The 2016 U.S. presidential election was unique. The frontrunner of a major political party was a woman for the first time (Hillary Clinton), and the opposing candidate (Donald Trump) readily aimed hostile rhetoric at outgroups, opponents, and protagonists (Kagan, 2016). These circumstances spurred much research. For example, recently published work shows that Trump attracted supporters who were relatively high on authoritarian aggression and group-based dominance (e.g., Pettigrew, 2017; Womick, Rothmund, Azevedo, King, & Jost, 2018), and who engaged in outgroup dehumanization (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). In light of well-publicized allegations of Trump’s sexism and sexual misconduct toward women (e.g., Fahrenthold, 2016) and Clinton’s election loss, investigators have also focused on gender-related
issues. For instance, Clinton supporters’ perceptions of gender equality decreased following the election (Does, Gündemir, & Shih, 2018). Also, Trump supporters were found to endorse greater sexism than Clinton supporters (Bock, Byrd-Craven, & Burkley, 2017; Ratliff, Redford, Conway, & Smith, 2017; Rothwell, Hodson, & Prusaczyk, 2019; Valentino, Wayne, & Oceno, 2018).

The current research likewise investigated whether Trump versus Clinton supporters differed in their degree of sexism, but moved beyond this descriptive question to address two novel theoretical issues. First, we sought to extend current accounts of the determinants of men and women’s perceptions of gender discrimination toward their own gender group. Perceptions of gender discrimination typically are understood to arise from actual experiences and sensitivity to detecting discrimination (Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003). For instance, women consistently report much higher levels of gender discrimination toward women, compared to men’s reports of gender discrimination toward men (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001). However, we argue that this usual pattern of perceived systemic discrimination may be upended among Trump supporters because of their sexist attitudes.

Second, we used the election as an ecologically valid context for examining beliefs about systemic fairness and justice. According to system justification theory, “people are motivated to exaggerate the fairness and desirability of social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements” (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 328). System justification theorists typically emphasize that system threats cause increased endorsement of system-justifying beliefs (e.g., Kay & Friesen, 2011). However, we investigated whether an internal system threat—Clinton’s loss as experienced by Clinton supporters—would result in sustained diminishment of system justification, whereas Trump’s victory would bolster system justification among Trump supporters.

Sexism and Perceptions of Gender Discrimination

Research has shown that hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), and other similarly antagonistic forms of sexism, predicted voting for Trump over Clinton (Bock et al., 2017; Ratliff et al., 2017; Valentino et al., 2018). In contrast, benevolent sexism, or seemingly positive attitudes toward women that nonetheless restrict them to stereotypically feminine roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996), did not uniquely predict candidate support in these studies. These findings suggest that antipathetic, competitive, and misogynistic attitudes toward women played a role in the 2016 election. Importantly, conservatism was used as a covariate in this past research, and also in the research we report herein. Political ideology overlaps considerably with voting behavior and also is related to sexism (Falk & Kenski, 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Thus, controlling for conservatism allows one to assess the relation between sexism and voting behavior that cannot be accounted for by conservatism.

We likewise hypothesized that Trump supporters would endorse hostile and antifeminist attitudes more than Clinton supporters (controlling for conservatism). We also tested whether Trump’s victory signaled a shift in social norms towards sexism (see Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018) that fueled greater post- than preelection endorsement of sexist attitudes, as would be predicted by the justification–suppression model of prejudice (Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002). Indeed, hate crimes and racist harassment spiked and then persisted following Trump’s election (Barrouquere, 2017). The election outcome likewise may have prompted an exacerbation of sexist attitudes among Trump supporters.

Moreover, we investigated whether differences in sexist attitudes among Clinton versus Trump supporters were related to men and women’s perceptions of systemic gender discrimination toward their own gender group. The extent to which people perceive that groups are targeted by discrimination has important consequences for individual and societal treatment of bias, social action, and social change (Carter & Murphy, 2017; Crosby, 1984; Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995). But what influences these perceptions? Members of traditionally stigmatized groups, especially highly identified
members (Major et al., 2003), routinely perceive greater levels of discrimination toward them personally than members of traditionally nonstigmatized groups (Moghaddam, Stolk, & Hutcheson, 1997; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002). Widening the lens, people are even more likely to agree that their group as a whole experiences discrimination than they are to agree that they experience personal discrimination (i.e., the personal–group discrimination discrepancy; e.g., Crosby, 1984; Moghaddam et al., 1997; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990).

We expected to replicate these classic patterns among Clinton supporters, with (a) women perceiving more personal gender discrimination, compared to men's perception of personal gender discrimination, and (b) women perceiving higher group- than personal-level discrimination compared to men. These gender differences may be exacerbated after Clinton's loss (Does et al., 2018).

However, stemming from their more misogynistic and antifeminist attitudes, Trump supporters may have very different perceptions of gender discrimination. We expected female Trump supporters’ endorsement of sexism (e.g., accepting the male-dominated, antifeminist hierarchy) would lead them to perceive less discrimination directed at them and toward women in general, compared to female Clinton supporters (above the influence of conservatism). Essentially, female Trump supporters are likely to believe “there’s no problem here” when it comes to the treatment of women (see Jost & Banaji, 1994). In contrast, a strikingly different pattern may emerge among male Trump supporters. Researchers have found that Whites are more likely to claim they are victims of racial discrimination when they are threatened by the progress of Blacks (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). In addition, Whites are more likely to endorse zero-sum beliefs (that progress for Blacks means setbacks for Whites) when the existing racial hierarchy is threatened (Norton & Sommers, 2011; Wilkins, Wellman, Babbitt, Toosi, & Schad, 2015). We reasoned that male Trump supporters’ sexism, in the face of a viable female presidential contender, would lead them to see themselves and men in general as victims of gender discrimination, relative to male Clinton supporters (beyond the influence of conservatism). This pattern may be especially likely to occur preelection, when Clinton was favored to win, and to dissipate following Trump’s victory.

System Justification

System justification research has demonstrated people’s tendency to bolster and rationalize current social, economic, and political arrangements as fair and legitimate, even when those arrangements disadvantage the self (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). System threats increase the motivation to justify the system, particularly when threats originate from outside of one’s own system (Kay & Friesen, 2011). We refer here to such threats as originating externally. For instance, priming international terrorism caused people to endorse system justification beliefs more strongly (Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). When people outside the system (i.e., terrorists) attacked, people were apparently motivated to defend and justify their social system. However, what happens when a prominent “internal” threat occurs, such as when individuals have been prompted to criticize or see shortcomings of their own system? Such a threat could potentially delegitimize one’s own system, thus reducing system justification. In one relevant study, British participants who were primed to think and then write about political, legal, social, or economic shortcomings in the UK reported lower system justification just after being primed, relative to a control condition (Jost et al., 2012). In a parallel vein, but in an ecologically valid context and while examining longer lasting effects, we expected that the 2016 U.S. election outcome would have consequences for participants’ endorsement of the system as fair and just.

Before the election, we saw little reason to expect a difference between Trump and Clinton supporters’ system-justifying beliefs. Because system justification and conservatism are typically related (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008), we used conservatism as a covariate so we could assess the effects of favoring Trump or Clinton on system
justification beliefs. However, we expected Clinton supporters to perceive the election outcome as an internal threat to the system (i.e., one that delegitimized the system), and therefore to show diminished system justification after the election. In contrast, we expected Trump supporters to perceive the election outcome as system reinforcing, resulting in a postelection boost in system justification beliefs.

In sum, the present research investigated influences on perceptions of systemic gender discrimination and of fairness and justice, as contextualized around the distinctive 2016 U.S. presidential election. We collected data from Clinton and Trump supporters before the election, immediately after it, and following inauguration (in a between-participants design) to test hypotheses concerning perceptions of gender discrimination and system justification.

**Method**

**Participants and Design**

Data were collected from 1,606 participants. Exclusions were applied based on a priori criteria: failed attention checks (n = 20); non-U.S. citizens (n = 10); identified neither as man nor as a woman (n = 13); indicated no candidate preference (n = 18); preferred a candidate other than Clinton or Trump (n = 243). The final sample size was 1,302.

Participants were either undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university who received partial course credit or Amazon Mechanical Turk workers who received $0.50.

Different participants completed the study at one of three times (and once they had completed the study, they were blocked from being able to complete it again): before the 2016 presidential election (October 21, 2016 to November 3, 2016; n = 422); postelection (November 14, 2016 to December 6, 2016; n = 455); and postinauguration (January 24, 2017 to March 2, 2017; n = 425).

Table 1 summarizes participant pool characteristics by data collection period. There were of course large age and education differences between the two samples. Fewer undergraduate women participated during the postelection wave than at other times, χ² (2) = 24.52, p < .001. Finally, the student sample scored higher on conservatism than MTurk participants, F(1, 1296) = 10.23, p < .001, η² = .01, 90% CI [0.002, 0.02]. Importantly, there were no systematic differences overall in sample characteristics as a function of data collection period, with the exception that the postelection wave included fewer women than the other waves, χ² (2) = 7.40, p = .02. The effect of time was not significant for race (White vs. non-White), χ² (2) = 1.80, p = .40; age, F(2, 1298) = 1.28, p = .28; conservatism, F(1, 1299) = 3.47, p = .03; or voting preference, χ² (2) = 2.42, p = .30.

A sensitivity analysis performed with G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) specifying ANCOVA, df num = 1, and number of groups = 24, indicated that the final sample size provided 95% power to detect a small effect size (f = .10).

**Procedure**

Participants could complete the online study at only one of the three data collection cycles. After consenting, they completed the following measures, which were presented in random order.

**Benevolent and hostile sexism.** The 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) assesses benevolent sexism (e.g., “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess”; α = .85) and hostile sexism (e.g., “Most women fail to appreciate all that men do for them”; α = .92). Ratings were made on a 5-point (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) scale.

**Modern sexism.** Participants completed the eight-item Modern Sexism Scale (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; e.g., “Discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States”; α = .90) using a 7-point (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) scale.

**Personal and group discrimination.** Following past research (e.g., Operario & Fiske, 2001), participants reported the extent to which they personally are the target of gender discrimination (a) currently, (b)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Student participants (N = 560)</th>
<th>MTurk participants (N = 742)</th>
<th>All participants (N = 1,302)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preelection</td>
<td>Postelection</td>
<td>Postinauguration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (%)</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18.98 (1.62)</td>
<td>19.07 (1.08)</td>
<td>19.23 (1.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7% high school or less;</td>
<td>87.4% some college;</td>
<td>3.9% college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86.1% some college;</td>
<td>1.9% college degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6% college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (%)</td>
<td>10% high school or less;</td>
<td>87.2% some college;</td>
<td>3.9% college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.7% high school or less;</td>
<td>87.4% some college;</td>
<td>3.9% college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6% college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatism</td>
<td>3.50 (1.63)</td>
<td>3.80 (1.64)</td>
<td>3.89 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton voters (%)</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have been the target in the past, and (c) anticipate being the target in the future (1 = not at all, 9 = to a great extent; $\alpha = .92$). Three parallel items asked participants to indicate the extent to which their gender group is the target of discrimination ($\alpha = .89$). Note that participants made these ratings with respect to their own gender group (i.e., males in relation to men, females in relation to women).

**System-justifying beliefs.** Participants completed the seven-item Global Belief in a Just World Scale (Lipkus, 1991; e.g., “I feel that people get what they deserve”; $\alpha = .88$) to tap into system justification (see Jost & Hunyady, 2005), making ratings on a 5-point (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) scale. The System Justification Scale had seven items$^6$ (Kay & Jost, 2003; e.g., “In general, I find society to be fair”; $\alpha = .85$) and was accompanied by a 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) scale. These two scales were highly correlated, $r(1298) = .64, p < .001$, and yielded redundant results. Therefore, as in past research (Monteith, Burns, Rupp, & Mihalec-Adkins, 2016), we standardized scores within each scale and averaged them for the system-justifying beliefs index.$^7$

**Candidate preference, conservatism, and demographics.** Finally, preelection participants indicated whom they intended to vote for, or if they would not be voting, which candidate they preferred. Participants at other time points indicated whom they voted for, or if they had not voted, which candidate they preferred at the time of the election. The distribution of candidate preferences was similar whether participants voted (82%) or not and across time. More participants preferred Clinton (64%) than Trump. Participants also reported gender, race, age, citizenship, and conservatism (1 = very liberal, 7 = very conservative).

## Results

### Overview of Main Analyses

Unless otherwise noted, dependent variables were predicted using a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ between-participants ANCOVA, with conservatism as the covariate. We anticipated that conservatism would consistently account for variance and were particularly interested in whether candidate preference effects were significant after controlling for conservatism.

Given the number of effects being tested and to reduce the likelihood of spurious effects, we used a significance criterion of $p \leq .01$ for omnibus effects. No significant three-way or four-way interactions were obtained (see supplemental material for full factorial results), so we trimmed the model to include only main effects and two-way interactions. 90% confidence intervals (CIs) for effect sizes are reported.

Descriptive information and correlations among measures are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive information and interrelations among measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>1.</th>
<th>2.</th>
<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
<th>5.</th>
<th>6.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Benevolent sexism</td>
<td>2.75 (0.76)</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hostile sexism</td>
<td>2.54 (0.92)</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Modern sexism</td>
<td>3.15 (1.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal discrimination</td>
<td>3.55 (2.14)</td>
<td>$-$.10</td>
<td>$-$.18</td>
<td>$-$.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Group discrimination</td>
<td>4.62 (2.36)</td>
<td>$-$.17</td>
<td>$-$.24</td>
<td>$-$.37</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. System justification</td>
<td>0.04 (0.90)</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>$-$.22</td>
<td>$-$.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conservatism</td>
<td>3.58 (1.76)</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>$-$.17</td>
<td>$-$.16</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All correlations significant at $p < .01$ at least.
Sexism Measures

Descriptive results for the sexism measures by candidate preference are summarized in Table 3. Conservatism was a significant covariate for benevolent, $F(1, 1282) = 69.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.03, 0.07]$; hostile, $F(1, 1282) = 157.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.08, 0.14]$; and modern, $F(1, 1283) = 143.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.08, 0.13]$, sexism. Men scored higher than women on benevolent, $F(1, 1282) = 17.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.005, 0.02]$; hostile, $F(1, 1282) = 47.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.02, 0.05]$; and modern, $F(1, 1283) = 143.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.08, 0.13]$, sexism. As expected, the candidate preference main effect was not significant for benevolent sexism, $F(1, 1282) = 2.22, p = .137, \eta^2 = .00, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.00, 0.01]$; Trump supporters more strongly endorsed hostile sexism, $F(1, 1282) = 47.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.02, 0.05]$; and modern sexism, $F(1, 1283) = 72.45, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.03, 0.07]$, relative to Clinton supporters. When we simultaneously predicted candidate preference with all three sexism measures, controlling for conservatism and gender in a logistic regression analysis, hostile and modern sexism were uniquely associated with a preference for Trump (see Table 4).

Note that the interaction between candidate preference and data collection period did not approach significance in any of the sexism analyses ($ps > .20$). This runs contrary to the possibility that Trump’s election signaled a social acceptability of sexism that released its expression (see Crandall et al., 2002).

Perceptions of Discrimination

Personal discrimination. Conservatism was negatively related to perceived personal discrimination, $F(1, 1283) = 6.52, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.001, 0.01]$. Women ($M = 3.98, SE = 0.07$) reported greater levels of personal discrimination due to their gender than men reported in relation to their gender ($M = 2.63, SE = 0.08$), $F(1, 1283) = 145.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.08, 0.13]$. We also observed the expected interaction between gender and candidate preference, $F(1, 1283) = 96.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.05, 0.10]$. As shown in Figure 1, male and female Clinton supporters diverged strongly in their ratings of personal discrimination, $F(1, 1284) = 317.29, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.17, 0.23]$, with females reporting much higher levels of gender discrimination toward themselves as women than males reported in

### Table 3. Scores on sexism measures as a function of candidate preference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Candidate preference</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinton (0.03)</td>
<td>Trump (0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent sexism</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile sexism</td>
<td>2.38 (0.03)</td>
<td>2.80 (0.04)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern sexism</td>
<td>2.95 (0.04)</td>
<td>3.61 (0.06)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means are adjusted with conservatism as a covariate. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Benevolent and hostile sexism possible range = 1–5; modern sexism possible range = 1–7. *$p < .001$.

### Table 4. Results of logistic regression using sexism scores and gender (controlling for conservatism) to predict candidate preference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>$p \leq$</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatism</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>238.45</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolent sexism</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile sexism</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>8.67</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern sexism</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>34.91</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. 0 = Clinton, 1 = Trump; 0 = men, 1 = women.
relation to themselves as men. In stark contrast, the effect of gender was not significant among Trump supporters, $F(1, 1284) = 2.24, p = .13, \eta^2 = .00, 90\%\ CI \ [0.00, 0.01]$. Examining the interaction another way, male Trump supporters claimed significantly greater discrimination than male Clinton supporters, $F(1, 1284) = 23.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02, 90\%\ CI \ [0.01, 0.03]$, and female Trump supporters claimed significantly less discrimination than female Clinton supporters, $F(1, 1284) = 47.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04, 90\%\ CI \ [0.02, 0.05]$. Finally, we also obtained a significant interaction between candidate preference and time, $F(2, 1283) = 7.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01, 90\%\ CI \ [0.00, 0.02]$. Among Clinton supporters, reports of personal discrimination remained quite stable, with a nonsignificant trend toward reporting greater personal discrimination as a function of data collection period ($M_{\text{Prelection}} = 3.20, SE = 0.12; M_{\text{Postelection}} = 3.35, SE = 0.12; M_{\text{Postinauguration}} = 3.58, SE = 0.13$), $F(2, 1284) = 2.59, p = .075, \eta^2 = 0.004, 90\%\ CI \ [0.00, 0.01]$. In contrast, Trump supporters’ reports of personal discrimination decreased significantly as a function of data collection period, ($M_{\text{Prelection}} = 3.37, SE = 0.17; M_{\text{Postelection}} = 3.50, SE = 0.15; M_{\text{Postinauguration}} = 2.83, SE = 0.17$), $F(2, 1284) = 5.81, p = .003, \eta^2 = .01, 90\%\ CI \ [0.002, 0.02]$. The pattern among male Trump supporters is consistent with the possibility that they were less threatened after Trump was elected and assumed office, so they tempered reports of gender discrimination toward them. We did not expect to observe this pattern among female Trump supporters and speculate on it in the Discussion section.

**Group discrimination.** Conservatism accounted for little variance in reports of group discrimination, $F(1, 1284) = 4.59, p = .03, \eta^2 = 0.004, 90\%\ CI \ [0.00, 0.01]$. Strikingly, the magnitude of the main effect for gender was triple the size as that of personal discrimination, $F(1, 1283) = 626.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .33, 90\%\ CI \ [0.30, 0.36]$. Women ($M = 5.54, SE = 0.07$) reported much more gender discrimination toward women than men reported in relation to men ($M = 2.96, SE = 0.08$). Most importantly, the expected interaction between candidate preference and gender was significant, $F(1, 1283) = 146.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10, 90\%\ CI \ [0.08, 0.13]$. As shown in Figure 1, female Clinton supporters reported much greater gender discrimination toward women compared to male

![Figure 1](https://example.com/image.png)

**Figure 1.** The extent to which participants perceived personal and group discrimination toward their own gender group as a function of candidate preference and participant gender, controlling for conservatism.
Clinton supporters’ reports of gender discrimination toward men, \( F(1, 1284) = 917.15, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.38, 0.45] \). Among Trump supporters, women also reported significantly greater group-based gender discrimination than men, but this effect was much smaller, \( F(1, 1284) = 69.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.03, 0.07] \). Examined differently, male Trump supporters reported significantly greater gender discrimination toward men than male Clinton supporters, \( F(1, 1284) = 35.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.01, 0.04] \), whereas female Trump supporters reported significantly less gender discrimination toward women than female Clinton supporters, \( F(1, 1284) = 71.27, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.03, 0.07] \).9

Finally, as with personal discrimination, we found an interaction between candidate preference and time, \( F(1, 1283) = 6.00, p = .01, \eta^2 = 0.005, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.00, 0.01] \). Among Clinton supporters, perceptions of group discrimination remained stable \((M_{\text{Time1}} = 4.19, SE = 0.11; M_{\text{Time2}} = 4.38, SE = 0.11; M_{\text{Time3}} = 4.43, SE = 0.12)\), \( F(2, 1284) = 1.30, p = .27, \eta^2 = 0.002, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.002, 0.01] \). In contrast, Trump supporters’ perceptions of group discrimination decreased significantly across the waves of data collection \((M_{\text{Time1}} = 4.42, SE = 0.16; M_{\text{Time2}} = 4.31, SE = 0.14; M_{\text{Time3}} = 3.80, SE = 0.15)\), \( F(2, 1284) = 5.51, p = .004, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.00, 0.02] \).

**Does Sexism Fuel Differences in Perceptions of Discrimination?**

We performed a moderated mediation analysis in Process (Hayes, 2013; Model 14; 5,000 bootstraps) predicting perceptions of discrimination with candidate preference as the predictor, hostile and modern sexism scores as mediators, gender as the moderator of the indirect effect, and conservatism as a covariate. Results showed the same patterns and significance levels across personal and group discrimination, so we averaged ratings for the two types of discrimination and report those results. The overall index of moderated mediation was significant for hostile, 95% CI \([-0.34, -0.09]\) and modern, 95% CI \([-1.15, -0.66]\), sexism. As shown in Figure 2, male Trump supporters’ stronger perceptions of gender discrimination toward men, relative to male Clinton supporters, were mediated by their higher levels of hostile and modern sexist attitudes (after controlling for conservatism). In other words, male Trump supporters’ antifeminist and misogynistic attitudes appeared to fuel their perception that they personally, and men in general, experience gender discrimination.

Among women, Trump supporters’ weaker perceptions of gender discrimination toward women, relative to female Clinton supporters, were mediated by their higher levels of modern sexism (after controlling for conservatism), although not significantly by hostile sexism. When exploring why hostile sexism was not a significant mediator for women, we looked at hostile and modern sexism separately in mediational analyses. These tests showed significant mediation for modern, 95% CI \([-0.82, -0.38]\) and hostile, 95% CI \([-0.31, -0.08]\), sexism. Thus, hostile sexism apparently was not a sufficiently strong mediator to be maintained in the multiple mediation analysis. Perhaps because hostile sexism scores were relatively low, and women endorsed it less than men (i.e., restricted range), it did not have an effect beyond modern sexism.

**System-Justifying Beliefs**

Conservatism was a significant covariate when analyzing system-justifying beliefs, \( F(1, 1283) = 92.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.05, 0.09] \). Men \((M = 0.19, SE = 0.04)\) endorsed system justification more than women \((M = -0.04, SE = 0.03)\), \( F(1, 1282) = 22.85, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.01, 0.03] \), and Trump supporters \((M = 0.16, SE = 0.05)\) endorsed these beliefs more than Clinton supporters \((M = -0.01, SE = 0.03)\), \( F(1, 1282) = 6.96, p = .01, \eta^2 = 0.005, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.00, 0.01] \).

More importantly, candidate preference interacted with data collection period, \( F(2, 1282) = 9.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.001, 0.02] \) (see Figure 3). At preelection, after controlling for conservatism, Clinton and Trump supporters
endorsed system-justifying beliefs to a similar extent, $F(1, 1282) = 1.42, p = .23, \eta^2 = 0.001, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.00, 0.01]$. However, candidate preference was significantly related to system-justifying beliefs at preelection, $F(1, 1282) = 11.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.002, 0.02]$ and at postinauguration, $F(1, 1282) = 11.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01, 90\% \text{ CI} [0.003, 0.02]$. Considered differently, Clinton supporters’ endorsement of the system decreased significantly from preelection to postelection and postinauguration ($ps = .022$ and $.006$, respectively) and remained similar between the last two waves of data collection ($p = .58$). This pattern is consistent with our hypothesis that Trump’s win would diminish Clinton supporters’ sense of fairness and justice in the world. In contrast, Trump supporters’ endorsement of the system was significantly boosted from preelection to postelection and postinauguration ($ps = .022$ and $.006$, respectively) and remained similar between the last two waves of data collection ($p = .58$).

**Discussion**

The present research capitalized on the politically charged atmosphere of the 2016 U.S. presidential
election to advance our understanding of two types of system-related beliefs: perceptions of gender discrimination, and beliefs about the fairness and justice of social, economic, and political arrangements in society.

Consistent with other recent findings (Bock et al., 2017; Ratliff et al., 2017; Rothwell et al., 2019; Valentino et al., 2018), we found that sexism (antifeminist and hostile attitudes toward women) distinguished Clinton and Trump supporters. Going beyond other research, we also tested whether the endorsement of sexist attitudes differed pre- versus postelection. Our results did not support the justification–suppression model (Crandall et al., 2002), given that expressions of sexism did not escalate following Trump’s victory (see also Crandall et al., 2018, who found no increase in other forms of prejudice surrounding Trump’s election). Perhaps Trump’s candidacy had already signaled the social acceptability of sexism and released its expression before data collection began. Another possibility is that the justification–suppression model does not apply to sexism. Researchers have long noted that social norms concerning sexism expressions are weak (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). People who harbored sexism may have felt free to express it, regardless of Trump’s candidacy and election.

As expected, we found that sexism was important to perceptions of gender discrimination. Female Clinton supporters reported greater personal and group discrimination toward women than male Clinton supporters reported discrimination toward men. This pattern was unsurprising in light of the traditionally stigmatized status of women. However, very different and novel patterns emerged among Trump supporters. Male Trump supporters perceived much higher levels of personal and group discrimination toward men, compared to male Clinton supporters. Furthermore, male Trump supporters’ opinion that men were victims of discrimination occurred indirectly through their more sexist attitudes toward women. Female Trump supporters perceived much lower levels of personal and group discrimination toward women, compared to female Clinton supporters. Here again we found a mediating role for sexism, but in this case female Trump supporters’ greater endorsement of sexism was associated with lower perceived discrimination toward women, relative to female Clinton supporters.

Male Trump supporters’ claim of discrimination toward men bears similarity to recent research demonstrating that Whites who are threatened by Blacks’ progress are more likely to perceive themselves as targets of discrimination (Norton & Sommers, 2011; Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2015). Our finding that male Trump supporters’ perception of discrimination
toward men dissipated after Clinton lost the election is consistent with the possibility that they were threatened by a woman’s successful candidacy, and less threatened after she lost (see Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2015). Unexpectedly, we also found that female Trump supporters reported less discrimination toward women after (vs. before) the election. Perhaps the election outcome reinforced the desired male-dominated status quo for female Trump supporters, thereby augmenting their belief that women are not targeted by discrimination. Some tentative support for this interpretation may be inferred based on the finding that female (and male) Trump supporters reported stronger system-justifying beliefs after the election than before it, and perceived discrimination toward one’s group is inconsistent with system justification.

Beyond the focus on systemic gender discrimination, our results shed light on beliefs related to the general societal status quo. Considerable system justification research (Jost & Banaji, 1994) supports the idea that people are motivated to defend and justify the status quo, even when the system disadvantages the self and others (Jost et al., 2004; Jost et al., 2012). The current work helps to extend this theory to understand the conditions under which people do not bolster the existing system, but lose faith in it instead. Specifically, we found that Clinton supporters’ endorsement of system justification dropped immediately after the election and was maintained at this lower level through Trump’s inauguration. In contrast, Trump supporters’ system justification was bolstered postelection.

Jost et al. (2012) also observed lower system justification in an experiment in which participants considered (vs. did not consider) negative system-related information. The present research shows this diminishment effect unfolding in a real-world political context and, furthermore, its maintenance across time. But how do people function when they cannot support and justify the existing system? Perhaps they depend on a belief that the system can change for the better. Along these lines, Jost et al. (2012) argued that the negative psychological state resulting from diminished system justification motivates social action. They found that participants reported greater willingness to engage in protest behaviors in their experiment that manipulated system justification, and that system justification was negatively correlated with protests about the Wall Street bailout. Trump’s election and resulting decreased system justification among some people likewise may have prompted collective action, such as the “Not Our President” protests observed nationwide (Mele & Correal, 2016) and the Women’s March on Washington (Hartocollis & Alcindor, 2017).

One might wonder whether our system justification results are a broader reflection of endorsing the system when one’s political candidate wins, and rejecting it when they lose. Whether a political win or loss affects system-justifying beliefs may depend on various factors, including the extent to which the candidates are perceived to hold polarized beliefs and values that will affect future policies and outcomes. Given that the 2016 election candidates and campaigns were clearly polarized (e.g., Stack, 2016), this election may have been a potent context for shifting system justification beliefs. Future research may address whether other elections with less polarized candidates likewise shift system-justifying beliefs.

A potential limitation of the current work is that we had no control over who chose to complete the study at different times, raising the possibility that participant differences may account for differences in system justification across data collection waves. We drew from the same pools of participants at each wave of data collection, and we held all study characteristics constant, such as the generic study title (“Contemporary Public Opinions”). Also, we found that participants at different time points were similar on a variety of variables. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that future research can use experimental or longitudinal methods to yield more definitive conclusions about fluctuations in system-related beliefs.

Conclusion

System-related beliefs are incredibly important. Perceptions of gender discrimination are related
to factors ranging from targets’ psychological health (e.g., Hakim, Molina, & Branscombe, 2018) to policy decisions (Crosby, 1984). Likewise, the consequences of system justification beliefs range from self-esteem and well-being to support for social change and resource distribution (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). The current findings contribute to our theoretical understanding of these critical beliefs, and they also revealed how these beliefs fared in the context of the controversial 2016 U.S. presidential election.

**Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Supplemental material**

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

**Notes**

1. We originally aimed to investigate the effects of electing the first female U.S. president, following prior research concerning President Obama’s election (Kaiser, Drury, Spalding, Cheryan, & O’Brien, 2009; Lybarger & Monteith, 2011). After Trump’s election (and prior to examining the data in any way), we revised our goals and hypotheses and proceeded to test them after all data were collected.

2. Azevedo, Jost, and Rothmund (2017) likewise studied election-linked system justification but only preelection and examining different research questions than the current work.

3. See the supplemental material for analyses involving Stein and Johnson supporters.

4. Recent evidence of “server farms” and “bots” has led to concerns about the potential contamination of MTurk data (TurkPrime, 2018). However, the issue with data contamination began in March 2018 (Bai, 2018), and we concluded data collection in March 2017.

5. We utilized TurkPrime features to prevent participants from taking the survey more than once.

6. The scale has eight items but one was missing due to a programming error.

7. See the supplemental material for two other measures included based on our initial goal of examining the effects of Clinton’s election.

8. Analyses of sample effects revealed occasionally significant effects that did not qualify any of the reported findings and were not of theoretical interest. These effects are reported in the supplemental material.

9. We also tested for the person–group discrimination discrepancy by treating personal and group discrimination as a repeated measure and including gender as a between-participants variable to determine whether the magnitude of the discrepancy varied across men and women. We found a main effect for discrimination type, \( F(1, 1298) = 685.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35, 90\% \text{ CI}[0.31, 0.38]\), a main effect for gender, \( F(1, 1298) = 533.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29, 90\% \text{ CI}[0.26, 0.32]\), and a Gender x Discrimination Type interaction, \( F(1, 1298) = 308.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19, 90\% \text{ CI}[0.16, 0.22]\). Women and men alike reported greater group than personal discrimination, but this effect was much stronger for women, \( F(1, 1298) = 1,187.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .48, 90\% \text{ CI}[0.48, 0.50]\) than for men, \( F(1, 1298) = 31.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02, 90\% \text{ CI}[0.01, 0.04]\).

**References**


