Deconstructing the Knowledge Gap: Gender, Knowledge Confidence, and Political Engagement

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Abstract

That women possess less political knowledge than men is a canonical finding in political science. However, this account obscures a second and understudied asymmetry: women are also less confident in the political knowledge they do have. Using two national surveys in the United States and the United Kingdom, I find that *knowledge confidence* is strongly correlated with political engagement—often more so than objective political knowledge. I then show that women exhibit significantly lower knowledge confidence than men, that this knowledge confidence gap is around twice as large as the objective knowledge gap, and that the difference between what people know and what they think they know—their knowledge underestimation—is systematically larger among women. These findings identify knowledge underestimation as an undertheorized mechanism of participatory inequality and suggest that correcting informational asymmetries alone may be insufficient for equalizing voice.

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1 Introduction

A long line of research documents gender gaps in political knowledge, with women consistently scoring lower than men on standard knowledge batteries (Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Burns et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1997; Stolle and Gidengil, 2010; Fraile, 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). This uneven distribution of knowledge is concerning: citizens who know more about politics are more likely to be attentive to public affairs, have stable and consistent political opinions, resist misinformation, and engage politically in a variety of ways (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001; Nie et al., 1996; Zaller, 1992; Meirick and Wackman, 2004; Siegel-Stechler, 2019; Gilens, 2001).[1]

This literature has largely measured political knowledge as the ability to answer factual political questions correctly. However, political knowledge as it functions in democratic life is not reducible to factual recall. Rather, political knowledge encompasses both the possession of information *and* the confidence to deploy that information: to trust one's understanding enough to discuss politics, evaluate candidates, contact officials, or vote. In recognition of this distinction, scholars have begun to disaggregate political knowledge into *objective knowledge*—the ability to correctly recall political information—and *knowledge confidence*—how certain individuals feel about the correctness of their political knowledge (Lee and Matsuo, 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Leonhard et al., 2020; Jansa et al., 2024). This nascent literature finds that the two knowledge dimensions do not always align (Anson, 2018; Rogers and Gooch, 2021), and that knowledge confidence is often a stronger predictor of the outcomes typically ascribed to objective political knowledge (Lee and Matsuo, 2018; Lee et al., 2022).

What we do not yet know is whether the gender gap in objective knowledge has a parallel in *knowledge confidence*. The participatory implications are important: if women systematically underestimate what they know about politics, then the mechanisms that produce participatory inequality may not only be informational but psychological. Participatory

[1] Some argue that at least part of the observed gender gap in political knowledge can be attributed to measurement. For instance, some research finds that gender differences decline when focusing on gender-relevant political knowledge (Dolan, 2011), political discussion sophistication (Kraft, 2023), and in contexts with more female representation (Kraft and Dolan, 2023; Pereira, 2019). Men are also more willing to guess, which may inflate the gender gap (Fortin-Rittberger, 2020; Ferrín et al., 2018; Mondak and Anderson, 2004). Critiques aside, the knowledge gap remains one of the most consistent findings in the field.

inequality, in other words, may stem not only from the unequal distribution of information, but from the unequal distribution of the *confidence to claim and act on that information*.

This paper addresses this question with original survey data from the United States and the United Kingdom. First, I show that knowledge confidence is strongly correlated with political engagement, and that it is usually a stronger predictor than objective political knowledge. Second, I find that the gender gap extends to knowledge confidence: women exhibit significantly less confidence in their political knowledge. In fact, this knowledge confidence gap is around twice as large as the gender gap in objective knowledge. Moreover, women systematically underestimate the political knowledge they have: the gap between what people know and what they think they know is consistently larger among women. Together, these findings reconceptualize the gender gap in political knowledge as not only informational but *epistemic*: where existing scholarship focuses on what women do not know, this paper refocuses attention on how women evaluate what they do know.

In so doing, this paper makes several contributions to the study of political knowledge, gender and politics, and political engagement. First, the paper advances a growing literature on knowledge confidence by showing that the democratic importance of political knowledge is not reducible to factual mastery: in two large democracies, knowledge confidence strongly correlates with political engagement even when accounting for objective knowledge. Second, the paper reconceptualizes the canonical gender gap in political knowledge: not only do women score lower on factual questions, they are also systematically more likely to discount the knowledge they have. The gender gap, in other words, is not only about information deficits but about epistemic confidence. Third, the paper identifies political knowledge underestimation as an undertheorized mechanism of participatory inequality. This mechanism suggests that correcting informational asymmetries alone may be insufficient: if knowledge confidence matters for engagement, participation gaps may persist even when informational gaps close.

In short, this paper argues that the study of political knowledge demands attention to both the possession of political knowledge *and* the confidence with which that knowledge is held. The participatory stakes are straightforward but far-reaching: efforts to equalize

information will not equalize voice if women continue to undervalue what they know.

2 Conceptualizing Political Knowledge

Most research on political knowledge operationalizes the concept as objective knowledge about government institutions, the responsibilities of those institutions, and the actors making decisions in those institutions (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993). This kind of knowledge is valued because it correlates with desirable outcomes: higher political participation and efficacy, more stable and consistent political opinions, the ability to hold elected officials accountable, and greater resistance to misinformation and persuasion (Zaller, 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Meirick and Wackman, 2004; Siegel-Stechler, 2019; Gilens, 2001; Althaus, 2003).

One of the most consistent findings in this line of research—and political science more broadly—is that there is a gender gap in political knowledge. Across decades of studies and multiple national contexts, women answer fewer factual political questions correctly, even when controlling for education, political interest, and media consumption (Verba et al., 1997; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Fraile, 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). Some work attributes the gap to differences in socialization and gendered adult roles that provide men with greater access to political information and discussion (Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Ferrín et al., 2019). Other studies point to motivational factors and gendered norms around authority, correctness, and epistemic risk-taking (Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Ferrín et al., 2018). Although measurement critiques have challenged the extent of the gender gap (Dolan, 2011; Kraft, 2023; Kraft and Dolan, 2023; Pereira, 2019; Fortin-Rittberger, 2020), the empirical regularity itself is one of the most durable findings in the field.

Recently, scholars have begun to disaggregate the concept of political knowledge into *objective knowledge*—the ability to correctly recall political information—and *knowledge confidence*—how certain individuals feel about the correctness of their political knowledge (Lee and Matsuo, 2018; Leonhard et al., 2020; Jansa et al., 2024). This research recognizes that the democratic utility of political knowledge rests on both information possession and the confidence to deploy that information. Early findings from this growing research agenda sug-

gest that knowledge confidence is often as (or more) predictive of political engagement than factual correctness (Lee and Matsuo, 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Ortoleva and Snowberg, 2015).

Despite these advances, we do not yet know whether the persistent gender gap in objective knowledge has a parallel in knowledge confidence. This question matters because knowledge confidence captures a meaningfully distinct dimension of political knowledge—how individuals experience and evaluate their grasp of politics, not simply whether they can retrieve the correct answer. This concept may therefore provide insight into individuals' epistemic posture toward politics: whether they feel able to participate in political conversation, assess new information, and rely on their own perspective as valid and competent when engaging with politics. As such, investigating the relationship between gender and knowledge confidence stands to significantly advance our understanding of the political knowledge gap.

3 Gendered Confidence and Knowledge Underestimation

Why might we expect a relationship between gender and knowledge confidence? Drawing on research in psychology, sociology, and political science, I argue that women are likely to systematically underestimate their political knowledge for three interrelated reasons: gendered socialization around epistemic certainty, stereotype threat in male-typed domains, and the psychological experience of operating in spaces where one's group is underrepresented.

First, a substantial body of research documents that men and women are socialized into different relationships with certainty, authority, and public knowledge claims. Women face stronger social penalties for expressing confidence, particularly in domains coded as masculine (Rudman, 1998; Rudman and Phelan, 2008). Asserting knowledge confidently can violate prescriptive gender stereotypes that expect women to be modest and collaborative (Prentice and Carranza, 2002). These norms are particularly salient in politics, which remains strongly associated with masculine traits like assertiveness, competitiveness, and authority (Dolan, 2014; Schneider and Bos, 2014). Research suggests that these gendered expectations around confidence and certainty can undermine women's psychological engagement with politics and their willingness to assert political knowledge (Wolak, 2020).

Research on gendered communication patterns provides additional insight. Women are more likely to use hedge words ("I think," "maybe," "probably") and disclaimers when expressing opinions, particularly on topics associated with male expertise (Lakoff, 1973; Carli, 1990; Leaper and Robnett, 2011). While some scholars interpret these patterns as strategic responses to backlash (women may choose to express uncertainty to avoid penalty), others suggest that they reflect internalized uncertainty about the legitimacy of one's knowledge claims (Tannen, 1990). Regardless of mechanism, these patterns suggest that women may be more likely to qualify their epistemic claims about politics—to discount what they know—independent of knowledge level. These dynamics may be compounded by the gendered distribution of cognitive household labor—the "mental load" (Weeks, 2025)—which could constrain the psychological bandwidth required to project epistemic certainty about politics.

Stereotype threat theory offers a second explanation for women's knowledge underestimation. When individuals are aware of negative stereotypes about their group's performance in a domain, the psychological burden of potentially confirming those stereotypes can undermine performance and self-assessment (Steele and Aronson, 1995; Spencer et al., 1999). In politics, where women are stereotyped as less knowledgeable and less competent (Schneider and Bos, 2014; Holman et al., 2016), women may internalize these expectations and consequently underestimate their mastery of political information. Importantly, stereotype threat operates independent of objective performance: research finds that women report lower confidence in their abilities in male-typed domains even when their performance equals or exceeds that of men (Ehrlinger and Dunning, 2003; Lundeberg et al., 2000).

Finally, knowledge underestimation may reflect the broader political context in which women evaluate their competence. When individuals assess their own competence, they implicitly compare themselves to others in the domain (Dunning et al., 2004). Politics remains a domain marked by substantial gender inequality: women are underrepresented in elected office, political media coverage, and in the set of political experts consulted by journalists (Lawless and Fox, 2005; Teele et al., 2018; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020; Ozer, 2023). This descriptive underrepresentation sends powerful signals about who belongs in political

spaces and whose political knowledge is valued (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007). This may lead women to calibrate their confidence downward—not because they lack knowledge, but because they perceive themselves as atypical or illegitimate participants in a male-dominated space. Research on the "imposter syndrome" documents this pattern: high-achieving individuals in contexts where their demographic group is underrepresented often experience persistent self-doubt (Clance and Imes, 1978; Cokley et al., 2013). Women in politics may experience a parallel dynamic, discounting their knowledge even when objectively well-informed.

These three explanations are likely mutually reinforcing. Gendered norms around certainty create pressure for women to express doubt; stereotype threat activates anxiety about confirming negative expectations; and descriptive underrepresentation signals that politics is not a domain where women's knowledge is presumed legitimate. Together, these forces may produce a systematic tendency for women to underestimate their political knowledge.

4 Data and Measurement

This paper draws on two surveys collected in Summer 2025 on Prolific. The first survey is a nationally diverse sample of 1,442 American adults. The second is a nationally diverse sample of 1,035 British adults. These samples exclude the 24 (U.S.) and 43 (U.K.) respondents who failed an attention check. Both surveys measure political knowledge confidence, objective political knowledge, political engagement, and demographic background (in that order).[2]

To measure political knowledge confidence, I use a five-item scale following Jansa and Ringsmuth (2022). These items ask respondents to assess their confidence in their understanding of five political topics: elections, parties, institutions, lawmaking, and separation of powers. Respondents rate their confidence on a five-point scale from "not confident at all" to "extremely confident." Each respondent's total score is summed and scaled to run from 0 to 1. Respondents answer the knowledge confidence questions in random order. Table 1 presents the five questions for the U.S. and U.K. surveys.

[2] Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix S1 present descriptive statistics for the U.S. and U.K. samples. Appendix S2 presents the survey questionnaires. Appendix S6 describes how the study adheres to APSA's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research.

Table 1: Knowledge Confidence Items (U.S. / U.K. Wording)

Survey wording
How confident are you that you understand how elections work?
How confident are you that you understand [what the Constitution says / how Parliament works]?
How confident are you that you could explain what distinguishes [the two parties / the main political parties] from one another?
How confident are you that you understand how laws are made?
How confident are you that you understand how power is divided among [the three branches of government / Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the courts]?

Bracketed phrases indicate the U.S. (first) and U.K. (second) institutional wording. Respondents rate their confidence on a five-point scale from "not confident at all" to "extremely confident." Each respondent's total score is summed and scaled to run from 0 to 1.

To measure objective knowledge, I use a five-item scale with multiple choice questions designed to capture knowledge of how government works. In line with the existing literature (Lee et al., 2022; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2023; Kraft and Dolan, 2023; Pérez, 2015; Jansa et al., 2024), I use Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) as a starting point for selecting and wording questions. I also adapted the questions to the relevant national context. Each respondent is scored as correct (1) or incorrect (0) and their score is summed and scaled to run from 0 to 1, matching the scale for knowledge confidence. Respondents received the objective knowledge questions in random order. Table 2 presents the question wordings and correct answers.

Measuring objective knowledge and knowledge confidence in this way allows for an examination of the extent to which a respondent's knowledge confidence diverges from their objective knowledge. I calculate this confidence gap as objective knowledge minus knowledge confidence. This measure allows me to examine the size and directionality of the gap between the two types of political knowledge and to compare these gaps between men and women.

After the political knowledge questions, respondents answer a series of questions about political engagement: voting in the most recent election (0 or 1), participating in a protest or demonstration in the past 12 months (0 or 1), contacting a government official in the past 12 months (0 or 1), and talking about politics with family, friends, or coworkers ("Never" to "Daily" on a five-item scale, rescaled 0-1).

Table 2: Objective Knowledge Items (U.S. / U.K. Wording with Correct Answers)

United States	**United Kingdom**
Which party currently has a majority of seats in the House of Representatives? *Republican Party*	Which party currently has a majority of seats in the House of Commons? *Labour Party*
What majority is needed in the House and Senate to override a presidential veto? *2/3*	What is the maximum length of time Parliament can last before a general election must be held? *Five years*
Which party is considered more conservative at the national level? *Republican Party*	Which party is generally considered more to the right at the national level? *Conservative Party*
Whose responsibility is judicial review? *Supreme Court*	Who is responsible for making the final decision on whether a law passes in the U.K.? *House of Commons*
What office is currently held by J.D. Vance? *Vice President*	What office is currently held by Rachel Reeves? *Chancellor of the Exchequer*

Note: Institutional terminology was adapted for functional equivalence across constitutional systems (e.g., Supreme Court → House of Commons; presidential veto threshold → parliamentary term length).

5 Objective Knowledge, Knowledge Confidence, and Participation

This section examines the relationship between objective knowledge, knowledge confidence, and measures of political engagement. Table 3 presents evidence from the U.S. and parallel models from the U.K.[3] In both contexts, knowledge confidence is a consistent—and often stronger—correlate of political engagement than objective knowledge. In the U.S., knowledge confidence is positively and significantly associated with all four behaviors: voting ($p<0.001$), protesting ($p<0.001$), contacting officials ($p<0.001$), and discussing politics ($p<0.001$). Objective knowledge, by contrast, is significantly associated with only one outcome (political discussion), and its coefficients are uniformly smaller.

The U.K. results show a relatively similar pattern. Objective knowledge predicts voting and discussion, but does not meaningfully predict protest or contacting elected officials. Knowledge confidence, on the other hand, significantly predicts protest ($p<0.01$) and political discussion ($p<0.001$), and its association with political discussion is more than double that of objective knowledge. Across both countries, then, political engagement appears tightly linked to how confident people feel about their political knowledge, even when we account for the

[3] For space considerations, I present only the coefficients for knowledge confidence and objective knowledge. Appendix S3 presents results with all covariates.

Table 3: Political Knowledge and Participation in the U.S. and U.K. Samples

	Vote	Protest	Contact	Discussion
United States				
Knowledge Confidence	0.229***	0.296***	0.497***	0.405***
	(0.058)	(0.053)	(0.066)	(0.034)
Objective Knowledge	0.144	-0.025	-0.037	0.096*
	(0.083)	(0.069)	(0.084)	(0.043)
N	1,400	1,400	1,400	1,400
R^2	0.139	0.076	0.099	0.162
Adj. R^2	0.120	0.055	0.079	0.143
United Kingdom				
Knowledge Confidence	0.076	0.161**	0.145	0.327***
	(0.063)	(0.049)	(0.075)	(0.037)
Objective Knowledge	0.253***	0.012	0.005	0.143***
	(0.060)	(0.040)	(0.055)	(0.029)
N	1,028	1,028	1,028	1,028
R^2	0.148	0.041	0.055	0.201
Adj. R^2	0.132	0.023	0.038	0.186

Note: Controls for party ID, gender, race/ethnicity, age, income, education, and region included but not shown. Robust standard errors (HC1) in parentheses. Appendix S3 presents results with all covariates. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

factual correctness of what they know.

These models suggest that the democratic importance of political knowledge cannot be reduced to factual mastery. Knowledge confidence exerts an independent association with engagement after accounting for objective knowledge and standard demographic controls. Together, these findings establish knowledge confidence as a substantively meaningful and behaviorally consequential dimension of political knowledge and motivate the next step in the analysis: whether knowledge confidence itself is unequally distributed by gender.

6 Knowledge Confidence and Knowledge Underestimation

This section examines whether the gender gap in political knowledge extends to knowledge confidence. The analyses use survey weights developed using the 2024 American Community Survey and 2024 data from the U.K. Office of National Statistics (applied in addition to front-end quota sampling) to ensure population representativeness. I constructed these weights

using population estimates on dimensions of gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and income for the U.S. and gender, age, ethnic group, and education for the U.K. (because the Office of National Statistics does not collect income). Because of some missing cases on weight dimensions, my final sample sizes are 1,398 for the U.S. sample and 1,025 for the U.K. sample.

Table 4 presents weighted means for women and men in the U.S. and U.K. across three dimensions: knowledge confidence, objective knowledge, and knowledge underestimation (objective knowledge minus knowledge confidence).[4] Figure 1 presents the visualization of these results for the U.S. (Figure 1a) and U.K. (Figure 1b). Starting with the U.S. sample, these results first reveal a substantial gender gap in knowledge confidence. Women report an average knowledge confidence of 0.61 compared to 0.71 for men (a difference of 0.1 points on the 0-1 scale). This gap is highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

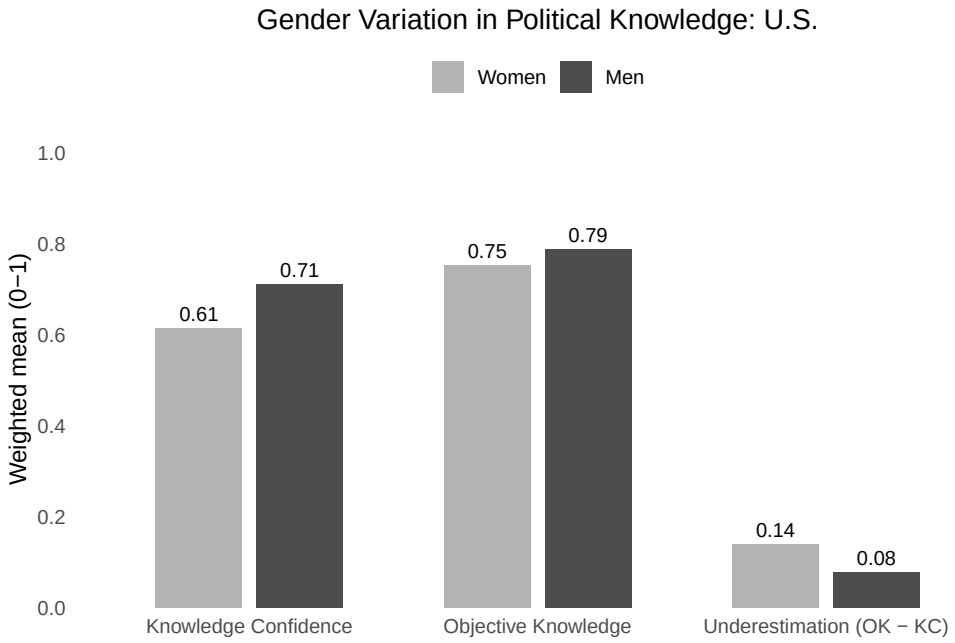
Table 4: Gender Differences in Political Knowledge in the U.S. and U.K. Samples

	Women	Men	Difference	p-value
United States				N = 1,398
Knowledge Confidence	0.61	0.71	−0.10	< 0.001
Objective Knowledge	0.75	0.79	−0.04	< 0.001
Underestimation (OK - KC)	0.14	0.08	0.06	< 0.001
United Kingdom				N = 1,025
Knowledge Confidence	0.52	0.62	−0.10	< 0.001
Objective Knowledge	0.64	0.70	−0.05	< 0.001
Underestimation (OK - KC)	0.12	0.08	0.04	< 0.005

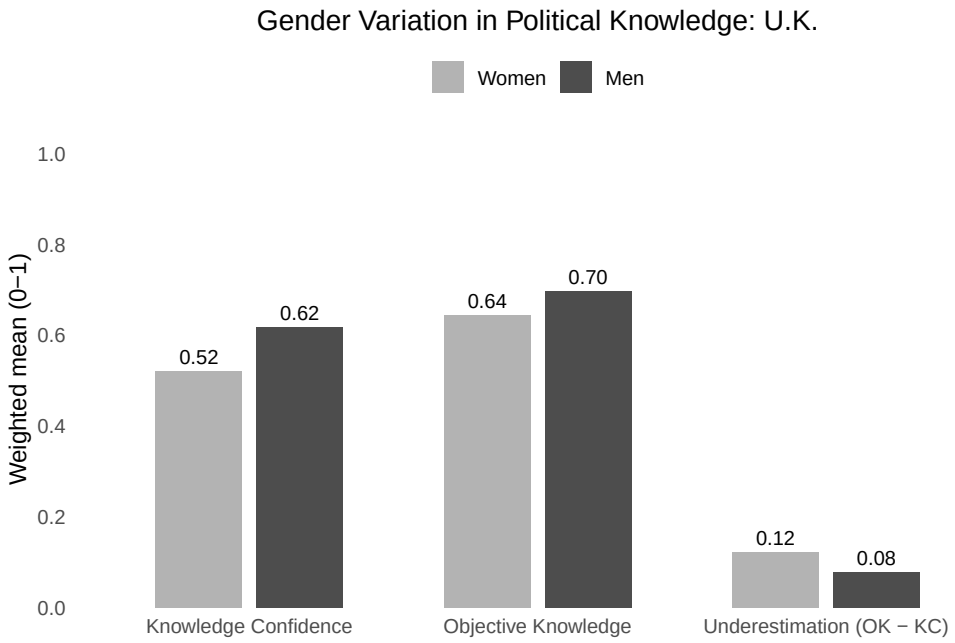
Note: Weighted means. Difference is women minus men. p-values from weighted two-sample t-tests. Knowledge variables scaled 0–1.

Second, the U.S. gender gap in objective knowledge is also significant but notably smaller. Women average 0.75 in objective knowledge compared to men's 0.79 (a rounded difference of 0.04 points, $p<0.001$). This gap is consistent with existing research on the gender gap (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). Importantly, this gap is just over half the size of the knowledge confidence gap.

[4] Tables A5 and A6 in Appendix S4 present these results as regression models.



(a) United States



(b) United Kingdom

Figure 1: Gender variation in political knowledge (weighted means).

Third, the gender gap in knowledge underestimation is substantial and significant in the U.S. sample. Women underestimate their political knowledge by 0.14 points on average (i.e., their objective knowledge exceeds their knowledge confidence by 0.14 points). Men also underestimate their political knowledge, but by only 0.08 points. The difference in underestimation

between women and men (0.06 points) is highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 4 and Figure 1(b) present a strikingly similar pattern in the U.K. sample. The gender gap in knowledge confidence is 0.10 points (women: 0.52, men: 0.62, $p<0.001$), again doubling the gap in objective knowledge, which stands at 0.05 points (women: 0.64, men: 0.70, $p<0.001$). Table 4 also shows a statistically significant gender gap in knowledge underestimation: women underestimate their political knowledge by 0.12 points, while men underestimate their political knowledge by only 0.08 points. The difference in underestimation between women and men (0.04 points) is highly statistically significant ($p<0.001$).

For space considerations, I analyze heterogeneity by race and party affiliation in Appendix S5. These analyses show that women report significantly lower knowledge confidence than men in the three major U.S. racial groups (White, Black, and Hispanic). The knowledge confidence gap is largest among Black and Hispanic women (-0.12, $p<.001$), followed closely by White women (-0.1, $p<.001$). Underestimation is steepest among White and Black women (0.1 and 0.08, $p<.001$), while Hispanic women show no meaningful difference from Hispanic men. In the U.K., the pattern is similarly robust for knowledge confidence among White and Black respondents (-0.11 and -0.12, $p<.01$), while the confidence gap among Asian respondents is small and not statistically significant. Underestimation is concentrated among White respondents and insignificant among Black and Asian respondents (we should, however, exercise caution here: the sample contains only 57 Black respondents and 64 Asian respondents).

Appendix S5 also shows consistent confidence gaps across party affiliations. In the U.S., Democratic women report lower knowledge confidence than men (-0.08, $p<0.001$). This gap is similar among Independents (–0.06, $p<0.001$) and substantially larger among Republicans (-0.18, $p<0.001$). Underestimation is most pronounced among Republican women (0.13, $p<0.001$), moderate among Democratic women (0.04, $p<0.05$), and statistically indistinguishable from zero among Independents. In the U.K., women report significantly lower knowledge confidence than men across the three major affiliations: Labour (-0.09, $p<0.001$), Independent (-0.1, $p<0.001$), and Conservative (-0.1, $p<0.001$). Knowledge underestimation is marginal among Labour women and larger among Independents (0.07, $p<0.01$) and Conservatives (0.09,

$p<0.01$). The confidence gap thus appears somewhat politically structured—a pattern that merits theoretical attention in its own right.

Together, these findings demonstrate a consistent and substantial gender gap in knowledge confidence. This gender gap persists within key intersectional subgroups across two national contexts and roughly doubles the well-established gender gap in objective knowledge. This gap represents a distinct and underexplored dimension of gender inequality—one that is not reducible to gaps in objective political knowledge and that plausibly constrains women's political engagement based on the findings in Section 5.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

The gender gap in political knowledge is well-documented (Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Burns et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1997; Fraile, 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). However, this account overlooks a parallel asymmetry: women are also less confident in the political knowledge they possess.

Drawing on original survey evidence from the United States and the United Kingdom, I demonstrate that confidence in one's political knowledge strongly correlates with political engagement, even when accounting for objective knowledge. This finding advances recent work disaggregating objective knowledge from knowledge confidence (Lee and Matsuo, 2018; Lee et al., 2022; Leonhard et al., 2020; Jansa et al., 2024; Anson, 2018; Rogers and Gooch, 2021) by providing robust cross-national evidence that the participatory consequences of political knowledge extend beyond factual mastery: confidence in one's knowledge correlates with engagement independent of actual informational levels.

I then show that women exhibit significantly lower levels of confidence in their political knowledge than men, and that this confidence gap is around twice as large as the well-established objective knowledge gap. Moreover, women systematically underestimate the knowledge they have: the gap between what people know and what they think they know is consistently larger among women. Together, these findings reconceptualize the canonical finding that women know less about politics (Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Delli Carpini

and Keeter, 1996; Wolak and McDevitt, 2011; Lizotte and Sidman, 2009; Burns et al., 2001; Fraile, 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2018). For decades, political science has characterized the gender gap as women's informational deficit. But the evidence presented here shows that women do not simply lack information: rather, they systematically undervalue the information they have. The gender gap is thus not only informational but epistemic: it reflects unequal confidence in claiming political knowledge, not merely unequal access to facts. If we want to understand how political knowledge contributes to gendered political outcomes, we must therefore examine not only what citizens know but how confidently they know it.

The participatory implications are consequential. Specifically, these findings suggest that political knowledge underestimation contributes to participatory inequality. Even if women acquire levels of objective knowledge equal to men, they may remain less likely to translate that knowledge into political engagement if they continue to undervalue what they know. Civic education initiatives, voter mobilization efforts, and interventions designed to close participation gaps should therefore target the mastery of factual information about politics *and* the confidence to claim and act on that knowledge. Without such attention, efforts to equalize information may be insufficient for equalizing voice.

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Supplementary Material for "Deconstructing the Knowledge Gap"

Contents

1 Descriptive Statistics: Prolific Samples

Table A1. Demographic breakdown: U.S. Prolific sample.
Means for continuous variables; percentages for binary indicators.

Variable	All	Women	Men
N	1401.0	719.0	682.0
Age (mean)	44.2	44.8	43.7
Education (mean, 1-4 scale)	2.5	2.5	2.6
Income (mean, 1-13 scale)	7.1	6.9	7.4
South (%)	44.9	46.9	42.8
Democrat (%)	37.3	39.6	34.8
Republican (%)	27.1	25.3	28.9
Independent/Other (%)	35.7	35.0	36.4
White (%)	55.6	55.4	55.9
Black (%)	20.5	21.7	19.2
Hispanic (%)	8.6	7.4	10.0
Asian (%)	5.0	4.7	5.3

Table A2. Demographic breakdown: U.K. Prolific sample.
Means for continuous variables; percentages for binary indicators.

Variable	All	Women	Men
N	1029.0	534.0	495.0
Age (mean)	46.8	47.1	46.4
Education (mean, 1-4 scale)	2.7	2.7	2.7
Income (mean, 1-9 scale)	4.7	4.6	4.8
Labour (%)	44.6	45.1	44.0
Conservative (%)	23.6	21.7	25.7
Independent/Other (%)	31.8	33.1	30.3
White (%)	85.1	86.0	84.2
Black (%)	5.8	5.6	6.1
Asian (%)	6.2	5.6	6.9

2 Survey Questionnaires

U.S. Survey Instrument

Knowledge Confidence: Please select your level of confidence regarding each question below. [Extremely confident; Very confident; Moderately confident; Slightly confident; Not confident at all]

1. How confident are you that you understand how elections work?
2. How confident are you that you understand what the Constitution says?
3. How confident are you that you could explain what distinguishes the two parties from one another?
4. How confident are you that you understand how laws are made?
5. How confident are you that you understand how power is divided among the three branches of government?

Objective Political Knowledge: Correct answer in italics.

1. Which party currently has a majority of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives? Democratic; *Republican*; Tea Party; I don't know
2. What majority is needed in the House and Senate to override a presidential veto? 51%; *2/3*; 3/4; I don't know
3. Which party is considered more conservative at the national level? Democratic; *Republican*; They are considered equally conservative; I don't know
4. Whose responsibility is judicial review? President; Congress; *Supreme Court*; I don't know
5. What office is currently held by J.D. Vance? Secretary of State; *Vice President*; Chief Justice of Supreme Court; I don't know

Political Engagement

1. Vote: In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just didn't have time. How about you—did you vote in the presidential election last November? Yes; No
2. Protest: Please indicate whether you have taken part in a protest, demonstration or sit-in in the past 12 months. Yes; No
3. Contact: During the past 12 months, have you contacted an elected official or government agency about an issue that mattered to you? Yes; No
4. Political Discussion: How often do you talk about politics with family, friends, or coworkers? Daily; A few times a week; A few times a month; Less than once a month; Never

U.K. Survey Instrument

Knowledge Confidence: Please select your level of confidence regarding each question below. [Extremely confident; Very confident; Moderately confident; Slightly confident; Not confident at all]

1. How confident are you that you understand how elections work?
2. How confident are you that you understand how Parliament works?
3. How confident are you that you could explain what distinguishes the main political parties from one another?
4. How confident are you that you understand how laws are made?
5. How confident are you that you understand how power is divided among Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the courts?

Objective Political Knowledge: Correct answer in italics.

1. Which party currently has a majority of seats in the House of Commons? Conservative Party; *Labour Party*; Liberal Democrats; I don't know
2. What is the maximum length of time Parliament can last before a general election must be held? 3 years; 4 years; *5 years*; 7 years
3. Which party is generally considered more to the right at the national level? Labour Party; *Conservative Party*; They are considered equally right-wing; I don't know
4. Who is responsible for making the final decision on whether a law passes in the U.K.? The Monarch; The Prime Minister; *The House of Commons*; I don't know
5. What office is currently held by Rachel Reeves? *Chancellor of the Exchequer*; Home Secretary; Speaker of the House of Commons; I don't know

Political Engagement

1. Vote: In talking to people about elections, we often find that some were not able to vote because they weren't registered, they were sick, or they just didn't have time. How about you—did you vote in the last general election? Yes; No
2. Protest: Please indicate whether you have taken part in a protest, demonstration or march in the past 12 months. Yes; No
3. Contact: During the past 12 months, have you contacted your local councillor, MP, or a government office/agency about an issue that mattered to you? Yes; No
4. Political Discussion: How often do you talk about politics with family, friends, or coworkers? Daily; A few times a week; A few times a month; Less than once a month; Never

3 Regressions in Section 5 with All Covariates

Table A3. Political Knowledge and Participation in U.S. Sample

	Vote	Protest	Contact	Discussion
Knowledge Confidence	0.229*** (0.058)	0.296*** (0.053)	0.497*** (0.066)	0.405*** (0.034)
Objective Knowledge	0.144 (0.083)	−0.025 (0.069)	−0.037 (0.084)	0.096* (0.043)
Independent/Other	−0.116*** (0.024)	−0.084*** (0.021)	−0.065* (0.027)	−0.035** (0.012)
Republican	0.017 (0.020)	−0.085*** (0.023)	−0.127*** (0.028)	−0.025 (0.013)
Female	0.045* (0.020)	0.025 (0.018)	0.034 (0.023)	0.027* (0.011)
Asian/Hispanic	−0.501* (0.252)	−0.046 (0.045)	−0.046 (0.070)	0.202* (0.101)
Black	0.103* (0.048)	0.865*** (0.037)	−0.259*** (0.050)	0.099*** (0.028)
Black/Asian	0.003 (0.046)	0.099** (0.036)	0.085 (0.048)	0.013 (0.027)
Black/Hispanic	0.389*** (0.054)	−0.061 (0.043)	−0.118* (0.055)	−0.050 (0.031)
Black/Other	0.038 (0.143)	0.145 (0.118)	0.284 (0.160)	0.003 (0.071)
Hispanic	−0.065 (0.310)	0.039 (0.050)	0.266 (0.261)	−0.022 (0.158)
Hispanic/Other	−0.001 (0.053)	0.041 (0.042)	0.117* (0.056)	0.045 (0.030)
Other	−0.549*** (0.059)	−0.016 (0.046)	0.054 (0.059)	0.105** (0.032)
White	0.087 (0.123)	0.207 (0.120)	0.123 (0.135)	−0.050 (0.061)
White/Asian	0.037 (0.042)	0.076* (0.032)	0.117** (0.044)	0.048 (0.025)
White/Asian/Other	−0.060 (0.127)	−0.100* (0.040)	0.121 (0.130)	−0.015 (0.054)
White/Black	0.324*** (0.055)	0.087* (0.044)	1.015*** (0.059)	0.283*** (0.031)
White/Black/Asian	−0.074 (0.113)	0.065 (0.071)	0.316** (0.114)	0.082 (0.051)
W/B/Asian/Hispanic	−0.642*** (0.054)	−0.039 (0.042)	−0.094 (0.053)	−0.048 (0.030)
White/Black/Hispanic	−0.277 (0.381)	0.466 (0.351)	0.426 (0.323)	0.046 (0.137)
W/B/Hispanic/Other	−0.639*** (0.064)	0.022 (0.049)	0.044 (0.060)	0.233*** (0.034)
White/Black/Other	0.068 (0.046)	0.861*** (0.040)	0.793*** (0.051)	0.302*** (0.028)
White/Hispanic	0.007 (0.062)	0.098* (0.050)	0.066 (0.059)	0.044 (0.032)
White/Hispanic/Other	0.221*** (0.049)	−0.060 (0.036)	0.945*** (0.048)	0.020 (0.027)
White/Other	0.023 (0.178)	−0.029 (0.038)	0.087 (0.143)	−0.052 (0.066)
Age	0.003*** (0.001)	−0.001 (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)	0.001** (0.0004)
Income	0.006 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)	−0.00002 (0.004)	−0.001 (0.002)
Education	0.050*** (0.012)	0.022* (0.011)	0.044*** (0.013)	0.004 (0.006)
Northeast	0.010 (0.031)	0.012 (0.027)	0.014 (0.039)	−0.002 (0.019)
South	−0.014 (0.026)	0.042 (0.022)	0.040 (0.030)	0.005 (0.014)
West	0.024 (0.028)	0.082** (0.028)	0.016 (0.035)	0.022 (0.017)
Midwest	0.269** (0.091)	−0.147* (0.067)	−0.385*** (0.089)	0.236*** (0.046)
N	1,400	1,400	1,400	1,400
R^2	0.139	0.076	0.099	0.162
Adjusted R^2	0.120	0.055	0.079	0.143

Note: Robust standard errors (HC1) in parentheses. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A4. Political Knowledge and Participation in U.K. Sample

	Vote	Protest	Contact	Discussion
Knowledge confidence	0.076 (0.063)	0.161** (0.049)	0.145 (0.075)	0.327*** (0.037)
Objective knowledge	0.253*** (0.060)	0.012 (0.040)	0.005 (0.055)	0.143*** (0.029)
Independent/Other	−0.007 (0.029)	0.022 (0.019)	0.021 (0.035)	0.002 (0.015)
Labour	0.067** (0.024)	0.021 (0.017)	−0.013 (0.033)	−0.009 (0.014)
Female	0.015 (0.021)	0.007 (0.016)	0.068** (0.026)	−0.0003 (0.012)
Black	−0.076 (0.078)	−0.038 (0.056)	−0.302*** (0.066)	0.031 (0.036)
Other	−0.278* (0.116)	−0.047 (0.073)	−0.221* (0.098)	0.081 (0.048)
White	0.043 (0.051)	−0.063 (0.043)	−0.199*** (0.060)	0.026 (0.025)
White/Asian	0.093 (0.122)	−0.148*** (0.044)	−0.340*** (0.064)	0.005 (0.102)
White/Black	0.087 (0.054)	−0.135* (0.060)	0.003 (0.264)	−0.002 (0.119)
White/Black/Asian	−0.699*** (0.056)	−0.131** (0.045)	−0.395*** (0.065)	−0.139*** (0.027)
Age	0.004*** (0.001)	−0.002** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)	0.001* (0.0004)
Income	0.012* (0.006)	−0.003 (0.004)	−0.010 (0.007)	0.002 (0.003)
Education	0.010 (0.011)	0.007 (0.007)	0.029* (0.013)	0.007 (0.007)
England-North	−0.020 (0.029)	0.004 (0.017)	0.012 (0.035)	0.032 (0.017)
England-South	−0.006 (0.028)	0.039* (0.019)	0.053 (0.034)	0.019 (0.015)
Northern Ireland	−0.087 (0.099)	0.061 (0.068)	−0.006 (0.091)	0.009 (0.033)
Scotland	−0.062 (0.047)	0.020 (0.031)	0.019 (0.054)	0.023 (0.024)
Wales	−0.003 (0.051)	0.023 (0.040)	0.021 (0.073)	0.055 (0.032)
Constant	0.312*** (0.089)	0.041 (0.061)	0.049 (0.092)	0.247*** (0.041)
N	1,028	1,028	1,028	1,028
R^2	0.148	0.041	0.055	0.201
Adjusted R^2	0.132	0.023	0.038	0.186

Note: Robust standard errors (HC1) in parentheses. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

4 Regressions for Descriptive Means in Section 6

Table A5. Regression of Knowledge Measures on Gender and Covariates (U.S. Sample)

	Knowledge confidence	Objective knowledge	Underestimation (OK−KC)
Female	−0.082*** (0.009)	−0.024*** (0.006)	0.059*** (0.010)
Age	0.0004 (0.0003)	0.001*** (0.0002)	0.001* (0.0003)
Education	0.021*** (0.005)	0.017*** (0.004)	−0.003 (0.005)
Income	0.006*** (0.001)	0.0003 (0.001)	−0.005*** (0.001)
Northeast	−0.014 (0.015)	−0.019 (0.011)	−0.005 (0.017)
South	−0.017 (0.012)	−0.029** (0.009)	−0.012 (0.014)
West	−0.011 (0.013)	−0.006 (0.010)	0.005 (0.015)
Democrat	0.015 (0.010)	0.006 (0.008)	−0.009 (0.011)
Republican	0.040*** (0.011)	0.013 (0.008)	−0.027* (0.012)
Asian	−0.063** (0.020)	−0.001 (0.015)	0.062** (0.022)
Asian/Hispanic	−0.011 (0.074)	0.009 (0.055)	0.020 (0.083)
Asian/Other	0.104 (0.106)	0.002 (0.079)	−0.102 (0.120)
Black	−0.006 (0.015)	0.044*** (0.011)	0.049** (0.017)
Black/Asian	0.217* (0.103)	0.092 (0.077)	−0.124 (0.116)
Black/Hispanic	0.052 (0.097)	0.142* (0.072)	0.090 (0.109)
Black/Other	−0.058 (0.109)	0.019 (0.082)	0.077 (0.123)
Hispanic	−0.031* (0.014)	0.050*** (0.011)	0.081*** (0.016)
Hispanic/Other	−0.107* (0.051)	−0.308*** (0.038)	−0.201*** (0.058)
Other	−0.021 (0.020)	−0.034* (0.015)	−0.013 (0.023)
White/Asian	0.094* (0.043)	0.044 (0.032)	−0.050 (0.049)
White/Asian/Other	−0.184 (0.104)	0.052 (0.077)	0.236* (0.117)
White/Black	−0.102** (0.032)	−0.087*** (0.024)	0.015 (0.037)
W/B/Hispanic	−0.146 (0.139)	0.057 (0.104)	0.203 (0.157)
W/B/Other	0.062 (0.357)	0.049 (0.266)	−0.013 (0.402)
White/Hispanic	0.044** (0.017)	0.066*** (0.013)	0.022 (0.019)
W/H/Other	−0.108 (0.138)	0.056 (0.103)	0.164 (0.156)
White/Other	0.111* (0.043)	0.070* (0.032)	−0.041 (0.049)
Constant	0.586*** (0.021)	0.683*** (0.016)	0.096*** (0.024)
N	1,398	1,398	1,398
R^2	0.185	0.173	0.092
Adjusted R^2	0.169	0.157	0.074

Note: Weighted least squares with survey weights. Female coded 1=female, 0=male. * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A6. Regression of Knowledge Measures on Gender and Covariates (U.K. Sample)

	Knowledge confidence KC	Objective knowledge OK	Underestimation (OK−KC) Underest.
Female	−0.099*** (0.011)	−0.074*** (0.014)	0.025^{+}(0.014)
Age	0.001*** (0.0004)	0.004*** (0.0004)	0.002*** (0.0005)
Education	0.029*** (0.005)	0.038*** (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)
Income	0.014*** (0.003)	0.015*** (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
England – Midlands	0.017 (0.015)	−0.027 (0.019)	−0.044* (0.019)
England – North	−0.005 (0.013)	0.022 (0.017)	0.027 (0.017)
Scotland	0.062** (0.021)	0.002 (0.027)	−0.060* (0.028)
Wales	0.095*** (0.028)	0.053 (0.036)	−0.042 (0.037)
Northern Ireland	−0.006 (0.044)	−0.114* (0.056)	−0.108 (0.058)
Labour	0.007 (0.013)	0.002 (0.016)	−0.005 (0.017)
Conservative	0.023 (0.015)	0.006 (0.018)	−0.017 (0.019)
Asian	−0.096*** (0.020)	−0.107*** (0.026)	−0.011 (0.027)
Black	0.054* (0.027)	−0.065 (0.034)	−0.119*** (0.036)
Mixed	0.005 (0.025)	−0.280*** (0.031)	−0.284*** (0.032)
Other	0.040 (0.048)	−0.174** (0.060)	−0.214*** (0.062)
Constant	0.423*** (0.027)	0.421*** (0.034)	−0.002 (0.035)
N	1,024	1,024	1,024
R^2	0.181	0.233	0.156
Adjusted R^2	0.169	0.221	0.143

Note: Weighted least squares with survey weights. Female coded 1=female, 0=male. Regions reference = England – South; party ID reference = Independent/Other; ethnicity reference = White. $^{+}$ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

5 Heterogeneity Analyses: Race and Party Affiliation

Table A7. Within-Race Gender Gaps (Women-Men) and p-values: U.S.

	KC_Diff	KC_p	OK_Diff	OK_p	Gap_Diff	Gap_p
White	-0.108	< 0.001	-0.013	0.050	0.095	< 0.001
Black	-0.122	< 0.001	-0.042	0.019	0.080	< 0.001
Hispanic	-0.122	< 0.001	-0.118	< 0.001	0.004	0.871

Note: Gaps are Women - Men. p-values from weighted two-sample t-tests.

Table A8. Within-Race Gender Gaps (Women-Men) and p-values: U.K.

	KC_Diff	KC_p	OK_Diff	OK_p	Gap_Diff	Gap_p
White	-0.112	< 0.001	-0.075	< 0.001	0.037	0.014
Black	-0.116	0.003	-0.099	0.146	0.017	0.808
Asian	-0.036	0.437	-0.063	0.294	-0.026	0.660

Note: Gaps are Women - Men. p-values from weighted two-sample t-tests.

Table A9. Within-Party Gender Gaps (Women-Men) and p-values: U.S.

	KC_Diff	KC_p	OK_Diff	OK_p	Gap_Diff	Gap_p
Democrat	-0.075	< 0.001	-0.033	0.003	0.042	0.010
Independent/Other	-0.060	< 0.001	-0.034	0.006	0.026	0.128
Republican	-0.176	< 0.001	-0.044	< 0.001	0.132	< 0.001

Note: Gaps are Women - Men. p-values from weighted two-sample t-tests.

Table A10. Within-Party Gender Gaps (Women-Men) and p-values: U.K.

	KC_Diff	KC_p	OK_Diff	OK_p	Gap_Diff	Gap_p
Labour	-0.086	< 0.001	-0.098	< 0.001	-0.013	0.548
Independent/Other	-0.104	< 0.001	-0.027	0.373	0.077	0.006
Conservative	-0.096	< 0.001	-0.004	0.876	0.091	0.003

Note: Gaps are Women - Men. p-values from weighted two-sample t-tests.

6 Ethical Considerations

This project received ethics review and was determined to be exempt from further oversight by the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board under U.S. federal exemption criteria for minimal-risk survey research. All data were collected in Summer 2025 via Prolific, and respondents were compensated at Prolific's prevailing fair-wage rates. Respondents were adults drawn from a general population sampling frame, and no vulnerable populations were targeted or disproportionately represented. No deception was used, and all respondents provided informed consent prior to participation.