



2021

Privilege & Voting for Predators: Exploring the Relationship between Privilege and Voting for Sex Offenders

Reilly Simmons
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur>

Recommended Citation

Simmons, Reilly (2021) "Privilege & Voting for Predators: Exploring the Relationship between Privilege and Voting for Sex Offenders," *Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 7 , Article 8.
Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur/vol7/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

PRIVILEGE & VOTING FOR PREDATORS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRIVILEGE AND VOTING FOR SEX OFFENDERS

REILLY SIMMONS, BUTLER UNIVERSITY
MENTOR: GREGORY SHUFELDT

Abstract

This paper was inspired by my confusion that women voted for sexual predators in several elections in 2016, despite the fact that women are usually the victims of sexual misconduct. My research question was, Does privilege affect political party crossover when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct? I hypothesized that a woman's likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct decreases as her privilege increases, and that the opposite would therefore also be true: as a woman's privilege decreases, her likelihood of crossing political party lines increases when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct.

I used a split-sample survey experiment, then ran four bivariate tests. The first bivariate test measured the impact of partisanship on political party crossover when the candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The second bivariate test tested the impact of privilege, controlling for partisanship. The third bivariate test was done differently for men and women. The last bivariate test measured whether privilege—controlling for partisanship—had an impact on the dependent variable separately among men and women.

I found my hypothesis to be wrong. A woman's privilege does not significantly influence whether she is willing to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. Partisanship is the pivotal force in determining a woman's voting habits when the candidate has been accused of sexual misconduct. I also found that a male's increasing privilege increases his likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate has been accused of sexual misconduct.

After witnessing several high-profile elections, such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and the Alabama senate election, in which candidates accused of sexual misconduct either won or came incredibly close to winning the election, one should question why. Donald Trump ultimately became president of the United

States after more than 15 women came forward to say he sexually assaulted them (Pearson et al., 2020). In Alabama, Roy Moore lost his U.S. Senate race but still received 48.4% of the vote (Bloch et al., 2017). He was undeterred after his 2017 loss and ran again in 2020. These are two examples of higher-profile cases. It should not be overlooked or understated that candidates and government officials at any level have been accused of sexual misconduct.

One might assume that women, who are most often the victims of sexual misconduct, would change political parties to prevent the reward of a political office to a sex offender, yet that is not the case, as voters elected Donald Trump and Roy Moore only narrowly lost. This paper asks why women specifically are still willing to vote for candidates accused of sexual misconduct. After evaluating the literature on partisanship and elections with sexual misconduct accusations, previous studies have yet to examine whether the several levels of privilege a woman possesses might explain the results of such elections. This paper seeks to answer the research question of whether privilege affects political party crossover when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct.

Literature Review

Certain aspects of a person's identity are powerful predictors of their voting patterns. Many factors predict why people vote the way they do. Previous literature shows how a person's race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status are all indicators of how that person may vote (Black & Stone, 2005; Crenshaw, 1997; Dunlap et al., 2007). A person's privilege, and how privilege is defined, can determine voting habits or patterns (McIntosh, 2007). Partisanship is another powerful predictor of a person's vote. This paper explores the connection between a woman's privilege and her likelihood to cross over political parties when a candidate is involved in a sexual-misconduct scandal. This connection is explored because of the gap in the literature regarding voting for candidates accused of sexual misconduct and the types of people voting for these candidates. Here, the focus is specifically on women because sexual misconduct affects women at a greater rate than it does men (World Health Organization, 2002). This study questions whether privilege effects political party crossover in the instance of a woman's party candidate being accused of sexual misconduct. The hypothesis is that with an increasing amount of privilege, a woman is less likely to cross political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct.

Partisanship plays a powerful determining role in voting habits (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Campbell et al., 1960; McCarty et al., 2016; Miller, 1991).

Partisanship has returned in a form that is both more ideological and more issue-based along liberal-conservative lines than it has been in more than 30 years. Voters are more influenced by partisan factors because these factors are more long-term compared to election-specific factors, which are seen as short-term. Voters have a certain attachment to their parties, and these loyalties to parties are what create the basic division in voters. The strength and direction of party identification are facts of central importance in accounting for attitude and behavior. Most Americans hold this sense of attachment to one party or another (Campbell et al., 1960). This attachment to one's party has held constant over different time periods, regions, genders, and races. Miller (1991) explains that year in and year out, women have been no more likely than men to cast party votes or to defect and cross party lines to vote for a president. Beginning in the mid-1970s, politics became much more divisive, with more Democrats staking out consistently liberal positions and more Republicans supporting exclusively conservative ones. This trend made it increasingly difficult for moderates to win their parties' contests (McCarty et al., 2016).

Additionally, society tends to view various types of scandals differently. Overall, people are more forgiving of sexual-misconduct scandals than of financial scandals, such as tax-evasion scandals, with the passage of time (Doherty et al., 2011), perhaps because the former depress evaluations not only of the politician's personal attributes but also of his or her professional judgment. Another explanation for this discrepancy may be that although the incidents behind moral scandals could imaginably happen "in the heat of the moment," financial scandals usually involve forethought and/or continued criminal behavior. Involvement in a financial scandal may thus be seen as a stronger signal of a politician's fundamental character than may involvement in a sex scandal. For a political figure, reputation is a decisive asset. Inappropriate behavior, such as involvement in a scandal, may leave the candidate vulnerable to commentary from other political candidates, yet candidates involved in scandals have still been elected to office. One factor that may be particularly influential in determining the extent to which past involvement in a scandal can be used against a candidate is whether it occurred recently or long ago. In the research, however, the distinction of "moral" scandal is not explicitly made clear. Berinsky and colleagues (2011) found that White voters penalize Black candidates more than White candidates when there are instances of sexual misconduct. If the scandal cue plays out in a racialized way, White voters who hold negative attitudes toward Blacks should respond more strongly to that scandal. In other words, a racialized cue should work more strongly among people who are already receptive to it. In their experiment, Berinsky et al. found that Barack Obama

suffered a higher penalty than John Edwards in overall evaluations. A negative story involving rumors of a sexual-infidelity scandal hurt Obama more than it hurt Edwards both directly and immediately, on his overall favorability rating, as well as indirectly and potentially, through perceptions of his liberal ideology. The results are not limited to a particular partisan or ideological group. In these ways, Black candidates do seem to suffer a racial disadvantage with White voters.

There are different levels of privilege and ways to measure the amount of privilege someone has. One way of measuring privilege uses a person's socioeconomic status (Dunlap et al., 2007). Economic privilege can be defined as having been reared in socioeconomic conditions that are financially stable and secure. In their article on social class bias and implications for training and practice, Liu et al. (2007) focus on White middle-class privilege. They forgo all other possible intersections related to race, making this a limited argument. In society, it is seen as normal to want to move upward with regard to socioeconomic status. When a person does not express desire for upward social mobility or cannot move up, this is viewed as deviant. Middle-class members frequently expect to get what they want because they are favored in economic institutions. Individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses believe that they are not as likely to have support from economic institutions and that they are more likely to face discrimination. The middle class is favored because it is the largest social class in society. The systems are set up to benefit middle-class members at a greater rate than lower-class members. McIntosh (2007) explains how socioeconomic privilege embodies itself through housing and the ability to move if needed. McIntosh then goes further to show that socioeconomic privilege includes the ability to choose where to receive an education. Other aspects include affording access to legal and medical help. Because the vast majority of societies are capitalistic, this allows the rich to exploit the poor underclass.

A second way of measuring privilege is via race (Crenshaw, 1997; Ghitza & Gelman, 2013; Jackson, 1999; Lucal, 1996). Crenshaw (1997) discusses how it is uncommon for White people to plainly mention their whiteness in political and academic discourse. Whiteness categorizes people into social areas that are easily distinguishable. A majority of White people view themselves as normal nonracists and are therefore often silent in times of struggle for people of color, in order to protect their own racial privilege. This silence is a type of language that many politicians take advantage of. By protecting their White privilege, they reinforce the idea of White superiority. This causes distrust and resentment between White people and people of color, and the underlying resentment builds into racial

tensions that drive political preferences. Ghitza and Gelman (2013) argue that the usual political discourse is that different demographic groups vote as homogenous blocs when, in fact, they show notable heterogeneity. The likelihood of one of the richest African Americans voting for a Democratic candidate was higher than that of one of the poorest African Americans voting for a Democratic candidate in the 2004 and 2008 elections. The turnout swing of voters is largely driven by African Americans and other young minorities. Younger White voters did not increase their turnout. Ghitza and Gelman's study is limited because it focused on the elections of only 2004 and 2008 and provided only inferences about a small quantity of demographics.

Jackson (1999) explains that when White people deny the existence of White privilege, they must be conscious that it exists. White people are systemically advantaged in society because our society was built around White people. White people do not have to argue their identities like people of color might, and they are in a position of comfort, knowing that they are usually the majority in social and political situations. These social and political situations lead to White people being in a position of power over people of color. White participants in Jackson's study felt empowered to keep a feeling of superiority. Lucal (1996) describes how race is thought to specifically apply to people of color, which leads White people to see it as something that does not affect them. Racial inequality discourse is spoken in ways that do not affect White society. Thus, White society can look at racial discrimination with disengagement. Whites have opportunities for not realizing how race works and not remembering how it works, whereas people of color are not afforded that luxury. White privilege gives White people the option of hearing or not hearing people of color. They can choose when they do and do not listen to different voices.

A third way of determining privilege is the sexual orientation of a person (Black & Stone, 2005; Blumenfeld, 1992; Bohan 1996). Black and Stone (2005) find that sexual-orientation privilege is based on heterosexuality being viewed as the most common expression of sexual orientation in society. Any orientation that strays from this expression is looked down upon, deemed inferior and wrong. Heterosexual people have a sense of superiority and an exaggerated belief in their self-worth. They also may have misperceptions about the world around them. Heterosexual people may believe that because they are heterosexual, they deserve special power and entitlements. For example, because they are heterosexual, the perceived norm, they may feel that their values are the correct values, or the only values that should be accepted, simply because they represent this norm. This

distortion of reality is painful for people to accept because they demand an examination of the consequences and demand accountability. Being accountable for privilege means that the privileged are ready to relinquish benefits and entitlements to which they have become habituated and that they recognize their aspect in the plausible oppression of others. Blumenfeld (1992) finds that any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality is thought of as able to be changed or that a person chooses to deviate from the norm. Even though homosexuality has been present throughout history, society still views sexual orientation as something that can change and that needs to be changed. Those who stray from the existing normative behaviors of heterosexual people are sometimes thought of as defectors of their sex. There are preconceived notions of what someone's sexual orientation needs to conform to or what someone's sexual orientation should avoid. When heterosexual people feel uncomfortable in an environment, they lash out at the minority sexual orientation.

Bohan (1996) explains how society rewards heterosexual people with benefits such as socially supported marriage and dating, therefore granting heterosexual people security within their sexuality. Heterosexual people do not have to suffer from violence or discrimination from institutions of any kind. They are also guaranteed a level of self-acceptance, in that society favors and approves of their sexual orientation. The system favors heterosexuality and does not question the actions of heterosexual people, whereas any other sexual orientation is questioned and the actions of people who are not heterosexual are under constant scrutiny because they are not approved of in totality by society. The dominance of Christianity in Europe and the United States feeds the narrative of heterosexuality being the only correct and natural sexual orientation; Christianity deemed homosexuality as a sin against God and an offense against the state.

The literature provides information about how partisanship heavily influences the way people vote, how the context of privilege affects the way people vote, and how a candidate's involvement in a scandal and the race of that candidate affects how people vote. This paper focuses on the relationship between a woman's privilege and her likelihood of crossing over political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct, because this is one gap found in the literature. The more privilege a woman has, the less likely she is to cross political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct.

This gap is important to explore because understanding the conceptions of privilege is important for voters and for scholars. Political party crossover when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct is important for policy makers to

understand because the voting patterns of certain people can be revealed. Policy makers can take advantage of this information to determine what types of people are more likely to vote for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct, and what groups are absolutely unwilling to vote for such a candidate or would cross political party lines instead. This phenomenon is also important for scholars to understand in order to conduct more research on the types of people who are more likely to cross political party lines in a time of such intense party polarization. Looking at how different women view sexual misconduct when it comes to potential political candidates can become a new predictor of how certain women vote.

White women who are heterosexual and of middle-class and higher socioeconomic statuses are more privileged than those who are not White, heterosexual, and of middle-class socioeconomic status. There are varying degrees of privilege, however; a woman can fit into one of the three categories and still be more privileged than a woman who does not fit into any of the categories. Besides privilege, partisan loyalty also plays a part in the crossover vote of women. Partisanship is the biggest determinant of voting habits. The prediction for this study is that with a woman's increasing privilege, her likelihood to cross political party lines will decrease when a political candidate is accused of sexual misconduct.

Research Design

The goal of this study is to determine the relationship between a woman's privilege and when or if she crosses political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The focus is on women specifically because sexual misconduct is deemed a women's issue (World Health Organization, 2002). Previous research and historical trends have indicated that a person's voting behaviors can be predicted by several factors. First, a person's partisanship is one of the most powerful predictors of voting habits (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Berinsky et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 1960). People have strong allegiance and loyalty to the political party they identify with. Second is their privilege—defined in this study through race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation (Black & Stone, 2005; Blumenfeld, 1992; Bohan, 1996; Crenshaw, 1997; Dunlap et al., 2007; Jackson, 1999; Liu et al., 2007; Lucal, 1996). The aim of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between a woman's privilege and her likelihood of crossing political party lines when the candidate from her political party is accused of sexual misconduct.

This study takes the existing research a step further by focusing on what types of women are more likely to cross political party lines when a candidate is

accused of sexual misconduct. It goes beyond the scope of regular voting habits and patterns by specifically including in the study a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. The independent variable is the level of privilege a woman has, and the dependent variable is a woman's likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The hypothesis is that as a woman's privilege increases, her likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct decreases.

More-privileged women will prioritize winning at the expense of supporting a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. Privilege allows a woman to overlook the issue of sexual misconduct and to prioritize winning an election. The less privilege a woman has, the more likely she will prioritize punishing a candidate accused of sexual misconduct by not voting for that candidate. Privileged women are more likely to see their family members or friends in candidates accused of sexual misconduct. A large majority of candidates running for office are wealthy White straight males. This fits the mold for a man who is present within a wealthy White straight woman's life. That is, the more privileged a woman becomes, the less likely she may become to believe the accusations of sexual misconduct against a candidate because she can see a friend or relative in the accused candidate.

Increasing privilege → Decreasing likelihood of crossing political party lines when candidate is accused of sexual misconduct

In contrast, women with less privilege have an increased likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. A woman with less privilege can more easily relate to a candidate's accuser. She may have more exposure to incidents of sexual harassment, assault, and violence. She may have more friends or family members who have been victims of sexual misconduct and may therefore be more willing to punish a candidate accused of sexual misconduct.

Decreasing privilege → Increasing likelihood of crossing political party lines when candidate is accused of sexual misconduct

To test these hypotheses, an online survey was administered through the online survey platform Qualtrics. The 61-question survey included questions designed to tap into political attitudes and behaviors, with each question being provided by a different student in an undergraduate research methods course (see Appendix A). The sample was recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing program. Mechanical Turk, in spite of being a more recent tool for recruiting survey respondents, is inexpensive and is documented to produce reliable

data (Berinsky et al., 2012; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Mason & Suri, 2012; Levay et al., 2016). Although the convenience sample limits the ability to draw conclusions regarding the full American public, it provides sufficient leverage to test the hypothesis. The survey, available for one week during the spring of 2018, recruited respondents by paying them \$0.50 upon completion of the survey. The survey had a total population of 751 respondents. The average time of completion for respondents was 13 minutes and 42 seconds. This translated to an effective average hourly rate of \$2.24.

The survey includes an original survey experiment in which respondents are divided into a split sample of a fictitious Democratic primary race and a fictitious Republican primary race. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two hypothetical scenarios in which a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The wording for the fictitious Democratic-race scenario is “Imagine there is a contested Democratic primary election in your state for Congress. Quinn Johnson, one of the candidates running for this office, has been accused of sexual misconduct in their history. This candidate is the best chance for the Democratic party to win the general election against their Republican opponent. If this candidate wins, the Democratic party is guaranteed the majority in Congress. How likely are you to vote for Quinn Johnson?” The respondent could choose from four options: *very likely*, *likely*, *unlikely*, and *very unlikely*. For the fictitious Republican-race scenario, the question is “Imagine there is a contested Republican primary election in your state for Congress. Quinn Johnson, one of the candidates running for this office, has been accused of sexual misconduct in their history. This candidate is the best chance for the Republican party to win the election against their Democratic opponent. If this candidate wins, the Republican party is guaranteed the majority in Congress. How likely are you to vote for Quinn Johnson?” The respondents had the same options of choosing from *very likely*, *likely*, *unlikely*, and *very unlikely*.

This question serves to determine who crosses political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The wording is the same for each, except one race is Democratic and the other is Republican. For the data analysis, only the people who self-identified as Republicans receiving the Republican experiment and the Democrats receiving the Democratic experiment were examined. This limits the data because people who identify as political independents, people who identify as Democrats and received the Republican experiment, and people who identify as Republicans and received the Democratic experiment were removed from the analysis. The name of the fictitious candidate is the same for both races and is purposefully relatively gender neutral, to prevent

explicit gender bias. The respondents have a choice to select if they are *very likely*, *likely*, *unlikely*, or *very unlikely* to vote for the fictitious candidate. The responses were codified as who voted for the candidate—those being the respondents who selected *very likely* and *likely*—and who did not vote for the candidate—those being the respondents who selected *very unlikely* and *unlikely*. Those who answered *unlikely* or *very unlikely* were considered as crossing the political party line and voting against the candidate accused of sexual misconduct. The people who chose *likely* or *very likely* were considered as unwilling to cross over, prioritizing winning by voting for the candidate accused of sexual misconduct.

Beyond assessing whether partisans are willing to cross over, this study also examines the extent of crossing over based on the degree of privilege based on a woman's sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and race. The survey questions that measure these demographic characteristics ask about participants' gender identification, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and income. Because in this study, privilege is defined by these categories, these questions help assess the level of privilege of each respondent. The question that determined gender asked, "What is your gender?" with the options *male*, *female*, and *prefer to self-describe*. Because only one respondent chose the option *prefer to self-describe*, the current study cannot draw conclusions about this group of people, and this respondent was not included in the data analysis. Respondents included 371 males and 378 females.

The survey item that determined race was "Please specify your race or ethnicity (check all that apply)." The options given to respondents were *White*, *Hispanic or Latino*, *Black or African American*, *Asian/Pacific Islander*, *Native American or American Indian*, and *Other (Please Specify)*. Race was codified as White or nonwhite. Six hundred twenty (620) respondents identified as White, and 131 identified as nonwhite.

The survey item to determine sexual orientation asked, "Do you consider yourself to be:" with the options *heterosexual or straight*, *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, or *not listed above (please specify)*. This group was codified as straight or non-straight. Six hundred seventy-five (675) respondents identified as straight, and 75 identified as non-straight.

The survey item to gauge level of income was phrased, "Information about income is very important to understand how people are doing financially these days. What is your total household income?" The options were *less than \$10,000*, *\$10,000 to \$19,000*, *\$20,000 to \$29,000*, *\$30,000 to 39,000*, *\$40,000 to \$49,000*, *\$50,000 to \$59,000*, *\$60,000 to \$69,000*, *\$70,000 to \$79,000*, *\$80,000 to \$89,000*, *\$90,000 to \$99,000*, and *\$100,000 or more*. Income was codified as less than

\$50,000 and more than \$50,000. Three hundred thirty-four (334) respondents had incomes less than \$50,000, and 416 had incomes greater than \$50,000.

The independent variable is the degree of privilege a woman enjoys. Privilege within the race category is defined as being White. Privilege within the gender category would be defined as being male, but this study focuses specifically on women and their likelihood to cross political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. Privilege within the category of sexual orientation is defined as being heterosexual. Privilege within the income category is defined as having a household income above \$50,000, indicating a participant has reached middle-class or higher standing.

To compare privileged women to a group, data for privileged men was included in order to understand if there is a difference in how privilege affects men and women. The general hypothesis was that with increasing privilege, a person's likelihood of crossing political party lines when a candidate is accused of sexual misconduct will decrease.

In this sense, partisanship was controlled for because it is such a strong predictor. A Democrat who received the Republican-primary experiment might be more willing to not vote for the candidate accused of sexual misconduct because crossing over would involve voting within the political party the participant identified with. The same logic applies to Republicans who received the Democratic primary experiment. Partisanship was originally measured in the survey with the question "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a/an ...?" The options the respondent could choose from were *Strong Democrat*, *Not so strong Democrat*, *Independent*, *Not so strong Republican*, and *Strong Republican*. For the current study, partisanship was dichotomized as either Democrat or Republican. Independents were not included because their behavior was not of interest for this study. Respondents included 198 Republicans and 312 Democrats. By taking partisanship into account, this study is able to examine the relationship between partisanship and privilege and the extent to which that relationship varies by gender. To assess how privilege affects voting amid scandals, this study relies on a series of regression tests discussed in the following section.

Results

The first test measured the impact of partisanship on political party crossover when the candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. This test did not account for privilege or gender. Being a Democrat makes someone more unwilling

to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct compared to being a Republican. This test had a *p* value of .004 and therefore is statistically significant. The coefficient for this value is 0.184, which means that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to punish candidates accused of sexual misconduct (Table 1). Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Republicans punish the candidate accused of sexual assault, meaning that most Republicans prioritize supporting the candidate with the best chance to win. Fifty-six percent (56%) of Democrats are willing to punish the candidate accused of sexual assault.

Table 1. Coefficients of Privilege, Party, and Crossing Over

	(1)	(2)	(3)		(4)	
	Full sample	Full sample	Men	Women	Men	Women
Democrat	.184*** (0.063)	.200*** (0.064)	.030 (0.091)	.335*** (0.087)	.057 (0.092)	.332*** (0.090)
Privilege		.056 (0.046)			.123* (0.068)	-.010 (0.063)
Constant	.379*** (0.049)	.237* (.127)	.439*** (0.066)	.304*** (0.070)	.135 (0.180)	.331* (0.179)
<i>N</i>	254	254	121	132	121	132

****p* < .01. ***p* < .05. **p* < .10.

The next regression tested the impact of privilege, controlling for partisanship. In this test, being a Democrat still has an impact. When controlling for partisanship, privilege does not have an independent impact on the likelihood of support for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. The *p* value for being a Democrat and not supporting the candidate accused of sexual misconduct was .002, which is statistically significant. The coefficient for this value is 0.20, which means that Democrats are more likely to not support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct than are Republicans. Controlling for privilege, 24% of Republicans punish the candidate compared to 44% of Democrats. The *p* value for privilege, a four-point scale that captures race, gender, and income, was .228 and was not statistically significant.

The third test examined differences between men and women. Being a Democrat has no impact among men; 44% of men, regardless of partisanship, continue to vote for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. Among women,

being a Democrat makes someone more unwilling to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct compared to being a Republican. The p value was less than .0001, so it can be said with 99.9% confidence that partisanship affects women's unwillingness to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct if the women are Democrats. Here the gender gap is particularly notable. While only 30% of Republican women punish this type of candidate, more than 64% of Democratic women refuse to support the candidate accused of sexual misconduct.

The final test assessed whether privilege, controlling for partisanship, has an impact on the dependent variable separately among men and women. For men, privilege, not partisanship, matters. For women, partisanship, not privilege, matters. The p value for privilege among men is .071, which is statistically significant with a 93% confidence interval. The p value for men being Democrats having an effect on willingness to vote for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct was .531 and therefore was not statistically significant. Roughly 14% of men without any additional privilege, regardless of partisanship, refuse to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. For each one-unit increase in privilege (in terms of race, sexual orientation, or income), men become 12% more likely to punish that candidate. For comparison, a nonwhite, non-straight male making less than \$50,000 is quite likely to prioritize winning, whereas a straight White male earning more than \$50,000 has a fifty-fifty chance of crossing over and refusing to support a copartisan accused of sexual misconduct.

Among women, it is partisanship, not privilege, that shapes views toward the candidates. The p value for women with the highest level of privilege is .871, making it statistically insignificant; however, it is in the direction predicted of women with more privilege being less likely to cross political party lines when their candidate is accused of sexual misconduct. The p value for women being Democrats having an effect on willingness to vote for a candidate accused of sexual misconduct was .0001, making it statistically significant with 99.99% confidence. The coefficient of 0.332 reveals a massive partisan gap. Controlling for privilege, 33% of Republican women punish a candidate accused of sexual misconduct. For Democratic women, it is a different story; more than 66% of Democratic women refuse to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct.

Discussion

Ultimately, this study found that privilege has a positive impact on males crossing party lines. As privilege increases among males, they are more likely to cross over and thus punish a candidate accused of sexual misconduct, although in

the expected direction, privilege among females does not have a statistically significant impact. For females, partisanship has an impact, not privilege. Female Democrats are more likely to punish a candidate accused of sexual misconduct, regardless of privilege. Partisanship has no impact among men. Among women, being a Democrat makes one more unwilling to support a candidate accused of sexual misconduct, compared to being a Republican. For men, privilege makes one willing to cross over.

Partisanship playing a preeminent role for women is of particular note, given the increasing gender gap. Women who self-identify as Republican appear to be unmoved on this particular issue. Republican women are less likely to self-identify as feminist and less likely to view feminism as empowering (Barroso, 2020). Issues that are often conceptualized as women's issues push women to be sorted into Democrat and Republican camps. The Republican party has a certain platform on abortion, reproductive health, gender roles, and tradition, so perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect sexual misconduct to make Republican women support their party any less. As Freeman (1986) believes, Republican women think the best thing they can do for women is to elect Republicans. Another way to think of this is that women who self-identify as Republicans are already choosing a stance on sexual misconduct. There is an overwhelming partisan split among women. Democratic women are twice as likely as Republican women to cross over. Before taking privilege into account, 64% of Democratic women, compared to 30% of Republican women, were willing to punish a candidate accused of sexual misconduct.

The findings for males are particularly interesting in that they are opposite of what one might expect. The implications of a man's privilege affecting his voting habits versus his partisanship perhaps requires further research into his marital status, or testing for specific education levels, which could be factors at play in this occurrence. What specifically about a man's privilege allows him to forgo his partisanship? Does pressure from peers, employers, relatives, spouses, and friends win out in an attempt to promote his own reputation or clout? Additionally, a man with more privilege may have greater access and time to learn about sexual-misconduct scandals and form an opinion than might someone who is living from paycheck to paycheck, focusing on putting food on the table, and simply surviving. Perhaps this issue trumps partisanship for men, or perhaps men—as those most likely to engage in sexual assault (World Health Organization, 2002)—do not necessarily view sexual misconduct as a partisan issue. Men, having a more stable position in society, are afforded more freedom to decide, ponder, and debate this

issue. Men are able to discard other males who jeopardize their positions, or they are also able to forgive and to welcome predators back into the fold. When taking privilege into account, there is a 50% chance that men will punish a fellow male copartisan accused of sexual misconduct.

In terms of future research, the first step would be to replicate this study to increase the external validity of the findings. In particular, a larger sample size would be helpful in providing a broader demographic pool. The sample size for this study had a majority of White and straight respondents. A more diverse pool would provide the opportunity to examine how privilege affects voting behavior among people of color, people of sexual-orientation minorities, transgender people, and people of different socioeconomic classes.

A larger sample size could also compensate for the design of the split sample. A larger universe would allow all people who identify as Democrats to be exposed to the fictitious Democratic-race scenario and the people who identify as Republicans, the fictitious Republican-race scenario. This would increase the number of respondents and allow for drawing more-accurate conclusions regarding political party crossover, because this study did not examine Democrats who received the fictitious Republican-race scenario or Republicans who received the fictitious Democratic-race scenario.

Revising the experiment to incorporate political independents also would provide an opportunity to examine how those with less partisan loyalty respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. Political independents were not included in this study because the focus was on political party crossover and in today's politics, a candidate is typically a Republican or Democrat, but it would be interesting to see how this group of people vote specifically in the instance of a candidate being accused of sexual misconduct. This could be a possible research topic to be pursued in future.

Additionally, this experiment was within a primary election. A similar experiment should be conducted within a general-election environment to see if attitudes are different than in a primary election. Voters often act differently in primary versus general elections; it could be expected that partisanship would play an even stronger role in a general election than a primary election.

This study also raises the question of when partisanship becomes obsolete. When is it too powerful? The most recent 2020 presidential election unfortunately brought forth a scenario not covered in my study: candidates of both political parties had been accused of sexual misconduct. In this instance, research should examine

how voters respond, including what types of groups or people are more willing to vote third party or not vote at all because of the candidates' sexual misconduct. It could also be of interest to study the specific group of people who refuse to vote for both major-party candidates accused of sexual misconduct and who instead choose to vote third party or not at all. As highlighted in this study, when it comes to the ballot box, #MeToo is a gendered, partisan issue.

References

- Bafumi, J., & Shapiro, R. Y. (2009). A new partisan voter. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(1), 1–24.
- Barroso, A. (2020, August 17). 61% of U.S. women say “feminist” describes them well; Many see feminism as empowering, polarizing. Pew Research Center. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/61-of-u-s-women-say-feminist-describes-them-well-many-see-feminism-as-empowering-polarizing/
- Berinsky, A., Huber, G., & Lenz, G. (2012). Evaluating online labor market for experimental research: Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, 20(3), 351–368.
- Berinsky, A. J., Hutchings, V. L., Mendelberg, T., Shaker, L., & Valentino, N. A. (2011). Sex and race: Are Black candidates more likely to be disadvantaged by sex scandals? *Political Behavior*, 33(2), 179–202.
- Black, L. L., & Stone, D. (2005). Expanding the definition of privilege: The concept of social privilege. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 33, 243–255.
- Bloch, M., Cohn, N., Katz, J., & Lee, J. (2017, December 12). Alabama election results: Doug Jones defeats Roy Moore in U.S. Senate race. *The New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/elections/results/alabama-senate-special-election-roy-moore-doug-jones
- Blumenfeld, W. J. (Ed.). (1992). *Homophobia: How we all pay the price*. Beacon Press.
- Bohan, J. S. (1996). *Psychology and sexual orientation: Coming to terms*. Routledge.
- Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. (2011). Amazon’s Mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–5.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American voter*. Wiley.

- Crenshaw, C. (1997). Resisting whiteness' rhetorical silence. *Western Journal of Communication, 61*, 253–278.
- Doherty, D., Dowling, C., & Miller, M. (2011). Are financial or moral scandals worse? It depends. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 44*, 749–757.
- Dunlap, M., Scoggin, J., Green, P., & Davi, A. (2007). White students' experiences of privilege and socioeconomic disparities: Toward a theoretical model. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 13*(2), 19–30.
- Freeman, J. (1986). The political culture of the Democratic and Republican parties. *Political Science Quarterly, 101*(3), 327–356.
- Ghitza, Y., & Gelman, A. (2013). Deep interactions with MRP: Election turnout and voting patterns among small electoral subgroups. *American Journal of Political Science, 57*(3), 762–776.
- Jackson, R. L. (1999). White space, White privilege: Mapping discursive inquiry into the self. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 85*, 38–54.
- Levay, K., Freese, J., & Druckman, J. (2016). The demographic and political composition of Mechanical Turk samples. *SAGE Open, 6*(1), 1–17.
- Liu, W. M., Pickett, T., Jr, & Ivey, A. E. (2007). White middle-class privilege: Social class bias and implications for training and practice. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 35*(4), 194–206.
- Lucal, B. (1996). Oppression and privilege: Toward a relational conceptualization of race. *Teaching Sociology, 24*, 245–255.
- Mason, W., & Suri, S. (2012). Conducting behavioral research on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. *Behavior Research Methods, 44*(1), 1–23.
- McCarty, N., Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (2016). *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. MIT Press.
- McIntosh, P. (2007). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. In P. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class, and gender in the United States: An integrated study* (pp. 177–182). Macmillan.
- Miller, W. E. (1991). Party identification, realignment, and party voting: Back to the basics. *American Political Science Review, 85*(2), 557–568.

Pearson, C., Gray, E., & Vagianos, A. (2020, September 17). *A running list of the women who've accused Donald Trump of sexual misconduct*. HuffPost.
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-running-list-of-the-women-whove-accused-donald-trump-of-sexual-misconduct_n_57ffae1fe4b0162c043a7212

World Health Organization. (2002). *Gender and mental health*.
https://www.who.int/gender/other_health/genderMH.pdf

Appendix A

Select Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer to self-describe: _____

2. Please specify your race or ethnicity (check all that apply).
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - e. Native American or American Indian
 - f. Other (Please Specify): _____

3. Do you consider yourself to be:
 - a. Heterosexual or straight
 - b. Gay
 - c. Lesbian
 - d. Bisexual
 - e. Not listed above (Please Specify): _____

4. Information about income is very important to understand how people are doing financially these days. What is your total household income? *Drop down menu:*
Below options
 - a. Less than \$10,000
 - b. \$10,000 to \$19,999
 - c. \$20,000 to \$29,999
 - d. \$30,000 to \$39,999
 - e. \$40,000 to \$49,999
 - f. \$50,000 to \$59,999
 - g. \$60,000 to \$69,999
 - h. \$70,000 to \$79,999
 - i. \$80,000 to \$89,999

- j. \$90,000 to \$99,999
 - k. \$100,000 or more
5. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a/an ...?
- a. Strong Democrat
 - b. Not so strong Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. Not so strong Republican
 - e. Strong Republican
 - f. Other: *(Please specify)*
6. *(Split Sample) Fictitious Democrat Race Format:* Imagine there is a contested Democratic primary election in your state for Congress. Quinn Johnson, one of the candidates running for this office, has been accused of sexual misconduct in their history. This candidate is the best chance for the Democratic party to win the general election against their Republican opponent. If this candidate wins, the Democratic party is guaranteed the majority in Congress. How likely are you to vote for Quinn Johnson?
- a. Very likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely
7. *(Split Sample) Fictitious Republican Race Format:* Imagine there is a contested Republican primary election in your state for Congress. Quinn Johnson, one of the candidates running for this office, has been accused of sexual misconduct in their history. This candidate is the best chance for the Republican party to win the election against their Democratic opponent. If this candidate wins, the Republican party is guaranteed the majority in Congress. How likely are you to vote for Quinn Johnson?
- a. Very likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely