Title: The Divided States of America: How the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Shaped

Perceived Levels of Gender Equality

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Abstract

When Barack Obama became the first black American to be elected as president of the U.S., many claimed that a "post-racial" society had been achieved. Analogously, we predicted that the election of a first woman president—i.e., a Hillary Clinton victory—would increase perceptions of gender equality in the U.S. In contrast, we predicted that a Donald Trump victory would decrease perceived gender equality. Pre- and post-election data revealed that perceived gender equality indeed decreased immediately after Election Day, but only for those who preferred Clinton over Trump—thus increasing polarization between Trump and Clinton supporters on gender-related issues. In an experimental study using a fictitious election, we found that the winner's gender and sexism of the man candidate both contributed, independently, to perceived gender inequality. These studies demonstrate how prominent events, such as political elections, can shape people's perceived levels of systemic inequality. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Key words: 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, Gender, Equality, Sexism

The Divided States of America:

How the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Shaped Perceived Levels of Gender Equality

Gender was a central theme in the highly divisive 2016 U.S. presidential election (Goldmacher, 2016). With Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, there was a chance of the first woman getting elected as U.S. President. Clinton's commitment to women's rights and gender equality further propelled gender issues to the forefront (Women's rights, 2015). At the same time, then Republican nominee, Donald Trump, was widely criticized for his lewd and controversial comments about women (Cohen, 2017; Transcripts, 2016), and more than a dozen women came forward accusing Trump of sexual harassment during election season (Blau, 2016). Given this nationwide focus on gender-related issues, the 2016 election provided a unique naturalistic setting to examine perceptions of gender equality in the U.S.

There are parallels between the 2016 and the 2008 presidential elections. When Barack Obama became the first black U.S. President in 2008, it fueled assertions about the country being "post-racial"—i.e., a color-blind country where racial hierarchy and discrimination no longer exist (López, 2010; Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). While few would dispute the racial significance of Obama's election, the post-racial rhetoric that followed his election was, and continues to be, troublesome. Given the systemic nature of racial disparities in the U.S. in areas such as health, socioeconomic standing, education, and incarceration rates (e.g., Bobo, 2011; López, 2010; Penner, Blair, Albrecht, & Dovidio, 2014), it is inaccurate to construe any single event—including Obama's election—as definitive evidence of a post-racial society. Moreover, post-racial assertions are not only counterfactual, but also problematic in their insinuation that equality-promoting policies have become obsolete, and have been found to reduce support for such policies (Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, O'Brien, 2009). Analogous to the 2008

election, we predicted that the election of the first woman as president would reduce perceptions of gender inequality in the U.S.

This prediction is congruent with prior work showing that people do not always perceive inequality as it exists. For example, Americans vastly underestimate the magnitude of wealth inequality in the U.S. (Norton & Ariely, 2011). Indeed, perceptions of inequality are influenced by a range of factors unrelated to objective markers of inequality, including people's orientation toward intergroup hierarchy (i.e., endorsement of hierarchy versus equality between groups; Kteily, Sheehy-Skeffington, & Ho, 2017), partisanship (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2015), and group membership (such as racial groups; Norton & Sommers, 2011). For example, the more people endorse hierarchy between groups, the less they perceive inequality compared to those who endorse equality between groups (Kteily et al., 2017). Moreover, whites perceive greater anti-white bias than anti-black bias in the U.S., whereas the reverse is true for blacks' perceptions (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Consistent with previous work, our research highlights antecedents of perceived inequality aside from objective markers of inequality. By demonstrating how contextual factors (i.e., political elections) shape perceptions of inequality, our work adds to existing literature outlining individual (e.g., Gimpelson & Treisman, 2015; Kteily et al.2017) and group-based (e.g., Norton & Sommers, 2011) predictors of perceived inequality.

By examining how potentially electing a woman as president shapes perceived levels of gender equality the current work builds on the tokenism literature. Tokenism refers to the practice of having a small number of disadvantaged group members (i.e., tokens) occupy high status positions and/or positions of power (Kanter, 1977). Tokenism is considered a form of discrimination, and differs from an egalitarian practice in that the latter would result in a proportionate, rather than skewed, distribution of power across groups. In the case of tokenism,

the success of a few disadvantaged group members (such as women or racial minorities) is often misperceived as evidence of an egalitarian systemPrior work suggests that token practices can maintain inequality by, for example, heightening beliefs about individual mobility and increasing positive perceptions of the institutions in which the practices take place (Danaher & Branscombe, 2010). Indeed, tokenism has been found to demotivate members of disadvantaged groups to reduce inequality, such as through activism or collective action (Wright, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1998). We predict that when a disadvantaged group member wins a political election this can serve to boost perceptions of equality in a given country, regardless of objective levels of equality. Thus, in the case of a potential Clinton victory, people might come to see greater gender equality in the U.S. as a whole, than in the case of a Trump victory. Considering the high-profile nature of political elections, they can be considered highly visible accounts of tokenism when disadvantaged group members win.

The Current Work

We tested our predictions with two studies. In Study 1, we assessed perceived levels of gender inequality the day before (pre-measures) and the week following (post-measures) Election Day, to test the hypothesis that the election outcome would shape perceptions of gender inequality in the U.S. We predicted, and pre-registered, that perceived gender inequality would decrease if Clinton would win and would increase if Trump would win. Given the highly contentious and polarized climate surrounding the 2016 election, we also predicted that these effects might be moderated by participant gender and/or candidate preference. Finally, we also assessed attitudes on issues unrelated to gender, such as preferred government focus on the economy and national security. This allowed us to test whether the election outcome would affect attitudes and perceptions on all issues, or whether the election outcome would solely

influence attitudes and perceptions regarding issues for which the election outcome had symbolic meaning—such as gender equality.

A key strength of Study 1 is that we were able to test "real-world" changes in perceived levels of gender inequality, thereby heightening ecological validity of the results. However, the correlational nature of the data precludes causal claims about the election outcome shaping perceived gender equality. Moreover, Study 1 posed at least one critical challenge. Because Trump was widely criticized for frequently making sexist remarks (for overview see Cohen, 2017), we were unable to differentiate whether observed effects would be due to the winner's gender or the sexist remarks and behaviors of Trump, or both. We therefore conducted a follow-up experiment (Study 2), complementing the correlational data from Study 1.

In Study 2, participants read about a fictitious election, followed by the manipulation of the winner's gender and whether or not the man candidate had made sexist remarks. This allowed us to test whether it's the winner of the gender, sexism of the man candidate, or a combination of the two, that shapes perceptions of gender inequality. Together, these studies were designed to uncover the consequences of high-profile events, such as presidential elections, for perceptions of inequality.

Method Study 1

A Priori Sample Size Determination

G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was used to assess the required sample size to test the predictions with a repeated measures ANOVA. As pre-registered on www.aspredicted.org[1], the a-priori power analysis suggested that our sample should consist of at

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[1] As can be found here: https://aspredicted.org/blind.php/?x=gfy7df

least 156 people, based on power of 0.95, a medium effect size ($f = .25$), and a design with two (pre- versus post-election) measurements and two-level (i.e., participant gender and candidate preference) moderators.

Participants

Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to complete the pre- and post-election surveys. A total of 201 participants completed both pre- and post-election surveys (96 men, 105 women; $M_{age} = 36.49$, $SD_{age} = 11.15$) of whom 131 indicated a preference for Hillary Clinton and 70 for Donald Trump. Candidate preference was not associated with whether or not participants chose to participate in the post-election survey, $\chi^2 (1, N = 468) = 0.06$, $p = .80$, which suggests against attrition bias. One hundred and seventy-two participants self-identified as white/European American, 17 as black/African American, 10 as Asian American, nine as Latino or Hispanic, and six as Native American or Alaska Native—including 11 participants self-identifying with two or more racial categories. Participant gender was not associated with candidate preference, $\chi^2 (1, N = 201) = 0.18$, $p = .67$. Participants were tracked based on their Mturk Worker ID. By assigning each participant a bonus (of $0.01) in the pre-election study, we were able to send an invitation message to the post-election study. Additional participant demographics and all study materials are reported in the supplementary materials.

Procedure

Pre-measures were collected on MTurk one day before Election Day and post-measures were collected in the week following the election. Pre- and post-election surveys were identical aside from; (a) in the pre-election survey, candidate preference was assessed by asking participants to indicate if they preferred Trump or Clinton to win the election, and (b) in the post-

election survey, participants were asked to answer one open-ended question about the election outcome preceding the survey (see supplementary materials).

Perceived gender equality was measured with items adapted from the perceived equal treatment of genders scale (Kaiser et al., 2013; 4 items; e.g., "I think that women and men are treated the same way in this country"; *1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; α_{pre}=.94; α_{post}=.96*). Next, we assessed how well people thought sexual harassment is handled in the U.S. (2 items[2]; "How well do you think sexual harassment complaints are handled in the U.S.?"; *1 = very poorly, 7 = very well;* r_{pre}=.67, *p* < .001 and r_{post}=.79, *p* < .001). To test whether the observed effects of the election outcome were specific to issues related to gender, we also assessed attitudes toward issues that are not directly related to gender: Preferred government focus on the economy and on national security. Participants indicated how much they thought the government should focus on each of these issues the coming years (*1 = not at all, 7 = a lot*). Participants then provided basic demographic information.

Results

Gender Issues

Perceived gender equality in the U.S. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no main effect of pre- vs. post-election on perceived gender equality, $F(1, 198) < 1$, $p = .94$. However, and unsurprising given the polarized political climate surrounding the election, we observed a significant interaction effect between pre- vs. post-election and candidate preference, $F(1, 198) = 4.67$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and a marginally significant interaction effect between pre- vs. post-election and participant gender, $F(1, 198) = 3.49$, $p = .06$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. To further examine these interactions, pairwise comparisons were conducted. First, for the interaction effect between time

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[2] Perceived handling of sexual harassment was originally measured with three items, but based on results of a reliability analysis, one item was excluded from analysis.

and candidate preference, those who preferred Clinton perceived less gender equality than those

who preferred Trump, before and after the election, both ps < .001. This polarization was

magnified after the election. Congruent with the central hypothesis, there was a marginal

decrease in perceived gender equality after the election compared to before, but only for those

who preferred Clinton, p = .08, and not for those who preferred Trump, p = .17 (see Figure 1).

Second, for the marginal interaction effect between pre- vs. post-election and participant

gender, a similar pattern emerged. Before the election, men (M =3.60, SE = 0.14) perceived

marginally more gender equality than women (M = 3.25, SE = 0.14), p = .07. After the election,

this polarization between men (M =3.73, SE = 0.16) and women (M = 3.13, SE = 0.15) was

magnified, p = .004. The change in perceived gender equality from pre to post-election was not

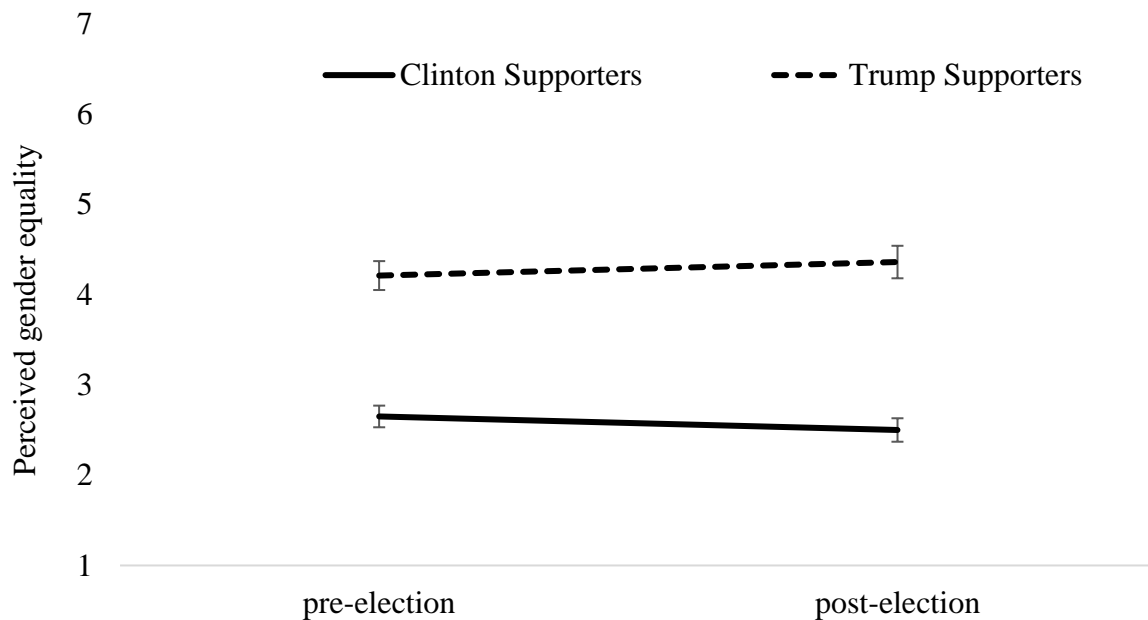significant for men nor women, both ps $\geq$ .20.

Figure 1. Marginal estimated means and standard errors for perceived gender equality in Study

1.

Perceived handling of sexual harassment in the U.S. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed no main effect of pre- vs. post-election on perceived handling of sexual harassment in the U.S., $F(1, 198) = 2.02$, $p = .16$. There was a significant interaction effect between pre- vs. post-election and candidate preference on perceived handling of sexual harassment, $F(1, 198) = 19.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and no interaction effect between pre- vs. post-election and participant gender on perceived handling of sexual harassment, $F(1, 198) < 1$, $p = .37$.

Pairwise comparisons were conducted to examine the interaction between pre- vs. post-election and candidate preference on perceived handling of sexual harassment. These revealed that those who preferred Clinton perceived poorer handling of sexual harassment than those who preferred Trump, before and after the election, both ps < .001, and this polarization was magnified after the election. Perceived handling of sexual harassment in the U.S. decreased after the election compared to before, among those who preferred Clinton, $p < .001$. In contrast, among those who preferred Trump, perceived handling of sexual harassment marginally increased after the election compared to before, $p = .07$ (see Figure 2).

Non-Gender Issues

There was no effect of time on preferred government focus on the economy, $p = .98$, or national security, $p = .27$ and no interactions between pre-post-election and candidate preference or pre-post-election and participant gender, all ps > .49. Thus, these findings suggest that the election outcome was associated with changes in perceptions of gender equality, in particular, and not associated with changes in people's stance on issues that were unrelated to gender.
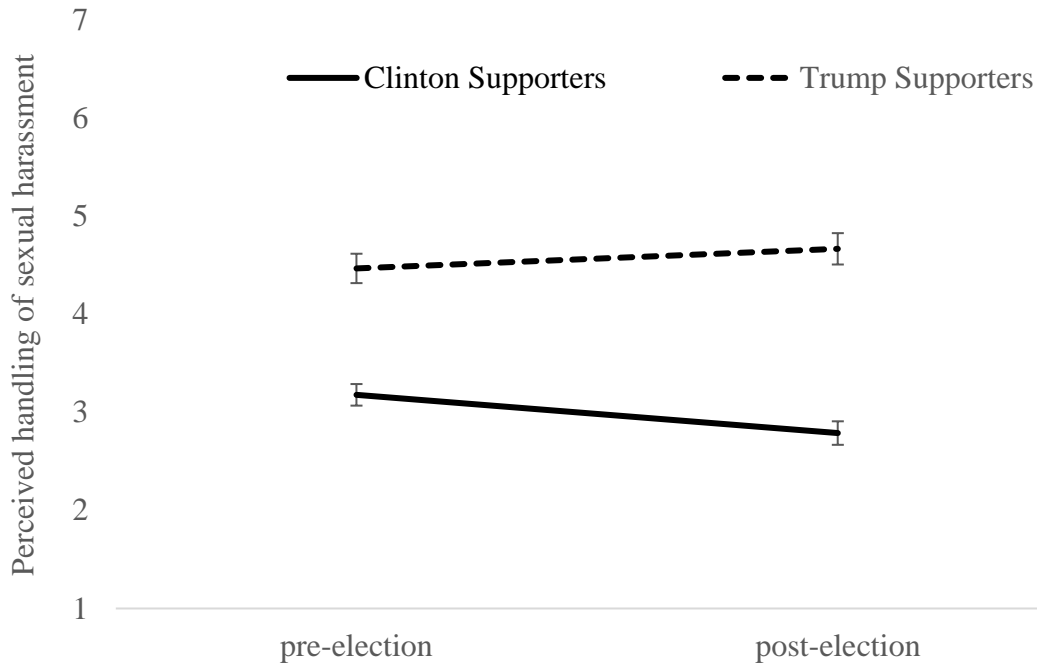
Figure 2. Marginal estimated means and standard errors for perceived handling of sexual harassment in Study 1.

Discussion

      The 2016 election outcome shaped perceptions of gender inequality and perceived handling of sexual harassment. However, the direction of its effect depended on people's candidate preference. Whereas perceived gender equality decreased after the election compared to before for those who preferred Clinton, the reverse pattern was observed for those who preferred Trump. Overall, those who preferred Trump perceived greater gender equality and better handling of sexual harassment compared to those who preferred Clinton. This polarization increased after the election. Given the specific election context, we were unable to tease apart the impact on perceptions of inequality of a man versus a woman winning on the one hand and the man candidate making sexist remarks on the other.

Study 2 was designed to experimentally tease apart the effect of the winner's gender and the salience of the man candidate's sexism on perceptions of gender inequality, using a fictitious election. We tested whether the winner's gender or the salience of the man's sexism, or both, would drive perceived gender equality. Data for Study 2 were collected in March 2017, several months after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. At the end of the study participants were asked the open-ended question "What do you think this study is about?" and 7.45% of people indicated that they thought the study was about the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Excluding these people did not alter the main effects of condition on perceived gender equality and perceived handling of sexual harassment.[3] In sum, we were able to test the psychology behind Study 1's findings beyond prior political affiliation and candidate preferences, which were non-existent or irrelevant in the experimental context of Study 2.

Method Study 2

A Priori Sample Size Determination

G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) was used to assess the required sample size to test our predictions with four experimental conditions using an ANOVA, indicating a sample size of at least 387 to detect a small effect size ($f=.14$).

Design and Participants

Participants were recruited via MTurk. The study consisted of a 2 (winner's gender: man vs. woman) x 2 (man's sexism salience: yes vs. no) between-subject design with random assignment. After excluding 32 people who either skipped or incorrectly answered the manipulation check[4], the sample consisted of 389 MTurk workers (220 men, 167 women, and two gender non-binary people; $M_{Age} = 36.12$, $SD_{Age} = 12.19$), of which 311 self-identified as

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[3] The interaction effect between salience of sexism and participant gender on perceived handling of sexual harassment became marginal when these people were excluded from analysis, $p = .055$.
[4] As a manipulation check, participants were asked to indicate the gender of the winning candidate.

White/European American, 35 as black/African American, 31 as Asian, 27 as Latino or

Hispanic, five as Native American or Alaska Native, one as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific

Islander, and three participants identified as other—including 21 participants who self-identified

with two or more racial categories. Additional participant demographics and all study materials

are reported in the supplementary materials.

Procedure

Participants were asked to imagine a large, democratic country where elections were held

every four years. Participants read that all past prime ministers had been men. In the most recent

election a man and a woman from opposing parties were the most prominent candidates.

Depending on condition, participants either did or did not receive information about sexist

remarks made by the man candidate, followed by information that either the woman or the man

won the election. Next, participants completed the perceived gender equality scale (adapted from

Kaiser et al., 2013; 5 items; e.g., "I think that men and women have the same professional

opportunities in that country"; *1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; α=.97*) and perceptions

of how well sexual harassment is handled in that country (2 items; *1 = strongly disagree, 7 =

strongly agree; r = .85, p < .001*). Participants then provided basic demographic information.

Results

Because participant gender moderated the effect of sexism salience on the outcome

variables, it was included in the model. We note that participant gender influenced the magnitude

rather than the direction of effects. A table containing marginal estimated means, standard errors

and confidence intervals is reported in the supplementary materials.

Perceived Gender Equality

There were significant effects of winner's gender, $F (1, 379) = 10.75$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, sexism salience, $F (1, 379) = 26.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and participant gender, $F (1, 379) = 7.24$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, on perceived gender equality. Overall, men perceived greater gender equality ($M = 3.87$, $SE = 0.10$) than women ($M = 3.45$, $SE = 0.12$). Participants perceived less gender equality when they learned that the man won than when the woman won, and when sexism of the man was made salient (see Figure 3). There was no interaction effect between conditions, $p = .34$, indicating that winner's gender and sexism salience both influenced perceptions of gender equality, independently.

Furthermore, the effect of sexism salience on perceived gender equality was moderated by participant gender, $F (1, 379) = 6.70$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that men perceived more gender equality than women ($M_{difference} = 0.83$, $SE = 0.22$), but this difference was only significant when sexism was made salient, $p <. 001$, and disappeared when sexism was not made salient, $M_{difference} = 0.16$, $SE = 0.23$, $p = .94$. Moreover, while sexism salience decreased perceptions of gender equality for everyone compared to when sexism was not salient, this effect was most pronounced for women, $M_{difference} = 1.22$, $SE = 0.24$, $p < . 001$, and marginal for men, $M_{difference} = 0.40$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .054$. Participant gender did not moderate the effect of winner's gender on perceived gender equality, $p = .25$, meaning that the observed effect of winner's gender on perceived equality was similar among men and women. Finally, there was no three-way interaction between winner's gender, sexism salience, and participant gender on perceived gender equality, $p = .95$.
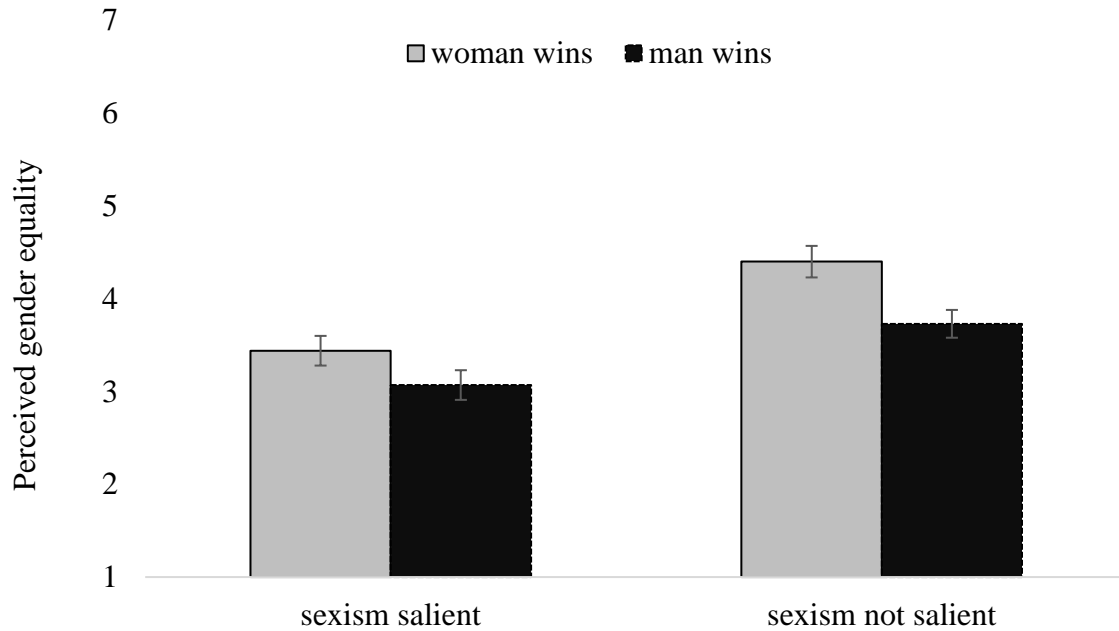
Figure 3. Marginal estimated means and standard errors for perceived gender equality in Study 2.

Perceived Handling of Sexual Harassment

There were significant effects of winner's gender, $F(1, 379) = 30.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, sexism salience, $F(1, 379) = 31.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, and participant gender, $F(1, 379) = 13.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, on perceived handling of sexual harassment. Participants perceived that sexual harassment was handled worse when they learned that the man won and the woman lost, and when sexism of the man was made salient versus when it was not made salient (see Figure 4). Overall, men perceived better handling of sexual harassment ($M = 4.21$, $SE = 0.10$) than did women ($M = 3.67$, $SE = 0.11$). Again, there was no interaction effect between conditions, $p = .68$. Winner's gender and sexism salience both, independently, influenced perceptions of how well sexual harassment is handled in that country.
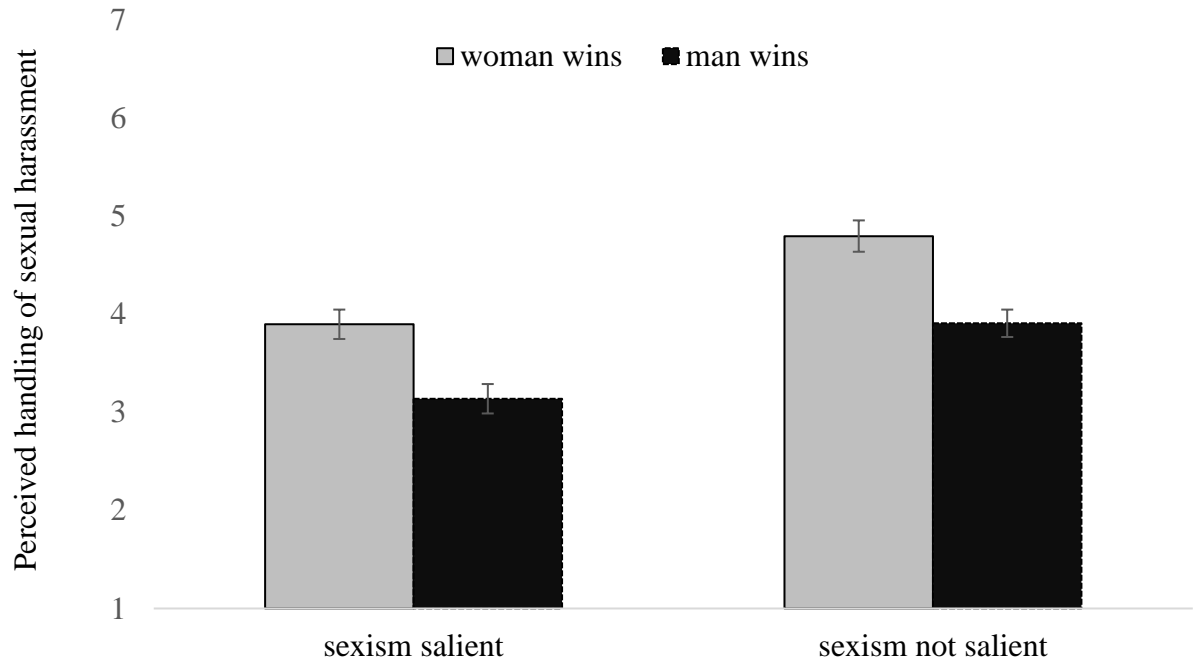
Figure 4. Marginal estimated means and standard errors for perceived sexual harassment in Study 2.

Similar to the effect of winner's gender on perceived gender equality, the effect of sexism salience on perceived handling of sexual harassment was moderated by participant gender, F (1, 379) = 4.86, p = .03, η_p^2 =.01. Pairwise comparisons revealed that men perceived better handling of sexual harassment than women ($M_{difference}$= 0.87, SE= 0.21), but this difference was only significant when sexism was made salient, $p <. 001$, and disappeared when sexism was not salient, ($M_{difference}$= 0.22, SE= 0.21, p = .32. Moreover, when sexism of the man candidate was made salient, men and women perceived worse handling of sexual harassment compared to when sexism was not made salient, and this difference was more pronounced among women, $M_{difference}$= 1.16, SE= 0.23, $p < . 001$, than among men, $M_{difference}$= 0.51, SE= 0.20, p = .01. Participant gender did not moderate the effect of winner's gender on perceived handling of sexual harassment, p = .67, meaning that the observed effect of winner's gender on perceived

handling of sexual harassment was the same among men and women. Finally, there was no three-way interaction between winner's gender, sexism salience, and participant gender on perceived handling of sexual harassment, $p = .65$.

General Discussion

Some have referred to the 2016 U.S. presidential election as a referendum on gender— one that women lost (Burleigh, 2016; Chira, 2016). The current work was aimed at examining the impact of political elections between a man and a woman candidate on perceptions of gender inequality. We predicted that the election outcome would affect people's perceptions of gender equality in the U.S., analogous to how Obama's election in 2008 shaped post-racial assertions. Reflecting the extreme polarization surrounding the 2016 election (Stack, 2016), there was a significant interplay between election outcome and candidate preference that shaped perceived gender equality. Those who preferred Trump reported greater perceived gender equality and better handling of sexual harassment than those who preferred Clinton—a polarization that was increased after the election. This pattern is consistent with work demonstrating that partisanship shapes perceptions in fundamental ways (Caruso, Mead, & Balcetis, 2009). No such effects were observed for issues unrelated to gender, namely, preferred government focus on the economy and national security. These results suggest that the election outcome polarized perceptions specifically related to gender. Despite the calls for national unity by several political leaders, including President Obama (Reed, 2016), the results of Study 1 suggest that the victory of Trump and loss of Clinton increased polarization on gender issues in a country that was already divided.

In Study 2, winner's gender and whether or not the man candidate had made sexist remarks were experimentally manipulated. This allowed us to disentangle the potential effects of these two factors—which were conflated in Study 1—on perceptions of gender inequality.

Results revealed that a man candidate making sexist remarks and woman losing an election to a man candidate both increased perceived gender inequality. There were no interaction effects, indicating that gender of the winner and salience of the man candidate's sexism were both independent predictors of perceived gender inequality. While these effects were moderated by participant gender in some cases—such that the observed effects were more pronounced among women than men—the effects of experimental condition on perceptions of inequality were significant, and in the same direction, for men and woman participants.

Parallel to Obama's election in 2008, the observed effects show how a single event—i.e., an election outcome—can shape perceived levels of social inequality (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011; Lopez, 2010). Study 1 shows how the interplay between the election outcome and candidate preference shapes perceptions of inequality. Study 2 shows that in the absence of pre-established political preferences for either candidate, perceptions of gender inequality are increased when a man rather than a woman wins the election and when a man makes sexist remarks. Taken together, these studies show that people use single, salient events (e.g., political elections between members of advantaged versus disadvantaged groups) to make inferences about inequality at a system (e.g., national) level. Since past research on tokenism suggests that such inferences could guide behavior (e.g., Wright & Taylor, 1998), future work should examine how these shifts in perceived inequality might drive behavior, such as engaging in collective action.

In both studies, we included participant's gender as an additional variable in our analyses. Studies 1 and 2 provide converging evidence for the main effects of participant gender: Men perceived more gender equality and better handling of sexual harassment than women. Study 1 revealed a marginal moderation by participant gender, showing that women's and men's

perceptions of gender equality further polarized after Trump—a man candidate who made sexist remarks —won the election. Study 2 demonstrated consistent participant gender by candidate sexism interactions, revealing that, while in the same direction, candidates' explicit sexism influenced women's responses to a greater degree than men's responses. Thus, while both studies show that women perceive more gender inequality than men, and the former are more likely to adjust their perceptions of gender inequality as a function of an election outcome than the latter, these effects were likely suppressed by candidate preference in Study 1. These findings suggest that while perceivers' gender may influence the strength of their responses, the interplay with other factors, such as candidate preference, is important to consider.

The findings presented here have theoretical and practical implications. First, is important to test whether election outcomes still influence perceptions of inequality when people are confronted with objective evidence of inequality. For example, future work can test whether the election of a black woman increases perceptions of gender and racial equality even if people are provided with objective evidence of gender inequality, such as the gender pay gap (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016), and of racial inequality, such as disproportionate incarceration rates of black people in the U.S. (López, 2010). Such work would highlight how malleable perceptions of inequality are as a function of the interplay between high-profile events—such as elections—and educational initiatives directed at increasing awareness of actual inequality (Garoutte & Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011).

Second, changes in perceptions post- compared to pre-election were most consistent among those who preferred Clinton rather than Trump. In all cases, however, perceptions of Clinton and Trump supporters were adjusted in a way that increased polarization between them after the election. Indeed, it is not so much a change in either party's position on a given issue

that constitutes polarization, but rather, a divergence between two parties' position. Thus, given that Clinton supporters consistently adjusted their perceptions after the election in a direction away from Trump supporters' perceptions, we conclude that polarization between the two groups increased after the election compared to before. Future work could examine whether those whose preferred candidate wins an election are more or less likely to adjust their perceptions based on an election outcome that those whose preferred candidate loses.

Third, the observed effects in Study 1 occurred in a timespan of a few days from pre- to post-election, without actual policy changes or shifts in objective markers of gender inequality, such as a reduction in the gender pay gap (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). As previously outlined, (mis)perceptions of inequality influence support for policies and behaviors that are designed to reduce inequality (e.g., Kaiser et al., 2009). Thus, election outcomes can shape support for policies or willingness to engage in collective action through their impact on perceived inequality. While not directly tested in the current work, it appears that the observed polarization immediately following the election may have been long-lasting and influential in terms of shaping people's behavior. For example, the largest demonstration in U.S. history, the Women's March, took place months after the election (Frostenson, 2017). Future work should examine how persistent the observed effects are and how they develop over time.

Finally, no election effects were observed for issues not directly related to gender, such as the economy and national security. This suggests that the election outcome specifically influenced polarization between Trump and Clinton supporters on "relevant" issues, that is, areas for which the election outcome had symbolic meaning. Future work should explore such contextual specificity of elections, and how their outcomes affect perceptions and behavior around other particular societal issues, such as racial or economic inequality.

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