

The Gendered Qualification Gap

No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.

—Michelle Obama

The United States stands out as one of the only democratic nations yet to elect a woman as the head of state. Over the last fifty-six presidential elections, just a handful of women even dared to run for the presidency. Arguably, the most serious female presidential contender is Hillary Clinton, who ran in both 2008 and 2016. A constant critique Hillary Clinton faced during both her presidential races is that she lacked the qualifications necessary to serve as president. Clinton's resume in 2016 included serving as Secretary of State under the Obama administration, twice winning election to the Senate, having an active role developing policy as First Lady, and being a lawyer at a top Arkansas law firm. Clinton faced qualification criticisms from her primary election challenger and her general election opponent. Trump notably contended that Clinton lacked that “presidential look.” The most common “look” sported by the forty-four presidents who served in office prior to 2016 is that they are all men. Trump further called Clinton too weak, too frail, and lacking the stamina necessary for the challenges of the presidency.

The news media contributed, in part, to the narrative of Clinton as “questionably qualified” for the presidency, discussing Clinton's qualifications frequently with abundant coverage about her role as Secretary of State in the Benghazi terrorist attacks and her use of a private email server. For example, a quick news search in the final eight weeks of the

2016 campaign uncovers nearly 200 news stories in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* alone about Clinton's use of a private email server during her time as Secretary of State. A news search in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* for stories about Trump's tax returns, a major point of contention about Trump's qualifications, uncovered a mere eighty articles discussing his refusal to release these documents. Donald Trump ran for the presidency without ever having served in political office, either appointed or elected, and Trump lacked experience formulating and implementing public policy.

The Shorenstein Center at Harvard University tracked the news coverage received by the primary and the general election candidates throughout the 2016 campaign. In the final two months of the election, 3 percent of Clinton's coverage reported on her leadership or experience, while 3 percent of Trump's coverage also reported on these same qualities, and both candidates received mostly negative coverage. These patterns suggest some parity in qualification news coverage and that the media devoted little space – indicative of a qualification information gap for both female and male candidates. I argue that the news media do not provide enough information about the qualifications of political candidates. The lack of qualification coverage is much more detrimental to female candidates because it leads voters to assume that female candidates lack the qualifications needed for political office. Voters do not form these same disqualifying assumptions about male candidates.

Political qualifications appeared to matter far more for Clinton compared with Trump – at least based on anecdotal evidence. One voter quipped when asked on NPR's Morning Edition Program about his support for Donald Trump during the 2016 election: "How big could he screw up? I mean, what could he do that would be any worse than what's happened with other presidents that weren't effective?" A *Washington Post* contributor to the political blog *The Fix* succinctly summed up why the lack of qualifications was not a problem for Trump: "For millions of Americans in this unusual election year, Trump's lack of government experience is precisely the sort of qualification they're looking for." Trump's sex, and associated masculine stereotypes, made his populist appeal viable among some voters even though he lacked political experience. Had a woman received a major party's nomination to run for the presidency without any political experience, it is hard to believe that voters would see her lack of political experience as precisely the "sort of qualification" they desired.

Qualification criticisms of female candidates did not cease with Clinton's 2016 presidential defeat. Newly minted member of Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez frequently faces gendered qualification criticisms. A Texas city-council member referred to Ocasio-Cortez as a "bimbo" – a frequently gendered insult used to demean women's intelligence.¹ Senior White House Counselor Kellyanne Conway drew attention to Ocasio-Cortez's sex and her age, characterizing her as a "29-year-old congresswoman who doesn't seem to know much about anything."² Other commentators piled onto the gendered insults that also highlighted her age, stating that she's "just 'young and naive.' She's stupid. We're talking full-blown dumb-dumb."³ The qualification critiques lobbed at Ocasio-Cortez attack her based on her gender and sex as well as her age and, implicitly, her ethnicity. Notable about many of these criticisms is that they came after Ocasio-Cortez defeated a longtime Democratic incumbent man in the primary election and then won the general election, thereby proving that she is, at least from the vantage point of her constituents, qualified to represent them in political office.

Scanning the historical record reveals that other women in politics frequently received criticism for lacking the "right" qualifications for serving in political office. Geraldine Ferraro made history in 1984 as the first woman to appear on a major party's presidential ticket, albeit in the much less high-profile vice-presidential slot. Ferraro was not a political novice when Walter Mondale selected her as his running mate. She spent nearly a decade in the House of Representatives and had an extensive background as a prosecutor. Journalists, political pundits, and some voters questioned whether Ferraro had the "fortitude," "experience," and "competency" necessary to take on the Soviet Union and navigate defense and foreign policy issues. A 1984 *Washington Post* article from the presidential race included a quotation from one female voter who summarized her gendered sentiments about Ferraro: "I don't trust the

¹ Scott McDonald, "Texas Councilman Calls Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 'Bimbo,' Then Apologizes," *Newsweek.com*, February 9, 2019, www.newsweek.com/texas-city-council-man-calls-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-bimbo-then-apologizes-1325135.

² Joe Concha, "Conway Says Ocasio-Cortez Is '29-Year-Old Who Doesn't Seem to Know Much about Anything,'" *The Hill.com*, December 11, 2018, <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/420751-conway-says-ocasio-cortez-is-29-year-old-who-dont-seem-to-know-much-about>.

³ Chantal Da Silva, "AOC vs. GOP: The Long List of Smears and Insults Hurlled at Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez," *Newsweek.com*, February 21, 2019, www.newsweek.com/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-republicans-gop-insults-1335151.

woman. She's gotten very emotional about a lot of things already, and there's going to be lots worse to come." For Ferraro, having political experience was not enough; she did not have the "right" political experience. It's almost as if Ferraro's qualification, and the qualifications of women more generally, just did not count in the same way they would if they were men's.

These qualification attacks occur not just in presidential races but also when women run for lower levels of political office. Pundits and political opponents dismissed Patty Murray as just a "mom in tennis shoes" with little political agency to make a difference when she first became politically active. Murray turned the dismissive insult into a rallying cry during her campaigns for the school board, state legislature, and then the US Senate. Patty Murray won election to the Senate in the critical first "Year of the Woman." Qualification criticisms do not reflect the reality of women's political backgrounds. On average, the women who run for and win political office have *stronger* qualifications compared with the men who run for and win political office (Anzia and Berry 2011; Ekstrand and Eckert 1981; Fulton 2012, 2014). Despite impressive resumes, female candidates frequently counter criticism that they lack the requisite qualifications for political office.

This book examines what I term the "gendered qualification gap." The gendered qualification gap refers to the differences in the quality of female and male political candidates and elected officeholders. Women, in the aggregate, far outpace men in qualifications. Little is known about the causes of the gendered qualification gap at the voter level. I address four critical questions about the gendered qualification gap. First, How do ideas about gender affect what it means to be qualified for political office? Second, What information do voters have about candidate qualifications? Third, Do voters think differently about the qualifications of female candidates and male candidates? Finally, How can female candidates overcome the gendered qualification gap? I argue that voters hold female candidates to higher qualification standards relative to male candidates based on the way underlying ideas about gender shape how voters think about who should and can hold political office.

Holding female candidates to high qualification standards is a subtle but pernicious source of bias that limits the success of women in politics by creating a high entry barrier for women seeking access to the ballot. These steep barriers can limit women's access to the political pipeline, delay women's political careers, and, in the long term, perpetuate women's political underrepresentation. Gendered qualifications point to

a serious tension in democratic decision-making. Campaigns condition many voters to seek out and reward candidates who display masculine qualities, such as being competitive, aggressive, and assertive (Conroy 2015; Dittmar 2015). These qualities do not necessarily make for good political leadership once a candidate wins the election (Guttmann and Thompson 2012). Indeed, legislating and leading require qualities that fit into the perceived stereotypic strengths of women, such as being willing to compromise, build consensus, and reconcile competing perspectives (Eagly and Carli 2003; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

This chapter lays the groundwork for developing my theory of the gendered qualification gap and the empirical tests I conduct in later chapters. I start by defining the gendered qualification gap, and then discuss current explanations in the literature explaining why this gap occurs. Past research examines how institutional barriers and socialization patterns contribute to the gendered qualification gap, but missing from the extant body of scholarship is how voters contribute to the qualification gap. This is the gap my book fills. Following the discussion of past scholarship, I then outline the plan for the rest of the chapters in this book.

WHAT IS THE GENDERED QUALIFICATION GAP?

The gendered⁴ qualification gap persists no matter how you measure political qualifications. Female candidates, compared with male candidates, have more political experience when they run for political office (Fulton et al. 2006) and more impressive professional backgrounds (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). As incumbents, the gendered qualification

⁴ Sex and gender are separate but related concepts (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017). The term “sex” refers to a whether a person is biologically male or female. The term “gender” refers to the performance and perception of femininity or masculinity. In this book, I use sex and gender in distinct ways to describe how biological sex differences between women and men gave rise to the separate social roles occupied by women and men, and how those social roles led to the development of gender stereotypes about the qualities attributed to women and attributed to men (Eagly 1987; Eagly and Karau 2002; Prentice and Carranza 2002). These biological origins of qualities associated with femininity and masculinity are essential to explaining women’s exclusion from leadership roles. Throughout this book, I use “sex” to refer to the biological assignment of women as women and men as men. When referring to people as female or male, regardless of their biological assignment, I will default to “gender.” But, note that gender is most often used to refer to feminine and masculine stereotypes that, in the minds of many voters, make up what it means to be male and to be female. Because “gender” refers to the qualities that make something or someone feminine or masculine, people have genders, but so do objects, ideas, and institutions.

gap widens. Female lawmakers, relative to their male counterparts, pass more legislation and bring home more federal dollars to their districts (Anzia and Berry 2011) – and female incumbents are especially productive even when they are in the minority party (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013). Current scholarship assumes that female candidates, as incumbents and challengers, develop these impressive qualifications to stave off voter bias (Anzia and Berry 2011). The logic is that female candidates anticipate bias from voters, and, as challengers, they run for political office only when they have the best record and the highest probability of winning (Lawless 2012). As incumbents, women work hard to prevent reelection challengers and to mitigate bias from voters (Branton et al. 2018; Milyo and Schlosberg 2000). This research does not explain the exact role voters play in perpetuating this qualification gap. For example, it is not clear whether voters reward productive female incumbents for their high levels of legislative productivity. This book directly addresses how concepts related to gender affect whom voters see as qualified for political office, and how these perceptions lead voters to hold female candidates to higher qualification standards.

Female candidates win elections at equal rates as male candidates (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997). It is easy to conclude from this point of parity that gender bias does not contribute to the underrepresentation of women in elected office. This conclusion is not quite accurate. Highly qualified female candidates actually win a smaller share of the vote than similarly or less qualified male candidates (Pearson and McGhee 2013). These findings create the impression that female candidates are more likely to win elections by having better qualifications relative to their male opponents. If gender does not affect electoral outcomes, then female candidates would win elections at higher rates than less qualified male candidates – an outcome that, based on empirical research, does not occur. This leads to an intriguing empirical puzzle: *Women win elections at equal rates as male candidates but women win these elections by a narrower vote margin, and these women, on average, have stronger qualifications relative to the victorious male candidates. Do female candidates have to be better than male candidates to win elections?*

I argue that outcomes that appear neutral across candidate gender, such as the probability of winning an election, are not necessarily absent of gender biases. Gender-neutral outcomes are often the result of highly gendered processes. Evaluating political candidates is a gendered process for many voters. Political institutions operate under strict norms of masculinity (Barnes 2016; Hawkesworth 2003; Homola 2019; Mahoney 2018);

voters hold strongly masculine expectations for political candidates (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2011, 2016; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993); and the media further reinforce masculine norms through what they choose to cover about political candidates (Conroy 2015; Hayes and Lawless 2016). These masculine norms and expectations affect how voters evaluate the qualifications of political candidates.

CURRENT EXPLANATIONS FOR THE GENDERED QUALIFICATION GAP

I start by outlining how previous research approaches the question of why the women who run for and win political office tend to have more impressive qualifications relative to the men who run for and win political office. I draw on political science research and also scholarship from sociology and social psychology. Extant scholarship identifies three central sources that contribute to the gendered qualification gap: (1) socialization patterns, (2) structural dynamics, and (3) stereotypic biases among voters.

Gendered Socialization Patterns

Gendered socialization patterns affect how people think about their capacity to serve as leaders. Gendered socialization is the process whereby children learn the appropriate roles, norms, and behaviors for each gender throughout childhood. Children can identify the behaviors and activities considered appropriate for boys and for girls in preschool and early elementary school (Bigler and Lieben 2006). For example, young children know that playing with dolls is an activity for girls and that playing with trucks is an activity for boys. Parents, teachers, the mass media, and other important sources of authority discourage young girls and women from displaying leadership qualities and pursuing leadership opportunities.

The socialization of children into separate social roles affects how they think about who can serve in political leadership. Through this socialization process, young girls face social sanctions for displaying power and agency, while young boys receive rewards for the same behaviors (Sadker and Sadker 1986; Sadker and Zittleman 2009). Take, for example, the case of two kindergarten students, one boy and one girl, who both in a rush of excitement to answer their teacher's question forget to raise their hand and just shout out the answer. The teacher is likely to sanction the

young girl for failing to follow the appropriate norm of raising one's hand and waiting one's turn to speak. The same teacher, however, is likely to reward the young boy for showing initiative even though he also violated the appropriate norms of class participation. These differential responses signal to girls that agency and initiative is bad while submissiveness is good; and, for boys, agency and initiative is desirable. Based on these gendered socialization patterns, girls grow up learning how to display submissiveness and boys grow up learning how to display leadership.

Young adults operate in environments where they receive positive reinforcement for conforming to gender-based expectations and punishments for violating such expectations. These patterns of socialization affect how people view their role in political life, especially their interest in pursuing political careers. During high school, students engage in activities that build civic skills, such as participating on student councils, playing sports, and pursuing a variety of extra-curricular activities (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2004). When these students enter college, the patterns of participation in public life begin to shift. College-aged women lose interest in pursuing political careers, while college-aged men increase their interest in pursuing political careers (Fox and Lawless 2014b; Schneider et al. 2016). The collegiate experience is one that sends implicit and explicit signals to women that public spaces are masculine spaces. Collegiate women interested in pursuing majors and career paths traditionally dominated by men, such as political science, engineering, or computer science, receive less mentoring, encouragement, and support than male students (Baird 2008). The result is a sorting of people into sex-segregated professions such that women end up pushed out of pipeline political careers and men end up pushed into these careers. The women who persist in pursuing careers in male-dominated fields end up with stronger qualifications than the men who choose those same career paths. Surviving in a profession where women receive consistent messages that they simply do not belong means that these women feel pressured to be better than everyone else to prove that they do, in fact, belong.

Gendered socialization leads young people to seek out very different experiences in adulthood. Women's socialization leads them to pursue careers that fulfill communal goals, such as serving disadvantaged populations, rather than pursuing power-seeking goals, such as political leadership (Holman and Schneider 2018; Schneider et al. 2016; Silva and Skulley 2019). These socialization patterns affect, at a basic level, the way people process political cues in discussion networks (Krupnikov et al. 2019). And this socialization process leads women to express less interest

in running for political office compared with men. Consequently, women often see themselves as *lacking* the qualifications needed to serve in political office, and this perception persists even if a woman has comparable qualities to a potential male candidate (Lawless 2012). Research finds these gender gaps exist throughout the candidate emergence process, from when individuals initially make the decision to run for political office (Fulton et al. 2006; Ondercin 2016) to when they make decisions about moving up the political ladder (Maestas et al. 2006). A consequence of gendered socialization is that women, in general, run for political office much later in life than male candidates – once the work–life balance is not as much of a burden (Fox and Lawless 2014a). Women also are more likely to consider a run for political office when they have a high probability of winning the election (Maestas et al. 2006; Ondercin 2016). This risk-averse decision-making process mitigates the trepidation women feel about electoral competition and conflict (Kanthak and Woon 2015; Stoddard and Preece 2015; Sweet-Cushman 2016).

Institutional Barriers

The way party institutions recruit and support candidates affects the gendered qualification gap. Local party networks are more likely to support men's candidacies, and some local party leaders do not believe that women are electorally viable (Sanbonmatsu 2006). Overcoming these perceptual biases means that female candidates need to have exceptional qualifications just to get on the radar of local party leaders. States without strong party organizations have less motivation to recruit female candidates simply because such recruitment requires an investment of time and resources that these party networks lack (Sanbonmatsu 2006). Local party leaders do not need to ask men to run for political office because men self-select into the candidate pool, and this makes it easy for party networks to, often unintentionally, overlook potential female candidates (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Crowder-Meyer 2013).

It is important to note that there is considerable variation in recruitment patterns across state and local party networks. Some state party organization consciously recruit women for political office and try to create a culture that promotes equal access to the ballot for women (Bos 2011). Despite the best of intentions, institutional interventions can backfire. Bos (2015) examined whether affirmative action statements read by party leaders at Democratic state nominating conventions encouraged party elites to nominate more women, and the efforts produced the

opposite effect. Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece (2017) found, more positively, that directly encouraging women to put themselves forth as candidates at Republican Party nominating conventions increased the number of female candidates running for political office.

Candidate recruitment patterns create barriers to the ballot for female candidates, and there are disparities in how Democrats and Republicans recruit women. I talk more about these differences in Chapter 6, which takes a deep dive into the partisan gender gap. Recruiting female candidates can be especially difficult because socialization patterns lead women to underrate their own political qualifications, and state and local party networks do not always have the resources needed to recruit viable women. While these factors certainly contribute to the gendered qualification gap, these explanations do not offer direct insight into how voters view candidate qualifications across sex.

The Role of Voter Bias

Current scholarship is relatively silent on how voters evaluate the qualifications of political candidates, with a few exceptions. Fulton (2012) asked political elites, including political activists and candidates, to evaluate candidate quality on the actual skills and tasks that legislators perform in public office, including the ability to speak well in public and secure federal dollars for their district. Fulton's research found that receiving a high qualification rating mattered much more for the electoral victories of female relative to male candidates. This research suggests that, among political elites, female candidates have a higher probability of winning elections by being better than the male candidates running against other male candidates. Pearson and McGhee (2013), using objective observational measures of candidate quality rather than subjective perceptions of candidate quality, reinforce the premise that electoral parity comes when female candidates outperform male candidates. It is not clear whether the candidate socialization and selection process causes this qualification gap or if voter bias contributes to the qualification gap. Current approaches to detecting gender bias focus on how sexism, candidate trait attributions, and issue competencies contribute to the electoral success, or demise, of female candidates.

Sexist attitudes reflect the belief that women are simply not suited for filling leadership roles and that men are best fit for political leadership. Mo (2015) found that sexist attitudes can take an implicit or explicit

form, with explicit attitudes reflecting an outright preference for male leadership and implicit attitudes reflecting the unconscious beliefs voters have about gender and political leadership. Both implicit and explicit attitudes affect people's willingness to support female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002a). The aftermath of Hillary Clinton's 2016 defeat spurred several studies reaching the empirical conclusion that bias contributed to this presidential loss. Holding the belief that men are more emotionally suited for politics (Bracic, Israel-Trummel, and Shortle 2019), having high levels of hostile sexism (Cassese and Holman 2019) and expressing negative attitudes toward women and feminists (Valentino, Wayne, and Ocen 2018) predicted support for Trump over Clinton especially among white Republican women (Cassese and Barnes 2019). Collectively, this research provides evidence that explicitly sexist attitudes can motivate voters to support an arguably less-qualified man over a more-qualified woman.

Feminine stereotypes characterize women as caring and empathetic (Prentice and Carranza 2002), and, in politics, voters stereotype female candidates as having a high level of expertise on issues that reinforce these traits, such as education or health care policy (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Schneider 2014a). Masculine stereotypes characterize men as assertive and dominant (Vinkenbug et al. 2011), and, as such, voters associate male candidates with masculine issues such as defense and the military (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016). The political relevance of these stereotypes is that feminine traits lead voters to see female candidates as better fit for communal, or supportive, social roles and not masculine, or leadership, social roles. Voters associate masculine traits with political leaders and see feminine traits as less important (Conroy 2015; Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

Voters do not automatically associate female candidates with stereotypically feminine traits, such as emotionality, compassion, or warmth (Bauer 2015b; Brooks 2013), but voters rate female candidates more poorly than male candidates on the stereotypic masculine traits that voters value in political leaders, including experience, knowledge, and political competency (Schneider and Bos 2014). Voters actively seek out information to confirm that female candidates are competent and knowledgeable (Andersen and Ditonto 2018; Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk 2014). Emphasizing feminine traits in campaign messages, such as a female candidate describing herself as caring, decreases electoral

support for female candidates but not male candidates (Bauer 2015a). Gendered traits serve as a source of bias because voters see female candidates as fundamentally deficient in the traits most strongly associated with political leadership.

Another approach to assessing voter bias is through perceptions of issue competencies. Voters see female candidates and lawmakers as having a high level of expertise on issues such as education, health care, the environment, pay equity, and anti-sexual harassment and discrimination policies (Alexander and Anderson 1993). These issues reflect feminine traits, such as compassion (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). This association between stereotypically feminine issues and female candidates is not, in and of itself, evidence of bias or a qualification gap. Bias emerges when voters associate female candidates with stereotypically feminine issues and form the impression that female candidates lack competency on stereotypically masculine issues including defense, the military, and national security (Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2016) – issues that reflect traits such as strength and authority (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister (2016) found that when national security is a dominant national issue, support for female candidates markedly decreases because voters do not think women can handle these issues.

Voter bias can also occur within the political parties based on the intersection between partisan stereotypes and gender stereotypes. Stereotypes about the Democratic Party mirror feminine stereotypes, while stereotypes about the Republican Party mirror masculine stereotypes (Hayes 2005; Winter 2010). Some evidence suggests that partisanship is a primary driver of the way candidates use feminine and masculine stereotypes in campaign messages and in voter decision-making (Dolan 2014). Other research points to a more complicated relationship between gender stereotypes, partisan stereotypes, and female candidates. The feminine nature of Democratic stereotypes leads voters to more strongly associate Democratic women with feminine traits and feminine issues relative to Democratic men and Republican women (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009; Schneider and Bos 2016). Republican women, however, are not strongly associated with the masculine qualities that define Republican partisan stereotypes (Bauer 2018; Hayes 2011). Democratic women, based on the gender–partisan stereotype overlap, more strongly fit into stereotypes of their political party. Feminine stereotypes may not hinder voter decision-making about Democratic female candidates. Republican women, however, face a “lack of fit” problem with their political party (Thomsen 2015).

Limitations of Current Research

Sexism, traits, and issues can affect how voters perceive a female candidate's qualifications and whether voters support female candidates at the polls. These factors, I argue, do not speak as to whether voters hold female candidates to a higher qualification standard relative to male candidates and what these higher standards entail. This book addresses several limitations of current scholarship, including the limitations of observational comparisons, the assumption that gender-neutral outcomes indicate gender-neutral processes, the lack of a distinction between candidate traits and other dimensions of a candidate's political resume, and whether voters have information about candidate qualifications during a campaign.

First, observational data cannot offer insight about how voters evaluate female candidates who have the same qualifications as male candidates because, in practice, actual female candidates often have better qualifications compared with male candidates. Observational research illustrates that lesser qualified male candidates do just as well as compared with better qualified female candidates. The best way to detect bias is to compare the evaluations of female and male candidates with the same set of qualifications. The experimental approach I employ controls candidate qualifications, and I can give female and male candidates the same set of qualifications. There is virtually no "real-world" scenario that pits a female candidate against a male candidate with the exact same qualifications. Controlling for candidate qualifications is necessary because it is this high level of control that allows me to be sure that any negative ratings a female candidate receives are due to her gender and not an actual difference in her qualifications.

Second, extant scholarship does not always examine what information about candidate qualifications voters have during a campaign. Studies that examine the campaign messages of female and male candidates often focus on the gender stereotypic traits and issues candidates emphasize (Dolan 2014), but few studies examine how female candidates talk about their qualifications (for exceptions, see Fridkin and Kenney 2015; Lazarus and Steigerwalt 2018). If voters do not know about the qualifications of female candidates, then it is likely voters will fall back on stereotypes to assume that female candidates lack the qualifications needed for political office. Female candidates, for fear of a backlash for breaking with feminine norms, may not be as likely as male candidates to tout their

accomplishments. If female candidates do not talk about their qualifications, the news media are unlikely to discuss a female candidate's qualifications.

Third, previous scholarship finds that directly associating a female candidate with feminine traits reduces the extent to which voters see that particular female candidate as qualified for political office (Bauer 2015a), while associating a female candidate with masculine traits enhances the extent to which voters see that particular female candidate as qualified for political office (Bauer 2017; Schneider 2014a). The gender trait literature suggests that female candidates lack the basic personality characteristics associated with leadership, such as experience, but this literature does not tell us how voters evaluate evidence of a female candidate's actual experience, and how these evaluations might differ across candidate sex. For example, it is not clear how information about a female candidate's political experience and political accomplishments shifts perceptions of gendered traits.

I conceptualize and empirically test qualifications as characteristics distinct from traits. I focus on qualifications as the resumes, backgrounds, or set of experiences candidates bring with them to political office. These experiences, when taken at face value, do not directly have the same gendered attachments as traits. Most individuals classify a trait such as aggressiveness as a masculine trait, but most individuals do not necessarily classify serving in a state legislature as a masculine experience. The political resumes of candidates are often seen as more objective indicators of candidate quality. Political experience is a common marker used to assess the level of a candidate's quality (Maestas and Rugeley 2008). If a candidate won election and served in political office previously, then it is reasonable to infer the candidate has the skills needed to serve in political office again. But holding political office is also a masculine experience. The inherent masculinity of the experiences, backgrounds, and skill sets needed to hold political office are not always recognized or discussed in research on candidate quality. For example, it is thought that being able to argue for one's position is a valuable political skill. But being able to argue a position and advocate for oneself or for others is a skill associated with power and agency, and this is a stereotypically masculine characteristic. It is not clear, however, that there is a gendered link between the resumes of political candidates and perceptions of candidate qualifications.

To summarize, this book fills three critical gaps in the literature on candidate quality, the underrepresentation of women in politics, and the

role voter bias plays in evaluations of female candidates. First, I argue that gender-neutral outcomes are not always indicative of gender-neutral processes. Observational comparisons of female candidates with male candidates find lots of parity, but the campaign process is rife with inequities that create greater obstacles for female candidates. Determining the role of bias in evaluations of candidate qualifications without experiments is incredibly difficult because the female candidates who make it to the ballot are, in practice, better than the male candidates. It is not always possible to know if these women win elections because they are better than their male opponents or if another process contributes to these outcomes. The ability to create conditions where two candidates are of the same quality allows me determine the role bias plays in these outcomes. Second, I look at the information environment in which voters encounter female and male candidates to see how the campaign context, including the news media, may contribute to the gendered qualification gap. Third, I use perceptions of qualifications to capture voter bias toward female candidates as an alternative to the more conventional trait and issue competency measures scholars have used in previous research. I examine qualifications as the set of resume factors that candidates bring with them to the ballot. This approach lets me see how seemingly objective factors of candidate quality can be evaluated differently for female candidates and for male candidates, and create steep barriers for women.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

I start in Chapter 2 with a brief history of women in political leadership. Arguments used to deny women suffrage and the full political rights of citizenship were deeply rooted in stereotypes that women lacked the stamina to excel in public life and that women's proper roles were as mothers and caregivers. These beliefs that women lacked the qualifications needed to operate in political spheres still affect how voters view the political acumen of women running for political office today. I not only discuss the historic exclusion of women from positions of political leadership through the lens of gender stereotypes but also analyze over time public opinion data about the role of women in politics. Polling data offer an optimistic picture about the prospects of electing a qualified woman to the presidency. These data, however, do not provide insight into who constitutes a qualified female political candidate, and how the public might assess those qualifications. I answer these questions in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 addresses the question: How do ideas about gender, namely, femininity and masculinity, affect what it means, from the voter's perspective, to be qualified for political office? I apply social role theory to the development of political leadership in the United States to show how masculinity determines the expectations voters have for what a qualified political candidate looks like. Ideas about femininity and masculinity shape the expectations of individuals for the different types of roles and occupations women and men hold. Caregiving roles are bound up in norms of femininity, and there is a link between masculinity and leadership roles: the expectation that leaders have masculine qualities extends back to America's founding, and indeed, well before the United States came into existence. I use two empirical tests of how masculinity influences thinking about political leadership and qualifications.

Chapter 4 asks: What information do voters have about candidate qualifications? More specifically, this chapter hones in on whether there is a gendered information gap. A gendered information gap has the potential to widen the qualification gap because if voters lack information about a female candidate's qualifications, most voters will assume, I argue, that she lacks the qualifications needed for political office. I investigate the qualification information environment through content analyses of campaign websites as well as analyses of news coverage from the 2016 Senate elections. These data allow me to test for imbalances in how candidates present their qualifications to voters. The website analyses show that while there are some similarities in how female and male candidates sell their qualifications to voters – for example, everyone talks about their political experience – important differences also emerge. Female candidates, the results show, talk about their professional experiences much more than do male candidates.

In Chapter 4, I pair the campaign website analysis with an exhaustive content analysis of campaign news coverage of the 2016 Senate candidates. The website analyses offer insights into whether female candidates might undersell their qualifications. The news analyses tell me two pieces of information. First, I can determine whether the news coverage matches the information candidates present on their websites. Second, I can assess, through both the website and the news analyses, whether voters have enough qualification information about female candidates. These results show a disjuncture in the information female candidates provide about themselves and the information presented in news coverage. Most female candidates talk about their political experience, but female candidates

receive less political experience coverage relative to male candidates. The benefit of conducting content analyses in this chapter is that the method has a high level of external validity as I can draw conclusions about the actual amount of qualification information voters have about high-profile female candidates running in actual elections.

In Chapter 5, I draw on shifting standards theory, derived from social psychology research, to determine how and when voters hold candidates to gendered typicality standards. These standards provide voters with a comparative metric to assess whether a candidate has the qualifications needed for political office. These standards also clarify the subtle and pernicious role gender stereotypes play in how voters rate the qualifications of political candidates. The experiments I use in this chapter allow me to control the qualification information about candidates to trace how being female affects the way voters use this information in decision-making. I am also able to measure voters' qualification expectations more directly to assess just how high the gendered qualification bar is for female candidates. This chapter shows that less qualified male candidates generally have a baseline electoral advantage over more qualified female candidates.

Stereotypes about women and men influence how voters evaluate the qualifications of political candidates, but stereotypes about gender sharply intersect with stereotypes about political parties. Chapter 6 builds on Chapter 5 and investigates how stereotypes about Democrats and Republicans affect evaluations of Democratic and Republican female candidates. Voters stereotype Democrats as feminine and Republicans as masculine (Winter 2010). These stereotypes, I contend, create a set of gendered partisan-typicality standards that affect how voters select candidates in primary elections. Republican female candidates face obstacles in primary elections where Republican voters are more likely to support a Republican male than a Republican female candidate. Partisan-typicality standards shaped by gender stereotypes contribute to the partisan gender gap in political representation.

Chapter 7 turns to closing the gendered qualification gap. I develop and experimentally test three strategies to close the gendered qualification gap. I show that simply providing voters with more information about female candidate qualifications is not enough to close the gendered information gap, and thereby the gendered qualification gap. Putting qualification information in a context that tells voters that female candidates have more or better qualifications than male candidates effectively closes the gendered qualification gap. Self-promotion does not close the

gendered qualification gap. This chapter points to the need for more research on how to disrupt the implicit biases voters bring with them to the ballot.

Chapter 8 highlights the broader implications of this research for women seeking to enter positions characterized by masculine expectations and traditionally dominated by men. The gendered qualification gap applies not only to political leadership but to the many public institutions that underrepresent women. Women, in general, need better qualifications than men to succeed in business leadership, the legal field, STEM industries, higher education, and other institutions traditionally dominated by men. The gendered qualification gap creates steep entry barriers for women pursuing professions that typically underrepresent women. The result is that women are noticeably absent from public life.