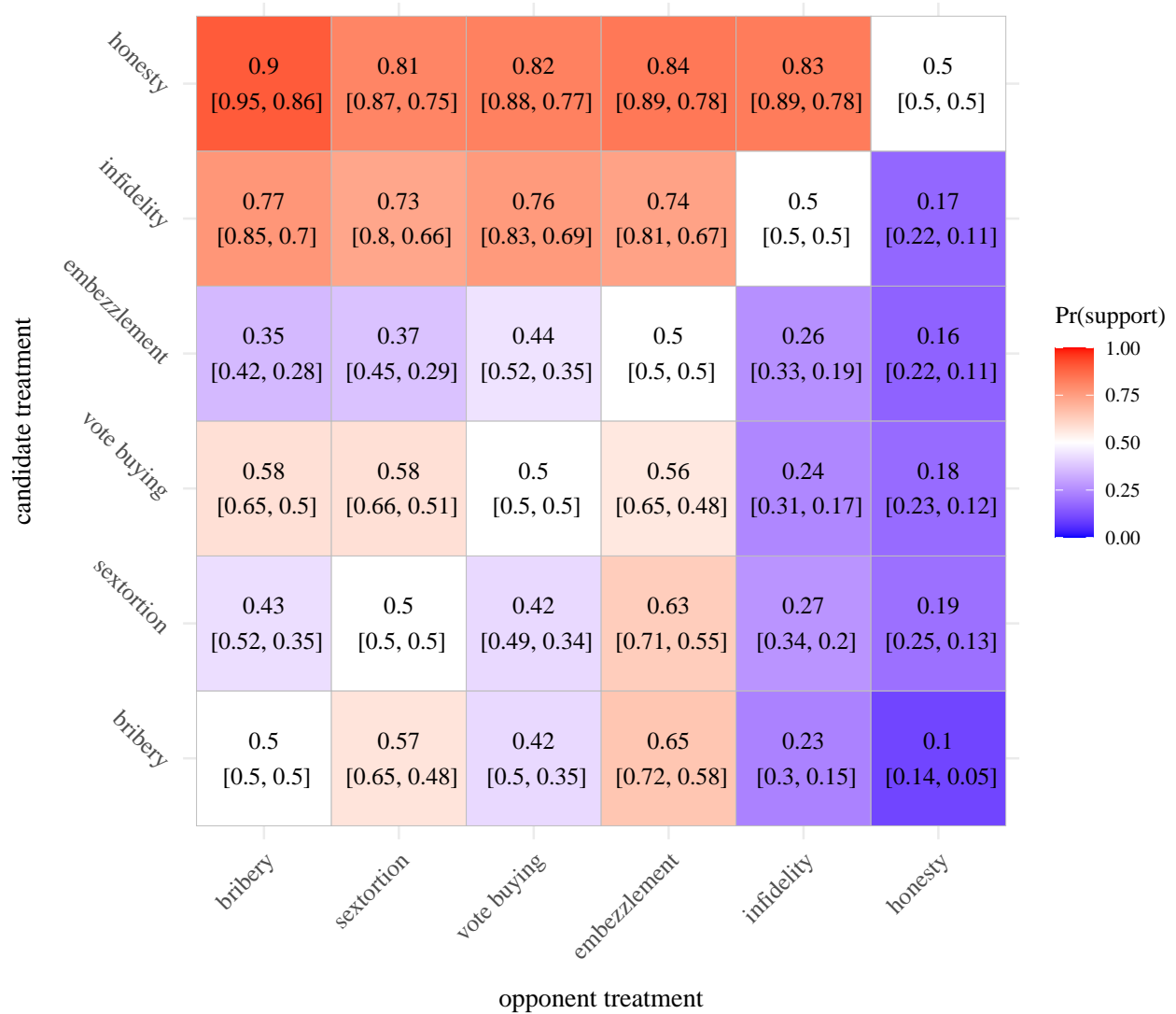
We begin with a simple pairwise comparison of each of six corruption-related information treatments. This is shown in Figure 2. Each box shows the proportion of respondents who supported the candidate whose treatment is listed in the row, when that candidate was matched against an opponent whose treatment is listed in the column. If the candidate and their opponent are equally preferred, that candidate will receive 50% support from the respondents; this is therefore our expectation under the null hypothesis that the treatments are comparable. The 95% confidence intervals presented under the estimated proportions are based on standard errors clustered on respondent from a constant linear regression.

An honest candidate is always strongly preferred by our respondents, receiving more than 80% support (averaging over all other randomly assigned characteristics) against an opponent under any other condition. A maritally unfaithful, but not politically corrupt, candidate is the next most preferred, receiving more than 70% support against anyone other than an honest opponent. Candidates accused of vote-buying appear to be third most-favored, as a majority of respondents favor a candidate accused of vote-buying over one accused of bribery, sextortion, or embezzlement; however, this preference is relatively weak and in some cases statistically insignificant.⁴ Embezzlement is the most damaging background for a candidate; candidates with any other background are preferred.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows the AMCE for each of the corruption-related treatments rel-

⁴Unless otherwise noted, significance tests are $\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed.

Figure 2: **Pairwise Comparison of Support for Candidate by Treatment, with 95% Confidence Intervals.** Each box shows the probability respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed in the row when compared to a candidate whose treatment condition is listed in the column. The bracketed values are 95% confidence intervals from a constant regression using CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.



ative to the baseline condition (honesty), controlling for the candidate's gender and their probability of winning the general election. In every case, the coefficient on the treatment condition is negative and statistically significant. While marital infidelity (on average) lowers support for a candidate by about 19 percentage points, all forms of corruption are associated with a substantively much larger decline in support between 36 and 44 percentage points.

We are also interested in whether female candidates are punished more strictly for corruption compared to men; in this case, "punishment" means that respondents are more willing to withhold their support from corrupt women compared to corrupt men. Figure 3 shows estimates of the probability that respondents support a candidate for each of the six corruption-related information treatments, separately estimated for male and female candidates. There is very little substantive difference in support for men and women in any treatment, although women receive slightly higher support in the infidelity, sextortion, and embezzlement treatments compared to men. None of these effects is statistically significant according to Model 3 in Table 2. Overall, we find that female candidates are on average slightly preferred over men (by about 2.5 percentage points in Model 1 of Table 2) and that men and women are equally preferred when candidates are honest (see Model 2 of Table 2).

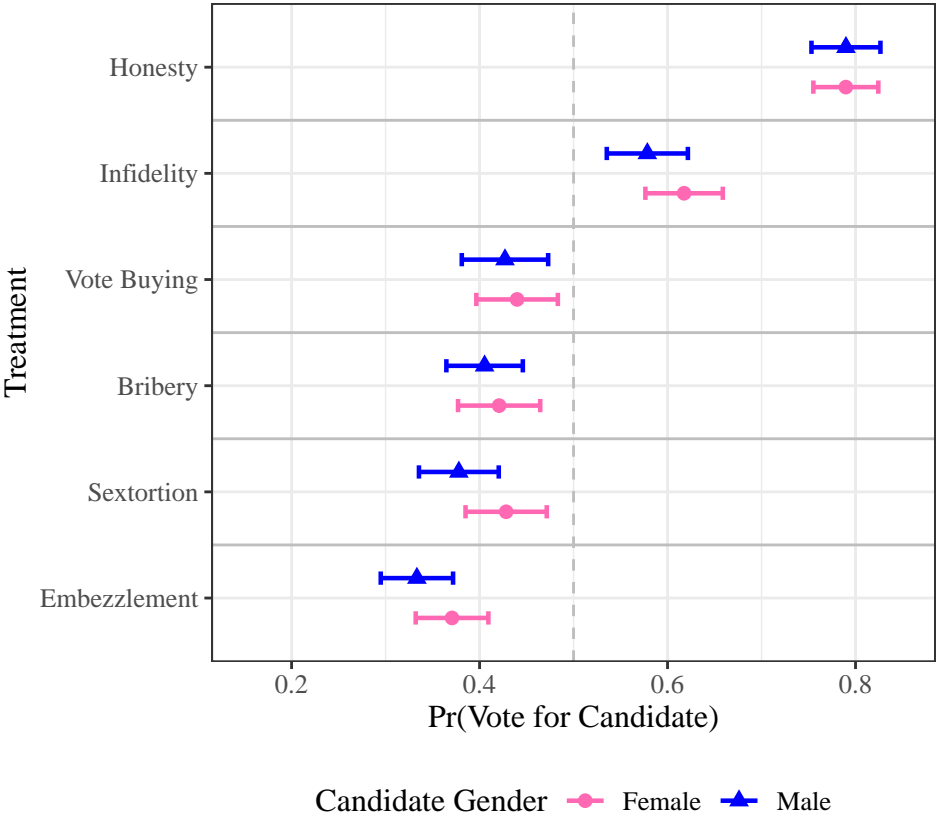
We find some evidence that female respondents are more likely to disproportionately punish male candidates for corruption while male respondents are not. This is shown in Figure 4, which shows the AMCE of male candidate gender on support separately for male and female respondents. Specifically, the point and bracket show the estimate and 95% confidence interval for the difference in support between male and female candidates when those candidates are in the treatment condition indicated on the left side of the figure. Pink lines show this estimate for female respondents, while blue lines show the same for male respondents. In the honesty treatment, both men and women respondents treat men and women candidates equally. However, when the candidate is accused of

Table 2: **Treatment Effect Estimates with Gender Interactions.** The table shows the relationship between experimental treatments and respondent support for a candidate using an OLS regression model with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Intercept	0.814*** (0.017)	0.802*** (0.020)	0.802*** (0.020)	0.815*** (0.019)	0.803*** (0.022)
infidelity	-0.192*** (0.021)	-0.176*** (0.025)	-0.171*** (0.028)	-0.192*** (0.021)	-0.171*** (0.028)
embezzlement	-0.439*** (0.020)	-0.423*** (0.025)	-0.420*** (0.028)	-0.439*** (0.020)	-0.420*** (0.028)
vote buying	-0.359*** (0.022)	-0.344*** (0.026)	-0.351*** (0.029)	-0.359*** (0.022)	-0.351*** (0.029)
sextortion	-0.385*** (0.021)	-0.370*** (0.026)	-0.362*** (0.029)	-0.385*** (0.021)	-0.362*** (0.029)
bribery	-0.377*** (0.021)	-0.362*** (0.025)	-0.371*** (0.029)	-0.377*** (0.021)	-0.371*** (0.029)
Male candidate	-0.025* (0.012)	-0.030* (0.013)	0.002 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.022)	0.000 (0.032)
Male candidate x honesty		0.032 (0.029)			
infidelity x Male candidate			-0.042 (0.039)		-0.042 (0.039)
embezzlement x Male candidate			-0.038 (0.039)		-0.038 (0.039)
vote buying x Male candidate			-0.016 (0.042)		-0.016 (0.042)
sextortion x Male candidate			-0.049 (0.040)		-0.049 (0.040)
bribery x Male candidate			-0.015 (0.040)		-0.015 (0.040)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	-0.059*** (0.015)	-0.059*** (0.015)	-0.059*** (0.015)	-0.059** (0.021)	-0.060** (0.021)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.024 (0.016)	0.024 (0.016)	0.024 (0.016)	0.022 (0.022)	0.022 (0.022)
Pr(win) = 20% x Male candidate				0.001 (0.030)	0.001 (0.030)
Pr(win) = 80% x Male candidate				0.004 (0.031)	0.003 (0.031)
Num.Obs.	5824	5824	5824	5824	5824
R2	0.099	0.100	0.100	0.099	0.100
AIC	7863.8	7864.8	7871.8	7867.7	7875.8
BIC	7930.5	7938.2	7971.8	7947.8	7989.2

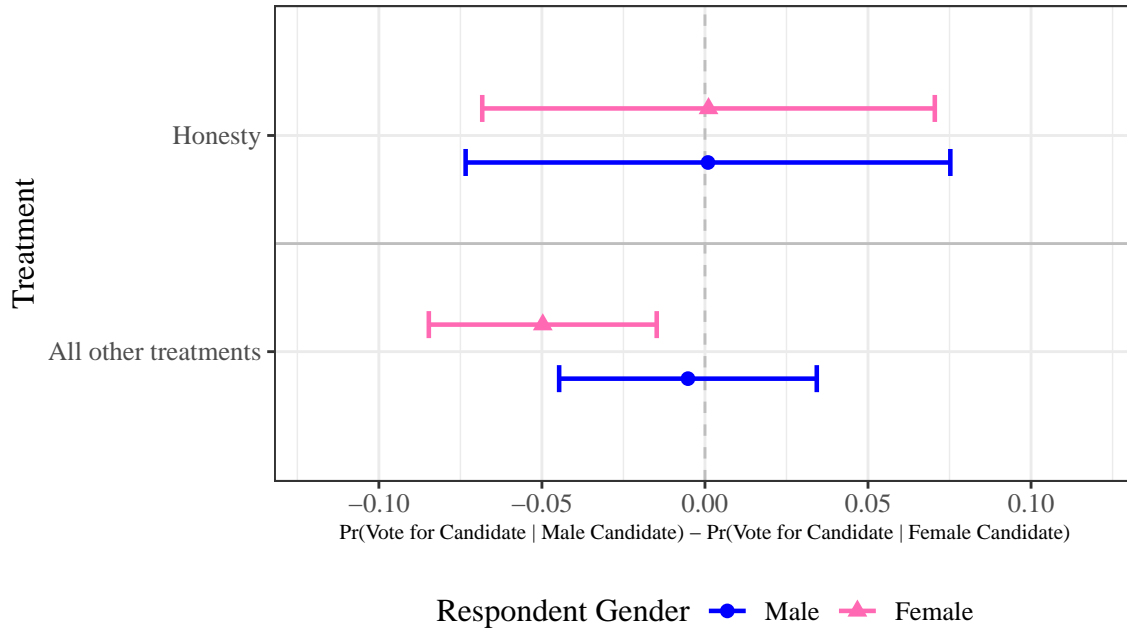
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure 3: **Average Support for Candidates by Treatment and Candidate Gender, with 95% Confidence Intervals.** Each point represents the probability that respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed on the left axis. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression (excluding the intercept) with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 3.



corruption, women respondents tend to disproportionately withhold support from male candidates. Male respondents continue to treat candidates of both genders equally.

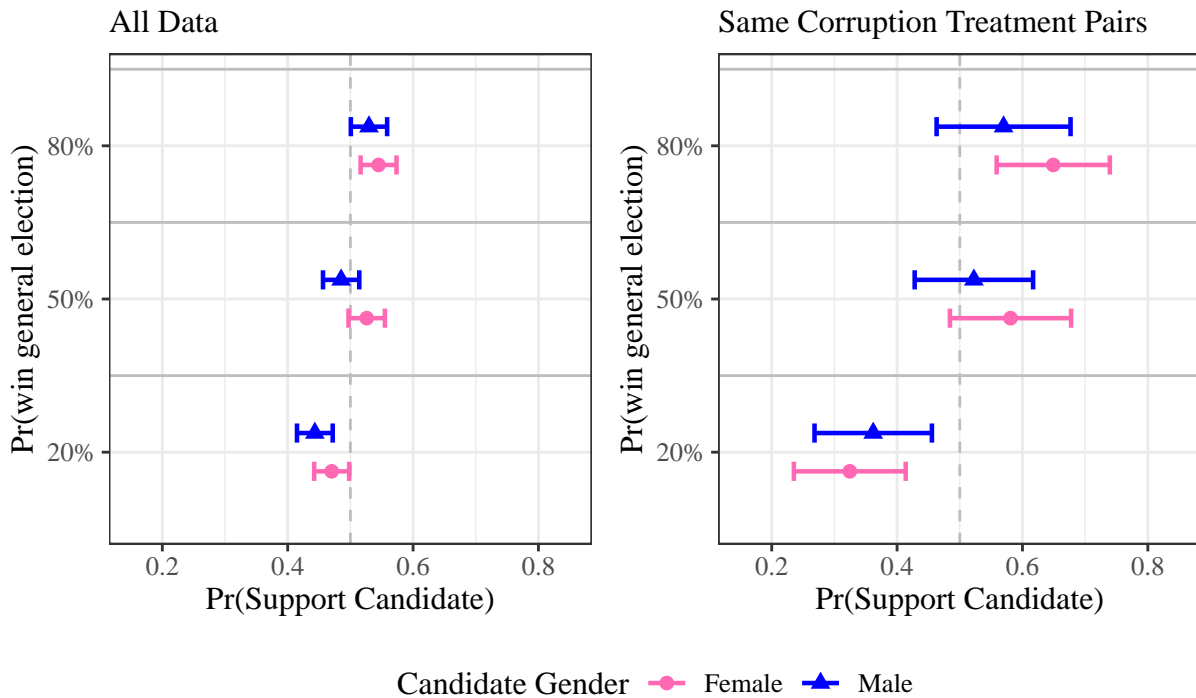
Figure 4: **Effect of Candidate Gender on Support by Treatment and Respondent Gender.** Each point represents the AMCE of being a male candidate in the honesty treatment or in any other condition. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 4.



According to Table 2, candidates with a higher probability of winning the general election are preferred by our respondents. However, the substantive size of this difference is surprisingly small compared to the impact of the corruption-related information treatments. A candidate with an even chance of winning the general election is preferred by about 6 percentage points more respondents compared to one with a 20% chance of winning. A candidate with an 80% chance of winning the general election enjoys about an 8 percentage point advantage over a candidate with a 20% chance of winning. These differences are shown in the left panel of Figure 5, which shows the proportion of our survey respondents who chose the candidate with the probability of winning listed on the left side (separately estimated by candidate gender). The increased support a male candidate enjoys when his probability of winning the general election rises is substantively very

similar to the increased support that a female candidate experiences, and we find no statistically significant indication that the probability of winning influenced male and female candidates differently (see Model 4 in Table 2). The effect of a candidate’s win probability on respondent support is much stronger if we compare only candidates with the same corruption information (in the right panel of Figure 5) and different win probabilities. The uncertainty of these estimates is increased because there are far fewer observations available for this restricted case ($N = 642$) as compared to the left panel ($N = 5824$). However, the mean effect of win probability on candidate support is much stronger.

Figure 5: Average Support for Candidates, By Probability of Winning General Election. Each point represents the probability that respondents chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed on the left axis. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression (excluding the intercept) with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The left panel shows estimates for the full data set, while the right panel shows estimates for cases where both candidates have been randomly assigned the same corruption information treatment. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 5.



Finally, we want to know whether Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are equally averse to corruption in their political candidates. Figure 6 shows average support

for candidates conditional on the candidate's gender; the candidate's treatment condition is listed in the rows and the respondent's self-reported partisanship listed in the columns. Point estimates and 95% confidence intervals candidates for male candidates are colored blue while those for female candidates are pink. The figure shows only minor partisan differences in support for a candidate by treatment. However, there does appear to be a somewhat consistent pattern of Democratic partisans preferring female candidates more than equivalent men while Republican partisans treat them more equally or even slightly prefer male candidates.

The apparent partisan difference in treatment of candidates by gender that is visible in Figure 6 leads us to study whether this difference is statistically detectable. We test this hypothesis in Figure 7, which reports the estimated marginal effect of a candidate's gender on respondents' support for the candidate as a function of respondent self-reported partisanship on a seven-point scale. The estimate is based on a regression model, reported in Appendix Table 8 in the rightmost column (labeled "All"), allowing for multiplicative interaction between a seven-point measure of party ID and whether the candidate was male. The figure also shows the marginal distribution of partisanship among our subjects as a bar chart along the top of the plot.

The interaction between candidate gender and respondent party ID is statistically significant and substantively meaningful. The most strongly partisan Democrats preferred women candidates over men in our experiment by a little more than seven percentage points. However, there was no detectable effect of candidate gender among Independents or Republicans.

Figure 6: **Average Support for Candidates by Treatment, Candidate Gender, and Respondent Partisanship.** Each point represents the probability that respondents with self-reported partisanship listed in the column chose a candidate with the treatment condition listed in the row. Bracketed whiskers indicate 95% confidence intervals calculated from a regression on the matching set of partisan respondents with CR2 standard errors clustered on subject. The models underlying these estimates are shown in Appendix Table 6.

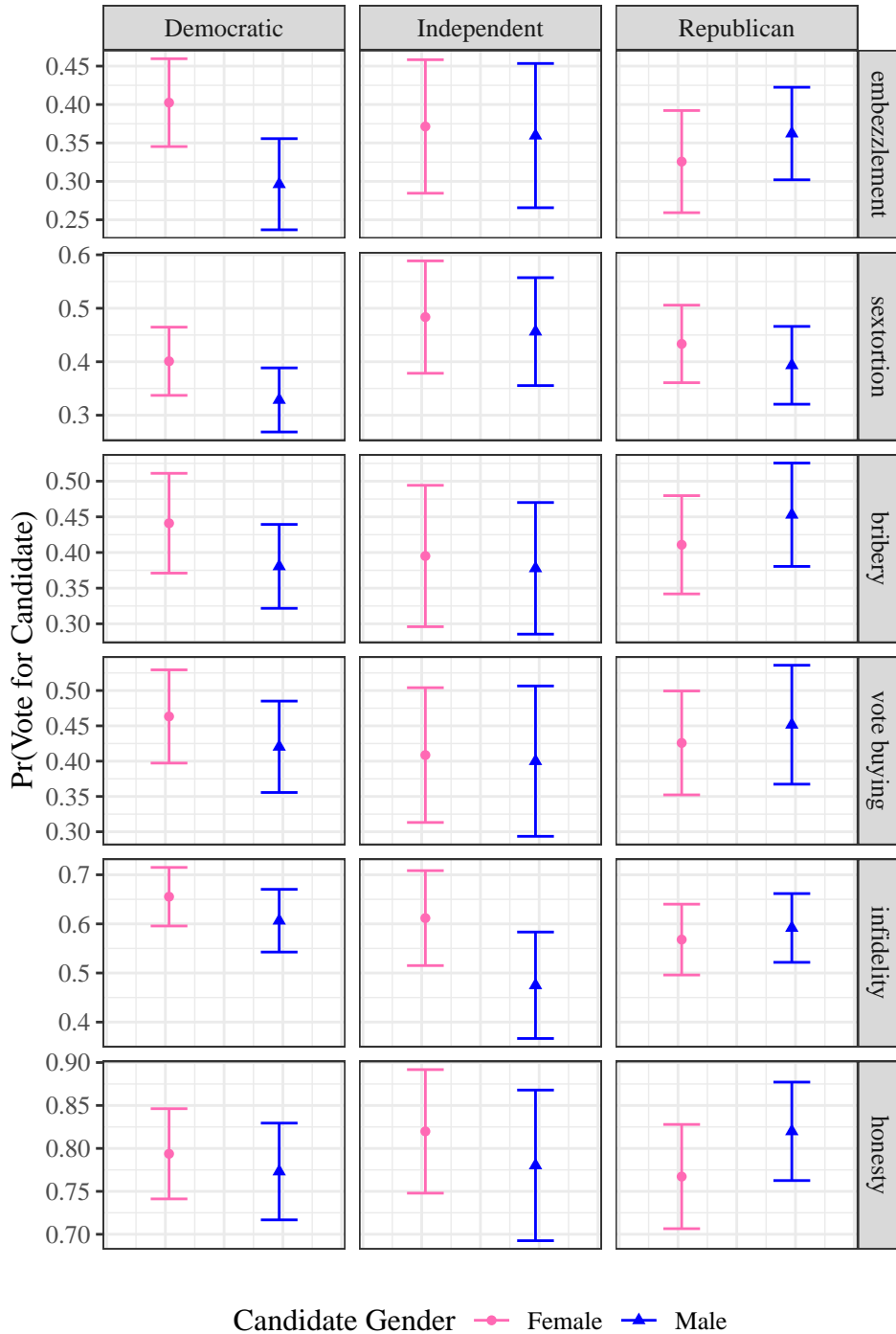
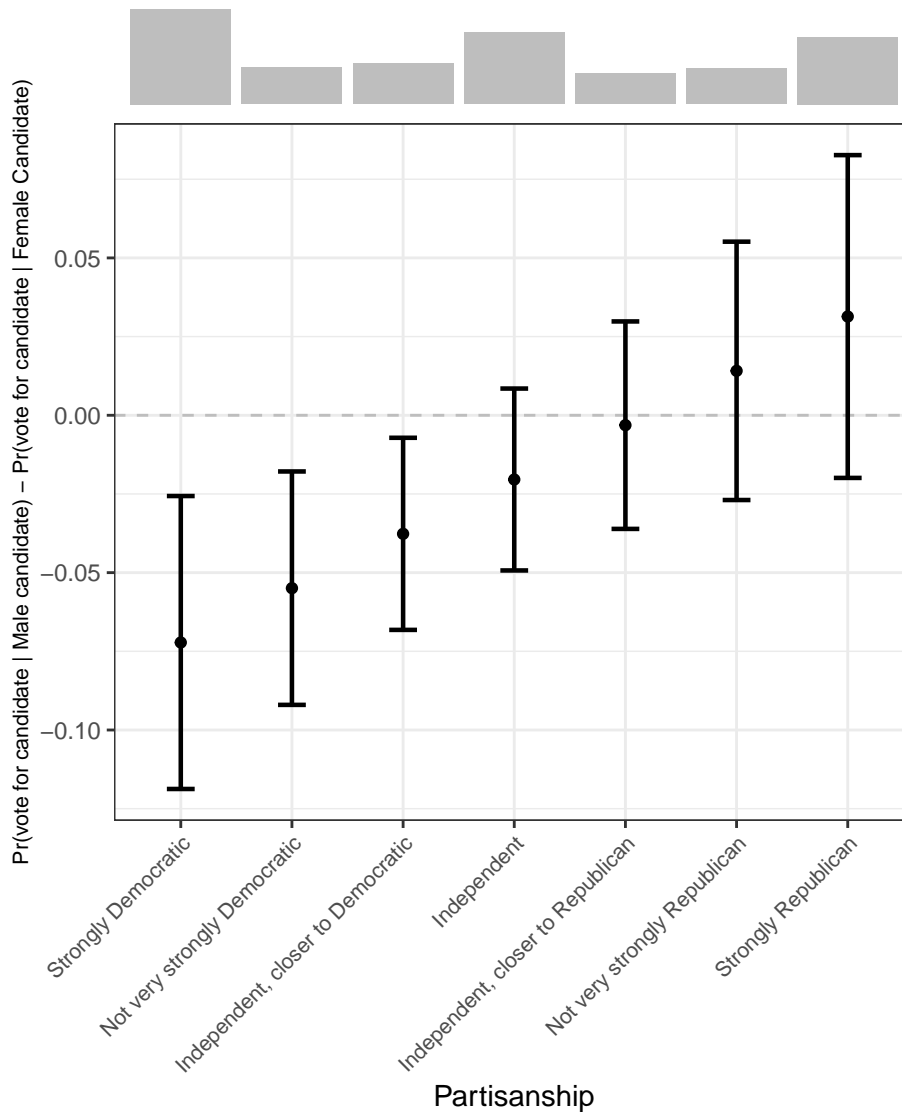


Figure 7: **Marginal Effect of Candidate Gender on Support by Partisanship, with Marginal Density of Partisanship.** The figure indicates the estimated effect of a candidate being male on support for a candidate, with 95% FDR Confidence Intervals corrected for multiple comparisons. The model underlying these estimates is shown in Appendix Table 8 under the column heading *All*. The marginal density of partisanship in the sample is shown along the top margin of the plot.



Conclusion

Let us return to the puzzle with which we began this paper: why have voters in recent elections supported corrupt candidates? Some traditional explanations, like a lack of clean alternatives or the trade-off of corruption against clientelistic benefits, do not seem to explain victories such as Donald Trump's 2024 re-election to the American presidency. We studied whether American voters might value winning the general election over all other priorities, whether partisans might discount information about corruption coming from journalists, whether women candidates might be held to a higher standard than men, and whether some forms of corruption might be discounted over others. In every case, our findings do not explain recent events. Respondents to our survey did *not* lexicographically prefer winning elections over an honest reputation; if anything, corruption seems to have been *more important* than winning to them. They did not ignore information about corruption provided by the media, regardless of partisanship. Women candidates were slightly *advantaged* over men when suspected over corruption, not held to a higher standard. We are thus left with a greater puzzle than the one with which we started! Further and immediate scientific attention is clearly warranted.

We have several suggestions for how future research should proceed. First, one aspect of candidates that we did not study is the anti-systemic or populist appeal that they present. Corrupt politicians might be tolerated by voters precisely because they ignore and undermine institutions, including but not limited to institutions related to corruption. Low trust in institutions and economic inequality have already been established as both causes and effects of corruption; increased tolerance of corruption by voters dissatisfied with the status quo may be a mechanism by which these factors cause increased corruption. Second, a desire to favor in-groups (co-ethnics, co-partisans, those with similar lifestyles, etc.) with government policy may also be a cause of tolerance for corruption, either because this policy is uniquely important to them or because there is a link

between the desire to favor in-groups via both legal and illegal means. Neither of these mechanisms would have been activated by our survey experiment because both candidates were presented as roughly equivalent members of the respondent's party with few details about their policy positions. Finally, it may be that there is no one explanation for why voters favor corrupt politicians, but that their decision is a cumulation of many small effects that combine to justify their decision. Future survey experiments may need to present much greater detail about a greater variety of policy positions held by alternative candidates, with greater diversity within and among those positions. This change would enable us to determine whether ideological distance can become sufficient to induce a voter to choose a corrupt candidate who shares their convictions over a clean candidate who does not.

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Appendix: Full Survey Instrument (with example treatments)



You are being invited to participate in a research study being done by Justin Esarey and Molly Linker of Wake Forest University (in Winston-Salem, NC). The purpose of this research study is to study how people decide which political candidates to support.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an on-line survey/questionnaire. This survey/questionnaire will ask you to answer some demographic questions about yourself, and also to choose between pairs of hypothetical candidates for President of the United States based on short biographical sketches. We anticipate that this survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You will receive compensation as reported to you by Dynata; your compensation will not depend on the choices you make during the study. In addition, we hope that your participation in the study will help us understand more about why voters choose to support certain candidates for political office. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any on-line related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. We will minimize any risks by collecting only de-identified data (i.e., Dynata will not link IP addresses, names, or e-mail addresses to the responses of this survey). Data will be maintained on password-protected computers and on-line services (e.g., Dropbox accounts and Qualtrics accounts) accessible only to those researchers affiliated with the project and to the services themselves. De-identified data (without IP addresses, names, or e-mail addresses) will be shared with other researchers via posting to public websites for replication purposes and secondary use.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose (other than questions verifying your eligibility to participate in the study).

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Justin Esarey (e-mail: esareyje@wfu.edu or telephone: 1-336-758-5133). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you should contact the IRB at Wake Forest University at irb@wfu.edu and reference study number IRB00025630. We encourage you to print or save a copy of this page for future reference.

By continuing on with the survey, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, living in the United States, are registered to vote in the United States, have read and understood this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study. If you do not wish to participate, please close your browser window.

If you wish to participate in this study, please click the arrow button below to start the survey.

Are you at least 18 years old?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently living in the United States of America?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently registered to vote in elections in the United States of America?

- Yes
- No

Powered by Qualtrics [↗](#)

The questions on this page are about your demographics. Please answer these questions before continuing to the next page.

What is your gender?

- Male
 Female
 Other (specify)

What is your age?

- 18 - 24 years
 25 - 34 years
 35 - 44 years
 45 - 54 years
 55 - 64 years
 65 - 74 years
 75+ years

Are you Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin?

- Yes
 No

What race do you consider yourself? (You may select more than one option.)

- White
 Black or African American
 American Indian or Alaska Native
 Asian
 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 Other (specify)

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?

- Strongly Democratic
 Not very strongly Democratic
 Independent, closer to Democratic
 Independent
 Independent, closer to Republican
 Not very strongly Republican
 Strongly Republican

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than High School
 High school graduate
 Some college but no degree
 Associate's Degree (for example: AA, AS)
 Bachelor's Degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
 Master's Degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MSW, MBA)
 Professional school Degree (for example: MD, DDS, LLB, JD)
 Doctorate Degree (for example: PhD, EdD)
 Other (specify)

What was the total income in 2023 of all your family members living in your household? This figure should include income from all sources, including salaries, wages, pensions, Social Security, dividends, interest, and all other income.

- \$0 - \$24,999
 \$25,000 - \$49,999
 \$50,000 - \$74,999
 \$75,000 - \$99,999
 \$100,000 - \$149,999
 \$150,000 - \$199,999
 \$200,000 - \$249,999
 \$250,000 or more

When you have answered all the questions on this page, click the arrow button below to continue the survey.

Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Charles Johnson is a 55 year old physician from Arizona who graduated from MIT. In addition to his career as a physician, Charles has also served as their state's Governor.

Journalists investigated Charles's background when he announced his candidacy. These investigations revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Election forecasters predict that Charles has an 80% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Elizabeth Smith is a 53 year old lawyer from Florida who graduated from Yale University. In addition to her career as a lawyer, Elizabeth has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate.

When Elizabeth announced her intention to run for office, journalists investigated her background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

Election forecasters predict that Elizabeth has a 20% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: Investigations into the background of _____ revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

- Candidate 1 (Johnson)
- Candidate 2 (Smith)
- both candidates
- neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

- Candidate 1 (Johnson)
- Candidate 2 (Smith)

Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Ted Brown is a 56 year old political commentator from Georgia who graduated from Cal Tech. In addition to his career as a political commentator, Ted has also served as their state's Governor.

When Ted announced his intention to run for office, journalists investigated his background. These investigations revealed allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars.

Election forecasters predict that Ted has an 80% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Jeff Thomas is a 52 year old physician from Florida who graduated from Harvard University. In addition to his career as a physician, Jeff has also served as their state's Governor.

When Jeff announced his candidacy, journalists began an investigation into his background. This investigation revealed that the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity.

Election forecasters predict that Jeff has a 50% chance of winning the general election if he is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: _____ graduated from Cal Tech.

- Candidate 1 (Brown)
- Candidate 2 (Thomas)
- Both candidates
- Neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

- Candidate 1 (Brown)
- Candidate 2 (Thomas)

Below are short biographies for two hypothetical candidates for President of the United States. Both hypothetical candidates are members of your political party. These candidates are competing in your party's primary for the nomination. Read their short biographies, then tell us which of these two candidates you would prefer to be your party's nominee for President of the United States.

Candidate 1: Kristen Williams is a 54 year old political commentator from Georgia who graduated from Harvard University. In addition to her career as a political commentator, Kristen has also served as their state's Governor.

Journalists began investigating Kristen's background when she announced her intention to run. These investigations revealed allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies.

Election forecasters predict that Kristen has a 50% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Candidate 2: Diane Wilson is a 56 year old political commentator from New Mexico who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to her career as a political commentator, Diane has also served as a member of the U.S. Senate.

When Diane announced her candidacy, journalists began an investigation into her background. These investigations revealed a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship.

Election forecasters predict that Diane has a 20% chance of winning the general election if she is the party's nominee.

Fill in the blank: _____ has a 50% chance of winning the general election if they are the party's nominee.

- Candidate 1 (Williams)
- Candidate 2 (Wilson)
- Both candidates
- Neither candidate

If these two candidates were competing in your party's primary to be the party's presidential nominee, which candidate would you prefer to support? (Indicate the candidate you support more strongly, even if you think both candidates are good choices or bad choices.)

- Candidate 1 (Williams)
- Candidate 2 (Wilson)

1. Corruption Involvement
 - a. "the candidate has a reputation for honesty and integrity."
 - b. "allegations that the candidate accepted bribes to steer government business towards certain companies."
 - c. "allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate embezzled over \$1,000,000 from their campaign to purchase personal luxuries such as jewelry and sports cars."
 - d. "allegations from a former campaign manager that the candidate has paid voters in exchange for their support at the ballot box."
 - e. "a former staff member who claimed the candidate threatened to fire them if they did not engage in a sexual relationship."
 - f. "allegations of recent marital infidelity by a former lover."
2. Probability of Winning
 - a. 20%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 80%
3. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
4. Education
 - a. Harvard University
 - b. Yale University
 - c. Princeton University
 - d. MIT
 - e. University of Pennsylvania
 - f. Duke University
 - g. Brown University
 - h. Johns Hopkins University
 - i. Stanford University
 - j. Cal Tech
5. Political Experience:
 - a. "served as a member of the U.S. Senate."
 - b. "served as a U.S. Cabinet member. "
 - c. "served as their state's Governor. "
 - d. "served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives."
6. Profession:
 - a. Military Officer
 - b. Lawyer
 - c. Physician
 - d. Entrepreneur

- e. Teacher
 - f. Political Commentator
7. Location 1
- a. Colorado
 - b. Virginia
 - c. Minnesota
 - d. Michigan
 - e. Arizona
 - f. Wisconsin
 - g. Georgia
8. Location 2
- a. North Carolina
 - b. Pennsylvania
 - c. Maine
 - d. Nevada
 - e. New Mexico
 - f. New Hampshire
 - g. Florida

Table 3: OLS Estimates for Figure 3

	(1)
honesty Female candidate	0.790 (0.018)
honesty Male candidate	0.790 (0.019)
infidelity Female candidate	0.618 (0.021)
infidelity Male candidate	0.578 (0.022)
embezzlement Female candidate	0.371 (0.020)
embezzlement Male candidate	0.333 (0.020)
vote buying Female candidate	0.440 (0.022)
vote buying Male candidate	0.427 (0.023)
sextortion Female candidate	0.428 (0.022)
sextortion Male candidate	0.378 (0.022)
bribery Female candidate	0.421 (0.022)
bribery Male candidate	0.405 (0.021)
Num.Obs.	5824

Table 4: OLS Models for Figure 4

	Male Resp.	Female Resp.	All Resp.
Intercept	0.794*** (0.030)	0.811*** (0.027)	0.801*** (0.020)
infidelity	-0.205*** (0.037)	-0.157*** (0.035)	-0.179*** (0.025)
embezzlement	-0.450*** (0.036)	-0.400*** (0.034)	-0.424*** (0.025)
vote buying	-0.369*** (0.038)	-0.326*** (0.035)	-0.347*** (0.026)
sextortion	-0.366*** (0.037)	-0.377*** (0.036)	-0.371*** (0.026)
bribery	-0.390*** (0.037)	-0.345*** (0.035)	-0.365*** (0.025)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	-0.032 (0.022)	-0.082*** (0.021)	-0.059*** (0.015)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.048* (0.023)	0.001 (0.022)	0.024 (0.016)
Male candidate	-0.005 (0.020)	-0.050** (0.018)	-0.029* (0.013)
Male candidate x honesty	0.006 (0.042)	0.051 (0.039)	0.029 (0.029)
Male respondent			0.004 (0.004)
Num.Obs.	2816	2984	5800
R2	0.099	0.103	0.100
AIC	3815.6	4029.3	7833.9
BIC	3881.0	4095.3	7913.9

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 5: OLS Estimates for Figure 5

	All Data	Same Treatment
Pr(win general election) = 20% Female candidate	0.470 (0.014)	0.325 (0.045)
Pr(win general election) = 20% Male candidate	0.443 (0.014)	0.362 (0.047)
Pr(win general election) = 50% Female candidate	0.526 (0.015)	0.581 (0.049)
Pr(win general election) = 50% Male candidate	0.485 (0.015)	0.523 (0.048)
Pr(win general election) = 80% Female candidate	0.545 (0.015)	0.649 (0.045)
Pr(win general election) = 80% Male candidate	0.530 (0.015)	0.570 (0.054)
Num.Obs.	5824	642

Table 6: OLS Models for Figure 6

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
honesty Female cand.	0.794*** (0.027)	0.767*** (0.031)	0.820*** (0.036)
infidelity Female cand.	0.655*** (0.030)	0.568*** (0.036)	0.612*** (0.048)
embezzlement Female cand.	0.402*** (0.029)	0.326*** (0.034)	0.371*** (0.044)
vote buying Female cand.	0.463*** (0.033)	0.426*** (0.037)	0.409*** (0.048)
sextortion Female cand.	0.401*** (0.032)	0.433*** (0.037)	0.484*** (0.053)
bribery Female cand.	0.441*** (0.035)	0.411*** (0.035)	0.395*** (0.050)
honesty Male cand.	0.773*** (0.029)	0.820*** (0.029)	0.780*** (0.044)
infidelity Male cand.	0.606*** (0.032)	0.592*** (0.035)	0.475*** (0.054)
embezzlement Male cand.	0.296*** (0.030)	0.362*** (0.030)	0.360*** (0.047)
vote buying Male cand.	0.420*** (0.033)	0.452*** (0.043)	0.400*** (0.053)
sextortion Male cand.	0.329*** (0.030)	0.393*** (0.037)	0.456*** (0.051)
bribery Male cand.	0.381*** (0.030)	0.453*** (0.037)	0.378*** (0.046)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104
R2	0.553	0.546	0.549
AIC	3598.5	2811.4	1514.1
BIC	3675.1	2884.5	1579.2

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 7: Average Support for Candidates, by Treatment and Respondent Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
infidelity	0.672*** (0.028)	0.580*** (0.029)	0.576*** (0.044)
embezzlement	0.389*** (0.026)	0.345*** (0.029)	0.398*** (0.039)
vote buying	0.481*** (0.029)	0.436*** (0.034)	0.434*** (0.041)
sextortion	0.406*** (0.027)	0.418*** (0.031)	0.505*** (0.042)
bribery	0.452*** (0.028)	0.433*** (0.029)	0.417*** (0.041)
Male candidate	-0.058** (0.018)	0.024 (0.020)	-0.036 (0.027)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	-0.066** (0.022)	-0.058* (0.027)	-0.051 (0.034)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.033 (0.024)	0.020 (0.025)	0.005 (0.036)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104
R2	0.556	0.547	0.550
AIC	3574.0	2797.5	1507.3
BIC	3632.9	2853.8	1557.3

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 8: **Treatment Effect Estimates by Respondent Party.** The table shows the relationship between experimental treatment effects and partisanship by estimating the AMCE separately for partisan subsamples (columns 1-3) and for the combined sample with an interaction effect between candidate gender and partisanship on a seven-point scale (column 4). The model in Column 4 is the basis for the marginal effect shown in Figure 7.

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	All
Intercept	0.827*** (0.025)	0.794*** (0.029)	0.832*** (0.036)	0.838*** (0.019)
infidelity	-0.155*** (0.031)	-0.214*** (0.034)	-0.256*** (0.050)	-0.193*** (0.021)
embezzlement	-0.437*** (0.031)	-0.449*** (0.033)	-0.434*** (0.047)	-0.440*** (0.020)
vote buying	-0.346*** (0.033)	-0.358*** (0.038)	-0.398*** (0.047)	-0.360*** (0.022)
sextortion	-0.420*** (0.031)	-0.376*** (0.036)	-0.327*** (0.050)	-0.386*** (0.021)
bribery	-0.375*** (0.032)	-0.361*** (0.036)	-0.415*** (0.045)	-0.377*** (0.021)
Male candidate	-0.058** (0.018)	0.024 (0.020)	-0.036 (0.027)	-0.072*** (0.020)
Male Candidate x Party ID				0.017** (0.006)
Party ID (7 point scale)				-0.008** (0.003)
Pr(win general election) = 20%	-0.066** (0.022)	-0.058* (0.027)	-0.051 (0.034)	-0.059*** (0.015)
Pr(win general election) = 80%	0.033 (0.024)	0.020 (0.025)	0.005 (0.036)	0.024 (0.016)
Num.Obs.	2666	2054	1104	5824
R2	0.112	0.095	0.099	0.101
AIC	3574.0	2797.5	1507.3	7858.6
BIC	3632.9	2853.8	1557.3	7938.7

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001