

## Women Candidates and their Campaigns

Campaign resources and favorable political opportunities have traditionally shaped women's election to office, and those factors remain essential today. Women are strategic about where, when, and how they run for office.<sup>1</sup> While all candidates need campaign resources, having encouragement and sufficient support seem to be even more important to women than to men.

Most current research about gender stereotypes is optimistic about voter support for women candidates.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, women candidates continue to navigate "gendered terrain" when they campaign.<sup>3</sup> The gendered terrain that women face can vary with political party and the type and level of elective office. Moreover, gender intersects with other factors, such as race/ethnicity.

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### WOMEN'S ELECTION TO OFFICE

Voter prejudice against women candidates does not appear to be a major factor in limiting women's election to office. Instead, studies of women's election to office often emphasize the structural constraint of incumbency: because most incumbents are male, the advance of women in politics depends on the existence of open-seat opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> The finding that women candidates are

equally competitive with men provides support for the notion that "when women run, women win." Therefore, it is the scarcity of women candidates rather than the poor performance of women candidates that seems to explain the lack of gender parity in officeholding.<sup>6</sup>

However, several other recent studies argue that when we look below the surface of women candidates' success rates, gender seems to shape election results in indirect ways—ways that put women at a disadvantage. Kathryn Pearson and Eric McGhee found that women congressional candidates appear to be more strategic than men in their entry decisions due to perceptions that they must be more qualified; they find that women are more likely than men to run with prior electoral experience.<sup>7</sup> Sarah Fulton introduced a new measure of candidate quality and argues that it is a missing variable in analyses of women's success rates.<sup>8</sup> She found that female incumbent congressional candidates must be more qualified in order to achieve the same vote share as male candidates.

Studies of women's success rates are based on the success of women candidates *where women have run*; but women are not equally likely to run in all districts.<sup>9</sup> Gender, race, party and geography interact to create more (or less) favorable electoral conditions for women candidates, and these factors affect women's entry decisions. For example, 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.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, women of color were usually elected from majority-minority districts.<sup>11</sup> The state mattered as well; women state legislators were more likely to serve in states with multimember districts, more likely to serve in states with liberal voters, and less likely to serve in states with strong political parties.<sup>12</sup>

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Why does geography matter? The nature of the political career ladder, whereby lower level office becomes a credential for higher office, means that the pool of candidates for statewide office is shaped in part by the presence of women in state legislative and local office. After all, half of women in Congress are former state legislators.<sup>13</sup> And geography matters because voters' characteristics differ across states and districts; regions such as the South with more traditional gender roles have typically elected fewer women than other regions of the country.<sup>14</sup>

## VOTER ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN CANDIDATES

In the most recent national public opinion survey about women leaders in government and business—conducted by the Pew Research Center—the vast majority of the public believes that both men and women make equally good leaders. But some key differences are evident. Women were slightly more likely than men to believe that women make better political leaders, and Democrats who expressed a view tended to think that women make better leaders, while Republicans choose men. Democratic women were the most enthusiastic about seeing a woman—perhaps Hillary Clinton—in the White House in their lifetime.<sup>15</sup> In past research, Republican voters, more conservative voters, less educated voters, and older voters have been less likely than others to express a willingness to support a woman for president.<sup>16</sup>

Voters' traditional gender-role beliefs reduce support for women in politics. Such beliefs are on the decline.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, though, most research reveals that gender stereotypes about women politicians persist; these range from stereotypes about the positions of candidates and their ability to handle issues to their personality traits.<sup>18</sup> In public opinion surveys and laboratory experiments, women are typically seen as better at education and health care and men are seen as better able to handle defense and foreign policy issues;

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in terms of traits, men are generally perceived as more emotionally suited for politics than women. The issue context can increase the importance of certain gender stereotypes; changes in issue salience can create an environment that favors women's perceived strengths or vice versa.<sup>19</sup> Studies also show that factors such as political party and parental status interact with candidate gender to shape voter attitudes.<sup>20</sup>

Two new books find positive news for women candidates regarding stereotypes. In a 2009 national experimental study using an internet survey, Deborah J. Brooks found little evidence that voters penalize women candidates due to gender stereotypes.<sup>21</sup> For example, Brooks failed to find gender bias in her experiments when examining voter response to news stories about candidate experience and candidate displays of anger; crying; toughness; lack of empathy; and knowledge gaffes. In one of the few examples of disadvantage for women candidates, Brooks found that women respondents were more critical of the female candidate than the male candidate in the crying experiment. She posits that the female respondent may be seeking to distance herself from the crying female candidate. Because male respondents were more likely to penalize the male candidate for crying (though to a lesser extent than female voters penalize female candidates), Brooks concluded that the net effect was not harmful to women. Brooks sees her research as encouraging news for women candi-

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dates and evidence that public opinion has undergone significant change.

Kathleen A. Dolan's panel study of actual voters in 2010 reached similarly optimistic conclusions about the current electoral environment for women candidates, although she found that voters do still hold gender stereotypes about women candidates.<sup>22</sup> These stereotypes are both positive and negative and affect public support for women's officeholding. However, Dolan found little evidence of stereotype effects on voting for women congressional and gubernatorial candidates. Instead, she found that party and incumbency are much more important than candidate gender in understanding voting behavior.

However, another recent study argued that voters can simultaneously hold explicitly egalitarian views about women candidates while also harboring implicit bias against women. This new study by Cecelia Hyunjung Mo was based on 2008 original survey data from one state (Florida), selected because its level of women's representation is average. A new measure of implicit bias was introduced in this study: the "Gender and Leadership Implicit Association Test (IAT)" that experimentally measures the extent to which voters associate gender with the concepts of "follower" and "leader."<sup>23</sup> Mo found that voters who expressed a preference for male leadership did not support fictitious female candidates—even when the female was more qualified than the male candidate. On a more encouraging note, Mo found that those who implicitly preferred male candidates but were explicitly egalitarian voted for the more qualified candidate regardless of the candidate's gender.

Sarah A. Fulton found that independent men seem to prefer male candidates, other factors being equal, while independent women did not express a similar preference for female candidates.<sup>24</sup>

Researchers may have reached different conclusions about stereotype effects because campaigns differ from one another. For example, Nichole M. Bauer argued that stereotype reliance will only occur when stereotypes are activated during a campaign.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, what voters learned about candidates may depend on candidate gender itself: Tessa M. Ditonto and her coauthors showed that the type of information voters search for about candidates depended on the gender of both the candidates and the voters.<sup>26</sup> Information about the competence of female candidates was especially likely to be sought.

## CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

As Ruth B. Mandel showed years ago in her landmark book *In the Running: The New Woman Candidate*, the existence of stereotypes leads women to strategize about gender in their campaigns.<sup>27</sup> For example, Kelly Dittmar's 2010 national survey revealed that both Democratic and Republican campaign consultants believed that voters see gendered areas of issue expertise and that presentation styles and themes may work differently for candidates depending on gender. A plurality of consultants of both major parties saw "strength/toughness" as a more effective theme for men, while a majority of both parties' consultants viewed "compassion" as a more effective theme for female candidates.<sup>28</sup>

Using interviews with campaign insiders from mixed-gender 2008 and 2010 statewide races, Dittmar found that beliefs about gender stereotypes shaped campaign decisions about the candidate's physical appearance, use of negative campaigning, portrayal of family and children, and trait and issue emphasis.<sup>29</sup> In the views of some of the pollsters in Dittmar's study, a campaign—if conducted well—can neutralize the disadvantages associated with being a woman. And women candidates work to take advantage of stereotypes that work in their favor.

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Dittmar estimated that women are only 25% of consultants working on federal and gubernatorial campaigns. She argued that they typically bring different perspectives to their jobs than men. Were more women to work behind-the-scenes on campaigns, gender dynamics and portrayals of women candidates might change.<sup>30</sup>

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Studies of campaign output (e.g., advertising, websites) are consistent with gender differences in campaign strategy. For example, Kim Fridkin Kahn, as well as Dianne Bystrom and her coauthors, found that women were more likely to be dressed professionally in their advertisements and were less likely to picture family members.<sup>31</sup> Women candidates were more likely to emphasize their credentials, and they conveyed masculine traits in order to assure voters that they were capable of the job.<sup>32</sup> In a study of television advertisements in 2000 and 2002 House races, Virginia Sapiro and her coauthors found much more evidence of similarity than difference in the candidates' self-presentations.<sup>33</sup> But, consistent with past studies, they found that women were more likely to emphasize toughness.

Women candidates' conscious efforts to display both masculine and feminine traits and overcome voters' gender stereotypes may explain the findings of studies about voter evaluations of the traits of actual—not hypothetical—candidates. For example, Danny Hayes

found that candidate gender did not play a very influential role in shaping voters' feminine and masculine trait evaluations of 2006 U.S. Senate candidates.<sup>34</sup> In an analysis of 2006 women senators, Kim Fridkin and Patrick Kenney did not find evidence that voters' evaluations of women suffered from gender stereotypes; instead, they found that women senators were viewed more positively than were men senators.<sup>35</sup> They also found that women were viewed in stereotypical ways—as more competent on health care and more honest and caring than male senators.

Women candidates also strategize about media coverage and must decide how to respond should they receive biased coverage or sexist attacks. A study by Celinda Lake of Lake Research Partners for the project “Name It. Change It.” using an online survey in 2010 demonstrated that women candidates can combat sexist media treatment. Lake recommended that women candidates acknowledge and respond to any mistreatment.<sup>36</sup>

Studies have reached mixed conclusions as to whether women and men campaign on different issues—no doubt because issues vary year to year and because women candidates campaign on their party labels.<sup>37</sup> The Democratic and Republican parties campaign on different platforms, offering different policy positions and issue emphases. In an analysis of 2010 congressional candidate advertisements and websites, Dolan largely found that party is more influential in choice of campaign issues than gender.<sup>38</sup> Also, Dolan argued that the issues that dominate a particular campaign year are more important than candidate gender.

At the same time, some studies have found gender effects and an interaction of gender with party. For example, in a study of 2000 U.S. Senate races, Brian Schaffner found that Democratic women are even more likely than Democratic men to campaign on education, health care, and childcare—traditionally considered

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women's issues. Kristen la Cour Dabelko and Paul S. Herrnson found few gender differences in campaigns, using surveys of 1992 congressional candidates and staff; among the differences, women were more likely than men to campaign on women's issues.<sup>40</sup> Democratic women were more likely than Democratic men to campaign on social issues and on abortion, while Republican women were more likely than Republican men to campaign on abortion. And Herrnson and coauthors argued that women candidates in the late 1990s who ran for a range of offices (including statewide, congressional, and state legislative office) were advantaged when they campaigned on women's issues (measured by compassion issues, traditional values, and traditional women's issues) and targeted women's groups or social groups.<sup>41</sup> They concluded that a woman candidate can benefit from campaigning as a woman. Indeed, practical advice from the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, offered in "Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates," argued that women candidates are more advantaged by their gender today than in the past.<sup>42</sup>

Experimental research has been used to help identify the effects of different campaign strategies. For example, Kim Fridkin and her coauthors used a 2006 experiment conducted by telephone with a nationally representative sample to analyze the effects of negative advertisements.<sup>43</sup> They found that negative commercials hurt male candidates more than female candidates, perhaps because gender stereotypes lead voters to discount attacks on women candidates.

Krupnikov and Bauer used an online experiment to examine whether negative campaigning interacted with candidate gender.<sup>44</sup> The results were complex but sug-

gested a note of caution for female candidates: voters were more likely to punish the female than male candidate if the candidate "going negative" was not of the voter's party affiliation. They also found that gender stereotypes mediate the relationship between candidate gender and voter evaluations, but only for female candidates. They name the contingent nature of stereotype effects "conditional stereotype use."<sup>45</sup>

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And Monica E. Schneider showed that "gender-bending" strategies can help women overturn gender stereotypes.<sup>46</sup> In her study, a female candidate was perceived at being competent on women's issues regardless of her strategy. But by pursuing a "male-stereotypical issue," the female candidate was less polarizing than a female candidate campaigning on a "female-stereotypical" issue.

One of the challenges facing women candidates is that the category "female politician" is less defined than other categories in voters' minds, such as "men," "women," or "male politician," according to Monica C. Schneider and Angela L. Bos.<sup>47</sup> They contend that women in politics do not seem to benefit from the positive stereotypes that the public ascribes to women as a group; meanwhile, the image of "male politicians" overlaps to a greater extent with the image of "men" as a group.



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## CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CAMPAIGNS

Conservative women candidates are of special interest to scholars—particularly in light of the persistence of the Democratic edge among women elected officials. As the country is increasingly trending Republican and the Republicans made historic gains in the 2014 midterms, the question of Republican women's underrepresentation is especially important. The problems facing Republican women in seeking office merit special attention.<sup>48</sup>

Research on conservative women in American electoral politics has become more common in recent years, and some studies have focused on Sarah Palin's vice

presidential candidacy specifically.<sup>49</sup> In a recent analysis, Ronnee Schreiber examined the websites of 2010 women congressional candidates.<sup>50</sup> As Schreiber notes, there are more efforts underway to help elect Republican women to office. But Republican women confront various dilemmas as they seek office, given the intersection of gender and party stereotypes.<sup>51</sup> They also are presented with opportunities to benefit from their status as female candidates, particularly as many seek to follow Palin's lead of a "Mama Grizzly" image. Interestingly, while most of the women congressional candidates who were mothers mentioned their status as mothers on their websites, only a minority of mothers articulated a link between their parental status and their issue positions.<sup>52</sup>

## *Future Research Directions*

All candidates need resources for their campaigns. But women may need even more assurance than men that they will have adequate resources for their campaigns. In the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) 2008 Recruitment Study, women state legislators perceived gender inequalities in fundraising. And women legislators reported having more encouragement, recruitment, and training compared with men.<sup>53</sup> Research by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox showed that women in the eligibility pool—citizens with the credentials to seek office—were more concerned than men about their qualifications and campaign skills and more likely to perceive sexism in politics.<sup>54</sup> Women's perceptions that they will face inequalities on the campaign trail can deter women from running.<sup>55</sup> Thus, promises of resources and support seem to be critical to women's candidacies.

One limitation of some past studies is the small number of women candidates examined due to the small number of women candidates running in a given year, for

gubernatorial and Senate races in particular. Scholarly efforts to understand the relationship between candidate gender and party continue to be hampered to some extent by the relatively small numbers of Republican women candidates. The geographic pattern of women's candidacies also means that research has been limited in its ability to generalize about the entire country; researchers study actual women candidates, and therefore the findings reflect those geographic areas that have been most likely to see women candidates.

We also know little about how women's representation at one level of office affects women's representation at other levels of office, and whether a "pipeline" is necessary from local office to higher levels.<sup>56</sup> One area of research that would help resolve this debate is additional data collection on women's local officeholding. Recent studies show a renewed interest in women's participation in local politics, which is an important but neglected area of scholarship.<sup>57</sup>

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Research is expanding about how gender intersects with other categories, though much more research is still needed in these areas. For example, Nadia Brown finds that the experiences of Black women state legislative candidates in Maryland cannot be understood with respect to gender alone; instead, their campaign experiences are inherently intersectional. Black women differ from both nonblack women and from Black men in the challenges and opportunities they face as candidates.<sup>58</sup>

Pioneering work by Donald Haider-Markel and Chelsie Lynn Moore Bright on lesbian candidates suggests that

lesbian candidates are not disadvantaged by being open about their sexual orientation, due to the fact that they typically run as Democrats.<sup>59</sup> As more lesbian candidates seek office, more cases will be available for scholarly analysis.

Research is also underway that examines the consequences of “new media” for women candidates. To date, it appears that Twitter is more commonly used by female candidates than male candidates.<sup>60</sup> Scholarship will have to continue to adapt as campaign technology evolves.

## Further Reading

Carroll, Susan J. and Richard Logan Fox, eds. 2014. *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*. Third Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The latest edition of this comprehensive edited volume provides an accessible and detailed account of the role of gender in elections with a focus on the 2012 elections. Chapters examine the topics of women voters; the gender gap; women’s candidacies for presidential, congressional, statewide, and state legislative office; parties and interest groups; media coverage and political communication; Latinas; and African American women. The book situates the contemporary role of gender in elections in historical context and provides original empirical analysis.

Dolan, Kathleen. 2014. *When Does Gender Matter? Women Candidates & Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book uses original national panel survey data to provide a comprehensive account of voters’ gender stereotypes and whether and how they affect elections. The analysis focuses on congressional and gubernatorial contests in 2010. Dolan finds that voters hold

both positive and negative stereotypes about women candidates. These stereotypes affect abstract support for women’s officeholding and in some cases, impact candidate evaluation. However, stereotypes are typically insignificant in predicting vote choice; instead, Dolan finds that party and incumbency are far more consequential in understanding voting behavior.

Dittmar, Kelly. 2015. *Navigating Gendered Terrain: Stereotypes and Strategy in Political Campaigns*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

In this book, Dittmar advances the idea that campaigns are gendered institutions replete with masculine norms and expectations that affect the strategic decisions that women and men make when they run for office. Using a national survey of campaign consultants and extensive interviews with candidates and their campaign teams, this book breaks new ground in the study of campaigns. Dittmar contends that even when gender differences may not be apparent in campaign output, gender affects campaign considerations earlier in the process as candidates make decisions about message, image and tactics. The book largely focuses on men and women who competed for senatorial and gubernatorial office in 2008 and 2010.

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## Women's Election to Congress

The first woman elected to the U.S. Congress, Jeannette Rankin, a Republican, took her seat in 1917. Much has changed for women in the United States in the nearly 100 years since then. Recent years have seen the highest levels of women's representation in Congress in U.S. history. Change in women's status is embodied by Nancy Pelosi, who made history as the nation's first female Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, serving from 2007 to 2011. But increases in the number of women elected to office are not inevitable; the 2010 elections, in fact, brought a small decline in the number of women in Congress.

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Growth for women is occurring, but very slowly. Today 104 women hold congressional seats, including 76 Democrats and 28 Republicans; women make up only 19.3% of the U.S. House of Representatives and 20.0% of the U.S. Senate.<sup>1</sup> While women congressional candidates face similar experiences to men candidates in many ways, women remain much less likely than men to run for Congress. And a large partisan gap persists among the women who run and serve.

### THE PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES

Research shows that women are competitive congressional candidates. In the most comprehensive analyses to date—extending from 1968 to 2012—Barbara Burrell concludes that women fare as well as men when they run for Congress.<sup>2</sup> Her extensive studies of primary and general election contests for the U.S. House of Representatives largely focus on the share of votes obtained by

female candidates, their success rates, and their fundraising ability. Burrell concludes that it is the scarcity of female candidates, rather than their poor performance, that explains the underrepresentation of women in Congress. The scarcity of women congressional candidates—even at the primary stage—was also found in a study by Jennifer L. Lawless and Kathryn Pearson: between 1958 and 2004, just 8% of primary candidates for the House were women.<sup>3</sup>

Burrell and other scholars emphasize the structural problem of incumbency.<sup>4</sup> Due to name recognition, experience, and resources, incumbent members of Congress are significantly advantaged when they seek reelection, making it difficult for challengers to run against them. Women members, like men members, benefit from incumbency. Nevertheless, women and politics scholars view incumbency as an institutional constraint: because most incumbents are male, the incumbency advantage makes it more difficult for relative newcomers, such as women, to win.

Incumbency is not the full story, however. After all, Burrell finds that even in open-seat contests, which are the easiest races for newcomers to win, women are running at low rates. Open-seat opportunities are a necessary but insufficient condition for increasing the presence of women in Congress.<sup>5</sup>

A great example of the power of open-seat opportunities is the banner year of 1992. It may seem that the media treats every election year as a potential “Year of the Woman”; but for most researchers, 1992 was indeed such a year. A record number of women sought congressional office that year: 11 women won major party nominations for Senate seats and 106 for House seats.<sup>6</sup> And a record number—53 women—served in Congress following the election, increasing women's presence in Congress to 10% from 6%.<sup>7</sup>

# Women's Election to Congress

A perfect storm of factors led to an unusual number of open-seat contests in 1992, creating a favorable political context for women.<sup>8</sup> To begin, it was a redistricting year. Every ten years, states must revisit the boundaries of their legislative districts to account for changes in population and ensure that districts are composed of equal numbers of residents. As a result, some legislators retire rather than run for reelection in newly configured districts. In addition to openings created by redistricting, a scandal in Congress related to use of the House bank led to a high number of retirements. Moreover, the Senate confirmation hearings of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and the sexual harassment allegations of his former colleague Anita Hill riveted the nation, calling attention to the issue of sexual harassment; Thomas' confirmation hearings before an all-male Judiciary Committee put a spotlight on the dearth of women in the Senate. Although 1992 did mark a turning point for women's congressional candidacies, almost all of the newly elected women were Democrats.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the competitiveness of women candidates, the watershed year of 1992, and the help of women's political action committees (PACs), we have not seen a comparable rise in the number of women in Congress since 1992.<sup>10</sup>

On the bright side, some studies beyond Burrell's continue to show that women's and men's success rates are similar once incumbency is taken into account.<sup>11</sup> But while almost all of the research about women congressional candidates is positive and shows improvements for women over time, it is important to put a spotlight on some of the findings that suggest that women are not yet on a completely equal footing with men.

Even Burrell notes a few important exceptions to the general trend that women fare as well, if not better, than male candidates.<sup>12</sup> Women primary winners tend to be more likely to have prior elective experience com-

pared with men, raising the possibility that women have to be "better" than men. These findings are echoed in research by Sarah. Using a new measure of candidate quality, Fulton finds that being a woman negatively affected the vote share of incumbent congressional candidates in 1998 once candidate quality is taken into account.<sup>13</sup> She concludes that "relative to men, women have to work harder at developing greater political quality to be equally competitive." Her measure of candidate quality is based on surveys of "informants" (party activists and potential challengers) that assess each incumbent's character, accomplishments, and skills. Early studies of women's congressional candidacies did not take candidate quality into account, meaning that we have not known if women must be more qualified in order to yield success rates similar to those of men.

## Women members between 1984 and 2004 were more likely than men to bring home federal dollars

Kathryn Pearson and Eric McGhee, in a study extending from 1984 to 2010, demonstrate that women congressional candidates are more likely than men to have previous electoral experience and to enter winnable races.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in a provocative study, Sarah Anzia and Christopher Berry contend that because of either gender bias or women's anticipation of bias, women outperform men to win congressional office; as a consequence, "better" women candidates make for "better" legislators.<sup>15</sup> Anzia and Berry find that women members between 1984 and 2004 were more likely than men to bring home federal dollars and were more likely to sponsor and co-sponsor legislation. In another new study that extends from 1973 to 2008, Craig Volden, Alan Wiseman, and Dana Wittmer also find that women are more effective members of Congress.<sup>16</sup>

# Women's Election to Congress

Burrell finds that women incumbents are somewhat more likely than men incumbents to face general election challengers, meaning that women are less likely to have a “free pass” to reelection, similar to past studies.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Burrell also finds that Democratic women running in competitive House districts are less likely than men to win similar races.<sup>18</sup>

There is some debate about whether women face more competition than men at the primary stage. Some studies found that incumbent women candidates are at a disadvantage in primary races.<sup>19</sup> However, Burrell did not find that female congressional candidates usually face more primary competitors than male candidates.<sup>20</sup>

While Democratic women are approaching one-third of all Democrats in the House and Senate, Republican women are only 10% of Republicans

## PARTY DIFFERENCES

More studies are needed about how parties, interest groups, PACs, and donors affect the emergence and success of women congressional candidates, as well as how the gender gap in ambition for Congress can be closed.<sup>21</sup> The candidate recruitment situation is especially dire for Republican women. While Democratic women are approaching one-third of all Democrats in the House and Senate, Republican women are only 10% of Republicans.<sup>22</sup> Because half of women members of Congress served previously in the state legislatures, the discrepancy between women's representation in the two parties in the state legislatures is partly to blame.<sup>23</sup> The stereotype that women legislators are more liberal than men can help a Republican woman with general election voters but can limit the likelihood that she can successfully win the Republican nomination.<sup>24</sup>

Research shows that women state legislators are more

reliant on party support than are men and that women, more than men, seek office as a result of recruitment.<sup>25</sup> Overall, women are more likely to arrive in office with encouragement and support compared with men.

One aspect of that support concerns financial support. Because there is more infrastructure in the form of organizations such as EMILY's List on the Democratic side than Republican side, the world of campaign finance and support seems to put Republican women at a tremendous disadvantage compared with Democratic women.<sup>26</sup> Republican women candidates are also less likely to be running as incumbents.

Women's PACs have helped recruit, train, and fund women congressional candidates since the 1970s, and in the 1992 Year of the Woman, they played a key role and helped women candidates take advantage of the available opportunities.<sup>27</sup> One of the most important PACs is EMILY's List. Founded in 1985, EMILY's List bundles contributions on behalf of pro-choice Democratic women candidates. In 1992, it claimed to contribute \$6 million to women candidates.<sup>28</sup> Efforts to elect Republican women are much less visible than are Democratic efforts.<sup>29</sup>

Pearson and McGhee's study that extends from 1984 to 2010 finds some important differences across women of the two parties.<sup>30</sup> Nonincumbent Democratic women are running in more favorable districts than are nonincumbent Republican women. Moreover, Republican women are disadvantaged in their general election races even after a host of factors are controlled.

The Republican party is aware of its deficit with women candidates, and some new efforts have emerged to help Republican women win office; at the same time, the party is not monolithic in supporting the goal of electing more women.<sup>31</sup> The Republican party commits very little direct money to primary candidates, and women do not seem to be disadvantaged in this regard.<sup>32</sup>

# Women's Election to Congress

Today's Republican voters do seem to perceive women and men candidates differently to some extent, providing both opportunities and challenges. For example, Republicans see women as more emotional than men, but view women as more likely to be honest.<sup>33</sup> On one of the most important traits in today's partisan politics—the ability to work out a compromise—Republican women are advantaged over Republican men.<sup>34</sup>

Many scholars and practitioners emphasize the need for more comprehensive and sustained recruitment efforts on the part of the Republican party, as well as for a stronger infrastructure to support Republican women candidates.<sup>35</sup>

## WOMEN-FRIENDLY DISTRICTS

Geography is an important aspect of women's election to Congress. Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon show that women are more likely to be elected from what they call “women-friendly districts.”<sup>36</sup> They analyze the demographics of House districts over time to determine the types of districts that have been more likely to send a woman to Congress, finding that the types of districts that favor Democrats (or Republicans) in House contests differ for women and men. Interestingly, the stories are different for the two parties, and the Democratic women's story differs by race.

Nonminority Democratic women are elected from districts that are more liberal, urban, educated, diverse, and higher-income than Democratic men.<sup>37</sup> Nonminority Republican women have been more likely to represent districts that are more moderate and more urban and somewhat less racially diverse than Repub-

lican men, although many of the gender differences in district type narrowed between 2002 and 2010 among Republicans. Gender differences among Latina and Latino members of the Congress are similar to the differences among nonminority women and men.

Meanwhile, the congressional districts that elect African American women—all but one of whom are Democrats—largely resemble the districts that elect African American men, except that the women's districts have slightly poorer populations and a slightly smaller percentage of blue-collar workers. These districts tend to be majority minority districts.

What these patterns mean is that not all congressional districts are equally likely to elect a woman and that women's opportunities for office depend on place. The states have also developed different reputations for the climate facing women; some states have never had a woman U.S. Senator, and many states' congressional delegations today do not include any women.<sup>38</sup> Three states have never sent a woman to either chamber of Congress.

The election of women to Congress is arguably a “political innovation”: the idea or practice of electing a woman can be thought to spread or diffuse to other locations, according to Heather Ondercin and Susan Welch. They explain: “Districts that have innovated by electing women are more likely to later have women candidates and representatives. In these districts, women are encouraged to run, and voters, witnessing the past success of women candidates, appear more ready to vote for them again.”<sup>39</sup>



# Women's Election to Congress

## *Future Research Directions*

One area for additional research concerns why state legislative service does not always translate into a bid for a congressional seat. Sarah Fulton and her coauthors found in a 1998 study of state legislators that gender affects ambition for a House seat in direct and indirect ways.<sup>40</sup> For example, because women legislators are older than male legislators, they are less likely to be interested in running for Congress; meanwhile, the presence of children at home decreases women's ambition for Congress while increasing men's. Likewise, Mack Mariani identifies a role for age and occupation in explaining the relationship between state legislative officeholding and congressional candidacy, noting that women state legislators tend to be older and less likely to hold the occupations that lead to running for Congress.<sup>41</sup>

The underrepresentation of women of color in Congress also requires more research. Only two women of color—Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois and Mazie Hirono of Hawaii—have ever served in the U.S. Senate; only Hirono serves today. Women of color in Congress are typically elected from majority-minority districts.<sup>42</sup> But women of color ought to be able to win election from a broader range of districts, suggesting the need for more research on the possible resource deficits and challenges that party leader beliefs may play in limiting their opportunities. The challenges facing women of color in seeking Senate seats may differ from those of men of color, who are also underrepresented.<sup>43</sup>

Few scholars have examined the retirement issue and women's congressional careers. One exception is that Jennifer L. Lawless and Sean Theriault demonstrate that increasing the number of new women who reach Congress is not enough to ensure that women's congressional officeholding will increase with time; we must also determine whether women's careers take the same form as men's, and whether women retire at the same rates and for the same reasons.<sup>44</sup> Lawless and Theriault's analysis of members of Congress between 1983 and 2002 showed that "career ceilings" are more likely to affect women's retirement decisions than men's; in other words, women who have had long careers in Congress without achieving positions of leadership are less likely than men to remain in the institution. The implication is that more women would have to be elected over time just for women to maintain their current level of representation.

The role of campaign funding has generated some attention from congressional scholars in the past, but many questions remain. The escalating costs of campaigns and the role that self-financing plays in congressional races suggest that this is a critical question for analysis. Studies show that women and men raise comparable funds when they run in similar types of races.<sup>45</sup> We know less about how resources shape congressional candidate emergence, however, or primary election success. The effects that *Citizens United* is having on women's congressional bids also warrant continued investigation.<sup>46</sup>

# Women's Election to Congress

## Further Reading

Burrell, Barbara. 2014. *Gender in Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

This book is a comprehensive investigation of women's congressional candidacies from 1994 to 2012. Burrell examines all stages of congressional elections, the backgrounds and impact of members of Congress, and the role of interest groups, PACs, parties, and gendered themes in congressional elections. The findings paint a positive picture of the playing field for women congressional candidates today, although there are a few areas of gender difference. The book emphasizes the dearth of women entering congressional primaries and the continued importance of incumbency.

Palmer, Barbara and Dennis Michael Simon 2012. *Women and Congressional Elections: A Century of Change*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

This indispensable account of women's rise in Congress over time primarily examines the period between 1956 and 2010, providing historical background on women's presence in both the House and Senate. Chapters consider such factors as ambition, primary and general elections, and party differences among women. Most importantly, Palmer and Simon identify and describe the nature of "women-friendly" districts that are more favorable to electing a woman to Congress. Informative tables provide details on topics such as women's biographical backgrounds, and charts present useful statistics about women's presence and performance in congressional elections.

Reingold, Beth. 2008. *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

This edited volume focuses on women as legislators, examining both their election to legislative office and their behavior once elected. Chapters concern such topics as the presence and performance of women as congressional primary candidates over time, the role of race and gender within state legislatures, the relationship between gender and committee assignments, and access to congressional leadership positions. By examining voters, candidates, and legislators within one book, Reingold assesses the state of knowledge about women legislators and suggests directions for additional research.

# Women's Election to Congress

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## Reaching Executive Office: The Presidency and the Office of the Governor

The presidency—the highest “glass ceiling” in American politics—has yet to be shattered by a woman. Another major elective executive office—the office of the governor—has been within women’s reach. But in 2015, only six of the nation’s fifty governors are women, almost 100 years after the very first woman served as governor.<sup>1</sup> A net gain of five women over the course of nearly 100 years is slow progress by any standard. Almost half of states have yet to experience a woman governor.<sup>2</sup>

What challenges do women face in seeking the presidency and the governor’s office? Is America ready for a woman president in 2016?

In 2015, only six of the nation’s  
fifty governors are women,  
almost 100 years after the very  
first woman served as governor

### GENDER AND THE PRESIDENCY

Voters associate leadership with masculinity. And no elective office is more masculine than the presidency. The president, as commander-in-chief, is expected to embody masculinity and exhibit toughness.<sup>3</sup> Voters associate the presidency with both masculine tasks and masculine traits.<sup>4</sup> Given that the public expects masculine leadership and male leaders, it can be difficult for women to persuade voters that they can lead.<sup>5</sup>

The presidential selection process itself is a “gendered space” imbued with references to “toughness,” according to Georgia Duerst-Lahti.<sup>6</sup> The prominence of war and terrorism issues and images in presidential campaigns can make a female candidate seem even

less appropriate for the job because voters hold gender stereotypes about politician issue competency in these areas.<sup>7</sup> Potential female presidential candidates are less likely to have a background of military service—a credential also associated with the presidency.<sup>8</sup>

The United States lags behind many other countries in its failure to elect a female president. Currently 22 countries are led by a female president or prime minister.<sup>9</sup> In a provocative argument, Eileen McDonagh argues that countries with female monarchs are more accustomed to women’s leadership.<sup>10</sup> She suggests that the absence of a hereditary monarchy in the United States may have had the unintended consequence of dampening public support for women leaders. McDonagh also argues that the United States lags behind other nations in social welfare provision; having a stronger welfare state—a government function more in line with women’s traditional areas of expertise—would make for a political tradition more hospitable to a female president.

Although the United States has yet to elect a woman president, women presidential candidates are not new. Michele Bachmann sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2012, and Hillary Clinton, who secured 18 million votes in her 2008 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, has been the most successful to date. But these women were not the first: the first woman to seek the presidency, Victoria Woodhull, did so in the late 1800s.<sup>11</sup> As Ruth B. Mandel observes, although most women who sought the presidency have not been serious contenders, they nevertheless had an impact on American politics.<sup>12</sup>

Only two women have ever appeared on major party presidential tickets. The first, Geraldine Ferraro, served as Walter Mondale’s vice-presidential running mate in 1984. Ferraro remains the sole woman ever selected by

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the Democratic party to be its vice-presidential candidate. And it was not until 2008 that the Republican party selected its first vice-presidential female candidate, Sarah Palin.

Although the vice-presidential candidate is not usually thought to have an independent impact on presidential vote choice, Palin's weaknesses as a candidate appear to have hurt the Republican ticket in 2008.<sup>13</sup> Critics argue that her media appearances perpetuated the stereotype that women are not qualified for office, undermining the chances of future women candidates. However, Palin's persona and status as a mother of young children opened the door to new models of campaigning, making her a source of inspiration for other Republican women candidates.<sup>14</sup>

Gallup found that only 33% of the public was willing to vote for a woman for president in 1937; in 2012, that statistic was 95%

## VOTER SUPPORT FOR A FEMALE PRESIDENT

Abstract willingness to support a woman for president has risen substantially since the public was first polled on this question. Gallup found that only 33% of the public was willing to vote for a woman for president in 1937; in 2012, that statistic was 95%.<sup>15</sup> Public support seems to be higher for a Democratic woman presidential candidate than for a Republican woman president. A 2015 Pew Research Center poll finds that Democratic women are the most interested in seeing a woman president in their lifetime (69%) followed by Democratic men (46%), Republican women (20%) and Republican

men (16%). And a 2007 internet survey conducted by Kathleen Dolan specified the party of the woman presidential candidate.<sup>16</sup> Among Democrats, 89% were willing to vote for a Democratic woman for president; among Republicans, 80% were willing to vote for a Republican woman for president.

Other studies confirm that some types of voters are more supportive of a woman president than others. Dolan's analysis of the determinants of voting for a hypothetical woman candidate, using General Social Survey data from 1972 to 1998, finds that women, Democrats, and liberals are more supportive, as are younger people, less religious individuals, and more educated individuals.<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult for researchers to measure public support for a female presidential candidate because of "social desirability bias": due to social norms, voters may be reluctant in a survey interview context to reveal gender bias. To circumvent this problem, one study used a "list experiment" in which people can more privately reveal unwillingness to vote for a woman president. In the list experiment, respondents report the total number of statements on a list that they find upsetting without having to reveal *which* of the statements upset them. Using this technique, Matthew Streb and his coauthors found that 26% of the public were "angry or upset" by the idea of a female president.<sup>18</sup> Though this experiment did not directly evaluate voter support for a female candidate, the authors concluded that their findings are cause for concern; the percentage of angry/upset voters in their study exceeds the percentage of people in national public opinion surveys who voice an unwillingness to vote for a hypothetical woman president. On the other hand, it is possible that their study—conducted in 2006—might have been partially influenced by public opinion toward Hillary Clinton's anticipated presidential candidacy.



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## HILLARY CLINTON'S 2008 CAMPAIGN

Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign for the Democratic nomination for president provided rich research opportunities for scholars. Clinton demonstrated that a female nominee is indeed possible; she only narrowly lost the nomination to Barack Obama. But her candidacy also served as a cautionary tale for future campaigns, including a 2016 Clinton run.

Although Clinton did not win the nomination and did not appear on the 2008 general election ballot, the Democratic primary contest does allow for detailed analyses of voting behavior. Analysis of 2008 exit polls by Leonie Huddy and Tony Carey, Jr. paints an optimistic picture about the role of gender bias in the electorate—or at least, the Democratic primary electorate.<sup>19</sup> Huddy and Carey conclude that racial bias hurt Obama's candidacy more than gender bias hurt Clinton's candidacy in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries. Meanwhile, Kinder and Dale-Ridder find that in-group solidarity by gender did not benefit Clinton as much as in-group solidarity by race helped Obama.<sup>20</sup> Similar to Huddy and Carey, they conclude that Clinton was not harmed by traditional gender attitudes among Democratic primary voters.

Clinton's fundraising prowess, aided by her access to her husband's fundraising network, also represented a vast departure from the previous cases of female presidential candidates. As a former First Lady, her case is somewhat exceptional. Interestingly, Clinton's campaign was also noteworthy because a majority of her contributions were from women.<sup>21</sup>

Other research about Clinton's 2008 bid paint a more worrisome picture about what the future holds for women seeking the nation's highest office. Media coverage, in particular, raises questions about the country's readiness for a female president. Media commentary about Clinton—particularly on the cable networks—

often included extremely sexist commentary.<sup>22</sup> This sexist coverage was surprising to researchers because media coverage of women candidates has become more equitable over time. Many voters perceived unfair press treatment of Clinton.<sup>23</sup> Regina Lawrence and Melody Rose found that Hillary Clinton received a similar amount of coverage to Barack Obama, but that her coverage was more negative.<sup>24</sup>

Media commentary about Clinton often included extremely sexist commentary. This sexist coverage was surprising to researchers because media coverage of women candidates has become more equitable over time

Sadly, as Kristina Horn Sheeler and Karrin Vasby Anderson argue in their recent book, the misogyny evident in Clinton's treatment—including the widespread and seemingly acceptable ways that she was "pornified," or framed in the blogosphere and cable networks with elements reminiscent of pornography—may be a better gauge of public opinion towards women presidents than traditional public opinion surveys.<sup>25</sup>

Gender dynamics were also evident in Clinton's own campaign strategy, which reveals the gendered opportunities and constraints she faced as a presidential candidate.<sup>26</sup> Clinton's service on the Senate Armed Services Committee, vote in favor of the Iraq war, and concerted effort to demonstrate toughness and preparedness with respect to defense and national security issues were successful in overcoming what has been the most significant hurdle for women presidential candidates.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, Clinton's very success in

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crossing the “toughness” threshold for a female presidential candidate proved to be a double-edged sword because of the accompanying perception that she was not feminine. Thus even credentialed, resourced women candidates must navigate gender stereotypes as they campaign for president.<sup>28</sup>

## SARAH PALIN AND CONSERVATIVE WOMEN

Susan J. Carroll and Kelly Dittmar have observed that although they were very different candidates from different parties, Sarah Palin—as a vice-presidential candidate—confronted many of the same gender stereotypes that Hillary Clinton navigated in 2008. For example, media coverage of Palin reflected gender stereotypes and included scrutiny that was atypical compared with past male vice-presidential candidates.<sup>29</sup> Palin also received systematically worse coverage compared to her male counterpart.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps more than for any other national female candidate, the public developed an understanding of Palin shaped by popular culture, and specifically by Tina Fey’s impression of Palin on *Saturday Night Live*.<sup>31</sup>

### The presence of a Republican woman on the 2008 general election ballot put feminist organizations in a dilemma

As Schreiber notes, the presence of a Republican woman on the 2008 general election ballot put feminist organizations in a dilemma and forced them to articulate specific reasons that they did not support Palin’s historic candidacy.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, Schreiber notes the significance of a conservative Republican woman vying for high office, making visible the diversity of women’s ideological perspectives. Palin’s candidacy gave conservative women’s organizations a chance to contest the agenda of feminist organizations and articulate an alternative vision of what it means to represent women.<sup>33</sup>

Since 2008, Palin has aided other conservative women directly with endorsements and contributions through “Sarah PAC.” But more significant, perhaps, is her innovative “Mama Grizzly” image. This campaign strategy, which she has popularized for other women candidates, is a new way to blend femininity, masculinity, and conservatism.<sup>34</sup> As Linda Beail and Rhonda Kinney Longworth observe, the “Hockey Mom” and other frames through which Palin has been understood as a candidate are partially reflective of existing narratives around women candidates and the Republican party.<sup>35</sup> But these frames also disrupt conventional understandings and transform opportunities for female candidates in some respects.

While Michele Bachmann sought the Republican nomination in the 2012 election cycle, she was unable to distinguish herself from a crowded field and did not last far into the primary season. Both Bachmann and Palin come from the Tea Party branch of the Republican party, which is fueled at the grass roots by women activists. Dittmar and Carroll note that although Bachmann’s campaign had weaknesses, her treatment by the press was shaped by the gender stereotypes that women presidential candidates have faced in the past.<sup>36</sup> In a systematic content analysis of coverage of the 2012 campaign for the Republican nomination, Dianne Bystrom and Daniela V. Dimitrova find that Bachmann fared similarly with her male opponents in some respects.<sup>37</sup> However, they also found that she received less coverage and less issue-based coverage.

As more Republican women campaign for the vice presidency and presidency, understanding how gender and party intersect in campaigns and voting behavior has become more important. The images projected by Sarah Palin—including the “Frontier Woman” and “Hockey Mom”—are tied not only to gendered images in American society and politics, but also to party, class, and race understandings.<sup>38</sup>

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In an experimental study conducted in 2005, Mirya Holman and her coauthors find that Republican women can more easily overcome women candidates' traditional disadvantage on terrorism and national security than Democratic women.<sup>39</sup> Republican women benefit from the stereotype that the Republican party is better able to handle these issues; meanwhile, Democratic women candidates can be doubly disadvantaged by stereotypes because both their gender and party suggest a lesser ability in these areas.

One of the severe challenges facing the Republican party with respect to the woman president question is the dearth of Republican women in the pool of potential presidential candidates. Because Republican women are vastly outnumbered by Democratic women in Congress—and especially the Senate—fewer Republican women are positioned to launch a credible bid for the presidency. And both Republican and Democratic women are dramatically underrepresented in gubernatorial office, another important source of presidential candidates.

## WOMEN OF COLOR AND THE PRESIDENCY

Jane Junn observes that Obama's 2008 victory over Clinton arguably makes the possibility of a female presidential candidate more likely because Obama's victory displaced the image of the president as a white male.<sup>40</sup> However, Junn argues that the victory reaffirms the perception that "African American candidates" are male and that "women candidates" are white. She concludes that more work needs to be done to change these dominant candidate images and make room for women of color.

Women of color face higher hurdles in pursuing executive office than non-Hispanic white women. When Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress, ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972, she was disappointed by

the lack of enthusiasm for her candidacy among both feminist leaders and civil rights leaders.<sup>41</sup> More recently, when Carol Moseley Braun, the only African American woman ever to have served in the U.S. Senate, sought the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination, she received the support of women's organizations but not African American organizations; those organizations may be more likely to support an African American male candidate over a woman.<sup>42</sup>

Women of color are far more poorly represented as statewide officeholders compared with other offices

The dramatic underrepresentation of women of color in the Senate and statewide elective executive office means that very few women of color hold the traditional credentials for a presidential bid

such as state legislative office and seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>43</sup> The dramatic underrepresentation of women of color in the Senate and statewide elective executive office, including the office of governor, means that very few women of color hold the traditional credentials for a presidential bid.

## WOMEN GOVERNORS

The 2010 elections brought women of color somewhat closer to presidential politics. History was made in 2010 when two women of color were elected as governors. Nikki Haley, of South Carolina, is Asian American, and Susana Martinez, of New Mexico, is Latina. Both are Republicans and both have been mentioned as potential vice-presidential candidates. The governor's office is a common stepping stone to the presidency. In fact,

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while major party presidential nominees are usually either governors or U.S. senators, research shows that governors seem to be advantaged over senators in presidential elections.<sup>44</sup> Because women currently occupy the governor's mansions in only six states, women are significantly outnumbered compared to men as potential presidential contenders.

Political Parity find that states with multiple women in high office—measured as the office of U.S. Senator and governor—are systematically different from other states

Women's pathways to gubernatorial office are not easy. Voters appear to be more comfortable with women in typically "feminine" statewide elective executive offices, such as state education official, than in more "masculine" offices such as that of governor.<sup>45</sup> Stephen Stambough and Valerie O'Regan found that women gubernatorial candidates between 1976 and 2004 fared worse than men on average, and Linda Fowler and Jennifer Lawless found the same in a study of women's candidacies in the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Stambough and O'Regan found that Democratic women were more likely to be nominated in states where more women served in the legislature, consistent with an argument about the relationship of the pool of potential candidates to the presence of actual candidates. The pattern of women's presence as Republican gubernatorial nominees differed from that of women's presence as Democratic gubernatorial nominees. Republican women were less likely to be nominated in states with open-seat contests (without Democratic incumbent candidates). Because open seats present more favorable opportunities, Republican women seem to be more likely than

Democratic women to run as sacrificial lambs.

In a new study that extends from 1978 to 2008, Jason Windett examines the state characteristics that predict the presence of women gubernatorial candidates.<sup>47</sup> He argues that women candidates will be more likely to emerge where the pool of experienced candidates is larger and where the opportunity structure is favorable. Using a statistical analysis and excluding nonviable candidates, he finds that women are more likely to enter primaries in states with more women in the legislature and states with a more favorable climate for women candidates (such as states with a history of women's officeholding and those where women have higher status in educational attainment and in the labor force). This suggests that there is a cultural or state tradition of electing women to office, and it highlights the importance of women's election to state legislatures. Women state legislators serve as the pool for higher office, and they also help to create a favorable climate for other women candidates.

Similarly, Political Parity find that states with multiple women in high office—measured as the office of U.S. Senator and governor—are systematically different from other states.<sup>48</sup> These state populations tend to be more Democratic, racially diverse, and young. It also matters if states have a stronger tradition of electing women and if they have public financing.

In a new article about women's pathways to the governor's mansion based on interviews, Windett finds that male governors were more likely than female governors to have experienced party recruitment in their political careers.<sup>49</sup> He argues that "women lag behind in party backing."<sup>50</sup> This evidence could help explain why more women are not serving in the office.

Windett also argues that family responsibilities and children in particular were commonly mentioned by the women governors he interviewed, but not by men

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governors.<sup>51</sup> The age of children affected what office the women first ran for and when they ran. In sharp contrast, the male governors Windett interviewed rarely mentioned family factors as considerations in their political careers.

Executive office seems to be more challenging for women to achieve compared with legislative office. Because the governor is the sole decision maker, she or he is invested with more power than an individual legislator. The idea that voters might be more comfortable with women in legislative rather than executive roles is held by many campaign consultants. In a national survey conducted in 2010, Kelly Dittmar found that 43% of Democratic consultants believe it is more likely that voters will support a woman for the U.S. Senate than for governor; among Democratic consultants, about one-third believe that voters are equally likely to vote for a woman for either office and 14% say that voters are more likely to vote for a woman for governor.<sup>52</sup> One survey respondent in Dittmar's study explained: "It's more difficult for voters to envision a female candidate in an executive role, than as 1 of 100 senators."<sup>53</sup> These consultants recommended an emphasis on toughness in races for the office of governor. In contrast, Republican consultants were much more likely to see similarity across the two offices, with 72% saying voters are equally likely to vote for a woman for governor or Senator.

Studies conducted by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation for over a decade also provide practical advice for women gubernatorial candidates.<sup>54</sup> For example, *Keys to the Governor's Office* advises women to lead a statewide

ballot campaign or assist with a candidate's statewide campaign to "demonstrate executive leadership." Keys recommends a solid background of political experience, as well, given that voters appear to be more likely to be willing to accept women candidates with previous statewide experience; men seem better able than women to persuade voters that private sector experience can be a credential for a gubernatorial bid.

Strength is seen by voters to be a  
function of character; toughness is  
a trait demonstrated in politics  
through one's actions

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation report, *Turning Point*, features Lake Research Partners and American Viewpoint findings based on 2010 surveys of registered likely voters in eight states with women gubernatorial candidates, two states with only male candidates, and a control group; surveys were also conducted with an oversample of young women voters in select states.<sup>55</sup> *Turning Point* finds new opportunities for women candidates, including the rise of "strength" rather than "toughness" as an important trait; whereas strength is seen by voters to be a function of character, toughness is a trait demonstrated in politics through one's actions. Women are also competitive on the trait of "problem-solving," which is important to voters. In more recent reports, women candidates are given specific advice about the most effective advertising strategies.<sup>56</sup>



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## Future Research Directions

One of the most pressing areas for additional research is the candidate emergence process for governor and U.S. Senator—the most common stepping stones to the presidency. The informal processes that surround gaining political party and financial support for statewide office-seeking can shed light on candidate scarcity, which is one of the central problems facing women with respect to running for governor and president.<sup>57</sup> The role of so-called “dark money” that is being spent in the

*Citizens United* era raises questions about transparency in elections generally, including elections featuring women candidates.

And while Hillary Clinton is the current frontrunner for the 2016 Democratic nomination, whether the short term could bring a female Republican frontrunner for the nomination or a woman of color from either party is much less clear.

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Lawrence, Regina G. and Melody Rose. *Hillary Clinton's Race for the White House: Gender Politics and the Media on the Campaign Trail*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

This book considers women's access to the presidency, with a focus on Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign for president. Historical background is provided on gender and presidential elections. The authors analyze Clinton's campaign closely and use content analysis to test the question of whether the media were biased in coverage of Clinton. They also speculate about the likelihood of electing a woman to the presidency in the future.

Barbara Lee Family Foundation. 2012. “Turning Point: The Changing Landscape for Women Candidates.” A Report by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation.

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation's series “Keys to the Governors' Office” offers practical advice for women gubernatorial candidates. This report presents findings from surveys, focus groups, interviews, and campaign

tracking conducted in 2010, focusing on eight gubernatorial races. The report finds some positive developments for women candidates, concluding that women candidates today have more gender-related strategic advantages. The research was conducted by Lake Research Partners, American Viewpoint, Inc., and Hughes & Company.

Sheeler, Kristina Horn, and Karrin Vasby Anderson. 2013. *Woman President: Confronting Postfeminist Political Culture*. College Station: Texas A & M Press.

This book argues that there has been a backlash against what the authors term “female presidentiality” which can be seen in the 2008 presidential election. The authors situate the election in historical context and analyze the ways that media coverage, popular culture, and campaign discourse rhetorically constructed the presidency as a gendered office in 2008. They argue that both antifeminism and postfeminism were evident in the election and that parody contributed to the reinscription of the presidency as a masculinist institution.

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## Why Women? The Impact of Women in Elective Office

The presence of women in elective office pales in comparison to their presence in the U.S. population. Although several records have been set for women's officeholding in the past decade, women are just 19.4% of members of Congress.<sup>1</sup> Women typically fare better in state legislatures, but even there women only hold 24.2% of seats.<sup>2</sup> The scarcity of elected women is even more dramatic when one considers the gender imbalance of elected officials since the nation's founding.<sup>3</sup> Had more women held office throughout U.S. history, would the country look different today? We can only speculate about what our laws and public policies might look like if American government had been more inclusive over the course of its history.

But what we can determine—through research—is the impact that the women who have served in elective office have had on American politics. Scholars have used a variety of techniques—from interviews and case studies to surveys and statistical analysis—to assess the impact of women in public office. Although the findings are complex, a growing body of evidence shows that gender is an important factor in legislative behavior.

### GENDER AND LEGISLATIVE BEHAVIOR

The most striking research finding about how women and men legislate concerns their legislative priorities. Studies of both state legislatures and Congress find that legislation on issues of particular importance to women was more likely to be introduced by women than by men. At the critical agenda-setting or bill-introduction stage, legislators choose from among countless pressing social, economic, and political issues. Legislators make difficult decisions about which policies merit their time and energy, and women and men typically make different choices about those priorities.

### Women are more likely to make bills dealing with women's issues and children and family issues a priority

For example, in a foundational study using a mail survey of legislators in twelve states in 1988, Sue Thomas found that women were more likely to make bills dealing with women's issues and children and family issues a priority.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, national studies of state legislators conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) in 1988 and 2001 using phone interviews reveal that women legislators were more likely than their male colleagues to list a women's rights bill or a bill affecting children and families as a top priority.<sup>5</sup> A study of Colorado state legislators in 1989 revealed gender differences in the conceptualization of public policy problems—with crime the focus of the study—and consequently, different policy solutions.<sup>6</sup> Research on Congress also finds a different issue emphasis by gender. Michele Swers, for example, found that women were more likely to sponsor women's issues bills in both the 103<sup>rd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> Congresses.<sup>7</sup>

The electoral constraints facing women legislators can also shape what issues are pursued and how they are pursued. For example, Swers shows that in Congress, women senators use their legislative work to combat the stereotype among voters that they are less capable than men of handling military and national security issues.<sup>8</sup>

Women's distinctive legislative priorities are understandable given gender differences in life experiences—ranging from differences in educational and occupational background to differences in caregiving experiences and experiences with gender inequality and

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discrimination. Physical differences, as well, can make policy issues related to women's health and reproduction more salient to women legislators. Women's desire to represent women can also arise if women—once they enter the legislature—believe that issues of disproportionate interest to women are not being addressed.<sup>9</sup> CAWP's congressional interviews also show that it is common for congresswomen to consider how legislation will affect women throughout the country, beyond the boundaries of the districts they represent; they see themselves as "surrogate representatives" for women throughout the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Most women legislators also believe that women have increased the extent to which the business of the legislature is conducted in public, as opposed to behind closed doors

CAWP surveys of women state legislators reveal that women legislators have close ties to women's organizations—much more so than do their male counterparts.<sup>11</sup> The connections of women legislators to women's organizations cross party lines.<sup>12</sup> These connections between women legislators and women's organizations help to give women in office a "collective vision of women's interests" that facilitates women's representation, according to Susan J. Carroll.<sup>13</sup> Both women and men in the legislatures believe that women legislators have increased legislative attention to how bills will affect women, and that women have increased political access for economically disadvantaged groups.<sup>14</sup> Most women legislators also believe that women have increased the extent to which the business of the legislature is conducted in public, as opposed to behind closed doors.<sup>15</sup>

A growing number of studies focus on the intersection

of gender with race. This path-breaking research about the interaction of race and gender identities finds compelling evidence that women of color champion a legislative agenda that combines issues traditionally associated with women as a group and issues historically important to communities of color.<sup>16</sup> For example, African American women state legislators have been found to be distinctive from other legislators in their focus on women's interests and African American interests.<sup>17</sup> A similar pattern is emerging for Latinas in state legislatures.<sup>18</sup> And while there is good reason to be concerned about the status and influence of all women legislators, women of color are arguably favorably positioned to appeal to a broader coalition due to their gender and race identities; women of color are not necessarily disadvantaged.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, Reingold and Haynie show that women of color state legislators are no less committed than white women to women's substantive representation.<sup>20</sup>

New research by Nadia Brown argues for the use of the term "race-gender identity" to better capture the intersectional experiences that African American women bring to their legislative work. Moreover, although Brown finds that African American women legislators find agreement on issues affecting African American women as a group, she also finds that other identities—such as parental status and sexual orientation—matter as well.

Studies have found a wide range of gender differences in legislative behavior beyond policy priorities, though the findings tend to be more variable across studies and the size of gender differences is usually narrower. For example, in an exhaustive study of all stages of the legislative process across two Congresses—the 103rd and 104th—Swers finds gender differences in virtually every aspect of behavior in the U.S. House of Representatives, even in the face of powerful statistical controls.<sup>21</sup> But some of the largest gender effects in her analysis occur in agenda-setting.



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Some advocates of increasing women's presence in elective office argue that women must constitute a "critical mass" of legislators—sometimes described as 25% to 35%—in order for women to overcome their minority status in the legislature and advocate for women as a group. However, most studies do not support the idea that gender differences in legislative behavior suddenly emerge once a specific threshold has been reached.<sup>22</sup> The watershed years for the expansion of women's rights by Congress in the early 1970s occurred when very few women served—far from a critical mass. The women who did serve in Congress played key roles at crucial moments on major pieces of women's rights legislation.<sup>23</sup> Even a small number of women legislators can make a difference.<sup>24</sup> Case studies of congressional policymaking likewise reveal the role that women legislators play throughout the

The women who did serve in Congress played key roles at crucial moments on major pieces of women's rights legislation. Even a small number of women legislators can make a difference

process—and often behind closed doors—in promoting issues important to women and in encouraging attention to the gendered impact of all policies.<sup>25</sup> Kristin Kanthak and George A. Krause emphasize the interaction of numbers with a strategy of coordination among women legislators, finding that women's situation improves in state legislatures when they form a women's caucus.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, women members of Congress are more likely to employ women as members of their staffs.<sup>27</sup> However, women members are not more likely to employ women in the most senior staff positions.

A number of factors may explain why scholars have not found even larger gender differences among legislators. Legislators can be analyzed in other ways, beyond the category of gender. Women hail from different racial, ethnic, religious, and occupational backgrounds. They bring different ideological perspectives to their jobs as legislators and represent different types of constituents from across the country. Thus, as Susan J. Carroll observes, "Even when women members of Congress act in ways that they perceive as representing women, their actions may not always look the same."<sup>28</sup>

It can be challenging for scholars to isolate the impact of women legislators. For example, if women legislators influence the priorities of the legislature as a whole—including men legislators—then the influence of women may be hard to detect. Should men follow women's lead and act for women, too, differences between women and men legislators would be less evident.<sup>29</sup>

## CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN LEGISLATORS

Because women have historically been underrepresented within legislatures, legislatures may not always be the most welcoming institutions.<sup>30</sup> Interview and survey evidence reveal the challenges that women legislators too often face because of gender dynamics within the legislature, as well as the interaction of racial and gender difference.<sup>31</sup> While most women believe they have access to leadership and are consulted within their institutions, a substantial proportion of women state legislators surveyed nationally by CAWP in 2001 do not. In the survey, 42% of women legislators disagreed with the statement that "Most men in my legislature are supportive of moving women into leadership positions"; a similar percentage disagreed with the statement that "The leaders in my legislature are as likely to consult with the women in the legislature as the men when making important decisions."<sup>32</sup>

Experimental research about deliberative democracy

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also sheds light on when and whether women's voices are heard in male-dominated settings. In a new laboratory study about citizen deliberation in small groups, Karpowitz et al. find that the gender composition of the group is consequential for how much women speak, although the results depend on the type of rule governing decision making.<sup>33</sup> They find that women's equal participation in decision making depends on either having an all-female or female-majority group, or on having a unanimous decision-making rule that ensures women's voices will be heard even if they are a minority in the group.

These authors also find that women's substantive representation—measured in the study by the small group reaching a decision that is more helpful to the poor—is more likely to occur when women constitute the majority of a small group and majority rule governs the decision making.<sup>34</sup> The authors show that whether women introduce “care” issues into the debate depends on the share of women in the group, as well as the rule governing deliberations. In short, women's voices can be easily marginalized in deliberations—particularly if they comprise a minority of group members.

Unfortunately, the distinctive issues that women members champion within Congress are less likely to find success than the issues championed by men in Congress.<sup>35</sup> This finding, which holds in a multivariate analysis, may emerge because women have traditionally been underrepresented in Congress and are bringing new issues to the table. The authors of the study see their results as an indication that more women need to win election to Congress and achieve seniority in order to pursue their distinctive policy agenda.

In a state legislative study, Dana E. Wittmer and Vanessa Bouche find that bills on human trafficking that attracted greater female sponsorship are less likely to find success than other bills.<sup>36</sup> This conclusion raises questions about the prospects for success when women legislators pursue issues collectively as women.

The distinctive issues that women members champion within Congress are less likely to find success than the issues championed by men in Congress

## PARTY DIFFERENCES AMONG WOMEN

Among the various factors that might make cooperation among women more or less likely, perhaps none is more important than party. Being an effective legislator may depend on cooperation with party leaders and support for the party's agenda.<sup>37</sup> The extent to which women serving in Congress share a common view of women's interests depends, in part, on which women are serving in a given congressional session. For example, the election of a new group of conservative Republican women in the 104th Congress made for very different relationships among women of the two parties compared with the previous Congress.<sup>38</sup> In an extensive study of gender and party effects across state legislatures, Tracy Osborn finds that Democratic and Republican women state legislators bring very different viewpoints to their roles as lawmakers. She argues that the concept of “women's representation” must account for the ways that women legislate through their political parties.<sup>39</sup>

Typically, studies have shown that women legislators are more liberal than men.<sup>40</sup> But recent research indicates that ideological differences between male and female lawmakers are narrowing.<sup>41</sup> Danielle Thomsen's analysis of the growing conservatism of Republicans in Congress shows that moderates—including moderate Republican women—have greater difficulty winning election.<sup>42</sup> Recent Republican congressional candidates do not differ ideologically by gender, suggesting that the difficulties faced by moderates today can partially explain the large gender gap among Republicans in Congress.<sup>43</sup> While congresswomen in the U.S. House of Representatives worked together across party lines

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through the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues in the past, it is difficult for today's female House members to find common ground.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup>

The growing ideological gulf between the two parties nationally includes women's rights issues. The Democratic party has alleged a "Republican War on Women" in recent election cycles—particularly in response to Republican candidates' campaign gaffes related to abortion and rape.<sup>46</sup> The two parties' differences on abortion and reproductive rights have become especially prominent as both parties have sought women's votes in what is an increasingly competitive environment. The increasing polarization of the two parties nationally makes cooperation across party lines more difficult, including cooperation on the basis of gender.

In the U.S. Senate, however, women from the two parties continue to meet informally for dinner once a month—a feat in today's partisan climate. While most previous research has focused on the House, the greater number of women serving in the Senate in recent years has made possible new research opportunities for studying women's lawmaking. Swers finds significant gender differences in sponsorship and co-sponsorship of women's issues legislation in the Senate, particularly on feminist bills.<sup>47</sup> The desire to represent women characterizes the orientations of both Republican and Democratic women. However, she also finds through case studies that Democratic and Republican women view women's issues differently. Democratic women senators are working together within their caucus on women's rights issues such as reproductive rights and equal pay, standing apart from both the men in their

caucus and their Republican women colleagues. The Democratic women senators also have shown a deep commitment to feminist issues that extends to their work behind the scenes. 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.

How women wield influence in Congress, and how they are received, may be contingent not only on women's party attachments, but also on their numerical presence within their caucus and their location within the majority or minority party. For example, Kristin Kanthak and George A. Krause find that female House members are less valued in terms of campaign contributions from other colleagues as their presence in the House caucus increases; as women gain seats and become a more sizable minority within the caucus, they are perceived as more threatening to the status quo.<sup>48</sup>

Craig Volden, Alan E. Wiseman and Dana E. Wittmer show that the effectiveness of women lawmakers in the House depends on majority party status.<sup>49</sup> While women of the minority party outperform men of the minority party in furthering their bills in the legislative process, majority women do not fare better than majority men. The authors attribute this difference to the ability of women in the minority to have more success in building coalitions. Thus, not only party but status in the majority or minority party interacts with gender to shape effectiveness.

In a novel argument, Clark and Caro contend that multi-member districts in Arizona help women to work across party lines, again highlighting the importance of institutional context for understanding how women legislate.<sup>50</sup>

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## SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

One area of research extends beyond the boundaries of legislative institutions to the public. This line of research asks if women's presence in government has a symbolic effect on voters—and particularly women. While some studies have failed to find the hypothesized effects, other studies do find evidence that women legislators make a difference to the country in a general sense. Women in the public, seeing women participating in politics as candidates and elected officials, may feel more included in politics and be more likely to care about politics and participate as a result.

For example, Nancy E. Burns, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba found that women candidates and elected officials closed the traditional gender gap in psychological engagement.<sup>51</sup> More recently, Kim Fridkin and Patrick Kenney find that the gender gap in political knowledge closes in states with women senators and that women are more politically active in those states.<sup>52</sup> Philip Edward Jones also finds that women are more

likely to know about senators' voting records when the senator is female.<sup>53</sup> And using a novel experiment with a national sample, Wittmer finds that gains in women's collective representation could indeed increase women's political participation.<sup>54</sup>

Women are more likely to know  
about senators' voting records  
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However, the results of studies by Jennifer Lawless and Kathleen Dolan are less conclusive.<sup>55</sup> Other studies find effects for symbolic representation, but argue that those effects are conditional.<sup>56</sup> Although most existing research has usually focused on the effects of women congressional candidates and officeholders, Brookman found that the presence of women state legislative candidates did not increase women voters' political participation.<sup>57</sup>

## Future Research Directions

More research is needed on how women experience legislative life, as well as on how women are navigating the contemporary era of partisan polarization and under what conditions they are able to cooperate across party lines. With more women of color holding office than ever before, new studies are needed about how race and gender work within legislative institutions and the factors that can enhance the influence of all women legislators.

Scholars continue to debate whether and how "women's issues" or "women's interests" can be defined and studied.<sup>58</sup> Some scholars are applying the idea of "claims making" by theorist Michael Saward to women's

legislative activities, which helps to cast a broader net to investigate women's representational acts rather than defining "women's issues" a priori.<sup>59</sup>

If more women are elected to legislative office, more women will be available to serve in both parties and across legislative committees, and more women can seek leadership positions.<sup>60</sup> And the more women win office, the more likely it is that women legislators can represent the diversity of women's experiences, including those of conservative women.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, the women who have served to date have already left their mark.<sup>62</sup>

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## Further Reading

Swers, Michele L. 2013. *Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

This book investigates the role of gender in the U.S. Senate. Swers examines legislative activity for all members in order to isolate gender differences once other member characteristics are taken into account. She also conducts case studies of multiple policy areas in order to pinpoint the interaction of gender with specific aspects of the policymaking process. She pays special attention to the situation facing women within their political parties, finding that Democratic women are working together to advocate for women. Meanwhile, the situation facing Republican women is more complicated because their goal of representing women is often hindered by the agenda and needs of their party.

Volden, Craig, Alan Wiseman, and Dana Wittmer. 2013. "Women's Issues and Their Fates in Congress." Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.

This paper takes an innovative approach to answer an enduring question in the literature: how gender is related to legislative behavior and whether women in Congress provide better substantive representation of female constituents. Their novel approach is to develop an endogenous measure of women's issues, defined as those issues that women are more likely to work on than men. Their dataset spans the years 1973 to 2002 and shows that women's issues achieve less success than men's proposals—particularly at the committee stage. This paper identifies the critical importance that the status of women in Congress holds for the advancement of women's issues in the legislative process.

Carroll, Susan J. "Representing Women: Congresswomen's Perceptions of Their Representational Roles." *Women Transforming Congress*. Ed. Cindy Simon Rosenthal. University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. 50-68.

This chapter examines the perspectives of women in Congress based on interviews conducted by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) with women serving in the 103<sup>rd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> Congresses. Carroll finds that virtually all of the female members of Congress act as "surrogate representatives" for women across the country. The congresswomen see commonalities in the experiences of women and feel an obligation to represent women broadly, even beyond their districts. At the same time, congresswomen's perspectives differ by factors such as district characteristics, party, and race/ethnicity, leading to different approaches to surrogate representation.



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## Media Coverage of Women Candidates

Are the media at least partly to blame for women's underrepresentation in politics? The question has generated much debate.<sup>1</sup> Early studies found that male candidates received more total coverage and better coverage than female candidates. Newer studies find that coverage for women has improved with time. But gendered coverage continues to be a challenge for women's candidacies. And while the rise of new forms of media offers women candidates new opportunities to connect with voters, it has also created new opportunities for sexism to impact women's candidacies.

### MEDIA COVERAGE OF WOMEN CANDIDATES

Seminal work by Kim Fridkin Kahn found that women running for U.S. Senate and for governor in the 1980s received less coverage, and more negative coverage, than male candidates, with greater gender discrepancies among Senate than gubernatorial candidates.<sup>2</sup> Using an experiment and prototype articles that mimicked the different coverage patterns she observed, Kahn further found that these patterns had important consequences for voter evaluations.<sup>3</sup> Candidates—and especially Senate candidates—whose coverage resembled the “female candidate” pattern of press coverage fared worse with voters in a hypothetical contest than those who received the “male candidate” press coverage. The hypothetical Senate candidate receiving “female” press coverage was seen by voters as less electable, with weaker leadership skills.

The good news for women candidates: most recent studies find that amount of coverage has equalized. For example, James Devitt found that male and female candidates for governor in four states in 1998 received the same amount of coverage.<sup>4</sup> Dianne Bystrom and her coauthors also find similarity in amount of coverage in mixed-gender U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races between 1998 and 2002.<sup>5</sup> In a more recent study, Linda Fowler and Jennifer Lawless, examining women

gubernatorial candidates in the 1990s, do not find many direct gender effects on coverage once other factors are controlled.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most consistent—and persistent—findings to emerge from studies is that women candidates receive more attention to appearance, personality, and family than men

But non-sexist coverage remains elusive. One of the most consistent—and persistent—findings to emerge from studies is that women candidates receive more attention to appearance, personality, and family than men.<sup>7</sup> For example, Bystrom and her coauthors found, in newspaper coverage of 2002 mixed-gender gubernatorial and senatorial races, that 8% of news stories about female candidates mentioned the candidate's marital status, compared with only 1% of men's news stories, and that 6% of women's news stories in that year mentioned appearance, compared with only 1% of the men's stories.<sup>8</sup> Bystrom and her colleagues also found disparities in the extent to which reporters call attention to the gender of women candidates compared with men candidates. In an extensive analysis of 2006 and 2008 contests, Johanna Dunaway and her coauthors find that male-female gubernatorial races are more likely to focus on personality traits than other contests.

Qualitative examples of gendered media coverage abound.<sup>9</sup> For example, Carol Moseley-Braun, the only African American woman to ever serve in the U.S. Senate, who sought the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination, was once described by *The Chicago Tribune* as a “den mother with a cheerleader's smile.”<sup>10</sup>

# Media Coverage of Women Candidates

Winning office does not end the effort to obtain fair media coverage; women officeholders, and not just candidates, strive for equitable press coverage. For example, in a study conducted in 1998, David Niven and Jeremy Zilber found that congressional press secretaries felt that the press defined women members of the U.S. House by their gender.<sup>11</sup> Press secretaries who worked for women were more likely than those who worked for men to believe that media coverage of their bosses was unfair. Similarly, Susan J. Carroll and Ronnee Schreiber found that reporting on women in Congress focuses largely on collective efforts on behalf of women's issues.<sup>12</sup> This coverage gives the mistaken impression that women members are not actively involved, either individually or collectively, in working on legislation on other issues.

Press is more likely to distort the messages of female than male senators and women receive less coverage

In a more recent analysis, Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney compare the local press coverage of male and female senators with the senators' communications.<sup>13</sup> They find that the press is more likely to distort the messages of female than male senators and that women receive less coverage. On a more positive note, they also find that women are more likely than men to be credited for positive policy initiatives and to be described with positive traits.

In an extensive study of Hillary Clinton's television news coverage over the course of her time on the political stage, Shawn J. Parry-Giles shows that the media play an important role in shaping judgments of politicians' authenticity.<sup>14</sup> Journalists serve as "character judges" who scrutinize leaders through gendered notions

of authenticity. The study shows that while political women may be lauded for assuming a progressive role, they risk violating traditional notions of womanhood and, as a consequence, jeopardize their portrayal as authentic leaders. Parry-Giles concludes that men in politics continue to be advantaged with the press in terms of judgments of political authenticity.

## WOMEN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The race for the presidency garners the most public attention and the most media coverage. As a particularly "masculine" office, the presidency has proven to be a glass ceiling for women candidates.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, coverage of female presidential candidates has usually reflected and reproduced the cultural idea that the president should be male. In an analysis that stretches from the 1800s to 2008, Erika Falk argues that the press has historically trivialized women's candidacies and portrayed them in stereotypical ways.<sup>16</sup> She argues that "the press portrays women as losers and novelties and not serious candidates" and worries that biased coverage discourages women from running.<sup>17</sup>

When Elizabeth Dole sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, the amount of coverage she received failed to reflect her standings in the polls, disproportionately focused on her lack of funds, and treated her bid as a novelty.<sup>18</sup> Dole received less issue coverage than the male candidates, and more attention was paid to her personality and appearance than to those of the other candidates.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, a qualitative analysis revealed that she was characterized negatively as "scripted, rehearsed, robotic, controlled"—criticisms that seemed to reflect the gender bias of reporters.<sup>20</sup>

Regina Lawrence and Melody Rose found that Hillary Clinton received a similar amount of coverage to Barack Obama in 2008, but that her coverage was more negative.<sup>21</sup> Falk's analysis showed that Clinton received more equitable coverage than previous female presidential

# Media Coverage of Women Candidates

candidates in some respects, but also found inequities in coverage and the persistence of the traditional patterns of media coverage of female presidential candidates.<sup>22</sup> Even public opinion polls showed that many Democrats believed Hillary Clinton was not treated as well by the press as the other candidates.<sup>23</sup> The media also dwelled more on whether Clinton would exit the Democratic race, and when she would exit, than is typical of presidential nomination coverage.<sup>24</sup>

Most notably, media coverage of Hillary Clinton in 2008—and especially cable news coverage—was filled with sexist remarks, from Glenn Beck describing Clinton as a “stereotypical bitch” to Tucker Carlson stating, “When she [Hillary Clinton] comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs.”<sup>25</sup> There were also instances of sexism faced by Clinton on the campaign trail that the media did not regard as newsworthy: Susan J. Carroll observes, “Sexism and sexist remarks by journalists and on-air pundits were treated as acceptable—a normal part of political discourse.”<sup>26</sup> Although they are from different parties and brought quite different backgrounds to the 2008 presidential election, both Clinton and Sarah Palin were portrayed in sexist ways and arguably faced the same gender stereotypes.<sup>27</sup>

Analysis of Palin’s media coverage showed traditional gendered news coverage. Stories about Palin were more likely to mention her gender, appearance, and family status compared with Biden’s.<sup>28</sup> And both Palin’s and Clinton’s coverage in blogs and cable news portrayed the women in vulgar and misogynist ways.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the harsh treatment women faced in 2008 was a significant departure from what had appeared to be a trend of more equitable treatment of women and men candidates.

## CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Today’s 24-hour media cycle, instant communication, and polarized political landscape could deter anyone from throwing his or her hat into the ring. Given gender bias in the media, concern about quality of media coverage and level of media scrutiny may weigh on

A new study of Sunday morning  
political talk shows reveals that the  
vast majority of guests (67%)  
are white men; women of color  
are especially underrepresented

the minds of women more than men. Indeed, Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox find that dealing with the press is among the campaign activities that discourage women potential candidates more than men from running for office.<sup>30</sup>

The underrepresentation of women in the news industry itself and decision-making positions therein partially contributes to distorted and biased coverage.<sup>31</sup> As one journalist put it, “With so few women in decision-making positions, there still is often no one to raise a red flag when egregious sexism appears in news stories.”<sup>32</sup> Women are only about one-quarter of television news directors.<sup>33</sup> In an analysis of major TV networks, wire, on-line news sources, and print, the Women’s Media Center found that over 60% of all bylines and on-camera appearances were by men. A new study of Sunday morning political talk shows reveals that the vast majority of guests (67%) are white men; women of color are especially underrepresented.<sup>34</sup>



# Media Coverage of Women Candidates

To overcome bias, women candidates strategize about gender stereotypes and how best to present themselves to voters and to the press.<sup>35</sup> In addition, educating journalists and calling attention to bias is an important strategy for challenging sexism and improving coverage of women candidates.<sup>36</sup> A campaign aimed at combating sexism in the media holds promise. Called “Name It. Change It.”, the project monitors press treatment of women candidates and documents sexist coverage.<sup>37</sup> Representatives of the media are encouraged to take a pledge to cover candidates fairly and refrain from sexist questions and portrayals. Research conducted by Celinda Lake of Lake Research Partners using an online survey in 2010 indicates that women candidates can combat sexist media treatment if they acknowledge and respond to the mistreatment.

Interestingly, Erika Falk argues that Hillary Clinton’s attempts to call out sexism in 2008 were treated with accusations that she was playing the “gender card.”<sup>38</sup> The media treated this gender-card playing in a negative light—as a phenomenon that is used to gain an unfair advantage. Thus, women candidates’ responses to sexist treatment can potentially beget further gendered coverage.

Recent studies have examined how candidates are

using new media. A study of 2012 Twitter use by U.S. House candidates found that women candidates are more likely to have Twitter accounts and more likely to Tweet.<sup>39</sup> Women’s presence on Twitter is still affected by their overall presence in politics, however. For example, in a study of Twitter use in 2011, Claudette G. Artwick finds that quotes from men are much more commonly tweeted by reporters than are quotes by women. In fact, the share of quotes by women was smaller than their actual presence in politics.<sup>40</sup>

Women candidates are more likely  
to have Twitter accounts and  
more likely to Tweet

While new forms of media provide new ways for women candidates to communicate their messages, the gender dynamics of these new media can be concerning. For example, a national survey revealed that women are more likely than men to experience sexual harassment online, with this experience especially like to occur among young women.<sup>41</sup> The organization WAM (Women, Action, and the Media) is partnering with Twitter to combat harassment.<sup>42</sup>

## Future Research Directions

More research is needed to determine whether and how media coverage differs—for both women candidates and women officeholders—across types of office, party, and race/ethnicity. For example, Sarah Gershon found that minority congresswomen fare worse in terms of amount of coverage and the more negative tone of coverage compared with Anglo women and minority male members of Congress.<sup>43</sup> More analyses like Gershon’s are needed.

New experimental studies can help determine how gendered media coverage affects voter evaluations of candidates. Multi-method investigative approaches, such as those of Heldman and her coauthors, that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis of media coverage, and both multi-candidate and in-depth, single candidate analysis, can provide a comprehensive picture of specific campaigns.<sup>44</sup> And as technology evolves, scholars will need to continue to examine how women candidates are faring in the new media environment.

# Media Coverage of Women Candidates

## Further Reading

Fridkin, Kim L., and Patrick J. Kenney. 2014. *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

This study—the first of its kind—carefully examines the communication strategies of 32 women and men senators and compares the senators’ communications with local press coverage in 2006. The senators’ reelection campaigns are also examined. Fridkin and Kenney consider citizens’ reactions to senator gender, finding important differences in citizen knowledge of their women senators compared with male senators. Throughout, the authors consider how gender stereotypes affect senators’ communication strategies as well as media coverage. Data sources include an analysis of 4,000 news stories and nearly 2,000 press releases, as well as surveys of 18,000 citizens across 17 states.

Falk, Erika. 2010. *Women for President: Media Bias in Nine Campaigns*. 2nd ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Falk uses paired comparisons of male and female presidential candidates throughout U.S. history to study media coverage of campaigns. Her study of nine women’s candidacies extends from the 1800s through the 2008 election, ending with Hillary Clinton’s candidacy. Her analysis reveals the uphill battle of women presidential candidates due to the biased nature of media

coverage, including recurring themes that women are not viable or competent to be president. Media coverage of Clinton showed improvement over that of past female candidates but many of the stereotypical coverage patterns persisted.

Carlin, Diana B. and Kelly L. Winfrey. 2009. “Have You Come a Long Way, Baby? Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage.” *Communication Studies* 60. September-October: 326-43.

This article examines how sexist media coverage during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign of Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton and Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin can potentially increase public skepticism about a woman’s fitness to serve as President or Vice President of the United States. The media coverage of Clinton and Palin centered on common stereotypes of corporate women (e.g., “sex object” “mother” “pet/cheerleader” and “iron maiden”). In moving forward, Cardin and Winfrey suggest that the media and the campaigns of female presidential candidates must attack sexism early to deter its negative influence. Moreover, scholars must educate the public about the prevailing gender stereotypes that took place during the 2008 Presidential campaign if the United States is ever to elect a female President or Vice President.

# Media Coverage of Women Candidates

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## Money and Women Candidates

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

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

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

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

### EVIDENCE OF FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

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

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

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

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

# Money and Women Candidates

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

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

## CHALLENGES IN FUNDRAISING

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

Women have a larger fundraising base than men, but may have to spend more time securing many individual contributions

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

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

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



# Money and Women Candidates

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

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

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

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

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

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

Because the majority of support from women's PACs flows to Democratic women, Republican women face a more daunting task of establishing early viability

## PARTY DIFFERENCES

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

# Money and Women Candidates

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

This disparity in donor networks may partly explain

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

## Future Research Directions

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

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

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

## Further Reading

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

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

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

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

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

themselves to improve the situation of women within the institution.

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

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

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## Women Candidates and Political Parties

Political parties are central to American politics. They provide voters with cues about candidate positions, help conduct elections, and organize government. In contrast to the strong role that parties play in nominations in many other democracies, it is usually the voters in U.S. primary elections who select the parties' nominees; in general elections, voters cast ballots for a candidate rather than a party list. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the role of parties in American elections. Parties can recruit and train candidates, provide endorsements and funding, and act as gatekeepers to the nomination.

Women are not new to party politics. Even before women won the right to vote, they were active in the Democratic and Republican parties. Today's women voters are even more likely than men to identify with one of the major parties, with men more likely than women to be independents.<sup>1</sup> But women do not usually lead their parties. As we will see, this affects women's election to office in direct and indirect ways. In particular, Republican women have not shared equally with men in their party's substantial gains. The representation of women within the Democratic party far exceeds that of women in the Republican party.

### PARTY LEADERS AND WOMEN

A famous quote by Democratic party leader John Bailey encapsulates the historic situation of women candidates in their parties: "The only time to run a woman is when things look so bad that your only chance is to do something dramatic."<sup>2</sup> Much has changed for women candidates. Studies show that party contributions and expenditures are similar for male and female congressional candidates.<sup>3</sup> Burrell observes that women candidates "have become mainstreamed in the parties" since the 1990s because the parties recognize that women are competitive candidates.<sup>4</sup> Women have

also achieved party leadership positions. In Congress, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, the former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, serves as the minority leader. Women have served as congressional committee chairs and have headed the parties' congressional campaign committees.<sup>5</sup> Florida Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz chairs the Democratic National Committee today.

Because male and female party  
leaders have different social networks  
and different beliefs about ideal  
candidate characteristics, the gender  
imbalance in leadership affects  
candidate recruitment

But women are far from achieving equality in party leadership. It has been rare for a woman to chair either national party.<sup>6</sup> Neither party has elected a woman to preside over the U.S. Senate; Pelosi remains the only woman to lead either party within Congress.<sup>7</sup> Nor has a woman ever won a major party's nomination for president. In state and local party organizations, the picture is not much rosier.<sup>8</sup> And in state legislatures, only 16 women are leading chambers across 15 states.<sup>9</sup>

The underrepresentation of women as party leaders is detrimental to electing more women to office. Because male and female party leaders have different social networks and different beliefs about ideal candidate characteristics, the gender imbalance in leadership affects candidate recruitment.<sup>10</sup> This is unfortunate because studies show that women state legislative candidates and state legislators are more likely than



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men to say that they ran for office because they were recruited.<sup>11</sup> The gender of party leaders is not the sole factor, however, since beliefs about women's electability and personal interest in increasing women's representation also matter.<sup>12</sup> Party organizations and party leaders could—if they so desired—play a significant role in the effort to achieve gender parity in officeholding.<sup>13</sup>

**In states where parties play  
stronger roles in candidate selection,  
fewer women hold state legislative office**

Women, more than men, are reliant on party support for their election to office.<sup>14</sup> According to Crowder-Meyer, the type of recruitment strategy that local parties use impacts the likelihood that women will be selected.<sup>15</sup>

However, women in politics often see their parties as a hindrance rather than a help to their candidacies. A majority of locally elected women in a four-state survey said that party leaders had “discouraged potential women candidates from running for office because of their gender.”<sup>16</sup> Kira Sanbonmatsu's case studies of state legislative candidate emergence in six states revealed that women's underrepresentation in legislatures is partly a failure of party leaders to recruit women; indeed, a statistical analysis of all states demonstrates that in states where parties play stronger roles in candidate selection, fewer women hold state legislative office.<sup>17</sup> Candidate gender can also factor into how the congressional campaign committees select candidates.<sup>18</sup> Party leaders, who are primarily interested in winning, do not always believe that women and men are equally competitive; party leader surveys show that it is common for party leaders to believe women will face electoral hurdles in at least some districts.<sup>19</sup> Women may also be overlooked for gubernatorial office.<sup>20</sup>

The global spread of gender quotas for candidates

and legislators has left the United States behind; more than one hundred countries have some type of gender quota, and the adoption of quotas has been on an upward trend since the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> In the United States, quotas for women have not been the subject of debate. Yet, both the Democratic and Republican parties have traditions of gender-balanced rules.<sup>22</sup> Back in the 1920s, the Democratic and Republican National Committees expanded to incorporate one man and one woman from each state.<sup>23</sup> The Democratic party uses a gender quota for selecting delegates to its party conventions. And although more Democratic state parties than Republican state parties have rules mandating “50-50” representation on state party committees, such rules exist within both parties.<sup>24</sup>

## PARTY DIFFERENCES

Data from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) show that women are faring quite differently in the two major parties today: 16.9% of Republican state legislators in 2015 are women, compared with 33.8% of Democratic state legislators.<sup>25</sup> CAWP statistics also show that Democratic women are over 60% of all major party women state legislators and over 70% of members of Congress.<sup>26</sup> There are more than enough women in both parties to run for elective office—and for party office, too; many more women from both major parties could seek and hold office than currently do.<sup>27</sup>

The Democratic and Republican parties have taken polarized positions on women's rights issues since the 1970s, with important differences in the types of interest groups allied with each party.<sup>28</sup> These party differences—particularly on abortion—yield different campaign funding opportunities for Democratic and Republican women. It is much more likely that a woman—compared with her male colleagues—comes from a background of activity in women's organizations and is affiliated with a women's organization.<sup>29</sup> This is true of women of both parties. At the same time, however, Democratic

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women seem to have more opportunities for financial support from women's organizations because of the role that abortion plays for many women's political action committees (PACs) and donor networks.<sup>30</sup>

The types of district characteristics most favorable to electing women differ for women of the two parties. Barbara Palmer and Dennis Simon find that non-minority Democratic women in Congress tend to be elected from ideologically liberal and very Democratic districts compared with Democratic men, whereas Republican women in Congress tend to be elected from more ideologically moderate districts—and therefore more competitive—districts than Republican men.<sup>31</sup> These differences may partly stem from the way that voters perceive Democratic and Republican women candidates. Republican women candidates are perceived as less conservative than Republican men candidates, which can be problematic for women's opportunities in Republican primaries.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the stereotypes that women candidates face transcend party lines. For example, Kira Sanbonmatsu and Kathleen Dolan find that in the 2006 American National Election Study Pilot Survey, voters perceive women in Congress to be better able to handle the issue of education than men within their party, but less able to handle the issue of crime.<sup>33</sup> However, gender stereotypes seem to advantage Democratic women more than Republican women. Moreover, Republican voters are less likely than Democratic voters to express abstract support for voting for a woman candidate, confirming that Republican women appear to face greater electoral hurdles when compared with Democratic women.<sup>34</sup>

## CHALLENGES FACING REPUBLICAN WOMEN

The situation of Republican women merits special attention, given the pattern of continued growth that Democratic women are experiencing compared with the stagnation that characterizes the situation of Republican women within their party.<sup>35</sup>

Some analyses reveal disproportionate barriers facing Republican women. For example, Pearson and McGhee show that non-incumbent Republican women are less likely than non-incumbent men to win their races; this finding of disadvantage persists even when other factors are controlled.<sup>36</sup> And in a new analysis of stereotypes, research by Public Opinion Strategies reveals that Republican women can benefit from stereotypes that are favorable to them, such as being perceived as more honest and more likely to work out a compromise.<sup>37</sup> But they also find that Republicans are more likely to see women as less emotionally suited for politics. Republicans are much less likely than Democrats to see strengths of women in politics and less likely to see benefits resulting from an increase in the presence of women in leadership roles.<sup>38</sup>

Because women are more reliant on party support and are more likely to come to office because of a policy motivation, the growing conservatism of the Republican party and disconnect between the party and moderates are putting Republican women at a disadvantage.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, the more liberal ideology of Democratic women compared with Democratic men does not disadvantage Democratic women in primaries. In a cross-state analysis, Laurel Elder finds that Republican women are faring the worst in more Republican and more conservative states.<sup>40</sup>

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## Future Research Directions

More research is needed on how women access party leadership roles.<sup>41</sup> Leaders of local and state parties may go on to run for office, making the party organization itself an important candidate pool.<sup>42</sup> Because party leaders can affect the recruitment and nomination of candidates, achieving gender parity in party leadership would facilitate gender balance in elective office. Work by Melody Crowder-Meyer about the role of local parties points to the need for more data on women's local officeholding and recognition that parties are often critical at the start of a political career.<sup>43</sup> It is also essential for research to examine the role of parties in funding local and state legislative women candidates; to date, most campaign finance analysis has focused on Congress. Because candidates—including congressional candidates—stand to benefit from

party endorsements, and because parties at all levels try to recruit candidates and clear the field for their preferred candidates, more research is needed on the internal decision-making of party organizations, including the congressional committees of both parties.<sup>44</sup>

Few studies have focused on how electoral rules governing nominations affect women's election to office across states.<sup>45</sup> In one recent study, Pamela Fiber-Ostrow shows that women in California fare better when they run for the legislature under open rules (which allow cross-over voting and independent voters) compared with more closed rules that give the parties more control over nominations.<sup>46</sup> More research is needed to investigate how these types of institutional differences affect women across states.

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This book argues that political parties are actively involved in encouraging—and discouraging—candidates for state legislative office. Drawing on 2001 and 2002 interviews conducted in six states and a 2002 national survey of state party leaders and legislative party leaders sent to all fifty states, Sanbonmatsu finds that party gatekeeping affects women's state legislative representation negatively. She finds that party leader doubts about women's electability and the gendered nature of party leaders' social networks—which are usually male—reduce the likelihood that women will be recruited to run for office.

Crowder-Meyer, Melody. 2013. "Gendered Recruitment without Trying: How Local Party Recruiters Affect Women's Representation." *Politics & Gender* 9 (4): 390-413.

Using a national survey of local party leaders conducted in 2008, Crowder-Meyer considers the role of parties in shaping women's candidacies for local office. She argues that local office is a critical entry point to politics and that parties are important recruiters for this first rung on the political ladder. Crowder-Meyer connects party recruitment activities to the identification of women candidates for office. However, she finds that the effect of recruitment depends on party and on the recruitment strategy that parties employ.

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Sanbonmatsu, Kira, and Kathleen Dolan. 2009. "Do Gender Stereotypes Transcend Party?" *Political Research Quarterly* 62 (3): 485-494.

This article uses national survey data from the 2006 American National Election Studies Pilot Study to compare voter beliefs about men and women within the two major parties. The authors argue that gender stereo-

types exist within both parties. However, Democratic women are more likely to benefit from favorable gender stereotypes than Republican women, while Republican women are more likely to be disadvantaged by gender stereotypes. The authors also find that the public is more likely to see differences between women and men in Congress on issue positions rather than issue competency.

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## Women Voters

Abigail Adams advised her husband John Adams to “Remember the Ladies” in 1776. Nevertheless, women were not enfranchised at the nation’s founding. Hundreds of campaigns waged across states and time would eventually culminate in the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1920. And the 1965 Voting Rights Act would be needed to ensure that all women—including African American women—could vote.

We no longer ponder whether women should vote. Instead, we are usually concerned with how women vote. What is the status of women voters? What role do women voters play in contemporary American politics?

The short answer is that women vote a lot: women are more likely to be registered to vote and more likely to turn out to vote than men. In the most recent presidential election, there were 10 million more women voters than men voters.<sup>1</sup> Women have been more likely to vote in presidential elections since 1980. Meanwhile, studies show that women and men vote differently, making women voters central to the study of American elections.

Some scholars have examined the relationship between women voters and women candidates, given that women voters are a natural base for women candidates. They have also analyzed political knowledge, which is a central building block of political participation.

### **THE GENDER GAP: PARTY, VOTING, AND POLICY DIFFERENCES**

The term “gender gap” has been commonly used in American politics since 1980. It usually refers to the difference in how women and men vote, though it can also be used to describe gender differences in partisan loyalties or policy preferences.<sup>2</sup> A persistent pattern has emerged whereby women are more likely than men to support Democratic presidential candidates. Underly-

**Gender gap = difference in how women and men vote: women are more likely than men to identify as Democrats; men are more likely than women to identify as Republicans**

ing this difference is a gender gap in partisan identification, with women more likely than men to identify as Democrats; men are more likely than women to identify as Republicans.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of a gender gap gives women’s organizations an opportunity for leverage in American politics. It is arguably a generalized resource for women, making possible political claims that warrant attention from candidates and politicians.<sup>4</sup> The gender gap is smaller than other gaps in voting behavior, such as the gap between white and nonwhite voters; nevertheless, the persistence of the gender gap across elections and the majority status of women voters makes the gender gap significant.<sup>5</sup> The distinct preferences of men and women in elections mean that election outcomes might change if only women or only men had the right to vote.

Women were more likely by 10 points to support President Barack Obama, a Democrat, in 2012.<sup>6</sup> In the 2014 midterm elections, exit polls showed that women preferred Democratic candidates for the U.S. House more than men by 10 points. In that year, gender gaps were evident in almost all statewide elections in which exit polls were conducted, with women more likely to prefer the Democratic candidate.<sup>7</sup>

Research has been conducted on some of the central reasons for the gender gap. Overall, it is believed that

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average differences between women and men in their life experiences, jobs, economic and family situations, and, by extension, relationship to politics and public policy, give rise to gender differences in policy preferences and partisanship. The precise reasons and mechanisms for the gender gap have generated substantial debate.

## Women were more likely by 10 points to support President Barack Obama, a Democrat, in 2012

One of the most persuasive explanations for the gender gap concerns women's greater support than men for an active role for government, including stronger social provision.<sup>8</sup> This orientation could arise from women's caregiving roles, greater employment in jobs close to government, economic self-interest, and/or personal experiences with sex discrimination. In a recent analysis, Laurel Elder and Steven Greene find that mothers, but not fathers, are more liberal on social welfare issues.<sup>9</sup>

Small and persistent gender gaps on policy issues, in turn, shape partisan loyalties and voting choices.<sup>10</sup> Personality and socialization may also play a role in shaping men's and women's values, and ultimately their policy preferences and behavior.<sup>11</sup>

There are other partial explanations. One consistent gender gap in policy preferences concerns war and peace issues.<sup>12</sup> Women tend to be somewhat more reluctant than men to support military intervention. The party reputations on defense and war issues, with Republicans typically perceived as more hawkish and stronger on defense than the Democrats, may help to connect these issues to the gap. Note, however, that

women have expressed greater interventionist tendencies for humanitarian causes.<sup>13</sup>

Whether feminists and feminist consciousness drives the gender gap has also been investigated, though this explanation does not find substantial support.<sup>14</sup> The partisan loyalties of women who identify as feminists cannot fully explain the gap, given the widespread nature of gender gaps throughout the electorate. Yet the reason that the gender gap emerged when it did in 1980 is most likely related to the emergence of the modern women's movement and the rising divorce rate, which allowed women to pursue their distinctive policy preferences.<sup>15</sup>

Candidates, politicians, and political parties court women voters with various strategies. Over the course of U.S. history, candidates have made appeals to women in their role as mothers.<sup>16</sup> In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan sought to improve his reputation on women's rights issues while also appealing to subgroups of women.<sup>17</sup> Both parties have battled over women voters in recent elections on reproductive rights issues, with the Democratic party alleging that the Republican party is pursuing a "War on Women."<sup>18</sup> Both parties use sophisticated techniques to target subgroups of women voters through radio and television advertising, as well as direct mail.<sup>19</sup>

Recent turnout efforts aimed at women voters reveal the diversity of subgroups of women as well as some of the key ways that young women are distinctive from older women.<sup>20</sup> For example, Susan MacManus shows that young women voters in 2012 were more ethnically diverse, more liberal, and more Democratic than older women voters, which affected how candidates and parties shaped their appeals.

While women voters overall trend Democratic, there are key differences among subgroups of women. For

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example, unmarried women and women of color are more likely to vote Democratic than married women or non-Hispanic white women.<sup>21</sup> And research examining public opinion by race/ethnic group has found that what the gender gap means and whether it exists on various policy issues is unclear.<sup>22</sup> For example, attention to gender alone fails to capture the determinants of attitudes and voting behavior for one of the fastest growing groups of voters: Latinos. Instead, Christina E. Bejarano shows that the relationship of gender to attitudes and voting among Latinos is shaped by ethnicity, generation, and relationship to migration.<sup>23</sup> She also shows that although Latinos overall are supportive of the Democratic party, Latinas are more Democratic than are Latino men.

Attention to the gender gap doesn't always yield policy benefits for women as a group. Campaign appeals targeted to swing voters may focus on narrow or symbolic issues without addressing the most pressing issues facing women. Also, the interests of women of color, who are the most loyal Democratic voters, are not always acknowledged when "women" are targeted as a group.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Wendy Smooth argues that the gender gap in turnout among African Americans is not necessarily something to celebrate; after all, one of the reasons that turnout is higher for African American women stems from the lesser voting power of African American men as a result of felony disenfranchisement laws.<sup>25</sup> Smooth emphasizes the importance of attention to both race and gender in analyzing voting patterns.

## WOMEN VOTERS AND WOMEN CANDIDATES

Women voters are often thought to be the natural constituency for women candidates. But are women more likely to vote for women candidates? Because voters usually vote for candidates on the basis of party rather than gender, "gender affinity" effects do not seem to

Because voters usually vote for candidates on the basis of party rather than gender, "gender affinity" effects do not seem to be especially important in elections

be especially important in elections. However, Susan J. Carroll finds some evidence that gender gaps are narrower in contests featuring a Republican female candidate compared with races featuring a male Republican candidate; Democratic female candidates, meanwhile, sometimes see larger gender gaps than those seen in contests with Democratic male candidates.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to recognize that women voters are more interested in increasing the presence of women in office than men; problems facing women as a group, including the problem of women's underrepresentation in politics, are more salient to women than to men.<sup>27</sup> Democratic women, in particular, are eager to see a woman elected president.<sup>28</sup>

## WOMEN VOTERS AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

Many have lamented a persistent gender gap in which women tend to be less knowledgeable about politics than men.<sup>29</sup> This gap can put women voters at a disadvantage as they pursue their interests in elections. If women know less about the players and processes of American government, they may be less effective citizens. But other scholars are more optimistic. They point out that women are not always less knowledgeable about politics than men. Instead, women seem to know more about issues that are especially relevant to them. If political knowledge is gendered, then our assessments about how much women and men know depend greatly on what measures are used and whether the measures are tapping into knowledge that

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women are likely to possess. Depending on the measure, women may even have an edge over men. For example, Dolan found that women were more likely to know the percentage of women serving in Congress and more likely to know that their state had a female U.S. Senator.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, Markus Prior shows in a new study that the gender gap in political knowledge declines when survey questions include visual elements, such as photographs, rather than questions that are purely verbal.<sup>31</sup>

He contends that some voters can store political information visually and that women seem to have a more visual cognitive style. His research adds to the view that past research may have exaggerated women's deficit in political knowledge.

Finally, Heather L. Ondercin and her coauthors find that the gender gap in knowledge decreases as a campaign progresses, suggesting that campaigns are especially valuable to the political engagement of women voters.<sup>32</sup>

## Future Research Directions

Scholars continue to investigate the nature of the gender gap in elections and the ways that gender intersects with other important categories of voters, such as race/ethnicity and marital status. And although party identification is a better predictor of vote choice than voter gender, research has yet to fully explore how the gender imbalance of voters, candidates, and elected officials may affect party loyalties. If voters, candidates and elected officials are disproportionately male in the

Republican party compared with the Democratic party, perhaps this knowledge provides cues to the public about which party can best represent them.

Future research should also examine the behavior of women voters in primary elections across offices. Voting behavior studies usually concern the general election stage. But the dynamics of primary elections featuring women candidates are also important aspects of women's election to office.

## Further Reading

Carroll, Susan. J. 2014. "Voting Choices: How and Why the Gender Gap Matters." In S. J. Carroll & Richard L. Fox (Eds.), *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*, 3rd edition (pp. 119-145). New York: Cambridge University Press.

In this chapter, Carroll provides a background on gender gap research. She investigates the gender gap strategies of recent presidential and congressional candidates. Carroll presents data on the size of the gender gap in recent presidential elections and examines the relationship between women candidates and the gender

gap in statewide elections. Explanations for the gender gap in party identification and voting are examined.

Bejarano, Christina E. 2014. *The Latino Gender Gap in U.S. Politics*. New York: Routledge.

While most gender gap research examines the American electorate as a whole, Bejarano offers a new perspective on the gender gap with this thorough comparison of gender differences among Latinos. Using data from a series of national surveys of Latinos, the book investigates the gender gap with respect to public opinion, partisanship, and voting behavior. Bejarano

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shows that gender interacts with ethnicity, immigration, and generation to make the Latina gender gap distinctive in comparison with other groups. She also shows that the overarching Latino community needs to be disaggregated by gender.

Dolan, Kathleen. 2011. "Do Women and Men Know Different Things? Measuring Gender Differences in Political Knowledge." *Journal of Politics* 73: 97-107.

Dolan uses an original, national survey conducted in 2007 to investigate the gender gap in political knowl-

edge in this article. She finds that the traditional gender difference (with women less knowledgeable than men) is only evident for what she calls "traditional political knowledge"; in contrast, there is no gender difference when political knowledge is measured with "gender-relevant" items. This means that we cannot assume that women are less knowledgeable than men. Instead, Dolan calls attention to the ways that gender interacts with American politics, which has consequences for whether women or men are engaged in the political process.



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# Candidate Recruitment and Women's Routes to Elective Office

How do women reach elective office? Where did they get their start? What role does recruitment play in the candidacy decision? What about political ambition? There are many reasons to expect gender differences in how women reach office. For example, women and men typically work in different types of occupations and have different relationships to paid work, and women are usually the primary caregivers in their families. Women's underrepresentation in politics and gender differences in campaign experiences can make for different perspectives on candidacy. Meanwhile, social networks and relationships with political parties, interest groups, donors, voters, and the media can interact with gender. What does this mean for how women reach office?

## **PATHWAYS TO THE STATE LEGISLATURES**

The most comprehensive research on this topic comes from the 1981 and 2008 Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) Recruitment Studies. CAWP surveyed state legislators in 1981 and again in 2008, comparing women state legislators with their male colleagues.<sup>1</sup> The presence of women in state legislative office is important in itself, given the significant policymaking role of the states. But women state legislators are also a pool of potential congressional candidates: about half of the women in Congress previously served in their state legislatures.<sup>2</sup>

The 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study reveals that women and men state legislators have somewhat different occupational backgrounds. Women are more likely to have backgrounds in health and education. The 2008 study found more women from business and law backgrounds than did the 1981 research. But men in the legislatures remain more likely to have those backgrounds. While women lawyers and businesswomen are important pools from which to recruit candidates, they are not the only pools. Business and law are usually seen as the most common stepping-stone occu-

pations for politics, but women can successfully reach office through female-dominated occupations, and in fact, they are more likely to do so. This means that the conventional wisdom about who can reach office fails to capture women's pathways into politics, and the pool of women who could seek office is larger than is commonly believed.<sup>3</sup> The pool of women who could run for the legislature is more than sufficient to achieve gender parity in office-holding in the short to medium-term.<sup>4</sup>

**44% of women state representatives  
had no elective or appointive experience  
prior to entering the legislature**

Political careers are often conceptualized as ladders: one must start on the first rung and work one's way up. In practice, this means that women sometimes think they could not run for Congress before serving in local and state office first, or that a woman couldn't seek a state legislative seat without first holding local office. It turns out, however, that previous officeholding experience isn't always necessary for a successful bid for state legislative office. In the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study, 44% of women state representatives had no elective or appointive experience prior to entering the legislature.<sup>5</sup> Thus, women need not have a longstanding plan or follow a particular series of steps to be successful.

## **SOCIALIZATION AND POLITICAL AMBITION**

One strategy for increasing the number of women candidates is to cultivate women's interest in running for office. In an important series of books and articles that analyze the dearth of women candidates from the perspective of those in the "eligible pool" of citizens who could theoretically run for office, Jennifer Lawless

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and Richard Fox consider gender differences in orientations toward candidacy. Their “Citizen Political Ambition Panel Study,” which began in 2001 with a national sample of 6,800 citizens, examines women and men in the typical occupations that lead to candidacy—business, law, education, and political activism. These are individuals who could have run for office—they had the right resumes—but they did not. Why not? What differentiates those with and without plans to enter politics?

Lawless and Fox’s answer is the ambition gap.<sup>6</sup> In the first wave of their study (conducted in 2001), they found

Increasing women’s presence in the pipeline professions are insufficient to achieve gender parity; it is essential to close the gender gap in political ambition

that 19% of men, but only 10% of women, had seriously considered running, whereas 57% of women, compared with 41% of men, had never thought about it.<sup>7</sup> Among those interested in running, women are less likely to set their sights on national office compared with men.<sup>8</sup> These results are puzzling because prior research had argued that gender equality in the eligibility pool should lead to parity in officeholding.

A large part of the answer, according to Lawless and Fox, is that these women—though “qualified” on paper to enter politics—do not perceive themselves as qualified. Just 14% of women in the 2001 study of citizens said they were “very qualified” to run compared with 26% of men, while 28% of women and only 12% of men saw themselves as “not at all qualified.”<sup>9</sup> Lawless and Fox conclude that open-seat opportunities and increasing women’s presence in the pipeline professions are insufficient to achieve gender parity; instead, they

argue that it is essential to close the gender gap in political ambition.<sup>10</sup>

In their most recent study, Fox and Lawless extended their eligibility pool approach to survey 4,000 young men and women about their political aspirations and the determinants of ambition.<sup>11</sup> Similar to their citizen study, they find a gender gap in political ambition. In this study, which involved an online 2012 survey, they also find that the predictors of ambition are similar in young women and men; however, young women are less likely to “possess the ingredients” that lead to an interest in running for office.<sup>12</sup> Although young women are interested in pursuing social change, they are less likely than young men to see electoral politics as the way to achieve change.

## POLITICAL RECRUITMENT

Studies also indicate that candidate recruitment is critical. The 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study found that women were much more likely than their male colleagues to have run for the legislature because they had been recruited. In fact, a *majority* of women state legislators had not seriously thought about running for the legislature until someone else suggested it.<sup>13</sup> Asked why they sought their current seat, 24% of women state representatives, compared with only 15% of their male colleagues, said that being asked by the party or an elected official was the single most important reason they ran.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Fox and Lawless find that citizens are more likely to think about running for office if they have been recruited.<sup>15</sup>

In the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study, political parties and public officials were the most influential sources of encouragement among those women and men legislators who ran at least in part because of recruitment.<sup>16</sup> Because candidacy has not been a typical path for women, and because of gender bias in politics, it is perhaps not surprising that women need more recruitment and encouragement compared to men. Another

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study also finds that among state legislative candidates, women are more likely to have run because of encouragement.<sup>17</sup> Party recruitment activities may be especially important in local politics. Melody Crowder-Meyer finds that greater activity by local parties can increase the presence of women candidates for local office, but that the gender and networks of party leaders shape those effects.<sup>18</sup> Thus, while American elections are often characterized as candidate-centered rather than party-centered, parties often play an important role in encouraging candidates to enter races. Indeed, a majority of state and legislative party leaders from the fifty states reported on a survey that new state legislative candidates are typically encouraged to run by the party rather than coming forward on their own.<sup>19</sup>

Political parties are not the only agents of recruitment. Women's groups and PACs have identified, trained, and supported women's candidacies for decades. Organizations interested in electing more women to office recognize the critical role of recruitment. For example, organizations such as Emerge America, EMILY's List, and the Excellence in Public Service programs are seeking to identify women and encourage them to run. These efforts are especially important because women are more likely than men to cite organizations as important to their bids for office.<sup>20</sup>

According to Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, the decision to run is more "relationally embedded" for women, meaning that women are more likely than men to evaluate the effects of their candidacies on their families and consider whether they have sufficient support and encouragement from political actors.<sup>21</sup> In light of this gender difference, the presence of supports and resources is critical to increasing women's representation; the absence of obstacles is insufficient to increase women's representation.

Both major political parties could expand and intensify their efforts to encourage women to run for office, but

the problem is more acute on the Republican side. Just 16.9% of Republican state legislators are women in 2015, compared with 33.8% of Democratic state legislators who are women.<sup>22</sup> Democratic women are 60% of major party women state legislators and over 70% of women members of Congress.<sup>23</sup>

The dearth of Republican women in office does not necessarily imply that the Democratic party has a monopoly on recruiting women candidates. In fact, Fox and Lawless do not find party differences among women citizens in terms of recruitment by party leaders, although Republican women were less likely than Democratic women to have been recruited to run by a political activist.<sup>24</sup> And more women of color could be recruited by both parties to seek office from a wider range of districts.<sup>25</sup>

Increasing women's presence in the pipeline professions are insufficient to achieve gender parity; it is essential to close the gender gap in political ambition

Party recruitment of candidates can help women, but it can also be problematic for women. Party leaders, who are usually male, tend to seek out candidates like themselves, and they have more access to and knowledge of male potential candidates.<sup>26</sup> The women state representatives in the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study were somewhat more likely than their male colleagues to have experienced efforts to discourage their candidacies. And women of color who are serving in the state legislatures are even more likely than non-Hispanic white women legislators to experience efforts to discourage their candidacies.<sup>27</sup>

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Kira Sanbonmatsu's statistical analysis shows that party efforts to restrict the nomination negatively affect women's state legislative representation.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, David Niven's analysis of Florida state legislative candidates found that women were more likely to drop out of contests where their party was strong, indicating that women may lack party support.<sup>29</sup> Thus, recruitment can help women decide to seek office, but negative recruitment can play a role as well. In the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study, women of color in the state legislators were disproportionately likely to have overcome efforts to discourage their candidacies.<sup>30</sup>

Because of the greater attractiveness of holding state-wide and federal office compared to many local and state legislative offices, recruitment may be less important for those races. In other words, it may not be necessary for the party to "beat the bushes" to find an interested candidate. At the same time, though, there is much at stake for the two parties in recruiting the best candidates. The national parties want to field the best congressional candidates for competitive seats—particularly today with intense party competition and electoral volatility.

## CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE EMERGENCE

A study of candidate emergence for 2006 open congressional seats reveals mixed results about party receptivity to women candidates. Brian Frederick and Barbara Burrell examined the "positional pool" of eligible candidates by collecting data on state and local officeholders within each open-seat district; the "mentioned pool" of potential candidates mentioned in the media; a pool of potential candidates provided by "informants" or those within leadership positions within each district; and the actual candidates who entered the primaries.<sup>31</sup> Both the share of women in the positional pool (21%) and the pool of potential candidates identified by informants (29%) exceeded the presence of women as the actual primary candidates who

Women were less likely than men  
to have received encouragement  
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a national party committee

entered (18%)—indicating a dropoff from "potential" to "actual" congressional candidate. Some gender differences also emerged in the survey Frederick and Burrell conducted of all of the potential plus actual candidates. They found that women potential candidates were more likely to have received interest group encouragement than men and that local party interaction was similar for women and men. However, the women were less likely than the men to have received encouragement from either a state party or a national party committee.

## NEW EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH

Another challenge to increasing women's representation has been identified in a provocative new study by Kristin Kanthak and Jonathan Woon: women may be more "election averse" than men on average.<sup>32</sup> Their study did not examine electoral politics directly. Instead, the college-student subjects in their experiment could volunteer to "run" (and "campaign") to be the representative of their small group. In their study, the task at hand was not governing but completing a simple addition task—a task on which women and men performed equally well. The critical gender difference in their study was that although women were equally likely to volunteer to be the representative from their group, they were less likely to do so if the selection mechanism was an election with a "campaign" to select the person. In other words, the ability and willingness of women to lead was thwarted by the necessity of standing for election. The authors conclude that elements of competition and evaluation that are involved in elections may discourage women from seeking public office.



# Candidate Recruitment and Women's Routes to Elective Office

## Future Research Directions

More research is needed on the process by which interest groups, PACs, and parties identify candidates for office. Who is mentioned in the media—and who is not mentioned—deserves more analysis as well. Future research could be modeled on Niven's study that examined candidates who declared but dropped out, or Frederick and Burrell's study comparing the candidate pool with actual candidates in open-seat congressional races.<sup>33</sup> These types of studies could shed light on the pre-primary candidate emergence process.

New efforts are underway to recruit more Republican women to run for office, although these efforts do not seem to approach the resources already available to

Democratic women.<sup>34</sup> Republican women's underrepresentation persists, and the Republican party's recent successes have failed to substantially change the situation facing Republican women. The fate of Republican women seems to be intimately linked to the fate of moderates more generally.<sup>35</sup> More attention to the geographic differences that are associated with Republican women's success might shed light on how more Republican women might reach office in the future.<sup>36</sup> To better understand the reasons for women's underrepresentation, including Republican women's underrepresentation, scholars should study the strength of recruitment and support mechanisms that are available to women candidates.<sup>37</sup>

## Further Reading

Carroll, Susan J., and Kira Sanbonmatsu. 2013. *More Women Can Run: Gender and Pathways to the State Legislatures*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Analyzing nationwide surveys of state legislators conducted in 2008 and 1981 by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), this book advances a new approach for understanding women's election to office, challenging assumptions of a single model of candidate emergence and the necessity for women to assimilate to men's pathways to office. Carroll and Sanbonmatsu argue that a relationally embedded model of candidate emergence better captures women's decision-making than an ambition framework in which candidacy is self-initiated. They argue that more women can run if more efforts are made to recruit women of varying backgrounds. Their research also examines party differences and the reasons that Democratic women are outpacing Republican women.

Lawless, Jennifer L. and Richard L. Fox. *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Rev. ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

In this revised version of their popular book *It Takes a Candidate*, Lawless and Fox examine the ambition gap among women and men citizens. They conduct a panel study of citizens positioned to run for office from the fields of business, law, education, and political activism based on surveys conducted in 2001 and 2008. Topics of the book include the relationship between gender and family life, recruitment to politics, and the role of qualifications. Their account emphasizes the effects of traditional gender socialization on political ambition. They find that women are less likely than men to have considered running for office. The authors argue that this ambition gap is central to the underrepresentation of women in elective office.

# Candidate Recruitment and Women's Routes to Elective Office

Lawless, Jennifer, and Richard L. Fox. *Girls Just Wanna Not Run: The Gender Gap in Young Americans' Political Ambition*. Washington, DC: Women & Politics Institute.

This report uses a survey of college students between the ages of 18 to 25 to investigate the origins of the gender gap in political ambition. Lawless and Fox find that even in college, women are less likely to exhibit interest in a future bid for office than men. College men are more likely than college women to find a career in politics attractive. The report shows that

college women are less likely to view themselves as qualified for candidacy, and that college men are much more likely to have received encouragement from to run for office. Importantly, Lawless and Fox note that the gender gap in ambition does not mean that women aren't interested in making a difference; instead, both women and men want to bring about societal change. Whereas women are more likely to see working through charitable organizations as a means to that end, men are more likely to see candidacy as the appropriate venue.

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The American population has changed dramatically over the past several decades. The growth of the Latino and Asian populations, largely driven by immigration, has fundamentally altered the composition of the country. Today, more than one-third of the U.S. population is nonwhite, Hispanic, or both; on the 2010 Census, 28% of U.S. residents identified as nonwhite racially and 16% identified as Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> Elected officials are also changing. To a large extent, recent gains in women's officeholding have been fueled by the achievements of women of color candidates. Nearly one of every three Democratic women state legislators today is a woman of color, as are two of the nation's three Republican women governors.<sup>2</sup> Increasing the number of elected women of color is vital to achieving gender parity in politics. Many challenges remain, however, in order for women candidates of color to reach office in proportion to their presence in the population. Research about women of color is expanding and identifying important differences in how women reach office and how they legislate.

### OFFICEHOLDING BY WOMEN OF COLOR

In recent years, women of color have been holding office at historically high levels.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, 33 women of color serve in Congress, 9 in statewide elective executive office, and 390 in state legislatures. African American women constitute the majority of women of color in public office; their representation has risen dramatically since the 1965 passage of the Voting Rights Act and the creation of majority-minority districts.<sup>4</sup> In the past three decades, the proportion of state legislators who are African American has nearly doubled: while they made up only 7% of women state legislators in 1981, today they are 14.1%.<sup>5</sup>

Women of color are more likely to identify as Democrats than Republicans. African Americans—both

voters and elected officials—tend to be overwhelmingly Democratic, dating back to the Democratic party's embrace of civil rights in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> All five of the Asian American women in Congress are Democrats.<sup>7</sup> However, the greater tendency to support the Democratic party is less strong beyond African Americans; the Asian American and Latino communities are more likely than are African Americans to include Republican party

**In 2015, 33 women of color serve  
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adherents.<sup>8</sup> While all but one of the 18 African American women serving in Congress are Democrats, seven of the nine Latinas serving in Congress are Democrats and two are Republicans.<sup>9</sup> And the two women of color who grabbed national headlines in 2010 were Republicans: Susana Martinez of New Mexico and Nikki Haley of South Carolina became the first women of color to win gubernatorial office in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Having won their reelection campaigns, both women continue to serve in 2015. According to the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project (GMCL), the most comprehensive study of officeholding by people of color, women of color are less likely to hold office than are men of color.<sup>11</sup> Yet, looking over time at officeholding patterns, scholars have found that much of the growth in officeholding by people of color in recent years has been driven by women of color.<sup>12</sup> At local, state and national levels, African American women hold office in the largest numbers, followed by Latinas and then Asian Americans, with the smallest group being women of Alaskan Indian or Native American descent.<sup>13</sup>

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## THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND RACE

The pathways that women of color take to public office and the challenges they face as candidates are somewhat different from those of non-Hispanic white women.<sup>14</sup> For example, women of color legislators are more likely to be elected from majority-minority districts.<sup>15</sup> Such districts were drawn in response to racially polarized voting patterns and the desire to allow minority voters to select their candidates of choice. The creation of these districts was critical to the progress that women of color have made in winning office to date.<sup>16</sup> It is unlikely, however, that majority-minority districts alone can increase officeholding by women of color in the future—in part because of limited opportunities to draw additional districts. In addition, the future of these districts is uncertain in light of *Shelby County v. Holder*<sup>17</sup>, which overturned a key provision of the Voting Rights Act.

Only two women of color  
have served in the Senate

While majority-minority districts have provided critical electoral opportunities for candidates of color, winning statewide office has proven more challenging. Women of color are only 2.8% of all statewide elective executives.<sup>18</sup> In the history of the United States, only two women of color have served in the Senate: Carol Moseley Braun, who is African American and served between 1993 and 1999, and Mazie Hirono, an Asian American who won election in 2012 and continues to serve.<sup>19</sup> The stereotypes and barriers that women of color face in electoral politics are not identical to those faced by non-Hispanic white women or by men of color; instead, race and gender intersect, creating unique opportunities and barriers for minority women.<sup>20</sup>

For example, negative stereotypes about African American women's personality traits and sexuality—many of which date back to slavery—are unlike those stereotypes that confront white women.<sup>21</sup> Challenging these stereotypes is made more difficult because of the dearth of women of color in visible public positions. As Melissa Harris-Perry has observed, African American women face damaging stereotypes but have lacked the resources and public presence to challenge them.<sup>22</sup> It is for these reasons that First Lady Michelle Obama has played a particularly important role on the national stage, counteracting longstanding stereotypes about African American women.

Studies show that the factors that help elect people of color to office work differently by gender.<sup>23</sup> Although minorities are more likely to win election in smaller, single-member district systems than in at-large systems that span a larger geographic area, this relationship turns out to explain the officeholding of men of color but not women of color.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the factors that facilitate the election of women of color—such as majority-minority districts—differ from those that affect the election of non-Hispanic white women, making for further complexity.<sup>25</sup>

As a consequence, studies have focused specifically on the experiences of women of color and, when possible, compared women of color across race/ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup> This research has often taken the form of case studies because of the relatively small number of women of color candidates competing for and holding state and federal office.<sup>27</sup>

Because of race-related and gender-related stereotypes, women of color can be considered to be doubly disadvantaged when they run for office.<sup>28</sup> The typical politician is a non-Hispanic white male, meaning that women of color are likely to have a higher credibility threshold to surmount with voters. Candidate recruit-

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ment can also be an obstacle. Party leaders may seek to replicate formulas that have worked in the past in a given district, making assumptions about voter unwillingness to support candidates other than white male candidates.<sup>29</sup> These assumptions about viability can make marshaling sufficient campaign resources more challenging for women of color. Indeed, the 2008 CAWP Recruitment Study—a national study of state legislators—finds that women of color are even more likely than their non-Hispanic white female colleagues to believe it is harder for women to raise money than men.<sup>30</sup> Research shows that Black women congressional candidates are disadvantaged in contributions.<sup>31</sup>

Because women of color are more likely than non-Hispanic white women to win election from majority-minority districts—and therefore districts safe for their party—they are more likely to face primary competition and less likely to reach office as a result of recruitment.<sup>32</sup> Viewed in one light, this can mean that women of color are able to reach office successfully without needing party recruitment. However, this means that women of color have not reaped the benefit of recruitment, which is disproportionately responsible for women reaching state legislative office compared with men's typical route.<sup>33</sup> Women of color are also more likely than their non-Hispanic white female colleagues to have encountered efforts to discourage their candidacies, meaning they have surmounted higher hurdles.<sup>34</sup> Together, this evidence suggests that were parties to become more receptive to and appreciative of their candidacies, women of color could be recruited for many more state legislative races.

Meanwhile, achieving statewide elective executive office remains a particular challenge for women of color.<sup>35</sup> It appears that women of color are overlooked as candidates for these important offices.

Campaign trainings—such as the Center for American Women and Politics' Ready to Run® Diversity Initiative

Women of color are more likely than their non-Hispanic white female colleagues to have encountered efforts to discourage their candidacies, meaning they have surmounted higher hurdles

that offers specific workshops for African American women, Asian American women, and Latina women—can help women of color build networks, access role models, and develop strategies for challenging traditional recruitment patterns.<sup>36</sup> Women of color are developing financial networks and organizations specifically tailored to women of color candidates.<sup>37</sup> Such efforts dedicated to electing more women of color are extremely important in light of the unique perspectives women of color bring to government.

Rethinking what is “political” opens the door to a wider range of potential candidates because of the important roles that women of color play in their communities.<sup>38</sup> Cathy J. Cohen argues that the political participation of women of color doesn't always fit conventional definitions of “political activity” as defined by mainstream political scientists; instead, research—and particularly research on African American women—has highlighted political activities that women of color undertake through work in local communities and churches and through labor organizing.<sup>39</sup>

Recent studies are seeking to turn the idea of the double-disadvantage faced by minority women candidates on its head, arguing that the intersection of gender and race may put women of color at an advantage rather than a disadvantage.<sup>40</sup> African American women and Latinas constitute a larger share of African American legislators and Latino legislators, respectively, than white women constitute of all white legislators.<sup>41</sup> Wendy Smooth argues that women of color candidates



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can appeal to a broader range of voters by tapping into communities of color and by appealing to women voters across racial lines.<sup>42</sup> Christina E. Bejarano's book about Latinas reaches a similar conclusion; it challenges the notion that Latinas are inherently disadvantaged in politics. Instead, Bejarano argues that Latinas have fewer electoral disadvantages due to the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender.<sup>43</sup>

Electing more women from all racial/ethnic backgrounds is likely to lead to policy change. 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 unique perspectives as officeholders.<sup>44</sup> For example, Edith J. Barrett analyzed African American state legislators through a 1992 survey and found that African American women legislators coalesced around a common agenda of education, health care, and economic development—an agenda that differed somewhat from that of their African American male and white female colleagues.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Kathleen Bratton, Kerry Haynie, and Beth Reingold find in a study of ten state legislatures in 2001 that African American women sponsor both Black interest and women's interest bills, and that African American women's legislative behavior differs from African American men and white women.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, Reingold and Smith find that intersectionality is apparent in legislating on welfare policy in the states, with women of color state legislators associated with higher cash benefits.<sup>47</sup> In one of the few studies to examine Latino state legislators, Luis Fraga and his coauthors find considerable overlap between Latinas and Latinos but note that Latina state legislators are more likely to feel it is important to represent multiple minority groups.<sup>48</sup>

A recent book by Nadia Brown proposes a new way of conceptualizing the role of identity in shaping legislative behavior.<sup>49</sup> In a multimethod analysis of Black women state legislators' behavior in Maryland, Brown proposes that both racial and gender identities are consequential, and labels this identity "race-gender identity." She also argues for "representational identity theory"; this approach builds on past theories that find a role for collective race and gender identities in representation, while also allowing for Black women's individual experiences to matter as well. The book provides powerful evidence that Black women make a difference in office while also challenging the conventional wisdom that Black women are monolithic. While Brown's study shows that Black women's legislative behavior is distinct from other legislators and cannot be fully understood without attention to intersectionality, she also argues for the importance of differences among Black women. One implication of her work is that the effects of identity appear to be more fluid than previously thought.

## Winning office does not always guarantee influence

At the same time that women of color have made their mark in office, studies show that interpersonal dynamics within legislatures can produce and reproduce gender and racial categories, making legislative life challenging for women of color.<sup>50</sup> Winning office does not always guarantee influence. Because women of color are a numerical minority within legislatures and have not typically been part of a state's traditional power structure, they may not have equal access to formal or informal leadership positions.<sup>51</sup>

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## Future Research Directions

Studies of women of color in politics, and studies using an intersectional approach to American politics generally, are increasingly common. But much more research is needed due to the fluidity of race/ethnic categories and variation in how social categories and identities change across space and across time.<sup>52</sup> For example, while some districts are majority-minority and have a long tradition of officeholding by people of color, other districts are experiencing recent changes in racial and immigrant composition. More research is needed to examine the experiences of women of color candidates and particularly candidate emergence, primary election experiences, and fundraising. Scholars have observed

that women of color often participate in politics at a higher rate than the standard models of participation would predict.<sup>53</sup> Thus, new theories, approaches, and data collection efforts designed to capture the political lives of women of color are still very much needed.

Kelly Dittmar's recent report for Higher Heights for America illustrates the gains that African American women have made in politics—even attaining state legislative leadership positions in some cases.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the analysis shows that minority women have yet to achieve their potential. Additional research within states is needed in order to fully understand how more women of color can be elected.

## Further Reading

Brown, Nadia E. 2014. *Sisters in the State House: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This path-breaking book examines the role of identity in legislative decision making with a focus on Black women state legislators in Maryland—one of the largest groups of Black women state legislators in the country. Using multiple methods—interviews, case studies, participant observation, and feminist life histories—Brown examines how Black women legislate and how they perceive their representational role. Brown develops a theory of representational identity to explain how Black women are both collectively and individually shaped as legislators; she also leverages differences across the women and across policy areas to better understand the consequences of race and gender for representation. Although Brown finds that Black women often work together on issues that affect Black

women as a group, she also finds important differences among Black women by generation, parental status, and sexual orientation.

Smooth, Wendy. 2014. “African-American Women and Electoral Politics: Translating Voting Power into Officeholding.” In Carroll, Susan J. and Richard Logan Fox, eds. *Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics*. Third Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In this chapter, Smooth identifies the significant role that African American women play as voters and demonstrates their growth as candidates and officeholders. Smooth also argues that an intersectional perspective helps to identify some of the unique opportunities that African American women candidates hold as they appeal to both the women's community and the African American community.

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Bejarano, Christina. 2015. *The Latina Gender Gap in U.S. Politics*. New York: Routledge.

While most gender gap research examines the American electorate as a whole, Bejarano offers a new perspective on the gender gap with this thorough comparison of gender differences among Latinos. Using data from a series of national surveys of Latinos, the book inves-

tigates the gender gap with respect to public opinion, partisanship, and voting behavior. Bejarano shows that gender interacts with ethnicity, immigration, and generation to make the Latina gender gap distinctive in comparison with other groups. She also shows that the overarching Latino community needs to be disaggregated by gender.

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