

QSS Honors Program Experience 2019-2020

[Sunny Drescher](#)

“Engendering Support? The Effects of Gendered Information Cues on Voters’ Policy Preferences”

What I Did

Working with my advisor, Professor Horiuchi, I looked at whether gendered information cues affect voters’ support for different policies. A fair amount of research existed that focused on partisan information cues, but gender alone had been relatively unexplored. As such, I conducted a survey experiment in which I randomized statements in support for two policies, one gendered policy and one non-gendered policy, and measured respondents’ support on the outcomes. I measured respondents’ support by using a hypothetical ballot initiative for each of the policies. I ran several ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models to estimate the average marginal component effects and average marginal treatment effects of the different statements in support.

What I Learned

My results show that gendered information cues do not have a statistically significant effect on voters’ support for the policies. These results suggest that the issues being evaluated in the ballot initiatives matter far more than the information cues being used to try and influence voters’ support. Future researchers may look to replicate my experiment with different issues and or more salient gendered information cues.

I conducted this research during much of the 2020 Democratic presidential primary race, which had a historic number of women candidates, which in turn made this research more meaningful and more challenging. As a woman who has experienced gender-related bias in my own life and who has observed it in the media (e.g., women candidates being asked about sexism in political races but not men), it was intellectually and personally fulfilling to explore trying to isolate the impact of a person’s gender on influencing others’ opinions. I am eager to see where gender and politics related survey experiments go in the future to continue trying to measure gender biases, as such biases seem to become more difficult to detect over time.

I additionally learned that I really like conducting research in an independent study format. While I hope to pursue a career in public service, I have not ruled out graduate school, in large part because of my positive experiences conducting research in the GOVT and QSS programs.

Advice for Future Thesis Students

- There are a number of important criteria for choosing a thesis advisor. Among the things to consider: the professor’s expertise in your topic, the professor’s expertise in your methodology, the professor’s availability, how often you want/the professor wants to meet, etc. In my experience, having an advisor who was less familiar with my topic but highly familiar with my research design and statistical methodology worked well.
- When you have an idea of what you’re interested in researching, start looking at the existing literature on the topic as soon as you can. This will help you get a sense of the

scope of your project, how you will design your research, and help foster ideas for how to answer/measure your specific question. This will also save you time later when you're writing your literature review.

- On that note, write your literature review (or a draft of it) as early as you can. You can always add to it and edit it later on, but once you have the bulk of it done, there's no reason why you shouldn't draft it and get it out of the way (e.g., over winterim—I did not do this and regretted still having it on my “to do” list months later).
- Engage with professors (not just your advisor) and peers regarding your research. Many questions or roadblocks I encountered were answered, mitigated, or simply made more bearable because of talking through issues with my mentors and friends. Independent research does not have to be a lonely endeavor, and you should make the most of the time you have at Dartmouth being surrounded by super smart and curious people.