Strategic Discrimination Against Women in US House Primaries*

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Abstract

A robust finding in American politics literature is that "when women run, women win." However, this literature's focus on the general election context overlooks a potential mechanism behind the systematic underrepresentation of women in government: strategic discrimination in primaries, defined as a bias against voting for women in primary elections due to the belief that they will face sexism from general election voters which could threaten the party's chances of victory. To date, studies of strategic discrimination have focused on the 2020 presidential primaries, which has limited analysis to a single election and to voters in Democratic primaries. Leveraging data from an original survey conducted during the 2024 US House primary elections, we find evidence that strategic discrimination also disadvantages women in Democratic, but not Republican, congressional primary elections, and only in districts where the general election is expected to be competitive.

Introduction

Despite progress towards a balanced gender composition, only 28% of current members of the United States Congress are women (Jackson 2025). This disparity in descriptive representation is substantively important, because women leaders govern differently. They are more likely to support feminist legislation (Holman 2015; Swers 2002), they are more legislatively productive on average (Anzia and Berry 2011; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013), and they are more responsive to casework requests from their constituents (Thomsen and King 2020). The persistent underrepresentation of women in Congress is especially confounding in light of the well-established finding that conditional on running, women candidates win general elections at rates equal to men (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997; Schwarz and Coppock 2022). Why, then, are women still underrepresented in Congress, as well as in most state legislatures nationwide (Center for American Women and Politics 2025)? Researchers seeking to solve this puzzle have largely focused on barriers to entry to electoral politics (Anzia and Berry 2011; Anzia and Bernhard 2022; Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Fulton 2012). This literature argues that the solution to equalizing gender representation in Congress lies

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not in increasing *demand* for women candidates among voters, but in increasing the *supply* of candidates by encouraging prospective women office-seekers to enter the electoral fray and equalizing their access to key resources.[1]

This literature has produced valuable insights into the process of candidate emergence, but we argue that studying supply of and demand for women candidates as separate phenomena has resulted in neglect of primary elections, a stage of this process in which voter demand directly affects the supply of general election candidates. The supply of general election candidates is a function not only of individuals' political ambition and elite support, but of primary voters' demand for a particular type of candidate. If primary voters are less likely to vote for women candidates, there will be fewer women running in general elections, and hence fewer opportunities for women to win elections. In turn, primary voter demand is a function not only of these voters' personal preferences, but also their beliefs about the preferences of voters in the general election. If primary voters expect that women candidates will face bias from general election voters that could hurt the party's chances of winning, their demand for women candidates at the primary stage may be diminished.

In this paper, we present evidence of "strategic discrimination" (Bateson 2020) by primary voters as a mechanism behind women's continued underrepresentation in Congress. Strategic discrimination occurs when primary voters personally prefer a woman candidate, but nevertheless vote for a man candidate because they believe general election voters would be biased against a woman. Existing work has found evidence that it occurs in Democratic presidential primaries (Bateson 2020; Corbett et al. 2022; Green, Schaffner, and Luks 2022),[2] but this is the first study to investigate strategic discrimination in congressional primaries of either major party in the United States. Although the United States has yet to elect a woman president, many women have served in Congress, making this investigation an important test of the scope of this behavior. In electoral contexts in which their is unequivocal evidence that women can succeed, do primary voters still engage in strategic discrimination? Studying strategic discrimination in congressional primaries also allows us to leverage variation in the competitiveness of general election contests in a way that existing studies of strategic discrimination cannot. Recent presidential elections have been extremely close, but the majority of congressional districts are solidly Democratic or Republican. If primary voters in these "safe" districts engage in discrimination against women candidates at rates equal to voters in the smaller number of competitive districts, whether this behavior is truly "strategic" or instead reflects first-order bias would be called into question.

[1] Incumbency advantage also undoubtedly contributes to the slow march towards gender equity in Congress. However, if one examines women as a percentage of all non-incumbent winners of House seats, the gender disparity persists, illuminating the presence of additional factors. In 2022, women made up 28.6% of non-incumbent winners and in 2024, women were 26.1% (Dittmar 2025).

[2] Kato, Lu, and Endo (2025) also document evidence of strategic discrimination against women in local elections in Japan.

Using a new dataset of survey responses from voters in select 2024 congressional primary elections, we present evidence that Democratic voters engage in strategic discrimination against women running in congressional primaries in competitive general election contests, but not in districts in which the Democratic nominee is the presumptive winner of the general election. We find minimal evidence of strategic discrimination among Republican primary voters. We leverage high-quality public opinion polling from the same election cycle to demonstrate that this is consistent with partisans' beliefs about women candidates' prospects: Democratic voters are uniquely pessimistic about the degree of discrimination women face and about how the prospects of a high-profile woman candidate, Kamala Harris, were impacted by her gender. This finding is normatively troubling given that research finds minimal first-order bias against women candidates, and in some cases even a preference for women (Hassell and Visalvanich 2024; Schwarz and Coppock 2022; Weissman Forthcoming). We also find that strategic discrimination is most prevalent among Democratic primary voters who are more ideologically extreme and affectively polarized, confirming the theoretical implication that higher perceived costs of out-party success motivate strategic primary voting behavior.

Our findings suggest that strategic discrimination in Democratic congressional primaries constricts the supply of women candidates in general elections, despite the existing literature implying that these candidates would likely succeed at rates equal to men. In addition to encouraging prospective women candidates about their chances of winning, our research indicates that more work must be done to convince primary voters — especially those most cognizant of ongoing gender bias and discrimination — that when they nominate women, those women can go on to win.

Primaries: a missing piece in the puzzle of women's underrepresentation?

The theory of strategic discrimination rests on the distinctive decision-making process of primary voters under specific circumstances. Where electoral districts heavily favor one party, the primary election of the dominant party effectively decides the outcome of the general election, thus removing the impact of general election considerations on primary election vote choice. However, in districts that are more evenly balanced, primary elections take on added significance: primary voters are tasked with choosing not only a candidate whom they personally support, but one who will have a good chance of winning a competitive general election. Empirically, primary voters have been shown to value electability as well as policy agreement (Hall and Snyder Jr 2015; Hillygus and Treul 2014; Simas 2017) and to favor candidates based on their perceived chances in the general election (Rickershauser and Aldrich 2007; Cherry and Kroll 2003; Simas 2017; Minozzi

and Woon 2023).[3] This literature indicates that in competitive districts, policy congruence with voters in one's own party may not be enough to secure the nomination; candidates may also need to convince these voters that those beyond their base will be willing to support them as well.

Research on voters' responses to women general election candidates indicates that voters need not engage in strategic discrimination on the basis of candidates' gender. Study after study has found that women candidates do not face systematic bias at the polls (Hayes and Lawless 2016; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997; Thomsen and King 2020). In a meta-analysis of conjoint experiments, Schwarz and Coppock (2022) find that women candidate profiles garner support equal to men candidate profiles across a broad range of hypothetical contests. In other words, "when women run, women win."

Since examining voters' "demand" for women candidates does not turn up evidence of systematic bias, scholars have understandably turned to studying differences in candidate "supply" to explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in elective office. This literature demonstrates that women are less likely than men to hold ambition for elective office (Bos et al. 2022; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Elder 2004; Piscopo 2019), and that elite recruitment is especially influential for prospective women candidates (Crowder-Meyer 2013; Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece 2017). Women also tend to underestimate their qualifications to run (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Lawless and Fox 2005), and to anticipate facing gender bias on the campaign trail (Butler and Preece 2016; Hayes and Lawless 2016), making them less likely to enter a race than similarly-qualified men. In sum, this literature provides extensive evidence that gender biases in political socialization impact the supply of women candidates in ways that limit prospects for equal representation.

This literature presents a convincing, but as we will argue, incomplete, account of the mechanisms behind the underrepresentation of women. Occurring after candidate emergence and before the general election, primary elections are a stage of the electoral process at which voter demand partially determines candidate supply. If primary voters doubt a candidate's chances of winning the general election, they may "strategically discriminate" against that candidate, even if they would prefer to have that candidate as their representative. As a result, the candidates "supplied" as options available to the general electorate reflect not only primary voters' personal preferences, but also their strategic inferences about the general electorate's views. Existing literature documents strategic discrimination against women candidates in the 2020 Democratic presidential primaries (Bateson 2020; Corbett et al. 2022; Green, Schaffner, and Luks 2022). Bateson (2020) shows that contrary to empirical findings of women general election candidates' equal chances of success, voters believe women to be less electable and that this belief costs women candidates votes, both in survey experiments and

[3]Though not all studies of strategic discrimination find such clear evidence; see Abramowitz, McGlennon, and Ronald (1981), Steger (2007), and Nielsen and Visalvanich (2017).

in actual elections. Furthermore, this belief is strongest among those who perceive the greatest amount of sexism among other voters, leading to the ironic outcome that those who are the most likely to value women's empowerment — and therefore to have a strong first-order preference for women representatives — are also the most likely to engage in strategic discrimination — that is, to vote in ways that constrict the supply of women candidates in general elections.

The existing literature leaves an important implication of the theory of strategic discrimination untested: because presidential races are nationwide and consistently competitive, these studies cannot evaluate whether primary voters' strategic discrimination against women candidates is conditional on the general election context. At the congressional level, Lawless and Pearson (2008) show that women win primary elections at rates equal to men, but they do not distinguish between primary elections whose winners will go on to run in competitive versus non-competitive general elections. Cowburn and Conroy (2025) find that general election competitiveness is indeed associated with lower win rates for women candidates in Democratic congressional primaries, but this research does not establish voter-level reasons for this difference. In this paper, we present data at the individual voter level to demonstrate that strategic considerations specific to competitive congressional districts do appear to contribute to women's underrepresentation in Congress.

Strategic discrimination complements rather than contradicts the existing literature on women's underrepresentation. First, strategic discrimination in primary elections is entirely consistent with the paucity of evidence that general election voter demand is biased against women, since it requires only that primary voters *believe* that such a bias exists. Second, strategic discrimination can exist alongside and even help to explain the gender gap in candidate entry: if women considering congressional candidacies believe they will face strategic discrimination at the primary stage, they may be less likely to run in the first place.

Assessing the evidence of strategic discrimination is important because despite the compatibility of this theory with existing explanations, it implies different solutions for addressing women's underrepresentation. The literature on candidate supply emphasizes the importance of encouraging women to run for office (Pate and Fox 2018) and encouraging political elites to actively recruit them (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013). However, if primary voters are engaging in strategic discrimination against women candidates, equalizing candidate entry will not be sufficient to equalize the supply of general election candidates. Rather, it will also be necessary to update primary voters' beliefs about women candidates' prospects of success.

Theory and hypotheses

We expect that we will observe evidence of strategic discrimination when two conditions are met. The first condition is that primary voters must perceive general election voters to be biased against women. If primary voters believe that women candidates have chances equal to men, there is no strategic reason not to vote for them. The second condition is that the general election must be expected to be close, and therefore competitive. If the primary election either decides the outcome of the general election (in the case of districts that are safe for the party of the primary in question) or alternatively has no bearing on the outcome of the general election (in the case of districts that are safe for the other party), primary voters need not consider the preferences of the general electorate — the primary is either decisive or purely expressive.

We test these conditions in the context of the 2024 congressional primaries. In addition to providing variation in general election competitiveness and enabling us to look for strategic discrimination among Republicans as well as Democrats, this context arguably provides a harder case for detecting strategic discrimination than the existing research on this theory, which analyzes the contest for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination (Bateson 2020; Masket 2020; Corbett et al. 2022; Green, Schaffner, and Luks 2022). In this case, Democratic primary voters were tasked with selecting a candidate who would prevent Donald Trump from serving a second term, creating a sense of exceptionally high stakes that likely increased strategic considerations. Additionally, Trump's association with overt sexism and sexual assault, as well as his triumph over the first woman to be nominated for president by a major party in 2016, raised the salience of gender bias in the election. Putting aside the specifics of the 2020 election, strategic discrimination could be more likely in presidential contests because a woman still has not served as president of the United States, whereas the presence of Congresswomen provides concrete evidence that it is possible for women to win congressional races. A finding of strategic discrimination against women congressional candidates would thus provide evidence of greater generalizability of this theory than has been previously established.

Our analysis proceeds in two stages. First, we test whether the first condition, perceptions of bias against women, was likely to hold in Democratic and Republican primaries in 2024. The existing strategic discrimination literature provides ample evidence that Democratic voters were concerned about presidential candidates' electability in 2020 (Bateson 2020; Green, Schaffner, and Luks 2022; Hassell and Visalvanich 2024), and Hayes and Lawless (2016) find that Republicans perceived significantly less bias against women running for political office. Based on these findings, we expect to find that Democratic voters in 2024 were distinctively pessimistic about women candidates' chances of success. We test this hypothesis through a novel analysis of a large-scale, nationally-representative poll of Democratic and Republican voters conducted in the lead-up to

the 2024 election (AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research 2024).

Second, we leverage an original survey dataset to look for voter-level evidence of strategic discrimination against women candidates running in primaries in both competitive and non-competitive districts. In non-competitive districts, we expect primary voters to support the candidate they most strongly personally prefer, because the primary election will either effectively decide the outcome of the general election or will have no bearing on it at all.[4] In competitive districts, we expect that a meaningful share of Democratic primary voters who express a personal preference for a woman candidate will express an intent to vote for a different candidate in the primary, implying that they are trading off some of their personal preferences to support a nominee they perceive as more "strategic." We do not expect to observe this pattern in Republican primaries, because we do not expect that Republican voters, on average, believe that women candidates are likely to face discrimination from the general electorate.

We also investigate the role of voter ideology and affective partisanship in motivating strategic discrimination. Primary voters with the most to lose from an out-party victory are likely to feel that the stakes of the general election are higher, and so may be more strategic in selecting their primary vote choice. Among Democratic primary voters, we expect that liberal ideology and polarized partisan affect will be associated with higher rates of defection away from preferred women candidates in competitive contexts.

Preliminary analysis: partisans' beliefs about gender discrimination and women candidates

Publicly available data from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research allows us to conduct preliminary tests for partisan differences in beliefs about bias towards women candidates. AP-NORC surveyed 1,059 Democrats and Democratic leaners and 574 Republicans and Republican leaners using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus between September 12 and September 16, 2024 (AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research 2024). As part of a longer survey instrument, participants were asked: "How much discrimination do you think there is against the following in the United States today," with two items measuring perceptions of discrimination against women and men. Response options were "None at all," "Only a little", "Some," and "A lot." Participants were also asked whether being a woman would help or hurt Kamala Harris's chances of

[4]In primaries with more than 2 candidates (or in the case of top-2 primaries, more than 3 candidates of the same party), voters may choose to strategically vote for a candidate other than their most preferred, regardless of the general election context, if voting for their most preferred candidate would be a "wasted vote" (Hall and Snyder Jr 2015). However, defection to avoid wasted votes is unlikely to underpin our results in Democratic primaries in competitive districts, because there are no races in this subset where the top 2 (or in the case of top-2 primaries, the top 3) candidates are all men. There is always at least one woman from whom it does not make strategic sense to defect to avoid "wasted votes." It is possible that voters defect from a less-viable woman in the race, but this behavior appears to be negligible since the magnitude of our results remains similar when the data is subset to the top man and woman in each race.

getting elected, with response options including "Help a lot," "Help somewhat", "Hurt somewhat", "Hurt a lot," and "Won't make a difference." We rescale each of these variables from 0 to 1, with non-responses coded as the midpoint.

Figure 1 presents weighted means with 95% confidence intervals for Democratic and Republican partisans' responses. The left-hand panel shows results for perceptions of gender discrimination in the United States in general. We find that on average, Democrats believe that women face significantly more discrimination than men do, whereas Republicans believe that women and men face equivalent amounts of discrimination. If voters apply these general perceptions of discrimination to candidates of each gender, then we should expect to observe Democratic primary voters engaging in strategic discrimination against women candidates while Republican primary voters do not.

The right-hand panel of Figure 1 presents results for how voters believe Kamala Harris's gender will influence her election chances, and indicates that voters do apply general perceptions of discrimination to perceptions of discrimination against candidates. Although as we have argued, gender may play a greater role in presidential elections than in congressional elections, we include this result because of the striking directional difference between Democrats and Republicans: On average, Democrats believe that Harris's being a woman will make it harder for her to be elected, whereas Republicans believe it will make it *easier*. This result reinforces our expectation that Democratic primary voters may strategically discriminate against women in competitive districts. Additionally, it raises the possibility that Republican primary voters might strategically discriminate *in favor of* women.

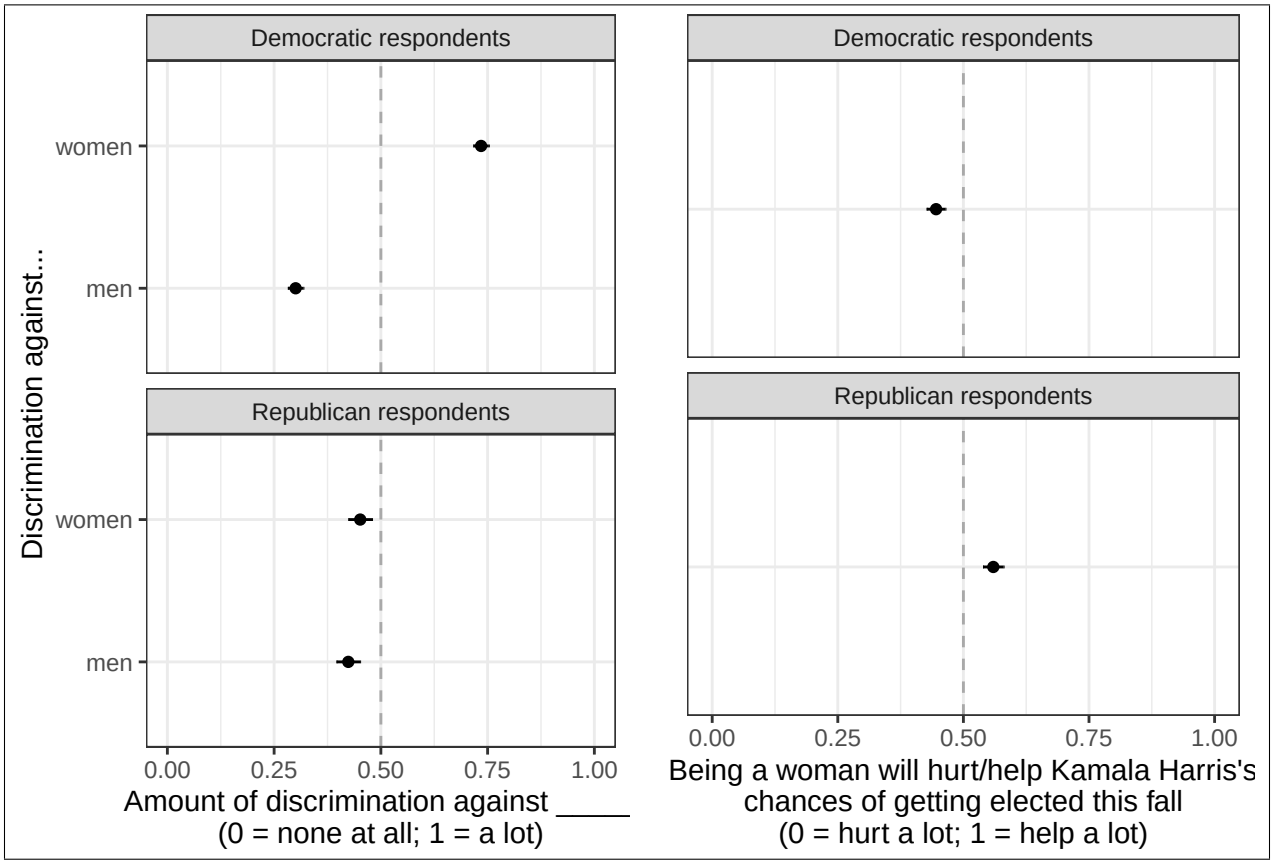

Figure 1: Perceptions of gender discrimination and how being a woman influences Kamala Harris's election chances among Democratic and Republican respondents. Data are from the September 2024 AP-NORC survey fielded via AmeriSpeak and are weighted for national representativeness. Results are presented in tabular form in Appendix Table A1.

A new dataset for studying primary voter behavior

Next, we directly test for evidence of strategic discrimination at the voter level using a novel survey dataset collected during the 2024 U.S. House primary season. This dataset was created as part of a larger project by David Broockman, Jacqueline Colao, Josh Kalla, and Greg Huber funded by the Berkeley Center for American Democracy, the Berkeley Citrin Center for Public Opinion Research, the Yale Institute for Social and Policy Studies, and the Institute for Humane Studies.[5]

The survey collected data from registered voters in 25 congressional districts. These districts were selected based on the following goals: 1) to have a similar number of Democratic and Republican primaries, 2) to have approximately 2/3 of the districts with competitive general elections,[6] and 3) to cover a variety of regions across the United States. To reduce the administrative burden, states with multiple viable districts were prioritized. Additionally, districts from California were oversampled due to the vast number of email addresses available on the voter file, resulting in an overall larger pool of respondents.

In this paper, we analyze data from the first two waves of the survey. These waves spanned the primary election season, with the first launched 50 days before each primary election[7] and the second wave launched the day of the primary, with data collection for each wave lasting one week.

Respondents were recruited for the pre-primary wave through voter file mailing and email addresses provided by L2 and the New York Board of Elections. Respondents were chosen for recruitment using a probability sampling frame based on on district characteristics, the individual's partisanship, and the individual's likelihood to vote in the primary election and general election, defined as the proportion of previous eligible elections the individual voted in. For example, in safe Democratic districts, registered Democrats who are likely primary voters had a higher sampling probability than in competitive districts.[8] The size of a monetary incentive was randomly assigned at the respondent level and indicated in the initial recruitment message. Individuals who completed the pre-primary survey and opted into receiving an invitation for subsequent surveys were invited to take the post-primary survey through the email address they provided on the pre-primary survey. The overall response rate for Wave 1 for the districts relevant to this paper is

[5]For more detailed information on the survey, see Colao et al. (2025).

[6]Researchers were interested in comparisons between primary and general elections, and therefore needed a significant amount of the districts to have consequential primary and general elections. Since primary dynamics may differ in safe districts, a smaller portion of districts were selected to account for that possibility (Colao et al. 2025).

[7]This timing was determined based on an analysis of campaign TV ads in the 2020 U.S. House primaries that showed that ads start to proliferate around 50 days before the primary election. The pre-election wave of the survey ideally captures voter preferences before voters gain knowledge of the candidate, which is why ad dissemination was used as a timing guide. Due to the surveys being customized based on the differentiating policy issues in each district, the pre-election wave cannot be so far away from the primary date that these issues cannot be determined by the researchers. Thus, fielding the pre-election wave much earlier than 50 days before the primary was not feasible.

[8]This difference is due to the survey spanning both the primary and general elections and the researchers wanting general election party voters from both parties for the general election waves, regardless of the party of the primary election studied (Colao et al. 2025).

2.7% and the follow-up response rate for Wave 2 is 37%. Appendix B provides further information about the probability of selection by district (Table B1), the district-level distribution schedule (Table B2, and response rates by district (Table B6 and incentive rates for Wave 1 (Table B7), along with other descriptive statistics.

For gender-based discrimination to be strategic, the district in question must be expected to have a competitive general election, and there must be otherwise-viable men and women candidates running in the primary election.[9] As shown in Table 1, seven primaries in the dataset satisfy both conditions. We compare these primaries with contests in non-competitive contexts to test whether voter behavior varies with electoral incentives. Across all of these districts, there are 20,815 Wave 1 responses and 7,629 Wave 2 responses. See Appendix B for additional district characteristics and a breakdown of responses by district and party ID.

In addition to there being candidates of each gender in the primary, we must also account for potential confounding characteristics. Even if the woman candidate is a voter's first choice, the voter may ultimately vote for a man candidate if that man is more experienced, more ideologically moderate, or has fundraised more, as each of these factors impacts perceptions of electability independently of gender (Anderson et al. 2025). We want to ensure that gender is the primary factor driving defections from the female candidate, ruling out other potential characteristics. Accordingly, some of our analyses include candidate-level controls that account for experience, ideology, and fundraising. Additionally, there are qualitative reasons to believe that factors other than gender are not driving strategic discrimination against women in the races we study. First, the ideology of the top man and woman candidates in each race do not differ substantially. Take, for example, CA-22, where Rudy Salas and Melissa Hurtado faced off in the Democratic primary. In a 2019

[9]It is possible that strategic discrimination is less likely to occur when the party's general election opponent is a woman as opposed to a man. However, under the assumption that voters who engage in strategic discrimination are looking to maximize their party nominee's chances of winning the general election, these differences should be minimal, since under the presumption of bias against women candidates, failing to nominate a man would still carry an opportunity cost for the party. Two districts with competitive primaries in our sample have a woman incumbent. See Appendix Table B9 for a list of all general election opponents by district.

Table 1: Surveyed districts

Party of primary/candidates	Non-competitive generals	Competitive generals
Democratic	CA-12 CA-30 CA-31 MD-2	CA-22 CA-45 CA-47 NY-22 PA-10
Republican	IN-3 IN-8	PA-7 TX-34

Note:
General election competitiveness was determined using Cook Political Report. General election races rated as "Toss-up" or "Lean Republican/Democrat" are considered competitive. The non-competitive general election districts listed in this table all favor the party of the primary under analysis. Since California primaries are non-partisan, we remove respondents who chose an out-party candidate as their vote intent/vote choice candidate or as their preferred candidate to mirror our analyses for partisan primaries.

analysis of California state legislator ideologies, Rudy Salas was deemed the most moderate Democrat in the California State Assembly and Melissa Hurtado was deemed the most moderate Democrat in the California State Senate (Christopher 2019). Out of all districts in our sample, the biggest ideological difference exists in NY-22, where the man candidate, John Mannion, is in favor of restricting abortion as a matter of personal choice after 24 weeks, whereas the woman candidate, Sarah Klee Hood, does not support any restrictions on abortion. Aside from abortion, there are no clear differences between the candidates on major policy issues.

Second, though not all candidates can be said to be of the exact same quality, gender and quality are not strongly correlated in this sample.[10] For example, in CA-47, although the woman candidate, Joanna Weiss, does not have prior government office-holding experience and the man candidate, Dave Min, does, shortly before the 2024 primary season, Min was arrested for a DUI and sentenced to three years' probation, creating a public scandal that he would contend with throughout his campaign. It is not clear that a voter would think a candidate with a recent scandal would fare better in the general election just because they have prior office-holding experience. In CA-45, the woman candidate, Kim Nguyen-Penaloza, has prior office-holding experience and was endorsed by the California Democratic Party, whereas the man candidate, Derek Tran, does not have prior office-holding experience. Again, the clearest difference exists in NY-22 where Mannion is a seasoned NY state legislator and Klee Hood has not held prior office. However, even in this case the county-level party endorsements were split between the two candidates. See Appendix Table B8 for relevant characteristics of all candidates.

To examine the prevalence of gender-based strategic discrimination in these districts, we compare participants' answers to two questions asked on each primary wave of the survey. The first is a traditional vote intent (Wave 1)/vote choice (Wave 2) question. The second is as follows:

> Earlier you said you plan to vote for [CANDIDATE]. If you could wave a magic wand that would make any of the candidates below the next representative to the U.S. House of Representatives form your area, who would you pick? You can pick the same candidate or a different candidate.

This question is designed to reveal a respondent's first-choice preference if all strategic considerations were removed. To our knowledge, this question format was first used on the November 2019 wave of the Democracy Fund + UCLA Nationscape Survey (Democracy Fund Voter Study Group 2021). In this paper, we refer to candidates that participants indicate in responding to this question as their "preferred" candidates, since the question asks them to select the candidate they would most like to have as their representative, regardless of whether they think they could prevail in the general election. If voters are engaging in strategic discrimination

[10]We conceptualize quality as a combination of prior office holding experience, fundraising in the 2024 primary cycle, endorsements, and a lack of scandals.

against women candidates, then we should expect to see higher rates of mismatches between preferred and intended vote choice candidates among those who prefer a woman candidate, particularly in districts where the general election is expected to be competitive.

Results

Figure 2 presents rates of mismatches between voters' preferred and intended vote choice candidates by party, preferred candidate gender, and general election competitiveness. The data are subset to respondents who voted in the primary, validated with voter file records, and are weighted to the voter file for election representativeness.[11] In contests between Democratic primary candidates, voters who prefer women candidates are significantly more likely to indicate that they will nevertheless vote for a different candidate (1) in competitive than in non-competitive general election contexts, and (2) compared to voters who prefer men in competitive general election contexts. In non-competitive general election contexts, mismatch rates for women and men Democratic candidates are statistically indistinguishable in Wave 1 and lower for women than for men in Wave 2. In the four Republican primaries we analyzed, mismatch rates for women and men did not differ significantly across general election contexts, with the exception of higher mismatch rates for men in non-competitive contexts in Wave 2. Overall, these patterns are consistent with strategic discrimination against women running in Democratic primaries in competitive districts but not women running in Republican primaries, both weeks before Election Day and immediately after the election.

[11] Appendix D presents unweighted versions of all analyses presented in the paper. We find substantively similar results in both sets of analyses.

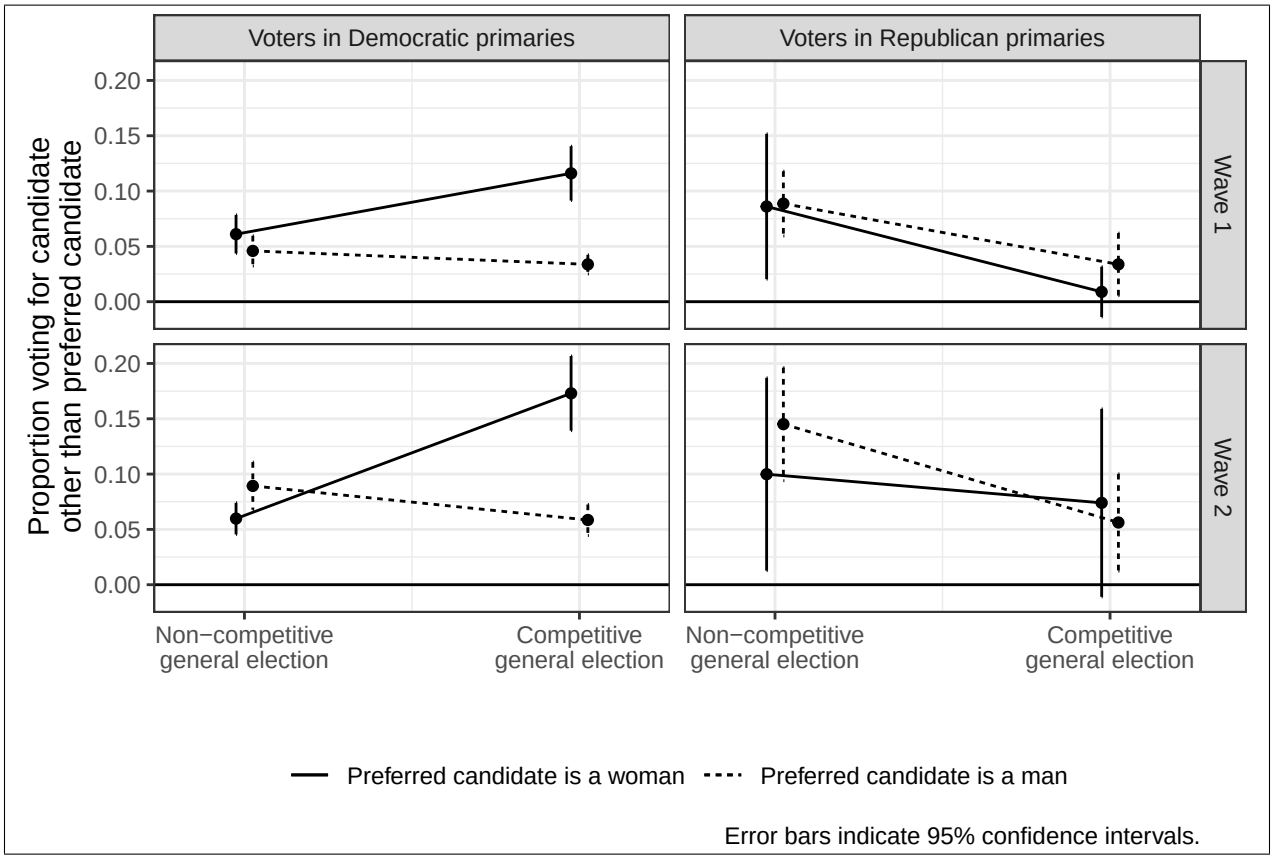

Figure 2: Rate of mismatch between preferred candidate and intended primary vote choice by survey wave, party, candidate gender, and competitiveness of general election. Results are presented in tabular form in Appendix Table C1. Unweighted analyses are presented in Appendix Table D1.

Next, we use multivariate OLS models to account for respondent-, candidate-, and district-level characteristics. To quantify the extent of gender-based strategic discrimination, and to estimate the degree to which this varies with general election context, we specify a model that interacts preferred candidate gender with general election context:

$$\begin{aligned} Y_{ij} =& \alpha_j + \beta_1 \times \text{Preferred candidate is a woman}_i \\ &+ \beta_2 \times \text{Competitive general election}_j \\ &+ \beta_3 \times \text{Prefer woman}_i \times \text{Competitive general}_j \\ &+ \beta_4 \times X_i + \epsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

Y_{ij} is an indicator for a mismatch between voter i's preferred candidate and the candidate for whom she intends to vote. β_1 can be interpreted as the difference in the rates of mismatches among voters who prefer women candidates and those who prefer men candidates in non-competitive election contexts, with positive values indicating that a greater proportion of these "defectors" listed a woman as their preferred candidate. β_2 can be interpreted as the difference in the rates of mismatches among voters who prefer men in non-competitive and competitive election contexts. β_3 indicates the difference in mismatch rates by gender across election contexts. This is our main quantity of interest. α_j is an election fixed effect, which we include to account for differences in the dynamics of each primary contest beyond gender. X_i is a vector of respondent-level controls and ϵ_{ij} is a random error term.

Table 2 presents results of this model for Democratic and Republican primary contests in each wave among validated primary voters. Column (1) demonstrates that, consistent with the averages presented in Figure 2, for Democratic primaries, there is a statistically significant interaction between preferring a woman candidate and being situated in a competitive general election context that is indicative with a higher mismatch rate between one's preferred candidate and intended vote choice. Column (3) replicates this analysis for Republican primaries and finds markedly different results: Republican primary voters are no more likely to abandon preferred women candidates than men candidates, and this pattern holds across both competitive and noncompetitive general-election contexts. Columns (2) and (4) demonstrate that these patterns persist through election day and strengthen among Democratic primaries.[12]

[12]Given the small sample size of Republicans in Wave 2, the results for this subsample should be interpreted with caution.

Table 2: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch as a function of candidate gender and general election competitiveness in Democratic and Republican primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice			
	Democratic primaries		Republican primaries	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.013	−0.017	−0.019	0.055
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.034)	(0.044)
Competitive general election	−0.012	0.100**	−0.069	−0.104+
	(0.028)	(0.032)	(0.089)	(0.061)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.069***	0.112***	0.019	0.114
	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.095)	(0.141)
Intercept	0.033*	0.054***	0.069***	0.115**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.039)
Num.Obs.	3613	3125	408	225

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election. Unweighted results are presented in Table D2.

Table 3 tests whether the finding for Democratic primaries is robust to accounting for established correlates of candidate electability including prior legislative experience, candidate ideology, and candidate fundraising (Anderson et al. 2025; Hassell and Visalvanich 2024).[13] "Prior legislative experience" is a binary indicator for whether a respondent's preferred candidate has previously held a legislative office; "perceived candidate ideology" is a continuous measure based on where respondents placed their preferred candidate on a liberal–conservative scale; and fundraising reflects total contributions received during the 2024 election cycle up to the primary election date. Table 3 indicates that gender-based strategic discrimination operates independently of these other dimensions of electability. The finding that this pattern of strategic discrimination against women is robust to controlling for perceptions of candidates' ideology is especially noteworthy, since women candidates tend to be stereotyped as more liberal than men (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Saltzer and McGrath 2024). Taken together, these results strengthen the inference that gender-based strategic discrimination is a meaningful factor shaping Democratic primary behavior in competitive districts.

[13]Results are shown using Wave 2 data. See Appendix Table C2 for Wave 1 results. Wave 1 is largely consistent with Wave 2, although the significance of the interaction term for competitive districts and preferring a woman is not robust to the inclusion of all three additional interaction terms, as in the model presented in Column (5).

Table 3: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch in Wave 2 as a function of candidate gender, general election competitiveness, perceived ideology, prior legislative office, and campaign fundraising in Democratic primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Preferred candidate is a woman	−0.017	0.005	−0.026	−0.036*	−0.006
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.019)
Competitive general election	0.100**	0.042	0.170***	0.039	0.197**
	(0.032)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.065)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.112***	0.091**	0.110***	0.143***	0.135**
	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.044)
Preferred candidate has prior legislative experience		−0.111***			−0.123**
		(0.019)			(0.038)
Prior experience x competitive general		0.111**			0.174**
		(0.034)			(0.056)
Respondent perception of preferred candidate ideology			0.010		0.013
			(0.033)		(0.033)
Perceived ideology x competitive general			−0.057		−0.177***
			(0.053)		(0.053)
Preferred candidate fundraising				−0.110***	0.065
				(0.022)	(0.043)
Fundraising x competitive general				0.003	−0.197*
				(0.061)	(0.085)
Intercept	0.054***	0.112***	0.037+	0.146***	0.069*
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.028)
Num.Obs.	3125	3125	2800	3064	2744

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Perceived ideology of preferred candidate ranges from liberal to conservative. Preferred candidate fundraising is coded as the proportion of funds in a given context raised by the respondent's preferred candidate. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election. Wave 1 results are reported in Appendix Table C2, results for Republican primaries are reported in Appendix Table C3, and unweighted results are reported in Appendix Table D3.

The dependent variable in the analyses presented thus far has been whether participants indicate different candidates when asked whom they would prefer as their representative and for whom they intend to vote, but our theory implies that if voters are engaging in strategic discrimination against women candidates, they should most often indicate that although they prefer a woman, they intend to vote for a man. However, specifying a gender mismatch between these two questions as the dependent variable in our main analysis could introduce bias in favor of our expected results since there are fewer women candidates competing in most of these primary elections. Under the hypothetical that all survey participants answer our two questions completely at random, the underrepresentation of women in primary candidate pools means that among voters who state that they prefer women candidates, the percentage who also state that they intend to vote for a man will be greater than the percentage of man-preferring voters who express an intent to vote for a woman. Of course, we hope (and have good reason to believe) that most survey respondents answered our questions thoughtfully, but any amount random error would bias a full-sample analysis of different-gender defections towards a finding of strategic discrimination against women.

We can, however, implement this finer-grained test of our main hypothesis if we restrict analysis to participants who indicated that they preferred and intended to vote for some combination of the top man and top woman candidate in their respective primaries. In doing so, we equalize the probability of randomly defecting from woman to man or man to woman, neutralizing this source of bias.

Table 4: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch as a function of candidate gender and general election competitiveness in Democratic primary contests across top man and woman candidate pairs.

	DV: Preferred candidate gender does not match intended vote choice gender	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)
Preferred candidate is a woman	−0.048**	−0.039*
	(0.018)	(0.019)
Competitive general election	−0.109***	0.029
	(0.029)	(0.030)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.137***	0.151***
	(0.020)	(0.023)
Intercept	0.046**	0.044*
	(0.018)	(0.018)
Num.Obs.	2865	2432

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election. Because of the limited number of candidate-district combinations, we do not include controls for preferred candidate characteristics. Results for Republicans are reported in Appendix Table C4. Unweighted results are reported in Appendix Table D4.

The results for Democrats are presented in Table 4. The data are subset to the man candidate with the highest vote percentage in the race and the woman candidate with the highest vote percentage in the race. This analysis is consistent with our main findings: defections away from women are significantly more common, with this overall result being driven entirely by greater rates of mismatches when a woman is preferred in a competitive general election context.[14]

Ideological extremity predicts strategic discrimination

Next, we investigate whether some voters are more likely than others to engage in strategic discrimination. We posit that ideological extremity heightens the perceived cost of an out-party victory, since the further a voter is from the opposing party's candidate, the larger their ideological distance and thus the greater the loss if that candidate prevails. Building on the classic turnout calculus and spatial models of voting (Downs 1957), this higher-stakes context should increase the incentive for primary voters to weigh electability considerations rather than simply ideological proximity. Thus, following the logic illustrated in Figure 3, we expect ideologically extreme primary voters in competitive districts to exhibit stronger strategic voting

[14]Results for Republicans can be found in Appendix Table C4, but should be interpreted with caution based on the very small sample size when the data are subset to only the top 2 candidates male/female candidates.

behavior.

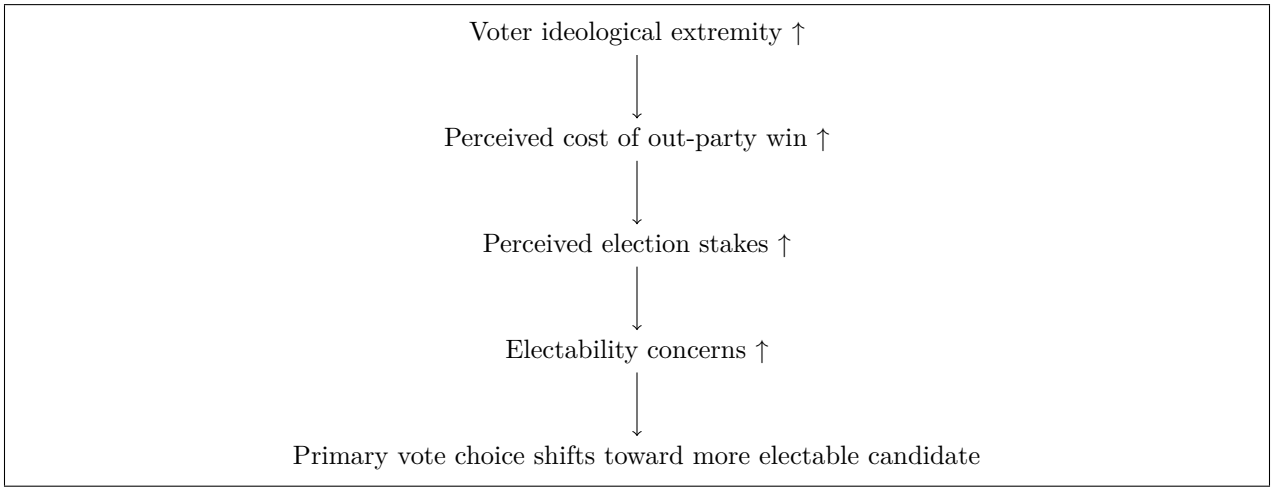

Figure 3: Theorized relationship between voter extremity and strategic discrimination in competitive districts.

This is exactly what we find when we examine strategic discrimination in Democratic primaries by ideological extremity. Figure 4 plots β_1 of the following equation by general election context and ideological extremity:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha_j + \beta_1 \times \text{Preferred candidate is a woman}_i + \epsilon_{ij}$$

where Y_{ij} is a binary indicator of a mismatch between a voter's preferred candidate and one's vote choice. Ideological extremity is a binary variable coded based on a respondent's self-placement on a 100-point liberal-conservative scale. Respondents who place themselves in the lowest quartile of this scale are coded as 1 for most-liberal and respondents who place themselves in the highest three quartiles of the scale are coded as 0 for moderate-to-conservative. Figure 4 plots values of β_1 estimated in each wave of the survey. The most liberal Democratic primary voters show a modestly greater pattern of strategic discrimination against women in competitive districts 50 days before Election Day, relative to both liberal voters in safe districts and moderate-to-conservative voters in competitive districts. This difference between more- and less-liberal primary voters intensifies in Wave 2, such that among Democratic primary voters in competitive districts, strongly liberal political ideology is associated with a 9-percentage-point greater likelihood of defection from preferred women candidates than that of more moderate and conservative voters ($p = 0.006$).

Table 5 analyzes the interaction between candidate gender and respondent ideology, now measured continuously, in estimating rates of preferred candidate/vote choice mismatch in competitive general election contexts.

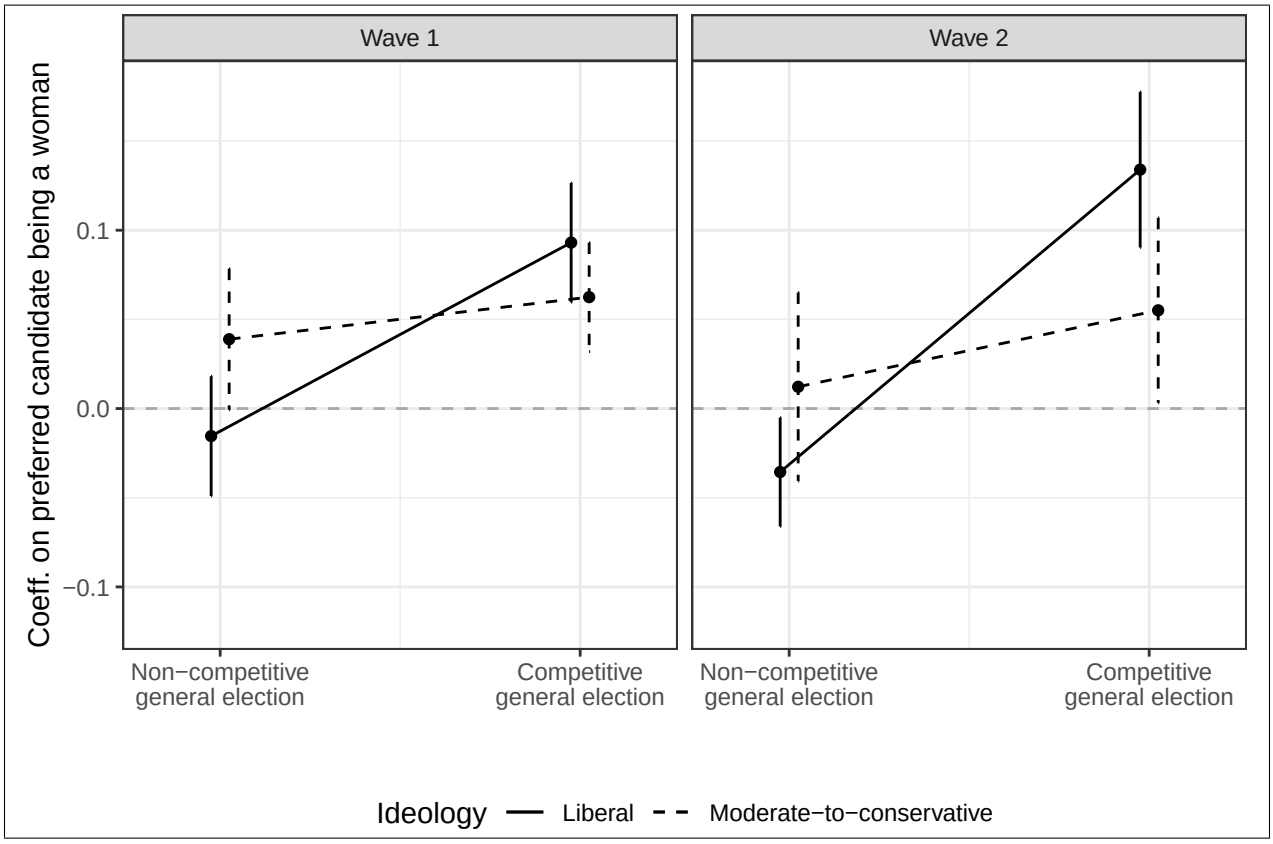

Figure 4: Marginal effect of preferring a woman candidate on estimated mismatch rates by voter ideology in Democratic primaries. Results are presented in tabular form in Appendix Table C5. Results for Republicans are presented in Appendix Table C6. Unweighted results are presented in Appendix Table D5.

Consistent with the results presented in Figure 4, liberal ideology is associated with higher rates of strategic discrimination against women candidates in both waves of the survey, as shown in Columns (1) and (4). In addition, we explore whether affective polarization, operationalized as a feeling thermometer rating of Biden minus a feeling thermometer rating of Trump, functions similarly to ideologically extremity. Columns (2) and (5) report positive and significant interactions between preferred candidate gender and affective polarization in estimating rates of mismatch across both waves. Columns (3) and (6) show that each interaction term remains statistically significant in a model that includes both. In sum, strategic discrimination appears to be most common among Democratic primary voters for whom a victory for the Republican party would be most undesirable.

An ironic, but plausible, additional interpretation of these findings is that the voters who are most likely to believe that women face significant discrimination are the ones most likely to engage in discrimination against them at the primary election stage. Although our original dataset does not include a measure of perceptions of sexism, prohibiting us from testing this relationship directly, liberal political ideology was significantly and positively associated with perceptions of discrimination against women in the AP-NORC dataset analyzed in Figure 1, with the difference in perceptions between strong liberals and strong conservatives equating to one-third of the entire scale.[15] This explanation is not mutually exclusive with the explanation centering affective polarization discussed above. Reny, Zhirkov, and Bae (2025) find that Democratic partisans' negative affect towards Republicans is driven, in part, by their perception of Republican partisans' racial conservatism, and although further research is needed to determine whether perceptions of gender bias among Republicans contributes similarly to negative outparty affect among Democrats, but we think it is plausible that Democrats who feel coolest towards the Republican party could be basing their opinions about the party in part on their perceptions of Republicans' attitudes towards women.

[15]See Appendix Table A2 for this analysis.

Table 5: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice mismatch as a function of respondent ideology and affective polarization in Democratic primary contests in competitive districts only.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice					
	Wave 1			Wave 2		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Preferred candidate is a woman	−0.013	−0.107	−0.163*	−0.040	−0.132	−0.260*
	(0.037)	(0.066)	(0.076)	(0.062)	(0.099)	(0.115)
Respondent liberalism	−0.028		0.009	−0.137*		−0.143**
	(0.030)		(0.032)	(0.054)		(0.055)
Prefer woman x liberalism	0.131**		0.091+	0.190*		0.197*
	(0.050)		(0.051)	(0.084)		(0.084)
Affective polarization		−0.136***	−0.152***		0.054	0.073
		(0.040)	(0.043)		(0.073)	(0.076)
Prefer woman x affective polarization		0.221**	0.208*		0.267*	0.252*
		(0.076)	(0.082)		(0.114)	(0.116)
Intercept	0.032	0.131***	0.136***	0.145**	0.015	0.103
	(0.028)	(0.038)	(0.040)	(0.048)	(0.069)	(0.078)
Num.Obs.	1947	1996	1947	1375	1395	1375

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election. Results for Republicans are presented in Appendix Table C6. Unweighted results are presented in Appendix Table D6.

Discussion and conclusion

We find support for our main hypotheses: Democratic voters are both uniquely likely to perceive women candidates as disadvantaged, and uniquely likely to engage in strategic discrimination against women candidates in congressional primaries in competitive districts. The magic wand question formulation allows us to directly assess strategic behavior by distinguishing between candidate preference and vote intention, giving us insight into the personal tradeoffs voters knowingly make to maximize their party's chances of success. Our results are robust to controls for political experience, perceptions of candidate ideology, and fundraising dollars. We can be less certain of our findings with respect to Republicans, given the smaller sample of applicable districts in our data and the smaller number of respondents, limiting both the number of analyses we can run and our confidence in the analyses we do run. With that in mind, as expected, we find no evidence of strategic discrimination in Republican primaries in either wave of the survey.

We can be confident that our results are not driven by the underrepresentation of women in Democratic primary candidate pools. We ran our analysis on the subset of voters for whom their combination of preferred candidate and vote choice included both the top man and top woman candidate in their respective primary, meaning that a woman candidate was an option in every choice voters made and eliminating the overrepresentation of men as a source of bias. Despite the reduced sample size that this analysis entails, the results are consistent: strategic discrimination is occurring, as evidenced by the substantively large and statistically significant coefficient on the interaction term between preference for a woman candidate and a competitive general election.

The results also support our expectation that strategic discrimination is most prevalent among the most liberal, as well as the most affectively polarized, Democratic voters. Whether because these voters are the most likely to expect Republican general election voters to discriminate against a woman candidate, because they face the highest personal costs of their party's nominee losing the election, or a combination, more-liberal Democrats are disproportionately likely to engage in strategic discrimination against women primary candidates.

This paper makes a meaningful theoretical contribution to the literature on strategic voting by clarifying the conditions under which strategic voting in primary elections is most likely to occur. Building on previous findings of strategic discrimination in presidential primary elections, we document the existence of strategic discrimination in congressional primary elections. We find evidence of strategic discrimination on the basis of candidates' gender only in contexts in which the general election is expected to be competitive, and only within the party whose voters, on average, anticipate that women candidates will suffer from discrimination

in the general election. Additionally, we hypothesize — and find — that strategic behavior is most prevalent among the most liberal Democratic voters, whose ideological distance from the opposing party is greatest. Future work can test the relevance of these conditions for other forms of strategic discrimination, both identity-based (*e.g.,* on the basis of race, class, or sexuality) and on the basis of other factors such as policy stances, as well as the incidence of strategic discrimination in other types of elections.

This paper also makes a substantive contribution to the gender and politics literature that seeks to solve the puzzle of women's continued underrepresentation in elective office. Our findings demonstrate that women's equal success rates in general elections mask important challenges that women face in obtaining a place on general election ballots in the first place, and shed light on an important mechanism for increasing women's representation. These results are not in tension with other findings (Schwarz and Coppock 2022; Hassell and Visalvanich 2024) that voters prefer women candidates, because strategic discrimination is voter bias not due to personal preference, but due to misperceptions of the preferences of the average general election voter. Our results are also consistent with evidence that women are not disadvantaged by voter bias in general elections (Hayes and Lawless 2016) because party is the single most important cue for voters in a general election (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004).

Our findings are consistent with a mounting body of anecdotal evidence of an under-analyzed obstacle women candidates face. Women and people of color are often discouraged from running by party leaders because the elites believe that these candidates won't be able to win a general election, as happened to Stacey Abrams before launching her 2018 campaign for Governor of Georgia (Bacon Jr. 2018). Less than a week after Elizabeth Warren announced her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president in the 2020 election, the New York Times published an article suggesting that Democratic primary voters were unsure that a woman could win in the 2020 general election (Lerer and Chira 2019). Among voters, the number one factor voters expressed that influenced their vote choice in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary was which candidate could beat incumbent then-President Donald Trump in a general election (Page 2020). For example, when asked for her opinion on Elizabeth Warren in January of 2020, one New Hampshire voter said "I think she would make an amazing President. I'm worried about whether she can win... because we need to win" (Donegan 2019).

Our findings suggest that this phenomenon is systemic and that it extends to congressional as well as presidential elections. However, in light of recent findings that voters, especially Democrats, prefer women candidates over men, strategic discrimination is not only a misinformed strategy but ironically self-defeating, preventing candidates whom voters actually prefer from even competing in general elections. In addition to convincing women that they can find success as political candidates, equalizing representation for men

and women will also require convincing voters of this. Our research suggests that voters engage in strategic discrimination because they are worried women are less electable in general elections, so correcting this belief may decrease strategic discrimination and thus increase women's representation in the long term, as Bateson (2020) and Corbett et al. (2022) show in the presidential context. Such corrective information could also encourage party leaders to recruit more women candidates (Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece 2017). Further research should investigate how strategic discrimination operates among elites in the candidate recruitment phase as well as the efficacy of potential corrective messaging on both voters and elites in races below the presidential level.

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Appendix A: Additional analyses of AP-NORC survey

Table A1: Results of AP-NORC survey reported in Figure 1.

Item	Average Democratic response	Average Republican response
Discrimination against men	0.300 (0.009)	0.424 (0.014)
Discrimination against women	0.735 (0.009)	0.452 (0.014)
Being a woman will help/hurt Kamala Harris's chances	0.446 (0.01)	0.560 (0.01)

Note:
All variables are scaled from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no discrimination/"hurt a lot" and 1 indicating a great deal of discrimination/"help a lot." Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Data are weighted using weights supplied by NORC.

Table A2: Political ideology and perceptions of discrimination against women among respondents to the September 2024 AP-NORC survey.

	DV: Perceived discrimination against women		
	All respondents	Democratic respondents	Republican respondents
Political ideology	−0.393***	−0.207***	−0.153*
	(0.026)	(0.037)	(0.061)
Intercept	0.812***	0.807***	0.557***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.044)
Num.Obs.	2028	1059	574

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

Note:
Political ideology is scaled from 0 (most liberal) to 1 (most conservative). Perceived discrimination is scaled from 0 (none at all) to 1 (a great deal). Data are weighted using weights supplied by NORC.

Appendix B: Voter survey information and descriptive statistics

Sample Selection and Survey Distribution

Table B1: Probability of Selection From Voter File

District	Likely Primary Voter (D)	Likely Primary Voter (R)	Likely General Voter
CA-12	0.8	0.05	0.15
CA-22	0.375	0.05	0.575
CA-30	0.8	0.05	0.15
CA-31	0.8	0.05	0.15
CA-45	0.375	0.05	0.575
CA-47	0.3	0.3	0.4
TX-34	0.05	0.375	0.575
PA-7	0.05	0.375	0.575
PA-10	0.375	0.05	0.575
IN-3	0.05	0.8	0.15
IN-8	0.05	0.8	0.15
MD-2	0.8	0.05	0.15
NY-22	all available emails	all available emails	all available emails

Table B2: Survey Distribution Schedule

District	Round	Wave 1	Days Before Primary Election (Wave 1)	Wave 2 (Day after Primary Election)
CA-12	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
CA-22	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
CA-30	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
CA-31	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
CA-45	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
CA-47	1	01/12/24	54	03/06/24
TX-34	1	01/16/24	50	03/06/24
IN-3	2	03/11/24	58	05/08/24
IN-8	2	03/23/24	46	05/08/24
MD-2	2	03/13/24	63	05/15/24
PA-7	2	03/04/24	51	04/24/24
PA-10	2	03/02/24	53	04/24/24
NY-22	3	05/06/24	51	06/26/24

Note:
'Round' refers to district groupings where the Wave 1 survey was distributed around the same time, based on the proximity of their primary election dates.

Response Rates and Sample Size

Table B3: Number of Respondents Per District

District	Wave 1	Wave 2
CA-12	3481	1002
CA-22	929	339
CA-30	3447	1016
CA-31	1076	435
CA-45	1206	492
CA-47	4092	1710
IN-3	1604	549
IN-8	548	155
MD-2	495	206
NY-22	2320	1092
PA-7	511	197
PA-10	586	257
TX-34	520	179

Table B4: Number of Respondents Per District By Party ID

	Wave 1			**Wave 2**		
District	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Democrat	Republican	Independent
CA-12	3258	83	140	945	22	35
CA-22	503	305	121	189	105	45
CA-30	3139	156	152	950	35	31
CA-31	847	152	77	341	66	28
CA-45	744	360	102	310	150	32
CA-47	2452	1306	334	1078	509	123
IN-3	657	764	183	267	219	63
IN-8	220	251	77	76	63	16
MD-2	383	81	31	169	30	7
NY-22	1645	454	221	826	184	82
PA-10	326	209	51	160	80	17
PA-7	278	188	45	118	62	17
TX-34	236	212	72	93	67	19

Note:
'Democrat' and 'Republican' includes leaners.

Table B5: Number of Primary Voters by District

District	Primary Election
CA-12	895
CA-22	261
CA-30	891
CA-31	338
CA-45	407
CA-47	1511
IN-3	289
IN-8	90
MD-2	164
NY-22	527
PA-10	183
PA-7	140
TX-34	106

Table B6: Response Rates by District and Wave

District	Wave 1 Distribution Type	Wave 1	Wave 2
CA-12	Mail and Email	7.1%	28.9%
CA-22	Mail and Email	2.1%	36.5%
CA-30	Mail and Email	4.7%	29.7%
CA-31	Mail and Email	2.3%	40.4%
CA-45	Mail and Email	2.6%	40.7%
CA-47	Mail and Email	3.9%	42.2%
IN-3	Mail and Email	1.1%	35.2%
IN-8	Email Only	0.5%	28.2%
MD-2	Mail Only	5.3%	46.1%
NY-22	Email Only	2.7%	46.6%
PA-7	Mail Only	5.4%	40.9%
PA-10	Mail Only	6.3%	46.1%
TX-34	Mail Only	5%	35.4%
Summary			
All Districts	Mail and Email	2.7%	37%

Table B7: Wave 1 Response Rates by Distribution Type and Incentive

Distribution Type	Baseline Payment	Follow-up Payment	Number of Distributions	Number of Responses	Response Rate
By Incentive					
mail	0	5	106524	5695	5.3%
mail	0	10	680	49	7.2%
mail	5	5	2405	294	12.2%
mail	5	10	6	0	0%
mail	10	5	754	63	8.4%
mail	10	10	4	0	0%
email	0	5	90583	3967	4.4%
email	0	10	864	35	4.1%
email	5	5	1071	80	7.5%
email	5	10	12	3	25%
email	10	5	867	46	5.3%
email	10	10	5	0	0%
email	0	0	581096	11013	1.9%
Summary					
Total Email	NA	NA	674498	15144	2.2%
Total Mail	NA	NA	110373	6101	5.5%

District and Candidate Characteristics

Table B8: Candidate Characteristics

Candidate	District	Incumbent	Gender	Race	Date of Birth	Prior Office
Lateefah Simon (D)	CA-12	No	Woman	Black	1977	No
Tony Daysog (D)	CA-12	No	Man	Asian	1966	No
Jennifer Tran (D)	CA-12	No	Woman	Asian	1987	No
Rudy Salas (D)	CA-22	No	Man	Latino	1977	Yes
Melissa Hurtado (D)	CA-22	No	Woman	Latino	1988	Yes
Mike Feuer (D)	CA-30	No	Man	White	1958	Yes
Laura Friedman (D)	CA-30	No	Woman	White	1966	Yes
Nick Melvoin (D)	CA-30	No	Man	White	1985	No
Anthony Portantino, Jr. (D)	CA-30	No	Man	White	1961	Yes
Sepi Shyne (D)	CA-30	No	Woman	Asian	1977	No
Bob Archuleta (D)	CA-31	No	Man	White	1945	Yes
Gil Cisneros (D)	CA-31	No	Man	Latino	1971	Yes
Gregory Hafif (D)	CA-31	No	Man	White	1965	No
Mary Ann Lutz (D)	CA-31	No	Woman	White	1961	No
Susan Rubio (D)	CA-31	No	Woman	Latino	1970	Yes
Cheyenne Hunt (D)	CA-45	No	Woman	White	1997	No
Kim Nguyen (D)	CA-45	No	Woman	Latina-Asian	1991	No
Aditya Pai (D)	CA-45	No	Man	Asian	1991	No
Derek Tran (D)	CA-45	No	Man	Asian	1980	No
Dave Min (D)	CA-47	No	Man	Asian	1976	Yes
Joanna Weiss (D)	CA-47	No	Woman	White	1975	No
Scott Baugh (R)	CA-47	No	Man	White	1962	Yes
Max Ukropina (R)	CA-47	No	Man	White	1990	No
Tim Smith (R)	IN-3	No	Man	White	NA	No
Wendy Davis (R)	IN-3	No	Woman	White	1967	No
Andy Zay (R)	IN-3	No	Man	White	1971	Yes
Marlin Stutzman (R)	IN-3	No	Man	White	1976	Yes
Mark Messmer (R)	IN-8	No	Man	White	1968	Yes
Richard Moss (R)	IN-8	No	Man	White	1954	No
Kristi Risk (R)	IN-8	No	Woman	White	1970	No
John Hostettler (R)	IN-8	No	Man	White	1967	Yes
John Olszewski Jr. (D)	MD-2	No	Man	White	1982	Yes
Harry Bhandari (D)	MD-2	No	Man	Asian	1977	Yes
Sia Kyriakakos (D)	MD-2	No	Woman	White	1970	No
John Mannion (D)	NY-22	No	Man	White	1968	Yes
Sarah Klee Hood (D)	NY-22	No	Woman	White	1982	No
Mayra Flores (R)	TX-34	No	Woman	Latino	1986	Yes
Mauro Garza (R)	TX-34	No	Man	Latino	1963	No
Vicente Gonzalez Jr. (D)	TX-34	Yes	Man	Latino	1967	Yes

Table B9: District Characteristics

District	Cook PVI	Cook Label	Seat Type	District Type	Primary Election	Primary Type	Out-Party Opponent
CA-12	D+40	Solid Democrat	Open	Safe	Democratic	Top 2	Stephen Slauson
CA-22	D+5	Toss Up	Incumbent	Competitive	Democratic	Top 2	David G. Valadao
CA-30	D+23	Solid Democrat	Open	Safe	Democratic	Top 2	Alex Balekian
CA-31	D+15	Solid Democrat	Open	Safe	Democratic	Top 2	Daniel Martinez
CA-45	D+2	Lean Republican	Incumbent	Competitive	Democratic	Top 2	Michelle Steel
CA-47	D+3	Lean Democrat	Open	Competitive	Democratic	Top 2	Scott Baugh
IN-3	R+18	Solid Republican	Open	Safe	Republican	Open	Kiley Adolph
IN-8	R+10	Solid Republican	Open	Safe	Republican	Open	Erik Hurt
MD-2	D+7	Solid Democrat	Open	Safe	Democratic	Closed	Kim Klacik
NY-22	D+3	Toss Up	Incumbent	Competitive	Democratic	Closed	Brandon Williams
PA-7	R+2	Lean Democrat	Incumbent	Competitive	Republican	Closed	Susan Wild
PA-10	R+5	Lean Republican	Incumbent	Competitive	Democratic	Closed	Scott Perry
TX-34	D+9	Lean Democrat	Incumbent	Competitive	Republican	Open	Vicente Gonzalez Jr.

Note: 'Out-Party Opponent' refers to the most viable out-party candidate in the race. For every district except CA-12, this is the general election opponent the primary winner faced. For CA-12, two Democrats advanced to the general election (Lateefah Simon and Jennifer Tran). Stephen Slauson is the Republican that received the most votes in the top-2 CA-12 primary.

Appendix C: Additional analyses of voter survey

Table C1: Rate of mismatch between preferred candidate and intended primary vote choice by survey wave, party, candidate gender, and competitiveness of general election. Results presented in graphical form in Figure 2.

		Competitive general?	Mismatch rate for men	Mismatch rate for women
Wave 1	Democratic primaries	no	0.046 (0.007)	0.061 (0.009)
		yes	0.034 (0.004)	0.116 (0.013)
	Republican primaries	no	0.089 (0.015)	0.086 (0.034)
		yes	0.034 (0.014)	0.009 (0.012)
Wave 2	Democratic primaries	no	0.089 (0.011)	0.060 (0.007)
		yes	0.058 (0.007)	0.173 (0.017)
	Republican primaries	no	0.145 (0.026)	0.100 (0.044)
		yes	0.056 (0.022)	0.074 (0.043)

Note:
Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Table C2: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch in Wave 1 as a function of candidate gender, general election competitiveness, perceived ideology, prior legislative office, and campaign fundraising in Democratic primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.013	0.016	0.011	−0.009	0.007
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Competitive general election	−0.012	−0.026	0.000	−0.092**	−0.001
	(0.028)	(0.037)	(0.032)	(0.035)	(0.067)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.069***	0.042+	0.036*	0.100***	0.017
	(0.017)	(0.025)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.041)
Preferred candidate has prior legislative experience		−0.071***			−0.058+
		(0.017)			(0.031)
Prior experience x competitive general		0.040			0.028
		(0.029)			(0.050)
Respondent perception of preferred candidate ideology			−0.008		−0.010
			(0.028)		(0.027)
Perceived ideology x competitive general			0.042		−0.010
			(0.041)		(0.040)
Preferred candidate fundraising				−0.075***	−0.007
				(0.020)	(0.038)
Fundraising x competitive general				0.097*	−0.003
				(0.042)	(0.070)
Intercept	0.033*	0.075***	0.033+	0.098***	0.080**
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.026)
Num.Obs.	3613	3613	3078	3575	3059

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Perceived ideology of preferred candidate ranges from liberal to conservative. Preferred candidate fundraising is coded as the proportion of funds in a given context raised by the respondent's preferred candidate. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Table C3: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch in Wave 2 as a function of candidate gender, general election competitiveness, perceived ideology, prior legislative office, and campaign fundraising in Republican primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.055	0.102+	−0.010	0.053	0.030
	(0.044)	(0.053)	(0.045)	(0.048)	(0.055)
Competitive general election	−0.104+	−0.022	−0.218	1.156*	0.960
	(0.061)	(0.082)	(0.179)	(0.565)	(0.740)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.114	0.053	0.185	0.101	0.115
	(0.141)	(0.147)	(0.136)	(0.144)	(0.150)
Preferred candidate has prior legislative experience		0.078			0.105+
		(0.049)			(0.057)
Prior experience x competitive general		−0.108			−0.147
		(0.080)			(0.214)
Respondent perception of preferred candidate ideology			−0.268*		−0.256*
			(0.117)		(0.119)
Perceived ideology x competitive general			0.129		0.188
			(0.213)		(0.254)
Preferred candidate fundraising				0.003	0.028
				(0.019)	(0.022)
Fundraising x competitive general				−0.565	−0.249
				(0.697)	(1.659)
Intercept	0.115**	0.051	0.339***	0.111*	0.203
	(0.039)	(0.056)	(0.101)	(0.049)	(0.125)
Num.Obs.	225	225	216	218	209

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Perceived ideology of preferred candidate ranges from liberal to conservative. Preferred candidate fundraising is coded as the proportion of funds in a given context raised by the respondent's preferred candidate. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Table C4: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch as a function of candidate gender and general election competitiveness in Republican primary contests across top man and woman candidate pairs.

	DV: Preferred candidate gender does not match intended vote choice gender	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.000	−0.059
	(0.000)	(0.061)
Competitive general election	0.000	−0.059
	(0.000)	(0.079)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.000	0.059
	(0.000)	(0.095)
Intercept	0.000	0.059*
	(0.000)	(0.027)
Num.Obs.	148	83

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

Note:

N.B. zero eligible voters who indicated either the top man or top woman in Republican primary contests as their preferred candidate expressed an intent to vote for a different candidate in Wave 1. Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election. Because of the limited number of candidate-district combinations, we do not include controls for preferred candidate characteristics.

Table C5: Marginal effect of candidate gender on mismatch rates among voters in Democratic primary elections.

	Respondent ideology	Competitive general?	Coefficient on preferring a woman candidate
Wave 1	Liberal	no	-0.015 (0.017)
		yes	0.093*** (0.017)
	Moderate-to-conservative	no	0.039 (0.02)
		yes	0.062*** (0.016)
Wave 2	Liberal	no	-0.036* (0.016)
		yes	0.134*** (0.022)
	Moderate-to-conservative	no	0.012 (0.027)
		yes	0.055* (0.026)

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Table C6: Marginal effect of candidate gender on mismatch rates among voters in Republican primary elections.

	Respondent ideology	Competitive general?	Coefficient on preferring a woman candidate
Wave 1	Conservative	no	-0.031 (0.071)
		yes	0 (0)
	Moderate-to-liberal	no	-0.003 (0.053)
		yes	0 (0)
Wave 2	Conservative	no	0.094 (0.084)
		yes	0 (0)
	Moderate-to-liberal	no	0.034 (0.066)
		yes	0.264 (0.188)

Note:
N.B. there are no mismatches between preferred and intended vote choice candidates among voters in Republican primaries in competitive districts in Wave 1 or among the most conservative voters in these same primaries in Wave 2. Models include election fixed effects. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Table C7: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice mismatch as a function of respondent ideology and affective polarization in Republican primary contests in competitive districts only.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice					
	Wave 1			Wave 2		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.240*	0.206	0.303
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.115)	(0.181)	(0.255)
Respondent liberalism	0.000		0.000	0.281*		0.308*
	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.134)		(0.142)
Prefer woman x liberalism	0.000		0.000	−0.210		−0.231
	(0.000)		(0.000)	(0.194)		(0.230)
Affective polarization		0.000	0.000		0.012	0.081
		(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.120)	(0.130)
Prefer woman x affective polarization		0.000	0.000		−0.044	−0.071
		(0.000)	(0.000)		(0.184)	(0.232)
Intercept	0.000	0.000	0.000	−0.154+	0.006	−0.198+
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.086)	(0.054)	(0.111)
Num.Obs.	137	142	137	82	84	82

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

Note:
N.B. no respondents included in analysis of Wave 1 data indicated their intention to vote for a candidate other than their preferred candidate. Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are weighted for representativeness of voters in each district's primary election.

Appendix D: Unweighted analyses of voter survey

Table D1: Rate of mismatch between preferred candidate and intended primary vote choice by survey wave, party, candidate gender, and competitiveness of general election. Results presented in graphical form in Figure 2.

		Competitive general?	Mismatch rate for men	Mismatch rate for women
Wave 1	Democratic primaries	no	0.053 (0.008)	0.058 (0.008)
		yes	0.031 (0.004)	0.146 (0.014)
	Republican primaries	no	0.069 (0.013)	0.089 (0.038)
		yes	0.021 (0.012)	0.012 (0.012)
Wave 2	Democratic primaries	no	0.101 (0.012)	0.058 (0.007)
		yes	0.053 (0.007)	0.156 (0.016)
	Republican primaries	no	0.120 (0.023)	0.132 (0.056)
		yes	0.111 (0.035)	0.071 (0.040)

Note:
Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Data are unweighted.

Table D2: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch as a function of candidate gender and general election competitiveness in Democratic and Republican primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice			
	Democratic primaries		Republican primaries	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.008	−0.025	−0.002	0.086+
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.034)	(0.050)
Competitive general election	−0.021	0.086**	−0.063	0.029
	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.088)	(0.100)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.112***	0.119***	0.002	−0.008
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.093)	(0.114)
Intercept	0.025	0.066***	0.063***	0.096*
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.042)
Num.Obs.	3613	3125	408	225

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are unweighted.

Table D3: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch in Wave 2 as a function of candidate gender, general election competitiveness, perceived ideology, prior legislative office, and campaign fundraising in Democratic primaries.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Preferred candidate is a woman	−0.025	−0.008	−0.012	−0.048**	0.011
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)
Competitive general election	0.086**	−0.043	0.140***	−0.008	0.051
	(0.032)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.068)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.119***	0.122***	0.101***	0.137***	0.113**
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.044)
Preferred candidate has prior legislative experience		−0.165***			−0.201***
		(0.019)			(0.035)
Prior experience x competitive general		0.194***			0.251***
		(0.033)			(0.055)
Respondent perception of preferred candidate ideology			0.003		−0.016
			(0.036)		(0.036)
Perceived ideology x competitive general			0.001		−0.014
			(0.056)		(0.056)
Preferred candidate fundraising				−0.160***	0.079+
				(0.023)	(0.043)
Fundraising x competitive general				0.055	−0.136+
				(0.056)	(0.082)
Intercept	0.066***	0.177***	0.040+	0.200***	0.129***
	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.030)
Num.Obs.	3125	3125	2800	3064	2744

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Perceived ideology of preferred candidate ranges from liberal to conservative. Preferred candidate fundraising is coded as the proportion of funds in a given context raised by the respondent's preferred candidate. Data are unweighted.

Table D4: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice gender mismatch as a function of candidate gender and general election competitiveness in Democratic primary contests across top man and woman candidate pairs.

	DV: Preferred candidate gender does not match intended vote choice gender	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)
Preferred candidate is a woman	−0.023	−0.024
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Competitive general election	−0.097**	0.032
	(0.031)	(0.030)
Prefer woman x competitive general	0.142***	0.118***
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Intercept	0.025	0.037*
	(0.019)	(0.018)
Num.Obs.	2865	2432

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are unweighted. Because of the limited number of candidate-district combinations, we do not include controls for preferred candidate characteristics.

Table D5: Marginal effect of candidate gender on mismatch rates among voters in Democratic primary elections.

	Respondent ideology	Competitive general?	Coefficient on preferring a woman candidate
Wave 1	Liberal	no	0 (0.016)
		yes	0.135*** (0.017)
	Moderate-to-conservative	no	0.02 (0.02)
		yes	0.099*** (0.017)
Wave 2	Liberal	no	-0.023 (0.018)
		yes	0.121*** (0.022)
	Moderate-to-conservative	no	-0.019 (0.027)
		yes	0.061* (0.024)

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. Data are unweighted.

Table D6: Preferred candidate and intended vote choice mismatch as a function of respondent ideology and affective polarization in Democratic primary contests in competitive districts only.

	DV: Preferred candidate does not match intended vote choice					
	Wave 1			Wave 2		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Preferred candidate is a woman	0.017	−0.046	−0.127	−0.055	0.016	−0.136
	(0.045)	(0.077)	(0.089)	(0.065)	(0.105)	(0.121)
Respondent liberalism	−0.043		−0.036	−0.099+		−0.103*
	(0.034)		(0.035)	(0.052)		(0.052)
Prefer woman x liberalism	0.139*		0.130*	0.200*		0.204*
	(0.058)		(0.059)	(0.085)		(0.085)
Affective polarization		−0.064	−0.065		0.045	0.056
		(0.049)	(0.051)		(0.074)	(0.075)
Prefer woman x affective polarization		0.192*	0.172+		0.093	0.092
		(0.088)	(0.091)		(0.119)	(0.120)
Intercept	0.032	0.059	0.084+	0.111*	0.003	0.070
	(0.030)	(0.045)	(0.050)	(0.045)	(0.068)	(0.075)
Num.Obs.	1947	1996	1947	1375	1395	1375

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

Note:
Models include election fixed effects. All variables are scaled 0-1. Data are unweighted.