

PATH TO PARITY

How Women Run and Win

A READER

Compiled by Political Parity

Editor | Katherine Kidd

June 2018



**POLITICAL
PARITY**

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Introduction

Our nation is at a watershed for women in politics. As we put finishing touches on this report, a legion of women have stepped up to seek positions of power.

Over an eight-year span, through a series of quantitative and qualitative studies, Political Parity has analyzed avenues and obstacles for women's advancement into highest level politics. But this year is different. For the first time, a U.S. senator has brought her brand-new baby to the Senate floor. A female has replaced a male senator who had to step down for sexual misconduct. In both major parties, a record number are setting their sights on House and Senate. With the surge of Democratic women into all levels of elective positions, media descriptions of a possible "women's tsunami" have become common in daily public discourse. That said, of course, barriers remain daunting on the trail and in office.

Taken together, our findings become a fundamental resource for anyone concerned with women trailblazers in the current season and beyond. It's vital to recognize what it takes to elect women, to understand how they govern, and to calculate how legislative bodies – and all of us – benefit from their presence.

The Political Parity Leadership Team, a diverse coalition of more than 50 women at the top of their fields, has been an indispensable element of our work. Mirroring our own partisan differences (one of us a Democratic-appointed US ambassador, the other a former Republican lieutenant governor), the members of this team work across the aisle – and beyond – to strategize and inspire candidates and their support teams. We're proud of this founding group's spectrum of expertise, backgrounds, and opinions. Despite conflicting theories of change, they share many common goals, including adding a boost to the momentum of women moving into high-level office.

With the job approval rating of Congress averaging below a paltry 17 percent, the camaraderie among our Leadership Team members is a much-needed source of optimism.

The research, analysis, and strategies presented in this reader will be equally useful in classrooms, church basements, and chambers of power. In these and other settings, we look forward to knowing you as one of today's and tomorrow's engaged and energetic problem-solvers.

With commitment to you and our shared vision of political parity,

Swanee Hunt and Kerry Healey

Co-Chairs, Political Parity

How to Use this Reader

Path to Parity: How Women Run and Win is for use by community groups, political organizations, teachers, prospective candidates, and committed citizens to frame questions about why women are underrepresented in elective office in the United States — and how that might change. This volume distills Political Parity’s research on women candidates and elected officeholders and draws on other research to illuminate issues and proffer strategies for overcoming the barriers to political parity. Each chapter provides links to multimedia resources which provide more in-depth information for further reading and research.

About Political Parity

Political Parity was founded by Ambassador Swanee Hunt in 2008 as a nonpartisan platform designed to catalyze dedicated leaders, researchers, and funders to change the face of US politics. The program convened the “grasstops” by creating an innovative Leadership Team from across the political spectrum to build relationships among unlikely groups to promote the election of women. By exchanging strategies with important political stakeholders and pursuing original research, the program successfully incubated multiple national projects and provided groundbreaking resources for women interested in running for office. These initiatives set the stage for increased awareness and collaboration in support of electing women to high office. In an ever-evolving political landscape, this experimental project concluded in 2016.

To explore the research and find additional resources, visit www.politicalparity.org.

About the Editor

Katherine Mancke Kidd is an educator and consultant. Educated at Pacific Lutheran University, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania, she was the founding director of the Global Studies major at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. At Fairfield University, she directed the International Studies Program, and was named teacher of the year. She has worked at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth, FHI 360, and the Lutheran Church in America, where she managed international and domestic programs.

About the Lead Researcher

Shauna L. Shames oversaw much of the Political Parity research that forms the core of this Reader. Working closely with the Leadership Team and several partner organizations, including the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, she designed the research projects and wrote the resulting reports. She earned her doctorate in political science from Harvard in 2014. She specializes in American political behavior, with a focus on race and gender. She is now assistant professor of political science at Rutgers.

About the Program Director

Marni Allen is currently the Deputy Chief of Staff at Babson College, and directs the school's Governance Office. Previously she served as director of Political Parity, a program of Swanee Hunt's family foundation, working to increase US women's political representation in high office. She directed several major research studies conducted for Political Parity, and launched [LatinasRepresent](#), a project to increase Latina women's leadership in high office. Prior to joining the foundation, she led policy and research at the 21st Century School Fund. She earned a Masters of Public Policy at Georgetown University and a BA from Swarthmore College.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the staff members who contributed so much to Political Parity's research and advocacy work, as well as to the compilation of this Reader: **Lauren Bush, Maria Daniels, Stephen Eisele, Nadia Farjood, Tracey Hymans, Rachel Isaacs, Erin Loughney, Melissa Luna, Michael Miller, Malliga Och, Stephanie Pierce-Conway, James Smith, Elizabeth Straub, Peggy Wang, Austin Whipple, Taylor Woods-Gauthier.**



It is not just the **RIGHT** of women to serve in public office;
it is also their **RESPONSIBILITY** as citizens.

CHAPTER 1

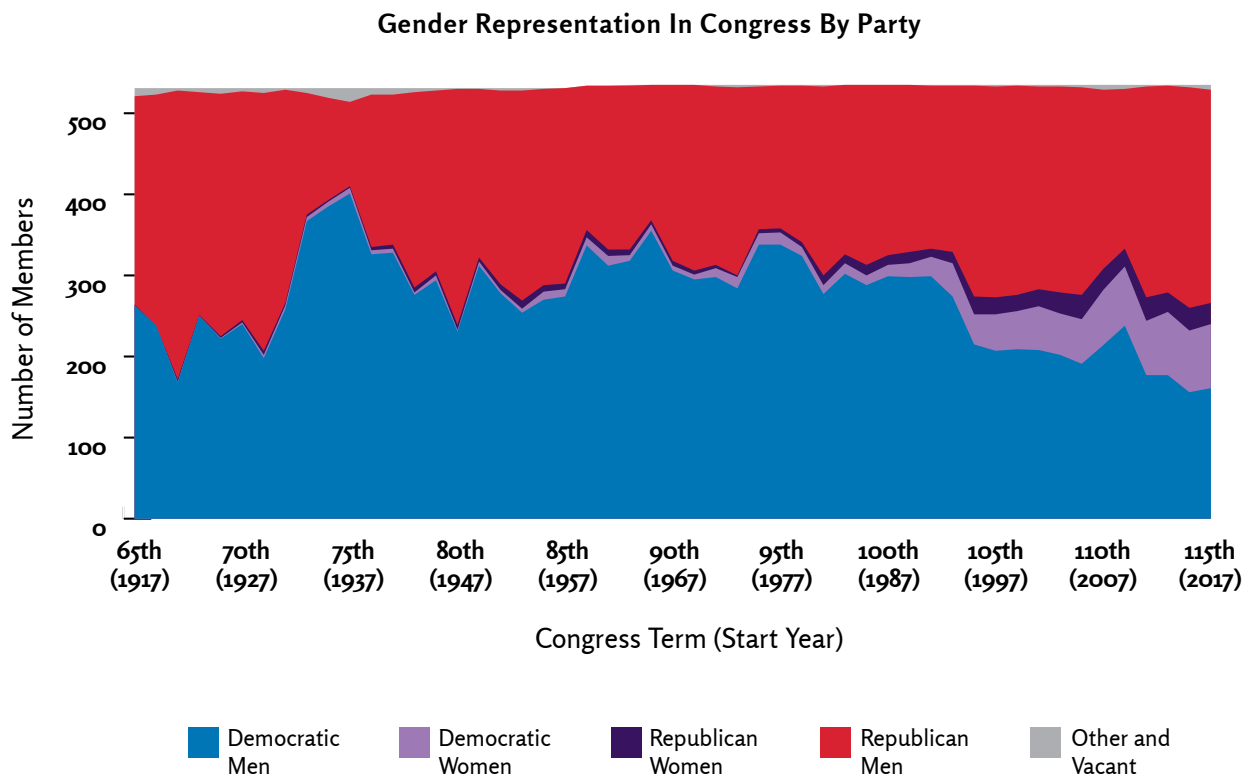
Why More Women?

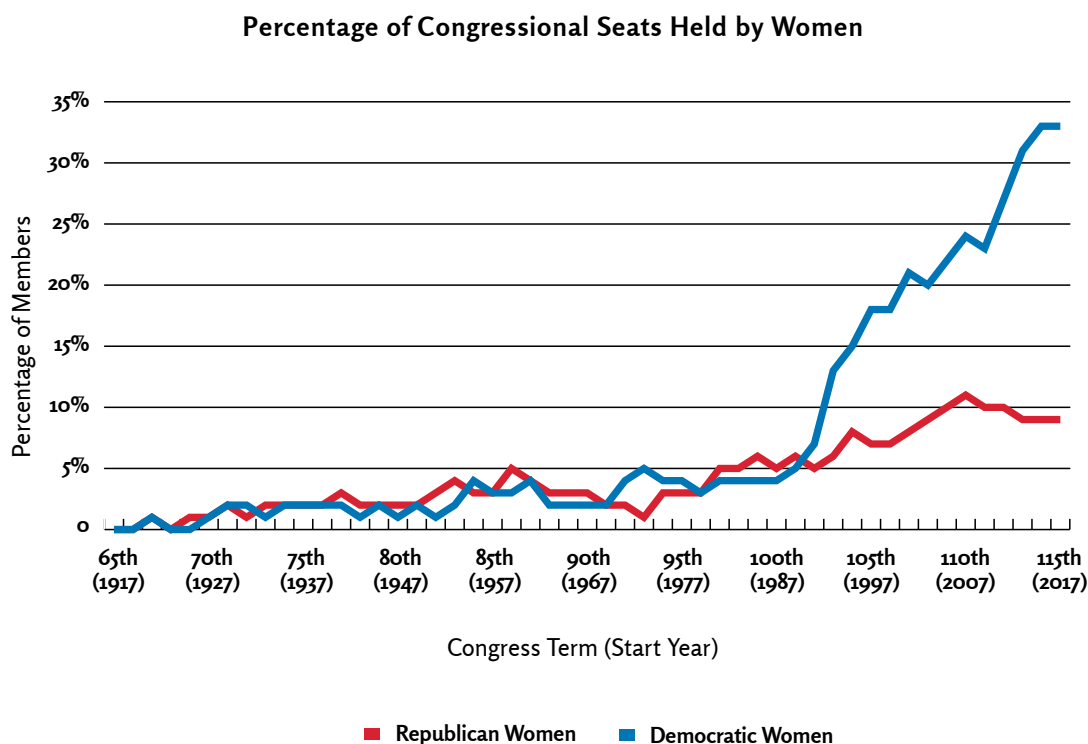
Drawing from its own research and that of other leaders in the field, Political Parity has found that including more women in leadership in government would have immediate, tangible, positive results. Here's why:

100% of the Talent Pool

A more representative government would lead to policies that take into account the interests, abilities, and priorities of more Americans.

The private sector in the United States has found that diversity in the workforce enhances productivity, innovation, and growth.¹ The public sector should experience similar gains with greater representation of women in elective office. Electing female political leaders increases participation in our democracy and inspires women in all sectors to lead. Simply seeing women run for office has been shown to galvanize female citizens, making them more interested and actively involved in the political arena.² By observing women as political leaders, other women may be inspired to run for office, tackle local policy issues, or seek higher levels of leadership in their own fields.





Female legislators gather policy information from different sources than men and rely on different types of information in making key decisions.³ In the 21st century, as we seek to integrate new knowledge, use data more effectively when making public policy, and meet the needs of a more diverse citizenry, women legislators could provide a critical edge in improving policy outcomes.

A Different Style of Leadership

Women are more likely than their male counterparts to lead through non-hierarchical collaboration, consensus building, and inclusion, and they bring that leadership style to politics.⁴ Democracy can be most fully realized when it demonstrates respect for all citizens and the inclusion of diverse voices in all aspects of governance.

Women in legislative and executive posts are most often motivated by serving the public and achieving gains in concrete policy goals, rather than power or prestige. At a time when approval ratings for Congress are so low, having more women who model servant leadership could help renew Americans' respect for government.⁵

Female executives and lawmakers often have different life experiences than their male counterparts. As a result, they bring new perspectives and issues to the legislative agenda, especially around the environment, public health, and education.⁶ As the United States faces environmental challenges from polluted drinking water to climate change, the highest cost of health care among all developed nations, and declining educational achievement, electing women who prioritize these issues is crucial to crafting public policy that will build our communities.

Improved Policy Outcomes

- On average, women senators sponsor and co-sponsor more bills than their male counterparts and are able to enlist more co-sponsors.⁷ According to Gallup polls, approximately 80% of Americans favor bipartisan cooperation on public policy at the national level.⁸ Women's proven ability to work across the aisle is essential to finding policy solutions that integrate different viewpoints.
- Across parties, women are, on average, 31% more effective when in the minority party at advancing legislation and see continued success farther into the legislative process.⁹ The 112th and 113th sessions of Congress passed less legislation than any Congress since 1973.¹⁰ Women legislators are needed at all levels to advance ideas that promote the common good.
- Congresswomen deliver 9% — or roughly \$49 million — more per year in federal programs to their home districts than do congressmen.¹¹ In 2015, only half of all states had passed state budgets by June, and 16 states had budget deficits.¹² In periods of state budget austerity, the federal government can be an important source of resources for states and municipalities.
- Women across the political spectrum are more likely than men — of any party — to prioritize issues affecting women, families, and children on their legislative agendas. In the 114th Congress, for example, the Congressional Women's Caucus emphasized investment in women's preventive health and health research; women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math); women in the military; equal pay for equal work; regulations to support women and small businesses; and protective measures against domestic violence.¹³
- Regardless of party affiliation, over the past 25 years women have voted more consistently in favor of environmental protections and policies than men have in both the House and Senate.

Greater Public Trust

- The American public rates women above or equal to men in seven of eight traits considered crucial for leadership; women are perceived as outgoing, hardworking, honest, intelligent, creative, compassionate, and ambitious.
- Women are ranked higher in public polling than men in five of seven key policymaking areas, including working out compromises, keeping government honest, standing up for what they believe in, and representing constituents' interests. In 2014, Americans' confidence in the federal government — the presidency, the Supreme Court, and Congress — dropped to an historic low of 7%; that improved marginally to 8% in 2015. These are the lowest numbers since Gallup started these polls in 1973.¹⁴ Electing women who exemplify the qualities that the public identifies as crucial for leadership could help to restore confidence in Congress.

Analysts used to predict that as women achieved parity in education and employment, progress in representation in elective office would surely follow. Formal barriers against the inclusion of women in political parties were eliminated in the 1970s, more than fifty years after the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote. Many women have advanced beyond men in educational attainment, and they are increasing their leadership in other fields that have been traditionally male-dominated, such as medicine and the law. Equal representation in government, however, remains elusive. The sad kicker: women vote at higher rates than men.

Women account for 51% of the US population, and they are an even higher percentage of voters. Since 1964, the number of women voting in presidential elections has exceeded that of men. Nonetheless, women today fill fewer than a quarter of political offices. They hold only 24% of state legislature seats and make up less than 20% of Congress. There are only



Research shows women are more **COLLABORATIVE**,
PRODUCTIVE, **HARDWORKING**, **TRANSPARENT**,
and **NON-HIERARCHICAL** in leadership.

five female governors — historically a critical pathway to the presidency — and just 20% of big-city mayors are women.¹⁵ Women have reached near-parity in only two types of elected offices: school boards and state court judgeships.

Moreover, women's entry into political office, and particularly their advancement into higher echelons, has slowed rather than accelerated. A quarter-century ago, in 1992's "Year of the Woman in Politics," the number of women in Congress doubled overnight. Not long after, however, progress waned considerably, especially in state legislatures. Although 2014 saw an increase in female representation in Congress, the number grew by just one in 2016, to 105 women members in the House and Senate; the overall trend in the past two decades has been near-stagnation, with only incremental gains. The United States is still far short of political parity.

This slow progress raises critical questions. Research shows women are more collaborative, productive, hardworking, transparent, and non-hierarchical in leadership. Given this documented effectiveness as political leaders, why the scarcity of female candidates and elected officials? Are women uninterested, unwilling, or uncertain? Is the political system unresponsive and impenetrable? Ultimately, is the issue the driver or the road?

To answer these questions, Political Parity examined the path to political leadership from multiple vantage points. In our research on women's pathways to public office, published as a report entitled *Shifting Gears*, we employed the metaphor of driving along a highway to capture the complexity of women's political ambition. Our research shows that both the driver (the candidate) and the road conditions (structural and procedural barriers), including the other vehicles on the road, are critical factors in shaping women's journey to elective office. Moreover, how a woman perceives the path to higher office influences not only her route but also her destination. The endless detours, potholes, and roadblocks put off many women who enter politics locally but ultimately choose not to continue the journey to top office.

With the goal of providing actionable strategies to support the work of our Leadership Team members and others in the field, Political Parity framed its core research agenda to answer the following questions:

- How do women enter politics and decide to run for office?
- To what extent do women see their political work as a career?
- What kinds of mentors and formal and informal advisors do they have?
- What internal, political, and cultural decision factors matter, especially when running for higher office?
- What is the value of training for female candidates?
- What are women's campaign experiences, including burdens they perceive in fundraising and the degree to which they experience discrimination?
- What defines these political women in terms of their strategic and personal characteristics?

In addition to asking how women — including political novices — weigh their choices, Political Parity conducted and commissioned research to examine patterns of political representation (*Twin States* and *Congressional Clusters*); partisan differences in women's political advancement (*Primary Hurdles*); and the impact of race on political representation (*LatinasRepresent*). Together with other key research in the field, this work allows us to better understand the factors that contribute to a successful political career as well as the barriers that hinder or stall progress.

Our goal is to grasp the root causes of the gender gap in political office, and to recommend ways to close it by increasing the number of female officeholders, especially at higher levels such as the House, Senate, and governorships. Understanding both women's decision-making and the political environment they face not only illuminates causes of

the candidate gender gap but also highlights how more women can become elected leaders. This knowledge should lead to greater organized support for women candidates and identify appropriate changes in structures, processes, and organizations that will help women be more successful as candidates for higher office.

It is not just the right of women to serve in public office; it is also their responsibility as citizens. When the political institutions of a nation do not allow the voices of all its citizens to be heard, the goals of that nation — “to establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity” — are compromised, and its ability to develop creative solutions to policy challenges is limited.

Through presentation of key findings and questions from Political Parity’s own research and other seminal studies in the women and politics field, this Reader explores how and why women choose to run for office (local and higher-level seats), the issues they face in their campaigns, and the contributions they make once in office. Given the disparity in women’s representation in the Republican and Democratic parties, as well as between women of different races, we also look at partisan and racial differences in office-seeking and elections. In the chapter on the presidency, we examine factors that have made the path to this office so difficult. The final chapter addresses multiple paths that could move women towards parity more quickly in the years ahead.

Conclusion

The chapters that follow examine the issues that affect political parity in the United States. We also consider how women of different races and ethnicities navigate electoral politics as candidates. Because the United States lags far behind other established democracies in high-income countries in terms of women’s political representation, we look at how parity has been achieved or enhanced in these countries and what lessons we might learn.¹⁶

At our country’s current rate of progress, it could be 100 years before women and men are equally represented in our government. It is essential that all citizens understand the benefits of parity; examine the barriers to it; and identify its positive accelerators. In the 1780s, writing to her husband (who was a delegate at the Continental Congress that was producing the Constitution), Abigail Adams declared that women were “determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation.” The principles that animated her spirit of revolution still motivate us in the 21st century. Political parity is a necessity for legitimate, representative, and just democracy.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

[In this interview](#), Kay Hagan, former senator from North Carolina, shares her insights into the contributions women make in the Senate.

“Who Runs in America?,” a video created by the [Women Donors Network](#), provides valuable data about who runs for elective office, the barriers that create these patterns, and how they reflect the population of the US.

Video: Lauren Bush of Political Parity met with [Boston City Councillor-at-Large Ayanna Pressley](#) in honor of Women’s Equality Day.

The [Pew Charitable Trusts’ 2014 report](#) on candidates’ personal traits highlights changing attitudes among voters towards political candidates.

[Political Parity’s web site](#) lists several organizations that work on gender parity in politics. These organizations, including the [Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers](#), the [Barbara Lee Family Foundation](#), and the [Institute for Women’s Policy Research](#), have a wealth of resources on their websites that address many of the issues in the following chapters.

The following blog posts from Political Parity provide additional insights into contributions women make in the political arena and how that arena is changing:

[Florida House needs more women](#)

[Women – More policy, less politicking](#)

[She’s more than a symbol](#)

[12 First for Women in 2014 Mid-Terms](#)

[94 Years Later, Women Need to Rock the Vote](#)

[If You Want to Change the World for Women, Read This](#)

Endnotes

- 1 Catalyst 2016; Catalyst 2011; Ernst & Young 2009; Catalyst 2007; Kramer, Konrad, and Erkut 2006
- 2 Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; and Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001
- 3 CAWP 2013
- 4 Volden and Wiseman 2013; Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013; Anzia and Berry 2011; Thomas 1994; and Wilson 2006
- 5 Greenleaf 1977
- 6 CAWP 2013; Rachel’s Network 2017
- 7 Quorum 2015
- 8 Gallup 2011
- 9 Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013
- 10 Bump 2014
- 11 Anzia and Berry 2011
- 12 Bosman 2015
- 13 Women’s Congressional Policy Institute 2017
- 14 Gallup 2015
- 15 CAWP 2018
- 16 IPU 2017



Political socialization is one of the processes by which individuals and groups decide whether they should be **DRIVERS** or **PASSENGERS** on the political highway.

CHAPTER 2

Becoming a Candidate

Many factors drive a woman's decision to run for political office. Individuals vary widely in their motivations for jumping into a campaign. Potential candidates may be influenced by their family's social context or by the tenor of society as they come of age. Recruitment is another critical factor for many who seek public office.

As candidates consider a campaign, they seek training, mentors, sponsors, and formal and informal advisors. The ability to identify these supporters often forms a critical financial base for women's campaigns. Finally, for most women candidates, finding the right balance for family and political life is essential.

This chapter examines each of these factors at the time a candidate considers running. In chapter three, many of these same issues are reexamined based on what happens when women candidates actually run for office.

Political Parity has used the metaphor of a highway¹ to illustrate the challenges women candidates and officeholders face. The candidate is the "driver," and her individual characteristics are crucial to her experiences on the road to elective office. However, the road, or the structure of the political system, is also very important. How well linked are local, state, and national elective highways? How well maintained are these highways — are they full of potholes and detours? Are special tolls required? What are the rules of the road — the formal and informal processes to navigate the political system? Are all drivers equal? How well are the rules enforced? Are they the same for drivers in different types of vehicles? In order to understand why the United States has not achieved gender parity in politics, we must consider all of these factors — individual, structural, and procedural.

Socialization

Journalist and activist Marianne Schnall was inspired to write *What Will It Take to Make a Woman President?*² because her then-young daughter asked about women's place in the US political system. Schnall recognized that her daughter's question touched upon critical issues about the absence of women in highest level elective office.² In a democracy, the ideal would be for all citizens to see themselves represented in their leaders, and view political office as attainable. We know, however, that this is not the case. How citizens, including children, develop political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors is the process political scientists call *socialization*. Experiences of socialization vary by age, gender, race, socio-economic status, geography, and other social factors. Views about engagement in the political system will not be the same for an African-American teenage girl and an older white man. Political socialization is one of the processes by which individuals and groups decide whether they should be drivers or passengers on the political highway, and whether they anticipate an unencumbered ride.

Most female
candidates
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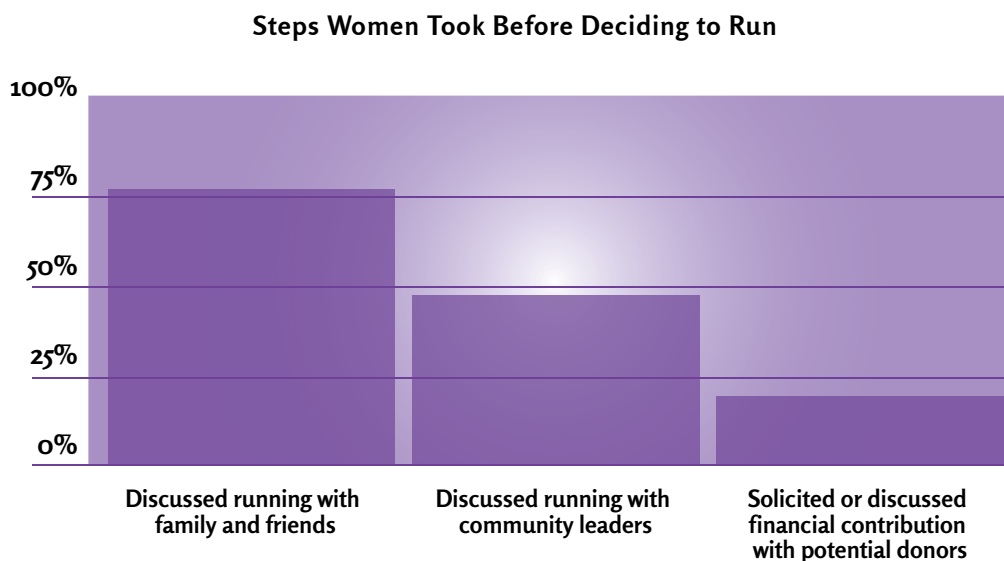
44%

Research shows that political socialization is gendered — women generally perceive themselves to be less effective in influencing the political system. Early socialization into politics is one of the factors that motivate women to engage in politics.³ In an in-depth qualitative study conducted by Denise Baer and Heidi Hartmann, twelve percent of women officeholders cited family involvement in politics as a critical experience that influenced their decision to run.⁴ In their seminal work on women and political ambition, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox found that socialization also impacts how women view political ambition. Early engagement in political processes socializes women to consider running for

office.⁵ Indeed Political Parity’s own research demonstrates that women living in states with a significant number of elected women were more likely to run for office than women in states with few female elected officials. We call this a “clustering” effect; in certain states, and even in certain congressional districts, women are far more likely to run, and a history of women being elected is part of this effect.⁶

Motivations to Seek Elective Office

Women seek political office for a wide range of motivations and through many experiences. In our research on why women do or don’t run for office, *Shifting Gears*, we found that 44% of female candidates were initially motivated to run by specific policy goals. Another 20% of women were motivated by family engagement in the political system. Lack of attention to women’s issues provided the initial motivation for 14% of candidates. Prior experience in electoral campaigns or community organizing brought 9% of women to their own campaigns.⁷ While motivations vary, most women candidates self-recruit — that is, they enter a campaign on their own without being sought out by an organization or political party. This is consistent with broader research on candidates, male or female, which finds that most are self-starters.⁸

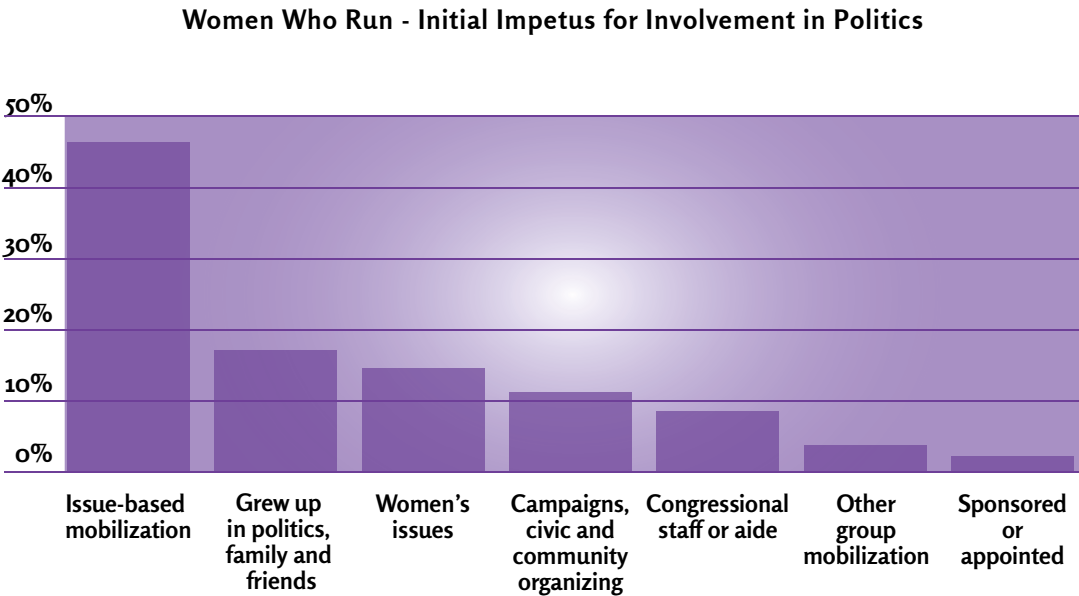


Self-recruitment is often easier for men because they are far more likely to consider themselves qualified to run, even when their documented qualifications are no better than those of their female counterparts.⁹ Women are more likely than men to question whether their experience is adequate to fulfill the responsibilities of the offices they seek.

Women’s paths to political engagement vary. In our research for *Shifting Gears*, nearly half of the female state legislators surveyed were motivated to run for office by a specific issue, which supports conventional wisdom that many women are mobilized to political action by a desire to achieve specific policy goals. However, women’s interests are diverse and include broad policy areas such as national security, business, economic inequality, and poverty. Many respondents were motivated by local issues and ran for office first to help solve a local problem. Others described a “eureka” moment when they realized that they wanted to help set public priorities to address corruption or create systemic change for economic justice.¹⁰ Female officeholders, particularly Republicans, cited the desire to change the way government works as the most important reason to run for higher office.¹¹

As in any profession, family connections help. In *Shifting Gears*, we reported that nearly one in five participants grew up in political families and got involved through family or friends. Support from a close inner circle is critical across the board, with 95% of respondents calling it important or very important.¹² In some cases, traditional “women’s issues” motivated candidates. They saw that political and legal structures sometimes ignored women or made it harder to level the playing field. Whether the issue is equal pay for equal work, reproductive rights, enforcement of child support, prosecution against sexual assault, or lack of funding for child care and education, many female candidates recognized that without systemic change, women and children would be disadvantaged in the local, state, or national arenas. Exposure to strong women political leaders also motivated some candidates.

The women interviewed for *Shifting Gears* were ambitious and driven to serve in elective office. In contrast to general perceptions, the candidates, eligible candidates, and elected officials surveyed displayed considerable interest in office at all levels, including higher office. They had made personal, professional, and often financial sacrifices to engage in public service. Most considered self-confidence one of their strongest assets. They were, however, realistic about the driving conditions on the road to office.



The Specter of Fundraising

Aspiring candidates identify funding a campaign as the highest hurdle they must overcome when considering a run for office. Prospective women candidates often perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage in fundraising, and women are more likely to favor public funding for elections.¹³ They often feel awkward raising money for their own campaigns, although they have no problem asking for funds to support specific issues or causes.¹⁴ While all of these hurdles have some validity and are frequently cited by candidates and the public, recent research shows that women actually raise as much money as male candidates when like races are compared. For example, two candidates for the same open-seat race will raise similar funds regardless of gender. However, women often need to work harder to raise the same amount, as their average contributions are lower.¹⁵ Even at the highest campaign levels, such as running for Congress, recent research by Barbara Burrell shows that women and men have been on an equal footing in fundraising since the 1980s.¹⁶

In *Building Women's Political Careers*, by Baer and Hartmann, fundraising is broken down into three distinct issues — learning how to ask, developing relationships with potential funders, and gaining access to good donor lists.¹⁷ The researchers show that training women candidates on fundraising and asking for donations can be done successfully, and most training programs for prospective candidates include fundraising. The challenges of access to potential funders and good fundraising lists, however, are more difficult. New candidates generally need sponsored introductions to major donors who can provide large-scale funding for a campaign. Political parties at the local, state, and national level maintain fundraising lists from past elections, and candidates who are given access to these lists can gain an important foothold.

EMILY's List, a powerful political action committee supporting pro-choice Democratic women, has provided that introduction for many progressive Democratic women candidates, enabling them to gain access to major donors. Republican women, however, still face challenges as candidates with developing donor relationships and with gaining access to fundraising lists. Since the mid-1990s, although women have increased their numbers in national elective office, Democratic women have outnumbered Republican women, and the trend of a partisan gap among women candidates and electoral winners only worsened in the past decade.

Noting these trends, in 2015 Political Parity released a report on Republican women, *Primary Hurdles*.¹⁸ This research systematically examined the specific situation faced by Republican female candidates, revealing weak support by women's PACs, especially compared to the EMILY's List support for many Democratic women.¹⁹ Rosalyn Cooperman and Melody Crowder-Meyer show this is partly because of the differing political ideologies of donors on the two sides of the aisle; Democratic donors often agree that women's under-representation is a problem that should be remedied, while Republican voters do not. The quantitative analysis in this research also showed that Republican women on the whole raise less money from their party than Democratic women do.

Women actually raise as much money as male candidates when like races are compared.

Improving access to funding sources for *all* women, and changing the system that governs political fundraising, is critical to helping women (and Republican women especially) make the choice to run for office. (Chapter 3 provides examples of actual fundraising experiences.)

Recruitment and Party Involvement

An essential role of political parties in a democracy is to identify candidates for elective office. Parties can act as gatekeepers to nominations by recruiting and training candidates and providing endorsements and funding. Over time, the right to vote has expanded in the United States, primarily through Constitutional amendments. African-American men gained the right to vote in the Fifteenth Amendment (1870), although the right was systematically denied in the South until the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Although women earned the right to vote in 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment, it was not until the 1970s that political parties began to recruit women candidates in significant numbers. For women of color, party recruitment has taken even longer. Laws enfranchising Native Americans passed in 1924 and 1940. Despite this legal expansion of the voter pool, political parties have often lagged behind when recruiting candidates. They have not treated all potential candidates equally, tending to look towards their familiar circles first, thereby overlooking many qualified candidates.

Women candidates have found more consistent party backing since the late 1990s, when both major parties realized that women could be viable candidates for a range of offices.²⁰ Women, however, have seldom been tapped for party leadership. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), the former Speaker of the House, remains the only woman to have led a party in Congress. In 2016, Debbie Wasserman Schultz chaired the Democratic National Committee, also a first. No Republican woman has held a comparable position in the GOP.

State and local party organizations also lack women leaders. Although women make up nearly one-quarter of all state legislators, only 19 women lead legislative chambers as senate presidents, presidents pro tempore, speakers, or speakers pro tempore.²¹ This persistent gender imbalance in leadership is detrimental to the recruitment of women candidates, as women leaders often tap a broader network of potential candidates.

Earlier research documented that parties often block, rather than facilitate, women's candidacy.²² Today, discrimination against women candidates is not overt, but may occur by omission, primarily by over-reliance on existing networks to identify candidates. In some cases, women candidates are appointed to office or are persuaded to run by an elected official rather than recruited by the party. In the *Shifting Gears* research, political parties were nearly absent from the recruitment and subsequent support of women candidates.²³ Nearly half of current office holders interviewed for *Shifting Gears* said their party encourages men more than women.²⁴ Recent studies on the electoral success of women candidates may be changing how parties view recruitment of women candidates.²⁵

Although political parties were traditionally closed to women beyond posting flyers and sorting mail, more than half of the current officeholders interviewed for *Shifting Gears* were involved in party activism or held a party position before running for elected office.²⁶ Several of the experienced candidates and officeholders in the study initially became involved in politics through campaigns for their party's other candidates. These participants said that the formal and informal gatekeepers are mostly men, and that the informal male networks recruit candidates similar to themselves. Regarding the "old boys' network," one female state legislator observed, "They get a great guy that they like and they're just, you know, throwing money at him like crazy and finding those different [donors], nationally and regionally... we just don't do that for the women candidates."²⁷

As Political Parity's *Primary Hurdles* research shows, women are faring quite differently in the two major parties. Democratic women account for more than 60% of all major party female state legislators and more than 70% of female members of Congress. In researching this partisan gender gap, Political Parity found that the primary problem for Republican women is the primary system itself. While many factors affect candidates in the race to high-level office, GOP women face higher hurdles, particularly in party primaries. In particular, we looked at infrastructure (the lack of recruitment, training, and financial support organizations for Republican women), ideology (the continuing gender role conservatism that is far more prominent among Republicans than Democrats), and inattention (the insufficient recruitment and support with which female candidates are usually met). No single factor is make-or-break, but together they dramatically hinder Republican women's chances for electoral success.

As Republican Kerry Healey, the former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts (2003-2006), says, "The mounting issues facing our country are complex. If we're going to solve these problems, we can no longer afford to leave the talent of half our nation out of the conversation." To achieve political parity, US political parties will have to recruit candidates more equally. While the Democratic congressional caucus is approaching parity within their party, this is not sufficient to promote a high-functioning government. Women need counterparts across the aisle with whom to collaborate.²⁸

Lessons From Abroad

Many modern democracies (both developed and emerging) have higher percentages of female elected officials than the United States. As of June, 2017, the US ranked 101st in the world in terms of the percent of parliament that is female.²⁹ Political Parity's investigations suggest three key factors contribute to this greater representation:

- The electoral formula — what it takes to win a seat in the legislature
- The ballot structure — who chooses the candidates
- The number of representatives per district

The United States has a majoritarian, “winner-takes-all” electoral formula. In many countries, as well as in several US counties and municipalities, electoral systems are mixed or proportional. Since World War II, countries with proportional electoral systems have consistently seated more women in national legislative bodies than countries with majoritarian systems.³⁰

Although most candidates in the US are affiliated with one of the two major parties, party control is weak. In stronger party systems in other countries, candidates often run as part of a centrally-determined party list. Candidates who are placed high on the list will be elected to the legislative body even if they do not win as individuals. Countries with party list systems, such as Germany, have raised representation of women more rapidly than the US, with its single-candidate system.

Proportional systems based on party lists have been the most beneficial to women candidates. France illustrates this point clearly. Elections for the French National Assembly are majoritarian, while representatives to the EU parliament are elected using a proportional system. In 2012, women held 27% of seats in the French National Assembly, whereas in 2014 women held 42% of the seats in the EU parliament.³¹ France (and over 100 other countries) also has a system of gender quotas in recognition of the importance of having women represented in governance.³²

Countries with multi-seat districts have also increased the proportion of women elected to legislative bodies. In the United States, all congressional districts elect a single member to Congress. Many other countries have multiple seats in each legislative district. In Europe, most countries have between two and ten seats per district. Research in the US shows that states with multi-seat districts in their legislatures also produce a higher percentage of elected women.³³

Because the US electoral system lacks all these features that have helped women win office in other countries, the nation consistently lags in women's representation. While changing electoral systems requires massive political will, it is important to recognize that current conditions make it harder for women's voices to be effectively heard in the political realm.

Mentoring, Sponsorship, and Kitchen Cabinets

The media, academia, and the candidates themselves widely acknowledge the value of political mentors for candidate success. Advisors provide real-world knowledge of political systems and can guide prospective candidates away from pitfalls that could derail a first campaign. In the *Shifting Gears* study, more than 70% of women officeholders indicated that they had a political mentor. Baer and Hartmann also found this to be true, noting that the most likely mentors for women seeking office are current officeholders, both elected and appointed. Fifty-seven percent of the Baer and Hartmann participants identified their mentors as coming from this group. Political party officials, on the other hand, accounted for only 15% of mentors.³⁴

Candidates and researchers distinguish between mentors and sponsors; only a handful of mentors also serve as sponsors for the women candidates we studied.³⁵ Beyond offering advice, as mentors do, sponsors also provide access to critical resources, like party fundraising lists. The lack of sponsorship by political parties is especially notable in the Baer and Hartmann study. Of those surveyed, 28% said they expected no sponsorship-type support from their party. Political party sponsorship was most common at the local level, with only 11% of candidates experiencing party support at the state or national level.³⁶ This lack of organizational backing is a major barrier to more women running for office.

The best-known sponsorship organization for women candidates is EMILY's List, which supports progressive Democrats. Candidates sponsored by EMILY's List receive training, fundraising support, and campaign consulting. While EMILY's List is very effective, prospective candidates note that the organization has not generally supported first-time candidates unless they are running for Congress or a governorship, and unless they have a fairly good chance of winning. Several groups modeled on EMILY's List support Democratic women candidates at the local and state levels with training, funding, and campaign advice. Republican women can also access a growing set of resources, both leadership PACs established by female members of Congress and new outside groups. However, these groups have far less influence on races than the well-established EMILY's List, which draws upon more than five million members to support its endorsed candidates.

In addition to seeking out mentors and sponsors, many candidates create “kitchen cabinets,”³⁷ informal groups of individuals who support them as they explore and undertake their first campaigns. Three-quarters of female candidates under study in *Shifting Gears* reported having a “kitchen cabinet.” Yet, as Baer and Hartmann note, fewer than 10% of these included party officials³⁸, suggesting a need for greater connection to established political leaders on the part of first-time candidates, especially women.

Recruitment of Latina Candidates

In 2014, Latinas held only 109 of the 8,236 seats in state and national political office, a proportion far below their 8% share of the population.³⁹ Over the course of our nation's history, some 12,000 members have served in Congress. Only 12 have been Latinas.⁴⁰ Latinas are one of the fastest-growing segments of the US population. Yet there are few Latina political leaders to mentor a new generation and capitalize on this demographic momentum to boost their political representation. Increasing the number of Latina candidates involves overcoming multiple challenges, as well as leveraging the advantages provided by the intersectionality of Latina identity (which provides an opportunity for support from both the women's and Latino communities).⁴¹

Non-Latino voters often see Latinos as a single voting bloc, but within the Latino community there are many divisions based on country of origin, immigration status, language, and the political experiences participants had in those countries.⁴² Many Latinas cite the need for a pan-Latino organization that could unite the broader community behind candidates. This organization could also support candidates with strategic planning between elections, candidate identification, training, fundraising, and mentoring.⁴³

Latinas recognize that to effect change, they must do more than just identify role models who demonstrate that a political career is attainable. Political Parity and The National Hispanic Leadership Agenda created LatinasRepresent in 2014 to provide support to Latinas serving in or seeking political office. LatinasRepresent conducts research, lifts up effective strategies, and unites stakeholders and communities to increase the number of Latina candidates and elected officeholders.⁴⁴

Through LatinasRepresent and other national organizations, both community and national leaders are encouraging young women to get involved, candidates and elected leaders to stay involved, and current Latina officeholders to ascend to higher offices. Succession planning must also be coordinated, where an elected official helps another fill her seat when she leaves office. Peer stewards, colleagues who champion and support candidates' journeys from campaign to Congress, are also being identified. These political leaders, who are not necessarily Latina, can explain the nuts and bolts of public service, from raising funds to raising issues to raising children while in office.⁴⁵



Training Programs for Prospective Women Candidates

Training programs for women candidates have steadily spread across the country over the past several decades, though they are still not reaching enough women. *Shifting Gears* found that only 40% of female candidates interviewed had training before launching their campaigns.⁴⁶ Training programs vary widely, and are set up to encourage and support potential candidates in a wide variety of life and career circumstances. Some are non-partisan and others are party-based; some focus on statewide elections while others are national; and some are for all women, while others are designed specifically for women of color. EMILY's List has trained progressive Democratic women across the country beginning in the 1980s. Since then, similar partisan training programs have emerged, such as Emerge America, which works in twenty states to train Democratic women to run in local and state elections. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, there are fewer national organizations that support Republican women's candidacies. However, new groups are emerging each cycle to support this demographic, both at the state and federal levels.

In many states, the effort to train women is bipartisan. Iowa's 50/50 in 2020 trains women for local and statewide campaigns regardless of their party affiliation. Rutgers, American University, and Yale each provide well-respected candidate-training programs as well. Meanwhile, organizations like She Should Run and VoteRunLead are capitalizing on digital networks and outreach to interests and engage a broader, often younger, group of women to participate in political training.

Politics-Life Balance

While the media often questions female candidates about their professional-family life balance, participants in research studies generally have not ranked personal or family factors as particularly important in deciding whether to pursue office at all, or in choosing lower versus higher office. In the Political Parity *Shifting Gears* research, it was the least important of four barriers to running for higher office cited by participants.⁴⁷ Female state legislators did cite the length and difficulty of campaigns and separation from family and friends as downsides in their political decision-making, but these were seen as less significant barriers compared with concerns about security, party support, or raising funds. We concluded that, despite negative media attention on the topic, women are not staying out of office because of family responsibilities.

Furthermore, the same research showed that personal and family issues varied widely among candidates. Young, single women said running for and serving in office are difficult without support from family and friends. They also indicated that dating is a challenge; both the media and constituents are overtly curious about their private lives. Older women face their own set of challenges. In a culture focused on youth, they experienced having to fight for attention. Advanced age correlated with lower political ambition in the *Shifting Gears* study; female state legislators over age 60 were far more likely than those under 60 to: (1) be ready to leave public life/get out of politics; (2) find politics frustrating; and (3) think they could do more good at lower levels of office.⁴⁸ Recruiting women earlier in life may help increase the size of the candidate pool, especially for higher office.

Politics, like other male-dominated fields, is a career built on a husband-wife family structure; that is, the nature of the job assumes that the politician has a full-time (or nearly full-time) support person in the home to do the child care, cleaning, social planning, and other key domestic duties.⁴⁹ Although this puts women at a distinct disadvantage, it will largely remain this way without substantial changes to public policy, family life, and political institutions. Male politicians are typically married and rely on their spouses to provide family care and support for their political careers (e.g., campaigning, joint and solo appearances, and help from additional family members and networks). The timing of having and rearing children can also be an issue. Slightly more than half of mothers in the *Shifting Gears* study with campaign or office-holding experience waited until their children were teenagers or adults to run their first campaign; more than a third ran when their children were newborns to age 13; one-tenth ran before having children.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The decision to run for office, especially for the first time, is complex. Research by Political Parity and others shows that prospective women candidates weigh the decision carefully and make strategic choices. Further research is needed to help prospective candidates differentiate between perceived and actual barriers, however. In addition, more support for first-time candidates to gain critical experience and name recognition, whether they win or not, is essential. Women candidates and their supporters must be prepared for the long haul, not just for their first campaigns.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

[Gender and Multi-cultural Leadership Project](#) is the most comprehensive study of officeholding by people of color.

[Fairvote](#) has good resources on reforms and structural blocks to more equal representation.

[Ready to Run](#), the diversity initiative of the Center for American Women and Politics, has both research and training materials on women of color and politics.

[RepresentWomen](#) is another national organization working on political parity. Visit representwomen.org for numerous helpful resources..

The [Strategy Scholars Network](#) provides links to current research by nearly 700 scholars on public policy. Their briefs on society and social issues include many on gender parity in office.

The following blog posts on the Political Parity website provide further insights into the factors candidates consider when deciding to run for office.

[Do High Chairs Belong in Higher Office](#)

[Is it the Driver, or is it the Road?](#)

[Representation Matters](#)

[Q&A with Senator Kelly Ayotte](#)

[Q&A with Roll Call's Shira T. Center](#)

[She's Young and Restless](#)

[Why we need Latina Representation](#)

[Why Women Still Can't Have It All](#)

[11 Ways to Encourage your Daughter to Pursue Politics](#)

[Video: How Women Become Political](#)

Endnotes

- 1 Political Parity 2014
- 2 See also Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006, Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007
- 3 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010
- 6 Political Parity 2013, 2016; see also Palmer and Simon 2012, who find much the same in their analysis of “women-friendly” districts.
- 7 Political Parity 2014
- 8 Baer and Hartmann 2014; see also Fowler and McClure 1989
- 9 Political Parity 2014; Baer and Hartmann 2014; Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010
- 10 Political Parity 2014
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Political Parity 2014
- 13 Fox and Lawless 2010, 159; see also Political Parity 2014; Baer and Hartmann 2014; and Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 14 Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 15 Jenkins 2007; Bryner and Weber 2013; Dittmar, Bryner, and Cooper 2014
- 16 Burrell 2014
- 17 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 18 Political Parity 2015
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Burrell 2014
- 21 CAWP 2018
- 22 Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 23 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Sanbonmatsu 2006
- 26 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 27 Baer and Hartmann 2014, 57
- 28 Quorum 2015
- 29 IPU 2017
- 30 Matland 2005, 102
- 31 Och 2013
- 32 Quota Project 2017
- 33 RepresentWomen 2017
- 34 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 35 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 36 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 37 The term “kitchen cabinet” dates to the presidency of Andrew Jackson. It denotes a group of informal advisors who assist candidates and politicians.
- 38 Baer and Hartmann 2014; see also Political Parity 2014
- 39 U.S. Census 2013
- 40 CAWP 2018
- 41 Latinas Represent 2014; see also Bejarano 2013 and Fraga et al 2005
- 42 Latinas Represent 2014
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Latinas Represent 2014
- 45 Latinas Represent 2016
- 46 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 47 Political Parity 2014
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Williams 2000
- 50 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014



Once women decide to become drivers on the road to political office, **WHAT** kind of road conditions do they find, **HOW** are the rules established and enforced, and **WHO** else is driving around them?

CHAPTER 3


Running and Winning

Improving governance in the United States means helping more women to run successful campaigns for political office at all levels. This requires tackling the structures and processes that obstruct women's political careers. Revealing these roadblocks and promoting strategies to dismantle or overcome them will allow more women to run and win.

In Chapter 2, we discussed how women decide whether to run and the steps they take in weighing that choice. In this chapter, we look to women's actual experiences of campaigning, again examining structural, procedural, and individual conditions. Once women decide to become drivers on the road to political office, what kind of road conditions do they find, how are the rules established and enforced, and who else is driving around them?

Political Parity's *Shifting Gears* research identified factors that affect women as candidates:

- Fundraising
- Assessing the Political Landscape: Campaign Strategies and Voter Attitudes
- Gender Images in Media
- Gender-Based Discrimination in Politics
- Need for Multimember Districts



The ways
women donate
affect female
candidates'
fundraising.

Fundraising

Fundraising is the single highest hurdle for female candidates, as reported by both current office holders and prospective female candidates. Since 2010 and the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, which protects corporations' and unions' indirect political spending as a form of free speech, the cost of campaigns has risen sharply, especially for higher office.¹ The increasingly partisan nature of elections has also put more pressure on candidates to raise additional funds. These factors may discourage potential female candidates; however, the perception and the reality of this barrier may differ.

What do women candidates actually experience as fundraisers? Barbara Burrell's groundbreaking research suggests that since the mid-1980s, women from the two major parties have actually been on an equal footing with men in their campaign receipts.² It has long been said that women don't raise as much money as men do, but this is only true when comparing all women to all men, an unfair assessment because men are far more likely to be incumbents, and incumbents enjoy a massive fundraising advantage. Burrell compared fundraising of similarly-situated campaigns, for example incumbent to incumbent and open-seat to open-seat, and found that women and men amassed similar fundraising totals.

Interestingly, however, even though women can raise as much as similarly situated men, it turns out that dramatically more effort is required to achieve these results. One study by Shannon Jenkins found that although male and female candidates raised the same amount, the women were more concerned about fundraising and used more techniques (and presumably spent more time on it).³ Although female congressional candidates raise as much as men, Burrell found that the average size of campaign contributions is smaller than those of their male opponents. Women also received fewer large contributions of more than \$750.⁴

For some potential candidates, the balance between fundraising and public service once in office is a barrier. As one state legislator remarked, “I love the policy work so much that if we could really be representatives and if we could really focus on public policy [I would do it] and what I’m hearing is, ‘No. You have to spend most of your time raising money.’ I have absolutely no desire to be in that.”⁵

The creation of women’s political action committees (PACs) such as EMILY’s List and the Women’s Campaign Fund has been critical to progressive women candidates. These PACs have provided women with access to major donors early in their campaigns. GOP women candidates have had less consistent access to major donors, contributing to their relative lack of success in congressional races. (More details about partisan differences in fundraising will be discussed in Chapter 6.)

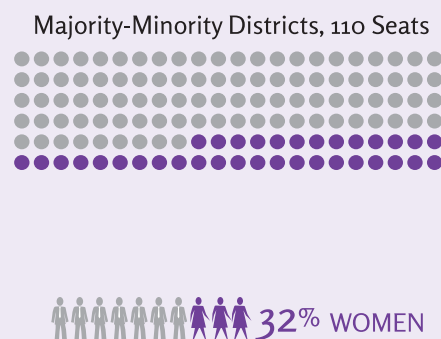
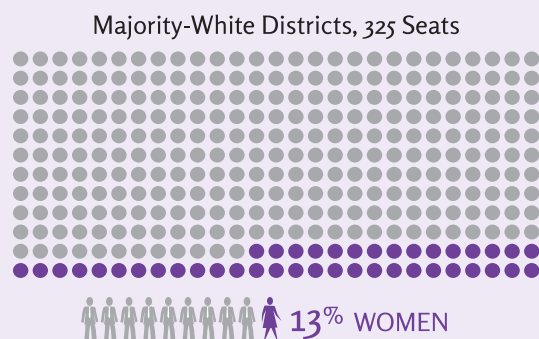
The ways women donate affect female candidates’ fundraising, and these effects vary by party. Female Democratic candidates are deeply dependent on contributions from women as donors, with nearly half of Democratic female candidates’ donations coming from women between 1990 and 2014. Only a third of Republican female candidates relied similarly on women donors during this time period.⁶ And over all, most money in politics comes from men (about 75% in the 2014 election cycle).⁷

As donors, women are less likely to donate to political campaigns than men, and when they do contribute, they typically give lower amounts.⁸ These differences are especially striking among Republican donors. Burrell finds that over all, women constitute about 30% of Democratic donors but only 16% of Republican donors.⁹ Burrell’s analysis of contributions to national campaigns shows that men are approximately three times more likely to donate more than \$200 than women.¹⁰ Research by Kelly Dittmar and colleagues finds that women are especially underrepresented among the “mega-donors” who have emerged since Citizens United.¹¹

Improving fundraising conditions for women candidates will require strengthening existing PACs that focus on women candidates, as well as facilitating greater connections to established political donors (both women and men). Encouraging women to see the value of political donations can also play an important role in growing the donor base for women candidates.¹²



Majority-Minority Districts and Women of Color in the US Congress



The case of women of color who run in majority-minority districts illustrates an unintended positive consequence of a structural change in the US political system. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, and an early-1990s push by President Bill Clinton's Justice Department, led to the creation of majority-minority congressional districts. These are districts where the majority of voters are from a minority group — e.g., African-American, Latino, or Asian-American.

Women of color have had extraordinary success in these districts. Post-primary, African-American women win general elections at a rate of 87%. Latinas and Asian-Americans win general elections 61.5% and 86% of the time, respectively. Once they've won their primaries in these districts, women of color fare much better in general elections than white women,¹³ whose success rate is only 42%.¹⁴

Put a different way, as of 2014, in majority-white districts, women were 13% of congressional seat-holders, while in majority-minority districts they were 31%.¹⁵ Yet the 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Shelby v. Holder* invalidated a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and could affect majority-minority districts.¹⁶ The decision increases the importance of encouraging and supporting minority women candidates in a wider range of districts.

In recent years, women of color have entered office at historically high levels. In 2017, 38 women of color served in Congress, seven in statewide elective executive office, 437 in state legislatures, and 8 as mayors of large cities — the majority of whom were African-American.¹⁷ In the past three decades, the proportion of female state legislators who are African-American has doubled: in 1981, they made up only 7% of women state legislators, and today they are 14.5%.¹⁸

While men of color are still more likely than women of color to hold office, women account for the recent increase in office-holding by people of color.¹⁹ In particular, African-American women have outpaced African-American men and white women in increasing their political representation over the past two decades.²⁰ Across all House races in this period, African-American women nominees had a win rate of 64.6%, significantly higher than that of white women (46.5%).²¹

While African-American women have achieved remarkable gains, they still face substantial barriers, particularly outside majority-minority districts. Stereotypes about African-American women's personalities, sexuality, and success in fundraising are still seen as barriers.²² Recruitment through traditional party channels is still rare for African-Americans and other women of color. Civil leadership, especially in local communities, churches, and labor unions, has been highlighted as an alternate path to candidate emergence for African-American women.²³

On at least one measure of formal political participation, African-American women have surpassed all other groups. African-American women have registered and voted at higher rates than any other group of voters in every election since 1998.²⁴ National organizations like Higher Heights for America seek to capitalize on this voting power to propel African-American women candidates into office. Additionally, recent studies by Wendy Smooth, Christina Bejarano, and Luis Fraga and colleagues suggest that far from identity being a liability, women of color are actually more successful than white women when they emphasize both their gender and race when running.²⁵

Assessing the Political Landscape: Campaign Strategies and Voter Attitudes

All candidates face the critical decision of choosing when and where to run. Candidates must consider a wide array of factors, including whether the seat is open or held by an incumbent, as well as the characteristics and voting patterns of the district. Historically, female candidates made these decisions without significant guidance from party leaders and may therefore have lacked critical data. *Shifting Gears* and additional research by Baer and Hartmann found that where party support was provided, the candidate initiated the contact.²⁶ Official party structures, especially in the GOP, have played a minimal role in recruiting or mentoring female candidates.²⁷ Political Parity researchers interviewed female state legislators across the US to identify what they consider when evaluating a bid for higher office. In *Shifting Gears*, researchers found that only 18% of current female legislators reported seriously considering a run for a higher office.²⁸

To run for most offices, female candidates need access to party resources. Party support comes in many forms — assistance with fundraising, access to donor lists and networks, endorsements, and support and advice from party campaign consultants and leaders. Yet initial access often comes through informal channels, sometimes leaving women in the dark. As one state legislator explained,

The informal part usually leads you to the formal, so it's the informal recommendation that then puts you into the party organization, or it's the informal pipeline that recommends you to the labor organizations that then carry you... The same people in the informal pipeline are the ones who manage the formal pipeline... They're the most important, and because you can never get into the pipeline—once you're in there, you can move.²⁹

In the absence of greater party support, women's PACs have begun offering a broad spectrum of resources to female candidates — developing data-driven campaign strategies, access to donors and consultants, and “get out the women's vote” campaigns. As noted earlier, progressive Democratic women have had the backing of EMILY's List since the mid-1980s, with positive results. GOP women are just beginning to benefit from similar conservative women's PACs. While these are generally smaller and not as effective as EMILY's List, the support they offer to GOP female candidates can be crucial. In particular, one way that women's PACs can help candidates is by introducing them to trustworthy professional staff for their campaigns. One worrying research finding from *Shifting Gears* was that women as candidates often stick with longtime friends in forming their campaign staff and “kitchen cabinets,” which is not always ideal in a professional campaign. Experienced campaign staff can make all the difference, especially for first-time candidates.

Although women candidates continue to face negative media portrayals, multiple studies and actual campaign results suggest that most voters are willing to consider candidates of both genders based on their records, their policy proposals, and their demonstrated skills and character, and not just on their gender. For example, Kathleen A. Dolan's 2010 voter study reached optimistic conclusions about the electoral environment for women candidates. She found that voters do still hold gender stereotypes; however, these stereotypes are both positive and negative, and had no discernable impact on voter support for female candidates in US congressional or gubernatorial races.³⁰ These findings, which reinforced a 2008 Pew Research Center study, showed that both women and men see women as strong political leaders, although women voters are slightly more positive than men in this view.³¹ The message that voters are welcoming female candidates needs to be shared with women to encourage them as they consider running for office.

As candidates, women must also strategize about what issues to focus on in their campaigns, and the gender stereotypes associated with those policy areas.³² Women candidates are typically perceived as better on issues related to education and healthcare, while men are seen as stronger on defense and foreign policy. While women are assumed to be informed and competent on “women's” issues, focusing on these areas can make for a polarizing campaign.

When women address “male” issues, e.g., defense or finance (more typical of Republican women), their candidacies are less polarizing. The successful 2014 campaigns of Iowa Senator Joni Ernst and Kentucky Lt. Governor Jenean Hampton both emphasized their military experience, to good effect.

Both of these women are Republicans, however, bringing up an interesting split among women by party. While Republican women achieved notable firsts in the last few election cycles, women voters have tended historically to identify more as Democrats. This difference is even greater among African-American, Latina, and younger voters, who are much more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. White women, however, have been more likely to vote for the Republican candidate in presidential elections since 2004, a trend that continued when the majority of white women supported Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Similarly, researchers have asked if female voters are more likely to vote for female candidates, regardless of party. Though party affiliation beats out gender for many voters, women voters generally want to see more women elected to office.³³ In one study of US senators, Kim Fridkin and Patrick Kenney found that voters viewed women senators more positively than their male colleagues.³⁴ This esteem on the part of voters was increased after a bipartisan group of female senators played a critical role in saving the country from a costly and unnecessary government shutdown in 2013. (Headlines asserted, “Women Are the Only Adults Left in Washington,” from Time.com, and “Men Got Us Into the Shutdown, Women Got Us Out,” from The Huffington Post.) In the wake of this extraordinary moment exemplifying women’s governing abilities, several organizations began to study gender and bipartisanship, generally finding that although party matters a great deal, women are more likely than men to work together to make better public policy.³⁵

While stereotypes persist, successful candidates shape their campaign messages to use these to their advantage.³⁶ Female consultants, or other campaign professionals with experience on women’s campaigns, can be particularly helpful to navigate these nuances. Unfortunately, only 25% of consultants on national and gubernatorial campaigns are women. Given the edge these consultants can provide, more of them need to be connected with women’s campaigns.³⁷

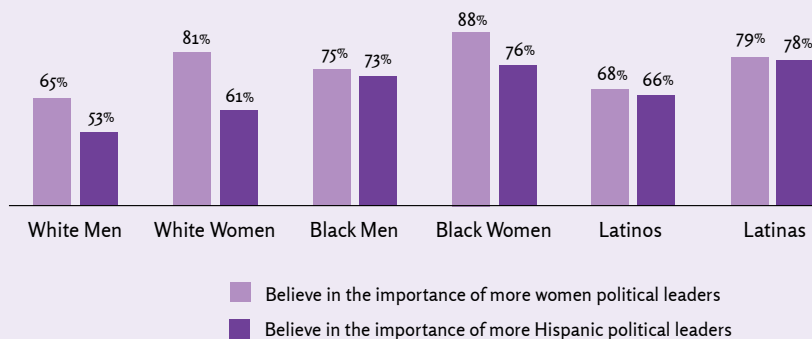


Women of Color as Candidates and Representatives

People of color are a growing proportion of the US population, but remain underrepresented among its political leaders. Women of color face especially low levels of representation, particularly Latina, Asian-American, and Native American women. In 2013, Political Parity helped to launch LatinasRepresent, a joint initiative with the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (also joined by HOPE, Hispanas Organized for Political Equality) to call out the lack of elected Latina leaders and to change the political landscape. Latinas represent over 8% of the US population but only 1% of its elected leadership. As Ambassador Swanee Hunt (Co-Chair of Political Parity) and Hector Sanchez (Chair of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda) put it in their Foreword to the report, “For a nation that prides itself on inclusion, that’s frankly unacceptable. Our very democracy is in question when our legislative bodies look nothing like the diverse constituencies of our country.”³⁸

Political Parity commissioned a nationwide poll to gauge opinions about more women and more Hispanics as political leaders. The results suggest a great deal of support; the majority of every race-gender group we studied thought it was at least somewhat important to have more of both. Support was particularly high for more female and more Hispanic elected leaders among women of all races and among men of color, demonstrating a widespread constituency for these types of candidates. Latinas, as Christina Bejarano, Luis Fraga, and other scholars have suggested, may indeed have a kind of intersectional advantage in running for office.³⁹

Belief in the Importance of More Women and Hispanic Political Leaders, by Demographic



Research also suggests a need for more Black women leaders; as a 2015 report from CAWP and Higher Heights puts it, “Put simply, the perspectives and priorities of Black women cannot be fully expressed without the representation of Black women in office. Once in office, Black women champion the interests of Black citizens and underrepresented populations, supporting progressive agendas around education, health care, and economic development... Black women politicians better engage and inspire Black citizens to participate in politics.”⁴⁰ While Black women continue to make strides as elected officials, they too are underrepresented, making up 7 percent of the US population but only about 3 percent of elected leaders. As a report by CAWP and Higher Heights notes, however, recent trends are positive:

“Black women’s representational growth has occurred primarily in the past two decades. Of the 35 Black women who have served in Congress, 28 (80%) have entered since 1993. Of the 10 Black women who have served in statewide elected executive office, all but one has entered since 1993. Since 1994, the growth in Black state legislators can be wholly attributed to Black women, who have increased their numbers by nearly 50%. Two Black women have served as Speakers of State Houses since 2008. The first big-city Black woman mayor was not elected until 1987 and at least eight more Black women have led big cities in the past thirteen years.”⁴¹

Gender Images in the Media

While voters generally hold positive views of female candidates, the media may perpetuate gendered stereotypes, both explicitly and implicitly, by treating female candidates differently than their male opponents. Women experience greater scrutiny of their qualifications and appearance than men. They often find themselves in the “double bind” of needing to demonstrate leadership without appearing aggressive.⁴²

Almost nine in ten participants in the *Shifting Gears* research said women’s campaign experiences differ from those of men.⁴³ Women expressed the need to comply with social norms to be considered credible, including acting and dressing professionally. Media coverage of women candidates may call their voices “high-pitched” or “lacking in authority.” Women’s generally shorter height, particularly relative to men, may be counted against them in being taken seriously. Yet being too tall seems problematic as well; one tall, blond elected official noted that she gets “Barbie” jokes, which subtly undermine her professional credibility as well.⁴⁴ Ultimately, the research suggests that media criticism of female candidates is often harsh, no matter what they look like.

Relatedly, female candidates often experience greater questioning of their qualifications than their male counterparts do. One *Shifting Gears* interviewee, a US congressional candidate, said:

“... If a guy says he’s done something, the assumption is he’s correct unless proven otherwise. If a woman says she’s done something, the assumption is she hasn’t until she can prove to everyone beyond a shadow of a doubt she has.”⁴⁵

The family lives of female politicians are subject to media coverage far more often than those of male candidates. A woman is often asked why she is not taking care of her children or how she plans to do so—a query put rarely, if ever, to men.⁴⁶

Women must decide how to respond should they receive biased coverage or sexist attacks. Name It. Change It., originally a project conducted by pollster Celinda Lake in 2010, and now a nonprofit that regularly publishes new research on sexism facing women candidates’ campaigns, toppled the conventional wisdom on combatting sexist media treatment. Their original research demonstrated that women candidates can respond best to such double standards and negative or stereotypical portrayals by acknowledging and responding to them directly.⁴⁷ Lake and colleagues found that when candidates immediately addressed such coverage, calling it out as unfair and inappropriate, the coverage had little impact on campaign outcomes. When sexist attacks came from an opposing candidate and were pointed out, both male and female voters reaffirmed support for the female candidate and withdrew support from the offending male candidate. When sexist coverage was not addressed, however, it reinforced stereotypes and increased support for the male candidate.⁴⁸

[The “Name It Change It” approach](#) has become accepted wisdom for women’s campaigns. Additional efforts to share this useful strategy are critical for all groups that train current or prospective women candidates.

Gender-Based Discrimination in Politics

Beyond media coverage, and even though the general public understands that women can be strong leaders, implicit gender bias continues to drive widespread discrimination in politics.⁴⁹ Nearly three in four participants in the *Shifting Gears* study said they had experienced this on the campaign trail. Of those who did not experience discrimination before politics, half say that they experienced discrimination after getting involved in it. Political peers and donors were the groups most likely to engage in sexual harassment of women candidates.

As a result, the *Shifting Gears* participants describe a gendered learning curve, which involves a number of factors relevant to what one interviewee called “campaigning while female.”⁵⁰ For example, for safety reasons, not all women felt comfortable traveling or campaigning alone. Campaigns, and indeed, politics, are conflictive and can be a new or difficult environment for women.⁵¹ In the *Shifting Gears* research, some study participants described politics as “brutal.” Women running for office can easily become lightning rods for polarized political beliefs and sexism. Female (and male) candidates would benefit from more attention on their policies and less on their personal appearance and private lives.

And yet, despite these difficulties, nearly three-quarters (73%) of participants agreed with the statement, “Fear would never hold me back from running for higher office.” (Unfortunately, more than a quarter said it would.) On the whole, however, female candidates show remarkable courage and resilience.



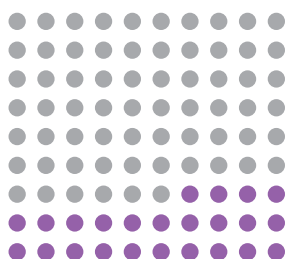
Need for Multimember Districts

While we absolutely need more women to run as candidates, some recent research suggests that reducing gender discrimination, as from the media, may not be enough; we also require structural changes to our electoral systems. RepresentWomen in particular has conducted illuminating research examining the types of electoral reforms that would benefit women as candidates, and concludes that our single-member, winner-take-all districts end up stifling diversity of all kinds. Their report notes:

The type of electoral system used in counties, cities, and states has a clear impact on women's electoral success. Multi-winner districts (where more than one person represents a community) are more likely to elect women candidates. **RANKED CHOICE VOTING** — a system that allows voters to rank candidates in order of choice — elects more women as well. **FAIR REPRESENTATION VOTING** combines multi-winner districts with ranked choice voting to create openings for women, people of color, and all parties in areas that are now one-party strongholds. It is in use today across the country and can be used at the local, state, and federal level without amending the U.S. Constitution. Women are more likely to win in these fair representation voting systems because political parties are more likely to recruit women to run, voters are more likely to vote for women candidates when electing multiple representatives, fewer incumbents win re-election, campaigns are more civil, and candidates spend less money to get elected — focusing instead on grassroots outreach.⁵²

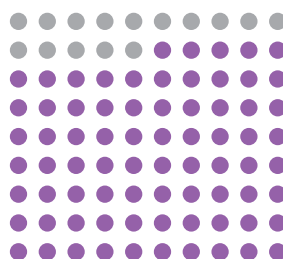
The evidence they present is instructive; for starters, while only ten states use multi-winner districts in state legislative races, these states have some of the highest numbers of elected women of all fifty states. We can also look at the data in terms of the number of citizens who have at least one elected female representative.

SINGLE-WINNER DISTRICTS



about **24%** of citizens
are represented by a woman

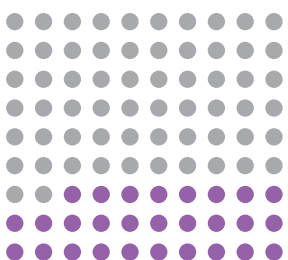
MULTI-MEMBER DISTRICTS



75% of citizens
are represented by a woman

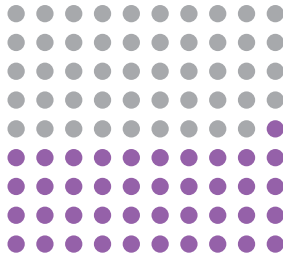
Similarly, in city council elections among the 100 largest cities, RepresentWomen's research shows that at-large seat elections (which are for larger districts and allow multiple winners rather than using a winner-take-all system for smaller individual districts of the city) are better for women.⁵³

DISTRICT-BASED CITIES



28% of seats
are held by a woman

AT-LARGE DISTRICTS



41% of seats
are held by a woman

Conclusion

While much research on women candidates focuses on the individual characteristics of candidates themselves, recent studies like Political Parity's *Shifting Gears* and others suggest that running and winning are also heavily contingent on factors outside the candidates' control: namely, the political and social environment in which campaigns are run. Structural and societal barriers must be addressed to increase victories for women candidates and enhance gender parity in government. Advocates need to address procedural issues, including party practices, campaign supports, and media coverage. Structural issues such as the drawing of legislative and congressional districts, the use of majority-minority districts, and the creation of multimember districts also impact the chances for political parity.

Endnotes

- 1 Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, 558 U.S. 2010
- 2 Burrell 2014
- 3 Jenkins 2007; see also Dittmar, Bryner, and Cooper 2014
- 4 Burrell 2014, 137
- 5 Political Parity 2014
- 6 Bryner and Weber 2013
- 7 Bryner and Weber 2013
- 8 Francia et al 2003
- 9 Francia et al 2003, 38
- 10 Burrell 2014, 148
- 11 Dittmar, Bryner, and Cooper 2014
- 12 She Should Run 2012; Traister 2014
- 13 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 14 Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2013; see also Sanbonmatsu 2015; "Safe" districts are those where an overwhelming percentage of candidates are from a particular party.
- 15 LatinasRepresent 2013
- 16 Shelby County, Alabama v. Eric Holder, Attorney General 570 US 2013
- 17 CAWP 2018
- 18 CAWP 2018
- 19 Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project 2007
- 20 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015
- 21 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015
- 22 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015
- 23 Cohen 2003
- 24 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015
- 25 Smooth 2010; Bejarano 2013; Fraga et al 2005
- 26 Political Parity 2014; Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 27 Political Parity 2015
- 28 Political Parity 2014
- 29 Political Parity 2014, 29
- 30 Dolan 2014
- 31 Pew Research Center 2008
- 32 Dittmar 2014
- 33 Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2010
- 34 Fridkin and Kenney 2009
- 35 CAWP and Political Parity 2017; see also Quorum 2015
- 36 Dittmar 2014; Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 37 Dittmar 2014
- 38 LatinasRepresent 2013
- 39 Bejarano 2013; Fraga et al 2005
- 40 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015, ii
- 41 CAWP and Higher Heights 2015
- 42 Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2017
- 43 Political Parity 2014
- 44 Political Parity 2014
- 45 Political Parity 2014
- 46 Political Parity 2014; Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2017
- 47 Name It. Change It. 2010
- 48 Name It. Change It. 2010
- 49 Eagly and Mladinic 1989; Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Greenwald and Krieger 2006; Richeson and Ambady 2001
- 50 Political Parity 2014
- 51 Political Parity; see also Shames 2017, Lawless and Fox 2015
- 52 RepresentWomen, 2017
- 53 RepresentWomen, 2017

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Political Parity blogs that document issues for Latinas and the Latina community in the political arena:

[Community Voices: Why We Need Latina Representation](#)

[Introducing Latinas Represent](#)

[Your Vote Matters: The Rise of Latina Candidates in 2014](#)

[Community Voices: Making the Pivot to Public Service](#) – this blog highlights Ruth's List, an organization in Florida that promotes progressive women candidates.

Interviews with Latina leaders

- Fundraising barriers: www.latinasrepresent.org/get-ready/resource/fundraising-tips-from-latinoa-leaders/
- Double standard for Latinas: [youtube/zFEwxmlez9Y](https://youtube.com/watch?v=zFEwxmlez9Y)
- Lacking role models: www.youtube.com/watch?v=plkC3FTOIYE
- Cultural barriers: [youtube/QygbroDhuBQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=QygbroDhuBQ)
- Latinas not seeing themselves as leaders: [youtube/uOAcMwIkIII](https://youtube.com/watch?v=uOAcMwIkIII)
- Congresswoman Linda Sánchez on mentors and public service: www.youtube.com/watch?v=v76oTSJWdoo
- Hilda Solis, former US Secretary of Labor and Los Angeles County Supervisor on public service and family: [youtube/lpgrGKzWt6k](https://youtube.com/watch?v=lpgrGKzWt6k)
- LatinasRepresent Boston Launch, addresses money, sexism, needing encouragement, lack of representation, trying multiple times: [youtube/XlwtEzBxqBc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=XlwtEzBxqBc)
- [Q&A with Political Activist Rosie Castro](#)

Interviews with Asian American leaders

[Lisa Wong \(on SoundCloud\), Diana Hwang, and Michelle Wu \(on SoundCloud\)](#)

[A Growing Political Force?](#)

Money and Politics: These Political Parity blogs address issues of campaign financing

[Money: A Necessary Evil](#)

[She Talks Dirty: Money in Politics](#)

[Reporting from the FEC](#)

[Women Giving](#)

The Media and Women Candidates

[Sometimes Women Say a Lot Without Saying a Thing. Really](#)

The average share
of **WOMEN** in
state legislatures
has remained between
20 and 25%
SINCE 1993



CHAPTER 4

Seeking Higher Office

By the early 1970s, barriers to women running for political office had fallen across the United States. Women ran for and won local offices and seats in state legislatures in increasing numbers. By the early 1990s, however, the number of women holding state and local office plateaued. The average share of women in state legislatures has remained between 20 and 25% since 1993.¹ Yet this statistic masks substantial state-to-state differences. In states like Colorado and Vermont, women are approaching parity, holding more than 40% of legislative seats. By contrast, in six states (Louisiana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Alabama, and West Virginia), women still hold less than 15% of state legislative seats.²

Additionally, participation in these lower-level offices has not translated into greater numbers of women running and winning gubernatorial or US House and Senate races. In 2016, only six governors were women, down from a high of nine in 2004 and 2007. Local and state-level offices are often seen as natural launching pads for women to move into higher office. Yet in 2016, four female candidates ran for Senate from their platforms as elected secretaries of state: Terri Lynn Land (R-MI), Karen Handel (R-GA), Alison Lundergan Grimes (D-KY), and Natalie Tennant (D-WV). All four lost. Martha Coakley, former attorney general of Massachusetts, also lost her bid for governor.

And in the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton, who had previously served as both a US senator and secretary of state (as well as First Lady) lost the presidential race to Donald Trump, who had never before held any elective office.

As shown in Chapters 2 and 3, female candidates face many challenges when running for all offices — structural, procedural, and individual. Political Parity especially wanted to understand how women’s campaigns for higher office — and the decisions about where to undertake them — are impacted by the broader political landscape. Those seeking a fairer share of women in national political leadership need to understand why women often choose not to run for, or fail to win, higher offices, specifically US House, US Senate, and state governorships.

To determine why women are not running for higher office in greater numbers, Political Parity studied all congressional races across all US states (but not territories) between 1980 and 2012. Women candidates remain the exception:

70% of the districts never had a female candidate for Congress in that 32 year period

23% have had one female candidate

5% have had two female candidates

2% have had more than two female candidates

21% of all districts had a woman in the general election

10% had a woman win³

In the vast majority of congressional races in which women ran, they were in a pioneering role; that is, they were the first woman (or the first woman since before 1980) to run in that district.⁴ These pioneers often need a different set of tools to succeed than the individuals who follow in their footsteps. They may also face unique barriers in breaking that initial glass ceiling.

Structural Factors

Three elements from the previous chapter are also critical in thinking about how, when, and where women run for higher office. The first and most critical factor is incumbency and the availability of open seats for which to run. Competing against an incumbent is the highest structural hurdle facing any candidate for political office in the US. Because men make up 80% of Congress, and because incumbents win at above a 90% rate when running to keep their seats, incumbency is the highest hurdle for gender parity over all. Political scientists call this the “Fenno Effect,” named for Richard Fenno, who first documented the fact that even when Congress as an institution is massively unpopular, people still almost always re-elect their incumbents.⁵ Laura Liswood, Secretary General of the Council of Women World Leaders, has notably remarked, “I do not believe there’s a glass ceiling for women in politics, only a thick layer of men.”

The large majority of women members of Congress elected between 1980 and 2012 first arrived by winning an open seat, rather than defeating an incumbent. Leadership PACs give most of their money for House races to current officeholders, and running against incumbents is generally a losing proposition.⁶ However, most studies of the performance of women candidates demonstrate that women generally fare the same as, if not better than, their male counterparts in similar types of races.⁷ Identifying House and Senate seats that may become open soon and identifying women in both the Republican and Democratic candidate pools who could run for them should be a strategy to increase the number of women in Congress. National women’s organizations could focus on congressional races for open seats, and work quickly to identify potential women candidates.

Another key factor is fundraising. Ninety percent of participants in *Shifting Gears* cited it as the issue that mattered most when deciding whether or not to run for higher office. The majority of the women officeholders interviewed said they had never raised more than \$100,000.⁸ However, the costs of congressional races are substantially higher, and have been increasing.

By 2012, the average cost to run had risen to \$1.3 million for the House and \$10.4 million for the Senate.

In 2008, before the *Citizens United* decision, US House campaigns cost \$1.1 million on average and Senate campaigns cost \$6.5 million. By 2012, the average cost had risen to \$1.3 million for the House and \$10.4 million for the Senate.⁹ In the most expensive five Senate races in 2016, the campaigns themselves raised between \$37 and \$64 million, with outside groups and parties estimated to have raised tens of millions of dollars more. These numbers are daunting, and discourage some women from seeking higher office.

Finally, candidates need party support to attain most elected positions, but it is especially critical when women think about running for higher office. Party backing can stimulate a woman’s ambition to move up the political ladder – and, conversely, the lack of such support can stop a woman in her tracks. In Political Parity’s *Shifting Gears* research, many of the respondents expected local and state party support if they decided to run for higher office, and a majority (65%) said they were asked by their party.¹⁰ There is a strong, statistically significant correlation between those who are asked to run by their party and those who consider running for higher office. Those that consider running report the most helpful thing the party can do is help them raise money. Women who previously held a party office (as distinct from public office) were far less nervous about raising money to run, were significantly less likely to find politics “frustrating,” and had fewer concerns about gridlock in higher office.¹¹

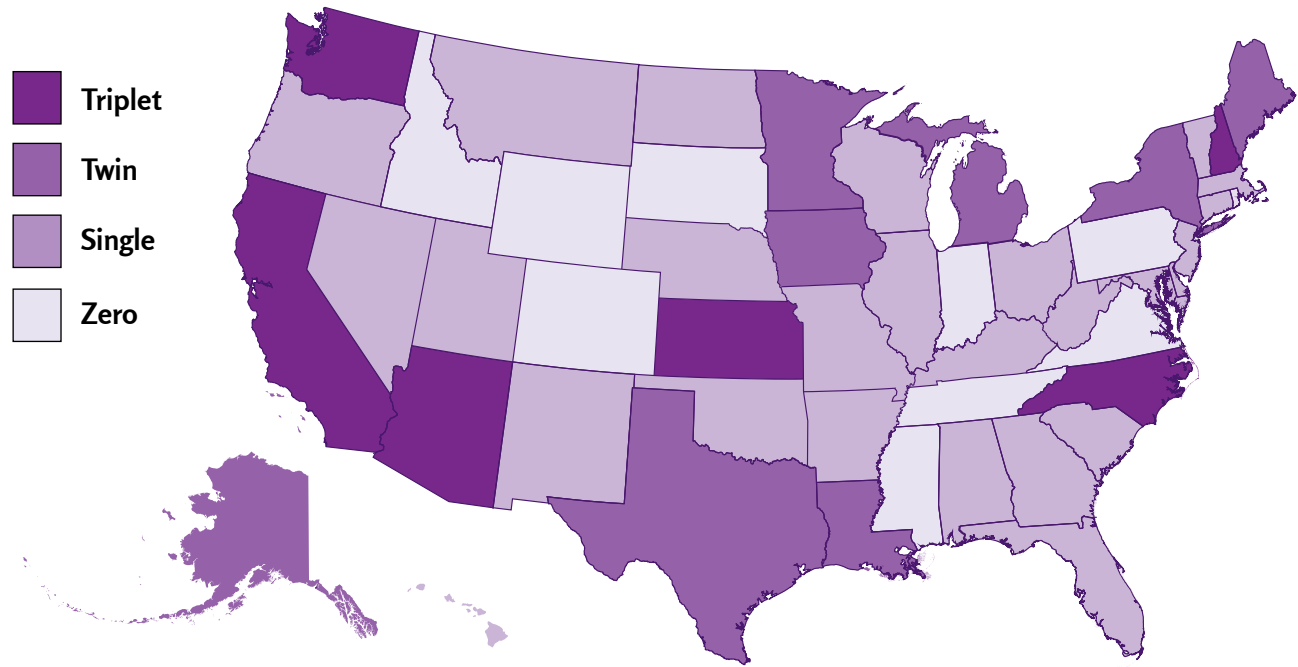
“Twin” States for Women in Top Offices

In 2013, noting that several states had not just one but two women senators while most had none, Political Parity designed research to uncover if this was purely random. Was there some magic involved in breaking that initial glass ceiling, whereby once a state elected a female senator, it was far more likely to then elect a second? Some states even had three women at the top (two female US senators and a female governor, as did Washington state, New Hampshire, and North Carolina at the time). Sometimes there seemed to be a succession effect, where a female senator or governor handed her seat to another woman to serve after her. We began collecting data to test just how random this was. If it turned out not to be pure chance, what factors caused women to be elected either together or in succession? This became Political Parity’s *Twin States* work, which then grew into a larger project asking the same questions about congressional districts (*Where Women Win*).

For the first set of questions, about senators and governors, the data collected by Political Parity about women who served in the Senate or in governorships from 1980 - 2012 shows that the distribution of high-level elected women is indeed not random. Some states are more likely than others to elect women as governor or senator. Political Parity identified states as triplets, twins, singles, or zero, depending on whether they have had three, two, one, or no women serving as senators or governors, together or in immediate succession. States more likely to elect multiple high-level women differ from other states based on the following:

DEMOGRAPHIC/ GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS	POLITICAL FACTORS	ELECTORAL HISTORY
Twin (or triplet) states tend to be larger, comprising younger, more educated, and more racially-diverse populations	Twin (or triplet) states tend to be more Democratic, have more women in their state legislative and Congressional delegations (especially in legislative leadership), plus offer same-day voter registration and public financing	Twin (or triplet) states have often already elected a woman to a top office. ¹²

Map color-coded by high-level women elected since 1992



Of the 20 women serving in the US Senate in 2017, seven represented twin states (California, Washington state, and New Hampshire all had two female senators, while Iowa had a female governor and a female senator).

This research showed an important correlation between having one woman in a top office and the election of other women to high levels within that same state. This relationship holds even when controlling for incumbency. The causal relationship between a first female high-level office-holder and the election of a second (or more) is not entirely clear. Prior research and experience suggest several potential mechanisms which could be driving these links:¹³

- **“Broken Barrier”**: The first woman in a high-level position — senator or governor — may break a barrier in the minds of decision makers (male and female), such as party leaders, recruiters, funders, and/or voters. After the positive experience of a woman in one of these top positions, decision makers may view a woman running for (and winning) top office as more likely;
- **“Beacon”**: Potential female candidates could see the first successful woman in high-level office, and it could increase their own political ambition to run; or
- **“Helping Hand”**: The first woman in a top position might directly help other women along by encouraging them, mentoring them, helping them raise money, or introducing them to donors and party leaders.

Because of the small number of states that fit the “twin” criteria, it is difficult to assess these hypotheses. Any or all of these potential forces could be operating, individually or jointly, to create the conditions to move from the election of one woman to the election of others. This research makes clear that having more women in state legislatures correlated strongly with women running and winning office at higher levels in their states. This correlation is partisan, however, with a positive correlation for Democratic women candidates and a negative correlation for Republican women.¹⁴

This is an area ripe for future research. It is likely, for example, that Democratic and Republican women run in areas with differing demographics; perhaps the areas in which Republican women are most likely to run also have a lower proportion of women in the state legislature and a lower likelihood of electing women to statewide office.

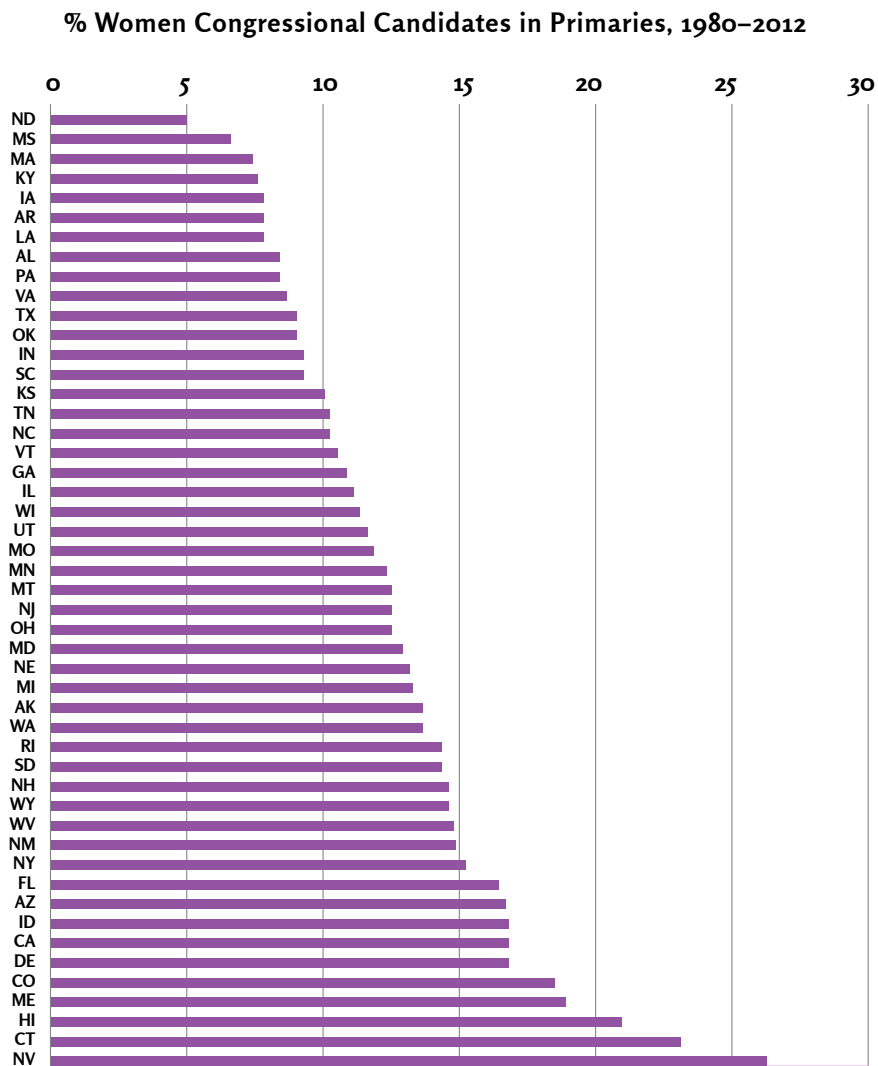
There’s no doubt that strong correlations exist between certain political and demographic factors and the number of women in a state’s top elected positions. By better understanding the factors that have driven access and success for women in these roles, organizations can identify “good” states and prepare women candidates, helping women to achieve greater success in state and national leadership.

Where Women Run (and Win) for Congress

After completing the *Twin States* research, Political Parity wondered if these results were true at the congressional district level as well. Previous studies of women’s success rates are based on where they have run. Women, however, are not equally likely to run in all districts.¹⁵ Indeed, *Shifting Gears* research clearly shows that female candidates are very strategic in their decisions about when and where to run, especially for a high-level office.

Beginning in 2014, Political Parity researchers constructed a massive dataset of all congressional candidates between 1980 and 2012, both male and female. We collected over-time political and demographic information for all congressional districts, as well as political and demographic information for each candidate (primary and general election) for that district’s House seat in each year of our time period. We sought to learn more about where women are more likely to run in primaries, win in primaries, and then go on to run in (and win) general elections for House seats.

Among the findings, we learned that states and districts vary widely in the number of women who run.



We also found that few women pass their seat along to another woman; of the 70 female House representatives who left office during the period under study, only 15 were succeeded by another woman. Encouraging a female successor could be another way of increasing the number of women in office over all.

The *Where Women Win* project found that certain demographic factors about the congressional district are strongly related to having a woman *run at all in that district's primary races* for a seat, including:

- Having more women in the state legislature (a very strong predictor of having women run in congressional districts in that state)
- If the seat is open (another very strong predictor — women are much more likely to run and to win in open seats)
- Having fewer blue collar workers in the district.

17 Women Senators in
112th Congress (2011)



INCUMBENCY is the highest hurdle for gender parity over all.

The large majority of women members of Congress elected between 1980 and 2012 first arrived by *winning* an **OPEN SEAT**, rather than *defeating* an **INCUMBENT**.

When considering whether a woman will *win a primary election*, the researchers found some of the same factors were important, including:

- A higher percentage of women in the state legislature (very strongly predictive)
- An open-seat contest (very strongly predictive)
- More Democrats in the district
- Greater racial and ethnic diversity in the district
- Fewer blue collar workers, or a higher median income
- Fewer senior citizens

When looking at women who win their primaries and go on to run as general election candidates, the factors that seem to predict whether a female candidate will *win a general election* are:

- A higher percentage of women in the state legislature (very strongly predictive)
- An open-seat contest (very strongly predictive)
- More Democrats in the district

Over all, this project shows that gender, race, party, and geography interact to create more or less favorable electoral conditions for women candidates, and that these factors affect women's entry decisions. Meanwhile, women of color (who were mostly Democrats) were usually elected from majority-minority districts, which lean strongly Democratic. The state-level politics matter as well. States that have higher numbers of women in the state legislature are more likely to have women who run successfully for Congress, lending credence to the idea of needing a "pipeline" for women to higher office. Women are more likely to run, and win, in congressional districts that are racially and ethnically diverse. Women are also more likely to run and win in districts that are geographically compact and contain a large city (100,000+ residents).¹⁶

In similar research, Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon found that districts "friendly" to electing white Democratic women to Congress were more liberal, urban, diverse, and wealthier than the districts that elect white Democratic men.¹⁷ The overlap of findings between the Political Parity and the Palmer and Simon studies lends credence to both; together, the research strongly suggests that where women run and win is not random but deeply tied to demographic and structural factors. Knowing this can help advocates for women's political inclusion strategize about the districts where more women should run.

Conclusion

To build equity and to improve the performance of government structures, we need more women to choose to run for higher office. Because experience at the local and state level is usually required for candidates for Congress and governorships, increasing the number of women serving as state and local office holders (the pipeline) is critical to enlarging the pool of potential candidates for higher office.

Given that states vary widely in their experiences with women candidates, strengthening national and state-based leadership groups is important as well. Strategies must be long term and must include multiple stakeholders, not just potential candidates and their immediate supporters. Aiding parties and women's recruitment and training groups by providing information about where women are most likely to run and to win will strengthen their efforts to promote greater gender parity in governing.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

The following posts from the Political Parity website provide further insight:

[The 3 E's with Lt. Governor Jenean Hampton](#)

[Interview with Kay Bailey Hutchison](#)

[Interview with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand Video: Cong. Kuster's Bipartisan Example](#)

Endnotes

- 1 CAWP 2018
- 2 CAWP 2018
- 3 Political Parity 2016
- 4 We chose 1980 as a starting point because few women ran in their own right prior to the “second wave” feminist movement of the 1970s (most of the women running before this were taking over their husband’s or father’s seat). Capturing the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s gave us enough women running in their own right to make for good variation for the study.
- 5 Fenno 1978.
- 6 Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 7 Political Parity 2016; see also Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 8 Political Parity 2014
- 9 Center for Responsive Politics 2017
- 10 Political Parity 2014
- 11 Political Parity 2014
- 12 Political Parity 2013
- 13 Political Parity 2013
- 14 Political Parity 2013
- 15 Political Parity 2016
- 16 Political Parity 2016
- 17 Palmer and Simon 2012



“A women’s place is in the house –
The House of Representatives.”

BELLA ABZUG

CHAPTER 5

Serving in Office

This chapter presents research on how women govern, exploring important questions: Do the behaviors, approaches, or policy priorities of elected women differ from those of men? Does the presence of women in political institutions make a difference? How do women and men differ in their attitudes towards openness in the political process? What is the role of party? What about race/ethnicity? How does the presence (or absence) of women in elective office affect who participates politically, including who runs for office?

Do Women Make a Difference?

Bella Abzug, a fierce advocate for women's rights and a Congresswoman from New York City in the 1970s, famously said, "A woman's place is in the House – the House of Representatives!" Running for the Senate in 1992, when that body was 98% male, Californian Dianne Feinstein echoed this sentiment. "Two percent is good enough for milk," she quipped, "but not for the US Senate."

While we have come a long way from two percent then to twenty percent today, the Senate — and the rest of our national and state government structure — is still far from representative. As noted earlier, women are more than 50% of the US population but hold less than a quarter of its political offices. From a pure democratic legitimacy standpoint, this is embarrassing. As the crowds rallying in the mid-1990s for women's mandated political inclusion in India put it, "Democracy without women is not democracy."¹

But the goal, for Abzug and for the feminist movement she helped to lead, was not solely symbolic or justice-oriented. Abzug is also famous for saying, "We are bringing women into politics to change the nature of politics, to change the vision, to change the institutions. Women are not wedded to the policies of the past. We didn't craft them. They didn't let us." The great hope of the movement, then, was not only to create more justice in representation by bringing in women, but also to enact better policy. It is therefore no coincidence that a great deal of research has focused on the question of whether women in office make a difference — and, if so, how. To get a clear answer we undertook a study with an eye toward institutional understanding.

Process Limitations

In most legislatures — both at the state and national levels — entrenched processes can reduce the effectiveness of female legislators. In many cases, the most senior legislators, who are usually men, control the leadership roles, including committee chairs. The chairs decide which legislation is prioritized for consideration by the full body and which bills are slated for hearings. In addition, the majority party controls committee agendas, which means they can advance certain legislation and stop other bills dead in their tracks.

In the Senate in 2017, only two Republican women (out of five in office) chaired a committee (out of 20 total committees). Similar proportions of committee leadership among Democratic women (approximately 40%) meant that seven women served as the ranking member on a committee. The lack of GOP women in Congress — and the Republican leadership's resistance to elevating women within its ranks² — continues to affect women's power within the legislative body as well as the direction of our country's policies. During the 113th Congress, when Democrats held the majority in the Senate,

women disproportionately held committee leadership roles, which they used both to set the agenda and to push passage of key issues.

Because many women are relative newcomers to Congress, practices that favor seniority and concentrate decision-making in only a few hands weaken their potential political impacts. It is not surprising that female legislators generally favor more transparency in governmental processes, including the setting of committee agendas.

The Role of Party

Unfortunately for those who would seek greater cooperation, we live in an era of highly-partisan governance, the result of several decades of what political scientists call polarization. Like a repelling magnet, the two sides drive each other apart. In a polarized environment, the parties are relatively united internally and their policy preferences are fairly clearly divided from those of the opposing party. Working together across the aisle to make good policy becomes difficult. Yet the research shows that women continue to try collaborating, and when they do, they generate better legislative outcomes and improve the political environment for everyone.

Following female senators' bipartisan success in breaking the impasse of the 2013 government shutdown, Political Parity sought to understand how deeply this collaborative impulse reached. Research conducted by Jennifer Lawless and Sean Theriault suggests that for the most part party reigns supreme in D.C. today. This conclusion is supported by the research of other scholars. In the Senate, for example, Michele Swers found that the partisan differences on issues pertaining to women, families, and children far exceed any gender differences. Similarly, Schwindt-Bayer and Corbetta concluded that gender does not predict the "liberalness" of roll call behavior from the 103rd to the 105th Congresses, after controlling for party and constituency influences.³ Based on an analysis of roll call votes in the 108th and 109th Congresses, Brian Frederick concluded that Republican women are ideologically indistinguishable from their male counterparts, even when the analysis focuses strictly on "women's" issues, where we might expect gender to count more than partisanship.

When it comes to roll-call voting, at least, the party rules. As Congress has become more polarized since the 1990s, party loyalties win out when close votes on key legislation occur. As Mary Hawkesworth and her coauthors point out, women's collaboration as legislators is usually the product of political coalition building and may come with political costs. In addition, the policy solutions sought for "women's" issues often differ between Republican and Democratic members. Thus, co-sponsorship of legislation by women across the aisle has become more difficult. Democratic and Republican women are increasingly seeking different solutions to issues such as reproductive rights and equal pay. Meanwhile, Swers shows that moderate Republican women are especially cross-pressured as they try to represent women while also satisfying the needs of their party.

Lawless and Theriault did find that women in Congress are much more likely than their male counterparts to participate in symbolic and social activities that promote a more collegial environment. "In times of gridlock, obstructionism, and inefficiency, we shouldn't underestimate the role that such collegiality and comity can bring to the legislative process. Even if it doesn't affect legislative outcomes or procedural steps through which a bill becomes a law, it can send a strong signal to the American public — and perhaps to potential candidates — that women's presence on Capitol Hill contributes to making the political arena a somewhat more civil and pleasant place to work."⁴

Making a Difference: Policy and Process

A separate and far-reaching qualitative study of women in Congress, commissioned by Political Parity and conducted by researchers at the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers, added new findings and rich detail to this initial observation of the importance of women's symbolic and social work as Congress members. Rather than trying to examine the impact of women quantitatively, which is difficult when party tops gender in a hyper-partisan political environment, the CAWP research was based on interviews with most of the sitting female members of Congress, both representatives and senators.⁵

In this deeper examination of political representation by women, the researchers conclude that even though voting itself may proceed along party lines, women on both sides of the aisle bring up issues that would go unaddressed if they were not there. Elected women clearly see themselves as charged with giving voice to the disadvantaged, regardless of their party. Although the women they studied, elected to the 114th Congress, “confronted a difficult political environment in which to achieve legislative success,” they found that women members of Congress from both parties “very much believe that their presence and their voices mattered, and they provided considerable evidence of achievements despite the overall environment of gridlock and party polarization in which they operated.”⁶

In earlier, less-divided political moments, evidence mounted about women's differences from men, in both policy and process. Numerous studies from the past three decades have shown that women legislators are much more likely than their male counterparts to sponsor legislation that directly addresses the needs of women and children, constituencies that do not usually receive their fair share of attention through the legislative process. In the 1980s — especially following 1992, nicknamed “The Year of the Woman” for the drastic increase in women's election that cycle — multiple high-quality studies showed that the new legislators made their mark.

For example, in a foundational 1988 study using a mail survey of legislators in 12 states, Sue Thomas found that women were more likely to prioritize bills dealing with women's or children and family issues. The Center for American Women in Politics surveyed state legislators in 1988 and 2001 and found that women legislators are more likely than their male colleagues to list bills related to women and children among their top legislative priorities.⁷ Similar results were found when examining sponsors of bills related to women in the 103rd and 104th Congresses.⁸ These studies led researchers to conclude that women officeholders often offer new perspectives, opening up issues for consideration that were never previously on the table.

In a time of vigorous party polarization, we would not expect to see too many examples of women working together across the aisle; they would likely be punished by voters and party leaders if gender concerns took precedence. But even within such a partisan environment, if gender matters at all, we should be able to find at least occasional indicators of its importance. And this, indeed, is what we do see — not in roll-call votes but in other, less obvious aspects of the legislating process.

Political theorist Hannah Pitkin defined political representation to mean “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.”⁹ By this definition, female legislators are essential, both for the interests represented and the higher level of responsiveness they seem to show. Researchers have found that female legislators generally frame the debate in different terms, receive input from a wider, more diverse group of advisers and stakeholders, and offer a broader range of proposed policy solutions.¹⁰

In the early 1990s, the Congressional Women's Caucus, under the leadership of Senator Barbara Mikulski, introduced the Women's Health Equity Act. This bill pushed for critical improvements in women's health care, including the

requirement that women be included in clinical drug tests. Prior to this, nearly all drug research focused on the efficacy and safety of treatments for the “typical 70 kilogram male.”¹¹ Women’s legislative leadership opened the conversation at the highest levels of government to force inclusive change.

Michele Swers’s research on the 103rd and 104th Congress suggests that some of the biggest differences between male and female members of Congress occur in agenda-setting rather than in how legislators vote (which is mostly determined by party). The 2017 *Representation Matters* CAWP study concluded that women in Congress “bring distinctive work styles and representational motivations, both of which facilitate bipartisanship,” even in a highly-partisan political moment.¹²

Such bipartisan leadership is not lost on the American public; indeed, it seems to make people trust women more than men. Following female senators’ bipartisan cooperation in 2013, which averted a costly and unnecessary government shutdown, *Time Magazine* referred to women as “the only adults left in Washington.”¹³ As Judith Warner recently wrote, “In fact, rather than being viewed as a handicap, being female can now work to candidates’ advantage. In the past decade, female senators’ well-publicized bipartisan dinners, co-sponsorship of legislation, and – most famously – ability to lead their fractious colleagues to the budget deal that ended the 2013 government shutdown have led to the widespread belief that female politicians are more skilled than men in the art of compromise – a view shared by 34 percent of Americans, according to the Pew Research Center.”¹⁴

Banding Together As Women

When numbers of women legislators are low, the creation of a women’s caucus seems to be critical to increasing women’s power in setting agendas. Many state legislatures have their own women’s caucus, and at the national level, the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues has been a symbol of bipartisanship since its founding in 1981. Caucus leadership is always shared between a Republican and Democratic member of the House, and all female members of Congress participate. In the Senate, female senators meet monthly over dinner, one of the rare, informal, ongoing bipartisan initiatives that persists.

While women in the US Congress sponsor many types of legislation as individuals, the Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues highlights members’ legislation that particularly focuses on improving outcomes for women, children, families, and disadvantaged groups, including:

- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act
- The Child Support Enforcement Act
- The Retirement Equity Act
- The Civil Rights Restoration Act
- The Women’s Business Ownership Act
- The Mammography Quality Standards Act
- The Family and Medical Leave Act
- The Violence Against Women Act
- The Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act
- The Commission on the Advancement of Women and Minorities in Science, Engineering, and Technology Act

Women's Effectiveness As Legislators

In addition to demonstrating a difference in priorities, elected women seem to outperform men on several aspects of legislative effectiveness. For example, studies have shown that women in Congress deliver more federal spending to their districts and sponsor more legislation than their male colleagues.¹⁵

Following a hypothesis proposed in Michele Swers's 2003 book, a more recent study by Craig Volden, Alan Wiseman, and Dana Wittmer confirms that party majority or minority status has an impact on women members' relative effectiveness. When a woman member of Congress is in the majority, her legislative success is comparable to that of her male colleagues. However, as members of the minority party, women are more effective than men in getting legislation passed, as they frequently reach across the aisle to gain support for key bills. Additionally, minority-party women in the US House of Representatives are better able than minority-party men to keep their sponsored bills alive through later stages of the legislative process.

Women of Color As Elected Leaders

According to the Reflective Democracy project of the Women Donors Network, 90% of our nation's 42,000 elected officials in 2014 were white, and 71% were male (despite these groups making up only 77% and 49% of the country's population, respectively).¹⁶

As Judith Warner wrote in a report for the Center for American Progress, "The one bright spot in the otherwise bleak electoral landscape of November 2016 was the news that nine new women of color were elected to the US Congress, bringing the total number of women of color in [Congress] to... the highest level in our nation's history."¹⁷

As Warner goes on to note, however, despite this "happy development," over all the level of political representation of women of color "remains unacceptably low: Although they make up 19 percent of the U.S. population, women of color represent only 7.1 percent of the total number of members of Congress, 4 percent of governors, and 5.4 percent of state legislators."¹⁸

Political scientists and others hypothesize that tapping a more diverse set of perspectives, talent, and experience by electing more women from all racial and ethnic backgrounds is likely to lead to policy change and a broadening of the legislative agenda. A growing body of research addresses differences among women legislators and assesses the impact of women of color.

Studies show that race/ethnicity and gender intersect to give women of color distinctive perspectives as office holders.¹⁹ For example, Edith J. Barrett analyzed African-American state legislators in a 1992 survey and found that African-American women legislators coalesced around a common agenda of education, health care, and economic development — priorities that differed somewhat from that of their African-American male and white female colleagues.²⁰

Similarly, Kathleen Bratton, Kerry Haynie, and Beth Reingold found in a study of 10 state legislatures that African-American women sponsor both African-American interest and women's interest bills, and that African-American women's legislative behavior differs from that of African-American men and white women.²¹ In one of the few studies examining Latino state legislators, Luis Fraga and his coauthors documented considerable overlap between Latinas and Latinos but noted that Latina state legislators are more likely to feel it is important to represent multiple minority groups.²²

“See Jane Run”: Stimulating Engagement With Politics and Government

Are women more engaged in politics when elected women are serving in state legislatures and in Congress? The answer appears to be yes. For example, Nancy E. Burns, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba found that having women candidates and elected officials helped close the traditional gender gap in psychological engagement in the public arena.²³ More recently, Kim Fridkin and Patrick Kenney found that the gender gap in knowledge of political processes and issues closed in states with women senators, and that women are more politically active in those states.²⁴ Philip E. Jones also found that women voters are more likely to know about senators’ voting records when the senator is female.²⁵ In a series of studies, Campbell and Wolbrecht have found that women and girls’ interest in politics rises when they see women in elective office.²⁶ And finally, Lonna Rae Atkeson and Nancy Carrillo have found that external efficacy – a belief that they matter to politics – rises among female citizens in state legislatures that have a higher proportion of women.²⁷

Political Parity’s *Where Women Win*²⁸ work examined the potential impact of women in Congress on down-ballot races. Among the key findings: higher percentages of women in state legislatures correlate with more women running for Congress. It is hard to say, however, what is the cause and what is the effect. One is that women in Congress may inspire other women to run; another possibility is that they actively mentor those below them, to help them ascend the political ladder (as is clearly the case in New Hampshire, with its legacy of women supporting each other in seeking political office).²⁹

Key Structural Factors

Some researchers and observers suggest that the impact of women in Congress will not truly be felt until women constitute a “critical mass” (25% to 35%). Much of this research stems from a seminal study by Rosabeth Moss Kanter from the late 1970s looking at the effect of ratios and proportions. When a minority constitutes less than 10-15% of a body overall, she found, they are treated as “tokens,” and their ability to make change is severely curtailed.³⁰ More recent research complicates the notion of “critical mass”; in addition to having women in office, Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook argue, there need to be “critical actors” (who can be male or female) to promote the interests of women as a group.³¹

The representational setup of districts also affects women’s work as legislators. Although multi-member districts are the norm in most comparable countries, which have proportional representation systems, in the US most districts (at both the national and lower levels) are mostly single-member. That is, our districts tend to be smaller and we only elect one winner from each district. In a multi-member district, we would combine, say, three small districts to create one large one, and we would elect three representatives from that enlarged district. In this kind of multi-member district, a larger number of candidates could both run and win, which opens the door not only to more women, but also more racial minorities of both genders.³²

A 2013 study by political scientists Jennifer Hayes Clark and Veronica Caro exploits a kind of “natural experiment” by comparing women’s bipartisan cooperation within a single legislature (the state legislature of Arizona), examining the House, which uses multi-member districts to elect its members, and the state Senate, which uses single-member districts. Over all, their findings suggest that women from multi-member districts are more effective working across the aisle than women from single-member ones.

As they put it, “[E]lectoral rules are not neutral with respect to who gets elected and their incentives to advance particular policies. Thus, attention to electoral rules that foster incentives for legislators to respond to women as a

constituency may be just as important as increasing the number of women in office.”³³ The mechanism that seems to be at play in promoting more attention to women’s issues, they conclude, is that the incentives of the individual legislator change when she is elected from a multi-member rather than a single-member district. “The findings of this research suggest that a switch to multi-member districts may offer the capacity and incentives for female legislators to collaborate to advance a women’s issue agenda that distinguishes them from their co-partisans.”³⁴

Daily Life As a Legislator

Once elected, women officeholders must navigate a gendered environment, learning how to exercise leadership and deal with double standards. In the *Shifting Gears* research, Political Parity collected responses on the strategies women use to deal with difficulties in office and the strengths that help them along the way. This study revealed two complementary facets of political women’s daily lives: many challenges are gender-specific, but the strengths of female politicians are more than equal to the opposition or biases they face.

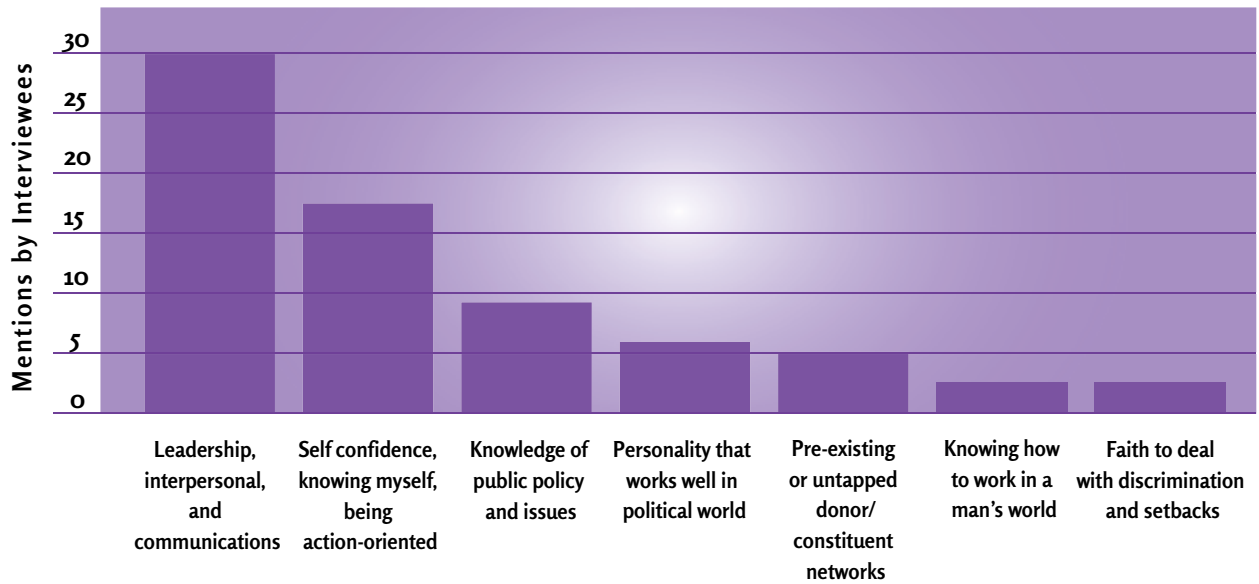
Stress was often mentioned as a critical factor by elected officials. While this is true at all levels, it presents a particular issue at the state and local levels. Political Parity asked interviewees for a year-round average of the number of hours per week they worked in politics and public service and whether this changed in legislative sessions or campaign season. Results indicate a grueling schedule of official duties during sessions, as well as community outreach, responding to constituents, and attending public events year-round.

Of current state-level officeholders, nearly two-thirds work 40 or more hours per week in public service. Nearly one in five works 60 or more hours per week in public service. This is often in addition to other paid work. Legislative office in most states is a part-time job. Only ten states have full-time legislatures — Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.³⁵ Workloads increase during legislative sessions and campaign seasons. The work differs across state legislatures as well. Some are more “professionalized,” with longer sessions and higher pay, but 40 of the 50 state legislatures are part-time (with low pay), even though the work is often full-time for those elected. Both the insufficient pay and the need for other income can be especially challenging for women; as Judith Warner has written,

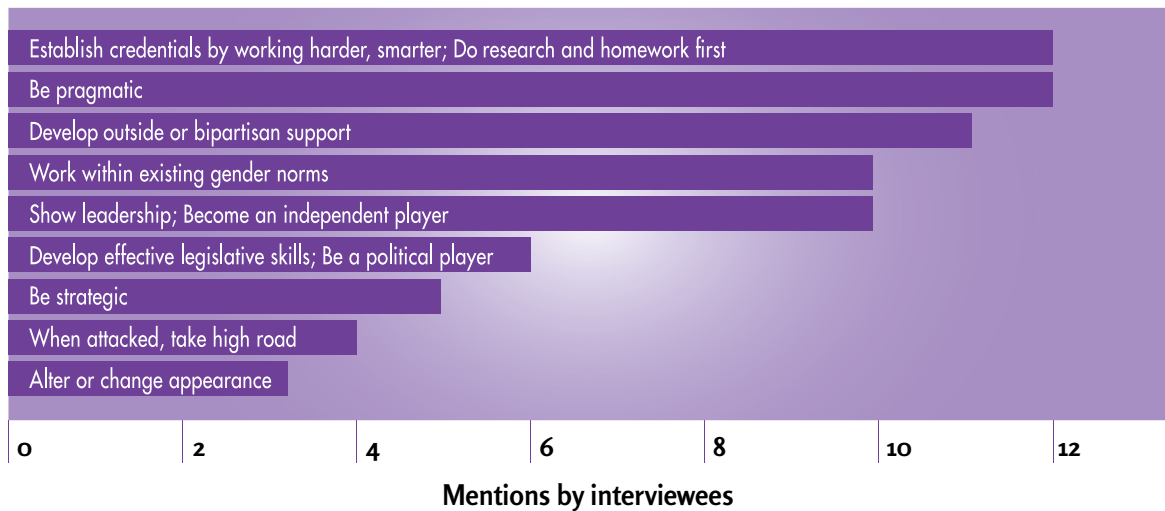
Many local and state-level elected offices pay so poorly that it’s very difficult for people without deep pockets – or a high-earning spouse – to consider a career in politics. Legislators in Texas earn just \$7,200 per year, for example, plus a \$190 per diem for expenses, while those in New Mexico earn no yearly salary and are provided a daily expense allowance of up to \$163. In some states, the problem of low pay is mitigated by the fact that legislative office is considered a part-time job. But that is of little help for those whose jobs don’t permit them much flexibility or who have caretaking responsibilities that make committing to a statehouse far from home all but impossible. This again keeps candidates without personal wealth, support on the homefront, or career flexibility – disproportionately women – from running in state-level elections and eventually finding their place in the pipeline for higher office.³⁶

In spite of gendered challenges, participants in *Shifting Gears* described themselves as confident, relentless, ruthless, and curious. Some drew on their experience in prior professions, which allowed them to deal with conflict in politics successfully, in a mature and positive way. Several found strength through their religion or spiritual beliefs to handle the day-to-day difficulties of being a female politician. Most importantly, though, they experienced the thrills and rewards of political achievement and standing up for their beliefs as legislators.

Strengths Shown by Female Politicians



Strategies Employed by Female Politicians



Conclusion

While the example of women leaders in other fields and other nations suggests that women would make valuable contributions to the US political system, the current procedural rules, jurisdictional divisions, and political climate make it difficult for American women to exercise their full range of leadership.

Rules within legislative bodies that favor senior legislators and that make bipartisan cooperation difficult narrow the scope for women officeholders. Women elected as change agents are particularly handicapped in this environment. Parties control these rules, and they hinder progress towards both political parity and the effectiveness of the women who are elected.

Despite the obstacles, however, women have proven remarkably innovative and resilient as legislators and as advocates for underrepresented interests. While they are often unable to engage in actions that would directly violate party norms, they have found numerous pathways to bipartisan collaboration, such as attending social and symbolic events, working through women's caucuses, and viewing themselves as representatives for all women, not just those in their districts. At the same time, research confirms that as legislators, women are often more effective than their male counterparts, both in bringing home funding for their districts and in serving their constituencies. It appears that whatever they actually do in office, elected women have yet another impact: they seem to stimulate greater political interest in and engagement with politics on the part of women and girls who see them. Elected women thus make quite a large difference, in multiple ways.

Organizations that promote political parity should develop strategies to elect women, but also to promote reforms that will make them more effective once in office. Because of the continuing small numbers of women serving in elective office and the many variations in the structures and processes within elective bodies, there is ample need for continued research to ascertain the impact of women officeholders.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

From the Political Parity website:

[Exclusive with Congresswoman Elise Stefanik](#)

[Interview with Mayor Lisa Wong of Fitchburg, MA, first female Asian-American mayor in Massachusetts](#)

Video: [Congresswoman Kuster's Bipartisan Example](#)

Video: [Q&A with Portsmouth Councilwoman Stefany Shaheen](#)

Video: [Q&A with Florida State Senator Anitere Flores](#)

Video: [Q&A with Texas State Representative Mary Gonzalez](#)

[A Conversation with Diana Hwang](#), who founded the [Asian American Women's Political Initiative](#) after she noticed that Asian-American women were noticeably absent in Massachusetts' politics, both behind the scenes and on center stage.

[Madame Mayor: Women's Representation in Local Politics](#)

Endnotes

- 1 Shames 2015
- 2 Political Parity 2015
- 3 Schwindt-Bayer and Corbetta 2004
- 4 Lawless and Theriault 2016
- 5 CAWP and Political Parity 2017
- 6 CAWP and Political Parity 2017, 4
- 7 CAWP 2001
- 8 CAWP 2013
- 9 Pitkin 1967
- 10 Wolbrecht 2000; Thomas 1994;
see also Levy, Tien, and Aved 2002
- 11 Keitt 2003
- 12 CAWP and Political Parity 2017, 52
- 13 Newton-Small 2013
- 14 Warner 2017; see also Pew 2015
- 15 Anzia and Berry 2011; see also Volden,
Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013
- 16 WDN 2014
- 17 Warner 2017
- 18 Warner 2017; see also CAWP 2018 and WDN 2014
- 19 Brown 2014; see also Sanbonmatsu 2015
- 20 Barrett 2001
- 21 Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold 2006
- 22 Fraga et al 2005; see also Bejarano 2013
and LatinasRepresent 2014
- 23 Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001
- 24 Fridkin and Kenney 2014
- 25 Jones 2014
- 26 Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006;
Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007
- 27 Atkeson and Carrillo 2007
- 28 Political Parity 2016
- 29 Seelye 2013
- 30 Kanter 1977
- 31 Childs and Krook 2009
- 32 RepresentWomen 2017
- 33 Clark and Caro 2013, 2
- 34 Clark and Caro 2013, 25
- 35 NCSL 2017
- 36 Warner 2017



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CHAPTER 6

Partisan Differences

Women are inching toward gender parity in Congress, but the gains are lopsided. Of 535 members, only 104 were women in 2016 — 76 Democrats and 28 Republicans. Democratic women outnumber Republican women 3:1. GOP women are far less likely to enter or win a primary election than their Democratic peers. GOP women also fare worse than either their male colleagues or Democratic women in general elections.¹

Consider these stark numbers. In the 2014 midterms, 249 women filed as primary candidates for House seats — 154 Democrats (62%) and 95 Republicans. Of these, 159 became general election nominees, with an even greater partisan split (69%). In the end, 84 women were elected to the House — 62 Democrats (74%) and just 22 Republicans. At each stage of the electoral process, the gap between Democratic and Republican women widened. Despite these lower numbers for Republican women, some of their results were notable. Senator Joni Ernst became the first woman elected to national office from Iowa. Martha McSally was the first GOP Congresswoman from Arizona. New York's Elise Stefanik became at age 30 the youngest woman ever to serve in Congress, and Utah's Mia Love was the first female African-American Republican congresswoman in history.² Even after these historic wins, 90% of Republicans in Congress were still male.

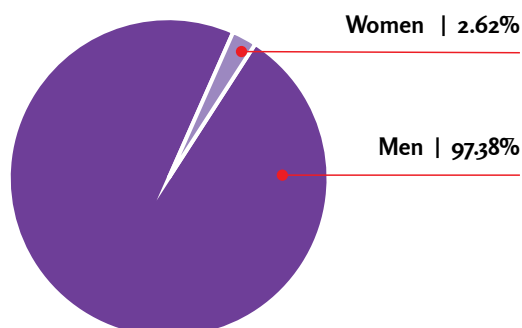
The partisan gender divide has not always been this pronounced. When Ronald Reagan was president, only 25 women served in Congress, but the partisan split was even: 13 Republicans and 12 Democrats. Since 1988, Democratic women have increased their numbers by 600%, while Republican women have only gained 200%. If Republican women had made similar gains since the 1980s, the US would rank among the top 40 countries worldwide in women's representation, compared to its actual ranking of 100th overall.³

Political Parity undertook research to understand why GOP and Democratic women candidates experience different campaign results. While many factors affect them, one jumps out: for Republican women, the highest hurdle is the primary election itself. In Political Parity's 2015 report, *Primary Hurdles*, we identified three factors as key barriers for GOP women congressional candidates:

- **Infrastructure:** fragmented support from the party, PACs, and donors
- **Inattention:** insufficient recruitment and development; and
- **Ideology:** the perception that female candidates are too moderate

No single factor is make-or-break, but together, these particular hurdles for Republican women dramatically hinder their chances for electoral success.⁴

Total men and women who have served in Congress since its inception in 1789

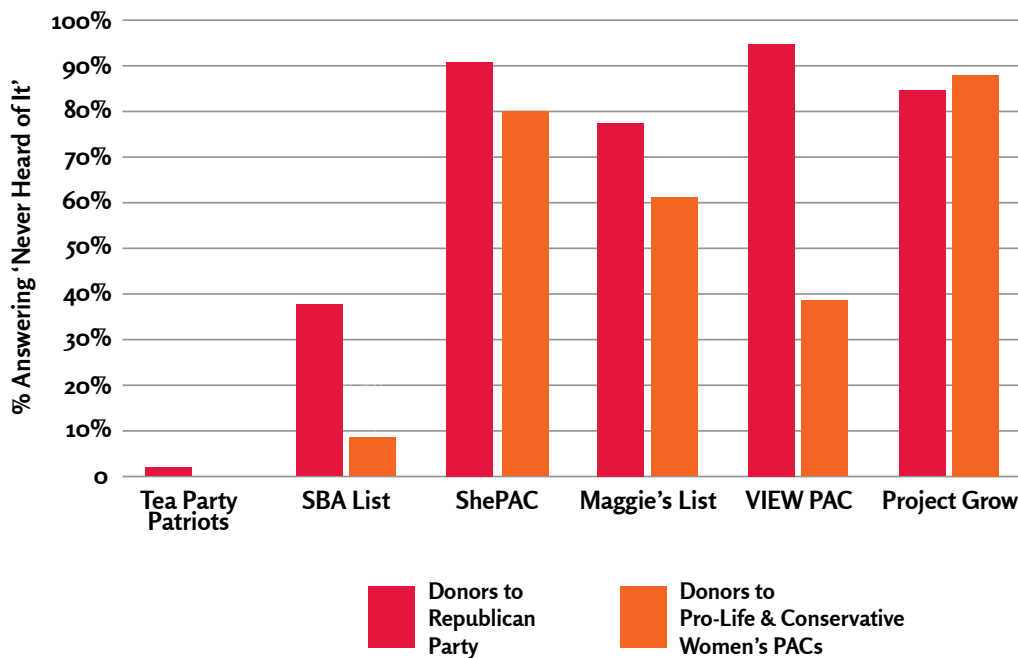


Infrastructure

Female Republican candidates generally have greater difficulty than their Democratic counterparts raising money during their primary campaigns, mainly because of fragmented support from the party, PACs, and donors. Political parties are hesitant to get involved in primary elections, and while there are several conservative PACs, none has the size or clout of EMILY's List (the best known Democratic PAC for women) to support female GOP candidates during the primary election.

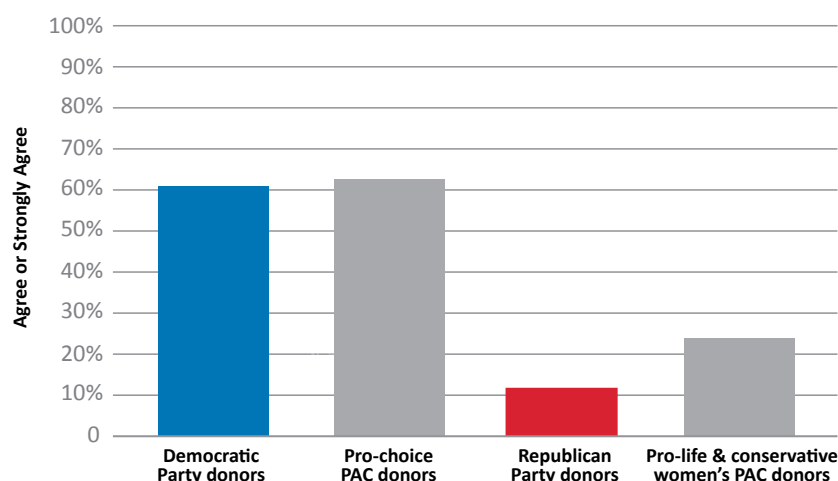
Democratic women running for the House of Representatives in 2014 raised more money than Republican women during all phases of the primary election cycle.⁵ While PACs nearly doubled the funds they provided to all candidates between 2000 and 2012, these funds are rarely available during primaries. As part of our research into Republican women in 2015, Political Parity supported political scientists Melody Crowder-Meyer and Rosalyn Cooperman, who produced a comprehensive survey ("The National Supporters Survey") of donors to PACs, especially those supporting women candidates. Their survey found that although most Democratic donors knew about EMILY's List, many conservative donors were unaware of Republican women's PACs. On average, only 10% of Republican Party donors knew about the PACs that support GOP women (Susan B. Anthony List, VIEW PAC, ShePAC, and Maggie's List). This unfamiliarity makes it more difficult for those groups to cultivate significant support, and therefore to help more women become candidates.⁶

Visibility of Groups Among Different Types of Donors



By contrast, 93% of Democratic Party donors had heard of EMILY's List, demonstrating this organization's reach through the party's donor base. For donors and PACs that support Democratic policy positions, an EMILY's List endorsement signals that a candidate is credible, electorally viable, and worthy of funding. The underrepresentation of women in politics is a compelling catalyst for Democratic funders, but far less so for Republicans. The National Supporters Survey found that more than 60% of donors to Democratic women's PACs and to the Democratic Party agreed with the statement "women's underrepresentation is a product of fewer opportunities," compared to only 11% of Republican Party donors.⁷

Is Women's Underrepresentation In Politics Due To Fewer Opportunities?



Source: 2014 National Supporters Survey

Inattention

Greater recruitment and development of female candidates could truly advance women's representation. Democrats have outpaced Republicans in nominating women for office. With little candidate development at the local level or explicit party engagement in primaries, Republicans are not yet establishing a clear pathway for future female officeholders at the national level. In *Primary Hurdles*, we refer to this barrier as “inattention.”⁸

Interviews with elected Republican women and party leaders confirm that the GOP struggles to recruit, coach, and retain women. The Republicans have no national-level program to develop female candidates and provide them with the skills and tools they need to win primaries for high office. As one female Republican leader stated, “We haven’t spent time developing a farm team. The Democrats have done a better job encouraging women to run for municipal and state office, and it puts them in a position to run in congressional seats.”⁹ The results of this inattention are reflected in outcomes. Even in open-seat elections, Republican men are more likely to win than Republican women in the primaries.

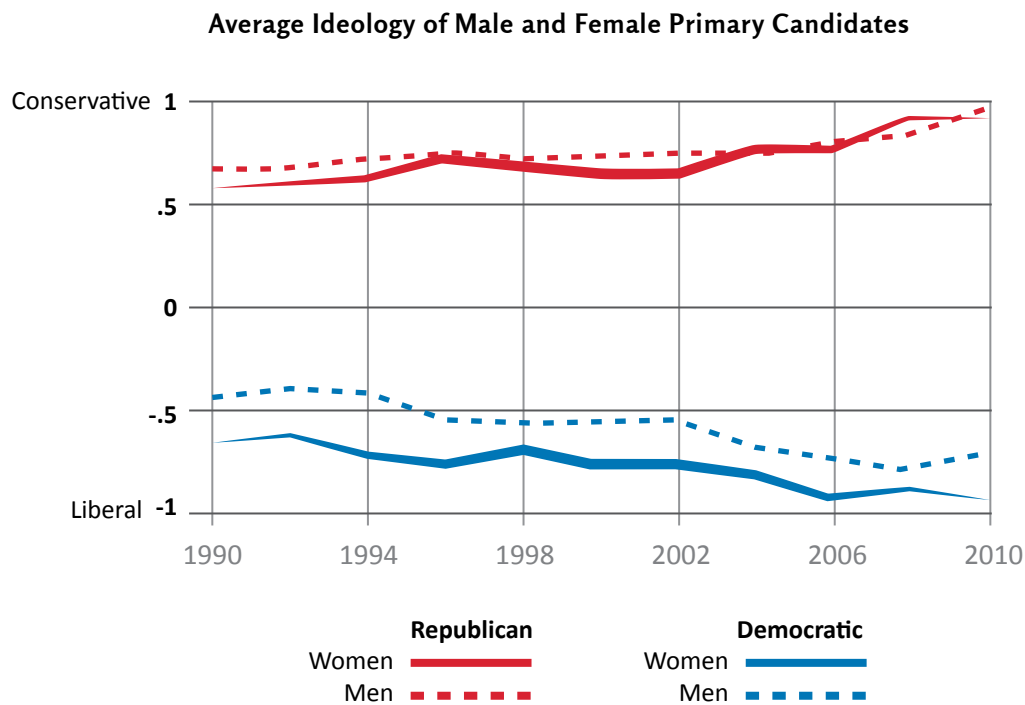
For the US Senate especially, candidate development processes seem to differ for Democratic and Republican women. Looking at all 20 women serving in the US Senate in 2016, Republican woman senators had held fewer local or state offices than their Democratic counterparts. Democratic women seem to consistently rise through the ranks — from local to state to national office. Republican women have a shorter path to higher office, often holding only one state or local office before being elected to the US Senate. Studies suggest that women are harder to recruit than male candidates. Women are also less likely to be asked to run than males. Even if they are asked, they are unlikely to say “yes” on the first ask. Thus, to get women in the candidate pool, different recruitment strategies are needed.¹⁰

In the National Supporters Survey, Republican men were more likely than other subgroups to say that female candidates are “emotional,” and that men are “better suited emotionally” for politics. This conception is detrimental at the primary level. Both Republicans and independents rated women as more likely to be “honest,” a quality all voters prize in a candidate. Republicans and independents thought female candidates would be better on “women’s” issues, but gave male candidates the advantage on defense and national security. For women to win among GOP electorates, and especially in primaries (where voters tend to be more conservative), Republican men need to be open to adjusting their perceptions of female candidates.

Republicans are beginning to develop the resources needed to promote women candidates. In the *Primary Hurdles* report, we suggest using as a model Indiana’s Lugar Series Program. Key elements of this program, which is named for former Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), are being replicated in several states to train GOP women candidates. The Republican State Leadership Committee has also instituted a major effort to build women’s strength in lower-level offices. As a Republican congresswoman noted, “When we have a high-quality leader running, there needs to be a commitment to get her through the primary. We’ve always adopted a hands-off approach. There’s growing recognition that we can’t sit out primaries.”¹¹

Ideology

Another portion of the *Primary Hurdles* study, conducted by political scientist Danielle Thomsen, looked at the ideologies of candidates for the US House. Thomsen found that in the past two decades, Americans, and the candidates and elected officials seeking to represent them, have diverged sharply. Conservatives have grown more conservative and liberals more liberal.



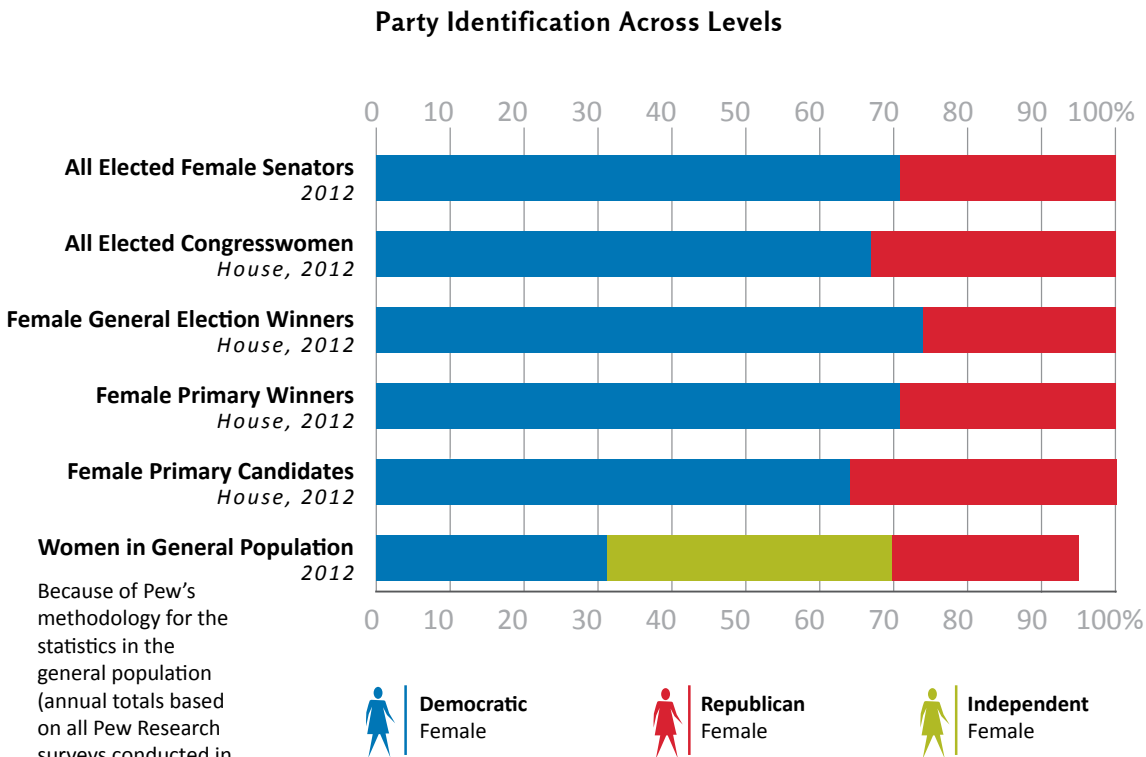
Often perceived to be more moderate, women are less likely to win in GOP primaries where more conservative Republican voters control outcomes. But in fact, as Thomsen’s analysis found, female Republican candidates are just as conservative as their male counterparts.¹² Ideology scores for more than 10,000 congressional candidates over the past two decades reveal no significant differences by gender among Republicans. The only gender difference, as the chart demonstrates, is on the Democratic side, where female Democrats on average are somewhat more liberal than their male partisan counterparts. Republican women and men, as of 2010, were similarly conservative. GOP women struggle, however, to overcome the public perception that they are more moderate.¹³

Conservative credentials should benefit GOP women in the primaries, where voters tend to be more conservative. But that may not translate to support in the general election. Polls by both Gallup and Pew suggest that 35% to 39% of voters consider themselves moderates.

As one GOP state leader noted, “I think there is a difference between what a primary voter is looking for and what a general election voter is looking for. Primary voters tend to be male and white. There are more married women. The general electorate is more diverse and includes more single women. It may be harder for some people to get through the primary, but they might be more successful and a stronger general election candidate.”¹⁴

If GOP women could succeed in the primaries, their potential as general election candidates may be as strong, or stronger, than that of male candidates. Some GOP leaders have recognized this phenomenon. With razor-thin electoral margins in many statewide races, independent voters are a coveted voting bloc. Political Parity’s research reveals that twice as many independent women as independent men said they generally prefer a female candidate to a male.¹⁵

Republican and independent voters perceived an advantage for female candidates on several key traits. When asked about the most important characteristics for political leaders, independent and Republican voters named honesty and problem-solving as their top two. Both Republican and independent voters saw women as better than men on these characteristics. Republicans and independents also considered women better at compromise.¹⁶ Finding ways to identify female GOP candidates who embody these qualities could help the GOP elect more candidates to national office and increase women’s representation.



Sources: Pew 2012 Values Survey, CAWP data

Identifying Solutions

Achieving political parity must be a bipartisan effort. Currently the Democrats field twice as many women candidates for Congress and governorships as the Republicans. If the GOP is to overcome this gap, it must systematically address the barriers for female Republican candidates. Scholars have suggested that the GOP needs to focus on recruitment, development, and collaboration. While the solutions identified below often speak to the weaknesses in Republican support of female candidates, many of the ideas could apply to the Democratic Party as well, especially in states where Democratic women have not achieved significant electoral success.

To increase recruitment of women, Republican leaders could:

- Assist with fundraising
- Look beyond informal (primarily male) networks
- Invite more women into GOP leadership circles to give them access to formal party networks
- Map open seats, matching female candidates to districts where they are more likely to succeed. Focusing on states that already have strong female representation at the federal level or strong Republican women in the state legislature could provide new candidates with a stronger springboard.
- Engage political mentors
- Work with current female Republican officeholders to identify strong women who could succeed them¹⁷

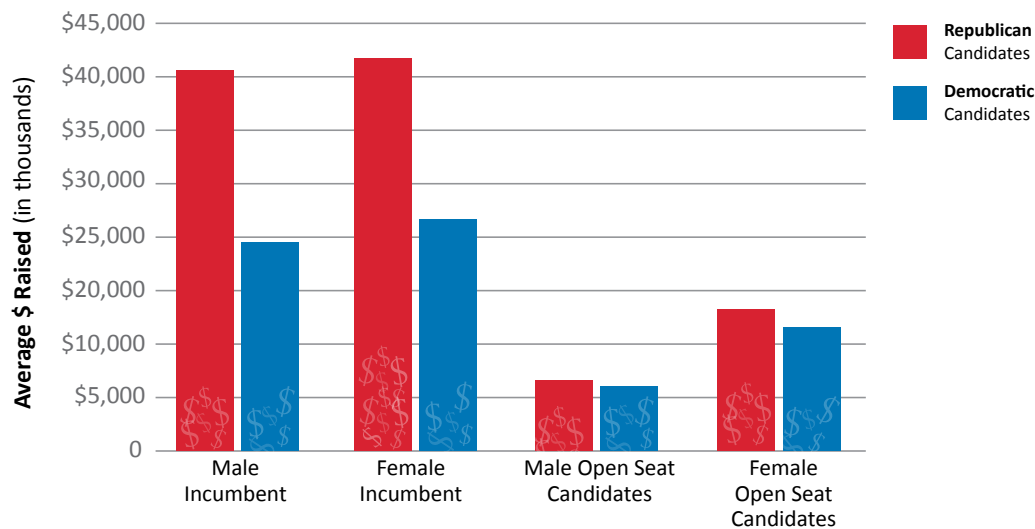
Assistance With Fundraising

Potential female candidates in both parties cited fundraising as the biggest hurdle when considering or completing a run for office.¹⁸ Historically, women candidates have not raised as much money as men. In recent election cycles, however, research shows that women can raise the same amount of money as men when running in comparable elections, e.g., both running for open seats.¹⁹ Overcoming the idea that women lag as fundraisers is essential to getting more women candidates of both parties into national offices.

Once women — both Democrats and Republicans — perceive that they can secure the funds needed for a successful campaign, they will need training and help identifying donor networks, especially within the GOP. Only 25% of all donors to political campaigns are women, who contribute 16% of campaign funds to GOP candidates, and 30% to Democrats.²⁰

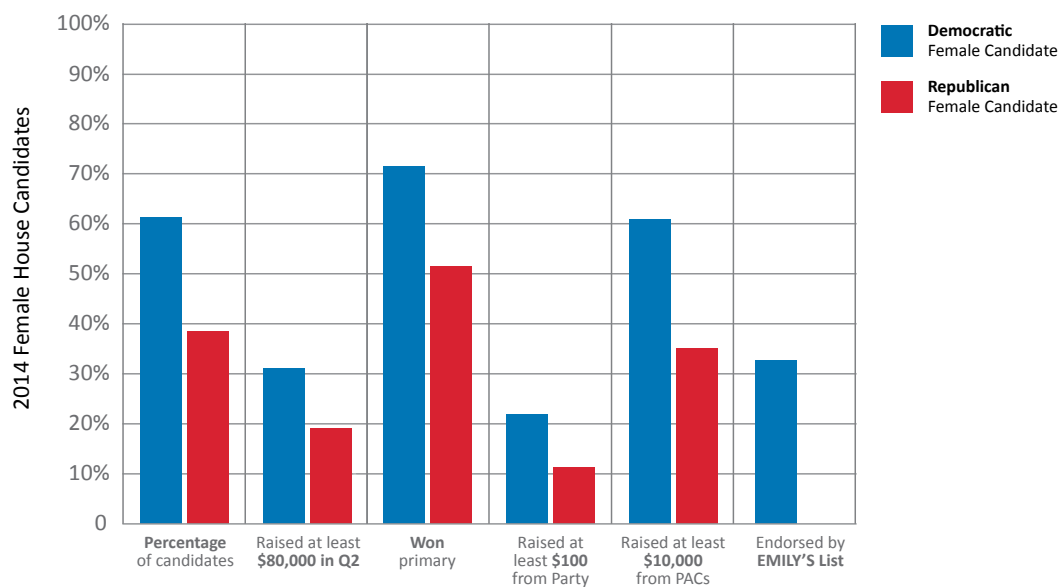
More collaboration within the party is a third possible strategy to elect more GOP women to national office. Multiple Republican PACs now support female candidates, but they each have very low visibility. Collaboration among these groups to increase their recognition within the GOP will be essential to increasing support for women candidates. This collaboration could translate to election victories and greater political parity at the national level.

Leadership PAC Contributions to House Candidate



Source: CAWP and Center for Responsive Politics analysis of FEC data; analysis applies only to incumbents and candidates running for open seats, not to candidates challenging incumbents. Data through the second quarter of 2014 only.

House Candidate Outcomes: Electoral and Financial (2014 Averages)



Source: Parity Data Collection from FEC reports and other public sources

Building and Populating a Candidate Pool

While many women serve in elective office at the local or state level, only a small number of them move up. By mentoring and providing training for these state and local leaders to run for national positions, both Republicans and Democrats could increase the number of experienced, qualified women candidates.²¹ A successful Republican network for female candidates might include party leaders, including men, and support from non-partisan women’s leadership networks.

Conclusion

Political parity can only be achieved if both the Democratic and Republican parties prioritize supporting women candidates and officeholders. The documented differences between the parties in women’s candidacy success rates suggest that existing party structures, processes, and priorities are key barriers.

The electoral success of women in recent years should convince both parties that supporting women candidates is a demonstrated path to electoral victories. Self-interest can be a powerful motivator and should drive both the Republican and Democratic parties towards greater support of female candidates.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

- [GOP Women in Congress. Why so few?](#)
- [Report: GOP women face high hurdles to office](#)

Endnotes

1

Political Parity 2015

2

Political Parity 2015

3

IPU 2017

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless and Fox 2010; Political Parity 2014; Baer and Hartmann 2014

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015; see also Sanbonmatsu 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015; see also Political Parity 2014

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Political Parity 2015

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Political Parity 2015

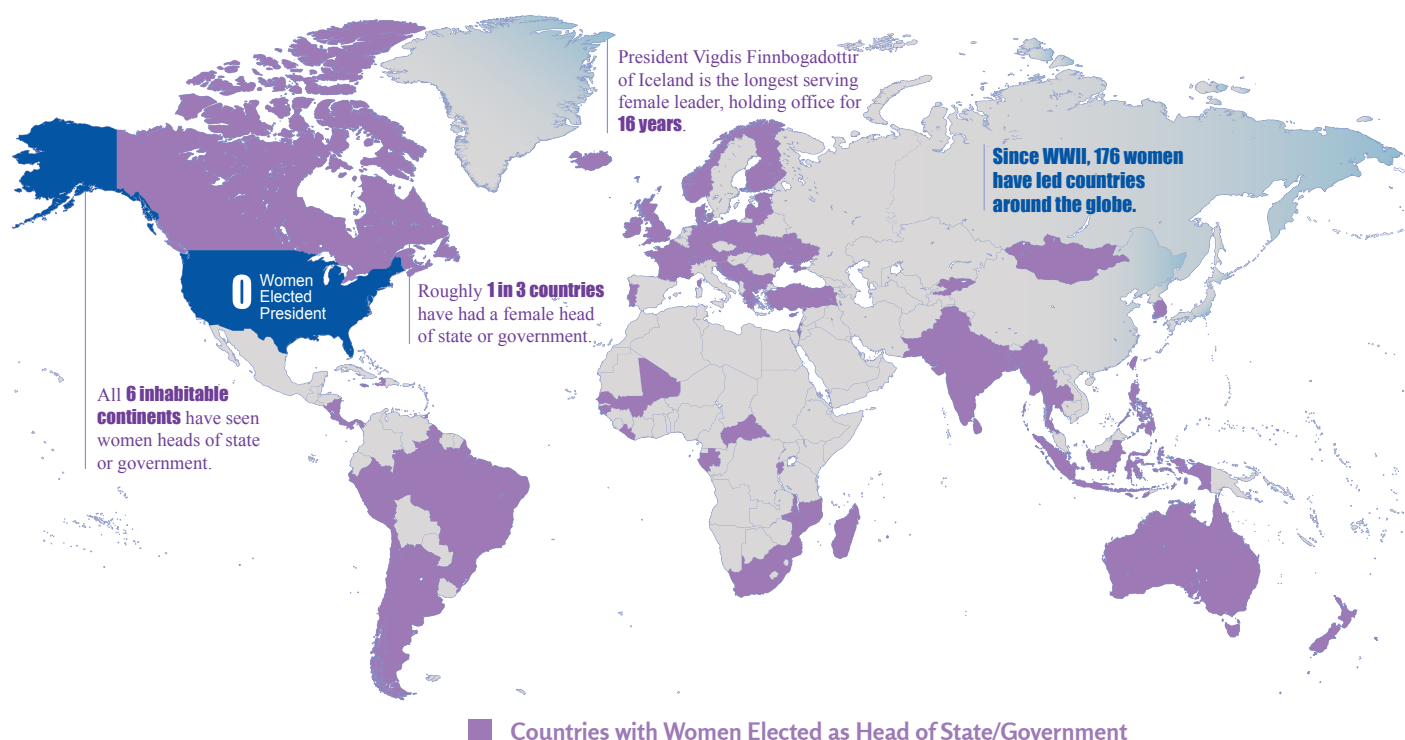
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Political Parity 2015; Political Parity 2014; Sanbonmatsu 2015

CHAPTER 7

A Woman President

Nearly one in three countries worldwide has elected a female head of state or government. With Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton's defeat in November 2016, the United States is still not yet one of them. Since World War II, 99 women have led countries around the globe. President Vigdis Finnbogadóttir of Iceland, who held office for 16 years, is the longest-serving female leader to date. In 1960, Sri Lanka elected the world's first female prime minister — Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Fourteen years later, in 1974, Isabel Martínez de Perón of Argentina was the first woman in the world to ever hold the title "president." Eighteen women are currently elected heads of state or government in their nations.



Andorra	Canada	Georgia	Latvia	Nepal	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Tannu Tuva
Antigua and Barbuda	Central African Republic	Germany	Liberia	New Zealand	San Marino	Thailand
Argentina	Ceylon	Greece	Lithuania	Nicaragua	Senegal	The Bahamas
Australia	Chile	Grenada	Macedonia	Northern Cyprus	Serbia	Transkei
Austria	China	Guinea-Bissau	Madagascar	Norway	Singapore	Transnistria
Bahamas	Costa Rica	Guyana	Malawi	Pakistan	Slovakia	Trinidad and Tobago
Bangladesh	Croatia	Haiti	Mali	Panama	Slovenia	Turkey
Barbados	Denmark	Iceland	Malta	Paraguay	South Africa	Ukraine
Belize	Dominica	India	Marshall Islands	Peru	South Korea	United Kingdom
Bolivia	East Germany	Indonesia	Mauritius	Philippines	Sri Lanka	Yugoslavia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ecuador	Ireland	Moldova	Poland	Switzerland	
Brazil	Estonia	Israel	Mongolia	Portugal	São Tomé and Príncipe	
Bulgaria	Finland	Jamaica	Mozambique	Romania	Taiwan	
Burundi	France	Kosovo	Myanmar	Rwanda		
	Gabon	Kyrgyzstan	Namibia	Saint Lucia		

While most Americans think a woman will be elected president in their lifetimes, few American women have sought the presidency. Since 1964, Republican and Democratic women have competed for the presidential nomination in 10 campaign cycles — Shirley Chisholm, Patricia Schroeder, Carol Moseley Braun, and Hillary Clinton as Democrats and Margaret Chase Smith, Michele Bachmann, and Carly Fiorina as Republicans. Many smaller parties have nominated women as presidential candidates, but only the two-time Green Party nominee, Jill Stein, gained significant visibility as a national candidate. No female candidate for president has broken the 500,000-vote mark except Hillary Clinton, who was the only female major party nominee and garnered over 65 million votes.¹ In fact, she defeated Republican Donald Trump in the nationwide popular ballot but lost due to the Electoral College vote. Why has the path to the presidency been so difficult for American women?

Pathways to the Presidency

Just as there are pathways for candidates who run for Congress or governorships, there have been a number of pathways to the presidency in American history, including:

	Congress	State Governor	Vice President	Major Military Role	Cabinet Secretaries
Of the 44 U.S. PRESIDENTS	25	17	14	15	8
WOMEN have only been active in	322	39	0	<10%	53
	12,244 people have served in Congress since its inception ² , but only 322 of them have been women, and women have only entered the Capitol as elected members since 1916, when Jeannette Rankin of Montana became the first woman elected to the House. It was not until the 102 nd Congress (1991-1993) that women crossed the 10% threshold in Congress. ³	39 women have been elected governor, but it was not until 1975, after three women married to former governors had won elections to succeed their husbands, that Ella Grasso of Connecticut won election as governor in her own right.		Until December of 2015, women were legally barred from serving in military combat roles (which is a common path to promotion), and women still make up less than 10% of top military leadership. ⁴	Francis Perkins was the first of 33 women to serve in the president's Cabinet, beginning her service as Secretary of Labor in 1933 under Franklin Roosevelt. In 1977, Jimmy Carter was the first president to appoint multiple women to his Cabinet.

Since the late 1970s a significant number of women have begun to move into the elected and appointed positions in government that would qualify them to run for president. Of the eight modern Democratic and Republican female candidates for president, seven served in the House, and Hillary Clinton served in the Senate and in the Cabinet. Only Carly Fiorina had never held elective office, but she had business experience as a CEO, a fairly common pathway to politics for men.

Until the election of Donald Trump in 2016, all successful presidential candidates had either political or military experience prior to nomination. Both of these pathways are still more common for men than for women. While the number of women in the US military has been rising steadily, women still make up only about 15% of all serving military personnel, and less than 10% of top leadership.³ In terms of previous political experience, nearly 40% (17) of the 45 presidents were governors first – and yet few women have served or are currently serving in the top state offices.

Of the 50 states in 2018, only six (18%) have female governors. Women are still only about a fifth of sitting members of Congress, a quarter of state legislators, and about 20% of big-city mayors.⁴ If presidents are recruited from either of these common pathways, then, we are more likely to see male than female candidates.

Structural Barriers

Because Hillary Clinton was the only female candidate for president who campaigned through two full primary seasons and the first to become a major party nominee, there is little data on women as presidential candidates. We can, however, develop hypotheses about the challenges viable female presidential candidates might face, based on the barriers women confront when competing for other elective offices. Many of these are magnified in the presidential race — multiple party-controlled primaries, long campaign seasons⁵, lack of public funding⁶, and high demands for fundraising⁷ all make seeking our nation's highest elected office more difficult for women. In most parliamentary systems, women candidates face none of these issues — there are no primaries, election seasons are very short (on average, 4-6 weeks), and campaigns are publicly funded.⁸ The primary system in the US is often the critical hurdle for Republican women candidates in particular, but also makes life difficult for women on the Democratic side.⁹ This is certainly the case for presidential hopefuls.

Of the seven women who have entered the presidential primaries in the two major parties, only Hillary Clinton has made it through the entire primary process. Patricia Schroeder entered the race too late to be added to primary ballots. Shirley Chisholm and Margaret Chase Smith both ran before the modern primary system developed in the 1970s. All of the other candidates lacked the financial and organizational resources to stay in the race until the nominating convention. How does the presidential primary process especially disadvantage women candidates? What kind of changes could be made in the primary system to enhance outcomes for women?

One of the most critical perceived barriers for women seeking elective office has been fundraising. In 2012, the presidential campaign cost \$2.6 billion. The 2016 campaign cost nearly as much (close to \$2.4 billion).¹⁰ As noted earlier, House races cost \$1.6 million on average, and Senate campaigns average \$6.7 million. Yet, as we found in the *Shifting Gears* research, most women state legislators have never raised more than \$100,000.¹¹ The sky-high cost of presidential campaigns, the lack of use of public funding since 2008, and the increasing clout of PACs (which have no limits on contributions or spending since the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision) mean that the single highest perceived barrier to women candidates (raising enough money to be competitive) is rapidly growing.

It may also be true that women as candidates would face a more difficult road than men in certain states because of demographics. We know from Political Parity's research on congressional districts that women have had the most electoral success in districts that are compact, diverse, middle income, younger, and contain urban areas.¹² In the presidential

campaign, however, candidates also need success in states that do not have these characteristics – large swaths of the country, in key electoral areas, are rural, mostly white, and working-class. Women can and do win elections in these areas (as the recent election of several women in rural states like West Virginia, Iowa, Alaska, and others attest), but it is more of an uphill battle; conservative women have the best shot.

As noted in earlier chapters, women have found more electoral success in states where multiple women have been elected to statewide office already. Yet a woman running for president must compete in 16 states that have not elected a woman to the Senate or the governorship in the modern political era (since 1992), and in 22 others that have only elected one woman to either high office in that time period. Thus, in the large majority of states (38 of the 50), if a woman candidate for president won a primary or general election, she would be only the first or second woman to win a top-level statewide contest there in a generation, or perhaps ever. Many of the “swing” states critical to recent presidential contests are among these, including Florida, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Media Coverage

The rarity of women as political candidates makes judging media coverage of them difficult, but we do possess some useful studies on women running in the modern era. We know, for example, that media coverage of Hillary Clinton’s campaign in 2008 included extremely sexist commentary, especially on cable networks.¹³ When compared to the coverage of Barack Obama in 2008, Clinton’s was more negative.¹⁴ Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton were very different candidates in 2008, but stories about them included many of the same gender stereotypes. Coverage of Sarah Palin was atypical of that of vice presidential candidates, demonstrably more negative and more focused on her gender and her family than that of Joe Biden.¹⁵ The 2008 campaign provided a preview of gendered coverage shaped by the popular media and social media. Images of Hillary Clinton in the blogosphere were sometimes framed with elements associated with pornography,¹⁶ and much of the public gained their images of Sarah Palin from portrayals by Tina Fey on *Saturday Night Live* rather than from actual news.¹⁷

For the 2016 presidential campaign, The Barbara Lee Family Foundation and the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University established “Presidential Gender Watch,” a news service and blog where media coverage and other aspects of the presidential race were analyzed. The web site, www.presidentialgenderwatch.org, has wide-ranging data and analysis on gender and presidential politics. Over all, the researchers found, gender was highly prevalent for both major-party candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, with assessments of Trump’s campaign especially focused on his masculinity (and interrupted by the frequent accusations against him of sexism and even sexual violence against women).

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For Hillary Clinton, although the majority of American voters indicated a willingness to vote for a female president, gender also mattered in sometimes subtle and negative ways. The final “Presidential Gender Watch 2016” report explains:

Presidential Gender Watch guest expert Melanye Price... used Clinton’s candidacy—and reactions to it—to demonstrate the dangers of “aversive sexism,” where discriminatory beliefs or behavior are justified on the basis of factors other than gender. Dan Cassino offered more explicit evidence of “gender role threat” negatively affecting Clinton’s ratings among men in an experimental setting, finding that reminders of gender role disruption caused a decrease in Clinton’s male support... Women candidates have historically faced disproportionate coverage and commentary on things like hair, hemlines, husbands, and the horse race compared with what their male counterparts experience.¹⁸

Voter Attitudes

Voter attitudes towards women presidential candidates have changed over the years. In 2012, 95% of US voters said they would vote for a woman.¹⁹ While the public in general sees female candidates in a positive light, some voters, especially those who are deeply conservative, less educated, and older, still demonstrate an unwillingness to support a female presidential candidate. The voters most likely to support a woman are Democrats, liberal, younger, less religious, and those with more education.²⁰

Conclusion

Hillary Clinton’s failure to become the first woman president of the United States, despite qualifications equal to or better than most successful male presidential candidates, suggests that a double standard still exists for women running for the top office. If we want to see women in the White House, and not just as First Ladies, many barriers need to be addressed and subsequently lowered or eliminated.

These barriers do not just apply to women running for president; a presidential race magnifies and illuminates the many challenges all women candidates and officeholders face as they seek to become elected public servants. As White House Project founder Marie Wilson and others have pointed out, we are limiting our political talent pool if we put up barriers to female candidates. Surely in this time of great challenges, both in our country and around the world, we should strive to utilize 100% of the available political talent.²¹ Women, who have only just begun to seriously consider running for president, may be exactly the leaders we need.

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Political Parity partnered with Marianne Schnall, author of *What Will It Take to Make a Woman President?*, to create a variety of multimedia resources to address issues around women presidential candidates. The following blog posts cover several:

[She’s More than a Symbol](#)

[She Looks to the Future](#)

[She’s Young and Restless](#)

[She Talks Dirty: Money and Politics](#)

[What Will It Take to Make A Woman President](#)

These blogs provide insights into top political leadership issues in Germany and France:

[From misfit to the most powerful woman in Germany](#)

[Q&A with Heather Arnet, Director of Madame Presidenta](#)

[Blog: A Woman President? Support Women](#)

Marianne Schnall interviewed many individuals involved in presidential politics. The following podcasts and interviews provide information, insights and questions about the gendered nature of presidential politics.

[3 Steps Closer to the Oval Office](#) – An introduction to the interviews

[Pat Schroeder](#) – Former congresswoman from Colorado, presidential campaign organizer and presidential candidate

[Carol Moseley-Braun](#) – Former senator from Illinois and presidential candidate

[Jill Stein](#) – Physician and Green Party presidential candidate

[Michael Kimmel](#) – Distinguished Professor of Sociology at SUNY Stony Brook specializing in gender studies

[Anita McBride](#) – Executive in Residence at American University’s Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies

[Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison](#) – Former senator from Texas

[Senator Kirsten Gillibrand](#) – Senator from New York

[Nancy Pelosi](#) – Congresswoman from California and Democratic leader in the House of Representatives

[How can we break America’s highest glass ceiling?](#)

Endnotes

- 1 CNN 2017
- 2 CAWP 2018
- 3 McGregor 2014; ABC News 2014
- 4 CAWP 2018
- 5 Shames 2017
- 6 Cigane and Ohman 2014
- 7 Shames 2017; Bryner and Weber 2013; Dittmar, Bryner, and Cooper 2014
- 8 Shames 2017, Chapter 3
- 9 Political Parity 2015
- 10 Center for Responsive Politics 2017
- 11 Political Parity 2014
- 12 Political Parity 2016
- 13 Carroll 2009
- 14 Lawrence and Rose 2010, 147
- 15 Miller and Peake 2013
- 16 Lawrence and Rose 2010, 157
- 17 Beail and Longworth 2013
- 18 CAWP and Barbara Lee Family Foundation 2017
- 19 Vavreck 2015
- 20 Dolan 2004; see also Political Parity 2016
- 21 Wilson 2006



Encourage **ORGANIZATIONS** to **SUPPORT** candidates earlier in their careers, and to **FOCUS** on filling the lower-level pipeline.

Early, lower-level campaigns are where women are often most in need of gap funding.

CHAPTER 8

Pathways to Parity

Political change does not happen by accident. When Thurgood Marshall and Charles Hamilton Houston studied the realities of life for African-Americans in the 1930s, they developed a legal strategy for ending Jim Crow segregation in the South. Step by step, they challenged the existing system through the work of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Gay and lesbian human rights activists developed a strategy and created organizations like Human Rights Watch and Lambda Legal to guide their march toward equality. Those who ran the suffrage movement in the US worked slowly but strategically for more than 70 years to finally get women the right to vote.

For women to reach political parity in US elective office, many pathways and institutional vehicles have been established, yet there are many milestones still to reach. Since 2009, Political Parity has identified the particular needs of women candidates, partnering with other organizations to create new institutions and projects to address gender inequities.

Name It. Change It., a partnership between the Women's Media Center, She Should Run, and several foundations (Swanee Hunt Alternatives, the Embrey Foundation, and the Barbara Lee Family Foundation), produced ground-breaking research that reversed the advice long given to women candidates facing gender bias in their campaigns. Latina community activists, candidates, and elected officials identified specific challenges – and opportunities – to be addressed in order for their community to increase its political representation. In 2014, Political Parity partnered with the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda to create LatinasRepresent and support Latinas' leadership in public service, including elected and appointed office.

In *Shifting Gears*, Political Parity identified critical steps to advance women's political leadership at multiple levels of office. Achieving parity will require complementary efforts by many organizations to attract and support candidates, as well as to advocate for systemic reform.

Develop Long-Term Strategies

In parliamentary systems, political parties or governments themselves often drive strategies to achieve gender parity. These approaches have included creating quotas for the percentage of women candidates included in party lists, using the two-list system to promote women, public funding for all candidates (which disproportionately benefits women), and moving women between parliament and cabinet positions to build their credentials.¹ In the United States, this kind of discipline, party support, and political will has been largely absent. Women candidates at all levels have identified political party structures and lack of support as key barriers.

While reform of party structures and processes could help, alternative strategies should also be considered. These approaches should look beyond the two- and four-year election cycles for local, state, and national offices. The following ideas, already underway in many places through a variety of nonprofit organizations and foundations, strengthen the path to office for women candidates:

- **Support women who have the potential to serve in Congress and start recruiting at the local and state level** many years before a congressional seat opens to help possible candidates build the elective experience necessary for a candidacy.

- **Identify local and state systems that already have capable women serving in elective and appointive office.** Work with these current officeholders to build a pool of prospective candidates for higher elective office.
- **Develop succession plans for seats that women currently hold.** Out of the 70 women in Congress who left office between 1980 and 2012, only 15 were succeeded by another woman.² Working with incumbent women to identify possible female successors early could help women candidates when they run for these open seats. Incumbency is the highest hurdle to political parity. Succession planning for key offices could turn this liability into an asset where women are incumbents.
- **Identify congressional districts in all states that may have favorable characteristics for women** — urban, well-educated, diverse, middle income — and position women to run in those districts when an incumbent could be weak or when the seats open.
- **Expand recruitment strategies.** Traditional party recruitment has not brought enough women in the pool, especially in the Republican Party.³ Parties would benefit by moving outside the typical networks from which candidates usually emerge (which tend to favor men), and putting women in charge of recruitment (as the Democrats have done at the DCCC, greatly increasing the number of women candidates).
- **Encourage organizations to support candidates earlier in their careers, and to focus on filling the lower-level pipeline.** Candidates who are preparing for a first run for office (which is usually local or state office) are rarely supported by national organizations, even though that first office is a critical stepping stone that can prepare them to move up through the political pipeline to eventually run for Congress or another national-level office. Those early, lower-level campaigns are where women often most need gap funding.
- **Support strong candidates at all levels, including those who lose their first race.** A first run often gives candidates critical experience, name recognition, and the network necessary for a second, successful run. Identify “way stations” where these candidates can gain critical experience and broader recognition while waiting for the next election cycle.

Training

Women officeholders identified training as a critical element for successful campaigns. In particular, women-centered training was the second most mentioned area of support for women’s groups.⁴ While political parties are increasing the training they provide to candidates, these programs often do not acknowledge or adjust to gender differences. Additionally, many women have found party venues to be unwelcoming, if not discriminatory. While party training programs should be made more hospitable to women, campaign training programs offered by women’s organizations provide distinct resources and perspectives.

Young women candidates in particular could benefit from national women’s groups. They often feel isolated and distanced from the women’s community. In interviews with Baer and Hartmann, they noted that national women’s groups do not focus on local elections, increasing the distance between these organizations and younger women entering politics. Many organizations have sprung up in the last 10-15 years to provide training and support to women candidates, including several that focus on local elections and younger women (e.g., Running Start, IGNITE, and EMILY’s List Rising Stars program). Prospective female candidates need guidance to identify the training program that is best for them plus a roadmap to access the services provided.

The following strategies could improve the value women candidates receive from training programs (whether mixed-gender or focused on women). Many of these ideas are “best practice” lessons learned from existing candidate training programs targeted to women, and could be replicated:

- **Women’s motivation to run often differs from their male counterparts’ reasons.** Recruiting and training women as candidates often requires a focus on specific and broad policy goals, and an emphasis on how politics can help people and make lives better.⁵
- **Many existing campaign training programs are geared towards political newcomers.** Running for higher office requires new skills and resources. Specialized training for women who want to shift from local or district-level politics to state-wide or national office could fill a critical gap.
- **Campaign training programs should encourage potential candidates** (especially those just thinking of city council or school board, where women usually start in politics) to think broadly about the wide variety of available offices, including less commonly known offices like comptroller, commissioner, and judgeships.
- **Once trained, women candidates have proven to be very effective fundraisers.** Current officeholders cite training programs focused on fundraising as a major need, and this instruction cannot be “one size fits all.”⁶ Specialized preparation, especially coupled with assistance building donor networks, is needed for candidates seeking higher office, where fundraising burdens are greater.

Mentoring

As participants in Political Parity’s *Shifting Gears* noted, women in elective office at all levels — not just first-time candidates — need mentors.⁷ Mentors can help all women either seeking or serving in elective office. Women candidates recognize the importance of access to both formal and informal political networks and processes. Female elected officials cited discrimination by the “old boys network,” but they could not identify a comparable “old girls network” to which they could turn for guidance, especially when gearing up for campaigns for statewide office or for Congress.

- **One useful approach is cross-level mentoring.** National networks for female elected officials are focused on women in like positions — mayors, state legislators, county officeholders, etc. Women who want to move from the state legislature to the Congress would therefore not normally have access to networks of female candidates and officeholders at the congressional level.
- **Some individuals are natural mentors, but most prospective mentors and mentees could benefit from training.** Executive coaching is often provided in the private sector and could be a model for mentoring in the political arena.
- **Identifying the link between individual mentoring and the development of essential informal networks** among women candidates and elected officials may help women see that mentoring is not just an individual act, but one that has much broader implications. This insight could encourage busy women to find more time for mentoring.
- **Many women elected officials at the state level feel their desire for public service is in conflict with the idea of politics as a career.** Women-to-women mentoring programs could help women frame the pursuit of higher office as an extension of their dedication to public service.
- **Mentoring around fundraising could provide a critical boost to achieving parity in higher offices.** Women candidates would benefit from advice from mentors as they begin to cultivate personal relationships with major donors.⁸

Increase Public Awareness of the Continuing Gendered Nature of Politics

Women officeholders cite widespread examples of gender stereotypes that they have encountered in their political careers. This is true for women of all ages. This Reader highlights several of the negative outcomes of that discrimination, from candidate discouragement to unfavorable electoral outcomes. Political Parity has sought to create a cultural shift that ends the implicit acceptance of gender stereotypes and sexist behavior. Women candidates and elected officials cannot do this on their own.

- Social media campaigns like Name It. Change It. can play an important role in resetting norms and changing behavior.
- Gendered stereotypes are most common in elections where a woman is running for office for the first time. Positive gender stereotypes replace the negative as women have served in a wider range of political offices. Thus, monitoring and responding to gender stereotypes is even more essential in races where women are running for positions previously held only by men. Targeted support from national organizations in such contexts can improve these candidates' chances of electoral success.
- In 2016 women presidential candidates had to campaign in 18 states that have not elected women governors or congresswomen in at least 25 years. These are the states where gender stereotypes are most likely to gain traction. Monitoring and responding to sexist media coverage in these states could be critical to the success of a woman running for president.

Support Campaign Consulting Services for Women Candidates

Women holding state and local offices identified campaign consulting services as a significant gap in their toolkits. This lack of access to professional consultants, especially those with experience working with women candidates, has several impacts. Most first-time candidates depend on family and friends in their informal “kitchen cabinets” rather than receiving advice from experienced professionals.⁹ Seventy-five percent of first-time candidates made their decision to run exclusively on the basis of consultation with family and friends, meaning their campaigns kicked off without the benefit of a strategic assessment or plan.¹⁰ Other candidates find that the services provided by party consultants are more expensive than those same services on the open market. Finally, some current officeholders have found their party-recommended consultants to be sexist and discriminatory.¹¹

Seventy-five percent of first-time candidates made their decision to run exclusively on the basis of consultation with family and friends, meaning their campaigns kicked off without the benefit of a strategic assessment or plan.

Suggestions and best-practices for improving access to consulting services include:

- Tailor existing efforts to provide new candidates with a “Campaign in a Box” to better suit women candidates. These toolkits for first-time competitors often include templates for messaging, targeting voters, logistics checklists for events, recommendations for campaign services, and more helpful tools. For female candidates specifically, they could also include summaries of the useful research about specific challenges facing women running for office and some “best practices” strategies about how to overcome these.
- Identify consulting firms that have been particularly successful partners for women at different stages of their political careers.
- Include consultants in training programs where candidates with similar needs could join together to purchase services as a group.

Create a Village of Women’s Organizations

Multiple organizations exist at both the state and national level to promote political parity and support women candidates. Many have developed specific goals and strategies to reduce inequality in electoral politics. One of the most important goals of Political Parity was to provide greater coordination among existing groups, to maximize the impact of limited resources, coordinate recruitment and support through the pipeline, share research findings, and work toward shared goals. Even after Political Parity’s closure, these groups continue to work together in ways that maximize efficiency, knowledge, and resources. While this coordination may not yet reach the level of being “a woman’s village,”¹² it is helping to fill the pipeline with new female candidates in increasing rates.

Additionally, women candidates would benefit from greater support for voter registration and turn-out programs. Women vote at higher rates than men. Minority voters — both male and female — are more likely to support women candidates. In elections with thin margins, turnout of women and minority voters could result in more victories for women. Higher Heights, HOPE (Hispanas Organized for Political Equality), and other groups are doing exactly this, and their efforts to mobilize minority women are achieving success.

Explore Structural and Institutional Reforms

We must also consider structural barriers when addressing routes to political parity. As Political Parity’s *Shifting Gears* report posited, some of the challenges facing women thinking of running are about the “road conditions,” and are not solely caused by or the responsibility of female candidates (the “drivers” on that road).¹³ While reform at the national level may be daunting in this age of political gridlock, state and local reforms could enhance opportunities for women candidates and increase the number of women working towards positive policy change. Possible areas for reform:

- **Campaign finance:** Fundraising is the single largest barrier identified by women as they consider seeking higher office. While fundraising has become even more daunting since *Citizens United*, campaign finance reform may be achieved at the state level, such as has happened in Arizona and Maine, if not nationally.
- **Ballot access:** States that have more open voting procedures — same-day registration, automatic registration when issuing drivers licenses, mail-in ballots, simplified early voting procedures, or longer early voting periods — tend also to be states that support women candidates. While the causal relationship between these procedures and women elected officials is not clear, the correlation is strong. It is worth pursuing these reforms to expand ballot access for the sake of more democratic elections, and because greater inclusion of lower-income and minority voters tends to correlate with inclusion of women as candidates.

- **Change voting structures:** Establish more multi-member districts and ranked-choice voting. In some states, there are multi-member districts (more than one legislator represents the district). Women candidates have been more successful in these districts than in single-member districts.¹⁴ In Europe, multi-member districts have also helped increase women's representation. Promoting multi-member districts in state legislatures and at the local level could enhance parity for both women and minority candidates.¹⁵
- **Support the integrity of the Voting Rights Act and the creation of majority-minority districts, which have boosted political parity both for women and people of color.** Continued support for majority-minority districts should help enhance diversity in all legislative bodies — local, state, and national.

Develop More Family-Friendly Policies

Many countries have much more expansive policies that support families. While the primary goal of these policies is to support all families, they make it easier for both fathers and mothers to take on roles in the political arena that would otherwise be difficult because of family obligations. Because most elective offices at the local and state level in the US are part-time and poorly compensated, public service puts an extra burden on many families.

- **Promote policies to reduce the cost of childcare:** American families pay more for childcare than families in comparable developed democracies. A variety of public policies could alleviate this — higher tax credits, public subsidies for childcare, public pre-school beginning at age three or four, longer school days, and more. Any of these could make public service for younger parents a more viable option.
- **Promote more generous family leave policies:** The United States is one of the only developed democracies that does not provide paid family leave for both men and women in the case of childbirth, adoption, or family illness. Without the option of one or both parent(s) taking paid leave, engaging in public service with little or no compensation is very difficult, especially for women with young children. In this regard, the US would do well to follow the lead of its advanced, post-industrial democratic counterparts in promoting policies at all levels (local, state, and national) that recognize and understand the need of nearly everyone to occasionally take a step back from work to care for family members.

Conclusion

Since the 2016 elections, we've seen a groundswell of women running for office. Interest has surged in local, state, and national candidate training programs, especially those focusing on women as candidates, and more women have secured places on ballots and in office. Now that so many new candidates are stepping forward, we hope the research and ideas expressed in this Reader help those women, the people who support their recruitment and campaigns, and others whom we hope will follow them into public leadership.

Endnotes

- 1 Quota Project 2017
- 2 Political Parity 2016
- 3 Political Parity 2015
- 4 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 5 Political Parity 2014; Shames 2017; Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 6 Political Parity 2014
- 7 Political Parity 2014
- 8 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 9 Political Parity 2014; see also Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 10 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 11 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 12 Baer and Hartmann 2014
- 13 Political Parity 2014
- 14 RepresentWomen, 2017
- 15 RepresentWomen, 2017

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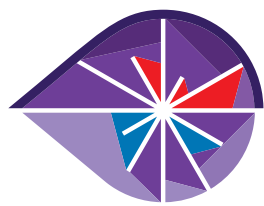
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