

# One of Our Own: Black Female Candidates and the Voters Who Support Them

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*This article examines the role of race and gender in candidate evaluations. Unlike previous research, we argue that the role of race and gender in electoral politics must be examined simultaneously because of their mutually reinforcing relationship. To do so, we explore the connection between the race and gender of voters and their propensity to support black female candidates. Using precinct-level data, experimental data, and national exit poll data from two congressional election years, we demonstrate that black women are the strongest supporters of black female candidates. We also find that support for black female candidates is contingent on their background and political experience. Black female candidates with significant experience in politics can attract both black and white voters, regardless of gender.*

While the number of African-American elected officials has increased over the last four decades, blacks remain underrepresented at all levels of government. Even more striking is the relatively small number of black women who achieve electoral success in the contemporary political arena. For instance, black women make up less than 3% of U.S. representatives and there are no black women in the U.S. Senate (CAWP 2005). Why are there so few black female elected officials? Does race or gender help or hinder the electoral prospects for black female candidates? These questions remain largely unanswered. While scholars have examined race (Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Reeves 1997, 11; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993) and gender (Kahn 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sapiro and Conover 1997; Zipp and Plutzer 1985) as moderating variables that determine a candidate's electoral success, few have examined the intersection of the two.

We attempt to address this omission by examining who are the likely supporters of black female candidates. While there is evidence to suggest that both blacks and women experience structural barriers to running for public office, we are primarily interested in understanding what happens once black women appear on the ballot. In doing so, we hope to illuminate some of the factors that

help explain the relatively few black female elected officials. Similar to previous studies, we argue that, inasmuch as blacks vote along racial lines, African-American voters will be more likely to support black female candidates. In contrast, since gender consciousness is more tenuous, gender will not predict support for a black female candidate. Finally, we argue that gender and race interact to create a separate consciousness whereby race trumps gender but the intersection of the two trumps both. In other words, we argue that black women candidates find their greatest support among black women voters.

In what follows, we discuss the literature on voting for black and female candidates. We then bridge these two literatures to discuss the unique position of black female voters and candidates. Finally, we test our hypotheses using national survey data, experimental data, and local aggregate election data. This study contributes to our understanding of electoral politics in two important ways. First, we demonstrate that candidates belonging to two marginalized groups need not be doubly disadvantaged. Second, we demonstrate that voters do not necessarily use one identity at the expense of the other when making political decisions. Rather, multiple identities can interact to create a separate single identity that can be used to evaluate candidates.

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## The Case of the African-American Candidate

Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the United States has seen an increase in the number of black elected officials. Nevertheless, “although blacks constitute 11% of the nation’s voting-age population, less than 2% of all elected officials in the nation are black” (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999, 291). Historically, more than 11,000 people have served in Congress. Yet just over 100 of them have been black (Walton and Smith 2003, 169). Although African-American representation in public office is greater at the state and local levels of government, blacks still remain underrepresented.

The relatively few African-American elected officials can be attributed, in part, to the difficulty these candidates face in getting elected. First, scholars have found a relative reluctance among white voters to vote for black candidates (Reeves 1997; Terkildsen 1993; Williams 1989). For instance, Williams (1989) found that although whites report a willingness to vote for a qualified black candidate, they were far more likely to believe that a white candidate would be more effective and more qualified than a black candidate. Similarly, Reeves (1997) also found that racially conservative, less educated, male, and older white voters are less likely to vote for black candidates, especially in a racially charged election. Some recent evidence suggests party may mitigate the effects of race. Using exit poll data from U.S. House elections, Highton found that there was “little support for the hypothesis that white voters discriminate against black candidates in House elections” (Highton 2004, 11). White voters were no less likely to vote for the Democratic candidate when he or she was black than they were if the candidate was white. The same held true for black Republican candidates. Of course, this data can only capture those opinions of voters who showed up at the polls. There is reason to suggest that discrimination may be masked by an unwillingness to participate. For instance, Gay finds that “the election of African Americans to Congress is accompanied by a lower level of political engagement among whites” (Gay 2001, 589). If this is the case, reluctance to vote for a black candidate would not appear in vote choice but in the decision to vote at all.

That is not to say that all whites are unwilling to vote for black candidates. The electoral success of J.C. Watts (R-OK), Alan Wheat (D-MO), Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), and Sanford Bishop (D-GA) demonstrates that black candidates can win congressional elections in majority white districts. In addition, there have been a number of black mayors (e.g. David Dinkins, Ron Kirk, and Tom

Bradley) elected in predominantly white cities (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1999).

Regardless of support from white voters, African-American candidates typically rely on overwhelming support from black voters to get elected. For instance, Adler (2001) discusses the electoral prospects of black mayors. He argues that “to win at the ballot box African-American candidates needed virtually unanimous support from African-American voters; these mayors typically captured more than 90 percent of the votes cast by African Americans” (Adler 2001, 12).

Along these lines, it is generally understood that black voters support black candidates. To be sure, ideology and viability of the candidate matter (Tate 2003). Nevertheless, a growing body of literature has been devoted to examining the impact of district composition on electoral prospects of black candidates (Canon 1999; Swain 1993), the impact of black candidates on black turnout (Gay 2001), and blacks’ evaluations and orientations towards government as a consequence of being represented by an African American (Bobo and Gilliam Jr. 1990; Fenno 2003; Tate 2003). For instance, using the 1987 General Social Survey, Bobo and Gilliam find that black participation increases in cities with black mayors. Moreover, African-American participation rates in these cities exceed those of whites (Bobo and Gilliam Jr. 1990).

For the most part, these studies assume that black voters vote for black candidates. Ironically, few studies have been devoted to examining black vote choice at the individual level. One exception is Tate’s examination of support for Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988. She found that blacks in the 1984 National Black Election Study (NBES) gave Jackson, on average, a feeling thermometer score of 74. In contrast, whites in the 1984 American National Election Study rated Jackson at 40 on the same scale. It comes as no surprise then that 57% of the NBES sample indicated they supported Jackson in the Democratic presidential primary, compared to 27% for Mondale (Tate 1993).

Black voting behavior, especially as it relates to support for black candidates, is thought to be a function of a sense of group identification. In general, scholars argue that “people identifying with various groups do bring different perspectives to bear on the political world, perspectives that focus more heavily on those issues most explicitly linked to each group’s economic and social interests” (Conover 1984, 774). Consequently, research has found that blacks in particular use what happens to the group as a proxy for individual self-interests (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Tate 1993). The higher one’s level of group consciousness, the more likely he or she is to vote for a black candidate or support policies

designed to ameliorate racial inequality. Although it was once predicted that group consciousness would dissipate as blacks experience greater social and economic heterogeneity (Wilson 1978), black group consciousness remains high (Dawson 1994; McClerking 2001). Thus, it is likely that blacks will continue to overwhelmingly support black (Democratic) candidates.

To sum, black candidates receive the greatest support from black voters. There is also evidence to suggest that black candidates can also gain the support of white voters. White support, however, is highly contingent on racial attitudes and overall perceptions of African Americans. As a result, black support for black candidates exceeds white support. The boundaries of this claim, however, will be explored shortly.

## The Case of the Female Candidate

Women constitute just over half of the American electorate, yet the percentage of elected officials who are female is nowhere near 50%. Duerst-Lahti and Verstegen argue that “when we look at the proportions of women holding public-leadership posts over time, women have in fact not been literally present beyond occasional tokens” (1995, 215). Over the past decade, however, there has been an increase in the number of women officeholders. Before the 1992 elections, women constituted only 5% of the U.S. Congress. As Duerst-Lahti and Verstegen note, the 1992 elections resulted in the doubling of this proportion, which “by far [was] the biggest single expansion of the number of women in Congress, especially in the Senate” (221). Still, the proportion of women serving in public office lags their proportion in the general electorate.

Some scholars have attributed the lack of female political elites to the relative reluctance on the part of women to run for public office. Like African-American candidates, however, there is also a relative reluctance to support female candidates. Female voters (and voters more generally) perceive women candidates and legislators to be especially responsive to women’s issues like child care and women’s rights (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993b; Kahn 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002). As a result, women have a greater propensity to support female candidates, all else being equal (Sanbonmatsu 2002). In most elections, however, all else is not equal. Thus, the results of several decades’ worth of studies examining the electoral prospects of female candidates are inconclusive. Support for female candidates can be contingent on issue salience (Paolino 1995), the particular office sought (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993a), and individual candidate characteris-

tics (Ekstrand and Eckert 1981). Voter partisanship and the extent to which the female candidates are identified as supporting women’s issues also affects vote choice (Zipp and Plutzer 1985).

Support for female candidates is also influenced by the electoral context. Duerst-Lahti and Verstegen point to the “Year of the Woman” as an illustration of the catalyzing effect of female candidates. The “Year of the Woman” marks the 1992 election in which “women stepped forward to run [for elected office] in record numbers and were supported by record numbers of women” (1995, 221). Using the 1992 American National Election Study, Sapiro and Conover examine the extent to which gender mattered in the 1992 elections. They found that “women were more attentive to election news in [gender-mixed elections] than in all-male contexts” (1997, 507). Contrary to their expectations, Sapiro and Conover also found that “the mobilizing impact of female candidates was especially strong for women who [did] not especially identify with feminism. . .” (507). Likewise, Zipp and Plutzer found that “sex is related to voting for a female candidate primarily among self-identified Independents in races in which the woman is identified as supporting issues which are important to women” (1985, 194). However, they found that “strong female candidates can attract the crossover votes of both men and women, while weaker ones can lose the votes of men and women” (194).

Finally, support for female candidates is contingent on the race of the voter. Sigelman and Welch found that “white men are about as likely as white women to support female candidates” (1984, 473). They also found that black women were more supportive of female candidates than black men, with black women being the most supportive of both sexes and races.

Again, there is mixed evidence supporting the notion that men and women support female candidates at different levels. Despite the prevalence of a gender gap—a small but persistent difference between men and women in support for parties, candidates, and issues (Frankovic 1982; Hutchings et al. 2004; Kaufmann 2004; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Norrander 1999a, 1999b; Wirls 1986)—women are not necessarily predisposed to support female candidates. Perhaps this is because gender consciousness does not exist to the extent that African-American consciousness does (Gurin 1985). While group identification is positively correlated with support for “women’s issues,” overall levels of group identity are not particularly high (Conover 1988). One explanation is that

. . .the structure of relations between men and women profoundly inhibits the development of group consciousness among women. Specifically,

the frequent and intimate interaction that typically occurs between men and women interferes with women's development of a sense of solidarity and their recognition of group deprivation. Thus the extent and intensity of group consciousness among women is less than for some other groups (such as racial minorities). . . . (Conover 1988, 67)

Nevertheless, in almost every instance where there is a gender gap in support for female candidates, it is because there is a marginal preference among female voters for women seeking elected office.

### **The Case of the Black Female Candidate**

As Mansbridge and Tate argue, "Race and gender are intimately intertwined in the lives of Black women in the United States. Race constructs the way Black women experience gender; gender constructs the way Black women experience race" (1992, 488). Historically, black women have found themselves marginalized by both the black and the female struggle for equality (King 1975). For instance, during the fight for universal suffrage, black women often found themselves torn between racist white women and sexist black men (hooks 1981). Around the time of the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, white women campaigned to have their right to vote granted before that of black men, citing the inherent inferiority of blacks (Walton and Smith 2003). As a result, "African American women were pushed to the periphery of any discussions, or were acknowledged only nominally, despite the fact that they existed as persons who were both female and black" (Locke 1997, 384). Black women also found themselves outside of the mainstream during both the Civil Rights Movement and the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s. The male leadership of civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panthers believed that issues specific to black women should come second, if at all, to issues of the race more generally (Anderson-Bricker 1999; Gay and Tate 1998; Perkins 1999). Likewise, throughout the women's movement, black women often found themselves in separate feminist organizations from white women. Black feminists criticized their white counterparts for neglecting issues of both race and class (Roth 1999).

Because they are "doubly bound," it is reasonable to posit that black women have developed a black female consciousness, separate from that of black men and white women. Limited support for this claim is evident when

examining black women's orientation toward politics.<sup>1</sup> Still, scholars have found that black women differ from both black men and white women in terms of their levels of political participation (Baxter and Lansing 1983; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001). Further, Gay and Tate (1998) found that black women who were both gender and race identifiers evaluated black leaders and political events differently than their low-identified counterparts. Interestingly, Gay and Tate's study does not include analyses of gender differences across racial lines. Inasmuch as a joint race and gender consciousness is more likely to occur among black women, however, there is reason to suspect that black women's evaluations would also differ from that of white women and men of both races.

We argue that black women also differ in terms of their support for candidates, particularly black female candidates. First, it is important to note that black female elected officials are a relatively new feature of the political landscape. It was not until 1968 that the first black woman, Shirley Chisholm, was elected to Congress. "Prior to the late 1960s the only period of widespread black involvement in politics was the period of Reconstruction in the South when women were still denied the franchise. Black women, therefore, did not experience with black men this brief stint of voting and officeholding, which was mostly restricted to the South" (Prestage 1977, 401).

Nevertheless, there has been an upward trend in the number of black female elected officials. According to a report issued by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the net increase in the number of black elected officials (BEOs) between 1999 and 2000 were all women. In general, the number of black female elected officials "has risen from 160 in 1970 (then 10.9 percent of all BEOs) to a record number of 3,119 in 2000 (34.5 percent)" (Bositis 2000, 9). The proportion of female BEOs is relatively constant across levels of government, with the exception of the county level where the number of black female elected officials is substantially lower (Bositis 2000). Even so, black women, who constitute slightly less than 7% of the U.S. population, remain underrepresented. For instance, in 2005 black women held less than 1% of statewide elective executive offices. In contrast, white women held approximately 24% of these positions. Likewise, only 3% of state legislators are black women, compared to white women who constitute 18% of state legislators. Note, however, that black women have been fairing better than Latina and Asian-American women elected officials at both the state

<sup>1</sup>The scant evidence supporting the notion that black women exhibit a distinctive and separate consciousness that influences their political orientations is more a function of the relatively few studies devoted to the subject matter than the lack of findings among extant research (Gay and Tate 1998; Simien and Clawson 2004).

and national level (CAWP 2005). According to the Center for American Women and Politics, seven Latinas currently serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, three hold statewide elective executive offices, and 69 serve in state legislatures. Moreover, only 24 Asian-American women serve as state legislators, one is a member of Congress, and none hold statewide elective executive offices (CAWP 2005). Regardless of color, there is room for improvement when it comes to female elected officials in general.

As a result of their few numbers, very little empirical work has been done on black female elected officials. What exists is mostly speculation about how black female candidates will fare given the examples provided by black candidates and female candidates and the general treatment of black women in the larger society. Scholars, however, disagree over the extent to which black female candidates receive more than their fair share of opposition from voters. Some argue that black female candidates face both sexual and racial discrimination, making it even more difficult for them to be elected than black men and white women (Anderson-Bricker 1999; Bryce and Warrick 1977; King 1975). In contrast, Tate argues that black women, relative to white women, are better able to mobilize voters along both racial and gender lines. She speculates, however, that black female candidates are more likely to find their support from other blacks. Similar to the arguments posited earlier, she contends that “the ‘women’s vote’ in contrast to the ‘Black vote’ has historically been far more elusive because women, for a variety of reasons, are less likely than Blacks to vote as a bloc” (Tate 2003, 64). Thus, she concludes that black women, like all women, cannot necessarily count on the female vote.

The small amount of empirical data available tends to support Tate’s argument. For instance, Clayton and Stallings (2000) use the election of Eva Clayton (D-NC) in 1992 to the United States House of Representatives as a case study. They found that Eva Clayton achieved a broad base of support from both blacks and whites, with African Americans being the strongest supporters.

While Clayton and Stallings provide the foundation for understanding the electoral prospects of black female candidates, the story is not complete. Namely, we do not know the extent to which the pattern of support for black female candidates found in their study extends beyond North Carolina’s first district. Since Clayton and Stallings relied primarily on county-level data, which did not allow them to control for sex of voters, we also do not know what role gender played in the decision to support a black female candidate. Thus, the goal of this article is to examine a variety of races featuring black female candidates to see if a discernable pattern of support emerges based on

the gender and race of voters, both at the individual and at the aggregate level.

Similar to Sigelman and Sigelman (1982), we argue that voters create a hierarchy of candidate preferences based on their own group membership. The closer a candidate resembles the voter, the more supportive of the candidate the voter will be. Applying this logic to black female candidates, we argue that black women will be the greatest supporters of black female candidates, while white men will be the least supportive of black female candidates. On its face, this argument suggests that black men and white women should be equally as likely to support black female candidates because each group shares one common identity. We argue, however, that black men will be more supportive than white women since race consciousness tends to be stronger than gender consciousness. In other words, African Americans are more likely to see themselves as a group than women are. Therefore, there should be a greater perceived connection between black male voters and black female candidates along racial lines than between white female voters and black female candidates along gender lines. More concisely stated, we hypothesize that the level of support in ascending order for black female candidates is as follows: white male, white female, black male, black female.

## Data and Methodology

We approach testing our claims about support for black female candidates from a number of different methodological directions. Specifically, we utilize three data sources: an experiment, precinct-level election data, and exit poll data. Below is a description of each study.

The experimental component of the research design gauges reactions to a description of a fictitious campaign which was embedded within the 2005 Party Image Study, a project examining politics and political parties more generally. Participants in the 2005 Party Image Study were nonstudent subjects recruited from a number of locations, including an art fair and hotel lobbies, in Michigan and Texas. In total, 469 subjects were recruited for the experiment, including 226 blacks and 210 whites.<sup>2</sup> The mean age of the sample was 42, 62% of the sample

<sup>2</sup>In these analyses as well as the analyses of the other two data sources, only blacks and whites are included in the sample because of the small number of respondents from other racial/ethnic groups. Likewise, we confine our examination to comparisons of black and white candidates because of the difficulty associated with identifying and obtaining data for the relatively few elections featuring a female candidate who is also a racial/ethnic minority. Moreover, the complex (and sometimes divergent) intragroup histories of Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans in the United States make

was female, 58% of the sample was college educated, and the median income of the sample was between \$40,000 and \$49,999. The entire questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Once subjects completed the study, they were given \$10 in cash for their participation.

In addition to answering a number of questions about their ideology, partisanship, and issue positions, respondents were randomly assigned to read one of three paragraphs about an upcoming mayoral election featuring a black female candidate. Each of the three paragraphs was identical except for the race and gender of the black female candidate's opponent. Below is the exact wording of the paragraph:

A recent poll indicates that the two front-runners in this year's nonpartisan mayoral race are City Councilmember Sharon Johnson and *businessman/businesswoman Claude/Claudine* Barker. Johnson, a 38-year-old lawyer, has served on the City Council for six years. If elected, Sharon Johnson will become the city's first black female mayor. Her opponent, 45-year-old *Claude/Claudine* Barker, is a relative newcomer to politics. Barker, who is a *black male/white male/white female*, is an active member of the city's chamber of commerce and has served on its board of directors. Both candidates have indicated that tackling the city's economic problem is their number one priority. Barker's plan includes providing tax incentives to business owners interested in relocating downtown with the hopes of revitalizing the central city area. Johnson, on the other hand, advocates the creation of job training programs that would prepare workers to meet the changing needs of today's economy.

The italicized words denote the words that were manipulated across conditions. In the first condition, subjects read that the black female candidate, Sharon Johnson, was running against Claude Barker, an African-American male. Claude Barker is a white male in the second condition. Lastly, in the third condition, Johnson's opponent is Claudine Barker, who is a white female. After reading about the campaign, subjects were then asked, "Based on what you read, if the election was held today and you had to choose between the two candidates, who would you vote for?" Responses were coded 1 if subjects chose Johnson and 0 if they indicated that they would vote for Barker. We then compared the mean level of support for

it difficult to form theoretically grounded predictions of when, why, and how gender and racial/ethnic consciousness intersect.

Johnson among black women, black men, white women, and white men. In addition, we examined whether this support was contingent on the race and gender of Johnson's opponent.

The advantage of using a contrived scenario about a black female candidate is that it allows us to control for spurious relationships that might interfere with our ability to discern the connection between race and gender in support for a candidate. In particular, these data allow us to examine support for black female candidates when all else (including incumbency status, campaign spending, prior political experience) is held equal. Nevertheless, using experimental data limits our ability to generalize beyond this hypothetical situation. In reality, political candidates launch campaigns under a variety of circumstances. Therefore, we supplement the experimental data with data from actual elections.

To examine the electoral support for black female candidates, we also rely on voting and registration data from the city of Atlanta. The city of Atlanta provides a unique opportunity to explore the current subject because of its unique political history and its place in the struggle for African-American political incorporation. As Affigne notes, "the city of Atlanta holds a prominent place in the history of Black America, the development of Black social thought, and the scholarly analysis of urban life in the United States. Crucial events of the nation's antebellum economic development, Civil War, Reconstruction, Civil Rights Movement, and post-civil-rights Black political emergence all occurred in Georgia's largest and most important city" (1997, 71). Atlanta also has a long history of electing and reelecting black mayors (Philpot and Walton 2005). In recent years, it has also witnessed the entry of black females into its mayoral elections and elected its first female mayor in 2001. Finally, Atlanta is one of the few cities that collect registration information by gender *and* race. Thus, we are able to examine whether the level of support for a black female candidate in a precinct was related to the race and gender of the registered voters in that precinct. The first dependent variable we examine is the change in voter turnout by precinct from 1997 to 2001. This variable was created by subtracting the percentage of registered voters who voted in 1997 from those who voted in 2001. We also examine the vote share in a precinct received by the two black female candidates in the 2001 Atlanta mayoral contest—Shirley Franklin and Gloria Bromell-Tinubu. We include independent variables measuring the percentage of black men, black women, white men, and white women registered in a precinct. Because voter turnout and vote choice are continuous variables, we use ordinary least squares to estimate the models.

As is the case with aggregate data, these data do not allow us to make conclusive arguments about individual-level phenomena. Therefore, to complement the Atlanta data, we also rely on an additional individual-level data source. Specifically, we utilize 1996 and 1998 exit poll data collected by the Voter News Service to examine vote choice during two electoral cycles. These two studies were chosen because, combined, they feature a relatively large number of respondents, including large subsamples of African Americans. Further, both polls included the state and congressional district number for each respondent, enabling us to add information about the race and gender of the candidates for whom respondents voted.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, these data are drawn from a national sample, enabling us to generalize beyond a particular region within the United States.

Using this information, we examined support for a black female candidate given the race and gender of the voter.<sup>4</sup> Here, the dependent variable represents a reported vote for a black female candidate in a U.S. House race. Responses were coded 1 if the respondent voted for a black female and 0 if the respondent did not.

Our primary independent variables are the race and gender of the respondents. First, the variable *black* was coded 1 if the respondent was African American and 0 if the respondent was white. We also included a dummy variable for the sex of the respondent, coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Finally, we included the interaction between the two in order to test the hypothesis that black women were more likely to support a black female candidate. This variable was coded 1 if the respondent was a black female and zero if otherwise.

To control for contextual factors related to each House race, we include dummy variables for whether the black female candidate was an incumbent (1) or nonincumbent (0), whether she faced an opponent who was a black male (1) or nonblack male (0), a white female (1) or nonwhite female (0), and whether she held elected office prior to running for Congress (1) or was a political novice (0). We also control for the region of the race. Included is a dummy variable, coded 1 for South and 0 for non-South. Because we combine exit poll data from two separate elections, we also include a variable for whether the race occurred during a mid-term election (1) or during a presidential election year (0). Finally, we include a party match variable that indicates when a respondent and a candidate have

<sup>3</sup>This information was obtained from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

<sup>4</sup>We restrict our analyses to only those cases in which the respondent voted in an election featuring a black female candidate running for office, excluding those respondents who did not vote for a black female candidate because they did not have that option.

the same party identification (1) and when their party identifications differ from one another (0).

To account for other differences among voters, we control for a number of background characteristics and political predispositions. Specifically, we include measures of the respondents' age and income, and whether the respondents received a college degree. We also include the respondents' self-reported ideology, coded 1 if the respondent was liberal, .5 if the respondent was a moderate, and 0 if the respondent was conservative. Similarly, we coded respondents' party identification 1 if they were Democrats, .5 if they were independents, and 0 if they were Republicans. Finally, because the dependent variable was dichotomous, we estimated the model using logistic regression.

## Analyses

Looking first at the experimental data in Table 1, we find that black women tend to be the biggest supporters of black female candidates. Regardless of whom her opponent was, black women overwhelmingly supported Johnson, the fictitious black female candidate. This support ran from 78% when Johnson's opponent was a black male to 85% when her opponent was a white male. Black males also supported Johnson at similar levels, although their support was contingent on her opponent. When Johnson's opponent Barker was described as a black male, only 60% of black men preferred Johnson over Barker. The difference between black men and black women's support for Johnson in this condition was statistically significant. The gap between levels of support for a black female candidate among black men and black women

**TABLE 1** Mean Support for the Black Female Candidate

	Black Females	Black Males	White Females	White Males
Black Female vs. Black Male	78	60**	67	61*
Black Female vs. White Male	85	81	68**	62**
Black Female vs. White Female	82	84	63**	53**

*Note:* Values are mean levels of support for Johnson (black female candidate) over her opponent. Difference-of-means tests were conducted by comparing black female subjects' responses to the responses of other groups. Starred values indicate statistically significant differences.

\*\*p < .05, \*p < .10.

*Source:* 2005 Party Image Study.

disappears when Johnson's opponent is white. Over 80% of both groups support Johnson when she faces a white opponent, regardless of whether the opponent is a white male or white female.

In contrast, white respondents supported Johnson at much lower rates than their black counterparts. When white women read about Johnson running against a black male candidate, their mean level of support for Johnson was 67%. Although this constituted a 17 percentage point difference from black women's support for Johnson, this difference was not statistically significant. In the treatment group where the black female candidate is challenging a white male candidate, 68% of white female respondents preferred Johnson over Barker. Similarly, support for Johnson was 63% among white women when Johnson faced a white female candidate. The differences between black female respondents and white female respondents in these conditions were statistically significant. When white male subjects read about the contrived election, their support for the black female candidate is 61% when Johnson runs against a black male and 62% when Johnson's opponent is a white male. These levels of support are significantly different from that of black women. White male support for Johnson, however, is lowest when the black female candidate faces a white female candidate. The percentage of white men who prefer Johnson over Barker drops to 53%. The almost 30 percentage point difference between black women and white men in this condition is statistically significant.<sup>5</sup>

Looking next at the Atlanta data, Table 2 presents the election returns for the 2001 Atlanta mayoral election. Shirley Franklin, who previously served as a city administrator during the Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson administrations, received just under half of the votes cast. Her strongest competitor, Robert Pitts, a black male and a longtime city council member, received roughly 33% of the vote. Newspaper accounts of the election attributed Franklin's success, in part, to a well-organized and well-funded campaign. Reportedly, Franklin "raised more money than any other female candidate for public office in Georgia's history" (Chunn 2001). Shirley Franklin's campaign received donations from Quincy Jones, Vernon Jordan, Bill Richardson, and Ed Rendell (Miller and Judd

<sup>5</sup>Arguably, the description of the fictitious nonpartisan mayoral election might have been sending partisan cues. If this was the case, our results would be affected in a number of ways. For instance, the high levels of support exhibited by blacks may be a result of their partisanship rather than their race. Likewise, the disproportionate number of white Democrats (44%, compared to about 30% in national random samples) in the experimental sample may be inflating the rate of support for Johnson among whites. Note, however, that the differences between blacks and whites remain, even when controlling for party identification.

**TABLE 2** The Number and Percentage of Votes in the 2001 Atlanta Mayoral Election

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Shirley Franklin	40,724	49.4
Robert Pitts	26,856	32.6
Gloria Bromell-Tinubu	12,970	15.7
Trudy Kitchin	295	0.4
G. B. Osborne	225	0.3

*Source:* Adopted from the "Fulton County Municipal General Election," City of Atlanta, November 13, 2001.

2001). At the local level, Franklin's campaign disclosure report revealed that just under half of her individual contributors were women and that she received substantial support from people of all races (Chunn 2001).

Gloria Bromell-Tinubu, the other black female candidate, also ran in the 1997 mayoral race. Although Bromell-Tinubu had previously served on the Atlanta city council and Georgia's board of education, her campaign was not as well funded as Franklin's, and she had less political experience than the two frontrunners in the election (Philpot and Walton 2005). A professor of economics at Spellman College, she ran a more energetic grassroots campaign and managed to capture 12.9% of the vote in 1997 and 15.7% in 2001, placing third in both elections. She also received campaign endorsements from the Georgia Green Party, the Teamsters Local 528, and the Atlanta chapter of the Georgia Women's Political Caucus (Miller 2001). Together, the black female candidates received roughly two-thirds of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

But what role did race and gender play in the 2001 Atlanta mayoral election? To answer this question, we first look at the change in voter turnout from 1997 to 2001. In general, voter turnout does increase modestly in 2001. Looking at Table 3, however, we see that race did not play a major role in the increased turnout. Turnout was not contingent on the number of registered black voters in a precinct. This was true regardless of gender; there was no statistically significant relationship between the percentage of black female registered voters in a precinct and voter turnout in that precinct. This is consistent with Gilliam and Kaufmann's (1998) findings that Atlanta voter turnout, in general, increases in elections where there is not an incumbent (as was the case in the 2001 election) and is not necessarily a function of race. On the other hand, voter turnout in a precinct did increase as the number of female voters in a precinct increased.

<sup>6</sup>Two other candidates, G. B. Osborne and Trudy Kitchin, received less than 1% of the vote. Osborne, a Nigerian-American male, funded his own campaign. Kitchin, who also funded her own campaign, is a white female Republican and local political activist.



**TABLE 3** Voter Turnout and Black Female Vote Share by Race and Sex

	Voter Turnout	Black Female Vote Share
Black Voters	.056 (.06)	-.685* (.14)
Registered (%)		
Female Voters	.201* (.09)	-1.604* (.21)
Registered (%)		
Black Female	-.181 (.12)	2.021* (.26)
Registered Voters (%)		
Constant	.025 (.04)	1.220* (.10)
R <sup>2</sup>	.12	.70
N	141	166

Note: Coefficients are OLS estimates. Standard errors appear in parentheses. Omitted category is the percent of white male registered voters in a precinct.

\*p < .05.

Source: Adopted from the "Fulton County Municipal General Election," City of Atlanta, November 13, 2001, and the "Fulton County, Georgia Count of Voters by Precinct and District," October 2001.

With respect to vote share, the results presented in Table 3 suggest that black women were the strongest supporters of the black female candidates. The two candidates' marginal vote share increased the most when the percentage of black female registered voters increased in a precinct. Surprisingly, support for Franklin and Bromell-Tinubu *decreased* as the percentage of white female and black male registered voters increased in a precinct. Note that the rate of decrease was larger for white women than black men. Nevertheless, contrary to our expectations, the black female candidates did better in precincts with higher levels of white male registered voter than they did in precincts with higher levels of black male or white female registered voters.

To illustrate this point, we use the Atlanta data to calculate the mean vote share of the two black female candidates based on the racial composition of a precinct. In precincts where black females make up the majority of the registered voters (n = 89), Franklin and Bromell-Tinubu received approximately 79% of the vote share. In contrast, they only received an average of 54% of the vote in precincts where black males comprised the majority of registered voters (n = 3). Finally, in precincts where white men (n = 2) and white women (n = 8) comprised the majority of registered voters, Franklin's and Bromell-Tinubu's vote share was 67% and 30%, respectively.

Finally, we examined the extent to which the pattern of support for a black female candidate translated across contexts by exploring vote choice in the 1996 and 1998 congressional elections. Model 1 in Table 4 looks at sup-

**TABLE 4** Voting for a Black Female House Candidate

	Model 1	Model 2
Black	1.004** (.31)	.517 (.38)
Female	-.297 (.21)	-.169 (.24)
Black * Female	.765* (.41)	.445 (.48)
South	.588** (.20)	.010 (.30)
Ideology	.920** (.27)	.542* (.32)
Party Identification	.439* (.23)	-.130 (.29)
Income	-.124* (.07)	-.134* (.08)
College Degree	.079 (.21)	.115 (.24)
Age	.069 (.05)	.150** (.06)
Mid-term Election		-.065 (.30)
Incumbent		1.042** (.51)
Party Match		1.912** (.24)
Held Previous Office		.773* (.47)
Black Male Opponent		-1.221** (.31)
White Female Opponent		.643 (.83)
Constant	-.857** (.39)	-1.487** (.45)
N	643	643
Log-likelihood	-379.25	-299.29
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.32

Note: Coefficients are logistic regression estimates. Standard errors appear in parentheses.

\*\*p < .05, \*p < .10.

Source: VNS National Exit Polls, 1996 and 1998.

port for a black female candidate when we do not consider campaign-specific variables. Using white males as the baseline, we see similar, although not identical, results. First, respondents' race mattered; African Americans were more likely to vote for a black female candidate. Specifically, being a black male increased the probability of voting for a black female candidate by 8 percentage points. Similar to the Atlanta findings, being a white female decreased the likelihood of voting for a black female candidate by 4 percentage points, although this effect was not statistically significant. Respondents who were black and female, however, were significantly more likely to vote for a black female candidate. There was a 10 percentage point difference between black women's and white men's probability of voting for a black female candidate. In other words, while there was no statistically significant difference between white men and white women in the probability of voting for a black woman running in a U.S. House election, there was a substantial difference between that of black women and white men.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>All of the marginal effects described in this paragraph were calculated by holding age, ideology, party identification, and income at their means and South and college constant at their modes.

Model 2 in Table 4 reveals that any race and gender effects completely disappear once we control for contextual factors. First, incumbency was substantively large and statistically significant. Respondents were 16 percentage points more likely to vote for a black female if she was an incumbent. This is consistent with previous research (e.g., Jacobson 1997) that demonstrates the power of incumbency status when predicting vote choice. Whereas Democrats were more likely to vote for a black female candidate in Model 1, party identification was not a statistically significant predictor of voting for a black female candidate in Model 2. What mattered more was that the candidate and the respondent have the same party identification; support for black female candidates received a 10 percentage point boost when the candidate and the voters' party identification converged. Also significant was whether the black female candidate held previous elected office prior to running for Congress. Black female candidates with prior political experience garnered a statistically significant, although modest (2 point), increase in support from voters. Finally, the race of the candidates' opponent was a significant predictor of vote choice. Respondents' probability of voting for a black female candidate decreased by 4 percentage points when she ran against a black male. Having an opponent who was a white female, however, did not make a difference.<sup>8</sup>

In summary, the race and gender composition of the electorate matters with respect to the electoral success of a black female candidate, although our findings come with a few caveats. In our fictitious race, black women respondents unconditionally preferred the black female candidate. Black men matched black women's support for the black female candidate so long as her opponent was not a black male. White men and white women both supported the black female candidate with less vigor than blacks. Their levels of support did not appear to be contingent on gender; white men's and white women's preference for the black female candidate did not significantly differ from one another.

With respect to the Atlanta data, the black female candidates received a greater percentage of the vote in precincts with greater numbers of black female registered voters. Consistent with the experimental data, the percentage of black male registered voters was negatively correlated with the black female candidates' vote share. On average, support for Franklin and Bromell-Tinubu was lower in districts with high percentages of black male reg-

istered voters than that of both black female and white male registered voters. Keep in mind that the other front-runner in the 2001 Atlanta mayoral election was a black male. Again, the findings suggest that black male support for a black female candidate is contingent on the race and gender of her opponent. Unlike the experimental data, the results of the analyses of the aggregate data also show that the black female candidates were significantly less well off in precincts with higher levels of white female voters, even when compared to the vote share in precincts with a greater number of white males.

Lastly, an examination of the electability of black female U.S. House candidates sheds further light on the complex relationship between race and gender. Without taking into account any campaign-specific factors, the pattern of support found in the other two data sources holds. Black female U.S. House candidates did better among black women. Substantively, the probability for voting for a black female candidate was highest among this group.<sup>9</sup> Black men were also more likely to vote for a black female candidate than white men or white women. Finally, as they did in the experimental and aggregate data, the results of the exit poll data reveal a lack of gender consciousness among white women—when it came to congressional elections, white women were no more or less likely to vote for a black female candidate than white males.

Interestingly, none of these differences matter when we control for incumbency, previous political experience, and the similarity between the candidates' and the voters' party identification. If there is an initial reluctance on the part of white voters to vote for a black female candidate, it subsides when the candidate is an incumbent or has held public office prior to running for Congress. Also, race and gender matter less when the candidate and the voter share the same party identification.

## Conclusion

We began this study by asking the following question: Does race or gender help or hinder the electoral prospects for black female candidates? Our answer is yes and no. First, it is important to note that when it comes to examining the electoral prospects of black female candidates, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of race and gender. For black women, race and gender do not operate separately from one another. By the nature of where they lie at the intersection of race and gender, black women

<sup>8</sup>All of the marginal effects described in this paragraph were calculated by holding age, ideology, party identification, and income at their means and South, college, black, female, mid-term election, incumbent, party match, held previous office, black male opponent, and white female opponent constant at their modes.

<sup>9</sup>A liberal significance test ( $p < .10$  in a one-tailed test) indicates that there is a significant difference between black women and black men, as well as black women and white women in their probability of voting for a black female House candidate.

experience a political reality separate from that of white women and black men. As evidence, we found that black female candidates garner support from black women at extremely high levels. Here, race and gender strengthened support for black female candidates.

Beyond black women voters, there are other ways in which race and gender operate in the electorate. The substantial difference between the level of support between blacks and whites suggests that race does play a significant role in the decision to vote for a black female candidate. If we assume that the difference between black and white voters is driven, at least in part, by whites' relative reluctance to vote for a black female candidate, then race does hinder the electoral prospects of black female candidates. The findings suggest, however, that black female candidates receive equal levels of support among whites relative to blacks when she has amassed a bit of political experience. Here, the background of the candidate allows her to transcend her race and gender among white voters. On the flip side, because of their race, black females are able to mobilize black voters, regardless of gender. From this perspective, race helps the electoral prospects of black female candidates, while gender plays little to no role.

Thinking more broadly, our findings have implications for the study of group politics. The foundation for understanding politics in terms of the battle over group interests was laid by the writers of our founding documents. It was argued that the incorporation of a variety of interests in the political debate would temper decision making (Wills 1982). The assumption was that people have a number of overlapping interests, so much so that one group could never dominate politics. Gay and Tate describe this pluralist perspective:

... each individual bears multiple, often competing, allegiances. No one is wholly constituted as a factory worker; she is also a female, a Jew, a parent. Only a fraction of her political identity and attitudes could be expressed through union affiliation, for example. The priorities of any one group are not expected to figure prominently in her interpretations of politics. Furthermore, the argument goes, the absence of internal cohesion (a consequence of overlapping memberships) limits the effectiveness with which any group can assert its claims—countering the threat posed by the proliferation of interest group activity. (Gay and Tate 1998, 171)

This argument rests on the notion that, when faced with competing loyalties, individuals will try to strike a balance between the two.

In the area of black politics, this has not been the case. Scholars, for instance, have found that race consistently factors more heavily than class in political evaluations and attitudes of African Americans (Dawson 1994; Tate 1993). That this phenomenon occurs even though blacks experience more economic and educational heterogeneity contradicts pluralist theorists (e.g., Dahl 1961) who argue that racial/ethnic identities become less salient as groups become more assimilated. Research has also demonstrated that black women use race at the expense of gender in their political evaluations (Gay and Tate 1998; Mansbridge and Tate 1992). Taken together, this research suggests that, rather than striking a balance between two identities, blacks frequently use their racial identity, while neglecting other identities.

Our research, however, reveals that neither the pluralist perspective nor the black politics perspective conveys the entire story. We argue that being a black woman and identifying as such is not simply adding what it means to be black to what it means to be a woman. Instead, we argue that by the nature of their status in American society, black women have created an identity that is greater than the sum of its parts. This, in turn, guides their political decision making whereby they evaluate candidates based on the potential benefit yielded to black women rather than blacks and/or women. Stated more generally as it relates to group politics, rather than choosing a political outcome that minimally satisfies both identities simultaneously or an outcome that satisfies one identity at the expense of another, individuals in some cases will choose a political outcome that maximizes the utility for those standing at the intersection of the competing identities. We provide evidence that demonstrates that black women's evaluations of black female candidates cannot simply be explained by their race or gender independently of one another. As scholars continue to explore the relationships between competing groups in society, we contend that this line of thinking should be extended to other individuals who simultaneously possess overlapping and competing interests, especially where these interests are both inescapable and subordinate. This includes, but is not limited to, homosexuals who are also racial/ethnic minorities.

While the findings of the current study are enlightening, we find it necessary to point to some of the limitations of our research. First, we treat objective group membership and group attachment as interchangeable. But as Conover notes, objective group membership is "a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for identification" (1984, 761). A more precise test of our hypotheses would examine whether the relationship between objective group membership and candidate preference is strengthened when voters exhibit higher levels of group consciousness, as well as the moderating role of racial and

gender attitudes. We speculate that such analyses would serve to bolster our evidence.<sup>10</sup> Similar to studies examining support for black candidates in general (Dawson 1994; e.g., Tate 1993), we hypothesize that African-American support for black female candidates would be even higher among blacks who exhibit a sense of linked fate with other blacks. Likewise, black women who identify with a black feminist ideology would be even more likely to support black female candidates. Finally, we expect to see an increase in support for black female candidates among those white women with a sense of gender consciousness.

We also recognize some of the limitations with the data we use. By themselves, the experimental data, the Atlanta data, and the exit poll data cannot conclusively test the hypothesized relationship between the race and gender of voters and support for black female candidates. To be sure, the Atlanta data allow us to examine actual vote returns. Because of the nature of aggregate-level data, we cannot make individual-level inferences. While these data allow us to discern whether the characteristics of the registered voters in a precinct related to support for the black female candidate, we do not know whether these registered voters actually cast ballots for this candidate. Moreover, the Atlanta data do not allow us to control for contextual factors related to vote choice. In contrast, the experimental data allow us to control for contextual-level factors by holding constant the background, experience, and other confounding elements related to candidate preference. They also allow us to delineate the relationship between support for a black female candidate and the race and gender of her opponent absent any campaign spending and partisan differences. The major drawback of experimental data, however, is that they restrict the ability to generalize. Likewise, the exit poll data also allow us to control for a variety of sociodemographic and contextual factors. These data, however, rely on self-reported vote choice, rather than actual vote choice. Yet, the three data sources taken together allow us to triangulate on the true relationship between gender and race of a voter and support for a black female candidate. That these three very different datasets yield similar patterns of support for black women running for public office enables us to

<sup>10</sup>Support for this claim can be found in Conover's (1984) examination of group identification and political perceptions. In this study, Conover examines which considerations different groups bring to bear when evaluating candidates and parties. Her results suggest that individuals' perceptions of the political world are guided by a combination of objective group membership and psychological attachment to that group. Specifically, Conover found that using group-relevant criteria to evaluate candidates and parties is bolstered when the individual identifies with that group. However, objective group membership explains quite a bit of the decision to use group-relevant considerations.

be fairly confident in the results. Moreover, examining both local and national elections allows us to speak to the generalizability of the findings.

Lastly, this study only constitutes one piece of a much larger puzzle. There are still many questions left unanswered. For instance, in addition to voters, what other obstacles do black women face in their quests for electoral success? Are there differences in the way black women are recruited to run for public office? Once in office, do black women behave differently than white women or black men? Does their gender or race or both guide their legislating? In other words, do black women differ from others in the way they substantively represent their constituents? Already, there is evidence to suggest that black women in state legislatures differ from black men and white women in terms of their policy priorities (Barrett 1995). Exploring these questions further should be among the avenues pursued by scholars in the future.

Nevertheless, we believe that the current study contributes to our understanding of race, gender, and electoral politics. Often, scholars explore the impact of race and gender on candidate evaluation separately. In this study, we have demonstrated that this approach leads to a miscalculation of the effects of each. Just as the relationship between gender and candidate evaluation is contingent on race, the relationship between race and candidate evaluation is moderated by gender. Here, we have illuminated some of the nuances of these relationships.

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