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The Variable Nature of the Gender Gap in Political Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Previous research demonstrates that long-standing gender gaps in political knowledge are often a function of measurement artifacts. This article examines two potential measurement issues – question content and format – to determine whether gender differences in knowledge are sensitive to decisions we make when choosing and constructing knowledge measures. Using an original survey from the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), we demonstrate that, while expected gender differences exist when we ask traditional knowledge questions, these gender gaps are ameliorated when we employ items that measure knowledge about women in politics. We also examine gendered response patterns regarding "don't know" responses, which can deflate women's knowledge levels. Finally, we examine the determinants of political knowledge for women and men, and uncover an important role for political interest in shaping women's knowledge levels. These results suggest that scholars should take steps to create political knowledge measures that can most accurately gauge the political capacities of women and men.

KEYWORDS

Gender gap; political knowledge; political interest

Over the past several election cycles, the landscape for women in US politics has begun to shift. The number of women candidates is increasing, as is the number of women who are elected to office. Women's and gendered issues have gained additional prominence as a result of the 2016 and 2018 elections. While women are still underrepresented as candidates and officeholders, and policy debates still focus on rectifying situations for women, there is a greater attention and interest to women's political roles than ever before. This situation existed even before six women declared their candidacies for the Democratic nomination for president in the 2020 race. Yet, while attention to women's political roles is receiving more attention in public life, scholars of gender politics still argue for the integration of gendered considerations in the study of public opinion in the United States. This need for more attention to gender and gendered concerns is most obvious in our examination of political knowledge.

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Political knowledge is a centrally important concept in political life and is assumed to be key to the ability of people to be engaged in political life and to advocate for their own interests (Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). For many years, scholars have pointed to a small, but persistent, gender gap in political knowledge that favors men (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Dolan 2011; Wolak and McDevitt 2011), which leads to pessimistic conclusions about the political lives and fortunes of women. At the same time, in the face of a conventional wisdom that finds women are less knowledgeable than men, recent work on the gender gap in political knowledge has demonstrated that these gaps appear to be variable and, to a large extent, the result of measurement issues involving question content and format.

Introduction

In this article, we contribute to efforts to contextualize the gender gap in political knowledge by examining alternative measures of knowledge and by highlighting the important role of political interest in shaping women's levels of knowledge. We also demonstrate that the format of knowledge questions can matter to women's reported levels of knowledge. Employing data from an original Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES), we find that gender gaps disappear when we broaden our knowledge measures to include questions about women's presence in government. We also find that the determinants of political knowledge are different for women and men, with political interest serving as a key influence for women. Since women generally hold lower levels of political interest than do men, this interest deficit may help to explain the gendered knowledge gap. Finally, we find support for the concern raised in earlier works that women's levels of political knowledge may be compromised when measures employ "don't know" options. These findings suggest that recognizing the degree to which gender gaps in knowledge are contingent on the context and content of our measures is important for understanding the political abilities of women and men. They also suggest, in concert with other works, that scholars should undertake more intentional efforts to measure political knowledge moving forward.

Explaining the gender gap in political knowledge

A significant body of work demonstrates a gender gap in political knowledge, both in the United States and around the world (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Dow 2009; Ferrin, Fraile, and Garcia-Albacete 2018; Fortin-Rittberger 2016; Fraile 2014; Fraile and Gomez 2015; Frazer and Macdonald 2003; Jerit and Barabas 2017; Kenski and Jamieson 2000; Miller 2019; Sanbonmatsu 2003; Wolak and McDevitt 2011). Since

political knowledge is held in such high regard in democracies, any gender gap in political knowledge is seen as a worrisome signal that women in a political society are less engaged and less able to advocate for their interests than are men (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997; Verba and Nie 1972). These concerns are not without consequence, as research finds that women's political participation is highly sensitive to knowledge levels, and that societal beliefs about women's lower levels of political knowledge create an atmosphere that can further depress women's performance on knowledge-related tasks (Ihme and Tausendpfund 2017; Ondercin and Jones-White 2011).

In seeking to clarify these gender gaps in knowledge, scholars have pointed to several possible explanations. One set of explanations has focused on the resources that determine knowledge and the life situations of women and men. In many systems, women are less likely to have the same educational and income status as men and are still more likely to spend time on child rearing and family considerations, (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). At the same time, women's resource gaps with men in education and occupation continue to shrink, and there is relatively little evidence to suggest that these life and family influences play a major role in political knowledge gaps (Dow 2009; Fortin-Rittberger 2016; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997).

Another set of explanations examines the degree to which women are still socialized to see politics as a "man's world," with scholars finding support for the notion that children are subjected to gendered socialization to politics, resulting in differences in political knowledge and interest in elementary students and adolescents (Lawless and Fox 2015; Pereira, Fraile, and Rubal 2015; Simon 2017; Wolak and McDevitt 2011). As with resource explanations, however, changes in the world demonstrate changes in gender gaps in knowledge. Dassonneville and McAllister (2018) show that the number of women members of a nation's parliament at the time a young woman comes of political age (18–21 years old) has a lasting impact on women's levels of knowledge, a finding that echoes Wolbrecht and Campbell's work on the impact of women members of parliament (MPs) on the political participation of adolescent and young adult women (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007).

Finally, a growing body of work demonstrates the degree to which what appears to be a gender gap in political knowledge is really the result of measurement artifacts. Here, we see that knowledge differences between women and men are sensitive to many different contexts, including, but not limited to: question format, question content, definitions of what constitutes knowledge, issues of stereotype threat, and the information environment (Ferrin, Fraile, and Garcia-Albacete 2018; Jerit and Barabas 2017; McGlone, Aronson, and Kobrynowicz 2006; Mondak and Anderson 2004). Each focus has revealed the

ways in which gender gaps may be inflated by measurement issues and demonstrates the importance of considering the context in which we ask political knowledge questions.

Women's engagement and gendered political knowledge

Given that gender gaps in political knowledge are clearly sensitive to the "how and what and when" of our questions, we argue for work that intentionally measures knowledge in more expansive ways. First, we address the content of knowledge measures. Most examinations of knowledge rely on measures that have a limited focus on national politics and leaders. Yet in their landmark work on knowledge, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) demonstrated that there were different domains of knowledge and that different people might have more exposure to, or motivation to learn about, different subjects. They identified a lack of gender difference on what they call "gender-relevant" knowledge. Since then, scholars have demonstrated that gender gaps are mitigated when we ask people about political and programmatic issues and leaders relevant to women's lives, whether that involves local political issues, information about accessing social services, or identifying women leaders and candidates (Dolan 2011; Fridkin and Kenney 2014; Shaker 2012; Stolle and Gidengil 2010; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). This focus on group-based relevant knowledge extends to other considerations as well. Perez (2015) finds that knowledge gaps between whites and Latinos are closed when knowledge questions ask about Latino officeholders and policy areas particularly relevant to Latinos such as immigration.

The idea that women should know more about gendered aspects of political life is supported by a broad literature on women's political engagement. Theories of descriptive representation suggest that the presence of women candidates and officeholders works to engage women citizens in politics, increasing their interest, efficacy, and knowledge (Atkeson 2003; Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Mariani, Marshall, and Lanethea Mathews-Schultz 2015). This impact on women can be felt broadly, as suggested by work that finds that the collective presence of women in political life is more important than a particular dyadic relationship between a woman and a specific representative (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Lawless 2004; Wolak 2015). As such, if women's engagement can be influenced by the presence of women political elites, measures of political knowledge that focus on women's representation can offer woman a place to demonstrate knowledge that may be hidden when we focus on only traditional (male) leaders and institutions.

In this work, we analyze women's and men's performance on two measures of political knowledge. The first focuses on items that are considered *traditional* political knowledge, such as constitutional rules and political parties in government, while the second presents a measure of *gendered* political knowledge,

focusing on information about the presence of women officeholders in government. In line with previous work, we hypothesize that women will exhibit lower levels of knowledge when it is measured in the traditional way and will erase any gender gap when asked about women's presence in government institutions (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Dolan 2011; Koch 1997).

Beyond knowledge levels, we also examined whether the determinants of political knowledge were the same for women and men. Dow (2009) finds that women and men often accrue different benefit from demographic and attitudinal characteristics, so we analyzed the determinants of both traditional and gendered knowledge separately for women and men to see if knowledge levels were a function of different influences on each.

Finally, related to explanations of women's knowledge levels is the issue of the format of knowledge items and gendered patterns of nonresponse. This refers to the demonstrated pattern of men's greater willingness to guess an answer and offer a response to knowledge questions, and women's greater likelihood of responding that they "don't know" an answer when they are unsure. Gendered patterns of willingness or hesitancy to respond to knowledge questions can result in women's knowledge levels appearing lower that they actually are (Ferrin and Fraile 2014; Fortin-Rittberger 2016; Fraile 2014; Lizotte and Sidman 2009; Luskin and Bullock 2011; Miller 2019; Mondak 2001; Mondak and Anderson 2004). Here, we hypothesize that women will be more likely than men to answer "don't know" when that option is available.

Data and methods

To test the hypotheses about the impact of content and format on gender gaps in political knowledge, this article relies on data from the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Many of the independent variables utilized in the analysis were from the Common Content module of the CCES, while the measures of gendered political knowledge were included in an original survey module created by the authors. A random sample of 1,438 US adults is stratified to represent the United States as a whole. Respondents come from all 50 states and mirror the general population on key variables of interest. To test our hypotheses, a series of multivariate logistic regression models were estimated with poststratification weights included. (See Appendix for all variables and coding).

Traditional and gendered political knowledge – broadening the content of knowledge items

To determine whether broadening the content of political knowledge items to include gendered content closes the gender gap, we relied on two items that tapped *traditional* knowledge and two items that measured *gendered* knowledge.

For traditional political knowledge, we relied on two items that are widely used in existing research on knowledge: asking respondents which branch of government decides whether laws are constitutional, and which party held a majority in the House of Representatives. Each question had a multiple choice format. The two original gender knowledge items asked respondents how many of the nine US Supreme Court justices were women and what percentage of the current members of Congress were women. Respondents were asked to report the number or percentage, 0 to 9 for the Supreme Court and 0 to 100 for Congress.[1] We used these measures to keep the focus of the items on national political issues, as the traditional measures do, while allowing us to ask questions that reflected important aspects of women's representation in politics. If the literature on descriptive representation is correct, women in the public may be more likely to be aware of women political leaders. Asking questions about these women leaders can give women a chance to demonstrate knowledge that is often hidden, given the content of most traditional knowledge measures.

Respondent demographics and attitudes

In examining patterns of response to our political knowledge items, we included a series of relevant demographic and attitudinal variables. Including respondent age, education, income, race, and sex allowed us to account for any systematic differences in political knowledge between groups of respondents. Political party identification and political ideology were included to account for the fact that knowing things about government can, at times, be related to whether a respondent's party is in power as, for example, with knowing which party holds the majority in the House of Representatives. Finally, we included political interest since it is reasonable to assume that those respondents more interested in politics maintain a higher level of knowledge about politics.

Analysis

Broadening the content of items – traditional and gendered political knowledge

The first step in our analysis was an examination of political knowledge levels among women and men across items that tapped both traditional and gendered knowledge. In accordance with previous work, the bivariate results in Table 1 indicated a gender gap in knowledge on our traditional measures about political parties and constitutional rules. While fully 71% of women knew that the Supreme Court decides the constitutionality of the laws and almost half of women knew that the Republicans controlled the House in 2014, significantly higher numbers of men offered these correct answers. We

Table 1. General and Gendered Knowledge.

	Answer	Women	Men
General Knowledge			
Branch that decides laws?			
	Supreme Court	570 (71%)	615 (87%)*
	President	19 (2%)	13 (2%)
	Congress	200 (25%)	69 (10%)*
	Skipped	12 (2%)	2 (1%)
House majority party?			
	Republicans	385 (48%)	509 (73%)*
	Democrats	119 (15%)	91 (13%)
	Neither	22 (3%)	10 (1%)
	Not sure	274 (34%)	87 (12%)*
	Skipped	1 (< 0.5%)	2 (< 0.5%)
Gendered Knowledge			
Women on Supreme Court?			
	Underestimate	346 (43%)	260 (37%)*
	Three	331 (41%)	352 (50%)*
	Overestimate	88 (11%)	65 (9%)
	Skipped	36 (5%)	22 (3%)
Women in Congress?			
	Underestimate	301 (38%)	232 (33%)*
	16–22%	175 (22%)	186 (27%)*
	Overestimate	314 (39%)	273 (39%)
	Skipped	11 (1%)	8 (1%)

* indicates statistical difference at $p < 0.05$.

also saw a gap on the gendered items, which tapped awareness of women's presence in Congress and on the Supreme Court. One point to make, however, is that the gendered items significantly closed the gap in knowledge between women and men. At the bivariate level, the gender gap in traditional knowledge was, on average, about 20 percentage points, while on the gendered items the gap came down to an average of 7 percentage points. So while women offered fewer correct answers, they were much more likely to offer correct answers on the gendered items than the general ones. One additional note to make is that, among people who answered the gendered knowledge questions incorrectly, women were more likely than men to underestimate the number of women on the Supreme Court and the percentage of women in Congress, while there were no sex differences in overestimation on these items. This might indicate a bit of pessimism about representation on women's part where, in the absence of accurate information, they were more likely to assume women were underrepresented than overrepresented.

While the bivariate analysis suggests that gendered content can diminish gender gaps in knowledge, multivariate analysis supports our hypothesis that women are not disadvantaged vis-à-vis men on items that have gendered content. Table 2 presents the results of logit models that estimates the determinants of the two types of knowledge as a function of respondent

Table 2. Models Predicting General and Gendered Political Knowledge (Full Sample).

	General		Gendered	
	Branch Decides Laws?	House Majority Party?	Women on SCOTUS?	Women in Congress?
(Intercept)	−1.33 (0.73)	−2.86* (0.94)	−2.18* (0.73)	−2.33* (0.59)
Education	0.68* (0.16)	0.50* (0.13)	0.38* (0.11)	−0.02 (0.13)
Sex	−0.53* (0.24)	−0.48* (0.20)	0.07 (0.18)	−0.25 (0.19)
White	1.03* (0.27)	0.01 (0.23)	0.49* (0.20)	0.12 (0.25)
Age	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Income	0.02 (0.04)	−0.00 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Party ID – Independent	0.39 (0.31)	0.18 (0.27)	−0.05 (0.22)	0.50* (0.22)
Party ID – Republican	0.01 (0.40)	0.23 (0.31)	−0.24 (0.27)	0.37 (0.26)
Political ideology	0.08 (0.09)	0.07 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)
Political interest – Only now and then	−0.79 (0.52)	0.87 (0.61)	0.41 (0.54)	0.20 (0.59)
Political interest – Some of the time	−0.36 (0.52)	1.12 (0.58)	0.37 (0.52)	0.29 (0.55)
Political interest – Most of the time	−0.30 (0.55)	2.32* (0.58)	1.32* (0.53)	0.68 (0.56)
N	1153	1163	1131	1155
AIC	942.83	1256.76	1399.33	1268.66
BIC	1185.24	1499.58	1640.81	1511.15
Log likelihood	−423.42	−580.38	−651.66	−586.33

*$p < 0.05$.
The models employ logit regression using survey weights.

demographics and political attitudes. In the first two columns in Table 2, we see the expected gender gap in traditional knowledge, even after controlling for these individual level influences, with women being significantly less likely than men to correctly answer either item. Columns 3 and 4, however, demonstrate that the gap in knowledge disappears when respondents take on questions about the number of women serving on the Supreme Court and the percentage of Congress that is female. This finding is consistent with other work that demonstrates an absence of a gender gap on issues or knowledge tasks that involve women and gendered issues (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Dolan 2011; Stolle and Gidengil 2010). It is interesting to note that this result, in line with others, does not suggest that women know more than men about gendered issues, but simply that they are not disadvantaged vis-à-vis men on these topics in the same way they are on more traditional measures of knowledge.

The impact of question format

The results in Table 2 suggest that women's levels of political knowledge can appear higher or lower depending on the content of the items used. Previous work has also found that women were more likely than men to choose a "don't know" response, as opposed to guessing on an answer, which may also lead to women's levels of knowledge appearing lower than they might actually be (Ferrin and Fraile 2014; Lizotte and Sidman 2009; Miller 2019; Mondak 2001; Mondak and Anderson 2004). Analysis of our items reveals the same concern. The two measures of general knowledge used here came from the CCES Common Content. While the reason is unclear, the items asking about House majority status included an explicit "don't know" response category, while the item on constitutionality of the law did not. Neither of the original items on gendered knowledge included a "don't know" option as a conscious choice. But we can use these items to explore response pattern differences according to the response categories offered.

On the item on the House majority, fully 24% of respondents chose the "don't know" option when answering that question. There was a significant gender difference, with 12% of men and 34% of women choosing this response. As previous work has indicated, when people guess an answer, they increase their chances of responding correctly, while answering "don't know" does not (Lizotte and Sidman 2009; Mondak and Anderson 2004). If men are more likely to guess and less likely to choose "don't know," they have an advantage over women in the number of correct answers they score. Analysis in Table 3 examines patterns of incorrect and "don't know" responses on the House majority question. Women were significantly more likely than men to answer this question incorrectly and also to choose the "don't know" response, but the coefficient for sex was much larger in the model estimating "don't know" responses. In fact, the

Table 3. Predicting Incorrect and Don't Know Responses for House Majority Party Question.

	Incorrect Response	Don't Know Response
(Intercept)	2.86* (0.94)	−0.03 (0.70)
Education	−0.50* (0.13)	−0.32 (0.18)
Sex	0.48* (0.20)	1.17* (0.27)
White	−0.01 (0.23)	0.17 (0.28)
Age	−0.02* (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)
Income	0.00 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.04)
Party ID – Independent	−0.18 (0.27)	0.29 (0.30)
Party ID – Republican	−0.23 (0.31)	0.21 (0.39)
Political ideology	−0.07 (0.07)	0.12 (0.10)
Political interest – Only now and then	−0.87 (0.61)	−1.27* (0.46)
Political interest – Some of the time	−1.12 (0.58)	−2.02* (0.44)
Political interest – Most of the time	−2.32* (0.58)	−3.14* (0.53)
N	1163	1165
AIC	1256.76	859.88
BIC	1499.58	1102.78
Log likelihood	−580.38	−381.94

*$p < 0.05$.
The models employ logit regression using survey weights.

frequency distribution on this question indicates that women and men responded incorrectly at about the same rate – 15% of women and 13% of men thought the Democrats were the majority party. Instead, the major gender difference was on correct answers, where there was a 25 percentage point gap favoring men, and on "don't know," where a 22 percentage point gap "favored" women. Surely some number of women (and men) who chose "don't know" knew the right answer, but denied themselves the chance to potentially be right. On the other three items, which did not have a "don't know" option, the only alternative to answering a question was to skip the item. Skip rates for these three items were low (1–3%) and the same for women and men. Mondak and Anderson (2004) recommend that knowledge measures avoid offering a "don't know" option and "force" respondents to offer a substantive response. The analysis of the four items used here reinforces these findings with regard to gendered response patterns and the impact they might have on women's demonstrated knowledge levels.

The importance of women's political interest

To this point in our analysis, we have found support for the hypotheses that women's political knowledge levels are sensitive to the content and format of the knowledge items we employ. The last step in our analysis is to examine whether the factors that influence an individual's political knowledge are the same for women and men. Here, we ran a series of logit models for each item for women and men. Tables 4 and 5 present the findings for women and men for each of the four items used to measure traditional and gendered political knowledge.

In first looking at traditional measures of political knowledge, we see that there were differences in the characteristics that influence knowledge among women and men (Dow 2009). Education level was significant and positive for both women and men, but the coefficient was larger for men than for women. Race and age were also significant predictors of political knowledge for men, with white and older men having higher levels of knowledge than minority and younger men. Neither of these variables were significantly related to knowledge levels for women, although Independent women were more likely to know which branch decides the constitutionality of the laws. Beyond this, we see

Table 4. Models Predicting General Political Knowledge (Sample Split by Sex).

	Branch Decides Laws?		House Majority Party?	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
(Intercept)	−1.95 (1.07)	−1.39 (0.84)	−2.32 (1.38)	−4.13* (0.88)
Education	0.93* (0.29)	0.53* (0.17)	0.53* (0.21)	0.47* (0.15)
White	1.69* (0.47)	0.61 (0.34)	−0.01 (0.39)	0.04 (0.29)
Age	0.05* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Income	−0.05 (0.07)	0.04 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.04)
Party ID – Independent	0.12 (0.48)	0.73* (0.37)	0.15 (0.40)	0.25 (0.32)
Party ID – Republican	0.45 (0.77)	0.01 (0.41)	0.57 (0.53)	0.02 (0.37)
Political ideology	0.03 (0.16)	0.13 (0.09)	0.07 (0.12)	0.06 (0.09)
Political interest – Only now and then	−0.82 (0.94)	−0.83 (0.56)	−0.43 (1.02)	2.17* (0.64)
Political interest – Some of the time	−1.17 (0.83)	0.02 (0.55)	−0.16 (0.92)	2.48* (0.62)
Political interest – Most of the time	−0.94 (0.83)	−0.07 (0.60)	1.22 (0.94)	3.49* (0.64)
N	563	590	563	600
AIC	380.27	570.83	549.13	712.59
BIC	570.94	763.56	739.79	906.05
Log likelihood	−146.14	−241.42	−230.56	−312.29

*$p < 0.05$.
The models employ logit regression using survey weights.

Table 5. Models Predicting Gendered Political Knowledge (Sample Split by Sex).

	Women on SCOTUS?		Women in Congress?	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
(Intercept)	−1.82 (1.35)	−2.09* (0.72)	−4.02* (0.92)	−1.52 (0.78)
Education	0.57* (0.18)	0.19 (0.14)	−0.07 (0.19)	0.07 (0.16)
White	0.62* (0.31)	0.39 (0.27)	0.32 (0.37)	−0.06 (0.34)
Age	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Income	0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Party ID – Independent	−0.00 (0.34)	−0.04 (0.29)	0.73* (0.31)	0.21 (0.31)
Party ID – Republican	−0.07 (0.45)	−0.36 (0.34)	0.58 (0.36)	0.15 (0.35)
Political ideology	−0.01 (0.09)	−0.04 (0.08)	0.16 (0.08)	−0.02 (0.08)
Political interest – Only now and then	−1.45 (1.13)	1.33* (0.55)	1.67 (0.96)	−0.58 (0.65)
Political interest – Some of the time	−0.73 (1.07)	1.03 (0.53)	1.51 (0.88)	−0.31 (0.62)
Political interest – Most of the time	0.13 (1.06)	2.03* (0.55)	1.76* (0.89)	0.21 (0.63)
N	551	580	561	594
AIC	656.77	755.69	631.45	650.10
BIC	846.49	947.66	821.95	843.12
Log likelihood	−284.39	−333.85	−271.72	−281.05

*$p < 0.05$.
The models employ logit regression using survey weights.

that political interest was a strong and significant influence on political knowledge for women. Women at all three levels of political interest were significantly more likely to know which party held the House majority at the time of the survey. That political interest was related to women's political knowledge might not seem surprising in itself. What is interesting, however, is the complete lack of relationship between knowledge and interest for men. For men, education, race, and age were the primary shapers of knowledge, while for women, education and political interest were most central.

When we look at gendered political knowledge, we see a slightly different pattern. For men, education and race remained significant influences on their levels of gendered political knowledge, with more well-educated men holding more of this knowledge. Also, Independent men were more likely to have an accurate sense of the percentage of women in Congress. For women, education was not related to possessing gendered knowledge. Instead, the only significant influence was political interest. Women who had both lower and higher levels of interest in politics were more likely to have an accurate sense of women's representation on the Supreme Court. These results make it clear that women receive different benefits from education and political interest than do men, and that political interest seems to be particularly related to women holding political information.

Since we know that women are less likely than men to be interested in politics, this finding may contribute to our understanding of women's generally lower levels of political knowledge. If women are particularly sensitive to the impact of interest *and* they are likely to have lower levels of interest than men, this can result in lower levels of knowledge overall. Indeed, patterns of political interest among women and men in this sample demonstrate these differences. Figure 1 offers the predicted probabilities from a bivariate logit model for each category of political interest by sex. There were significant differences between women and men in all four categories, with women being more likely to say they were interested in politics hardly ever, only now and then, or some of the time. Women were also less likely than men to say that they were interested in politics most of the time, which was the category with the biggest difference between women and men (Table A1). This points to a double-edged sword for women – their knowledge levels seem to be particularly affected by political interest, but they were less likely to be interested than were men. This is an important finding, as it signals that women's lower levels of political knowledge may well be a function of their lower levels of interest.

Discussion

Within the study of political attitudes and behavior, it is clear that a particular definition of political knowledge has been privileged over time, and that most measures of political knowledge in polls and surveys have relied on a handful of

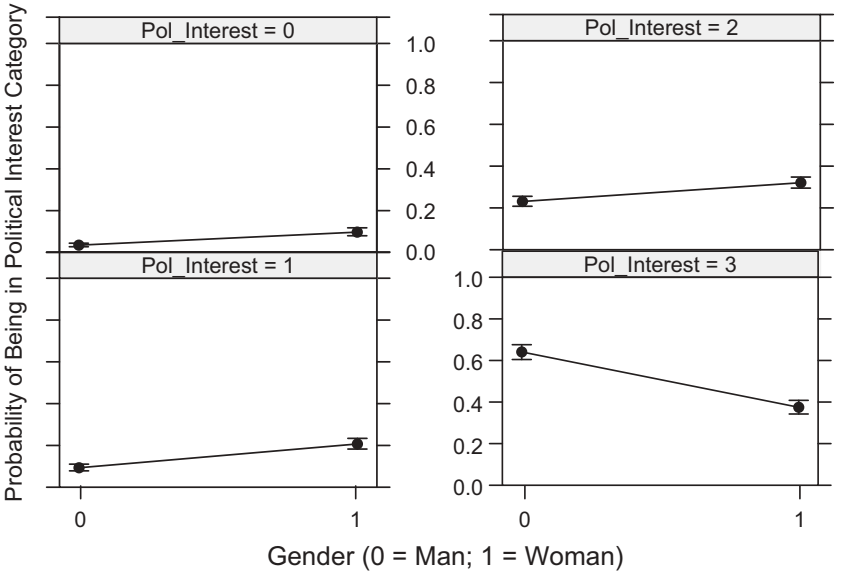

Figure 1. Political interest predicted probabilities for gender. Predicted probabilities calculated from a bivariate logit model using survey weights. All Political Interest categories contain statistically significant differences.

questions about national politics that ask people to identify a leader, place a party on an ideological scale, or identify a constitutional rule.

While this may appear to be a parsimonious and inexpensive way of tapping what people may know, an overreliance on these limited questions has left us with a tightly constrained idea about what constitutes the best or right or sufficient political knowledge, and a definition of political knowledge that ends up demonstrating consistent gender gaps.

As a growing body of research clearly demonstrates, what appears to be a gender gap in political knowledge is often an inconsistent difference between women and men based on the content and format of measures employed. Our findings support this trend – broadening the content of knowledge items demonstrated that gender gaps in knowledge fell away when we asked about facets of political life that were more relevant to women. Understanding this can inform our choice of measures based on the political and governmental realities of any particular time period. Including more knowledge items and a wider range of items that represent "male" and "female" domains – policy issues, leaders, subnational politics – may result in a more accurate sense of the knowledge and abilities of women and men. Since the same dynamic of diminishing knowledge gaps in the face of relevant question content was evident for racial minorities, and may well be for other groups in society, future work should continue to broaden knowledge items to represent the diversity of issues and individuals in a political system that is increasingly diverse (Perez 2015). Beyond diversifying the content of knowledge items, scholars should also work to make

sure that the format of questions does not unintentionally introduce bias through the use of response categories like the still common "don't' know" or "not sure."

Finally, our analysis uncovered an important role for political interest in shaping women's political knowledge, and suggests that women's lower levels of knowledge may well be dependent on their political interest in a way that is different than men's experience. Engaging women in political matters may be key to increasing their political knowledge levels. Building on the work on descriptive representation, future work should examine whether the presence of women as candidates and officeholders can work to better engage women in politics and influence knowledge levels as a result.

But the story does not end here. We need to continue to explore the influences on women's and men's political knowledge – and broader civic skills – to evaluate whether and when the story of women's deficits is accurate. We also need to understand the mechanism around influences that ameliorate the gender gap, such as questions about gendered content or policies that affect women's lives. Is it the case that women are more attentive to gendered issues, which results in their being equally able to address them? Or might it be that men are less motivated to pay attention to these topics and end up with less information about them than they have about nongendered issues? As scholars, we should strive to uncover the clearest picture of reality, so understanding more about how to accurately measure political knowledge for women *and* men will remain important.

Note

1. At the time the survey was conducted in fall 2014, there were three women on the Supreme Court, women were 19% of the members of Congress, and the Republicans held the majority in the House of Representatives.

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Appendix

General Knowledge Items:
1. Do you happen to know which branch of the national government decides whether laws are constitutional? Congress, President, or Supreme Court.
2. Which party has a majority of seats in the United States House of Representatives? Democrat, Republican, Neither, Not Sure.
Gendered Knowledge:
3. Of the nine justices currently serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, how many are women?
4. Taking your best guess, what percentage of the seats in the U.S. Congress do you think are held by women? Coded responses between 16–22 percent as correct.
Additional variable coding: Age – coded in years; **Education** – no high school = 0; high school grad = 1; some college = 2; two-year degree = 2; four-year degree = 3; postgrad = 4; **Political Ideology** – very conservative = 0; conservative = 1; somewhat conservative = 2; middle of the road = 3; somewhat liberal = 4; liberal = 5;
very liberal = 6; **Party ID** – Republican = 0; Independent = 1; Democrat = 2; **Political interest** – How often are you interested in news about government and politics? Hardly at all = 0; only now and then = 1; some of the time = 2; most of the time = 3; **White** – 1 = white; 0 = nonwhite; **Sex** – woman = 1; man = 0; **Income** – continuous measure based on income categories. Less than $10,000 = 1; $10,000 – $19,999 = 2; $20,000 – $29,999 = 3; $30,000 – $39,999 = 4; $40,000 – $49,999 = 5; $50,000 – $59,999 = 6; $60,000 – $69,999 = 7; $70,000 – $79,999 = 8; $80,000 – $99,999 = 9; $100,000 – $119,999 = 10; $120,000 – $149,999 = 11; $150,000 – $199,999 = 12; $150,000 or more = 12; $200,000 – $249,999 = 13; $250,000 – $349,999 = 14; $250,000 or more = 14; $350,000 – $499,999 = 15; $500,000 or more = 16.

Table A1. Basic Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Analysis.

Variable	Women	Men	$p < .05$
Education	1.8	1.8	
Party ID – Republican	27%	26%	
Party ID – Independent	29%	42%	*
Party ID – Democrat	44%	33%	*
White	73%	72%	
Age	48	47	
Income	5.9	6.1	
Political ideology	2.9	2.5	*
Political interest – Hardly at all	9%	5%	*
Political interest – Only now and then	22%	8%	*
Political interest – Some of the time	31%	24%	*
Political interest – Most of the time	38%	64%	*

* indicates statistical difference at $p < 0.05$ in bivariate models.