

Female Political Competency and Social Dominance Orientation

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Abstract

The current study seeks to prove two hypotheses using a survey methodology: first, are there stereotyped policy areas such that some policies being considered more masculine, feminine or neutral. Secondly, Is SDO a valid measure of predicting competency of hypothetical female candidates both overall and in these spheres of policies. A survey was taken by 60 participants with 34 being excluded from analysis. Participants rated a hypothetical female candidate's competency in 15 policy area ranging from defense, to welfare. Overall the results suggested SDO related to all discipline areas, a factor analysis was unable to be used to distinguish the separate policy areas due to sample size, but using hypothesized groupings of policies there was an overall negative trend as SDO increased in perceived competency. Future research should look to correct the sample size issues to perform more powerful analysis, and look for differences in SDO's predictive power in the different policy areas or predict perceived competency of other minorities in the political realm.

Introduction

As of March 2017 there are only currently fifteen female world leaders, with eight being the first female leader of their respective country (Geiger & Kent, 2017). Also currently 21.2% of United States Senators, 19.1% of the U.S. House and 21.1% of U.S. Cabinet positions are filled by women (Brown, 2017), as well as 0% of all United States presidents since 1789 (Vargas 2017). Although these are strides forward in terms of leadership representation there is still steps needed in order for equal representation within the political sphere. When running for public office women run into the problems of voters stereotyping their political abilities based on

typical feminine traits. Research has been done on the overarching perceptions that individuals have on feminine traits in political leadership and its effects in different political spheres, such as military issues and social issues of poverty (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993), crime and education (Sanbonmatsu & Dolan, 2009), among other research. However, studies have not examined if these policies and are considered by voters as policies that feminine politicians are inherently more competent or less competent in, and if competency in these areas is influenced by the voters being higher or lower in Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). By being able to see which policies are grouped as more feminine or masculine more work can be done to correct negative stereotypes and work toward electing more female heads of state and work towards a more equal political representation and breaking down feminine stereotypes.

The current research to be conducted looks into the perceived political competence of female candidates in specific policy areas. Fiske and colleagues mixed stereotype content model has focused that when stereotyping groups we focus on two dimensions of warmth and competence which different levels elicit different stereotypes (2002). They explain, “Some stereotyped groups are liked as sweet and harmless (e.g., housewives), whereas others are disliked as cold and inhuman (e.g., rich people). Surely, such differences matter.” (2002) Competence is defined by Fiske and colleagues (2007) as, “ traits that are related to perceived ability, including intelligence, skill, creativity and efficacy.” Previous research contains findings within the field showcases the complexity of feminine as well as masculine traits on perception of competency. Huddy’s and Terkildsen’s (1993) research summarized that certain “warm” and “instrumental” traits, stereotypically associated with women and men respectively, would lead to voter perceptions of political candidates being more competent at either “compassion” issues,

dealing with poverty or the aged, or, military and defense issues. These traits however did not predict competence in economic issues. These findings were strong across any political candidate male or female showcasing these traits, but gender of candidate did interact with these traits with women seen as more competent in “compassion” issues than male counterparts when both possess warm traits, as well as men being more competent at military and defense issues than their female counterparts when both possess the instrumental traits.

Research also by Sanbonmatsu & Dolan (2009) showcases that gender stereotypes tend to be pervasive across party with slight differences when looking at competency within party ratings. Using data from an American National Election Survey pilot study from 2006 the researchers found that stereotypes about women being more competent in education, within their own party, and men being more competent in criminal issues. However there was a slight difference with Republican women candidates receiving less benefits and more disadvantage when evaluated by own party members. Also, perceivers Identifying as Democrats perceived women of all parties as more competent in education than men.

Research also by Dr. Sanbonmatsu (2002) finds that many voters seem to have a baseline preference for either male or female candidates based on gender of perceiver and gender stereotypes around traits beliefs and issue competency. This study also supports that stereotypical male or female traits tend to lead voters to believe females candidates are more competent in certain policy areas and male candidates are more competent in others. Overall this body of work again leads its support to the current Idea that these stereotypical policies are a part of a larger subset of policies grouped together by certain characteristics.

The other aspect of the current research is predicting female political leaders competency in certain grouped policy areas by SDO. SDO is defined by Pratto and colleagues as, “ the extent to which one desires that one's in-group dominate and be superior to outgroups. We consider SDO to be a general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations, reflecting whether one generally prefers such relations to be equal, versus hierarchical, that is, ordered along a superior-inferior dimension.”(1994) Those high in SDO levels have been shown to have high levels of prejudice (Altemeyer, 1998) and been used to predict prejudice attitudes toward multiple different outgroups including gay and lesbian individuals, (Whitley & Ægisdóttir, 2000) African-Americans (Whitley, 1999). SDO has also been used to predict differences among different genders in political attitude and political ideology (Pratto et. al, 1997). SDO should therefore also predict negative attitudes towards women due them having a traditional sphere and with perceptions of women as described by Fiske and colleagues as having high warmth and low competency(2007).

The current research expands on previous research in multiple ways. First, previous research has lacked in overtly defining policies as either masculine or feminine. Most research has used previous findings as simple policies to showcase traditional male and female stereotypes. This research looks to create sets of policies which can be factored into masculine, feminine, and neutral policies. These policies then can be used in future research as groups of policies which have been shown to be stereotyped as feminine or masculine. Another aspect of the current research which expands on previous research is the use of SDO to predict competency in political policies. SDO has not previously been used as this type of predictor, and if successful will expand on the plethora of attitudes SDO has been shown to predict.

The current research looks to answer the two questions: First, if competency perceptions of policy issues can be grouped into several factors. Secondly, should these political factors exist is Social Dominance Orientation(SDO) a significant predictor of how individuals rate female political competency within each of these factors. The hypothesis is also twofold, with the answer based on previous research seeming to lean to policies begin grouped as either masculine, feminine, or neither. Also, SDO is a significant predictor of female competency, with high SDO individuals showcasing higher levels of competency in feminine issues and lower levels in masculine and neutral issues.

Methods

To examine the current research topic a sample of 28 participants (12 males, 15 females, 1 prefer not to answer) were recruited using my personal Facebook page to participate in a survey measuring political viability of a hypothetical female candidate running for local office. The original post contained the link to the survey as well as a plea to share the survey with friends, meaning the final collection of participants was collected using snowball sampling methods. The sample was mostly white (85.7%) college age students (*Mean Age* = 25.51, *SD* = 12.78). The sample also leaned slightly liberal in political identification (*Mean Lib-con* = 3.21, *SD* = 1.791). Also 2 participants identified as Republican Party members, 13 as Democratic party members, 9 identifying as independent, and 2 as another political party.

Both of the research questions posed by for this study were answered using a single online survey. The survey involved participants first consenting to taking the study and being 18 years old or older. Next, to help answer the question if political policies fall into certain gendered or ungended factors, participants were shown a short passage describing a hypothetical female

candidate running for United States House of Representatives. The passage reads, “Kaitlyn Jones is a candidate running in 2017 for a government position in the state of Michigan for your preferred party. She has experience at the local level of government, and is hoping to make it to a more prestigious political position one day. Kaitlyn has been working for the past year on her campaign.” Next participants were asked to rate this candidate’s competency on a 1 to 7 scale with 7 being the most competent in 15 policy areas including: education, civil rights, defense policy, crime reduction, and anti-terrorism.

Next to answer the question of if these created factors scores are able to be predicted by Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), the 16 question SDO-7 scale developed by Ho and colleagues was used to measure participants Social Dominance Orientation (2015). Participants were asked to answer on a 7 point scale (1 = Never, 7 = Very Often) to what extent they agreed with statements endorsing social inequality, and group based hierarchy. These question was always asked second to avoid problems with priming participants. There are 16 total questions specifically have eight questions measuring egalitarianism, with four reverse coded, and eight measuring dominance, again with four reverse coded. The scores showed high interrater reliability ($\alpha = .946$). Next, the 16 questions were then combined to create a single mean measure of SDO ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.49$).

Participants were then finally asked two feeling thermometers. Each feel thermometers were on continuous sliders scales from 0 to 100 asking participants to rate their warmth towards women in general and warmth towards politicians. Participants on average felt much warmer towards women in general ($M = 82.45$, $SD = 22.44$) than politicians ($M = 35.9$, $SD = 27.68$).

Finally, multiple demographic variables were asked. First age of participants was asked on a continuous scale using a drop down menu in order to find mean age. Next, participants were asked their gender Identity as Male, Female, Other, or Prefer not to answer. Then, Race/Ethnicity of the participants was asked using a categorical system with choices of White, Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, or Asian. Participants were finally asked two questions regarding political identity. First participants were asked on a continuous 7 point liberal conservative spectrum how liberal or conservative they were with 1 being very liberal and 7 being very conservative. The final question asked if they identify with any of the following political parties: Republican Party, Democratic Party, Independent, or Other party.

Results

After distribution the survey was taken by 60 participants. 34 of the participants were excluded for not completing the survey, or not having lived in the United States for more than a year. This second group was excluded due to either being on exchange, or not having lived in the United States long enough to have a strong political background. Of those remaining participants the participants were almost evenly male and female (12 (42.9%) males, 15 (53.6%) females) and 1 (3.6%) chose to not identify. The sample was also majority White with 24 (85.7%) participants identifying as such, 2 (7.1%) identifying as African-American, 1 (3.6%) as Asian, and 1 (3.6%) as Biracial/Multiracial. The mean age of the sample was approximately ($M = 25.5$, $SD = 12.80$). Therefore there appears to be a mostly younger group of individuals with a large difference in age. Education wise, the majority of respondents had some college education but no degree at 13 (46.4%), 9 (32.1%) held a bachelor's degree, 4 (14.3%) held either a high

school diploma or GED, 1 (3.6%) held a masters, and 1 (3.6%) held an associate's degree. The political party affiliation also was skewed towards the democratic party with 13 (50%) self-identifying as Democrats, 9 (34.6%) as Independents, 2 (7.7%) as Republican party members, and 2 (7.7%) as another political party affiliate. This is also confirmed with participants self-ratings on the 1 to 7 liberal-conservative scale, with the sample having slightly more liberal lean ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.80$).

SDO was used in the survey as a measure of endorsement of group based hierarchy. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the internal reliability of the measure. The measure was found to be highly reliable ($\alpha = .946$). The sample was also overall low in SDO ($M = 2.52$ $SD = 1.49$). Competency in the 15 policy area was computed into a four different mean scores with Cronbach's alpha calculated for each area. First, was an overall score including all the competency measures ($\alpha = 0.98$, $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.58$). Next, due to being unable to run a factor analysis on the data due to small sample size the policies were split up using hypothesized groupings based on previous research. There were three policy area groups with 5 policies each. First, feminine stereotyped policy areas were: education, abortion, marriage rights, welfare and poverty, and civil rights ($\alpha = 0.97$, $M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.68$). Next, masculine stereotyped policies were: crime reduction, defense policies, gun rights/control, anti-terrorism, immigration ($\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 4.32$ $SD = 1.58$). Then, policies neutral to both types of stereotypes: international trade, healthcare, climate change, minimum wage, tax reform ($\alpha = 0.95$, $M = 4.483$, $SD = 1.66$).

The main analysis for the study was a regression analysis. The reasoning for using this type of analysis is twofold. First, both the independent, SDO scores, and dependent variable, competency scores, being continuous in nature. The second reasoning behind using this type of

analysis is to observe the effect that changes in participants SDO has on the mean scores of competency for our hypothetical candidate in different grouped policy areas.

To examine how SDO predicted each four regression analysis run for: masculine policy areas, feminine policy areas, neutral policy areas, and overall competency on all policy areas. For masculine policy areas with SDO (Figure 1) we see a strong negative correlation between mean masculine policy mean scores and SDO mean scores ($r = -.634, p < .000$). which also is reflected in the analysis with a regression coefficient ($b = -.640, p < .000$) the model also did well in accounting for differences in scores ($R^2 = .402$). A similar pattern was also seen in feminine stereotyped policies with SDO ($r = -.699, p < .000$) seeing a stronger negative relationship (Figure 2) with SDO ($b = -.735, p < .000$). This was also done with policies not typically prescribed to a type (Figure 3), which competency in these areas also had a negative correlation with SDO ($r = -.710, p < .000$) where SDO was again significant in predicting lower competence scores ($b = -.736, p < .000$). Finally, a regression was ran with the Overall policy competency score (Figure 4) which again had a significant negative correlation with SDO ($r = -.673, p < .000$) and a significant negative relationship ($b = -.668, p < .000$). Overall there seems to be a significant negative relationship between SDO and perceived competency of female candidates.

Discussion

The findings of the study were overall mixed. Due to sample size issues completion of a factor analysis was unable to be performed, failing to provide evidence of certain stereotyped policy area. However, after grouping policy areas within hypothetical groups based on previous research, a statistically significant negative linear trend was found for each group, which was

also mimicked in the overall trend for all 15 policy areas, suggesting that participants with higher levels of SDO rated the hypothetical female candidate as less competent in the grouped policy areas and overall. These results partially support the second hypothesis with the negative trend in perceived competency showcasing itself in all policy areas, as well as stereotypically masculine policy areas, and neutral areas. being hypothesized in higher SDO individuals. However, a negative trend was also shown in policy areas typically stereotyped as areas considered more feminine in nature. This all suggests that higher SDO individuals regardless of policy area believe women to be less competent in all areas of politics.

There are two possible main reasons for problems associated with policy area competency and SDO. First, is issues with sample size. Due to only having a usable sample of approximately 30 participants, this lead to first an inability to either confirm or deny the hypothesized idea of stereotyped policy areas. Also, due to small sample size there was no significant difference in trend based on the hypothesized stereotyped policy areas which may manifest itself in larger samples. This could lead to confirming the initial hypothesis which would be more consistent with past research on perceptions of female politicians being more competent in areas such as education, and welfare. This could also be coupled with perceivers rating female candidates as less competent, compared to their male counterparts, in areas such as crime, and defense.

The second reasoning for not results not fully supporting the hypothesis may lie more in study design. First, by using a hypothetical candidate, this gives participants no information about the candidate leading participants to have to make choices purely on stereotype without any knowledge of the candidates stances or previous record. Some participants may be more

apprehensive to do this or confused as to how to rate the competency of this candidate without more information on the candidate. The second issue is there was no male counterpart to judge competency in each area against. Without both cases it is still more difficult to see if competency predicted by SDO in these areas would have shown similar trends to their female counterparts.

There are multiple limitations to the study overall. First, and foremost are sampling issues. The sample size was much too small leading to a lack of statistical power in all tests and an inability to conduct some analysis. Secondly, the sample was not representative of the population at large. The sample was taken from a personal Facebook friends who were self-selected by the researcher and encouraged to take the survey. This all together lead to poor sampling and an overall weaker study.

Secondly, the study design had multiple flaws. The study only included one condition: judging female candidates and does not look to see if male candidates might suffer from the same competence issues as female candidates with regards to SDO. Future research should perform an experimental design using both male and female hypothetical candidates to check for differences in perceived competence in these different policy areas. Another possible avenue for future study would be a design with only the female candidate, however switching the traits with which she portrays, either more instrumental traits, such as toughness, or more compassionate traits. With this design there could possibly be a manipulation of how the candidate's competency in the different areas is perceived based on the traits they display.

Overall this study has a multiple implications for future research. First, it opens up the possibility of creating policies which could be represented as different spectrums such as masculine, feminine, or neutral, which could in turn be used in new research as concrete

examples and open new avenues to study prejudice in politics. Secondly, it shows that SDO is a valid measure in predicting perceived competence. This is important due to this study continuing to showcasing SDO as a valid measure of predicting group discrimination, and allowing for to be used as predictor of perceived competency of minority individuals . This opens the way also for other measures such as right wing authoritarianism to be used in predicting competence in other minority groups in political spheres and beyond. This study overall although not entirely successful could be used as a gateway for new research within political psychology, and the study of prejudice and discrimination.

Tables and Figures

Figure 1

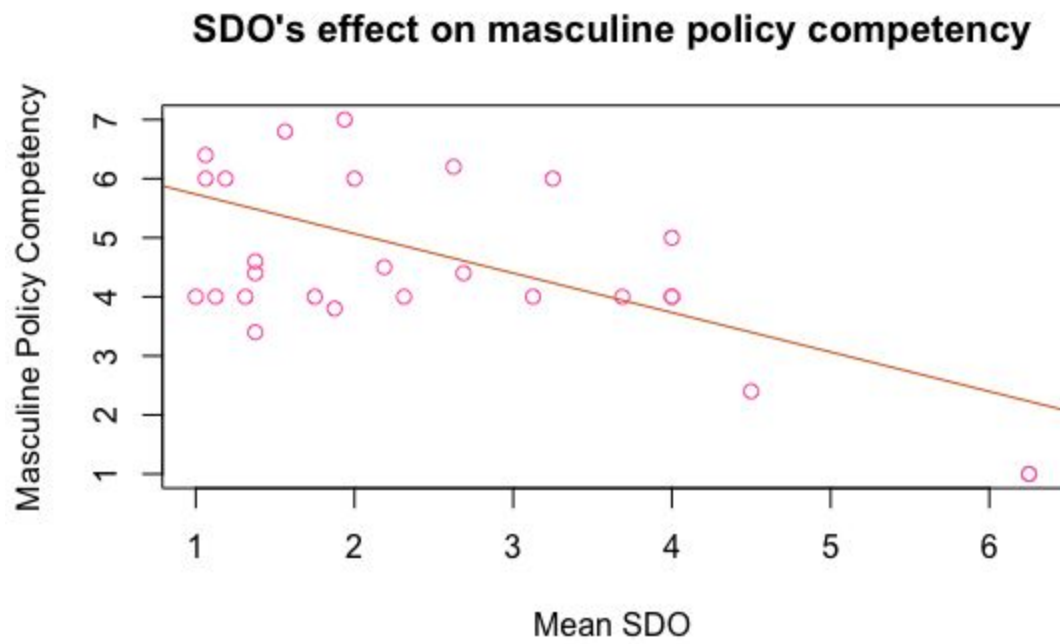


Figure 2

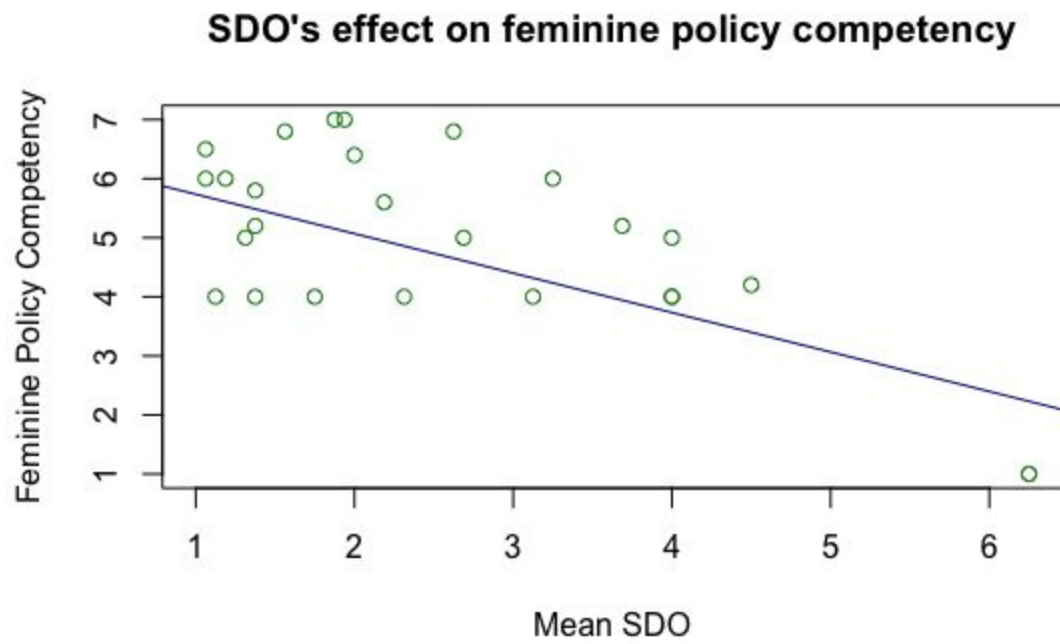


Figure 3

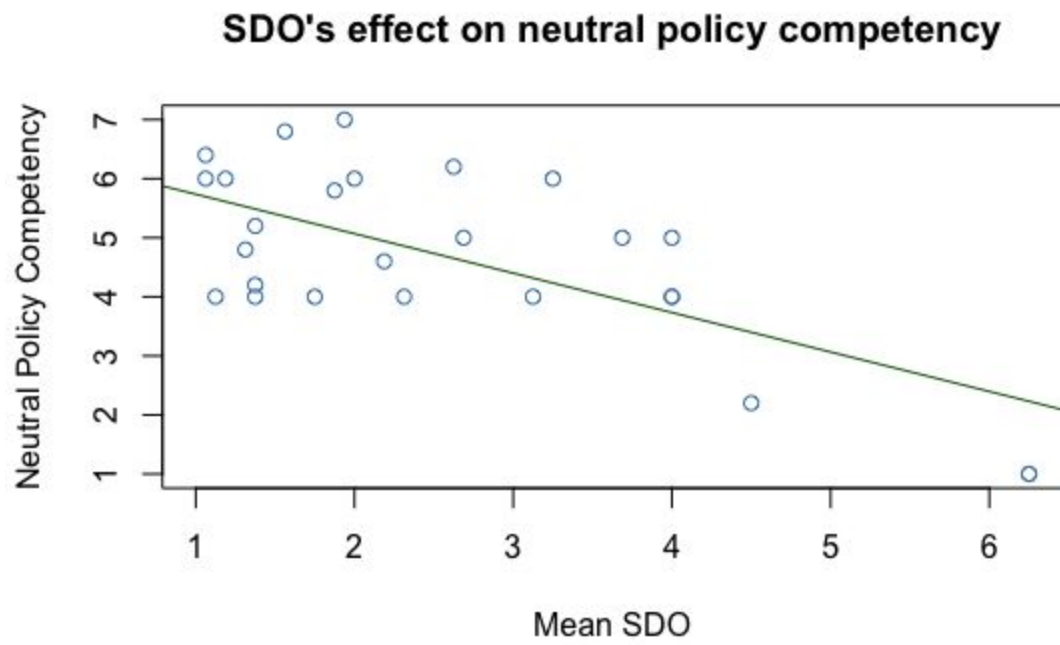
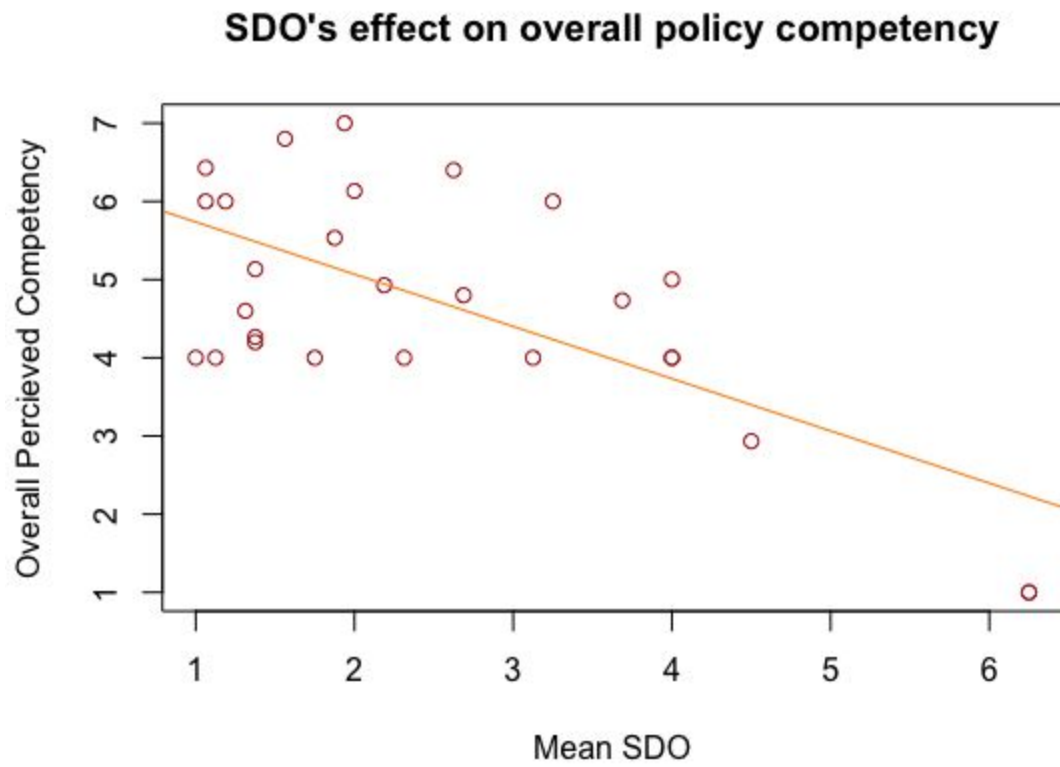


Figure 4



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