

Effects of Partisan Identity on Judgment of Sexual Assault in the Workplace

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Abstract

The United States is facing two major concurrent phenomena that have recently interacted in a very public and momentous manner. Namely, sexual assault continues to be a glaring social, and now political, issue in modern American life. Simultaneously, we are living through the most politically polarized era in the history of our country. The division between the identity of modern Democrats and Republicans continues to widen as political partisanship becomes a key part of a modern American's identity. As sexual assault becomes politicized, this research seeks to understand the link between an individual's political identity and how he or she then interprets an alleged incident of sexual assault. Previous research has not addressed this relationship, nor how it manifests in the workplace as compared to a purely political setting. Through a survey of American adults, this research delves into how political identity influences an individual's judgement of an alleged incident of sexual assault in two distinct settings. Overall, the survey results offered support my hypothesis that a match in partisan identity between a respondent and alleged perpetrator would be linked to a more lenient judgment of the perpetrator. Furthermore, there is evidence that this match in partisan identity would be more salient in decision-making for allegations made in a purely political context as opposed to in a workplace. This research also suggests that Republican respondents were more likely than Democratic respondents to be lenient in the case of a party match.

Significance

Though the United States is often perceived to be a standard for a modern democracy, it faces two major phenomena today that call the effectiveness of this democratic system into question. Not only have political polarization and antipathy been steadily growing, the US also faces a high frequency of sexual assault cases. These two trends in modern-day America have come to intersect in several recent high-profile cases of sexual assault accusations against prominent state and federal

government officials, such as President Donald Trump, Judge Brett Kavanaugh, former Congressman Al Franken, and others. As such, there seems to be an effect of political partisan identity on how an individual perceives and makes judgments on alleged perpetrators of sexual assault. Existing research does not explicitly address the effects of partisanship on judgments on sexual assault. This paper seeks not only to explore the potential link between an individual's political alignment and his or her judgments on a sexual assault accusation, but also to compare this link in a purely political versus professional context.

In addition to its obvious moral violations, sexual assault also continues to be frequent and has massive socioeconomic consequences. Today, a culture of victim-blaming persists (Bieneck & Krahe 2011) and rape myths continue to bolster broader rape culture, contributing to the underreporting of sexual violence.

Concurrent with these trends in sexual assault is growing polarization between the Democratic and Republican parties. Recent data from the Pew Research Center reports that Americans are more divided along ideological lines than at any point in the last 20 years (Pew Research Center 2014) as ideological overlap between members of these parties continue to decrease. American constituent ideology continues to skew toward the extremes (Brookings 2019) as negative partisanship simultaneously increases (Pew Research Center 2014).

Especially since sexual assault solidly straddles the social and political spheres of modern American life, a better understanding of the association between political identity and judgments on sexual assault is essential. As a salient social and personal offense, sexual assault is a prominent issue not only in big politics as covered in the media, but also in daily life. This research would be valuable in understanding the true depth of influence of partisan mindsets and whether it affects the everyday American beyond a purely political context. Existing research on workplace sexual harassment is limited, though according to data from the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

suggest that the number of sexual harassment allegations from 2010 to 2018 has barely decreased from 7944 to 7609 while the number of resolutions has dropped more significantly within the same time frame from 8959 to 7986 (2018).

Clearly, sexual assault is still an outstanding issue in the workplace. Understanding the extent of the effects of political mindsets in interpersonal interactions in a professional environment can offer new perspectives on how to prevent workplace sexual harassment. This research would also bring the broad, contentious issue of sexual assault into a more focused and relatable scale, hopefully leading to actionable findings that help working professionals keep each other accountable during a time when many politicians seem to escape consequences despite credible accusations. Overall, this research is especially relevant today as conversations about gender equality and sexual violence are brought into the public spotlight. Ideally, it will provide some insight into how to resolve future allegations and means of fairly judging both alleged perpetrators and victims of sexual violence.

Literature Review

Prevalence of Sexual Assault

Despite the emphasis on equality in the United States, one of the most striking violations of civil rights today is the prevalence of sexual assault. In recent times, there have been several high-profile cases in which government officials have been accused of sexual assault. While names such as Donald Trump or Brett Kavanaugh come to mind in this discussion, sexual assault and harassment are still rampant in other segments of everyday life, namely in the workplace.

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (Truman & Langton 2015), one in five women will be raped at some point in her life and the CDC reports that only about 23% of sexual assaults are actually reported to the police. The epidemic of sexual assault is also extremely costly, leading to decreased productivity and lost wages for the victim (MacMillan 2000) while

costing the US government about \$127 billion as of 1997 (Miller et al. 1996). Specifically, in the workplace, Schneider had found that sexual harassment can even come to be considered as normative, often resulting in the survivor, not the perpetrator, being unfairly labeled as “deviant”. In these circumstances, victims are often faced with the choice of acclimating to a threatening environment or quitting, both of which would allow for the continuation of assault in the workplace (1991). In general, a culture of victim-blaming continues to be sustained, as individuals seem to employ a special leniency bias in cases of sexual assault as compared to other crimes like robbery (Bieneck & Krahé 2011).

Today, sexual assault straddles the social and political spheres of modern American life as it reported with greater frequency and has been magnified by the spotlight of major media outlets in recent years. As federal officials are accused of sexual assault, other government representatives and constituents often take a side – supporting and granting credibility to the alleged victim, or in other cases, vindicating the accused, sometimes without consideration of existing evidence. In this process, an individual’s political alignment plays a role in determining how this individual perceives and judges a case of sexual assault.

Cases of Sexual Assault in Politics

Sexual assault takes place in many settings in modern American life, but some of the most prominent cases are those that have recently surfaced in the realm of politics. Politicians and government officers often come under public scrutiny when they are up for election or have been nominated for a position. In each of the following cases, current President Donald Trump and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh faced accusations of sexual assault, but each suffered minimal consequences despite the alleged transgressions. Cases like theirs, detailed below, have brought the issue of sexual assault into the spotlight of the public eye.

President Donald Trump

During his campaign and term as president thus far, Donald Trump has been accused of being a perpetrator in a laundry list of sexual misconduct episodes. Even previous to his campaign, two allegations, including one by his ex-wife Ivana Trump became prominent, but the major incident that concretized his lewd behavior was the leakage of the Access Hollywood Tape on October 7th, 2016. In the recording, Trump, then a presidential candidate, is heard bragging that he “can do anything to women” including “kissing them” and “grab[bing] ‘em by the pussy.”

Despite this audio evidence, Trump and his defenders have excused this misogynist language as “locker room talk.” Following the tape’s release, Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine, as Democrat and Trump’s opponents in the race, swiftly and publicly condemned his behavior, taking to Twitter, claiming that the incident was “horrific” and that he could not be “allow[ed]... to become president” (Tani 2016). While the tape gave Democrats like Clinton additional justification of Trump’s inadequacy as a presidential candidate, Republican reaction was different. While now-Vice President Mike Pence initially claimed to be “offended” by Trump’s comments he did not withdraw his support. Republican leaders including House Speaker Paul Ryan, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus displayed similar behavior, with verbal condemnation accompanied by ultimate endorsement by the Trump campaign (Wellford 2016). Few Republican members of Congress actually withdrew their support, suggesting that partisan identity and motivation to win an election outweigh moral values and perhaps even personal beliefs.

Similar reactions seem to be mirrored in public opinion in the week following the release of the tape. 74% of Republicans did not believe that sexual assault would disqualify Trump from the presidency, while only 18% of Democrats held the same opinion (Moore 2016). Similarly, only 12% of Republicans believed that the sexual assault allegations were credible compared to 70% of

Democrats (Moore 2016). These partisan divides were much more conspicuous and even more salient than gender ones.

The Access Hollywood Tape was followed by at least 19 other accusations of sexual misconduct by various women (Ford 2017) as well as by allegations that Trump walked into Miss Teen USA pageant dressing rooms unannounced on multiple occasions. Even after widespread condemnation, Trump did not face major ramifications, going on to win the presidency. Following the Access Hollywood Tape, he also attempted to divert blame by accusing Bill Clinton of abusing women and Hillary Clinton of bullying his victims. Overall, despite serious accusations, Trump was victorious nonetheless and continues to serve as president with limited ramifications concerning his sexual misconduct.

Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh

Following his nomination to the Supreme Court by President Donald Trump, Brett Kavanaugh faced sexual misconducts accusations from Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and two other women. In this case, Kavanaugh allegedly sexually assault Blasey Ford at a house party 36 years ago. Though she originally submitted the accusation confidentially to Senator Dianne Feinstein, she eventually came forward and ultimately testified at Kavanaugh's Senate Judiciary Hearing. Despite evidence like therapist's notes and a polygraph test which she passed, Blasey Ford's credibility and mental wellness were continually questioned, with a conservative commentator even labeling her a "loon" (Panetta 2018).

Ultimately, despite these accusations, Kavanaugh was confirmed by a record low margin of 50-48, with votes running cleanly along party lines with the exception of two Senators who voted across lines. Following the hearing, public opinion was also sharply divided based on party identity. While Democratic opposition to his confirmation grew, Republican support appeared to increase (Shepard Politico 2018). According to Gallup (Jones 2018a), opinions on Kavanaugh's nomination

are the most politically polarized to date, with a 71-point gap between Republicans and Democrats who supported his confirmation in late 2018 (Jones 2018b).

Furthermore, during and following Kavanaugh's public hearings, reactions from government officials were also divided by partisanship. Trump, who nominated Kavanaugh in the first place, continued to support him, commenting that, "Brett Kavanaugh is one of the finest human beings you will ever have the privilege of knowing or meeting" (Holland 2018). Similarly, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell expressed strong support for Kavanaugh and even believed that the opposition to his nomination had been a "great political gift" that united the Republican Party prior to the midterm elections (Stewart 2018). In addition, Trump also praised party members like Senator Susan Collins who voted for Kavanaugh's confirmation and condemned the single Republican Senator, Lisa Murkowski, who voted against it.

Clearly, Kavanaugh's nomination and confirmation were exceedingly partisan, though the Supreme Court was built on foundations of neutrality. Though members of the Supreme Court are not directly elected by citizens, the president and Senate, who choose and vote on justices, are. Kavanaugh's confirmation is another representation of the breakdown of democracy due to extreme partisanship, in which Republican support alone was enough to confirm him despite significant questions surrounding his moral character. Kavanaugh's confirmation also followed that of Justice Neil Gorsuch, another Trump nominee, moves that are part of the effort to stack the court with conservative judges.

Extent of Political Polarization

Moreover, the United States has become increasingly polarized between two major parties, Democratic and Republican, in recent years. Though public opinion surveys show that Americans want politicians to compromise, in practice, partisan identity still seems to prevail over desire for bipartisan compromise (Harbridge et al. 2014). Partisanship is especially evident today, as seen in the

2016 presidential election, which both candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, faced exceptionally unfavorable ratings, while their respective parties maintained high levels of unity (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019). In this case, moderate voters also largely voted along party lines, feeding a culture of mistrust and animosity between opposing parties (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). Data from the Pew Research Center, through a 2014 survey of 10,013 adults nationwide, reports that Americans are more divided along ideological lines than at any point in the last 20 years (Brookings 2019), as ideological overlap between Republicans and Democrats decreases. This indicates a trend of American constituent ideology skewing toward the extremes, with 92% of Republicans further right than the median Democrat and 94% of Democrats further left than the median Republican. Beyond a simple division of ideology, is an accompanying increase in negative partisanship, or antipathy between parties, with approximately 1/3 of each party viewing the other as a “threat to the nation’s well-being” (Pew Research Center 2014).

Furthermore, existing data suggests that partisan identity plays an especially salient role in shaping how individuals process information and make decisions. While some studies suggest individuals are more influenced by personal qualities (e.g. personality, interpretation and performativity) of a politician or candidate (Ballacci 2018), many others suggest the uniquely high salience of party identity in individual formations of judgment. Lebo, McGlynn, and Kroger (2007) find that one of the strongest predictors of a party’s voting unity is the unity of the opposing party, suggesting strong links between party behavior in Congress and electoral outcomes. Similarly, Dancey’s research (2018) argues that voters’ perceptions are generally formed to agree with possibilities that have the most positive impressions of their party’s congressional leaders when compared to leaders of the opposing party.

Intersection of Polarization and Sexual Assault

Currently, little literature is available to directly address this partisan reality and the accompanying antipathic attitudes to the issue of sexual assault. However, studies suggest that extreme polarization may be detrimental to individual decision making. For example, Lau and Redlawsk's study (2001) confirms that voters use heuristics like party identity while voting, but that these heuristics actually decrease the probability of a correct vote for political novices. Similarly, even when provided with policy information, voters are more likely to use party stereotypes as a shortcut to complex information-processing and decision-making (Rahn 1993), which can create scenarios in which voters simply "follow the leader" and vote according to the preferences of the political elite of their party (Lenz 2012).

The outstanding question is whether these effects are at play when it comes to the topic of sexual assault. Data collected by the Wall Street Journal seems to suggest that there is a political component to attitudes toward sexual assault, as a larger percentage of Democrat women report experiencing gender-based discrimination compared to Republican women, while 74% of Democrat women and 64% of Democrat men believe that more improvement is necessary concerning sexual violence compared to a 33% of Republican women and 20% of Republican men (Galston 2017).

However, more information is necessary to understand the extent of the influence of partisan heuristics on how individuals make decisions and judgments concerning cases of sexual assault. It may be easy for voters to simply "follow the leader" or jump on the bandwagon of their parties when the accused is a public political figure. These shortcuts may not be as easy to take in the workplace, even if the decision-maker and perpetrator each solidly identify with a political party. As sexual assault continues to be a prominent topic that permeates the modern American society, political environment, and economy, my research seeks to further understand the impact of growing partisan polarization on how alleged perpetrators of sexual harassment are perceived. Particularly,

this work will assess these judgments and the use of partisan heuristics when the accusation is in a political environment compared to when they are in a professional workplace.

Social Identity and In-group Favoritism

Political parties can also be understood in terms of social identity theory, which helps explain people's behaviors both within and between groups. According this line of thought, individuals possess various social identities derived from group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and as a result, feel the need to perceive themselves and their groups in a positive manner (Tropp & Wright, 2001).

As such, group-affirmation can exacerbate group-serving biases in certain contexts, including political ones. Particularly, in their study, Ehrlich and Gramzow (2015) found that participants tended to evaluate members of the opposing political party more negatively than they evaluated members of their own party. Furthermore, affirming this group identity only made individuals identify with their parties even more strongly, exacerbating negative ratings of opposing party members.

Furthermore, other scholars suggest that social identity theory can also affect how individuals perceive the truthfulness of others. Free from the influence of any social biases, truth default theory implies that people expect the truth from each other and default to believing other people's messages (Levine, 2014). However, social identity theorists have found that group members have a psychological attachment to believing in-group members while disbelieving out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This, again, is true in a political context, in which people tend to make assumptions and accompanying decisions based on a politician's party label (Clementson, 2018). In this case, people often assume that a politician who share their political affiliation are more similar to them than a politician of the opposing identity. Overall, in Clementson's study (2018), a

politician was found to be significantly more trustworthy by participants of the same political party than participants who identified with the opposing party.

Other studies have demonstrated biases in conjunction with individuals' political identities. It is well-known that politicians' careers are particularly sensitive to scandal (Ekström & Johansson, 2008). By using vignettes that varied political party affiliation and types of scandal, Solomon et al. (2019), found further support for the ingroup bias theory. Participants presented with these vignettes tended to rate fictitious politicians with higher approval ratings and perceived them to have better characters if the given politician was a member of the same party as them. These findings suggest that individuals may judge scandalous events less harshly, depending on whether a politician is a member of the same or opposing party as them.

Research Question and Hypotheses

More specifically, this research aims to better understand the relationship between political partisanship and decision-making regarding cases of alleged sexual assault. The following are my hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *If the partisan identity of the perpetrator matches that of the respondent, the respondent will be less critical of the alleged perpetrator of sexual assault.*

As previously mentioned, partisan polarization continues to grow, and it is likely that an individual's partisan identity is especially salient when he or she makes decisions in a political sphere. Partisan identity may then be the strongest source of group identity for individuals in a political scenario as opposed to a work one. For this reason, if a partisan match does indeed affect the judgment of an alleged perpetrator, the strength of this effect is likely to vary across settings:

Hypothesis 2: *If the partisan identity of the perpetrator matches that of the respondent, the respondent will be less critical of the alleged perpetrator of sexual assault in a political setting than in a workplace setting.*

Furthermore, existing data suggests that an individual's partisan identity may influence their opinion on gender-based discrimination and sexual violence. Particularly, initial data seems to suggest that both male and female Republicans, compared to Democrats, believe less improvement is necessary in addressing sexual violence (Galston 2017).

In addition, in a study conducted on members of the United States Senate, Tetlock found that conservative senators presented issues in a less complex manner compared to their liberal or moderate counterparts (1983). The suggestion that conservative individuals may utilize less complex cognitive processes has led to my final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: *This effect will be greater for Republican respondents than Democratic respondents.*

Data and Methodology

Existing Measurements of Attitudes Toward Sexual Harassment

Previous research on sexual assault has resulted in the formulation of several relevant scales measuring general attitudes toward sexual assault, perpetrators, and victims. These include the Illinois Harassment Myth Acceptance Scale (ISHMA) and the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale – Short Form (IRMAS - S), which consists of 20 items (Lonsway et al, 2008). Each contains measures of seven subscales – 1) “She asked for it,” 2) “It wasn’t really rape,” 3) “He didn’t mean to,” 4) “She wanted it,” 5) “She lied,” 6) “Rape is a trivial event,” and 7) “Rape is a deviant event.”

The ISHMA and IRMA have been used in past research to understand the role of rape myths and stereotypes in sexual assault on a university campus (Crittenden, 2009). This study also employed the use of seven different hypothetical vignettes between a supervisor and subordinate and asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1-4 whether they believed a given scenario constituted sexual harassment. Through this experimental design, this study found that men were generally more accepting of rape myths than women and that participation in sexual harassment training programs or classes were not significant in influencing respondents' acceptance of sexual harassment mythologies.

The IRMAS was also used in a separate study that focused on male collegiate athletes and their beliefs and attitudes toward sexual violence (James, 2012). In this study, the researchers coupled the IRMAS – S with the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (developed in 1973) to measure rape myth acceptance, reactive aggression, sexual coercion, and belief in the sexual division of power. Through this, the study found that male collegiate athletes had higher scores of rape myth acceptance than non-athletes and also tend to hold more traditional views on gender roles.

Though these scales seem to be promising as an outcome variable, existing language in the ISHMA and IRMA questionnaires gender victims to be female. In addition, they are meant to measure an individual's overall attitudes toward sexual assault and harassment, while this research calls for a measurement of an individual's attitudes toward a specific perpetrator in a particular setting. As such, instead I take a scenario approach to the measurement of this construct.

Methodology

Through my research, I hope to understand how an individual's political alignment may cause them to evaluate a case of sexual assault differently. I am also interested in how this effect may or may not change based on whether the alleged incident takes place in the workplace or in a strictly political setting. As such, there are three key variables I'm interested in observing – the political

identity of the respondent, the political identity of the perpetrator, and the setting of the alleged incident. To do this, I distributed a survey to measure attitudes of American adults toward hypothetical scenarios.

This survey was created on Qualtrics and then distributed through MTurk, where I can sample a population with diverse sociopolitical backgrounds. The use of MTurk in behavioral science research has increased vastly. While MTurk samples are not complete substitutes for population-based samples, they can be credibly used if at least nine covariates (age, gender, race and ethnicity, income, education, marital status, religion, ideology, and partisanship) are accounted for (Levy et al., 2016). In order to administer the survey, I received IRB approval.

The survey that was distributed is included in the appendix, in its entirety. I also collected some demographic information from respondents, which will be used as control variables in my analysis. Additional demographic questions were also used to draw attention away from the question asking a respondent to indicate his or her political alignment. Particularly, I asked respondents to provide information on their gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education level, and income level. The predictor of interest was the self-reported political alignment of the respondents (Democrat, Republican, or Independent / Other).

Measuring attitudes toward cases of sexual assault may be difficult and subjective, but I attempted to combat this difficulty by having respondents read hypothetical vignettes and then answer questions related to the perpetrator in the scenario. There was a total of four scenarios, which are included in the survey in the appendix. These scenarios varied on two dimensions – the setting of the vignette and the partisanship of the perpetrator. Similar to respondent partisanship, the perpetrator will be either a Democrat or Republican while the context will be either in a professional workplace or political setting. In the political scenario, the perpetrator was a career politician running for reelection, while in the workplace scenario, the perpetrator will be a

supervisor. Subsequently, participants were asked questions regarding how willing they were to support the perpetrator in an election or in a promotion, how likely he or she believed the accusations to be true, how much they agreed that the alleged perpetrator should resign, and how much they agreed that the perpetrator should resign once guilt was confirmed.

To understand the survey results, I ran statistical analyses by using ANOVAs with the four response variables: 1) likeliness to support the perpetrator, 2) likeliness to believe accusations to be true, and 3) belief that the perpetrator should resign based on the allegations, and 4) belief that the perpetrator resign if found guilty of the allegations. Each of these were evaluated with a question following the vignettes were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The predictors were partisan identity of the respondent, partisan identity of the perpetrator, and scenario of the incident. Each participant will read only one randomly assigned scenario. Since it is likely to affect the results, respondent gender will also be included as a factor in a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA. Through these analyses, I evaluated whether the predictors of interest were significant in impacting judgments on sexual assault.

Results

To test the three aforementioned hypotheses, I employed a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA, which included the following binary factors: perpetrator party (0 = Democratic, 1 = Republican), respondent party (0 = Democratic, 1 = Republican), scenario received (0 = political, 1 = workplace), and an exploratory analysis of respondent gender (0 = male, 1 = female). In addition, to control for their effects, party strength, or the level to which a respondent identified with their political party, and age were included as covariates in the ANOVA. To do so I randomly assigned one of four vignettes to 435 participants on Mechanical Turk. After reading the assigned vignette, each

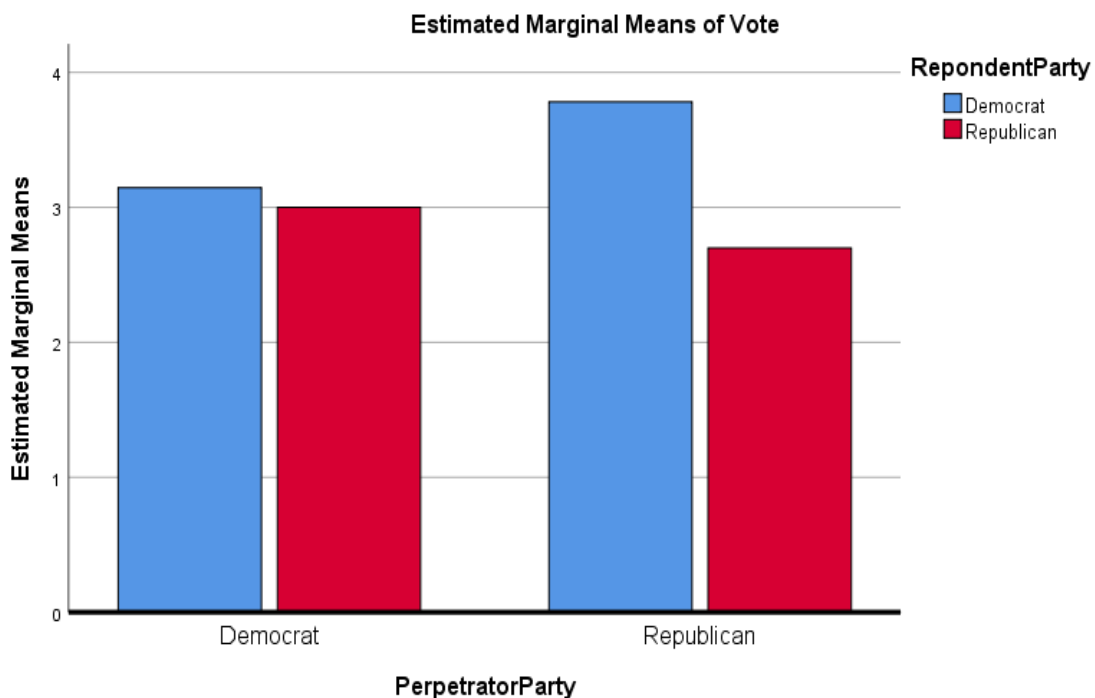
participant then answered the four dependent variable questions on a scale of (1) Extremely likely to (5) Extremely unlikely or (1) Strongly agree to (5) Strongly disagree.

Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations of each variable, along with their correlations. According to the correlation matrix, the likelihood a respondent is to support an alleged perpetrator is negatively correlated with the likelihood the respondent is to call for a guilty perpetrator's resignation and the respondent's political party. However, a higher score of the level of support for a perpetrator was positively correlated to being a female and amount the respondent identifies with their political party. In others words, females were more likely to have lower levels of support for alleged perpetrators.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicts that respondents will make more lenient judgments when the perpetrator is a member of the same political party. I tested this hypothesis by evaluating whether

Figure 1
Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party interaction for Question 1



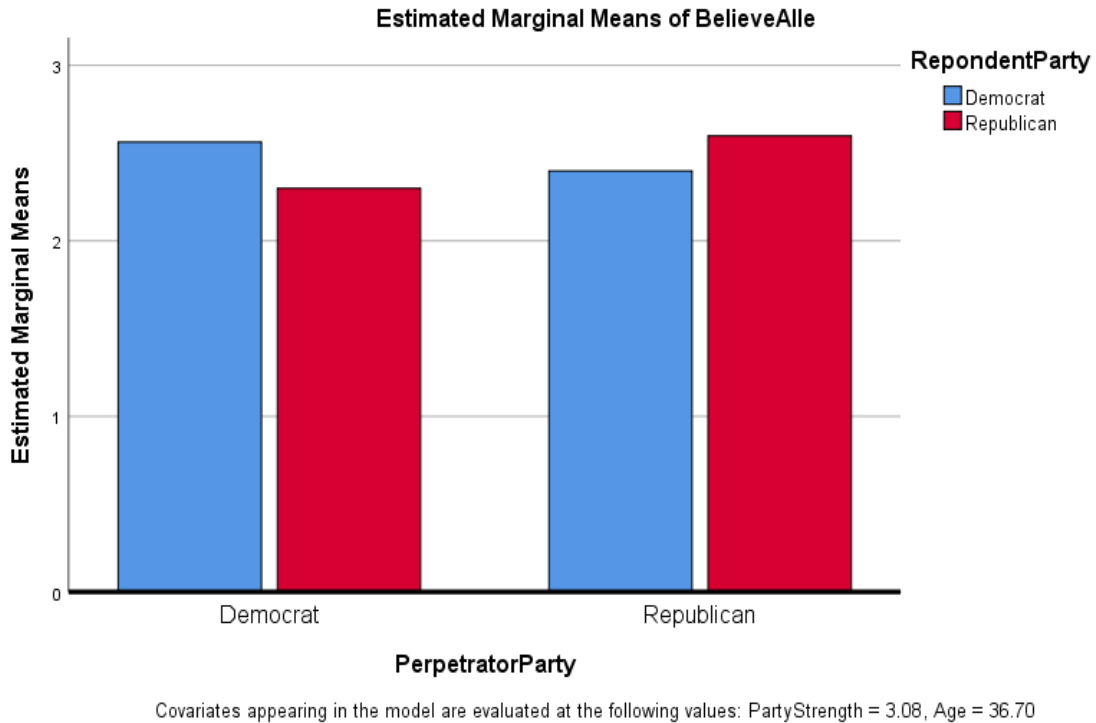
Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: PartyStrength = 3.08, Age = 36.70

the interaction between perpetrator party and respondent party was a significant factor in each of the response variables across the entire population that was surveyed. For each of these factors, a Democratic party identity was coded as 0, while a Republican party identity was coded as 1.

According to **Table 2**, the interaction between perpetrator party and respondent party significantly affected the amount the respondent would support an alleged perpetrator of sexual assault ($F = 11.391$, $p < 0.01$). This effect is illustrated by **Figure 1**, which indicates that scores for the “Vote” response variable were higher, meaning lower levels of support, when there was a party match between the respondent and perpetrator. This effect is consistent for both Democratic and Republican respondents.

A similar effect is found in **Table 3**, which includes the results for how likely respondents believed the allegations against the perpetrator to be true. Again, there is a significant interaction between the respondent party and perpetrator party ($F = 5.460$, $p < 0.05$). In **Figure 2**, a match between respondent party and perpetrator party resulted in higher scores for Question 2, corresponding to lower levels of belief in the allegations of sexual assault. This also supports Hypothesis 1, since a match seems to correspond to greater leniency for the alleged perpetrator.

Figure 2
 Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party interaction for Question 2



There was no significant interaction between the perpetrator party and respondent party for the third question, which evaluated respondents' opinions on whether the perpetrator should resign (in the political scenario) or dismissed (in the workplace scenario) as a result of the allegations. Similarly, this interaction also did not exist for the fourth question, which asked respondents the same question, with the modification that the perpetrator has been found guilty.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the effect described by Hypothesis 1 would be stronger in a purely political setting, as opposed to a workplace setting. To test this, political scenarios were coded as 0, while workplace scenarios were coded as 1. The scenario received did not have any significant main effects on any of the response variables. However, when respondents were asked to rate the level to which they believed the sexual assault allegations, there was a significant three-way

interaction between the scenario received, perpetrator party, and respondent party (see Table 3; $F = 6.269$; $p < 0.05$). When respondents received a political scenario, they were more likely to believe

Figure 3

Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender for Question 2

3a. Political Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Male)

3b. Political Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Female)

3c. Workplace Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Male)

3d. Workplace Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Female)

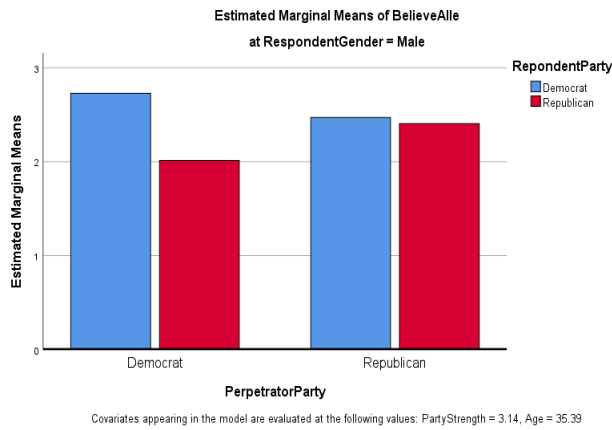


Figure 3a

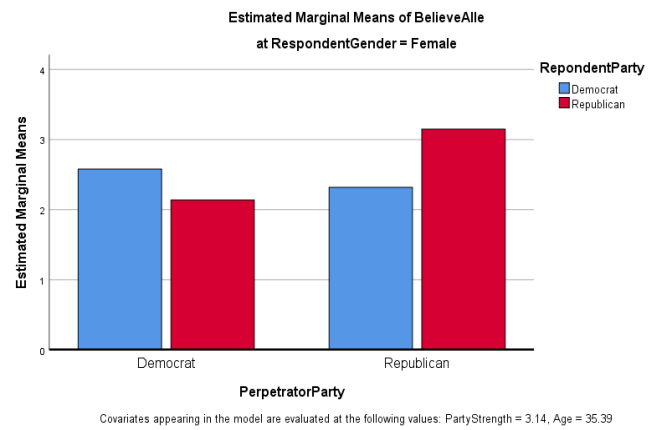


Figure 1b

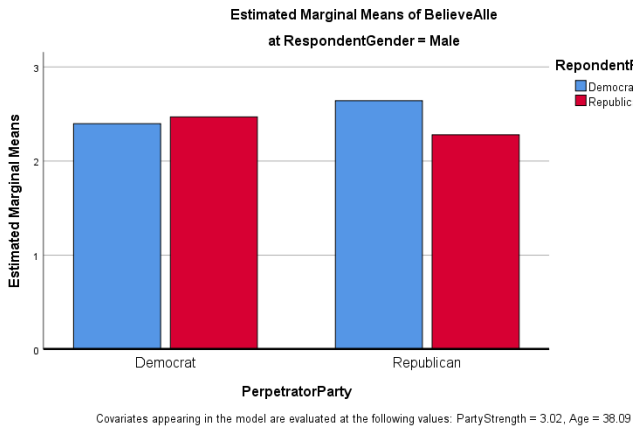


Figure 3c

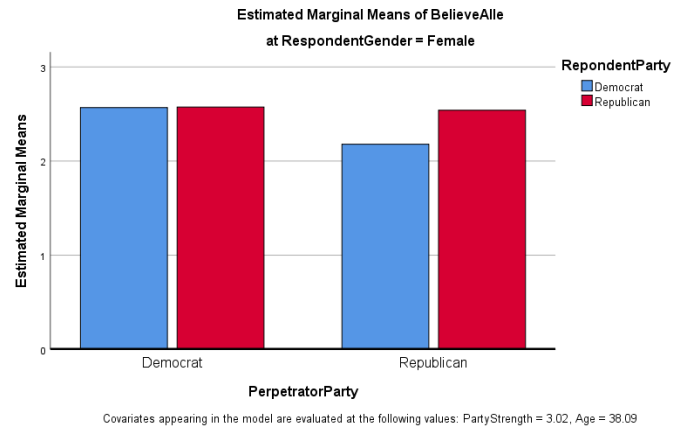


Figure 3d

the allegations to be true. However, when respondents received a workplace scenario, this effect is no longer present, with individuals responding with similar scores across parties (See Figure 3).

The same three-way interaction is also significant when respondents were asked whether they believed that the perpetrator should resign as a result of the allegations (See Table 4; $F = 7.054$; $p < 0.01$). When presented with a purely political scenario, respondents were less likely to call for the resignation for perpetrators who matched their own party preferences. However, when presented with a workplace scenario, this effect becomes flipped for male respondents and is much less pronounced among female respondents (See Figure 4). These results offer support for Hypothesis 2, since the survey results suggest that respondents supported perpetrators of the same party to a greater degree in a political scenario than in a workplace one.

Figure 4

Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender for Question 3

- 4a. Political Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Male)
- 4b. Political Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Female)
- 4c. Workplace Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Male)
- 4d. Workplace Scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender (Female)

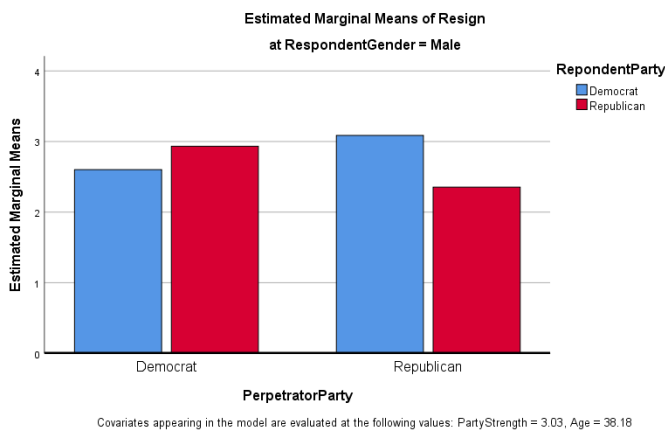


Figure 4a

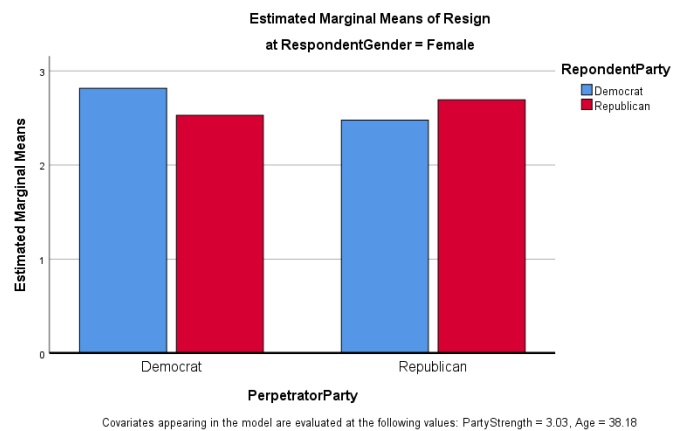


Figure 4b

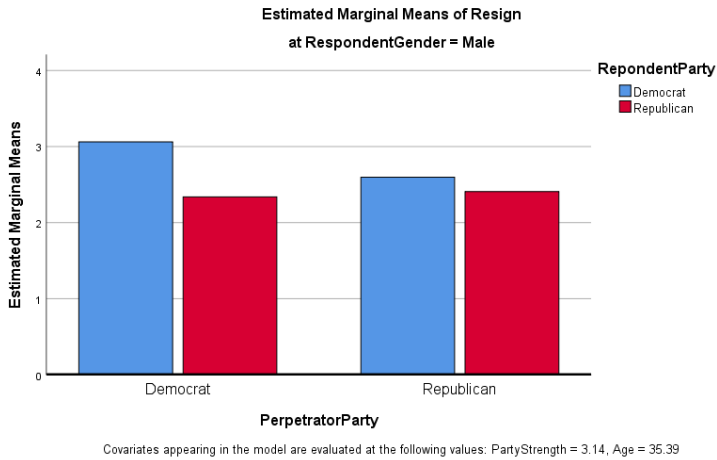


Figure 4c

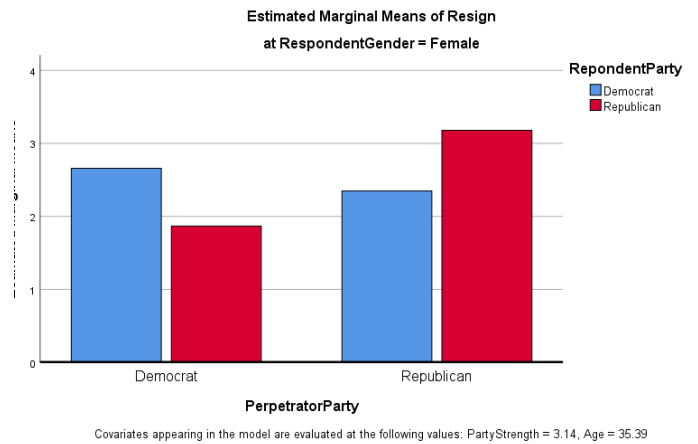


Figure 4d

I also used the ANOVA to the final hypothesis, which predicted that the effects of the party match on judgments of alleged perpetrators of sexual assault would be stronger in a purely political setting than in a workplace setting. To test this hypothesis, the vignettes assigned to respondents were coded as 1 if they took place in a political setting and as 2 if they took place in the workplace.

In testing this hypothesis, I evaluated the main effects of the respondent party variable as well as interactions with this variable. According to **Table 2**, the respondent's party identity had a significant effect on the respondent's level of support for an alleged perpetrator ($F = 18.874$, $p < 0.01$). Particularly, the mean of the responses from Republican individuals was lower ($\mu = 2.850$, $\sigma = 0.109$) than that of Democratic individuals ($\mu = 3.464$, $\sigma = 0.089$) indicating that, overall, Republican individuals were more likely to support alleged perpetrators of sexual assault.

Respondent party did not have a significant main effect on whether respondents believed the accusations, nor on whether the alleged perpetrator should resign as a result of the accusations. However, in the case where the perpetrator was determined to be guilty, the respondent's party was significant (see **Table 5**; $F = 4.960$; $p < 0.05$), with a higher Republican respondent average ($\mu = 1.640$, $\sigma = 0.076$) than Democratic respondents ($\mu = 1.418$, $\sigma = 0.063$), indicating that overall, Democratic individuals were more likely to support the resignation of a guilty perpetrator. These

results suggest that Republicans were, across hypothetical perpetrators of both parties, more lenient with perpetrators, even after they were confirmed to be guilty.

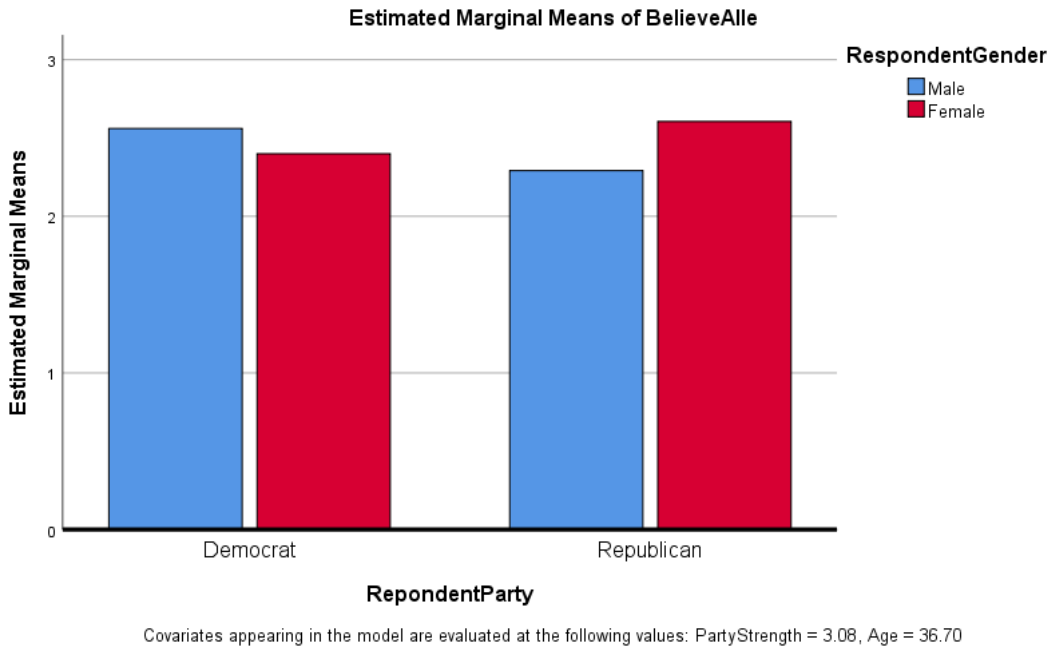
Exploratory Analysis on Gender

Though none of my original hypotheses included gender as a factor, past research and history suggests that gender has a significant effect on judgments of sexual assault allegations. As a result, I conducted ANOVAs including gender as a separate factor in an exploratory analysis of this variable. The respondent's gender had a main effect on how likely the respondent was to vote for (in a political scenario) or support the promotion of (in a workplace scenario) an alleged perpetrator (see Table 2; $F = 11.171$, $p < 0.01$). Namely, female respondents were less likely to support perpetrators ($\mu = 3.397$, $\sigma = 0.119$) compared to male respondents ($\mu = 2.916$, $\sigma = 0.077$).

There is also a noteworthy interaction between respondent gender and respondent party when respondents were asked about the level to which they believed the allegations. Specifically, Democratic females were more likely to believe sexual allegations about Democratic as compared to

republican males, but Republican females were less likely to believe allegations about Republican as compared to democratic males (See Figure 5).

Figure 5
Perpetrator Party * Respondent Gender interaction for Question 2



However, a more puzzling and concerning result is observed when respondents were asked the level to which they agreed an alleged perpetrator should resign. In political scenarios, Republican men were about equally inclined to support the resignation of an alleged perpetrator regardless of political party, while Republican females were much less likely to support the resignation of a fellow Republican than their male counterparts or compared to Democratic respondents in general. Democratic men and women were more likely to support the resignation of a Democratic as compared to Republican politician. (See Figure 6).

Similarly, after the perpetrator was determined to be guilty, Republican women were the least likely to support the resignation of another Republican, compared to all other groups. Republican women seem to exhibit the most extreme response of all groups, since highest levels of support for resignations was found among Republican women evaluating Democratic perpetrators (See Figure 6b).

Figure 6
Political scenario: Perpetrator Party * Respondent Party * Respondent Gender interaction for Question 3

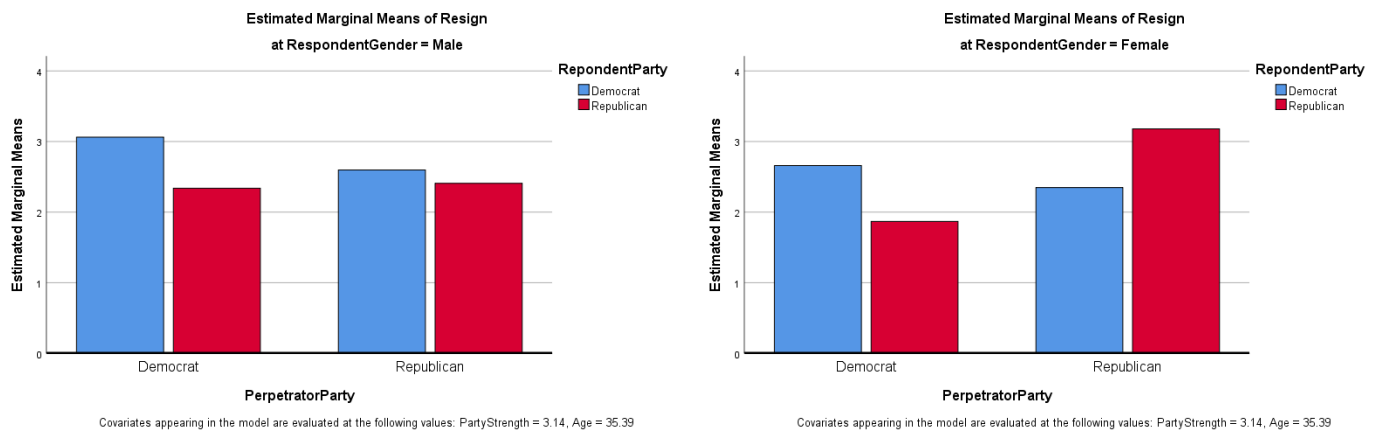


Figure 6a

Figure 6b

Discussion

Currently, the United States is undergoing a particularly tumultuous social and political era in its history. Previous research has presented evidence for growing political partisanship in the American government and among its population. This research has also demonstrated the negative social and political consequences of this growing division in our two-party system. However, my research directly establishes a link between partisan identity and attitudes toward sexual assault.

In alignment with my hypotheses, I found that partisan identity was, in fact, significant, in affecting respondents' attitudes toward alleged perpetrators of sexual assault, especially in a purely

political context. I found evidence that a match in partisan identity between a respondent and an alleged perpetrator led to a more lenient judgment of the perpetrator. Particularly, across both political and workplace scenarios, respondents were less likely to believe allegations against a perpetrator of the same party and less likely to call for said perpetrator's resignation, except in the case of male respondents who were presented with a political scenario. In the case of male individuals responding to a political scenario, respondents were more likely to support the resignation of a perpetrator of the same party as themselves (See Figure 4a). Overall, respondents were more likely to call for a perpetrator's resignation once guilt was proven.

This increased support in the case of a partisan match is likely due to in-group favoritism, which has been heavily studied in social identity theory. With growing ideological division in the United States, past research provides evidence that partisan identity does affect decision-making processes. My research suggests that biases resulting from partisanship do apply to attitudes toward sexual assault, with individuals more likely to defend those in their in-group, while judging those in the out-group more harshly. The results of my study also suggest that attitudes toward sexual assault allegations in politics align with past research that individuals found politicians of the same political party more trustworthy than those of the opposing party.

Furthermore, there is some evidence to support my second hypothesis that the bias toward in-group perpetrators is less prominent in the workplace, as opposed to in a purely political space. In other words, partisan identity was less important in how individuals made judgments on workplace colleagues across the board. This is to be expected, since political identity is more salient in making political decisions, such as the election of a senator than in making social ones, such as in the workplace. However, it is interesting that sexual assault, a social and personal issue has served such a crucial role in modern American politics, as seen in several recent high-profile cases in the United States government.

Finally, it does also appear that Republican respondents tended to be more lenient overall on alleged perpetrators of sexual assault, especially when the perpetrator was also a Republican. This includes Republican women. These greater levels of support for alleged perpetrators among Republican respondents is consistent with past data that Republicans believed that less improvement is necessary in addressing sexual violence (Galston, 2017). However, my research is limited in understanding the reasoning behind how respondents made their decisions, and more work can be done to understand why the gap between Democratic and Republican respondents exists.

Future Directions and Implications

My research provides evidence that partisan biases can affect decision-making when it comes to accusations of sexual assault. However, there are some limitations with the study. Evidently, sexual assault is a sensitive subject for many, and realistic scenarios are difficult to recreate through a survey. Reading a hypothetical scenario differs greatly from real life, in which high-profile cases are not only covered over multiple forms of media and platforms, but also presented differently by different groups of people. In real life, there are many other avenues through which bias can be created, including the manner through which news is consumed. Real life cases of sexual assault are also much more nuanced, especially since the details of each case are different, including the severity of the assault and number of allegations brought against a single perpetrator.

Besides the difficulty in replicating the reality of sexual assault allegations, my sample is also imbalanced in the number of male respondents (N = 231) and female respondents (N = 117). Overall, additional research on the effects of gender of sexual assault in politics should be completed, including the interaction between gender and partisan identity. For example, this study begs the question as to why Republican women are especially lenient in calling for the resignation of perpetrators, even when they believe allegations to a comparable level to other respondents.

In addition, my research only begins to explore the role of politics in the workplace. Future research could be conducted to understand how companies choose to deal with political or social issues in their workplace. Is the effect of a partisan match less prominent in a workplace because American employees tend to compartmentalize their political and professional identities? Is this because employers tend to encourage employees to avoid political conversations and issues at the workplace? Reduced political bias at work may be positive, but sexual assault and sexism continue to be prominent in the workplace.

Overall, more research and action must be conducted regarding political polarization and sexual assault in the United States. Partisanship only continues to grow, typically to the detriment of the broader society and functionality of our political system. This in turn affects how important social issues like sexual assault are evaluated. My research begins to explore the link between the political and social, but there is still more to understand about this link, if we expect both victims and perpetrators to be fairly evaluated. The United States continues to lack in its ability to understand and manage incidents of sexual assault, and further research in this subject matter can hopefully lead to greater justice and improved treatment of individuals.

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Appendix

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Support	3.12	1.299	--								
2. BelieveAlleg	2.47	.896	-.026	--							
3. Resign	2.67	1.164	.022	.561**	--						
4. Resign Guilty	1.55	.883	-.255**	.216**	.118*	--					
5. PerpetratorRepub	1.50	.501	.047	.048	-.003	-.023	--				
6. RespondentRepub	1.45	.498	-.311**	-.048	-.101	.094	.063	--			
7. Work Scenario	1.49	.501	.006	.021	.040	.007	.007	.006	--		
8. Female	1.31	.464	.193**	.109*	.043	-.030	.055	-.078	-.002	--	
9. PartyStrength	3.08	1.337	.297**	.086	.218**	-.083	.007	-.175**	-.041	.129*	--
10. Age	36.20	12.702	.154**	.222**	.316**	-.128**	.054	-.020	.104*	.234**	.309**

N = 435. ** *p* < 0.01, * *p* < 0.05; 2-tailed

female is coded as (1) and male is coded as (0)

Democratic party is coded as a (0) whereas Republican party is coded as a (1)

Workplace Scenario (coded as 1) versus Political Scenario (coded as 0)

Table 2 – ANOVA for Question 1

Dependent variable: Vote

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	Sig
Intercept	125.574	1	125.574	93.662	.000
PartyStrength	15.667	1	15.667	11.685	.001
Age	5.961	1	5.961	4.446	.036
RespondentGender	14.977	1	14.977	11.171	.001
ScenarioReceived	.101	1	.101	.075	.784
PerpetratorParty	1.947	1	1.947	1.452	.229
RespondentParty	25.304	1	25.304	18.874	.000
ScenarioReceived *	.324	1	.324	.242	.623

PerpetratorParty					
ScenarioReceived * RepondentParty	.054	1	.054	.040	.841
ScenarioReceived * RespondentGender	1.438	1	1.438	1.072	.301
PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	15.272	1	15.272	11.391	.001
PerpetratorParty * RespondentGender	.503	1	.503	.375	.541
RepondentParty * RespondentGender	2.079	1	2.079	1.550	.214
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	1.962	1	1.962	1.464	.227
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty * RespondentGender	5.859	4	1.465	1.092	.360
Error	442.436	330	1.341		
Total	3910.000	348			

Table 3 – ANOVA for Question 2

Dependent variable: BelieveAlle

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	Sig
Intercept	94.631	1	94.631	135.839	.000
PartyStrength	.087	1	.087	.125	.724
Age	9.000	1	9.000	12.920	.000
RespondentGender	.380	1	.380	.546	.461
ScenarioReceived	.264	1	.264	.380	.538
PerpetratorParty	.318	1	.318	.456	.500
RespondentParty	.067	1	.067	.096	.757
ScenarioReceived *	1.546	1	1.546	2.220	.137

PerpetratorParty					
ScenarioReceived * RepondentParty	.055	1	.055	.079	.779
ScenarioReceived * RespondentGender	.329	1	.329	.472	.493
PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	3.734	1	3.734	5.360	.021
PerpetratorParty * RespondentGender	.013	1	.013	.019	.890
RepondentParty * RespondentGender	3.837	1	3.837	5.508	.020
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	4.367	1	4.367	6.269	.013
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty * RespondentGender	3.741	4	.935	1.342	.254
Error	229.891	330	.697		
Total	2387.000	348			

Table 4 – ANOVA for Question 3

Dependent variable: Resign

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	Sig
Intercept	44.455	1	44.455	37.168	.000
PartyStrength	7.144	1	7.144	5.973	.015
Age	30.604	1	30.604	25.587	.000
RespondentGender	.743	1	.743	.621	.431
ScenarioReceived	.349	1	.349	.292	.590
PerpetratorParty	.214	1	.214	.179	.673
RespondentParty	1.828	1	1.828	1.528	.217
ScenarioReceived *	.592	1	.592	.495	.482

PerpetratorParty					
ScenarioReceived * RepondentParty	.004	1	.004	.003	.955
ScenarioReceived * RespondentGender	.010	1	.010	.008	.927
PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	3.062	1	3.062	2.560	.111
PerpetratorParty * RespondentGender	1.662	1	1.662	1.389	.239
RepondentParty * RespondentGender	2.105	1	2.105	1.760	.186
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	8.437	1	8.437	7.054	.008
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty * RespondentGender	9.945	4	2.486	2.079	.083
Error	393.508	329	1.196		
Total	2949.000	347			

Table 5 – ANOVA for Question 4

Dependent variable: ResignGuilty

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	Sig
Intercept	92.610	1	92.610	139.030	.000
PartyStrength	.021	1	.021	.031	.860
Age	5.323	1	5.323	7.991	.005
RespondentGender	.060	1	.060	.090	.764
ScenarioReceived	.002	1	.002	.003	.953
PerpetratorParty	.058	1	.058	.087	.768
RepondentParty	3.304	1	3.304	4.960	.027
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty	4.457	1	4.457	6.692	.010

ScenarioReceived * RepondentParty	.006	1	.006	.008	.927
ScenarioReceived * RespondentGender	.233	1	.233	.349	.555
PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	.395	1	.395	.593	.442
PerpetratorParty * RespondentGender	.102	1	.102	.154	.695
RepondentParty * RespondentGender	4.027	1	4.027	6.046	.014
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty	1.251	1	1.251	1.878	.172
ScenarioReceived * PerpetratorParty * RepondentParty * RespondentGender	2.998	4	.749	1.125	.344
Error	218.486	328	.666		
Total	1048.000	346			

MTURK Survey

Please choose the response that best describes you. Please enter only one response to each question. All responses are anonymous and will remain confidential.

Demographic Questions

1. Please indicate your gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other: _____

2. Please indicate your age: _____

3. Please indicate your Race / Ethnicity:
 - a. White
 - b. Black / African American
 - c. Non-white Hispanic / Latino
 - d. Native American or American Indian
 - e. Asian / Pacific Islander
 - f. Other: _____

4. Please indicate your marital status:
 - a. Single (never married)
 - b. Married, or in a domestic partnership
 - c. Widowed
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Separated

5. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent??
 - a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. No preference

Ask if response to Question 5 is “Republican” or “Democrat”:

6. How strongly do you identify with your political party?
 - a. Very little
 - b. Somewhat
 - c. Moderately
 - d. Quite a bit
 - e. Extremely

Ask if response to Question 5 is “Independent” or “No preference”:

7. As of today, do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democrat Party?
 - a. Republican Party
 - b. Democratic Party

8. Please indicate the highest level of education you have completed:
 - a. Less than high school degree
 - b. High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
 - c. Some college
 - d. Associate degree
 - e. Bachelor’s degree
 - f. Graduate Degree

9. What is your total household income for 2019?
 - a. Less than \$20,000
 - b. \$20,000 to \$34,999
 - c. \$35,000 to \$49,999
 - d. \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - e. \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - f. Over \$100,000

Please carefully read through the following scenario and then respond to the subsequent questions as if you were really in the given situation.

Political Setting

Vignette I:

The 2020 Senate elections are approaching. Your current local Democratic senator is up for re-election. Previously, you have held generally positive opinions on the policies of this senator, who has not been involved in any major scandals. However, recently, multiple allegations that the senator sexually assaulted a congressional staffer have surfaced.

Vignette II:

The 2020 Senate elections are approaching. Your current local Republican senator is up for re-election. Previously, you have held generally positive opinions on the policies of this senator, who has not been involved in any major scandals. However, recently, multiple allegations that the senator sexually assaulted a congressional staffer have surfaced.

1. How likely are you to vote for this Senator?
 - a. 1 – Extremely likely
 - b. 2 – Likely
 - c. 3 – Neutral
 - d. 4 – Unlikely
 - e. 5 – Extremely unlikely

2. How likely do you believe these allegations to be true?
 - a. 1 – Extremely likely
 - b. 2 – Likely
 - c. 3 – Neutral
 - d. 4 – Unlikely
 - e. 5 – Extremely unlikely

3. Please rate the level to which you agree with the following statement: The senator should resign as a result of these allegations.
 - a. 1 – Strongly agree
 - b. 2 – Agree
 - c. 3 – Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. 4 – Disagree
 - e. 5 – Strongly disagree

4. After an investigation, it is determined the senator is guilty of these allegations. Please rate the level to which you agree with the following statement: The senator should resign as a result of these allegations.
 - a. 1 – Strongly agree
 - b. 2 – Agree
 - c. 3 – Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. 4 – Disagree
 - e. 5 – Strongly disagree

Workplace Setting

Vignette III:

One of your supervisors at work is up for a promotion, and the Human Resources department wants to know whether you, as someone who has previously worked with this individual, would support this promotion. You have had previously positive experiences working with this supervisor,

who also volunteers as the chairperson of your local Democratic Party in their free time. However, recently, multiple allegations that this supervisor sexually assaulted another employee of your company have surfaced.

Vignette IV:

One of your supervisors at work is up for a promotion, and the Human Resources department wants to know whether you, as someone who has previously worked with this individual, would support this promotion. You have had previously positive experiences working with this supervisor, who also volunteers as the chairperson of your local Republican Party in their free time. However, recently, multiple allegations that this supervisor sexually assaulted another employee of your company have surfaced.

1. How likely are you to support your supervisor's promotion?
 - a. 1 – Extremely likely
 - b. 2 – Likely
 - c. 3 – Neutral
 - d. 4 – Unlikely
 - e. 5 – Extremely unlikely

2. How likely do you believe these allegations to be true?
 - a. 1 – Extremely likely
 - b. 2 – Likely
 - c. 3 – Neutral
 - d. 4 – Unlikely
 - e. 5 – Extremely unlikely

3. Please rate the level to which you agree with the following statement: This supervisor should be dismissed as a result of these allegations.
 - a. 1 – Strongly agree
 - b. 2 – Agree
 - c. 3 – Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. 4 – Disagree
 - e. 5 – Strongly disagree

4. After an investigation, it is determined the supervisor is guilty of these allegations. Please rate the level to which you agree with the following statement: This supervisor should be dismissed as a result of these allegations.
 - a. 1 – Strongly agree
 - b. 2 – Agree
 - c. 3 – Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. 4 – Disagree
 - e. 5 – Strongly disagree