To Believe or Not to Believe

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A Closer Look at the Impact of Sexual Assault in Politics

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Overview

- Why ?
- Survey Data
- Case Studies
- Why this matters?

Why?

- The intersection of sexual assault and politics is complex
  - There are many different dynamics at play, power (age, class, workplace), gender, age
- How people respond is complicated
  - Personal experience, gender, partisanship, other politicians, media, societal attitudes
- Public opinion

The Argument

- Individuals judge sexual misconduct in relationship to its severity. The more severe, the harsher the consequences.
- Individuals are more likely to advocate for harsher punishments when the accused politician is not of the same political party.
- Republican respondents, in general, will be more lenient than Democratic respondents.
- Female respondents are more likely to advocate for more severe punishment than male respondents.

Approaches to Analysis

1) **Survey**
   - The survey was conducted for the Bucknell Institute for Public Policy by the professional polling firm YouGov
   - Total sample size of 1,200 participants.
2) **Case Studies**
   - These cases were the basis for the scenarios described in the survey questions.
   - They reflect the real life public response to sexual misconduct in politics over the past 30 years.

Questions

A (Republican/ Democrat/ No Party) senator has been accused of having a sexual relationship with a young female staffer. The Senator has (a history/no history) of making unwanted sexual advances on his female staffers.

A (Republican/ Democrat/ No Party) senator has been accused of making unwanted sexual advances towards a young female staffer. The Senator has (a history/no history) of making unwanted sexual advances on his female staffers.

A (Republican/ Democrat/ No Party) senator has been accused of attempted rape. The Senator has (a history/no history) of making unwanted sexual advances on his female staffers.

Response Options

Should this Senator (check all that apply)
- Resign from his position
- Issue an apology
- Take a temporary leave of absence from his position while the charges are investigated
- Have legal action taken against him
- None of the above

Relevant Survey Hypotheses

1) The proportion of Democratic respondents to select a severe consequence will be higher than the proportion of Republican respondents
2) Respondents will be more likely to select a harsher consequence when the accused politician has a history of misconduct.
3) The proportion of respondents to select severe consequences will increase as the severity misconduct increases
4) Respondents will be more likely to select a harsher consequence when the accused politician is not of the same politician party

Findings

Overall…

- Both Democrats and Republicans advocate for harsher consequences when the accused politician is of the opposite party
  - However, within this trend Democrats were more likely to show statistically significant differences in response behavior, meaning that the Democrats reacted significantly more harshly than Republicans.
- Democrats respondents were more likely to advocate for harsher punishment than Republican respondents, regardless of the accused politician's political party.

Responses to Same Partisan & Different Partisan Treatment

Table 1. Difference of proportion test between treatments with the same partisanship for the "resign" option.

Same Partisan (Resign)					
Severity	Context	Prop Republican	Prop Democrat	Diff Prop (Rep-Dem)	P Value
Sexual Relationship	History	0.5909	0.4894	0.1015	0.4335
Sexual Relationship	No History	0.2143	0.2000	0.0143	0.2865
Unwanted Advances	History	0.3725	0.5789	-0.2064	0.0057*
Unwanted Advances	No History	0.1200	0.1852	-0.0652	0.0808
Rape	History	0.3061	0.5769	-0.2708	0.0008*
Rape	No History	0.2250	0.2250	0.0000	0.2500

Table 2. Difference of proportion test between treatments with different partisanship for the "resign" option.

Different Partisan (Resign)					
Severity	Context	Prop Republican	Prop Democrat	Diff Prop (Rep-Dem)	P Value
Sexual Relationship	History	0.4091	0.6197	-0.2106	0.0069*
Sexual Relationship	No History	0.2174	0.2987	-0.0813	0.0812
Unwanted Advances	History	0.3947	0.6338	-0.2391	0.0042*
Unwanted Advances	No History	0.1600	0.3000	-0.1400	0.0194*
Rape	History	0.6279	0.5000	0.1279	0.4544
Rape	No History	0.2553	0.2308	0.0245	0.3110

Republican Responses

Table 3. Difference of proportion test between Republican response to same and different partisan treatment for the "resign" option.

		Republican (Resign)			
Severity	Context	Prop Same Partisan	Prop Different Partisan	Diff Prop (Same-Diff)	P Value
Sexual Relationship	History	0.5909	0.4091	0.1818	0.4780
Sexual Relationship	No History	0.2143	0.2174	-0.0031	0.2430
Unwanted Advances	History	0.3725	0.3947	-0.0222	0.2078
Unwanted Advances	No History	0.1200	0.1600	-0.0400	0.1411
Rape	History	0.3061	0.6279	-0.3218	0.0005*
Rape	No History	0.2250	0.2553	-0.0303	0.1855

Democrat Responses

Table 4. Difference of proportion test between Democrat response to same and different partisan treatment for the "resign" option.

		Democrats (Resign)			
Severity	Context	Prop Same Partisan	Prop Different Partisan	Diff Prop (Same-Diff)	P Value
Sexual Relationship	History	0.4894	0.6197	-0.1303	0.0240*
Sexual Relationship	No History	0.2000	0.2987	-0.0987	0.0400*
Unwanted Advances	History	0.5789	0.6338	-0.0549	0.1241
Unwanted Advances	No History	0.1852	0.3000	-0.1148	0.0247*
Rape	History	0.5769	0.5000	0.0769	0.4137
Rape	No History	0.2250	0.2308	-0.0058	0.2327

The Take Legal Action Response

- Observed the same overall trends
  - As well as an upward trend in selection as severity increased
- Significance of "Take Legal Action"

Notable Findings:

- In the Rape, No History Treatment, Democrats were two times more likely to advocate for legal action when the accused politician was a Republican

Case Studies

- Bill Clinton
  - History of Behavior
  - Power Dynamics and Consent
- Clarence Thomas
  - "He Said, She Said"
- Brett Kavanaugh
  - Post "Me Too" era
  - Shift in framing
- Donald Trump
  - 2020 Election

Why Does This Matter?

Questions?