

## Money and Women Candidates

Money matters in elections. With increasing campaign costs, a rise in two-party competition, and the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, campaign funds are in demand now more than ever before. How do women candidates fare in the essential task of fundraising?

On the one hand, there are good reasons to expect that raising campaign funds is more difficult for women. Women generally have fewer personal resources than men, and their social and professional networks are less likely to include individuals who give regularly to campaigns. Because women have been underrepresented in politics, donors, political parties, and political action committees (PACs) may be skeptical about women's electability. On the other hand, women's PACs such as the nonpartisan Women's Campaign Fund and the partisan EMILY's List and WISH List exist specifically to give women a boost in fundraising.

There are fewer scholarly studies about fundraising than about other aspects of women's campaigns. But studies generally show that women, especially those who become general election candidates, raise as much as men when they are of the same party and run in similar types of situations (as incumbents, as challengers, or for open seats).

At the same time, women in politics perceive that fundraising is more difficult for them than for men. These perceptions suggest that money remains a hurdle. Moreover, new research finds that women candidates are disadvantaged with respect to leadership PAC contributions. And Republican women continue to lack access to the types of women's donor networks that are available to Democratic women.

### EVIDENCE OF FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

Most research in the area of campaign finance has been conducted by Barbara Burrell, who looks at women's candidacies for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Overall, she finds that women from the two major parties have, since the 1980s, been on an equal footing (and even advantaged in some cases) with respect to campaign receipts.<sup>1</sup> She also finds that women and men raised the same amount of money from PACs between 1980 and 2010. In another possible area of disadvantage—ability to raise early money—Burrell did not find any inequalities for women. Nor do party expenditures on behalf of congressional candidates reveal any gender disparity.<sup>2</sup> Other studies, usually based on bivariate analysis, find similar results.<sup>3</sup> There are also studies of state legislative elections that reach positive conclusions about women's ability to raise and spend money.<sup>4</sup>

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At the same time, however, women are thought to be disadvantaged indirectly because funds are related to incumbency. Because incumbents are advantaged in fundraising and most incumbents are male, incumbency can make it more difficult for women candidates to raise money.<sup>5</sup>

Women's PACs, such as EMILY's List (founded in 1985) and the Women's Campaign Fund (founded in 1974), have been critical to women's gains in congressional officeholding, particularly because they provide early financial support.<sup>6</sup> These PACs have helped women compete with men in the realm of campaign finance.

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Victoria Farrar-Myers contends that the high campaign expenditures of recent successful female senatorial candidates—higher than the average for winning male senatorial candidates—are evidence that women have the fundraising potential to be serious presidential contenders.<sup>7</sup>

The highest glass ceiling of the presidency has yet to be shattered by a female candidate, and presidential campaigns happen to be the most expensive campaigns. Money is one problem women have historically faced in launching presidential bids. In her campaign for the 2000 presidential nomination, Republican Elizabeth Dole drew negative media coverage that appears to have contributed to her difficulties in raising campaign funds at levels commensurate with her standing in the polls.<sup>8</sup> As a former first lady, Hillary Clinton was not a typical female candidate, and Clinton lost her 2008 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. Yet, Clinton's 2008 campaign demonstrates that money is not an insurmountable barrier for a female candidate. Clinton's race also showcased the role of EMILY's List, which bundled significant contributions and provided independent expenditures.<sup>9</sup> A PAC called "Ready for Hillary" began fundraising on Clinton's behalf for the 2016 cycle even before she announced her candidacy.

## CHALLENGES IN FUNDRAISING

There is some evidence that women are disadvantaged at the congressional level. Several studies find that a larger share of women's campaign contributions come from individual donations; this means that women have a larger fundraising base than men, but may have to spend more time securing many individual contributions.<sup>10</sup> Pamela Fiber and Richard Fox found, in a multivariate analysis of open-seat House races featuring men and women candidates, that men raised more than women on average.<sup>11</sup> Burrell found that a larger share of women's congressional campaign contributions were in the form of smaller contributions (less than \$200) and

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a smaller share in larger contributions (more than \$750) compared with contributions to men's campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

Women congressional candidates also appear to be disadvantaged with respect to Leadership PAC contributions, which members of Congress give to other candidates. Kristin Kanthak and George Krause find that men with leadership PACs in Congress are less likely to give funds to women's campaigns as the proportion of women in Congress increases.<sup>13</sup>

Women also perceive gender inequalities in fundraising. For example, the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study of state legislators from the 50 states found that women were significantly more likely than their male colleagues to believe that it is harder for women to raise money than men. In that study, 56% of women state representatives, compared with 9% of men state representatives, said they believe it is more difficult for women candidates to raise money; in contrast, 44% of women state representatives and 90% of men state representatives believe it is equally hard for men and women.<sup>14</sup> Among the women state representatives who believe it is harder for women to fundraise, 41% believe the single most important reason is because women lack the networks that men have; the second most common reason given was that women are less comfortable asking for money for themselves. These gender differences in state legislator attitudes about fundraising may help explain why Shannon Jenkins finds that women state legislative candidates surveyed in 1996 assembled more extensive campaign fundraising efforts than men.<sup>15</sup>

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Whether money translates into votes in the same way for women and men is another vital research question. If women need more money to obtain the same vote share as men, then equality in fundraising does not yet exist. For example, Rebekah Herrick found that campaign spending translated into more votes for men compared with women who ran as challengers for the U.S. House between 1988 and 1992.<sup>16</sup> Burrell, as well, found that women challengers were disadvantaged in translating money into votes between 1994 and 2010.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, in a 1996 and 1998 study of state legislative races, Robert E. Hogan found that spending translated into votes in the same way for men and women candidates.<sup>18</sup>

Experts on women candidates, such as Barbara Burrell and Susan J. Carroll, have advocated for campaign finance reform as a means to increase women's representation.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Timothy Werner and Kenneth R. Mayer find that public funding of elections affects women and men differently: women running for the lower chambers of the Arizona and Maine legislatures were more likely than men to accept public funds, other factors being equal.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in a study of citizen ambition, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox find women more likely than men to believe that candidacy would be more appealing if campaigns were publicly financed.<sup>21</sup> They also find that fundraising is perceived more negatively among the women than the men in their study.

Women are less likely than men to give money to politics, and when they give, women give less.<sup>22</sup> For example, Peter Francia and his coauthors surveyed donors who gave at least \$200 to congressional candidates in 1996. More than three-quarters of donors in their survey were men, and the women were more likely to give smaller amounts and more likely to be occasional rather than habitual donors.<sup>23</sup> They also found that 31% of Democratic congressional donors in the survey were women, but only 16% of Republican donors were women.<sup>24</sup> Burrell's analysis of 2010 campaign contri-

butions to federal campaigns revealed a gender imbalance as well: 0.18 % of adult U.S. women gave more than \$200, compared with 0.46% of adult men.<sup>25</sup> The gender imbalance in giving may be more important than ever in light of *Citizens United*. In fact, Kelly Dittmar finds that women are especially likely to be underrepresented as "mega-donors."<sup>26</sup>

Not only do women have fewer resources than men, but women appear to be less accustomed to giving money to politics. Meanwhile, women candidates may find fundraising more difficult compared with men candidates. Cultural expectations about women's selflessness can make women candidates feel awkward about seeking campaign contributions.<sup>27</sup> Women seem to be more comfortable raising money for a cause rather than for their own candidacies.

Unfortunately, women's concerns about fundraising can deter them from running.<sup>28</sup> And should donors have more doubts about women's electoral chances than men's, they may be less likely to contribute to women candidates than to men candidates, or to contribute in smaller amounts.<sup>29</sup>

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## PARTY DIFFERENCES

Although women's PACs have been critical to women's election to Congress, these PACs are much more prevalent and active on the Democratic side than on the Republican side.<sup>30</sup> In a comparison of the ability of Democratic and Republican women to raise early

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money, Peter Francia noted: “Because the majority of support from women’s PACs flows to Democratic women, Republican women face a more daunting task of establishing early viability.”<sup>31</sup> Republican women lack well-financed, dedicated streams that are comparable to those that fund Democratic women.<sup>32</sup>

This disparity in donor networks may partly explain

why there are so many more Democratic women than Republican women in Congress today. A recent survey of donors revealed that EMILY’s List is far better known than similar PACs for women in the Republican party.<sup>33</sup> A strategy to better harness the giving capacity of conservative women might help Republican women achieve representation at levels similar to Democratic women.<sup>34</sup>

## Future Research Directions

Because most research on campaign finance is about candidates—and usually general election candidates—we lack data on women who may have seriously considered running for office but did not do so because they lacked sufficient financial support. Despite evidence of gender parity in fundraising—based largely on the receipts of party nominees—it may be that serious female potential candidates have been more likely than men to choose not to run after testing the financial waters. We do not know if female and male potential candidates with comparable backgrounds are perceived the same way by donors.

More research is needed on all areas of campaign finance with respect to women candidates. Research is

needed at all levels of office and at both the primary and general election stages. And because women’s fundraising abilities are dependent on donor, party, and PAC beliefs about women’s viability as candidates, studying those beliefs—and whether and how those beliefs affect campaign contributions and independent expenditures—is essential. The primary stage should be a focal point for scholars because insufficient funds may hinder women in their attempts to become party nominees. Studies of the timing of contributions to women’s campaigns are also needed.<sup>35</sup> With continual changes to the landscape of campaign finance, such as the proliferation of Super PACs, research will need to keep pace.

## Further Reading

Dittmar, Kelly. 2013. *Money in Politics with a Gender Lens*. National Council for Research on Women (in collaboration with the Center for American Women and Politics and the Center for Responsive Politics).

Kelly Dittmar provides a thorough analysis of gender and campaign contributions in the 2008, 2010, and 2012 federal cycles in light of the *Citizens United* decision.

In general, the report shows that candidate gender is not related to campaign spending. She also examines public financing systems in states and fails to find evidence that women are better represented in those states. In an analysis of donors, however, Dittmar finds that women are significantly underrepresented among mega-donors. She also finds that men are more likely to give to outside groups than women.

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Kanthak, Kristin, and George Krause. 2012. *The Diversity Paradox: Political Parties, Legislatures, and the Organizational Foundations of Representation in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book investigates how the ratio of men to women in Congress affects legislative life and the likelihood that women will be able to increase their numbers in Congress. Kanthak and Krause theorize that women, as a minority of their party caucus, are valued by their colleagues up until they reach a certain threshold at which their male colleagues are less likely to value them. Evidence comes from member-to-member leadership PAC contributions. They find that as the presence of women increase in a party's caucus, their male colleagues are less likely to give them campaign contributions. In other parts of the book, Kanthak and Krause examine how women legislators can coordinate among

themselves to improve the situation of women within the institution.

Crespin, Michael H. and Deitz, Janna L. "If You Can't Join 'Em, Beat 'Em: The Gender Gap in Individual Donations to Congressional Candidates." *Political Research Quarterly* 63.3 (2010): 581-593.

This article examines campaign contributions to congressional candidates between 1998 and 2002. The authors find that women's donor networks such as EMILY's List have allowed women to achieve greater equality in campaign finance. However, women candidates from the Republican party face different obstacles than Democratic women. While women who receive funds from female networks are advantaged over men, the same is not true of women who do not receive these funds.

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