

# Are there gender affinity effects between women voters and women leaders in parliamentary elections? Evidence from a cross-national study

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# ABSTRACT

## **Are there gender affinity effects between women voters and women leaders in parliamentary elections? Evidence from a cross-national study\***

An increasing amount of literature has demonstrated that party leaders affect voting behavior in parliamentary elections. However, the electoral impact of women's leadership of political parties has been under-researched. The gender affinity hypothesis suggests that when women run for presidential or prime ministerial office, women are more likely than men to vote for them. Using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project, we tested gender affinity effects between women voters and female party leaders in sex-mixed legislative elections, that is, elections involving at least one female party candidate for prime minister, in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. We analyzed 50 elections held from 1996 to 2016 in 24 countries. The results showed that female leaders are better evaluated by women and that women are more likely than men to vote for them. However, gender affinity effects are small and not conditioned by the electoral setting.

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# PRESENTATION

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. The gender affinity effect**
- 3. Hypotheses**
- 4. Data, variables and analyses**
- 5. Results**

# The gender affinity effect

The starting point of this research was that sex of voters and candidates for prime minister matters for their electoral success in parliamentary elections.

The gender affinity effect occurs when women are more likely than men to vote for a female candidate (Dolan, 2008; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2003).

**Several mechanisms may provide a linkage between voter sex and candidate sex (Dolan, 2008; Goodyear-Grant and Croskill, 2011):**

- ➔ Identity politics or gender solidarity,
- ➔ Descriptive representation
- ➔ Substantive or policy representation
- ➔ Heuristic decisions
- ➔ The party-sex

# HYPOTHESES

**H1: Female leaders are more positively evaluated by women than by men.**

**H2: Women are more likely than men to vote for a party led by a woman.**

**Research on the electoral effects of party leaders on voters' choice suggests that gender affinity effects may be dependent on several factors, the most important being the attributes of candidates (sex, age and political experience) and their respective parties (ideology, size and governing status); voters' characteristics (e.g., closeness to the party and ideology); and some contextual determinants (Barisione 2009; Blais, 2011; Costa Lobo 2008, 2018; Ferreira 2019; Garzia 2011).**

**Therefore, we examined whether gender affinity effects were conditional upon these factors.**

# DATA

- To test our hypotheses on gender affinity effects between women voters and female leaders, we used two datasets. First, the CSES-IMD (2018) provides information about the voting choice of respondents and their evaluations of the main parties' leaders (up to nine) in the most recent parliamentary elections, their gender, party identification and ideology. Second, we elaborated a dataset on the personal and political attributes of political leaders and their parties. We then combined the datasets. .
- We restricted the CSES-IMD in four important ways. First, we considered only parliamentary elections (or the Lower House in the case of bicameral systems) in both parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. Second, we restricted the dataset to mixed-sex elections. Third, we considered leaders running as their party candidate for prime minister even if they were not the leaders of their respective party organizations. Fourth, in the CSES-IMD (2018), the number of particular parties, voters were asked to indicate whether they liked or disliked their leaders in a given election, ranged from 4 to 9, with the selection of parties made by national survey teams. Only those leaders and their parties were included in the analyses.
- These four criteria narrowed the dataset to 24 countries and 50 legislative elections for both parliamentary and mixed or semi-presidential systems

**DEPENDENT VARIABLE  
(1)**

Party leaders' evaluations on a scale from 0 to 10 points.

**DEPENDENT VARIABLE  
(2)**

Vote choice: 1 the respondent voted for the party's leader and 0 otherwise

The data were transformed from a wide to a long format so the results could be observed at the individual party level.

**We ran a series of logistic regression models with two-way clustered standard errors by respondent and election study**

# INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

**GENDER OF VOTERS**

**GENDER OF LEADERS**

Gender affinity was captured by the interaction between voters' and leaders' sex

**PARTY CLOSENESS**

Close to the leader's party / other leaders' party and no party attachments

**POLITICAL IDEOLOGY**

Respondents' self-positioning on the left-to-right (0-10-point) scale

**CHARACTERISTICS OF VOTERS**

AGE AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION

**CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERS**

AGE, TIME IN OFFICE AND EXECUTIVE EXPERIENCE

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LEADERS' PARTY**

SIZE, GOVERNING STATUS AND IDEOLOGY

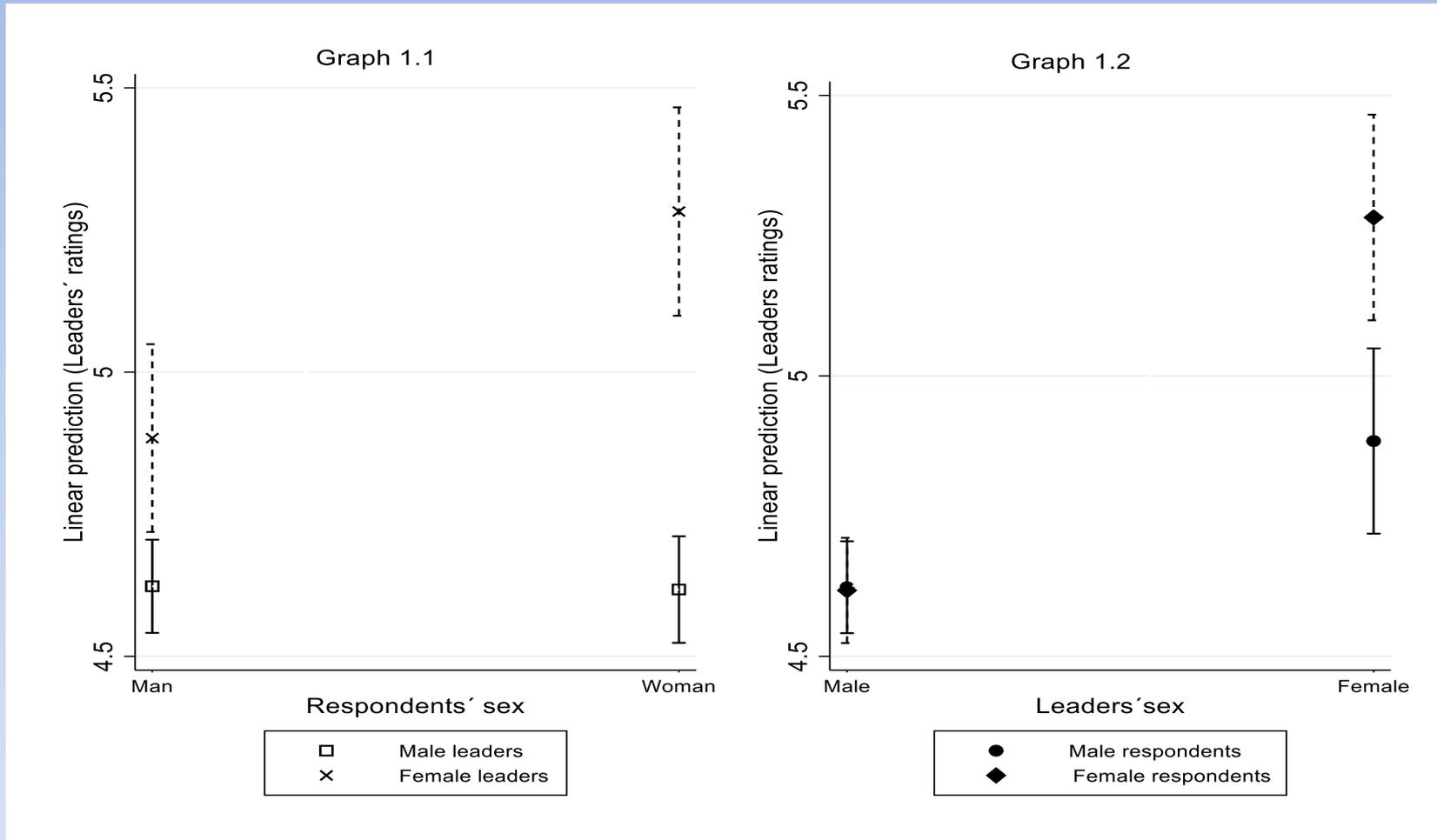
# RESULTS

## **H1: Female leaders are more positively evaluated by women than by men.**

We found that female leaders were better evaluated than their male counterparts by voters of both sexes, but this advantage was not limited to female experienced politicians.

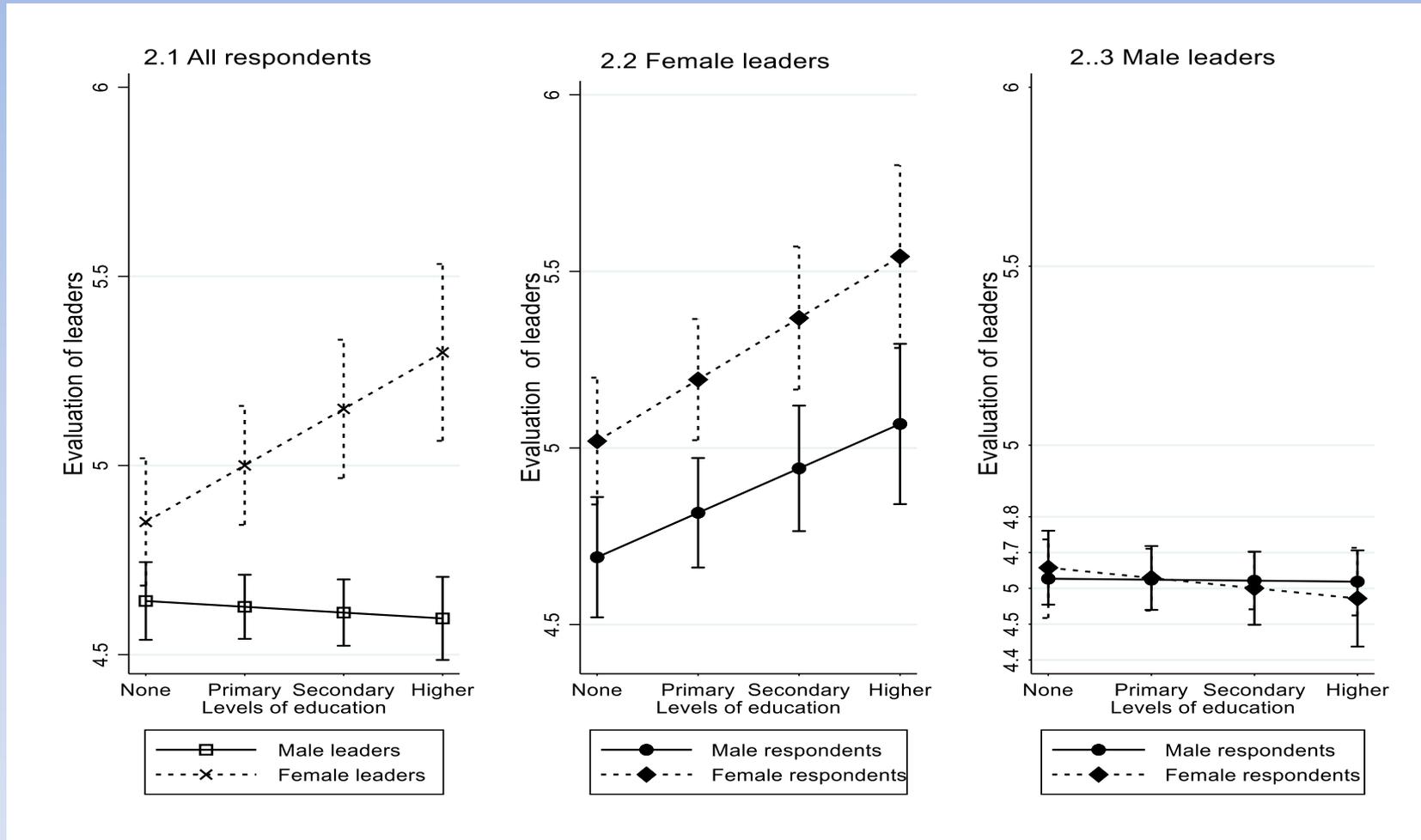
We also found that women rated female leaders better than men, which confirmed H1 (Figure 1). Conversely, there were no significant gender differences in ratings of male leaders

Figure 1. Predicted margins of sex of both respondents and leaders on leaders' evaluations with 95% CIs



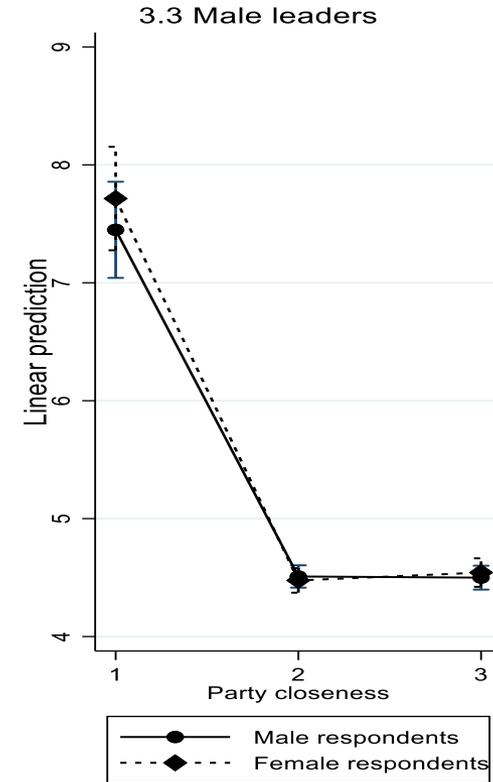
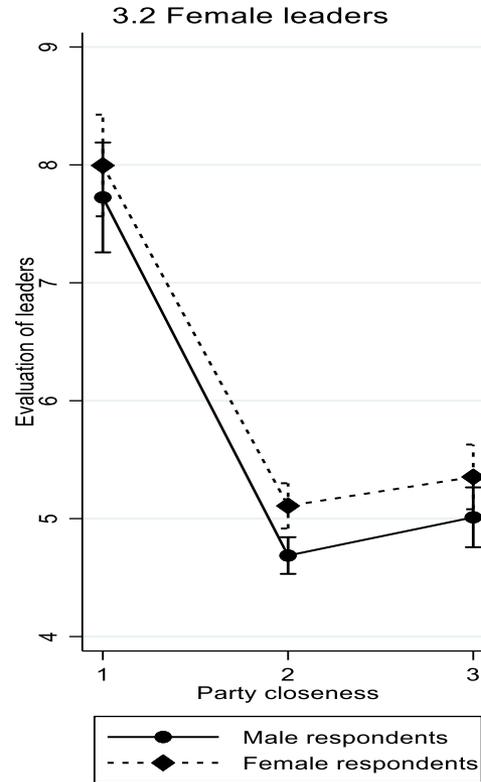
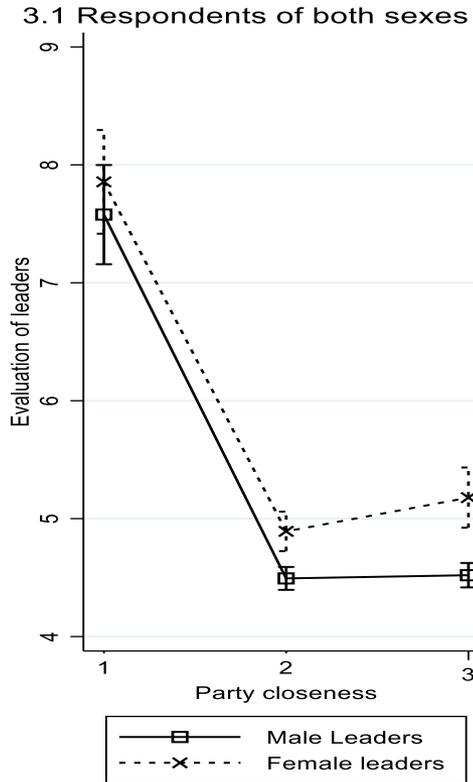
Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

Figure 2. Predicted margins of sex of both respondents and leaders and levels of education on leaders' evaluations with 95% CIs



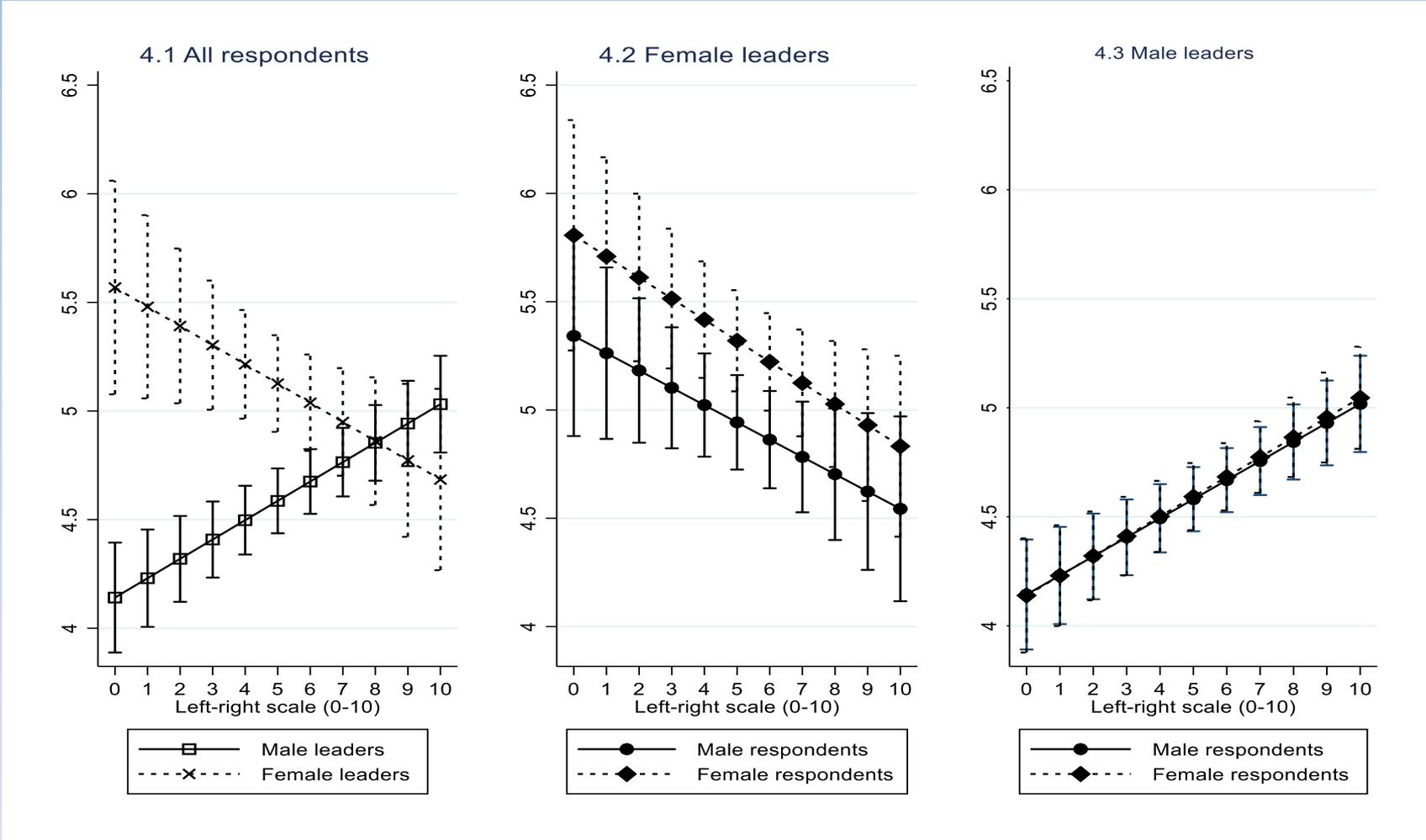
Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

Figure 3. Predicted margins of sex of both respondents and leaders and party closeness on leaders' evaluations with 95% CIs



Note: for party closeness, each category indicates “1” for respondents who feel close to the leader’s party; “2” for respondents who feel close to other leaders’ parties; and “3” for independents. Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author’s dataset.

Figure 4. Predicted margins of sex of both respondents and leaders and ideology on leaders' evaluations with 95% CIs



Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

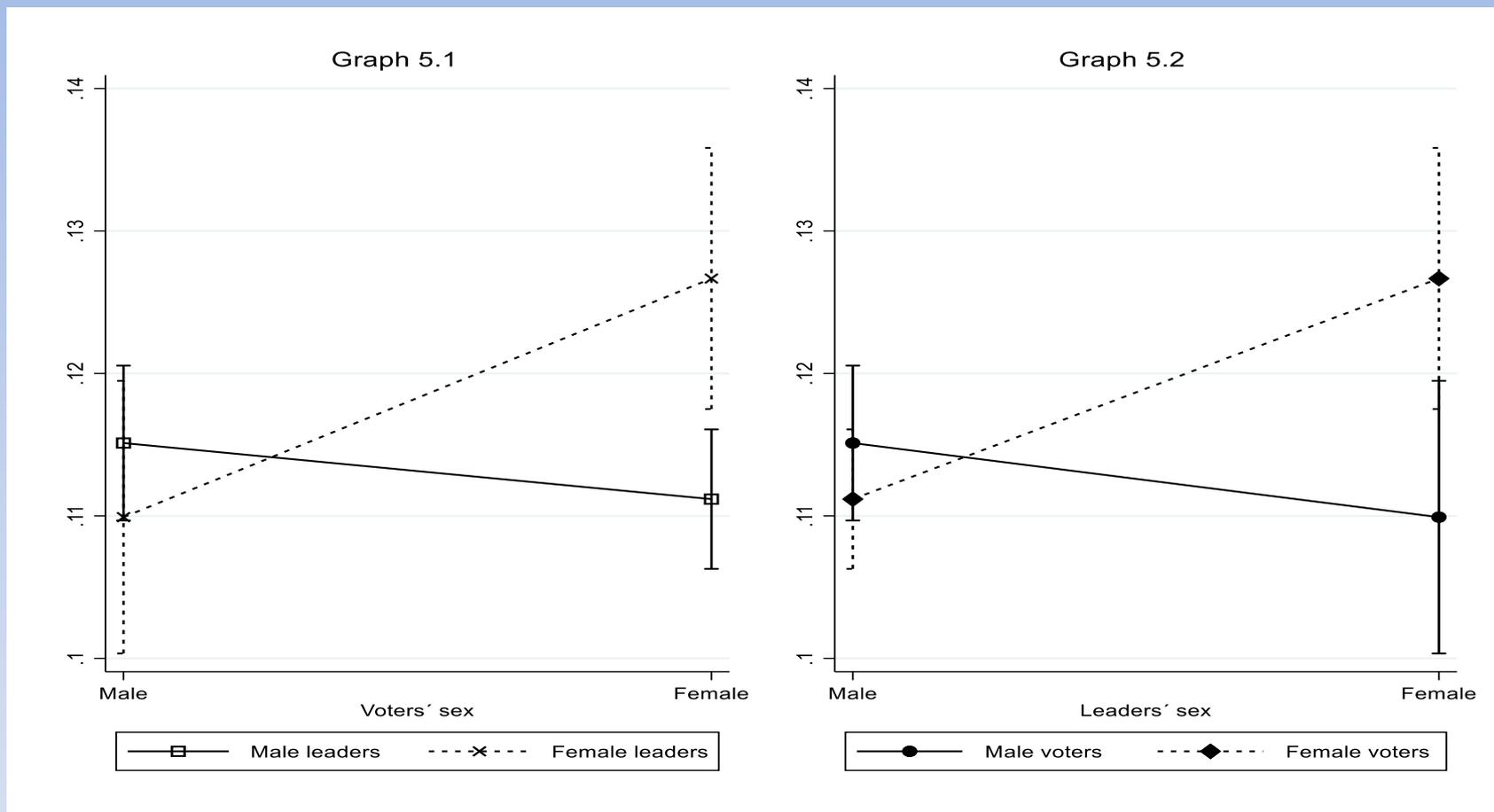
# RESULTS

## **H2: Women are more likely than men to vote for a party led by a woman.**

Female leaders were not advantaged in attracting votes for their parties: Female leaders decreased the probability of someone voting for a party, but the effect was not significant.

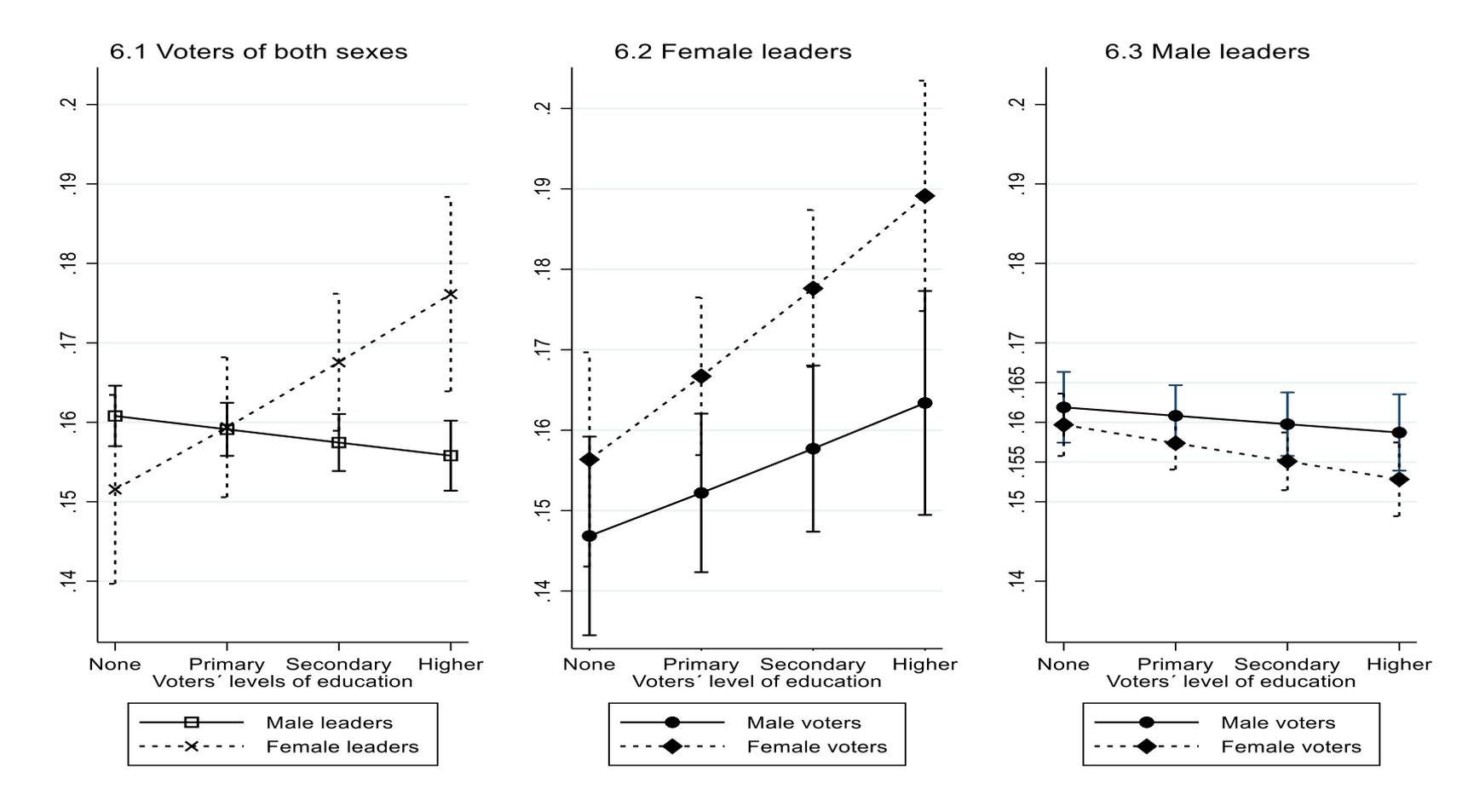
Furthermore, we found a significant gender affinity effect on voter choice, so H2 was confirmed, but the magnitude of the effect was small. On one hand, women were slightly more likely than men to vote for a female leader. The mean predicted probability of voting for a party led by a female leader was 0.127 for women and 0.110 for men (Figure 5). On the other hand, men are slightly more likely than women to support a party led by a man, but the effect was not significant.

Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of sex of both respondents and leaders on voter choice with 95% CIs



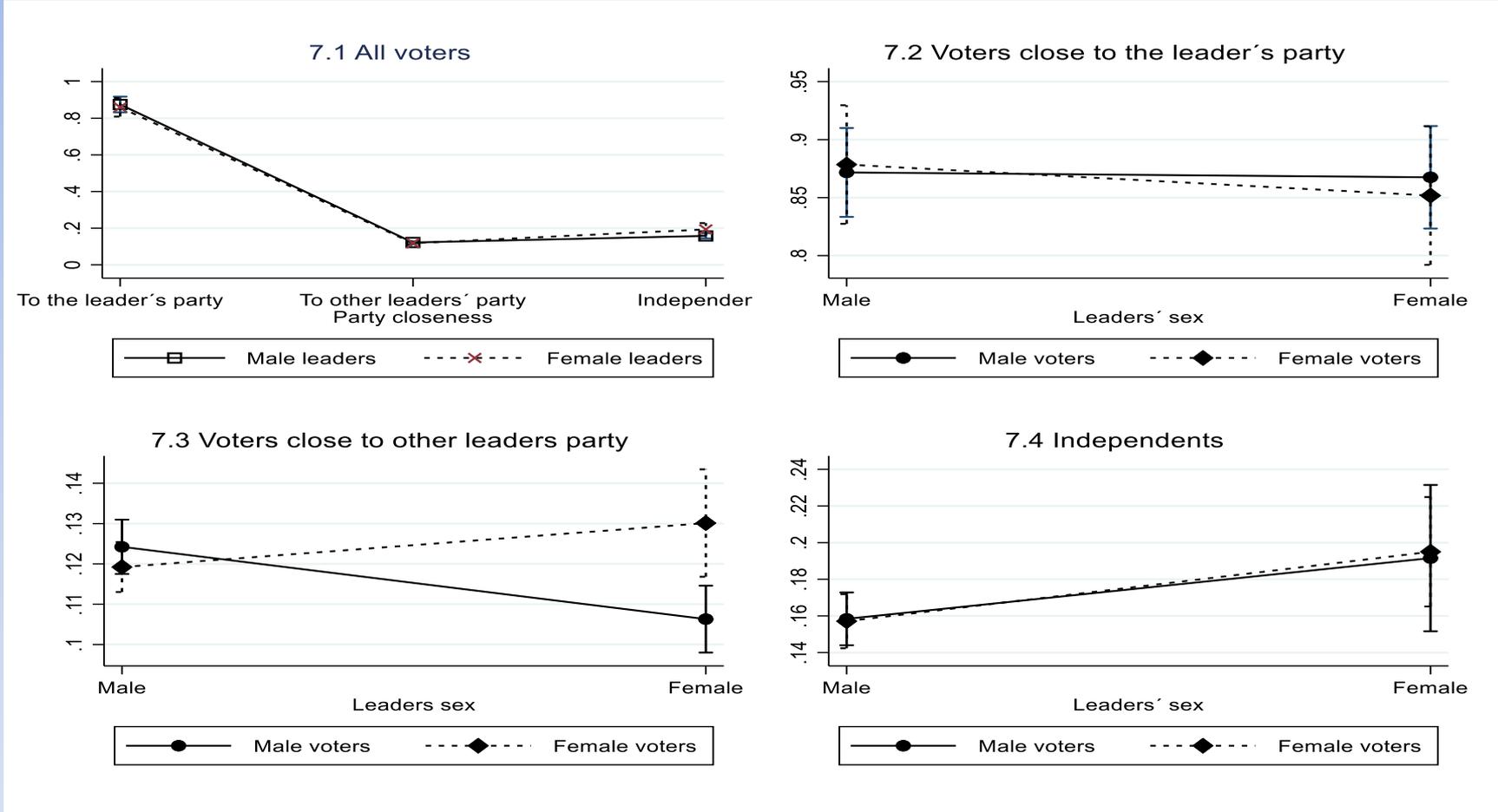
Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

Figure 6. Predicted probabilities of sex of both respondents and leaders and levels of education on voter choice with 95% CIs



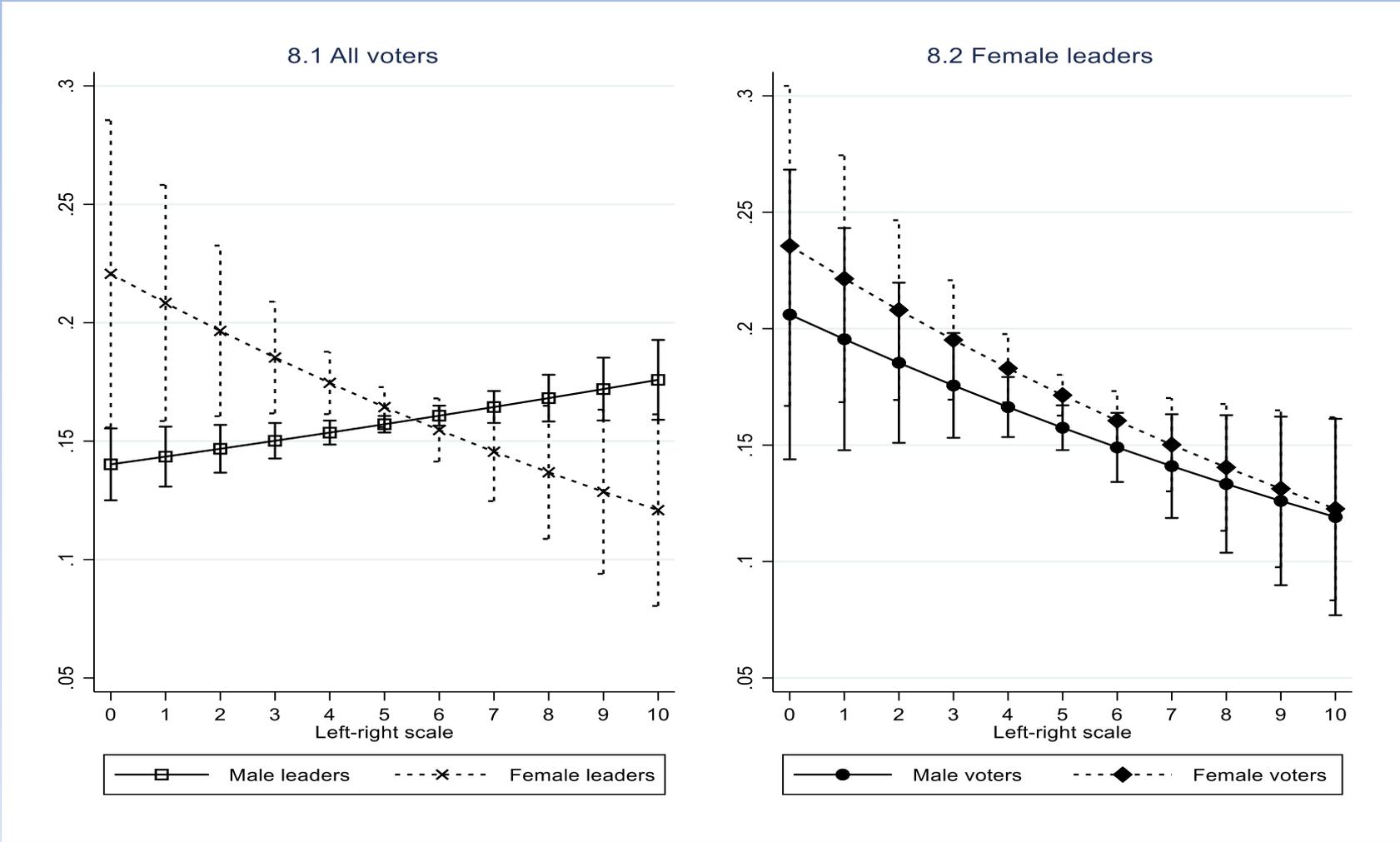
Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

Figure 7. Predicted probabilities of sex of both respondents and leaders and party closeness on voter choice with 95% CIs



Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.

Figure 8. Predicted probabilities of sex of both respondents and leaders and ideology on voter choice with 95% CIs



Source: Own elaboration based on data from IMD-CSES (2018) and author's dataset.