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Values and candidate evaluation: How voters respond to allegations of sexual harassment

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ABSTRACT

How do voters respond to candidates accused of sexual harassment? The literature on political scandals demonstrates that candidate characteristics, scandal type, and voter characteristics matter; as well as party affiliation. However, empirical evidence suggests that not all co-partisans react the same way. Why is this the case? Our study uses Schwartz's (1996) theory of values to hypothesise that voters prioritising 'universalism' and 'benevolence' are less likely to vote for candidates accused of sexual harassment compared to voters who prioritise 'self-enhancement' values. Using an original, mixed methods, online survey experiment ($n = 704$), we show that American voters do become less favourable towards candidates linked to allegations of sexual harassment; but a sizeable minority would nevertheless vote for a co-partisan candidate accused of sexual harassment. Values are an important mechanism to explain this heterogeneity. Qualitative data corroborates our findings, and helps explain why sexual harassment allegations are not always a barrier to electoral success.

1. Introduction

Stories of sexual harassment in politics are firmly on the agenda (Krook, 2018). Observers of the MeToo movement would be forgiven for thinking that voters are now more likely to punish candidates accused of sexual harassment. But this expectation appears to be at odds with real world politics, based on recent high-profile cases from the US, UK and beyond. This article aims to investigate how voters respond to political candidates facing sexual harassment allegations, and understand why voters vary in their appetite for electoral punishment. The literature on scandals involving allegations of sexual harassment finds that people on average tend to punish allegations of sexual misconduct; however, many people are still minded to vote for a candidate despite serious allegations. As well as candidate characteristics, party loyalty is an important factor here (Stark and Collignon, 2022). But grouping voters by broad party labels does not fully account for individual differences amongst voters. We therefore frame two research questions: Are co-partisan candidates punished for allegations of sexual misconduct? Do values play a role when evaluating co-partisan candidates linked to allegations of sexual misconduct?

Personal values are a lens by which voters evaluate policy, political decisions, and political leaders. Schwartz (1992, 2006) sets out a set of basic values that people in all cultures recognize. Values serve as criteria to guide individual behaviour and decision-making, and this framework of personal values has been applied to a range of behaviours, including voting, pro-social, and time use behaviours (Miles, 2015). We argue that variations in voters' favourability towards candidates facing accusations of sexual harassment can be explained by the importance they assign to certain core values. Since sexual harassment and abuse are expressions of power (Stark and Collignon, 2022), we argue that voters who place a greater emphasis on universalism and benevolence (self-transcendence values) will be more likely to respond negatively to sexual misconduct allegations.

We test our argument using a mixed-methods online survey experiment ($n = 704$). The study was conducted in the US during Oct 2020. We report that candidates lose voter support when they are linked to allegations of sexual misconduct. A treatment vignette reveals that an otherwise well-qualified and likeable candidate has previously been accused of sexual harassment, and settled a lawsuit. The estimated size of the electoral punishment is sizeable and statistically significant (voters are 53% less likely to vote for the candidate, $p < 0.00$). We also uncover heterogeneity across voters, with a sizeable minority of 43% of

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voters remaining favourable after hearing of the allegations. In line with our theory, voters who attach importance to universalism and benevolence are far less likely to overlook the allegations ($p < 0.05$). Thematic analysis of open-ended text responses corroborates these findings.

In the next section we review the scholarly context on political scandals and electoral outcomes. Section 3 presents our application of Schwartz's theory on values to candidate evaluation in the context of sexual harassment claims. In section 4 we explain the mixed methods research design for the online survey experiment and in section 5 we present the statistical and thematic analysis. Section 6 discusses these findings with regard to external validity, and section 7 concludes.

2. Background

Three broad approaches have been adopted to investigate the electoral effects of scandals: scandal-focused, candidate-focused and voter-focused.

Many scandal-focused studies have taken an experimental approach to test voter reactions and evaluations of scandal-affected candidates in hypothetical election races.[2] Early studies drew on small samples of US college students (Sigal et al., 1988; Funk, 1996; Carlson et al., 2000), and some found little evidence of an overall effect of misconduct (Sigal et al., 1988). Larger survey experiments with more representative samples of the general public find clearer and sizeable negative effects on voters (Doherty et al., 2011; Vonnahme, 2014; Stark and Collignon, 2022). While much of the research focuses on the US, Maier's (2011) survey experiment in Germany reports a negative turn in candidate evaluations amongst those members of the public exposed to information about political scandal. Anduiza et al. (2013) find negative effects from corruption scandals in a survey experiment in Spain; and Bhatti et al. (2013) also report negative effects from professional scandals amongst Danish voters.

In the context of an electoral race, *when* the scandal breaks is important, and may explain why breaking news of a scandal may end up being electorally inconsequential. Vonnahme (2014) suggests that late disclosure may be more problematic for a candidate than earlier disclosure. Voters who were more supportive initially tend to have particularly negative reactions to news of the scandal, but then return to their pre-scandal levels of support quickly. In other words, immediate but early negative reactions may not show up in the electoral outcome. Drawing on two longitudinal studies, Mitchell (2014) corroborates these findings, pointing to the importance of repetition. Where news of a scandal is repeated over time, this can intensify the negative effects. But, without repetition, these effects may have dissipated by the time a voter casts their ballot. A scandal breaking early in the election cycle may come to have little effect on the outcome because of informational decay over time.

There remains some disagreement on which type of scandal hurts politicians the most. Some studies suggest voters care much less about sex scandals than corruption (Barnes et al., 2020), whereas others report larger effects from corruption and sex scandals than financial scandals (Basinger, 2012); or no difference between financial or sex scandals (Sigal et al., 1988). But a broad consensus has been reached that scandals involving an abuse of power are, on average, damaging for a politician's career (Doherty et al., 2011; Barnes et al., 2020). But even anecdotal observation suggests not all scandal-linked candidates see their political careers affected to the same degree; and in this regard, the personal characteristics of the candidate matters.

The candidate-centred approach suggests that political leaders are evaluated according to their traits and integrity, empathy, leadership and competence (Funk, 1999; Hall and Thompson, 2018; Klingler et al., 2018). All are important aspects of character, but the weighting each is given may vary based on the particular candidate and voter's preferences (Collignon and Sajuria, 2018). Candidates, when linked to scandals, may be evaluated more negatively than others based on demographic traits such as race, gender, and sexuality. Berinsky et al. report that "black candidates may suffer disproportionately for involvement in sexual scandals" (2011: 189), based on their survey experiment drawing on a hypothetical scandal involving a white Presidential candidate and a black Presidential candidate, and this may be more pronounced when subtle racial cues are used. Rajan and Pao suggest that gay candidates have "less room for error" (2022: 2).

Gender effects are less pronounced, with Bhatti et al. (2013) finding little evidence that voters are biased against the opposite gender. Rajan and Pao (2022) report that female candidates accused of scandal appear not to face higher electoral penalties. Stark and Collignon (2022) consider female respondents as a sub-group, and find little difference in their voting intentions when they learn of a sexual harassment scandal. However, the interaction between candidate characteristics and voter attitudes can be important. Barnes et al. (2020) show that a sex scandal does not by itself lead to an electoral penalty for female candidates; however there is a significant and negative effect relative to male candidates amongst a sub-group of voters with hostile sexist attitudes.

The candidate's political profile also matters, and its interaction with the voter's political outlook. Voter-centred approaches indicate that partisanship and partisan identity are dominant drivers of electoral support (Campbell et al., 1980), and a strong partisan bias emerges in studies of how voters evaluate sex scandal. For example, Bhatti et al. find that "a left wing voter punishes a right-wing politician more harshly than a left-wing politician, and vice versa" (2013: 424). These co-partisan effects are identified by others (Mitchell, 2014; Frazier and Kreutz, 2019). More recent work by Stark and Collignon (2022) extends this insight with the finding that, upon hearing information about a scandal, Republican voters were likely to withdraw less support from a co-partisan than Democrat voters. Across these studies, partisan effects are found to matter more than demographic characteristics such as age or sex (Bhatti et al., 2013; Stark and Collignon, 2022).

As well as the co-partisan element, the political ideology of the voter also matters. The loss in trustworthiness is greater when the scandal appears to violate an expected ideological position or values, suggesting perceived hypocrite plays an important role (Bhatti et al., 2013). Socially conservative voters are found to evaluate politicians in an infidelity scandal "particularly unfavourably" (Doherty et al., 2011). Conservative voters may also be more outraged by sex scandals than liberals, linked to their traditional values and perceptions of social order (Saxton and Barnes, 2022).

Put together, the current literature suggests a politician's reputation may be damaged by the nature of the scandal (sexual or not), the degree of abuse of power involved (consensual or not) and the candidate's own characteristics (such as race and ideological position as signalled by party); as well as the party affiliation and attitudes of the voter. These factors as well as the effects of timing, and the way information influences voters over time, all help explain why some politicians are able to repair their image and avoid the political costs of scandals while others cannot.

While much has been done to advance our understanding of how scandals affect candidates' evaluations of politicians, there is more to be done. Firstly, with few exceptions, prior studies have tended to focus on extra-marital affairs. But there is a substantive difference between a scenario involving two consenting adults and a scenario where a politician uses their power to acquire sexual favours (breaking the law) (Sachleben, 2011; Cossette and Craig, 2020). These types of scandals are often difficult to verify. Therefore voters' internal mechanisms, culture and ideology may play a heavier role in evaluating the importance of misconduct allegations involving sexual abuse or harassment (Stark and Collignon, 2022). In such cases, more than the nature of the scandal, it is arguably the abuse of power that is evaluated by citizens. In a MeToo world where allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct are increasingly reported, including in political life (Krook, 2018), it is important to assess candidate evaluations in this specific scenario. Has voters' inclination to punish political leaders changed? In increasingly polarised electoral races, will voters withdraw support from a co-partisan?

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[2] It is worth noting a number of observational studies in this literature also, including Banducci and Karp (1994), Welch and Hibbing (1997), and Basinger (2012).

Secondly, while partisanship is clearly a key explanatory factor, research on sex scandals tends to control for party identification (Cossette and Craig, 2020), but tends not to investigate the underlying dynamics that link partisanship with candidate support despite allegations of sexual harassment. What drives heterogeneity within partisan identity? Among the few studies that have done so, the evidence indicates that party identification mediates and mitigates the negative effects of sexual harassment allegations (Frazier and Kreutz, 2019; Stark and Collignon, 2022). Partisanship can define attitudes towards victims, with liberals more likely to believe victims and penalise candidates accordingly (Cossette and Craig, 2020; Stark and Collignon, 2022). Together, findings suggest a tension between partisanship and how voters deliberate over their support for a party in the context of a morally undesirable candidate. Although party may be seen as a heuristic for shared values and ideology (Krishna and Sokolova, 2017), studies on voter responses to sex scandal have not related partisanship to personal values.

This article aims to address these gaps. Firstly, by testing for the effects of sexual harassment allegations on voter support for co-partisans. Secondly, by investigating heterogeneity of scandal impacts based on voter characteristics, using the under-researched dimension of voters' personal values. This may not only offer an additional explanatory factor alongside other voter traits, it may also deepen our understanding of why partisan effects have been so prominent in prior studies.

3. The overlooked role of values

We apply the well-established theory of values (Schwartz, 1992, 2006) to explain how voters evaluate candidates accused of sexual harassment. Long established cross-national research has shown that a shared party identification is a key factor defining voter choice (Campbell et al., 1980; Denver et al., 2012; Fiorina, 2002; Dalton, 2016). We also know that the party serves as a cue and a shortcut, reducing the need for costly information search by partisan decision-makers (Jessee, 2010; Krishna and Sokolova, 2017). Party is thus used by voters to channel their identity and organise their preferences. These preferences, in turn, are defined in large part by their personal *values*.

Values are a set of organised beliefs that serve as a guiding principle in people's lives. They define desirable behaviours, transcend specific situations, are organised by relative importance, and guide decisions (Davidov et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz, 1992). According to the theory of values (Schwartz, 1992) there are a basic set of values that are shared by individuals in different countries and cultures. In countries as diverse as China, Poland, Spain, the United States and Venezuela individuals exhibit the same values but they are prioritised differently depending on history, culture, social and political structures (Schwartz, 1992, pp. 2).

The theory of values identifies ten basic personal values prioritised and ranked differently by individuals and groups. They are grouped by Schwartz according to the goals or motivations they promote: openness to change: conservation; self-transcendence; and self-enhancement. Some values cannot co-exist as they conflict with others. For example, values like conformity and security are compatible while values like benevolence and power are conflicting. Values serve as standards or criteria, guiding the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events. Values could be used to evaluate an event, or the people involved in the event. People decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding, based on possible consequences for their cherished values. Values form a continuum of shared motivational emphases, but they relate to other variables, like behaviour in different degree and magnitude.

Since values are the “glue” that holds together policy preferences (goals) and political attitudes (which lead to actions like voting), they are at the very core of the ideological divide (Barnea and Schwartz, 1998), and explain with great accuracy preferences for left or right (Caprara and Schwartz, 2006). Research looking at voters in 20 European countries has shown that centre-left voters score higher than centre-right voters on values like universalism, benevolence, and self-direction; and lower on security, power, achievement and conformity and that these patterns hold cross-nationally (Piurko et al., 2011).

We argue that voters use values to organise their preferences in a consistent manner and provide a structure to political attitudes (Converse, 2006), depending on context and time (Davidov et al., 2008; Feldman, 2003) because this will help them achieve their policy goals. When voters receive information during the campaign trail, they fit it into the frame that their values and beliefs provide in order to evaluate it, rather than changing those values to fit the new information (Campbell et al., 1980). This is one reason why voters may fluctuate in their evaluation of individual candidates but remain stable with respect to their partisan identity.

Based on the theory of values, we can expect heterogeneity in the degree to which partisans penalise their candidates for sexual harassment allegations, conditioned by the importance they assign to the opposing set of values related to self-transcendence and self-enhancement. We suggest that attitudes towards candidates accused of sexual harassment can be explained by the importance that individuals assign to personal values such as universalism and benevolence. Schwartz notes that the shared nature of such values motivates *self-transcendence* defined by enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests. Thus, individuals that show concern for the welfare and interest of others may be more prone to sympathise with victims of sexual harassment. Therefore, we can predict that those who place a greater emphasis on universalism and benevolence values (self-transcendence) will be more likely to punish candidates accused of sexual harassment, by not voting for them.

Sexual abuse and harassment constitute an expression of power (Stark and Collignon, 2022). Values of power and achievement, which relate to motivations of *self-enhancement*, define individuals that look for social superiority and esteem. They conflict with values of self-transcendence and therefore we can predict that individuals who hold power and achievement high in their consideration will be less likely to respond negatively to sexual misconduct allegations; indeed, they may not react at all.

In sum, voters need to negotiate between their partisanship and support for their party's candidate in the context of a morally undesirable candidate. The theory of values suggests that individuals choose their party based on their aims and policy goals. But preferences and goals are defined by a voter's specific set of values and the same values guide moral evaluations. Thus, variations in how important voters find each value define the likelihood of penalising a candidate from their preferred party for morally questionable behaviour.

This argument is summarised in the following hypotheses:

H1. Individuals will be less likely to vote for a candidate accused of sexual harassment allegations (electoral punishment)

H2. Individuals scoring highly on self-transcendence values are less likely to vote for a candidate accused of sexual harassment allegations

4. Research design

To test these hypotheses, we ran an online survey experiment to isolate the effect of information about sexual harassment on voting decisions (see Figure A1).[3][4]

4.1. Participant recruitment

We recruited US-based participants through the online platform Amazon Mechanical Turk, based on two eligibility criteria: they were aged over 18 and were eligible to vote in the 2020 US elections. The US is an interesting and insightful case both because of the highly polarised political context, and the potential for strong co-partisan effects; and recent high-profile cases that raise questions around the conduct of political leaders and the apparently high thresholds of acceptance for their misconduct. A total of 722 responses were registered during October 2020; 18 were excluded after data collection was complete where the survey was incomplete or if it had been submitted in too short a time to offer meaningful responses.[5] A final dataset of 704 observations was available for analysis, in line with the target sample size.[6]

4.2. Experimental design

After providing informed consent, participants completed a survey where they were presented with a vignette of a hypothetical male candidate standing for state Governor.[7] After being asked how they would vote for the candidate based on what they knew so far, participants were randomly assigned to two groups (control, n = 335; and treatment, n = 369) and given a second vignette about the same candidate. Vignette 1 (see Table 1) was deliberately designed to convey bland information that would appeal to the majority of voters, with the candidate being framed as a family man with a range of political priorities. Importantly, the candidate was introduced as being from the participant's favoured party. With this design, we rule out investigation of how voters might punish politicians from the opposite party, and focus instead on how they react when the accused politician is a co-partisan.

The control group's vignette shared information about media reporting on the campaign trail, focusing on local schools. It was expected to largely leave voters' opinions unchanged, as the new information was in keeping with the positive if unremarkable characterisation of the candidate in vignette 1. The treatment group's vignette mentioned media reporting on allegations of sexual harassment against the candidate raised by female staffers three years ago, which had been previously settled in a lawsuit. The references to sexual harassment and legal action were expected to provoke a further process of candidate evaluation. In line with hypothesis 1, this second evaluation was expected to be less favourable. The only difference between the two experimental groups is the second vignette they were shown, which was based on random assignment during the survey. The research design ensured that any difference in voting behaviour could be attributed to the content of vignette 2.

Potential threats to validity in survey experiments can arise in the form of attrition bias and sample selection. We report 0% attrition in this one-shot survey. Our demographic variables further demonstrate our participants represent a range of political views, ages, locations, and backgrounds (in terms of employment, education and income). The experimental groups are well balanced (see Appendix A2), with no significant differences in participant characteristics between groups. The treatment group reports slightly higher levels of trust in national news organisations but this is not significant at 5% level, and it is not unexpected to find minor imbalances when undertaking multiple hypothesis testing (Glennerster and Takavarasha, 2013). Notably, both groups are highly favourable towards the hypothetical candidate with over 90% inclined to vote for him following vignette 1.

Table 1
Informational vignettes for control and treatment groups.

Vignette 1 (All)	Vignette 2: Control	Vignette 2: Treatment
"David Anderson is your preferred party's candidate for State Governor. *Anderson supports business and urban development schemes and has promised to help all citizens "achieve their full potential".* *As U.S. Representative, Anderson developed a reputation for a great work ethic, strong ties to the community, and backing local services.* *Anderson and his wife moved to the state twenty years ago; the couple raised two children together, both of whom now attend universities in the state."*	*"Recently there has been some media coverage on candidate David Anderson.* *He visited primary schools and launched his campaign promise to improve the quality of education by investing in teachers and pupils."*	*"Recently there has been some media coverage on candidate David Anderson.* *Two former staffers went public with the accusation that Anderson had sexually harassed them three years ago. It was revealed the parties settled a lawsuit about the matter."*

Notes: see appendix A8 for further discussion on treatment design and wording.

4.3. Data

The main outcome variable was voting intention, derived from responses to the question: *Based on the new information about the candidate and campaign, would you vote for David Anderson to be Governor of your State?* This was asked immediately after the survey presented vignette 2, with responses captured on a four-point categorical scale ('definitely not', 'likely not' to 'likely yes' and 'definitely yes') and converted into a binary variable for the analysis. The survey gathered baseline data on political participation, ideology, knowledge and engagement, as well as party affiliation, and recent voting record; drawing on the literature reviewed above. We are investigating co-partisan behaviour, and these variables allow us to control for ideology and party identification. Survey questions also asked about attitudes and trust towards different sources of political information and trust in people in general. Age and gender are incorporated into the statistical analysis.

To test hypothesis 2, the survey incorporated 11 questions about personal values, which relate directly to the theorised values of self-transcendence (benevolence and universalism), and self-enhancement (power, authority and hedonism). Survey questions follow the wording and response options employed in the 21-item Human Values Scale in the European Social Survey (European Social Survey, 2021) (see appendix A3). The questions have been empirically tested and validated (see Davidov et al.'s (2008) study of 20 European countries responding to the ESS instrument in 2002–3; and Schwartz et al., 2012). In our sample, scores on self-transcendence questions were not highly correlated with scores on self-enhancement questions.[8] Both variables are incorporated into the statistical analysis.

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[3] Approved by Brunel University London ethics committee reference 23716-MHR-Aug/2020-26640-1.

[4] The study was pre-registered at the Open Science Framework along with a pre-analysis plan. There were no deviations from the analysis plan.

[5] The timing of the survey coincided with a US Presidential election and a backdrop of significant political polarisation; co-partisanship would be expected to hold strong meaning for voters.

[6] Participants were compensated for their time in line with research ethics principles.

[7] Based on ex ante sample size calculations and power assumptions, our survey is based on two treatment arms and this allowed for testing of one hypothetical candidate, who in this case is male, heterosexual, and married with older children. This profile reflected the typical US political candidate for Governor in 2020. The candidate's name was derived by pairing two reasonably common names in the US.

We also asked why participants chose to support the candidate or not using open-ended text responses. A total of 683 useable responses were collected, of which 356 were from the treatment group. The data serves partly as a check on how participants interpreted the treatment vignette, and to confirm that the allegations were salient in their decision-making. Importantly, these responses were intended to help explain why some voters might punish a co-partisan, while others remain favourable after learning about the allegations.

4.4. Mixed methods analysis

The survey data allowed us to test hypotheses 1 and 2 using two statistical models. Equation (1) estimates average treatment effects (intent-to-treat) of the sexual harassment vignette. As set out by hypothesis 1, we expect the coefficient on the binary treatment variable (T) to be negative and statistically significant. Equation (2) estimates heterogeneous treatment effects (conditional average treatment effects) based on the personal values (V) that participants held.[9] Here, the interaction terms between the treatment variable and the values variables allows for sub-group effects to be isolated. In line with hypothesis 2, we expect the combined coefficients of the treatment and self-transcendent values variables to be negative and statistically significant; we expect the equivalent for the self-enhancement values variable will not be statistically significant. In both cases, covariates (W) include all the political variables gathered including trust, along with age and gender. These control variables help to reduce standard errors and improve the precision of the model but do not allow for causal inference.

$$Y = \propto + \beta_1 . T + W + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

$$Y = \propto + \beta_1 . T + \beta_2 . T . V_{self-transcendent} + \beta_3 . T . V_{self-enhancement} + W + \varepsilon \tag{2}$$

In addition, we undertake thematic analysis of qualitative survey data. Qualitative data can be incorporated into randomised control trials in multiple ways (O'Cathain et al., 2013; O'Cathain et al., 2010). By gathering qualitative data alongside statistical outcome data, we are able to contextualise and corroborate the quantitative findings. We developed a coding scheme to investigate motivations for voting behaviour in the treatment group ($n = 356$), which allows for the contextualisation and triangulation with the statistical analysis of treatment effects.

Two independent rounds of open coding by the authors on a small sample of responses generated a preliminary coding scheme. An important insight at this stage was that the emerging themes varied between those who voted in favour of the candidate ($n = 147$) and those who decided not to ($n = 209$), and the two groups were considered separately to allow different themes to emerge. The preliminary coding scheme was applied to the full dataset by one of the authors and a third independent coder. Through a detailed process of comparison and agreement over two further rounds of coding, final coding schemes were produced. The findings of these coding exercises as they relate to the hypotheses outlined above are discussed in the next section.

5. Results and analysis

Are candidates penalised for allegations of sexual harassment?

The results show a definitive penalty for candidates accused of sexual harassment (Table 2 and Fig. 1). Both control and treatment group are highly favourable towards the candidate when they are initially introduced to his profile. The control group remains positive, reporting an increase in positive voting intention from 91% to 94% after reading vignette 2. In contrast, there is a marked fall in positive voting intention in the treatment group from 93% to 43%.

Table 2
Summary of voting intentions by experimental group.

	Favourable after vignette 1	Favourable after vignette 2	Change
	N (%)	N (%)	
Control group (n = 335)	306 (91.3%)	314 (93.7%)	+2.4%
Treatment group (n = 369)	342 (92.7%)	159 (43.1)	- 49.6%

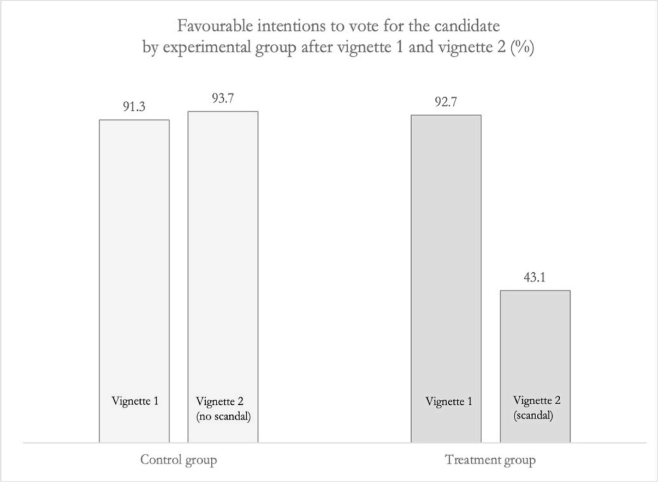

Fig. 1. Positive voting responses by experimental group after vignette 1 and vignette 2.

Regression analysis bears out these findings (see Table 3). Our preferred model uses a probit estimator and incorporates political partisanship, ideology, engagement, and knowledge variables; trust variables; personal values; and gender and age. Further robustness checks are reported in the appendix, and alternative model specifications corroborate our findings. A negative coefficient on the treatment variable indicates a less favourable voting intention from the respondent. Respondents exposed to the scandal vignette offered a more negative candidate evaluation ($p < 0.001$). The marginal effect implied by our preferred model suggests the allegations reduce positive voting intentions by 53% ($p < 0.00$) (Table 3, column 2). The marginal effect from a model excluding control variables, specified in Table 3 column 1, indicates the treatment vignette reduces positive voting intentions by 51% ($p < 0.00$).

While the covariates do not offer causal inference, some interesting associations emerge. Personal values appear to be strongly associated with voting outcomes: self-transcendence values are negatively correlated, while self-enhancement values are positively correlated. Levels of trust in information from friends and family have a statistically significant and negative association with voting outcomes. Conversely, respondents who have higher levels of trust in people in general were more likely to view the candidate favourably even after knowing the allegations. The model includes categorical variables for age. The only age group of statistical significance is the 60–69 year olds, who are more favourable to the candidate than the baseline group of 18–30 year olds across each model specification. Partisan controls are binary variables based on a respondent identifying 'strongly' or 'very strongly' with one of the two main political parties in the US. The two variables on party

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[8] Neither are the values scores correlated strongly with gender or age.

[9] The investigation of sub-group effects is not data-driven, but motivated by Schwartz's theory of personal values. For this reason equation (2) highlights interaction effects based on the core values of self-transcendence and self-enhancement.

Table 3
Effect of sexual harassment allegations on voting intentions.

	(1)	(2)
Treatment vignette	−1.707*** (0.126)	−1.918*** (0.149)
Strongly identifies with Democrat party	–	−0.055 (0.145)
Congressional vote in 2018	–	−0.125 (0.065)
Describes political views as liberal	–	0.011 (0.144)
Follows political and election news closely	–	−0.084 (0.205)
Political engagement	–	−0.067 (0.100)
Political knowledge	–	−0.111 (0.154)
Self-transcendence	–	−0.221** (0.068)
Self-enhancement	–	0.316*** (0.083)
Trusts information from national news organisations	–	−0.189 (0.155)
Trusts information from friends and family	–	−0.353** (0.135)
Trusts information from social media	–	0.136 (0.142)
Trusts information from political leaders	–	0.230 (0.131)
Concerned about made-up news and information	–	0.464* (0.195)
Generally speaking, believes people can usually or almost always be trusted	–	0.534*** (0.124)
Female voter	–	0.187 (0.127)
N		702
Pseudo-R^2		0.365

Notes: standard errors in parentheses, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$. Model uses a binary voting intention dependent variable, with probit estimator. Column 1 excludes control variables. Column 2 includes control variables with categorical variables for age. Results are consistent with alternative model specifications using OLS and Ologit estimators (see appendix).

identification are not strongly correlated with one another, so both are incorporated (results are not affected when one party identification variable is omitted). Perhaps surprisingly, partisan affiliation is not significantly associated with the candidate evaluation, (except in the ordered logit model specification reported in the appendix).

Overall, our statistical findings provide strong support for hypothesis 1. Thematic analysis of the open-ended text responses corroborates the idea that participants in the treatment group are responding to the allegations of sexual harassment in their updated candidate evaluations (Table 4). Amongst those who were not inclined to vote for the candidate, the allegations were an important and influential consideration, with 73% of text responses from the treatment group referencing this theme.[10]

5.1. Do values play a role in voters' decision making?

Our theory predicts that voters' personal values are an important mechanism by which voting decisions are made. Table 5A presents the full results of equation two to estimate heterogeneous treatment effects; for ease of interpretation, the linear combined effect of the treatment and interaction terms are reported in Table 5B. The same covariates are used in this model as for the average treatment effects model, meaning we control for political ideology, trust, and partisanship.

Table 4
Qualitative responses from voters who would not vote for the candidate.

Theme	Sexual harassment allegations matter in the candidate evaluation
Excerpts and examples	*"The former sexual activity" (id 416)* *"What he was accused of" (id 190)* *"He was accused of sexual harassment and that is a no go for me" (id 46)* *"The sexual harassment claims makes me not like him (id 701)* *"The most important factor was the sexual assault allegations" (id 26)* *"I would NEVER vote for someone who sexually harasses anybody" (id 684)* *"the sexual harassment allegations ultimately became the most important factor when evaluating this candidate" (id 205)*

The findings support hypothesis 2, with higher scores for self-transcendent values significantly associated with negative voting behaviour in the treatment group ($p < 0.05$). Heterogeneous treatment effects do not allow for easy causal inference, since personal values are not randomly assigned. But our results demonstrate that amongst voters who report higher motivational values relating to universalism and benevolence, the inclination to withdraw support from a candidate accused of sexual misconduct is significantly higher.

We visualise this in Figs. 2 and 3. In the control group, most of our respondents are favourable towards the candidate, and voters with higher scores for self-transcendent values are somewhat more favourable (Fig. 2). In the treatment group, once the information about the sexual misconduct case is known, voters with higher scores for self-transcendent values are far less willing to vote for the candidate (Fig. 3).

We use thematic analysis of the text responses to triangulate the idea that values are a key driver of negative candidate evaluations. Our qualitative dataset firstly shows that voters frequently refer to values alongside personal ethics or a code of conduct. Notably, respondents frequently referred to the importance of good *"character"*, *"morals"* and *"integrity"* when choosing candidates for political office (see Table 6 theme 1). Some participants explained that their previously positive impression (from vignette 1) was *"tarnished"* by the allegations, for example: *"all previous factors went out the window when it was revealed that there were charges and a settlement which involved sexual harassment"* (id 476*)*. We note that of the 55 coded references to values in this sense, 46 (84%) are amongst respondents who prioritise self-transcendent values.

While this demonstrates the importance of values in evaluating candidates, does the qualitative data shed light on the specific personal values theorised earlier? Hypothesis 2 highlighted benevolence and universalism, which both emphasise the importance of preserving and enhancing the welfare of other people. Our respondents did allude to the same principles (see Table 6 theme 2), corroborating to some extent the theorised relationship between self-transcendent values and evaluation of sexual harassment allegations. The way that colleagues and staff are treated is taken as an important indicator of how the candidate might be expected to treat other people, and this prompted respondents to worry about the candidate being re-elected to office. As one respondent mused: *"What else did he do that he would be willing to hide?"* (id 191). Other

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[10] This demonstrates that the treatment vignette was interpreted consistently and in the manner intended by the research design. Responses that were not coded within this theme often pointed to other factors explaining the voting decision, including an aversion to voting in general, or specific aspects of the candidate's policy platform which were unappealing.

Table 5A
Heterogeneous treatment effects.

Treatment vignette	−0.620 (0.610)
Treatment x self-transcendent values	−0.566*** (0.111)
Treatment x self-enhancement values	0.213 (0.173)
Strongly identifies with Democrat party	−0.052 (0.152)
Congressional vote in 2018	−0.122 (0.065)
Describes political views as liberal	0.029 (0.146)
Follows political and election news closely	−0.051 (0.214)
Political engagement	−0.066 (0.103)
Political knowledge	−0.065 (0.155)
Self-transcendence	0.168 (0.094)
Self-enhancement	0.193 (0.147)
Trusts information from national news organisations	−0.242 (0.154)
Trusts information from friends and family friends, family a	−0.348* (0.137)
Trusts information from social media	0.135 (0.141)
Trusts information from political leaders	0.250 (0.133)
Concerned about made-up news and information	0.441* (0.190)
Generally speaking, believes people can usually or almost always be trusted	0.516*** (0.126)
Female voter	0.208 (0.127)
N	702
Pseudo-R^2	0.389

responses imply criticism of the converse values in Schwartz's framework: power and hedonism (the self-enhancement values). Power relates to social status and the control or dominance over people and resources. Respondents with high self-transcendence used these terms to explain their hesitation to vote for the accused candidate: "*The factors that are most important to me are how Anderson conducts himself with those he holds power over*" (id 468); *"I wouldn't trust a person who could do such a thing, especially with such power in office"* (id 95). In an implicit criticism of perceived hedonism, one respondent mentions the candidate's *"careless personal lifestyle"*.

Excerpts for theme 2 might be dismissed as mere anecdotal evidence. They are not used to test hypotheses or confirm our theory's validity, but they are useful in assessing the intuition of our theoretical framework; and they offer a further source of triangulation to the statistical

Table 5B
Effects of personal values on voting intentions for candidates accused of sexual harassment.

Treatment x values: self-transcendence	−1.186* (0.587)

Notes: robust standard errors in parentheses, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Model specifications identical to average treatment effects model presented in Table 2, with the addition of two interaction terms for treatment group and personal values. All three models include categorical variables for age. Table 4B reports linear combined effects of the treatment coefficient and treatment interaction terms derived from Table 4A; self-transcendence values are reported as tests of hypothesis 2. The negative effects of the treatment vignette are greater amongst those who report higher self-transcendence values, across all model specifications (p = 0.043 in model 1; p = 0.000 and p = 0.024 respectively in models 2 and 3).

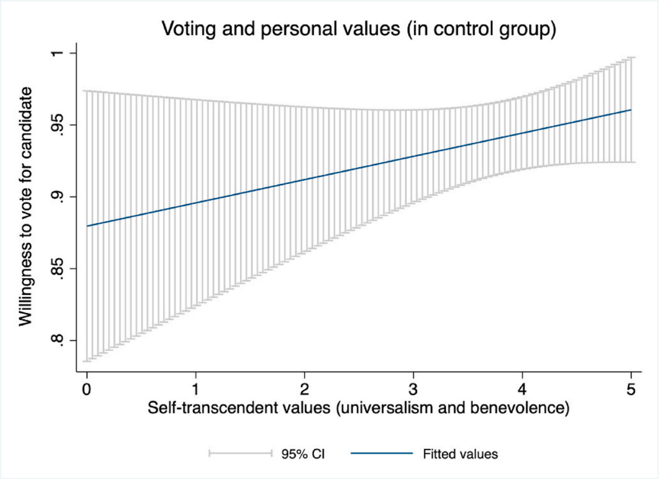

Fig. 2. Voters in the control group with higher self-transcendent values are more willing to vote for the candidate after vignette 2.

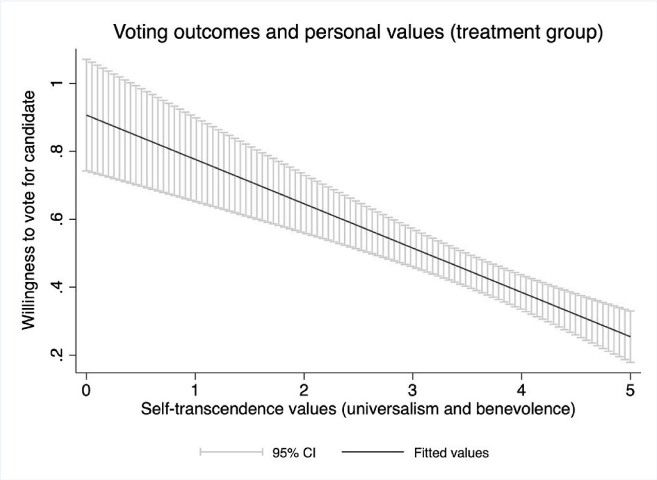

Fig. 3. Voters in the treatment group with higher self-transcendent values are less willing to vote for the candidate after vignette 2.

Table 6
Qualitative responses explaining voters' decision not to vote for the candidate as they relate to values.

Theme 1	Importance of character, morals, ethics and integrity of candidate
Excerpts and examples	*"The lack of ethical behaviour in harrassing others" (id 505)* *"Even if he has a good political record, it is most important to me how he treats and respects people personally. I think that shows true character" (id 89)* *"The most important factors I look for in a candidate are their morals and experience." (id 342)* *"I question the candidate's integrity and ethics" (id 54)* *"His moral code being put into question on a legal level" (id 414)*
Theme 2	Benevolence and universalism (self-transcendence values)
Excerpts and examples	*"I cannot vote for anyone who treats others with such disrespect" (id 468)* *"The candidate's character towards people is important" (id 255)* *"He does not respect his own workers" (id 203)* *"His value system and how he treat other people" (id 309)*

robustness checks (see appendix Tables A5 and A7). Our research design asked for open text responses rather than more directed survey questions to probe voting outcomes, which means the language in our dataset may not fit neatly against the terminology and scholarly jargon of our theoretical framework. This is an acceptable trade-off for gathering data on voters' thought processes that is unprimed by theoretical concepts. Although the qualitative data adds to the analysis through descriptive rather than causal inference, these insights triangulate positively with the statistical support for hypothesis 2; and lend credence to the idea that personal values influence voter (even co-partisan) evaluations.

6. Discussion

6.1. External validity

Our findings suggest a Cohen's *d* treatment effect size of 1.28. To put this in context, we estimate a comparable treatment effect size of 0.92 in Stark and Collignon's (2022) study of sexual harassment scandals; and lower effect sizes in earlier studies that do not specify sexual harassment in their scandal treatments (0.67 in Vonnahme, 2014; ranging from 0.5 to 0.2 and below in Bhatti et al., 2013). While we cannot claim to measure change over time, our effects are considerably larger in size than recent comparable work.

What is remarkable about these findings is the scale of the shift away from a co-partisan, given previous findings that suggest voters are more willing to forgive accused politicians from their own party (Anduiza et al., 2013). Perhaps this reflects a MeToo world where such allegations are held in greater contempt by voters, even co-partisans. Or perhaps, indeed more likely, we are capturing an immediate and instinctive response amongst the 50% who turn away from their candidate. Time and the noise of a real-world campaign may erode that sizeable marginal effect considerably, to the point where it becomes far less significant to the electoral calculus. Such a scenario is consistent with the findings of Mitchell (2014) and Vonnahme (2014) who also report large initial reactions to news of scandal; but go on to demonstrate that negative feelings towards a candidate tend to dissipate over time. A longitudinal experiment would be needed to identify whether such strong marginal effects as we discovered can be sustained in the current political climate.

Vignettes drawing on hypothetical politicians and scenarios have been critiqued on the grounds that they may exaggerate average treatment effects, with "mirror experiments" being proposed as a superior alternative (McDonald, 2020). However, there are circumstances where the hypothetical vignette remains a valid and appropriate approach. For example, where the experiment is more concerned with effects across control and treatment groups, and where there are ethical implications to using real world politicians as subjects of the vignette (McDonald, 2020, p. 280). While there is a precedent for comparing real world politicians using fabricated allegations of sex scandal (Berinsky et al., 2011), given the nature of our vignette (sexual harassment, rather than Berinsky et al.'s marital infidelity vignette) and the timing of our survey (during a polarised political campaign period), the hypothetical candidate was a preferable option.

6.2. Data quality

Some concerns have been expressed on the grounds that the AMT sampling pool may not yield a representative sample. Recent studies have sought to address these criticisms. For example, Berinsky et al. (2012) report that drawing on AMT can be more representative than convenience samples, and they use AMT samples to successfully replicate famous experimental work such as Tversky and Kahnemann's (1981) Asian Disease Problem. Our sample is not strictly representative of the US electorate, but we find that our demographic data suggests a very reasonable spread of age, political affiliation, income, educational background, race, and geographical location. Detailed descriptive statistics for the sample are available in table A2 table in the appendix. Other concerns centre on the potential for low data quality arising from bots or other fraudulent respondents (Kennedy et al., 2020). Our survey incorporates an attention check question following the first vignette to encourage stronger engagement and deliberation; and we removed a small number of surveys that appeared to have been undertaken too rapidly to allow for meaningful engagement (18 surveys in total). Our open text question gathered a large number of unique individual responses which show very good engagement with the survey and vignettes.

7. Conclusions

We set out to investigate the role of personal values in voters' evaluations of candidates, specifically in the context of political candidates having allegations of sexual misconduct against them. We theorised that vignettes offering information about sexual misconduct would lead to electoral penalties. Data gathered from a pre-registered and mixed methods online survey experiment confirmed this hypothesis (H1). We report a statistically and politically significant treatment effect, with the allegations of sexual misconduct reducing positive voting intention by 53%. The literature offers a number of potential explanations for how voters differ in their evaluation of scandal-accused candidates and co-partisans. We theorised that personal values (Schwartz, 1992), particularly those relating to universalism and benevolence (self-transcendence), would explain heterogeneity in co-partisan candidate evaluation. Our data supports this hypothesis (H2) also. Voters who attach more importance to these personal values are more likely to vote against a candidate accused of sexual harassment.

Our mixed methods research design allows for further insights. Amongst the treated participants who decide not to vote for the candidate, qualitative analysis confirms that the sexual harassment information is a primary factor in their decision-making. We uncover evidence relating evaluations of the scandal-accused candidate to voters' personal code of values, such as expectations for integrity and respectful treatment of others. These factors emerge as more important for candidate evaluation even for a co-partisan candidate, corroborating the statistical analysis that does not find strength of party affiliation to be a significant explanatory factor.

Our findings offer the following contribution. We uncover evidence of a more fundamental explanation for heterogeneity among voters evaluating a scandal-affected candidate. Within a rich literature that identifies variation in candidate evaluation based on type of scandal, candidate traits, and voter characteristics, we offer a further explanatory lens: personal values. Our findings help us understand variation in voter responses to candidates accused of scandal, even serious allegations of sexual misconduct. Voters grouped by party are not homogeneous, and analysis of the nuances amongst them needs to consider heterogeneity driven by personal values. Future research will want to test the role of values in more elaborate experimental designs, for example using conjoint experiments to investigate how values of universalism and benevolence affect a range of scandal situations and electoral races; across both male and female candidates from named political parties; varying candidates' demographic characteristics and the political contexts in which voters are making their decisions.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102613.

Appendices

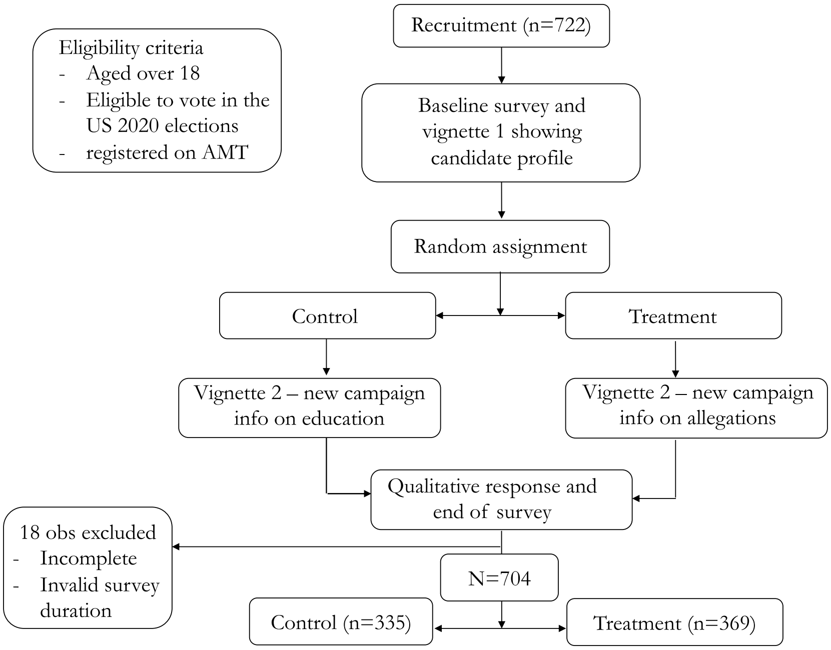
Recruitment (n=722)
Eligibility criteria
- Aged over 18
- Eligible to vote in the US 2020 elections
- registered on AMT
Baseline survey and vignette 1 showing candidate profile
Random assignment
Control
Treatment
Vignette 2 – new campaign info on education
Vignette 2 – new campaign info on allegations
Qualitative response and end of survey
18 obs excluded
- Incomplete
- Invalid survey duration
N=704
Control (n=335)
Treatment (n=369)

Fig. A1. CONSORT experiment flowchart.

Table A2
Descriptive statistics and balance across experimental groups.

	Sample mean (N = 704) (1)	Control (N = 335) (2)	Treatment (N = 369) (3)	p-value H: (2) = (3) (4)
Which party did you vote for in the Congressional elections in 2018? N(%) 'yes'				0.918
Only Republican	256 (36.4%)	120 (35.8%)	136 (36.9%)	
Only Democrat	329 (46.7%)	160 (47.8%)	169 (45.8%)	
Independent	40 (5.7%)	17 (5.1%)	23 (6.2%)	
Split-ticket	54 (7.7%)	26 (7.8%)	28 (7.6%)	
Prefer not to say	25 (3.6%)	12 (3.6%)	13 (3.5%)	
Strongly identifies with Republican party	225 (32.0%)	108 (32.2%)	117 (31.7%)	0.880
Strongly identifies with Democrat party	282 (40.1%)	136 (40.6%)	146 (39.6%)	0.781
Describes political views as liberal	370 (52.6%)	179 (53.4%)	191 (51.8%)	0.657
Follows political and election news closely	704 (90.3%)	306 (91.3%)	330 (89.4%)	0.391
Knows which party controls Senate	704 (77.8%)	263 (78.5%)	285 (77.2%)	0.685
When you talk about political and election, you…				0.293
Never talk about politics	70 (9.9%)	34 (10.1%)	36 (9.8%)	
Listen more than lead	412 (58.5%)	187 (55.8%)	225 (61.0%)	
Lead more than listen	222 (31.4%)	114 (34.0%)	108 (29.3%)	
On first impression would vote for candidate	704 (92.0%)	306 (91.3%)	342 (92.7%)	0.512
Trusts information from national news organisations	491 (69.7%)	223 (66.6%)	268 (72.6%)	0.080
Trusts information friends and family	457 (64.9%)	219 (65.4%)	238 (64.5%)	0.808

(*continued on next page*)

Table A2 (*continued*)

	Sample mean (N = 704) (1)	Control (N = 335) (2)	Treatment (N = 369) (3)	p-value H: (2) = (3) (4)
Trusts information from political leaders	382 (54.3%)	192 (57.3%)	190 (51.5%)	0.121
Trusts information from social media	295 (41.9%)	141 (42.1%)	154 (41.7%)	0.924
Concerned about made-up news and information	627 (89.1%)	300 (89.6%)	327 (88.6%)	0.692
Generally speaking, believes people can usually or almost always be trusted	378 (53.7%)	185 (55.2%)	193 (52.3%)	0.438
Self-enhancement values, mean (SD)	3.56 (0.86)	3.52 (0.83)	3.59 (0.88)	0.299
Self-transcendence values, mean (SD)	3.61 (1.10)	3.56 (1.11)	3.65 (1.08)	0.329
Female	286 (40.6%)	141 (42.1%)	145 (39.3%)	0.451
Age group				0.751
18–29 years	126 (18.0%)	56 (16.8%)	70 (19.0%)	
30–39 years	279 (39.7%)	143 (42.9%)	136 (36.9%)	
40–49 years	157 (22.4%)	68 (20.4%)	89 (24.1%)	
50–59 years	93 (13.3%)	44 (13.2%)	49 (13.3%)	
60–69 years	40 (5.7%)	19 (5.7%)	21 (5.7%)	
70 +	7 (1.0%)	3 (0.9%)	4 (1.1%)	
Education				0.863
Some High School	2 (0.28%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	
High School	160 (22.7%)	80 (23.9%)	80 (21.7%)	
Bachelor’s Degree	378 (53.7%)	171 (51.0%)	207 (56.1%)	
Master’s Degree	124 (17.6%)	61 (18.2%)	63 (17.1%)	
Ph.D. or higher	17 (2.4%)	10 (3.0%)	7 (1.9%)	
Vocational qualifications	20 (2.8%)	10 (3.0%)	10 (2.7%)	
Prefer not to say	3 (0.4%)	2 (0.6%)	1 (0.3%)	
Annual household income				0.304
Less than $25,000	81 (11.5%)	41 (12.2%)	40 (10.8%)	
$25,000 - $49,999	207 (29.4%)	103 (30.7%)	104 (28.2%)	
$50,000 - $99,999	304 (43.2%)	141 (42.1%)	163 (44.2%)	
$100,000 - $199,999	84 (11.9%)	34 (10.1%)	50 (13.6%)	
$200,000 or more	20 (2.8%)	11 (3.3%)	9 (2.4%)	
Prefer not to say	8 (1.1%)	5 (1.5%)	3 (0.8%)	
Married	430 (61.1%)	200 (59.7%)	230 (62.3%)	0.475
Employment status?				0.554
Employed Full-Time	517 (73.4%)	244 (72.8%)	273 (74.0%)	
Employed Part-Time	55 (7.8%)	21 (6.3%)	34 (9.2%)	
Self-employed	76 (10.8%)	39 (11.6%)	37 (10.0%)	
Seeking work opportunities	11 (1.6%)	8 (2.4%)	3 (0.8%)	
Student Full-Time	1 (0.14%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	
Caring responsibilities Full Time	15 (2.1%)	10 (3.0%)	5 (1.4%)	
Retired	16 (2.3%)	5 (1.5%)	11 (3.0%)	
Prefer not to say	13 (1.9%)	7 (2.1%)	6 (1.6%)	
Ethnicity				0.378
Caucasian	550 (78.1%)	267 (79.7%)	283 (76.7%)	
African-American	73 (10.4%)	29 (8.7%)	44 (11.9%)	
Latino or Hispanic	35 (5.0%)	20 (6.0%)	15 (4.1%)	
Asian	27 (3.8%)	11 (3.3%)	16 (4.3%)	
Other	14 (2.0%)	4 (1.2%)	10 (2.7%)	
Prefer not to say	5 (0.7%)	4 (1.2%)	1 (0.3%)	

Notes: p-values reported in column 4 from t-tests on values, pr-tests on binary variables, and Wilcoxon ranksum tests for categorical demographic variables. No significant relationships found between state variables and experimental group assignment.

Table A3
Survey questions on values (from Schwartz, 2005)

Next we briefly describe some statements people have made. Please read each statement and think about how much each person is or is not like you.

Tick the box that shows how much the person in the description is like you.

Response options: Very much like me; like me; somewhat like me; a little like me; not like me; not like me at all

Self-transcendence: Universalism

1. I think it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. I believe everyone should have equal opportunities in life.
2. It is important to me to listen to people who are different. Even when I disagree with them, I still want to understand them.
3. I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me.

Self-transcendence: Benevolence

4. It’s very important to me to help the people around me. I want to care for their well-being.
5. It is important to me to be loyal to my friends. I want to devote myself to people close to me.

Self-enhancement: Power

6. It is important to me to be rich. I want to have a lot of money and expensive things.
7. It is important to me to get respect from others. I want people to do what I say.

Self-enhancement: Achievement

8. It’s important to me to show my abilities. I want people to admire what I do.

(*continued on next page*)

Table A3 (*continued*)

9. Being very successful is important to me. I hope people will recognize my achievements.

Self-enhancement: Hedonism

10. Having a good time is important to me. I like to "spoil" myself.
11. I seek every chance I can to have fun. It is important to me to do things that give me pleasure.

Table A4

Robustness checks on average treatment effects

	OLS (1)	OLS (2)	Ologit (3)	Ologit (4)
Treatment vignette	**−0.506*** (0.029)**	**−0.500** (0.028)**	**−2.22*** (0.184)**	**−2.314*** (0.183)**
Strongly identifies with Democrat party	–	−0.010 (0.034)	–	0.149 (0.176)
Congressional vote in 2018	–	−0.033* (0.016)	–	−0.130 (0.080)
Describes political views as liberal	–	−0.002 (0.034)	–	0.021 (0.181)
Follows political and election news closely	–	−0.026 (0.054)	–	−0.207 (0.254)
Political engagement	–	−0.013 (0.024)	–	−0.088 (0.120)
Political knowledge	–	−0.026 (0.037)	–	0.043 (0.189)
Self-transcendence	–	−0.058*** (0.015)	–	−0.224** (0.085)
Self-enhancement	–	0.080*** (0.019)	–	0.430*** (0.105)
Trusts information from national news organisations	–	−0.049 (0.036)	–	−0.055 (0.175)
Trusts information from friends and family	–	−0.074* (0.032)	–	−0.302 (0.158)
Trusts information from social media	–	0.026 (0.033)	–	0.090 (0.163)
Trusts information from political leaders	–	0.059 (0.032)	–	0.493** (0.158)
Concerned about made-up news and information	–	0.108* (0.048)	–	0.581* (0.254)
Generally speaking, believes people can usually or almost always be trusted	–	0.122*** (0.030)	–	0.583*** (0.151)
Female voter	–	0.044 (0.030)	–	0.131 (0.155)
N	704	702	704	702
R^2/Pseudo-R^2	0.290	0.387	0.115	0.167

Notes: robust standard errors in parntheses, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. The model specifications in columns 1 and 2 incorporate a binary voting intention variable using OLS, with column 1 excluding control variables. The model specifications in columns 3 and 4 apply an ordered logit estimator on a categorical outcome variable with four voting intention categories: definitely no/most likely no/most likely yes/definitely yes. Column 3 excludes control variables. Columns 1 and 2 present R-squared figures, columns 3 and 4 present Pseudo-R-squared figures. Columns 2 and 4 include categorical variables for age.

Table A5

Robustness checks on heterogeneous treatment effects

	OLS (1)	Ologit (2)
Treatment vignette	−0.361** (0.130)	−0.785 (0.849)
Treatment x self-transcendent values	−0.163*** (0.024)	−0.946*** (0.159)
Treatment x self-enhancement values	0.127*** (0.032)	0.516** (0.197)
Strongly identifies with Democrat party	−0.021 (0.033)	0.106 (0.181)
Congressional vote in 2018	−0.031* (0.015)	−0.128 (0.083)
Describes political views as liberal	0.012 (0.033)	0.093 (0.188)
Follows political and election news closely	−0.013 (0.054)	−0.159 (0.270)
Political engagement	−0.013 (0.023)	−0.084 (0.125)
Political knowledge	−0.017 (0.036)	0.106 (0.195)
Self-transcendence	0.027 (0.015)	0.252* (0.108)
Self-enhancement	0.011 (0.020)	0.154 (0.141)
Trusts information from national news organisations	−0.061 (0.034)	−0.120 (0.179)
Trusts information from friends and family friends, family a	−0.073* (0.031)	−0.320* (0.158)
Trusts information from social media	0.026 (0.032)	0.090 (0.163)
Trusts information from political leaders	0.059 (0.031)	0.513*** (0.156)
Concerned about made-up news and information	0.107 (0.045)	0.585* (0.259)
Generally speaking, believes people can usually or almost always be trusted	0.120*** (0.029)	0.607*** (0.154)
Female voter	0.043 (0.029)	0.106 (0.156)
N	702	702
R^2	0.428	–
Pseudo-R^2	–	0.194

Table A6

Effects of personal values in evaluating candidates accused of sexual harassment

	OLS (1)	Ologit (2)
Treatment x values: self-transcendence	−0.524*** (0.120)	−1.737* (0.768)

Notes: robust standard errors in parentheses, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. Model specifications identical to average treatment effects model presented in Table 5. Robustness checks using alternative OLS and Ologit estimators. Both models include categorical variables for age. Table A6 reports linear combined effects of the treatment coefficient and treatment interaction terms derived from Table A5; self-

transcendence values are reported as tests of hypothesis 2. The negative effects of the treatment vignette are greater amongst those who report higher self-transcendence values, across both model specifications ($p = 0.043$ in the Probit model 1 reported in the main paper; $p = 0.000$ and $p = 0.024$ respectively in the OLS and Ologit models reported here).
Notes for tables A5 and A6: robust standard errors etc.

Table A7
Comparing heterogeneous treatment effects with full interaction regression model approach

DV: Would you still vote for Anderson? (yes/no)	(1) Interaction term on values only	(2) Full interaction regression model (Bansak)
Treatment	−0.620 (0.610)	−0.985 (0.997)
Self-transcendent values	0.168 (0.094)	0.152 (0.105)
Treatment # Self - transcendent values	**−0.566*** (0.111)**	**−0.555*** (0.132)**
N	702	699
Pseudo-R^2	0.389	0.411

Notes: robust standard errors in parentheses, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$. Model specification in column 1 identical to heterogeneous treatment effects model presented in Table 5. Model specification in column 2 also uses a probit estimator but applies a 'full interaction regression model', with all covariate terms interacted with the treatment variable. Results for treatment and treatment interaction terms reported here.

Following Bansak (2021), we ran a 'full interaction regression' model. The important difference between this and our pre-registered approach to investigating heterogeneity is that, in practical terms, we include a series of additional treatment × covariate interaction terms that takes in all of the covariates used in our original model. The rationale for this expanded approach is to estimate not just the descriptive heterogeneity of our treatment effects, but the size and significance of the 'average treatment moderator estimator' (ATME), which allows for a stronger claim about the variable used to explain heterogeneity. If the theorised source of the heterogeneity remains significant and of a similar magnitude after other moderators are incorporated into the model, Bansak (2021) suggests a *causal* claim can be made about the theorised moderator. Here, results in column 2 confirm our expectation that values explain the heterogeneity in treatment effects amongst co-partisan voters: the model yields a treatment x self-transcendent values coefficient (bold) that is comparably sized and retains the same statistical significance. This additional analysis was requested by an anonymous reviewer.

A8: Treatment wording and justification

Our experimental design aims to isolate the impact of information about sexual harassment misconduct. We follow a well-trodden approach of using informational vignettes embedded in a survey, which participants are randomly assigned to see. Within the literature we locate our paper, this approach has been adopted by (amongst many others): Berinsky et al. (2011); Barnes et al. (2020); and Rajan and Pao (2022).

The comparison of control vs treatment groups allows for a between-subjects analysis. The two-stage vignette process was deliberately included to give us confidence that the initial candidate profile was (a) uncontroversial and reasonably easy to support, and (b) there were no differences in the experimental groups' first impressions.

The two-stage vignettes also allow us to consider in more detail a within-subjects analysis, and we gain a clear sense of the change in voting intentions once the second vignette is shown. This is what Table 1 demonstrates – the considerable early impact of the informational vignette amongst the treatment group. The idea of layering up information mimics a little better a real-world campaign, where perhaps an initial favourable first impression is followed at later stages of the campaign by more information, some of which may include negative stories about the candidate's past.

The wording of vignette 1 was designed to be a brief introduction to the candidate that made clear that they were from the respondent's preferred party, with some facts about his personal background, his professional background, and his policy priorities. The wording of vignette 2 for the treatment group (sexual misconduct allegations) was designed to summarise the allegations made and the lawsuit being settled. The amount of information provided is consistent with prior studies (see Stark and Collignon, 2022; Saxton and Barnes, 2022). In order that the comparison group participants did not lack a second round of information, they were presented with an alternative vignette (control) that gave a little more detail about the campaign trail, but in bland enough terms that it was designed to have very little effect one way or another relative to the initial impression from the baseline vignette (which we broadly confirmed).

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