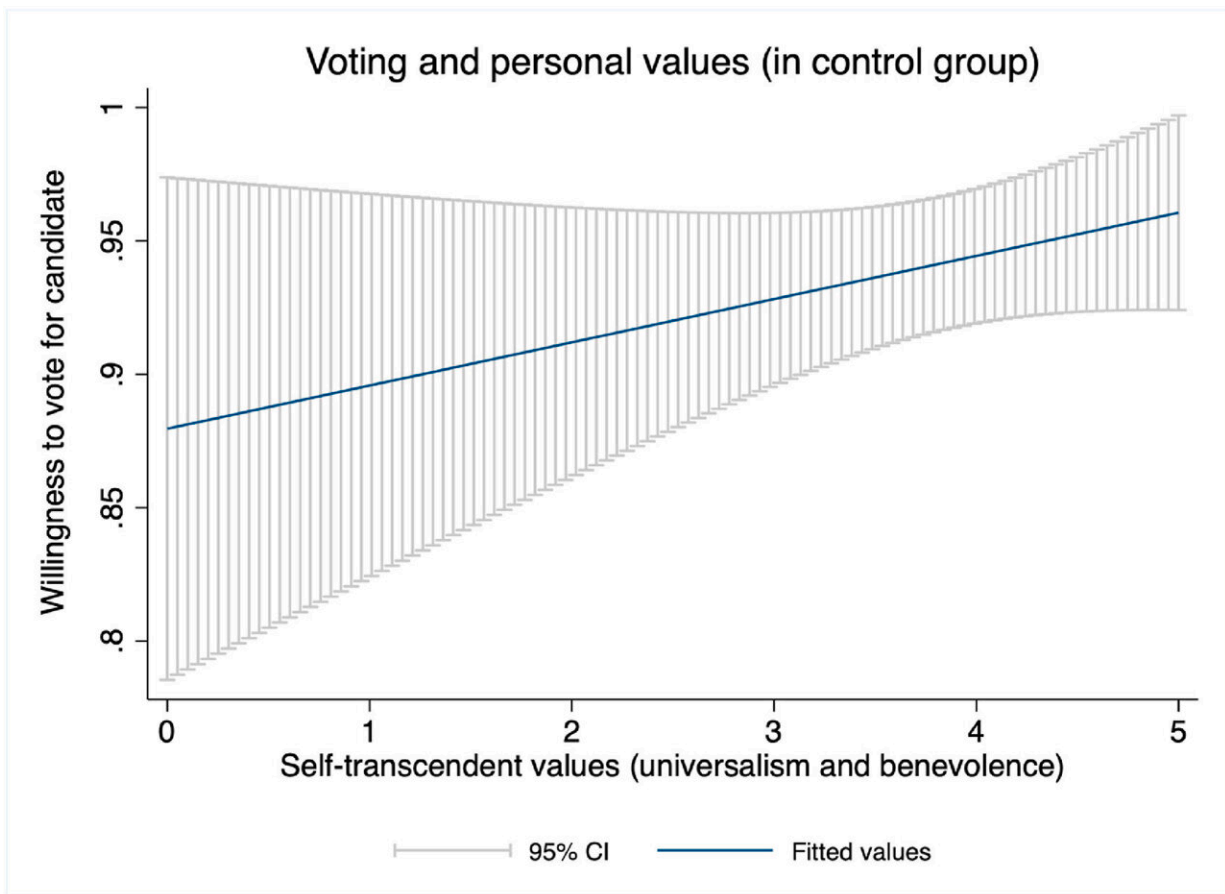


Research reveals how voters view politicians accused of sexual harassment

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Voters in the control group with higher self-transcendent values are more willing to vote for the candidate after vignette 2. Credit: *Electoral Studies* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102613

Alleged misconduct generally reduces public support for political candidates, but many people would still vote for someone accused of sexual harassment, according to a new paper in the journal *Electoral Studies* from Queen Mary University of London and Brunel University London.

An outsider observing politics would be forgiven for thinking that politics and scandals go hand in hand. Some politicians step down from their roles when accused of misconduct, while others do their best to ride out the storm—but how do allegations of sexual harassment affect voters?

Research so far shows that voters tend to punish politicians accused of [sexual misconduct](#), though some maintain party loyalty despite allegations against their candidate. Other studies suggest that voters care less about sexual scandals than corruption. Evidence also highlights the impact of timing; for example, scandals breaking in an [election campaign](#) can cause more problems for candidates, and when such news is repeated over time it can intensify the negative effects.

New research published today in the journal *Electoral Studies* has investigated whether people are less likely to vote for a candidate accused of sexual harassment, and how much personal values affect the likelihood of voting for such candidates.

The new study involved more than 700 American adults who were eligible to vote in the 2020 US elections. Participants were given basic information about a hypothetical male candidate standing for governor from the participant's favored party, outlining his policy priorities and presenting him as a family man. When asked how likely it was they would vote for him, based on the information they had been given, 90% expressed support for the potential governor.

Participants were then randomly assigned to two different groups and given additional information about the candidate. One of the groups was given details of his work with [local schools](#), while the other read media reports of recent sexual harassment allegations by former colleagues which led to the candidate settling a lawsuit. The first group remained supportive and voting intention increased to 94%, while the second group showed a fall in voting intention to 43%.

Although the allegations of sexual harassment reduced support overall, the study also revealed that a sizeable minority would still vote for a candidate accused of sexual [harassment](#), with personal values playing a strong role in these outcomes. For example, voters aged 60-69 were more favorable to the accused candidate than those aged 18-30—welcome news for politicians involved in scandals when you consider that [older people](#) are more likely to vote.

Study author Dr. Sofia Collignon, lecturer in comparative politics at Queen Mary University of London, explained, "We found that [personal values](#) of universalism and benevolence were particularly important. If the [voter](#) prioritized the welfare of other people over power and ambition, they were more likely to switch away from the accused candidate."

Study author Dr. Manu Savani, senior lecturer in behavioral public policy at Brunel University London, continued, "Individual values guide people in their decision making in all aspects of life, including politics. What we wanted to know was whether this also explained why some voters were more likely than others to punish candidates at the polls if accused of sexual misconduct."

More information: Manu M. Savani et al, Values and candidate evaluation: How voters respond to allegations of sexual harassment, *Electoral Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102613](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102613)

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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