Do Women Write More About Women?

The Impact of Journalist Gender on the Media Visibility of Female and Male Politicians

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The representation of women in politics and political journalism remains disproportionately low. This paper argues that these disparities are interconnected, as individual journalists exhibit a same-gender preference when deciding who to cover. Since journalists are key gatekeepers in the selection and dissemination of news, gender-based differences in reporting can contribute to the limited media visibility of female politicians. Drawing on more than 500,000 news articles, this study investigates how the gender of journalists (n = 2,315) influences coverage of female and male politicians (n = 1,087) across 17 U.S. news outlets from 2010 to 2020. Using several metrics of media visibility and Bayesian multilevel models, we estimate the effects of journalist gender while accounting for unobserved characteristics of articles, individual reporters, media outlets, and temporal context. The results indicate that journalist gender is a small but consistent factor in shaping gendered media visibility. Articles by female journalists were more likely to include at least one female politician, mention them more frequently, and feature them more prominently. However, these differences varied significantly across media outlets, suggesting that individual journalistic decisions are shaped by organizational context. Longitudinal analyses show that the observed gender bias has remained stable over time. By highlighting the impact of journalist gender on political news coverage, this study shows that inequalities in newsrooms may contribute to imbalances in media content.

Key words: media visibility, journalist gender, gender bias, political journalism, U.S. politics

1. Introduction

Women remain underrepresented in both politics and political journalism (Pew Research Center, 2023; Women's Media Center, 2021). This disparity is mirrored in media coverage, which plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions but often affords female[1] politicians less attention (Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Shor et al., 2019). This may, in turn, result in a lower recognition of female politicians among the electorate (Hopmann et al., 2010; Van Aelst

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1 Due to the limited number of non-binary politicians suitable for computational and longitudinal analysis, the lack of openly available information on journalists' gender identities, and the scarcity of prior research using non-binary gender categorizations, this study relies on a binary classification of gender. We acknowledge that this binary framework, while necessary for the type of quantitative analysis conducted here, remains a coarse and simplified reflection of gender as a social construct. This limitation is addressed in the discussion of our findings.

et al., 2008). A psychological perspective on journalistic practices suggests that individual characteristics of journalists, including their own gender and the cultural expectations they hold about gender, contribute to the persistence of gendered biases in political journalism (Braden, 1996; Donsbach, 2004; Falk, 2008; Leiva & Kimber, 2022). Empirical evidence supports this view, showing that journalists tend to prefer sources of their own gender for mentions or interviews (e.g., Bastin, 2022; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Zeldes et al., 2012). Although news reporting aspires to impartiality, such tendencies are unsurprising, given that journalists operate within broader societal norms, including prevailing gender stereotypes (Braden, 1996). As individual journalists act as gatekeepers of political information (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), these practices can lead to a quantitative imbalance: male politicians are more frequently and prominently covered, particularly by male journalists, limiting the visibility of female politicians in the news.

This study investigates whether the gender of individual journalists has influenced the visibility of female and male politicians in U.S. political news between 2010 and 2020. Drawing on the hierarchy of influences model to explain media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) and focusing on legacy media, we examine how individual journalists' gender affects coverage patterns, taking into account the organizational context of media outlets. In addition, we explore how the influence of journalist gender has evolved over time in response to broader societal changes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hierarchy of Influences on Media Content

The media plays a critical role in the political landscape not only by conveying information but also by serving as a central gatekeeper that shapes the volume and character of political content reaching the public. This gatekeeping function is vital to politicians' electoral prospects, political influence, and public credibility (Hopmann et al., 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2008). According to gatekeeping theory, information passes through successive "gates," where it is filtered based on internal and external pressures (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; White, 1950). Building on this foundation, the hierarchy of influences model (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) identifies five interconnected levels—individual, routine, organizational, institutional, and societal—that collectively shape media content. While the model has sparked debate about the relative importance of each level and the extent to which journalists themselves can distinguish among them, it remains a widely used framework in journalism studies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hovden & Väliverronen, 2021).

At the individual level, journalists' beliefs, experiences, and demographic traits, such as gender, can influence news selection and framing (Kim, 2010; Relly et al., 2015). These personal factors are embedded within professional routines and newsroom norms that guide daily decision-making (Figueroa, 2020). Organizational influences, including editorial priorities, ownership structures, resource constraints, and internal hierarchies, also exert strong effects over reporting (Nechushtai & David, 2025). Beyond the newsroom, external actors, such as political institutions and advertisers, further shape media output (Tandoc, 2015). At the societal level, media content is influenced by broader institutions and dominant ideologies that tend to reinforce existing power structures and elite interests (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). These dynamics vary across media systems, with economic, political, and cultural pressures shaping how journalism is practiced in different national contexts (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hovden, 2023). For instance, liberal media systems are more affected by market pressures, while democratic corporatist and pluralist systems are more influenced by interventionist norms and collective values (Hovden, 2023). In the

digital era, gatekeeping extends beyond editorial control, as audience engagement and platform metrics increasingly shape content, challenging journalists to balance traditional news values with evolving norms (Salonen et al., 2022). Moreover, media structures and journalistic practices co-evolve, but organizational constraints and slow-to-adapt newsroom cultures often create a gap between what journalists aim to report and what they can deliver (English et al., 2025; Giddens, 1984; Schimank, 2016).

2.2 Gender of Individual Gatekeepers and its Influence on Political Coverage

Based on these frameworks, journalists' demographic characteristics, beliefs, and professional norms emerge as particularly salient factors in shaping political news content. In particular, journalists' personal attributes and the cultural expectations tied with their gender and societal gender norms profoundly influence how they perceive authority and expertise in politics (Braden, 1996; Falk, 2008; Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). For example, decisions about whom to include or interview in a story may inadvertently reflect persistent gender stereotypes. Moreover, journalism remains a gendered institution, with men occupying most leadership roles and frequently being assigned to cover high-priority policy areas such as the economy (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010). This gendered structure also influences professional interactions: male journalists tend to engage more with male colleagues and sources, while female journalists may interact with men out of necessity (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Voronova, 2014). Some female journalists respond by building stronger connections with female politicians (Voronova, 2014). As a result, journalist gender and related gendered practices can contribute to imbalances in the representation of female and male politicians in the news.

Indeed, research has consistently identified discrepancies in reporting between female and male journalists. Female journalists are more likely to include female sources (Shor et al., 2015), feature them more prominently (Armstrong, 2004), and draw on a more diverse range of sources overall (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). In the context of political journalism, Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) find that female reporters in the U.S. are more likely to cover electoral races featuring female candidates. Similarly, analyses of television coverage during the 2000 (Zeldes & Fico, 2005; Zeldes et al. 2007), 2004 (Zeldes & Fico, 2010), and 2008 U.S. presidential elections (Zeldes et al., 2012) show that women journalists are more likely than their male counterparts to use female and nonpartisan sources in campaign reporting. This pattern extends beyond the U.S., with studies from France (Bastin, 2022), Austria (Riedl et al., 2022), Britain (Ross et al., 2013), and Chile (Leiva & Kimber, 2022) likewise finding that female journalists include more female sources, while male journalists are generally less likely to cover women. However, other studies report no significant influence of journalist gender on the media visibility of politicians (e.g., Freedman et al. 2007, 2010; Liebler & Smith, 1997; Vos, 2013). These mixed findings may be attributed to variations in sample strategies, time periods, or operationalizations of media visibility across studies.

In summary, journalist gender plays an important role in shaping political coverage, particularly in the representation of female politicians. However, individual preferences are often constrained by newsroom routines, editorial priorities, hierarchical structures. At the same time, broader developments, such as the increased visibility of women in politics during the 2010s, may lead both male and female journalists to adapt their practices. For instance, the 2020 U.S. election featured an unprecedented number of female candidates, making their coverage more politically salient (Pew Research Center, 2023). As such, gendered reporting is shaped not only by individual dispositions but also by shifting structural conditions. This study therefore investigates how individual journalists' characteristics,

specifically gender, influence political reporting, while recognizing that these effects are embedded within broader organizational and societal contexts.

2.3 Dimensions of Media Visibility

Media visibility can be conceptualized as either presence or prominence (Tresch, 2009). *Presence*, often measured as a binary variable, indicates whether a politician is mentioned at all (e.g., Leiva & Kimber, 2022; Riedl et al., 2022). *Prominence*, which is more commonly studied, includes metrics such as the number of paragraphs, articles, or mentions a politician receives (e.g., Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Hayes & Lawless, 2015; Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Lühiste & Banducci, 2016; Midtbø, 2011; Shor et al., 2019; Tresch, 2009) or whether they are the main focus of an article (e.g., Banwart et al., 2003; Bystrom et al., 2001). Additional indicators include story placement, airtime, and male-to-female actor ratios (e.g., Liebler & Smith, 1997; Riedl et al., 2022; Bastin, 2022). Across both U.S. and European contexts, studies consistently show that female politicians receive less media coverage than their male counterparts (e.g., Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Lühiste & Banducci, 2016; Shor et al., 2019).

Although journalists may cover male politicians more frequently due to their dominance in U.S. politics (Pew Research Center, 2023), the media *presence* of female politicians can increase when they are politically active, for example, by delivering more floor speeches (Pearson & Dancey, 2011; Tresch, 2009). Gender stereotypes linking men with leadership (Schneider & Bos, 2014), along with the continued overrepresentation of men in top political roles, may lead journalists to prioritize male politicians for commentary and assign them greater *prominence* in news stories (Midtbø, 2011; Tresch, 2009). Yet, research findings remain mixed: while some studies show that female politicians are mentioned less frequently than their male counterparts (Johnstonbaugh, 2018; Shor et al., 2019), others suggest they may more often be the focus of news stories (Banwart et al., 2003; Bystrom et al., 2001). The influence of journalist gender on both media presence and prominence remains underexplored, although evidence indicates that female journalists are more likely to cover female politicians (Leiva & Kimber, 2022; Riedl et al., 2022).

3. Present Study

In our study, we address the research question *Does the gender of journalists affect the media visibility of male and female politicians?* We examine both media presence and media prominence, while also accounting for the embeddedness of journalists within their organizational and societal contexts.

Previous studies report inconclusive findings. While some suggest that female journalists are more likely to mention female politicians (e.g., Bastin, 2022; Leiva & Kimber, 2022), others find no significant gender-based differences (e.g., Liebler & Smith, 1997; Vos, 2013). This study takes a more comprehensive approach by examining both media presence and prominence to assess gender differences in journalists' coverage of politicians. Although prior research has addressed this area, much of it has focused narrowly on single measures. By distinguishing between inclusion and centrality, our framework offers a more granular understanding of political media visibility and helps reduce the risk of overgeneralization.

As journalists' selection of politicians may be shaped by assumptions about gender roles, it is important to consider the evolving nature of gender stereotypes. Research suggests that the growing presence of women in male-dominated fields such as politics (Pew Research Center, 2023) and journalism (Eddy et al., 2023; Women's Media Center, 2021) has contributed to a decline in the association of women with conventional feminine traits over time (e.g., Bhatia & Bhatia, 2021). Longitudinal media studies similarly point to

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a shift toward emphasizing female politicians' leadership qualities (Andrich et al., 2023). However, drawing on the hierarchy of influences framework (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), Riedl et al. (2022) argue that journalism culture, gendered newsroom structures, and individual journalist characteristics continue to contribute to the underrepresentation or biased portrayal of female politicians. For example, female journalists are still more often assigned to so-called soft news beats—topics associated with compassion and kindness—compared to their male counterparts (Santia et al., 2024). Moreover, gendered patterns persist in the coverage of political topics traditionally associated with either male or female politicians (Meeks, 2013; Meeks, 2016). While some studies outside the U.S. report stable gender-based reporting patterns over time (Bastin, 2022; Leiva & Kimber, 2022), longitudinal research in the U.S. remains limited. To address this gap, we examine changes over the past decade, situating them within the broader sociopolitical and organizational contexts that shape journalistic behavior (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In this study, sociopolitical developments refer to political and structural changes that have reshaped gender dynamics in the U.S., including the rise of women in elected office, events such as #MeToo and the Clinton-Trump elections, and broader gains in women's education and income (Shames et al., 2025).

4. Method

4.1 Sample

Politicians

The initial politician sample included members of the 111th to the 116th U.S. Congress as well as members of the U.S. Cabinet from 2010 to 2021 ($n = 1{,}095$). The U.S. represents a relevant case due to notable shifts in women's political representation during this period (Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Female representation increased significantly (Pew Research Center, 2023), with record numbers of women running for office and the election of the first female vice president in 2020. These developments suggest a sufficiently large presence of female politicians to allow for meaningful comparisons in media coverage.

Information on politicians, such as full name, gender, party affiliation, and political role, was collected using the ProPublica Congress Application Programming Interface (API) and supplemented with data from politicians' Wikipedia pages. After applying filters based on article and journalist characteristics (see subsequent sections), the final sample included 1,087 politicians, of whom 219 (20 %) were women.

As a robustness check, we excluded party-nominated presidential candidates and sitting presidents during the period under investigation (Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden) to assess the potential influence of highly prominent political figures on patterns of gendered media visibility (Appendix C[2]).

Media Outlets

The sample included 17 national U.S. newspapers, magazines, and online platforms, with monthly unique readership per outlet ranging from 6.5 to 125 million (see Appendix A). The outlets comprised *The Atlantic, Business Insider US, CNN (CNN.com and CNN Wire), Forbes, National Review, New York Observer, Newsweek, Politico.com, The Christian Science Monitor, The Hill, The New York Post, The News York Times, The News York Times Interna-*

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2 Online appendix and supplemental material available at: https://osf.io/yxtjs/?view_only=0682a3324 85542358f64b6aa9cefd127.

*tional Edition, The Weekly Standard, USA Today, The Washington Post (*including *Washingtonpost.com),* and *Washington Post Blog*s.

Overall, this sample provides a more representative view of the U.S. media landscape than prior studies (e.g., Zeldes et al., 2012). Several outlets were consolidated into single entities based on shared editorial oversight. Specifically, *The Washington Post* and *Washingtonpost.com* were unified as *The Washington Post. CNN Wire* and *CNN.com* were merged to represent non-television news produced by CNN. Similarly, *Atlantic Online* and *The Atlantic* were treated as one entity. In contrast, *The New York Times* and its *International Edition* were analyzed separately due to distinct editorial boards. *Washington Post Blogs* were also treated as a separate outlet from *The Washington Post* and its website for the same reason.

Five outlets—*Politico.com* (11 %), *Washington Post* (12 %), *CNN* (15 %), *The New York Times* (18 %), and *Washington Post Blogs* (24 %)—accounted for 80 percent of the articles in the final sample. However, statistical analyses were adjusted to account for these imbalances across outlets.

Period under Investigation

The sample covers an 11-year period, from January 2010 to December 2020, based on the availability of reliable data at the time of collection. Temporal developments were modeled across 132 months, with the number of articles per month ranging from 1,022 and 8,160 articles ($M = 3,890.4$, $SD = 1,601.3$).

Media Reports

We used LexisNexis APIs to collect the complete digital archives of news stories from the selected media outlets during the study period. The initial dataset comprised 1,138,950 news reports. Duplicate articles were identified and removed through a combined manual and automated text analysis process. Specifically, we examined a sample of potentially identical articles authored by leading journalists during randomly selected 60-week intervals. Articles were flagged as duplicates if they shared the same author(s), publication week, and mentioned politicians. We compared titles and article lengths, calculated semantic similarity, and applied fuzzy string matching to verify text similarities. The accuracy of this deduplication method was validated by manual review of a random subset. Consequently, 219,138 duplicate articles were removed. Furthermore, we included only articles written by identifiable individual journalists who had contributed at least 50 articles (see the following section for details). To avoid ambiguity arising from mixed-gender authorship, only articles with a single author were considered. The final dataset consisted of 513,539 news stories. For a detailed description of the deduplication process, see Appendix A.

Journalists

Author names were extracted from the bylines of news reports, yielding 50,188 unique authors. To ensure accuracy, journalists with identical names working at the same outlet were assumed to be the same person; this assumption was verified through a manual review of a random sample of 60 names. To focus on active contributors, only journalists who had authored more than 50 articles were included in the final sample, resulting in a dataset of 2,763 journalists (see Appendix A for details). Next, two annotators determined each journalist's gender by identifying pronouns used in biographies on outlet websites and other publicly available online sources (*Cohen's kappa* = 0.93). Bylines with unclear gender information

were excluded. The final journalist sample consisted of 2,315 journalists, of whom 967 (42 %) were female.

4.2 Measures of Media Visibility

To examine media presence and media prominence, we used three measures of media visibility. All measures were calculated at the article level and separately for female and male politicians. *First*, for media presence, we derived two binary indicators reflecting whether any female or male politician, respectively, was mentioned in the article. *Second*, as a more nuanced measure of media prominence, we counted the number of mentions of female or male politicians to capture their relative importance within each article. *Third*, two additional binary indicators identified whether the most-mentioned politician in an article was female or male, capturing the gender of the most prominent politician. The outcome variable *key political figure female (male)* was coded as 1 if the most-mentioned politician in the article was female (male), and 0 otherwise. Both indicators were coded as 1 if politicians of different genders shared the top position with an equal number of mentions.

Table 1 presents the univariate and bivariate distributions of the media visibility measures. The results clearly show that female politicians were underrepresented in the news, while male politicians appeared almost ubiquitously. As expected, the measures are correlated, indicating that they are not independent. However, they are neither redundant nor perfectly complementary, providing empirical justification for considering multiple indicators of media visibility.

4.3 Data Analysis

Our statistical model reflects Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) conceptual hierarchy of influences, with the quantity of interest situated at the level of the individual journalist, while also accounting for higher-level influences and constraints on journalistic work. The central aim is to assess differences in media visibility measures between articles authored by female and male journalists. We estimate these differences using Bayesian multilevel models with vaguely informative priors.

The structure of the models accounts for three sources of influence on media visibility: the individual journalists who wrote an article (with gender as the key predictor at this level), the media outlet that published it, and the month of publication. Each of these sources may influence how female and male politicians are represented in the media. By estimating random intercepts for each of these levels, we control for unobserved influences even when distinct factors were not directly measured.

Additionally, we explore whether differences between articles authored by women and men vary across media outlets and over time. This is modeled using random slopes, with the estimated differences expressed as a combination of an overall effect (*fixed effect slope*) and variations due to unobserved characteristics of outlets and months. Binary outcomes were modeled using logistic regression, while count outcomes were modelled using negative binomial regression due to the large variances relative to the means (see Table 1). The original model coefficients are reported on a logarithmic scale. We report these coefficients, along with the full models, in Appendix B, Table B1. However, in the main text, all comparisons and predictions are presented on the response scale of the visibility measures (i.e., probabilities [for binary outcomes] and counts) to facilitate intuitive interpretation. Throughout the results section, we report posterior medians as point estimates and the 5th and 95th percentiles of the posterior distributions as measures of uncertainty. All software used for data management, measurement, statistical modeling, and results presentation is

listed in Appendix D. To ensure reproducibility, the scripts and processed data used for the statistical modeling are provided in the online appendix[3].

Table 1: Distributions and correlations of the media visibility measures

Outcome	P or M[A]	SD	(1)[B]	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Mention of female pol.	0.37			-0.30	0.50	0.18	0.55	-0.47
(2) Mention of male pol.	0.95		-0.30		-0.08	0.18	-0.55	0.64
(3) Count mentions f. pol.	1.66	4.38	0.50	-0.08		0.23	0.45	-0.48
(4) Count mentions m. pol.	9.79	12.68	0.18	0.18	0.23		-0.20	0.17
(5) Key pol. figure female	0.15		0.55	-0.55	0.45	-0.20		-0.85
(6) Key pol. figure male	0.89		-0.47	0.64	-0.48	0.17	-0.85	

A Proportions are reported for the binary outcomes; means and standard deviations are reported for the count outcomes.
B Columns (1) to (6) report Pearson's correlation coefficients. The numbers refer to the variables listed in the first column.

5. Results

This section presents the overall findings of the study, highlighting how gender and higher-level factors shape individual journalists' coverage of female and male politicians. It also examines how gender differences between journalists vary across outlets, over time, and across the three media visibility indicators.

5.1 Effects of Journalists' Gender

The overall results suggest that journalist gender has a small but noticeable impact on the visibility of female and male politicians. These effects were consistent across most indicators of media visibility. Controlling for outlet-specific and temporal variation, as well as individual journalist characteristics, female journalists were 1.8 percentage points (% pt) [-0.3 % pt, 3.9 % pt] more likely than male journalists to mention at least one female politician in a report. Based solely on journalist gender, we would expect 29.4 % [26. 8%, 32.0 %] of articles by women to mention at least one female politician, compared to 27.5 % [25.0 %, 30.4 %] of articles by men.

At the same time, female journalists were 1.0 % pt [0.4 % pt, 1.6 % pt] more likely to publish articles that did not mention any male politician. However, such articles were exceedingly rare: approximately 95 % of articles included at least one male politician (female journalists: 95.5 % [94.0 %, 96.7 %]; male journalists: 96.5 % [95.4 %, 97.3 %]).

Female journalists included, on average, 0.10 [0.01, 0.21] more mentions of female politicians into their articles. A news report authored by a woman was estimated to mention female politicians 0.82 [0.71, 0.95] times, compared to 0.72 [0.63, 0.82] times in an article written by a man. In contrast, the number of mentions of male politicians did not consistently differ between articles written by female and male journalists (-0.28 [-1.16, 0.57]).

On average, both were estimated to include approximately six mentions of male politicians (female journalists: 5.94 [4.89, 7.19], male journalists: 5.63 [4.56, 7.04]).

Female journalists were 2.3 % pt [1.0 % pt, 3.6 % pt] more likely to write articles featuring a woman as the key political figure (and, conversely, by 2.0 % pt [1.0 % pt, 3.1 % pt] less likely to focus on men in that role).[4] This corresponds to an expected 14.1 % [12.1 %, 16.2 %] of articles highlighting a female key figure, compared to 11.8 % [10.3 %, 13.5 %] of articles written by men. For male key political figures, the expected shares were 89.7 % [88.1 %, 91.3 %] in articles by women and 91.7 % [90.5 %, 92.9 %] in articles by men.

5.2 Variation by Media Outlets and Over Time

The differences between articles by female and male journalists in the three visibility measures varied substantially across media outlets and over time. Figure 1 visualizes this variation for qualitative inspection. Panel A illustrates considerable variation at the outlet level. The density contours shown represent the posterior distributions of the gender-related differences between articles by female and male journalists. In this context, a posterior distribution indicates the probability of different possible values for the gender difference, given the model and the data. Positive values signify that female journalists were more likely to include or mention politicians of the corresponding gender more frequently. For contextual reference, the solid vertical lines indicate the aggregate differences discussed earlier.

Notably, articles by female journalists demonstrably increased the visibility of female politicians within certain media outlets. However, there remains a considerable probability of negative differences, as well as numerous instances where differences were negligible. The direction of these differences was more consistent with respect to indicators related to the mention of male politicians—either generally or as key figures. Specifically, articles by female journalists consistently showed a lower likelihood of mentioning male politicians, largely irrespective of the media outlet. Again, when interpreting average results, it is important to account for the possibility of (near-)zero differences. The variation in the number of male politician mentions was substantial, spanning a wide range of directions and levels of certainty, ultimately tending to balance each other out.

Panel B depicts the estimated differences and their 90 % credible intervals for each month. While some variation exists in the size of the estimated differences over time, the qualitative patterns remain mostly consistent. Across most of the period under investigation, articles by female journalists tended to increase the visibility of female politicians and decrease that of male politicians. Although the uncertainty surrounding the estimates limits the confidence with which individual months can be interpreted (many of the 90 % credible intervals include zero), the general direction appears suggestive over time.

However, we did not identify consistent temporal *trends*, such as the differences between articles by women and men becoming systematically smaller or larger. One notable exception to the overall pattern of female politicians' visibility emerged during Hilary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign: during this period male journalists were just as likely, or even more likely, than their female counterparts to cover a female politician.[5]

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4 Articles with female and male key political figures are not perfect complements, as it is possible for two politicians of different genders to be mentioned an equal number of times. Nonetheless, the two measures are strongly negatively correlated (see Table 1).

5 The special importance of super-prominent politicians is supported by a robustness check (see Appendix C). When we exclude presidential candidates and presidents during the period under investigation (Obama, Romney, H. Clinton, Trump, Biden) from the data, the differences between

Figure 1: Variation of estimated differences in visibility measures between articles by female and male journalists across media outlets and over time

Positive differences indicate higher values for articles by female journalists.
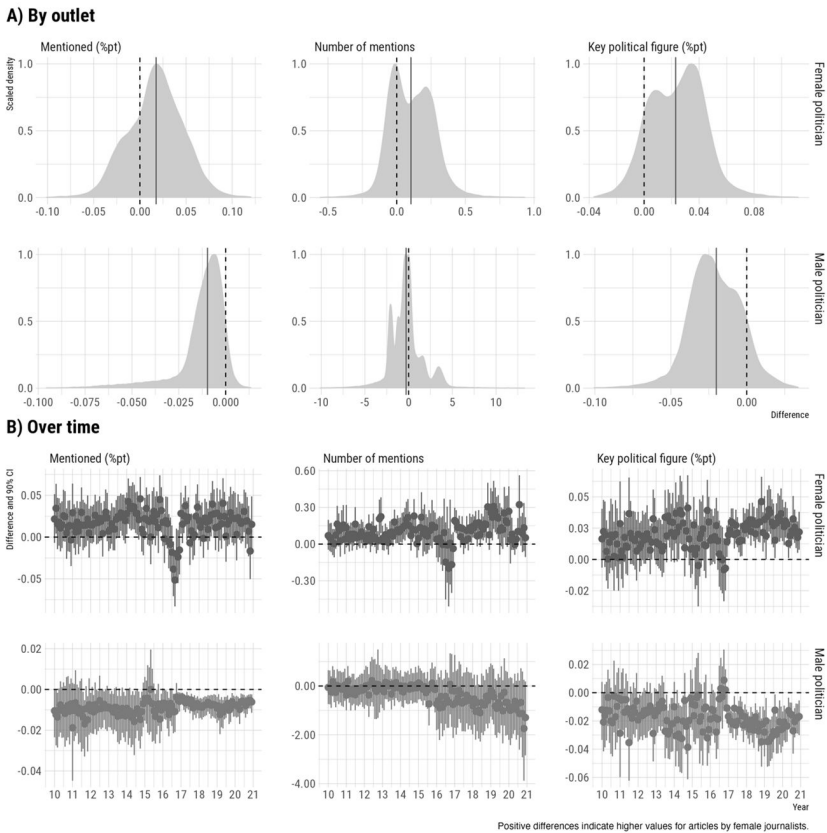
The comparison of the overall differences—averaged across outlets and months—and the posterior standard deviation at each level provides a quantitative sense of variability. For instance, an article by a female journalist was, on average, 1.8 percentage points more likely than one by a male journalist to mention at least one female politician. The posterior distribution of outlet-level differences shows a standard deviation of 3.0 percentage points, while the month-level variation has a standard deviation of 2.3 percentage points. In other words, depending on the media outlet, the difference between articles by female and male journalists could range from roughly 1.7 times below to 1.7 times above the overall average difference. Similarly, depending on the publication month, the difference could vary between ±1.3 times the overall average. These ratios were comparable across all visibility

articles written by women and men become more pronounced. This finding suggests that the high news value of these politicians overrides other selection mechanisms, including any gender-based preferences by journalists.

indicators, suggesting that variation across outlets was somewhat greater than variation over time.[6]

6. Discussion

This study examines the impact of journalists' gender on the media visibility of female and male politicians in the United States. Drawing on multiple indicators, we assess political visibility in terms of both presence and prominence, and we compare these measures across media outlets and over time. Our findings show that gender-based differences in media coverage are largely consistent across the three visibility indicators. Articles authored by female journalists tend to make female politicians more visible and male politicians less visible, compared to articles by male journalists. While the estimated population-level differences are small, they are nonetheless noticeable. Moreover, we observe considerable variation in these gender-based differences across different media outlets and temporal contexts.

In terms of media presence, our findings align with previous research (e.g., Leiva & Kimber, 2022), which shows that female politicians are more likely to be mentioned at least once by female journalists than by their male counterparts. Similarly, with regard to media prominence, female journalists are more likely than men to include more mentions of female politicians and portray them as the key subject of an article. The combination of indicators used in this study allows for a more nuanced understanding of media visibility, revealing dimensions that a single metric would overlook. For example, identifying key political actors highlights those prioritized in the narrative, but often reinforces the visibility of already prominent—typically male—figures, potentially underestimating the role of journalist gender (Johnstonbaugh, 2018). By contrast, the number of mentions and mere presence in articles capture how less prominent politicians, including women, are embedded in political discourse, and can offer insight into more subtle patterns of inclusion or exclusion. Future research should further refine these indicators and incorporate additional dimensions, such as textual positioning or article length, to better conceptualize media visibility. Our study draws on a large dataset covering all possible mentions of both male and female politicians. However, due to the scale of the data and the limitations of automated content analysis, we did not distinguish whether politicians were cited as sources or referred to in the third person, nor did we analyze the sentiment of the mentions. Future research should examine the tone and function of these mentions in greater detail to provide a more detailed understanding of gendered reporting patterns in political journalism.

The patterns observed in our study are largely consistent with prior research (e.g., Bastin, 2022; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Riedl et al., 2022). Several factors may help explain this continuity, including the sociocultural expectations journalists hold regarding the social roles of women and men (Braden, 1996; Falk, 2008; Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). Journalism remains a gendered industry, shaped by unequal access to professional networks. Within this context, journalists may be more inclined to interact with same-gender politicians due to shared experiences, smoother communication, or unconscious biases (Löfgren Nilsson, 2010; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Indeed, some female journalists explicitly challenge the male dominance of politics and journalism, as well as the masculine norms embedded in both fields, by building stronger relationships with female politicians (Voronova, 2014). Moreover, journalists frequently report that sourcing diverse sources requires additional effort (Asr et al., 2021). Given that men continue to dominate newsrooms (Women's Media

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6   Male politician mentioned: SD_{outlet} = 1.4 % pt, SD_{month} = 0.7 % pt; female key political figure: SD_{outlet} = 2.1, SD_{month} = 1.7; male key political figure: SD_{outlet} = 1.8, SD_{month} = 1.4; number of mentions of female politicians: SD_{outlet} = 0.17, SD_{month} = 0.12.

Center, 2021), male politicians may be more frequently contacted for expert commentary than their female counterparts. While existing studies show that journalists tend to report more favorably on politicians they know personally or with whom they share views (Van der Goot et al., 2021), the specific role of journalist gender in this dynamic remains unclear. Future research could combine surveys and content analysis to examine how gender shapes professional networks and social media interactions between journalists and politicians—and whether these relationships affect the visibility of particular political figures in news coverage. Furthermore, as journalists' perceptions of gender and gender stereotypes vary cross-nationally (e.g., Voronova, 2014), comparative studies could help illuminate how gatekeepers' gendered biases and practices differ across distinct media systems.

Some studies suggest that the gender composition of newsrooms can significantly shape media content. Newsrooms with a higher proportion of female editors are more likely to include female sources and distribute reporting assignments more equally between female and male journalists (Shor et al., 2015; Craft & Wanta, 2004). It is possible that some of the media outlets in our sample had a higher share of female publishers, editors, or journalists, which may have influenced the visibility of politicians. Our individual-level results point in this direction. However, we were unable to directly analyze the impact of newsroom gender composition, as employment data for the outlets was not available, and gender classification was only feasible for the subset of highly active journalists who authored more than 50 articles. Previous longitudinal work, such as that by Shor et al. (2015), has faced similar challenges and was able to assess the impact of editor gender only for a limited timeframe. Future research could build on our findings by focusing on a smaller number of media outlets where employment data may be more readily accessible, possibly through direct cooperation. Another promising approach could involve gender classification for all bylined journalists.[7]

Our findings highlight the potential impact of organizational context, including editorial policies, routines, culture, and norms, on political reporting. Variations between outlets may reflect differing levels of commitment to gender equality, diversity in leadership, or journalistic values that either emphasize or downplay balanced political representation (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Further research is needed to better understand how these organizational factors shape the media visibility of politicians. While existing studies have examined the effects of gender composition within editorial boards (e.g., Shor et al., 2015), future work could broaden the scope by considering other structural dimensions, such as ideological leaning, editorial guidelines, or ownership models. The visibility indicators and measurement strategies developed in the present study offer a useful starting point for such inquiries. However, collecting high-quality, ideally time-varying outlet-level data remains a key methodological challenge, as these characteristics cannot be reliably inferred from media content alone. Moreover, future research could examine whether and how media organizations actively implement strategies to mitigate gender-based biases in political coverage.

Although we expected that sociopolitical developments, such as the increasing number of women in both US politics and journalism (Pew Research Center, 2023; Women's Media Center, 2021), would be reflected in news coverage, our analysis indicates that gender-based differences in political reporting have remained stable over the past decade. An exception occurred during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Hillary Clinton became the first female presidential candidate nominated by a major party. During this period, male journal-

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7 It should be noted that our initial attempt to apply semi-supervised gender classification methods yielded unsatisfactory results. Consequently, we opted for a more costly but reliable approach: manual classification of all authors.

ists were as likely as their female colleagues to report on female politicians. These findings suggest that the visibility gap between male and female politicians may narrow in contexts where female politicians are perceived as particularly newsworthy. This raises important questions about the conditions under which women receive equal media attention and whether coverage by male journalists is driven more by necessity than by routine editorial choices. Further research is needed to explore this dynamic. For example, future studies could replicate our analysis using coverage of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, comparing representations of Kamala Harris, the Democratic Party's candidate, with those of Hillary Clinton in 2016.

The stability of our findings over time aligns with previous research conducted outside the U.S., which has demonstrated a persistent association between journalist gender and the gender of political sources (Bastin, 2022; Leiva & Kimber, 2022). Some scholars argue that achieving gender-balanced reporting requires increasing the number of women in newsrooms, as journalists, editors, and media managers, until a *critical mass* is reached (Childs & Crook, 2008). However, Bastin (2022) cautions that while rising female participation can initially challenge entrenched norms, its effect may eventually plateau. These mixed perspectives underscore the need for further longitudinal research to evaluate whether and how increased gender diversity among journalists leads to enduring changes in reporting practices. Additionally, we argue that more theoretical engagement is needed to clarify the meaning of "gender-balanced reporting," a concept that carries normative assumptions and must be critically examined in relation to broader political and societal dynamics.

Research on gendered political news coverage presents a mixed picture. Some studies find that female politicians are more frequently covered in soft policy areas (e.g., Hayek & Russmann, 2022; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008), while others report no significant gender differences in the coverage of such topics (e.g., education, Andrich & Domahidi, 2023). Similarly, although female journalists are still often assigned to soft news and certain gendered patterns in coverage persist (Meeks, 2013; Meeks, 2016; Santia et al., 2024), other research finds no notable differences based on journalist gender (e.g., Freedman et al., 2007, 2010; Liebler & Smith, 1997; Vos, 2013). These divergent findings underscore the need for future research that integrates these perspectives by jointly examining policy areas, the roles of journalists and politicians, and the gender composition of both newsrooms and political leadership. Such an approach could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how gender continues to shape political news coverage.

While our study offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between journalist gender and politicians' media visibility, it is not without limitations. Most notably, we focused on binary gender categories due to the lack of publicly available data on non-binary identities. Collecting such data would require direct inquiry from individuals, raising ethical and privacy concerns. Although binary classification necessarily simplifies gender as a complex social construct, it remains the most practical and least intrusive approach for large-scale analysis of this kind. Future qualitative research is needed to contextualize these findings and to explore more inclusive approaches that better capture the diversity of gender identities.

This, however, does not imply that social sciences are not in need of new methodologies for measuring gender. In text analysis, reliance on binary gender classification has tended to overlook gender fluidity, contributing to biases such as the underrepresentation and misgendering of non-binary individuals in large language models, as well as the use of stigmatizing language (Ovalle et al., 2023). Future research should adopt more inclusive approaches, such as the use of gender-neutral datasets and bias-reducing tasks, to better reflect the full spectrum of gender identities.

7. Conclusion

Our analysis of a decade of U.S. political news coverage indicates that journalists' gender consistently influenced the gendered visibility of politicians. Articles authored by female journalists were more likely to include at least one female politician (media presence), contained more frequent mentions of female politicians, and featured them more prominently (media prominence). While the average differences were modest, their consistency is striking, especially given the male-dominated political landscape, that structurally limits journalists' opportunities to focus on female politicians. These differences varied considerably across media outlets, suggesting that individual journalistic decisions are shaped by organizational context. Longitudinal analyses further revealed that these patterns remained largely stable over time.

By demonstrating that journalists tend to favor covering same-gender politicians, this study highlights how inequalities within newsrooms contribute to broader imbalances in media content. This persistent pattern of gender bias aligns with findings from Latin America and Europe (Leiva & Kimber, 2022; Lühiste & Banducci, 2016), indicating that the underrepresentation of women in journalism is a systemic issue across global media systems.

The implications of our findings are important for both journalism and democratic politics. For media organizations, our results point to the importance of adopting policies and practices that promote more gender-balanced reporting, workplace cultures, and professional networks. Initiatives may include diversifying newsroom staff and offering training programs aimed at recognizing and addressing implicit biases in political coverage.

8. Statements and Declarations

8.1 Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

8.2 Funding statement

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8.3 Data availability statement

The data analyzed in this study were provided by LexisNexis under license and are not publicly available. The processed data necessary for reproducing the statistical models has been anonymised and can be found in the online appendix to this article.

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Appendix

See the appendix here: https://osf.io/yxtjs/?view_only=0682a332485542358f64b6aa9cefd127.