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## Do Voters Read Gender? Stereotypes as Voting Cues in Electoral Settings\*

*Abstract:* In this paper, I examine the impact of voters' stereotypes regarding candidate gender on their propensity to favour either male or female candidates to the parliament. I draw on two strands of literature: the proposition put forward by Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a) holding that candidate gender gives a rise to the emergence of stereotypes concerning their qualifications and stances on political issues, and Sanbonmatsu's (2002) argument that such stereotypes breed voters' preferences regarding their representatives' gender. The link between gender stereotypes and voters' gender preferences is examined in the context of Polish parliamentary election of 2005. I find out initial evidence suggesting that, indeed, stereotypes concerning candidate qualifications and beliefs, as well as a voter's own gender, affect electoral preferences of Polish voters.

*Keywords:* gender-related stereotypes, baseline gender preference, voter choice, quotas.

Women's numeric representation in countries' national parliaments remains considerably lower than the analogous proportions of women in countries' populations (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2012). Thus, researchers have eagerly addressed the problem of women's legislative underrepresentation and tried to identify the factors behind this state of affairs. Numerous studies focusing on Western democracies provide evidence that in the electoral contests women do not perform any worse than men (Darcy and Schramm 1997; Studlar and McAllister 1991; Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994; Black and Erickson 2003; McElroy and Marsh 2010). These studies find that the initial loss suffered by women in terms of the numbers of votes received is cancelled out when party identification and political experience of candidates are controlled for. Moreover, several authors claim that when such characteristics are taken into account women candidates may gain a small but consistent advantage over their male counterparts (Black and Erickson 2003; Borisyuk et al 2007; Dolan 1998; Smith and Fox 2001). The main conclusion from this body of research is that voters, in general, do not discriminate against women and, more importantly, that they largely ignore candidate gender (Zipp and Pluzted 1985; Black and Erickson 2003; McElroy and Marsh 2010).

Somewhat contrary to these conclusions, several authors explicitly note that the fact that women receive no less support from voters than do men does not preclude the

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possibility that voters take a candidate gender into account while deciding upon their ballot (Alexander and Andersen 1993; McDermott 1997; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Black and Erickson 2003). Indeed, there exists evidence to suggest that large proportions of voters are not indifferent with respect to a candidate's gender. Kira Sanbonmatsu (2002: 23) reports that a considerable portion of survey respondents (51 per cent of men and 62 per cent of women) declared a straightforward gender preference while choosing among two equally qualified candidates. In research on Polish local government elections (from 1994 up to 2002) Renata Siemieńska (2005b) found that despite the growing proportions of voters who declared voting for both men and women, a substantial share of the electorate consistently supported candidates of only one gender: in the 2002 local election 49 per cent of men and 45 per cent of women declared to have made a choice based on gender.

This study seeks to understand why voters exhibit such straightforward preferences with respect to their representatives' gender. This question seems valid regardless of whether, at the aggregate level, female candidates fare worse or better than their male counterparts. One significant explanation of voters' preferences regarding candidate gender was proposed by Kira Sanbonmatsu who refers to such preferences as 'baseline gender preferences' (2002). Sanbonmatsu states that baseline gender preferences are formed on the grounds of voters' gender stereotypes. In this study, I follow in Sanbonmatsu's footsteps by enquiring to what extent gender stereotypes can explain voters' preferences with respect to a candidate gender. By doing so, I focus on the context of Polish parliamentary elections. These constitute a radically different electoral setting from the American one, analysed by Sanbonmatsu. Such an extension of the institutional and cultural settings of the analysis is needed given the evidence flowing from other literature that the effects of candidate gender on voters' preferences vary considerably, across both countries and types of elections (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Sapiro and Conover 1997; Valdini 2012).

The empirical investigation into attitudes towards candidate gender seems especially relevant after the recent adoption of mandatory party-list gender quotas in Poland. The bill imposing that the representation of each of the sexes on parties' electoral lists must not be lower than 35 per cent was introduced in January, 2011.<sup>1</sup> As a result, a considerable increase in the proportion of women contesting the most recent 2011 election was achieved. While in 2007 election women constituted 22.95 per cent of all candidates, four years later, in 2011, their fraction rose up to 43.54 per cent. However, the accompanying increase in women's share of parliamentary seats—from 20.4 per cent in 2007 to 23.9 per cent in 2011—was far less impressive.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it seems that women candidates' success rate fell substantially after the quota adoption, as the increased (of almost 50 per cent) number of women on parties' electoral lists elicited

<sup>1</sup> The bill dated January 5, 2011, 'concerning the changes introduced to the law—"the election statute to commune councils, powiat councils and voivodship councils, as well as changes to election statute to the Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland, as well as the change to the election statute to European Parliament.'" Journal of the Laws dated January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, no 34, item 172; available online at: <http://www.dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2011/s/34/172> (access on December 8, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> All the calculations concerning the 2007 and 2011 electoral results are based on data available from the Polish State Electoral Commission: <http://www.pkw.gov.pl>

only a moderately positive response from Polish voters, the number of votes for women having increased by just 3.5 percentage points. This limited success of gender quotas in promoting women's legislative representation suggests either a straightforward gender bias held by the voters after the quota adoption or a lack of adequately experienced female contesters running for the office. While this problem cannot be fully resolved in this article, as no measures of candidate experience are available in the survey data I am using, the study directly addresses the question of the link between voters' gender stereotypes and their preferences for either male or female candidates. Thus, it offers new insights into whether the limited success of gender quotas in Poland may be attributed to voters' unfavourable gender stereotypes that disadvantage women candidates at the polls.

The article proceeds as follows. I start with a review of the scholarly literature on gender-related stereotypes and their impact on voters' gender preferences. In the second part, I introduce the analysis to be conducted and describe the data which will be used. In the next step, I present the results of the analyses and, in the final part, I discuss the findings and the way they contribute to our knowledge on gender-related stereotypes and their impact on the formation of Polish voters' electoral preferences.

### **Baseline Gender Preference and Voters' Gender Stereotypes**

A growing body of research on candidate gender and voting behaviour ascertains that voters exhibit preferences for their representatives' gender (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Siemieńska 2005a, 2005b). Such preferences were long considered to be absent as many studies failed to find any straightforward gender bias among the voters and have thus concluded that the electorate is generally indifferent with respect to a candidate gender (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a). Kira Sanbonmatsu (2002) has proposed an explanation of this apparent paradox. She states that voters may hold well-developed gender preferences but these need not be disadvantageous to female candidates. In fact, strong gender preferences among voters may produce, at an aggregate level, any given electoral result, even the one suggesting that voters actually favour female candidates. According to Sanbonmatsu, gender preferences among voters should not be interpreted as a bias or discrimination of any kind. She claims that to the extent that such preferences are based on gender-related stereotypes they may be perfectly rational voting strategies that serve to simplify voter choice. To put it simply, voters may stereotype either male or female candidates as best representing their interests and world-views and may thus be inclined to consistently support candidates of only one gender.

The theoretical proposition linking candidate gender and voters' electoral preferences goes in line with the psychological theory of schema processing. Research within this framework proves that there are two general processes of impression formation: individuating and category-based (Koch 2000). The second one, far less demanding and time-consuming than the former, is thought to be particularly widespread (Koch 2000). Under the category-based process of impression formation, individuals are claimed to be trying to reach rational decisions by analysing only category-specific

information. Such category-based information may be treated as a shortcut on the grounds of which to infer traits and characteristics specific to the subjects of interest. In this way, bearing only minimal cognitive costs, people are trying to arrive at judgments and choices they would have arrived had they possessed more detailed and accurate knowledge (Taylor et al. 1978; Bem 1981; Conover and Feldman 1989). Many scholars prove that the category-based process of impression formation is common in the electoral context (Popkin 1993; Valdini 2012). Here voters usually have few or no incentives to acquire detailed information on candidates' characteristics and issue positions. Thus, candidate gender is thought to be one of the easiest and readily available bits of information that may serve as an informational cue on the basis of which to infer candidate-specific information (Conover and Feldman 1982, 1989; Popkin 1991; McDermott 1997; Koch 2000; Valdini 2012). From this point of view and in line with Sanbonmatsu's proposition, citizens' preferences concerning candidate gender may be regarded as rational voting strategies that stay in line with citizens' values and positions on political issues.

It is time now to explicate how gender stereotypes may give a rise to the formation of baseline gender preferences among voters. This, however, is a challenging task as there are many reasons to believe that the exact influence of such gender-stereotyping on candidates' electoral fortunes varies across countries and types of elections. Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b) found that gender stereotyping may have different effects on women's chances of electoral success depending on the level of office sought. One may also expect significant variation with respect to the ways gender stereotypes affect women candidates depending on the exact content of the stereotypes prevailing in a given country (Valdini 2012). Further, the rates at which gender stereotypes are used by voters may be contingent on the electoral system, with open-list proportional representation systems, wherein larger numbers of candidates compete, leaving more place for gender stereotypes to operate (Valdini 2012). Thus, it is well possible that gender stereotypes that have been found to have an effect on voters' baseline gender preferences in the US will operate differently in Poland. Nevertheless, in what follows I introduce the existing literature concerning the link between voters' own gender, their gender-based stereotypes and the preferences they exhibit for either male or female candidates.

### **Social Group Membership Voting**

The hypothesis of 'same-gender voting' states that people cast their votes for same-gender candidates. Such a propensity of voters to choose same-sex candidates is explained by the 'social group membership' theory. From this perspective, gender is expected to form grounds for the emergence of feelings of group solidarity and identity among women and men, respectively. These feelings may be easily expressed at the polls, resulting in same-gender voting (Plutzer and Zipp 1996). Thus, candidate gender is the first possible explanation of voters' baseline gender preferences.

Indeed, a recent study by Holli and Wass (2010) found that Finnish voters were prone to vote for the same sex candidates. However, the authors notice that while

men tended to vote for men out of habit, women consciously chose female candidates in an attempt to foster their representation in the national parliament. The theory of same-gender voting has also received considerable support from several studies on the American elections. Also in this context, women were found to be consistently more supportive of female candidates (Paolino 1995; Plutzer and Zipp 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002). Here, again, women's preference for female candidates is claimed to have little to do with a simple in-group bias. In a study on the 1992 U.S. Senate election, in which a record number of women was elected, Paolino (1995) found that women's increased support for female candidates was an expression of a concern that their substantive interests might be overlooked by male representatives. As the author argues, this surge of support of female voters for women contesting the election was a reaction to "Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas" hearings concerning sexual harassment, where, according to Paolino, all-male Judiciary tended to neglect women's substantive interests. In the Polish context, on the other hand, men have traditionally been found to be more inclined to vote for same-sex candidates. Renata Siemieńska reports that in 2001 36 per cent of men, compared to 14 per cent of women, declared a preference for same-gender candidates (Siemieńska 2005a: 67). At the same time, however, the author finds that growing proportions of voters are declaring indifference with respect to a candidate's gender. This pattern concerns men in particular, among whom a predisposition to vote only for men used to be particularly widespread (Siemieńska 2005b).

### Belief Stereotypes

The second explanation of voters' baseline gender preferences builds on the concept of 'belief stereotypes'. This theoretical proposition holds that candidates' ideological positions are inferred on the basis of their sex. Research within this framework proves that women are perceived as more liberal with regard to morality and as more socialist with reference to the economy than are their male counterparts. In particular, women are ascribed more egalitarian sex-role attitudes and are assumed to be more devoted to reducing poverty and economic inequalities than are men (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; McDermott 1997; Koch 2000).

The link between candidates' ideological positions inferred on the basis of their gender and voters' inclination to choose either male or female candidates has received indirect empirical support in studies carried out in the American context. Alexander and Andersen (1993) found that female candidates were perceived in a consistently positive way by those adhering to an egalitarian ideology. McDermott's study (1997) yielded similar results: among liberal voters women performed significantly better than did men, whereas among conservative electorate no considerable difference between women and men's electoral results was observed. In the context of American elections, the belief stereotype argument receives a clear interpretation in terms of party affiliation. Characteristics ascribed to women—socialist stances on the economy and liberal value orientation—are often regarded as ideological indicators of the Democratic Party. Indeed, Huddy and Terkildsen (1993a) found that women were more often than men viewed as Democratic Party representatives.

### Trait and Issue Stereotypes

Yet, another theoretical proposition holds that male and female politicians are ascribed, on the basis of their gender, different areas of expertise. It has been shown that voters command distinct perceptions of the qualifications of a typical woman and a typical man (Huddy and Terkilsen 1993a). Men are generally believed to do better job in foreign affairs, the military, fighting crime and reducing unemployment, whereas women are perceived as better at ‘compassion’ issues such as childcare and social welfare (Sapiro 1981). There is much evidence to suggest that such issue stereotypes—areas of expertise associated with gender—are congruent with ‘trait stereotypes’, that is personality characteristics ascribed to women and men on the basis of their gender. Women are supposed to do a better job in childcare and social welfare precisely because they are consistently viewed as compassionate, honest and sensitive. Men, on the other hand, perceived as resolute, tough and self-confident, are expected to be better in dealing with ‘big business’ and crime policy (Sapiro 1981; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a; Alexander and Andersen 1993).

Research on the perception of female and male candidates in Poland also found significant differences with respect to traits and issues of expertise ascribed on the basis of gender. Women were commonly viewed as less aggressive in interpersonal relations and as more sensitive to social problems than were men (Siemieńska 2005c). Polish voters also ascribed women with issues of expertise that broadly go in line with those found by the American scholarship. Renata Siemieńska reports that voters perceived female candidates as efficient at handling abortion politics, organising social care for the elderly, providing healthcare services and at ensuring equal right to both sexes (Siemieńska 2005d). Danuta Suska (2005) found that during the electoral campaign women tended to focus on education and healthcare issues, while men were much more prone to discuss the economy and security problems.

### Hypotheses

The existing scholarly literature lends substantial support to the thesis that voters’ preferences with respect to a candidate gender can be explained in terms of gender-related stereotypes that they embrace. In particular, voters’ own gender and their stereotypes concerning candidates’ ideological positions, traits and issues of expertise are found to be predictive of preferences for either male or female candidates. The 2005 Polish National Election Study gives a chance to validate these propositions in the context of Polish parliamentary elections.

Based on the existing research, three hypotheses can be put forward here.

- 1) Social group membership theory leads us to expect that both men and women would support same gender candidates more often than cross-gender candidates. Thus, (H1) all else being equal, we shall see men more inclined to vote for men than for women and a similar pattern of same-gender voting should concern women.

- 2) Theories referring to belief stereotypes as basic mechanisms in operation make us anticipate that (*H2*) all else being equal, women candidates would be more preferred by citizens with liberal stances on morality and egalitarian sex-role attitudes, as well as those with a socialist outlook on the economy than by respondents embracing conservative worldviews or supporting liberal economic ideology.
- 3) The third hypothesis concerns trait stereotypes. This theory leads us to expect that (*H3*) all else being equal, respondents finding men better suited for politics would—compared to those opposing this view—be much more inclined to support male rather than female candidates.

Apart from these three theory-based hypotheses, one more expectation can be put forward. It concerns the recent discussion over women's presence in politics and the adoption of party-list gender quotas. It seems reasonable to expect that (*H4*)

- 4) individuals committed to increasing women's engagement in politics would be highly supportive of female candidates and would be inclined to vote for women more often than those indifferent to the levels of women's political representation.

### The Data and the Concept of Analyses

All the empirical analyses will be carried out using the 2005 Polish National Election Study (PNES) data set, in which a battery of questions on women's engagement in politics was asked.<sup>3</sup> The dependent variable indicates voters' baseline gender preference, that is their inclination to choose either a man or a woman from among two equally qualified candidates. Respondents were asked almost the exact question as the one used by Sanbonmatsu (2002) to capture voters' baseline gender preferences.<sup>4</sup> There were three answers offered: the choice of a female candidate, the choice of a male candidate and the answer 'It is hard to say'. As the last answer—'It is hard to say'—was explicitly offered as a response category, I treat it as an indication of a respondent's lack of a clear preference with respect to a candidate gender.

A first glance at the data suggests that Poles are not indifferent with respect to their representatives' gender. As figures in [table 1](#) indicate, over two thirds of the respondents expressed a preference for a candidate gender. Faced with a choice between two equally qualified candidates, they declared they would not be indifferent about their gender. In general, women seem to be more concerned about their representatives' sex: only 25 per cent of them expressed no preference in this regard, compared to 34 per cent of men. Although both men and women seem to prefer candidates of their own gender, this pattern concerns women in particular as 46.38 per

<sup>3</sup> I use the second wave of the survey, which was conducted in December 2005, after the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The PNES question wording was following: 'Imagine that in your constituency two candidates are running for an election to the parliament. They are running on behalf of the same party. They are equal in terms of their education, age, income level, ethnicity, political programme, and both are equally popular. They are only different with regard to their gender. Given the above, whom of them would you vote for?' Sanbonmatsu used the following question wording: 'If two equally qualified candidates were running for office, one man and the other a women, do you think you would be more inclined to vote for the man or the woman?'

Table 1

**Baseline Gender Preference: Conditional Distribution with Regard to Respondents' Gender**

Baseline Gender Preference	Respondent's Sex		Total
	Male respondent <i>N</i> (% of men)	Female respondent <i>N</i> (% of women)	
A man	213 (40.0)	184 (28.4)	397 (33.6)
No preference	182 (34.2)	164 (25.2)	346 (29.2)
A woman	138 (25.8)	301 (46.4)	439 (37.2)
Total	533 (100.0)	649 (100.0)	1182 (100.0)

Pearson  $\chi^2$  (df = 2) = 52.6999 (p = 0.000)

cent of them declared same-gender voting preference, compared to 39.96 per cent of men expressing a preference for a male candidate.

To capture the effect of gender-related stereotypes on the hypothetical voter choice, four previously formulated hypotheses are going to be examined. With regard to the trait stereotype hypothesis, I use respondents' position (agree/disagree) on the statement that men exhibit higher levels of political ambition than women. I treat it as an indicator of an expectation that men are better suited for politics than are women (question wording, coding of variables and descriptive statistics are presented in the Appendix). This variable points to the traditional perception of politics as a predominantly male domain within which women have only narrow chances of success.

The second hypothesis concerns the effects of voters' belief stereotypes on their baseline gender preferences. The belief stereotype is operationalised as respondents' left-right (self-placement) ideology. It has been argued that one's position on this scale is to a large extent accounted for by two groups of factors: values concerning the economy and morality. The left-wing orientation encompasses a mixture of socialist positions on the economic dimension as well as liberal orientation with regard to morality. On the other hand, right-wing leanings refer to liberal stances on the economy and traditional, conservative perspective on morality (Grabowska and Szawiel 2003; Szawiel 2010; Letki 2012). Thus, a respondent's ideological self-placement is a two-fold indicator reporting on individual's moral (conservative or liberal) and economic (socialist or liberal) orientation. Operationalising the belief stereotype with reference to the left-right ideology has the advantage of a clear correspondence with basic cleavages present within the American political context, with liberal and socialist values associated with the Democratic Party, which in turn has been shown to have a positive impact on voters' preference for female candidates. Thus, if voters indeed assume that women candidates are more liberal than are men, we should expect voters with left leanings to support women more often.

Two other explanatory variables refer to respondents' gender and their attitudes to women's political representation. The latter captures respondents' commitment to increasing the numbers of women present in Polish politics. It combines two items: respondents' position (agree/disagree) on the statement that there should be more



women in politics and their declared support for the introduction of special measures promoting women's presence in politics.

Three other factors of potential significance included in the analysis are the interviewer's sex, voters' predefined voting plans, and party voted for in the 2005 parliamentary election. Interviewer gender has been found to have an effect on voters' self-reported preferences with respect to a candidate gender (Kane and Macaulay 1993). It is included as a dummy variable coded 1 for women and 0 for men. The second variable, pre-defined voting plans, indicates factors taken into account while voting. The variable scores 1 for those who declared casting their vote for a specific and already known candidate, and 0 for those who were motivated otherwise. As there exists compelling evidence that party ideology affects both the MPs' and their electorate's attitudes towards women candidates (Siemieńska 2000; Suska 2005; Dubrow 2010), I also include in the analysis a series of dummy variables indicating party voted for in the 2005 parliamentary election.<sup>5</sup> This step warrants, however, a note of caution. In the analyses on Swedish and American elections, Maciej Górecki has shown that high electoral salience is accompanied by significant over-reporting of voters' electoral turnout (Górecki 2011a; 2011b). As high salience certainly characterises elections to the Polish parliament, it may seem plausible that voters' self-reported party choices are unreliable measures of their true electoral behaviour. This concern, however, may be partially mitigated in the light of Cassel and Sigelman's (2001) study which ascertains that there are no major discrepancies between the correlates of misreporters' self-reported and validated electoral preferences. This finding is reassuring and allows us to rely on self-reported data on party preferences with no concern that such data distorts significantly the conclusions to be drawn. The estimated model of baseline gender preference includes also standard control variables such as age, university degree, and church attendance.

The dependent variable takes on three values: it indicates respondents' declared propensity to vote for an abstract male or female candidate, or their neutrality regarding candidate gender, which is treated as a reference category. To handle this multinomial nature of the dependent variable, multinomial logistic regression was applied (Long 1997). Thus, the parameters of two logistic equations were estimated. In the first equation, the dependent variable is a dummy scoring '−1' if a respondent prefers a man and '0' when no preference with regard to a candidate's sex is stated. A similar dependent variable is included in the second equation, where the value of '1' indicates a respondent's preference for a female candidate and '0' indicates no

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<sup>5</sup> Respondents who did not vote in the election are treated as a reference category, counting 535 people. I aggregate voters into supporters of five major political parties. 158 respondents declared voting for Civic Platform Party; 54 people voted for Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland; 44 people supported Polish Peasants' Party. Respondents voting for Law and Justice Party (212) or League of Polish Families (41 individuals) as well as those supporting Polish National Party (2 persons) were merged into one category, and are referred to as Law and Justice Party supporters. This is done for the simplicity sake. The same holds for the category labeled as 'Left Democratic Alliance' which comprises voters supporting three parties: Left Democratic Alliance (67 individual), Polish Social Democracy (22) and Democratic Party. Respondents voting for the following minor parties were excluded from the analysis: Janusz Korwin-Mikke Platform (10 people), Polish Labour Party (3 people), "Dom Ojczysty" (1), "Dignity and Labour Confederation (1) and other (1 respondent).

preference as to a candidate gender. **Table 2.** presents multinomial logistic regression estimates of preferring a male candidate over being neutral and of preferring a female candidate over being neutral.

Table 2

**Predictors of the Baseline Gender Preference: Multinomial Logistic Regression Estimates**

	Man		Woman	
Age	0.01	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
University degree	-1.02**	(0.34)	-0.18	(0.27)
Church attendance	0.19	(0.26)	-0.12	(0.21)
Personal voting	-1.00***	(0.28)	-0.62*	(0.33)
Female interviewer	-0.89**	(0.29)	-0.46*	(0.21)
Ideology	0.36	(0.35)	0.87**	(0.30)
Support for women	-0.56*	(0.22)	1.48***	(0.25)
Men well suited	0.85***	(0.22)	-0.02	(0.23)
Female respondent	0.20	(0.17)	0.86***	(0.21)
Civic Platform	-0.32	(0.41)	-0.41	(0.35)
Law and Justice	0.18	(0.33)	0.08	(0.32)
Left Democratic Alliance	-0.52	(0.35)	-0.18	(0.40)
Polish Peasants' Party	0.61	(0.55)	0.12	(0.54)
Self-Defence	1.39*	(0.63)	0.46	(0.72)
Constant term	0.49	(0.39)	-0.15	(0.35)
Log Likelihood	-701.8			
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.1659			
N	778			
Chi Square	938.71*** (30 df)			

Notes: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.000$  (one-tailed tests). Main entries are unstandardized regression coefficients and the numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Errors are clustered at the level of electoral district (41 clusters).

The unstandardised beta coefficients seem to support the general expectation that voters' baseline gender preferences can be explained by voters' sex-related stereotypes. As it can be seen in **table 2**, the respondent being a women (*H1*), respondents' left-right self-placement (*H2*), perception of men as having higher levels of political ambition than women (*H3*) all turn out to reach the standard level of statistical significance. Also, support for women's increased political engagement (*H4*) seems to affect strongly respondents' baseline gender preferences.

However, given that the estimated parameters in the multinomial logistic regression inform us about the relationship between the independent variables and the logit—a non-linear transformation of our dependent variable—it may be misleading to directly interpret these quantities in terms of strength of the effects (Long 1997). Thus, to present the substantive impact of each independent variable on a respondent's propensity to express a preference for a candidate's sex, the predicted probabilities were calculated.<sup>6</sup> They are presented in **table 3** as 'first differences' between predicted values of the response variable associated with a change in values

<sup>6</sup> The predicted probabilities were calculated using Gary King's 'Clarify' software: <http://gking.harvard.edu/publications/clarify-software-interpreting-and-presenting-statistical-results>

of a given independent variable, holding other variables constant at their real level. As the key explaining variables are binary, the corresponding first differences reflect the predicted change in the dependent variable caused by a change from 0 to 1 on each independent variable. The exception is taken for age, for which the difference in the response variable is an effect of the change in respondent's age: from 28 (which is a minus one standard deviation from the mean age) to 63 (which is a plus one standard deviation from the mean age).

Table 3  
Predicted Probabilities of Preferring a Male or a Female Candidate

	Male candidate	Female candidate
Age	6.6% [-1.6%; 14.9%]	-4.3% [-9.9%; 1.3%]
University degree	-23.0% [-36.2%; -9.8%]	6.3% [-1.1%; 15.4%]
Church attendance	5.5% [-4.2%; 15.5%]	-2.4% [-9.8%; 5.2%]
Personal Voting	-18.8% [-30.2%; -7.7%]	-1.0% [-8.5%; 7.6%]
Female interviewer	-17.8% [-30.0%; -6.2%]	1.2% [-4.7%; 7.1%]
Ideology	-1.6% [-15.7%; 11.8%]	9.2% [1.0%; 19.2%]
Support for Women	-31.9% [-40.8%; -23.5%]	37.2% [27.8%; 46.7%]
Men well suited	17.4% [9.5%; 26.6%]	-6.9% [-11.5%; 3.3%]
Female respondent	-5.5% [-13.3%; 1.6%]	11.7% [4.8%; 20.3%]
Civic Platform	-4.6% [-21.9%; 10.8%]	-2.4% [-10.0%; 4.8%]
Law and Justice	3.0% [-9.1%; 15.0%]	-0.5% [-5.8%; 5.4%]
Left Democratic Alliance	-11.5% [-27.7%; 5.4%]	2.9% [-7.6%; 15.9%]
Polish Peasants' Party	10.0% [-9.8%; 30.2%]	-2.6% [-12.8%; 12.1%]
Self-Defence	21.5% [5.6%; 38.3%]	-6.2% [-13.1%; 1.9%]

*Note:* The main figures indicate each independent variable's effect on the predicted probabilities of preferring a candidate of a given gender. These figures are differences between two expected values of the response variable, associated with a change in independent variable from 0 to 1 while holding other variables at their real level. The figures in square brackets are 95 per cent confidence intervals of the main predictions.

The quantities reported in [table 3](#) provide us with the assessed effect of each independent variable on voters' propensity to choose male or female candidates. The results corroborate the hypothesis of same gender voting (*H1*). In Poland, as in the United States, women, when faced with a choice between equally-qualified female and male candidates, are found to favour a woman. On average, a female respondent is about 12 per cent more likely to vote for a woman than a male respondent. With regard to preference for male candidates, the effects of a respondent's sex fail to reach statistical significance. In other words, men are no more likely than women to support male candidates.

The belief stereotype hypothesis received empirical support as well (*H2*). The change from centrist or rightist position to the left results in a 9.2 percentage points increase in the probability that a person would choose to vote for a woman. However, a respondent's ideology has no effect whatsoever on their chances of preferring a male candidate. This finding seems to go in line with the argument saying that individuals with liberal stances on moral issues and socialist view on the economy would readily choose women as their representatives.

The findings lend significant support to the trait stereotype hypothesis as well. Respondent's agreement with the statement that men exhibit higher political ambition than do women has a positive effect on chances of preferring a male candidate. The difference in probabilities between those scoring 1 and those scoring 0 on this measure is over 17 per cent. That is, respondents recognising men's higher political ambitions are about 17 per cent more likely to favour male candidates than those contradicting this view. The analogous effect with regard to chances of choosing a woman fails to reach statistical significance. This means that agreement with the aforementioned statement does not affect chances of preferring female candidates.

Last but not least, in line with *H4* support for women's increased presence in politics has a strong effect on both, chances of preferring female and male candidates. A person scoring 1 on this variable is about 32 per cent less likely than a person scoring 0 to prefer a male candidate. Even greater is the impact of this variable on Poles' propensity to choose female candidates. In this case, the difference in probabilities between those supporting and not supporting women's enhanced presence in politics equals 37.2 per cent, meaning that support for women's political engagement highly contributes to chances of favouring female candidates.

The results reported above broadly corroborate all the hypotheses put forward in this paper. However, several other effects are also worth noting. First, respondents with university degree are highly unlikely to favour male candidates. Second, personal voting, that is voting for a specific candidate has also a negative impact on chances of expressing a straightforward preference with respect to a candidate gender. In fact, the effects of these two variables, personal voting and university degree, are negatively associated with chances of favouring male candidates; however, they do not have any impact on respondents' attitudes towards women. The last effect concerns interviewer gender. It seems that female interviewers elicit more egalitarian attitudes towards candidates, as those respondents interviewed by women are less likely to declare support for men candidates. This finding is consistent with past research on the topic (Kane and Macaulay 1993; Sanbonmatsu 2002).

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have tried to assess to what extent gender-related stereotypes influence voters' baseline gender preferences. The hypotheses of group membership voting, trait and belief stereotypes as well as support for women's increased presence in politics all received initial empirical support. In line with *H1*, respondents' gender has been found to significantly affect their expressed baseline preferences for candidate sex. In fact, it is women who are more likely to follow a pattern of same gender voting. This finding goes in line with most conclusions drawn by students of gender stereotypes in the American electoral context (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Plutzen and Zipp 1996; Paolino 1995; McDermott 1997). In those studies, women's consistent support for female candidates is thought to have little to do with a simple

in-group bias, being regarded as an expression of a concern that women's rights and interests are not overlooked and receive due consideration. In my analysis, however, and partly contrary to these conclusions, the effect of voter gender remains independent of the other factor included in the analysis, namely support for women's increased presence in politics (*H4*). If women's increased inclination to choose female candidates is, indeed, to be regarded as an expression of their concern for women's due representation, then we should observe the coefficient on respondent gender to lose statistical significance after the variable indicating support for women's presence in politics is included in the analysis. On the basis of a separate regression analysis (not reported here)<sup>7</sup> it is clear that the effect of a respondent gender on their baseline gender preferences is significantly reduced—from 23.3 per cent to 11.7 per cent—after support for women's increased presence in politics is included in the analysis. However, it still remains statistically significant after this control variable is introduced. Thus, a respondent gender and support for women are independent of one another and both strongly affect respondents' baseline gender preferences. The fact that even those women who do not express any concern for increasing women's engagement in politics tend to state a preference for female candidates is an interesting finding and suggests that, in some cases, such a preference may be more of a habit rather than an expression of any conscious attitudes.

Furthermore, support for women's increased presence in politics (*H4*) is found to be the strongest predictor of voters' hypothetical preferences concerning candidate gender. Nearly half of the respondents indicated that there should be more women in politics and that special measures should be taken to guarantee that their increased presence in politics is achieved. These respondents have been found to be significantly more likely to choose female candidates as well as less likely to prefer male candidates than the rest of the electorate. Thus, we may conclude that public attitudes towards women's presence in politics, and towards gender quotas in particular, were rather positive and supportive at the time directly preceding the adoption of party-list gender quotas.

The analyses presented here provide also an initial empirical evidence for the impact of stereotypes related to candidates' beliefs (*H2*) and traits (*H3*) on voters' baseline gender preferences. We find out that individuals who view politics as a predominantly male domain are more prone to choose male candidates. Moreover, respondents describing their ideology as leftist are more supportive of female candidates. However, further research is needed to corroborate this result more thoroughly. In particular, we should be able to test this relationship using a broader range of indicators of both types of stereotypes. Let thus the results presented in this analysis be considered as an invitation to further research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the nuances of gender-related stereotypes held by Polish voters.

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<sup>7</sup> In this separate analysis, a respondent's support for women's presence in politics was not included as an explaining variable. As a result, the effect of a respondent gender—not controlling for their support for women's presence in politics—on their baseline gender preferences was 23.3 per cent.

Appendix  
**Questions wording, coding and descriptive statistics**  
**from Polish National Election Study, 2005**

Variable	Description
Baseline gender preference	Question wording: 'Imagine that in your constituency two candidates are running for an election to the parliament. They are running on behalf of the same party. They are equal in terms of their education, age, income level, ethnicity, political programme, and both are equally popular. They are only different with regard to their gender. Given the above, whom of them would you vote for? 1) for a woman, 2) for a man, 3) It is hard to say' 1 = for woman (N = 439), 0 = staying neutral (N = 346), -1 = for man (N = 397).
Church attendance	1 = at least once a month (N = 807); 0 = less than once a month (N = 359)
University degree	1 = university degree (N = 110); 0 = less than university degree (N = 1073)
Age	Mean = 46.0; st. dev = 17.5; min = 18; max = 91
Respondent gender	1 = female (N = 650); 0 = man (N = 533)
Personal voting	Question wording: 'What did you take into account, in the first place, while choosing your candidate from the ballot? 1) candidate's name, 2) party name, 3) party candidate in the presidential elections.' 1 = voting for a candidate's name (N = 194); 0 = otherwise (N = 989).
Interviewer gender	1 = woman (N = 731); 0 = man (N = 452)
Ideology	Question wording: 'Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 stands for leftist and 10 for rightist ideology?' 1 = self-placement from 0 to 4 (N = 188); 0 = otherwise (N = 774).
Support for women	An index combining two questions: 'Is it important, in your opinion, that more women get engaged in politics?' 'Would you support special measures ensuring that more women are present in politics?' 1 = if respondent agreed with both statements (N = 498); 0 = otherwise (N = 498)
Men well suited	Question wording: 'Who, in your opinion, has higher political ambitions, men or women?' 1 = men have higher political ambition (N = 492); 0 = otherwise (N = 620)

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