

# SEX, BIPARTISANSHIP, AND COLLABORATION in the U.S. Congress

Written by  
Jennifer L. Lawless  
Sean M. Theriault

## Foreword



Women have never come close to achieving parity with men in Congress and state capitols across the United States. The Political Parity program has sought to understand and confront the obstacles so that we can achieve more equal representation for women in high office. This report makes an important contribution to our grasp of the problem and potential solutions.

Political Parity has served as a nonpartisan platform for dedicated leaders, researchers, and funders who are changing the face of US politics. With a bipartisan Leadership Team of more than 50 women at the top of this field, we have worked collectively to elevate the number of women in the halls of Congress and governor's mansions. Currently, women make up just 18 percent of Congress and hold only 6 governorships. Adding more women to national political office is not just a matter of fairness—it can help break the gridlock and polarization in Washington. Women bring a broad perspective to policymaking. It's common sense that truly representative political bodies will reflect the public will more fully.

While Political Parity completes its work over the next year, we look forward to thoughtfully engaging leading voices and completing major research projects to serve as a lasting contribution to the advancement of women's political leadership. Our vibrant website, [politicalparty.org](https://politicalparty.org), will remain a beacon of knowledge and actionable ideas. We thank Marni Allen, the long-time director of Political Parity, for her tireless and effective leadership. Thanks also to team members Malliga Och and Lauren Bush. Our mission will move forward through the voices of our partner organizations and the research we have led.

We are especially grateful to Jennifer L. Lawless and Sean M. Theriault for their authoritative work in producing this report – rich in insights into how women's participation and collegiality might alter the political landscape – even in a climate of heightened partisanship.

### Swanee Hunt

Co-Chair, Political Parity  
President, Hunt Alternatives

## Jennifer L. Lawless



Jennifer L. Lawless is professor of government at American University, where she is also the Director of the Women & Politics Institute. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University and her B.A. from Union College. Professor Lawless' research, which has been supported by the National Science Foundation, focuses on representation, political ambition, and gender in the electoral process. She is the author of *Becoming a Candidate: Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and the co-author of *Running from Office: Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015) and *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Her work has appeared in many academic journals, and she is also a nationally recognized speaker on electoral politics. Her scholarly analysis and political commentary have been quoted in numerous newspapers, magazines, television news programs, and radio shows, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Associated Press*, *Reuters*, *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell*, *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, the *CBS Evening News*, *ABC World News Tonight*, *CNN.com*, and *MSNBC.com*.

## Sean M. Theriault



Sean M. Theriault is professor of government and university distinguished teaching professor at the University of Texas. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from Stanford University (in 2001; M.A. in Political Science in 2000), his M.S. in Public Policy Analysis from the University of Rochester (1996), and his B.A. from the University of Richmond (1993). His research focuses on decision-making in the U.S. Congress. He has published three books: *The Power of the People: Congressional Competition, Public Attention, and Voter Retribution* (Ohio State University Press, 2005), *Party Polarization in Congress* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), and *The Gingrich Senators: The Roots of Partisan Warfare in Congress* (Oxford University Press, 2013). He has also published numerous articles in a variety of journals on subjects ranging from presidential rhetoric to congressional careers and the Louisiana Purchase to the Pendleton Act of 1883. He is a nationally recognized speaker on Congress and party polarization. He or his research has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Huffington Post*, *CNN*, and the *Dallas Morning News*.

# SEX, BIPARTISANSHIP, AND COLLABORATION in the US Congress

## Introduction

In fall 2013, many Americans experienced – firsthand – the consequences of political dysfunction. From furloughed workers to disgruntled tourists to patients denied access to federally-funded clinical trials, the effects of the government shutdown were widespread. Around-the-clock coverage of the federal government’s inability to pass a budget only reinforced the worst clichés about politicians. The *Daily News*, on the first day of the shutdown, ran the headline, “House of Turds,” over a picture of then-House Speaker John Boehner.<sup>2</sup> The *Washington Post* went with “In Shutdown Blame Game, Democrats and Republicans United: It’s the Other Side’s Fault.”<sup>3</sup> The CNN.com homepage flashed: “The biggest threat to the U.S. economy? Washington dysfunction.”<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly, this political climate has culminated in the most negative public attitudes toward government since the advent of modern polling. The Pew Research Center, which has tracked the public’s trust in government since 1958, has uncovered a steady downward trend. By 2013, not even one in five voters trusted government to do what is right at least most of the time.<sup>5</sup> Approval ratings for Congress, which generally signal how citizens feel about the national government, are also in deep decline, regularly dipping into the single digits. Even U.S. Senator John McCain joked that Congress is down to “paid staffers and blood relatives” approving of the job they do.<sup>6</sup>

Amid the dysfunction, some see a potential solution: more women in politics. After all, it was women, on both sides of the aisle, who received credit for ultimately ending the government shutdown. Indeed, then-Senator Mark Pryor became a “huge fan” of his female colleagues after watching them spearhead the negotiations. “Women in the Senate is a good thing,” he told a reporter. “We’re all just glad they allowed us to tag along so we could see how it’s done.”<sup>7</sup> Women, who at that time chaired or sat as ranking members on ten of the Senate’s 20 committees, could also take more than partial credit for passing the budget, the transportation bill, the farm bill, the Water Resources Development Act, and the Violence Against Women Act.<sup>8</sup> These successes led John McCain to gush, “I am very proud that these women are stepping forward. Imagine what they could do if there were 50 of them.”

Are women more likely than men to focus on problem solving and less likely to engage in procedural gamesmanship?

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That would, of course, involve quite a bit of imagination; women hold only 20 seats in the Senate. Assessing the veracity of McCain's conclusion would also require a far more comprehensive study of how women and men legislate and collaborate on Capitol Hill. To be sure, women played an instrumental role in ending the 2013 shutdown. And the bipartisan approach they pursued suggests that there could be something "different" about the way women govern. But this is an empirical question. Was the shutdown an anomaly? Or are women more likely than men to focus on problem solving and less likely to engage in procedural gamesmanship? Are women less likely than men to support measures and introduce amendments that work to stymie the legislative process? Are they more inclined to engage in symbolic activities that indicate a sense of collegiality and comity?

Despite growing bodies of research about party polarization, women's leadership, and legislative effectiveness, these remained largely open questions. Until now. Our comprehensive study of gender and cooperation on Capitol Hill is a first cut at assessing the conventional wisdom that women of both parties are more likely than their male co-partisans to be "problem solvers" – people who create a climate for passing legislation rather than serving partisan goals. But as we illustrate below, the results indicate only the faintest evidence for this argument.

### Gender, Comity, and Collegiality: Assessing Patterns of Social Engagement

Perhaps the best place to begin an analysis of whether women are more likely than men to be "problem solvers" is with an assessment of whether they are more likely than men to contribute to civility in Congress. After all, the assumption that congresswomen are more cooperative and collaborative than their male colleagues is predicated, at least in part, on the assumption that the social relationships they develop outside the chamber generate a sense of trust and collegiality inside the halls of Congress.

The notion that women in the Senate – across party lines – like each other and develop friendships outside the chamber is well-established in media accounts. From monthly dinners (sometimes even at the White House) to theatre outings to baby showers to the annual congressional women's softball game, female senators and representatives from across the aisle have been known to engage in social activities together. And these activities allow women to get to know – and like – each other. According to Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD), for example, practicing for and participating in the annual Congressional Women's Softball Game, is "such a wonderful way for us to get to know our colleagues."<sup>9</sup>

But that's only the first step. As a result of the friendships the women develop, they are more likely – so the conventional wisdom goes – to cooperate with one another when it comes to governing. Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), for example, believes that social relationships allowed women in the Senate to “craft a long-term budget without the counterproductive barbs that some politicians throw at each other when they don't agree.” She went on to explain that “the 20 women in the Senate have formed such strong friendships of trust, even though we come from different places, that . . . those relationships are going to make a difference as we get into what matters.”<sup>10</sup> Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) agrees. Although she recognizes that “women span the ideological spectrum, just as men do,” she contends that “women of the Senate are more likely to collaborate and to realize that we can disagree on an issue but still seek common ground.”<sup>11</sup>

The problem, of course, in concluding that this behavior makes women “different” than men is that we have no sense of how often men in the Senate do the same thing. It's just not newsworthy and doesn't present a photo opportunity when male legislators dine together, take in a sporting event, or meet for a drink. But two regularly-scheduled social activities in the Senate – activities that are open to men and women, Democrats and Republicans alike – allow us to gain leverage over gender differences in social engagement.

### **The Secret Santa Gift Exchange**

Now a tradition, the gift exchange was started by Democratic Senator Al Franken in 2011 as “a good way to cut through the partisan divide.” Or in the words of Republican Senator Tim Scott, it is a way “to sweeten the pot and improve the relationships; to get across the aisle.”<sup>12</sup> Senators who participate are held to a \$15 limit (up from \$10 in 2011) and are encouraged to select a gift with special meaning for the giver or the recipient (like the map Al Franken gave to Indiana's Joe Donnelly, marked with all of the significant moments in Donnelly's life, or the two lumps of coal West Virginia's Joe Manchin had sculpted into a donkey and an elephant for Chuck Schumer).

### **Seersucker Thursday**

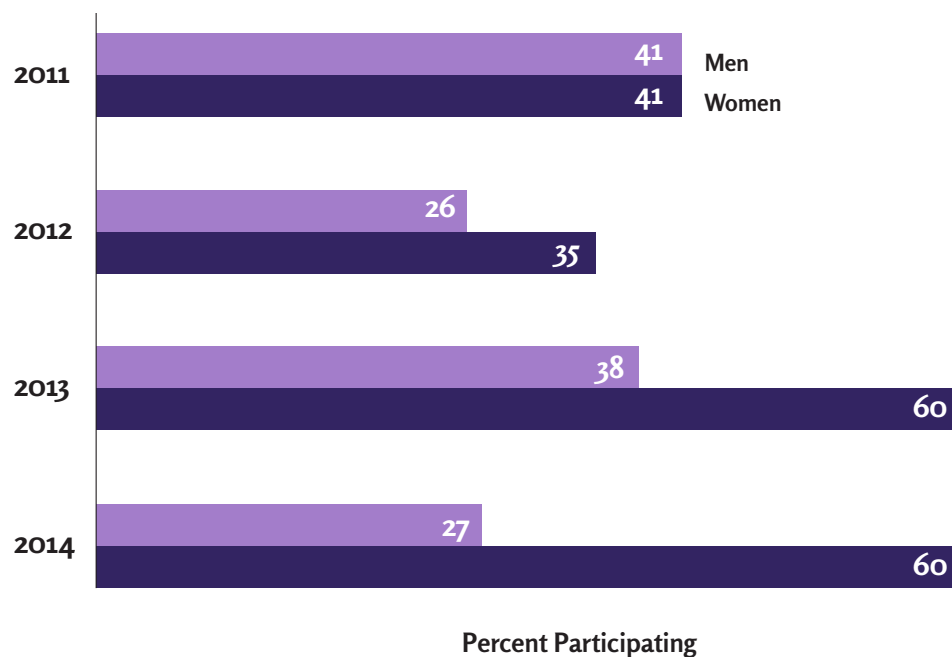
Started by then-Senator Trent Lott in 1996, Seersucker Thursday is a way to “bring a little Southern charm to the Capitol,” and to remind senators how their predecessors had to dress in the 1950s, before air conditioning cooled down the chamber.<sup>13</sup> On one Thursday in May, senators are encouraged to join the “fashion parade,” which, according to Lott, “some might call frivolous, but actually helps get things done.”<sup>14</sup>

Official records are of no help when it comes to tracking participation in these activities, but photos, news articles, and conversations with the Office of the Senate Historian allowed us to assemble rosters of participants. These two data sets allow us to determine whether women and men differ in their rates of participation in symbolic activities that contribute to a sense of collegiality in the U.S. Senate.

In a nutshell, they do. We uncover clear evidence that women differ from men when it comes to social engagement off the Senate floor. Across time, women have been consistently more likely than men to participate in both activities geared to promote a sense of comity and collegiality.

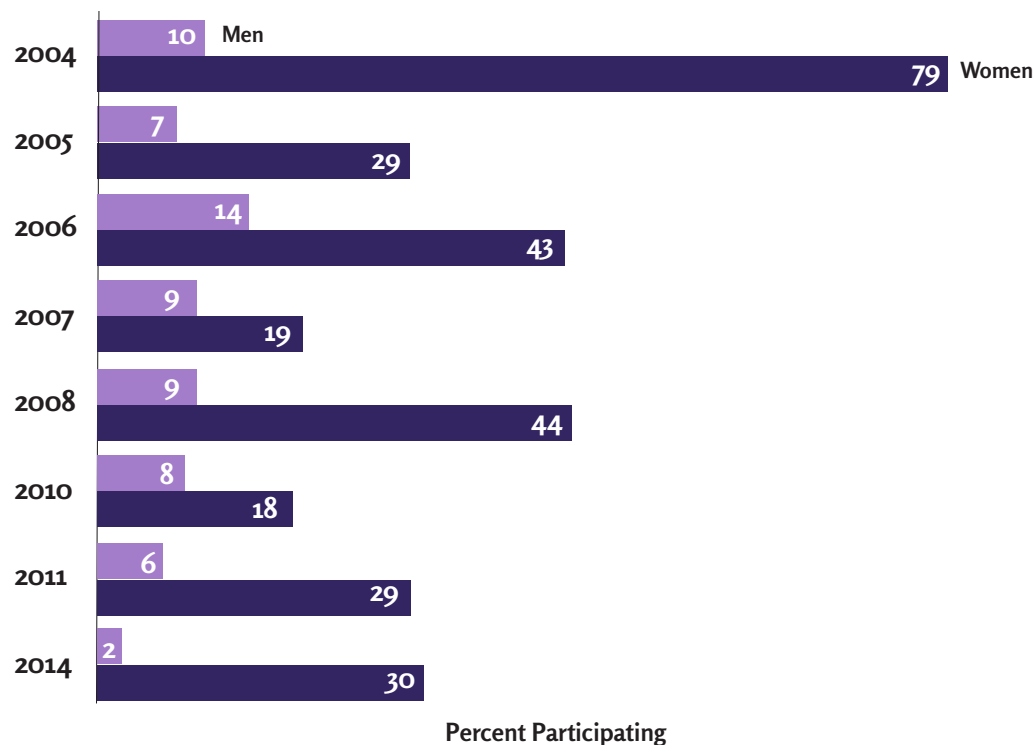
Let's begin with the Secret Santa gift exchange. Although participation rates vary from one congress to the next, approximately 40% of senators partake in the holiday festivities. Women, however, are statistically more likely than men to do so. From 2011 to 2014, 49% of women, compared to only 33% of men, participated in Franken's gift exchange (gender difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). The data presented in Figure 1 indicate that, with the exception of the inaugural gift exchange (in which women and men participated in equal proportions), female senators have been consistently more likely than their male colleagues to participate. Furthermore, the gender gap has grown each year. This pattern persists over time and across party (analysis not shown).

**Figure 1. Participation Rates in the Senate's Secret Santa Gift Exchange, 2011 – 2014**



We also see greater female participation when we turn to Seersucker Thursday. The overall rates of participation are lower than they are for the holiday gift exchange – indeed, the average number of senators participating in any given year is only about 12 – but gender differences are clear. Over time, women have been almost four times as likely as men to participate (35% of women, compared to 9% of men; difference significant at  $p < .05$ ). And once again, this is true on both sides of the aisle (analysis not shown). As indicated in Figure 2, these results have been quite consistent through the years.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 2. Participation Rates in Seersucker Thursday, 2004 – 2014**



Insofar as Secret Santa and Seersucker Thursday represent activities that offer senators an opportunity to build the Senate’s social fabric, the data reveal that women place a higher premium on comity than men do.

## Gender and Legislative Behavior: Assessing Procedural Votes and the Propensity to “Problem Solve”

Women appear to be more likely than men to value collegiality. But does this affect their legislative behavior? If popular news accounts of women’s problem-solving roles extend beyond high-profile and commonly cited examples (e.g., ending the government shutdown), then we should see it borne out in how they evaluate the procedures surrounding debate in both chambers of Congress. Procedural votes – which include resolutions setting up the rules for debate on particular pieces of legislation, motions to adjourn, motions to instruct conferees, cloture motions to restrict filibusters in the Senate, and motions to table amendments – provide an excellent opportunity to assess whether gender differences emerge in members’ likelihood of trying to obstruct the legislative process, stymie debate,



or limit the amendment process. Members who are “problem solvers” should be more inclined than those who are not to vote with colleagues across the aisle on procedural votes, since doing so moves the legislative process along and generates a more efficient, collaborative route to a final passage vote (regardless of the fact that those final passage votes are likely to be highly partisan).

In order to analyze procedural votes, we developed a multi-step data collection and configuration process:

1. We determined which votes during each congress (dating back to the 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress in 1973) were procedural. This was a massive data collection effort, which involved coding as procedural or not 24,936 votes in the House of Representatives and 15,706 votes in the Senate.<sup>16</sup>
2. For each procedural vote – 7,202 in the House and 6,792 in the Senate – we coded how each member of Congress actually voted.
3. We employed Poole and Rosenthal’s W-Nominate algorithm in the R statistical program to generate a “score” for each member based strictly on procedural votes. The algorithm arrays members of Congress on a continuum from -1 to +1. For each chamber in each congress, at the endpoints of the continuum are the two members who disagreed with each other on the most procedural votes. Consider, for example, the Senate in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress: Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) was at one end (-1) and James Risch (R-ID) was at the other (+1). The algorithm places the remaining 98 senators along the continuum so that they are lined up according to how they vary with the two extremes.
4. Importantly, the algorithm allows for someone who is an ideologue on substantive votes – someone like Ted Cruz (R-TX) or Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), for instance – to be more “in the middle” on procedural votes. After all, the calculation is based only on the procedural votes we’ve identified.
5. Democrats’ scores typically – and increasingly over time – fall between -1 and 0, whereas Republicans’ scores normally range from 0 to +1. We calculated these scores separately for each chamber and each congress from the 93<sup>rd</sup> through the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.
6. We merged the procedural vote scores with demographics about the members, their institutional standing, and the political conditions in their constituencies.

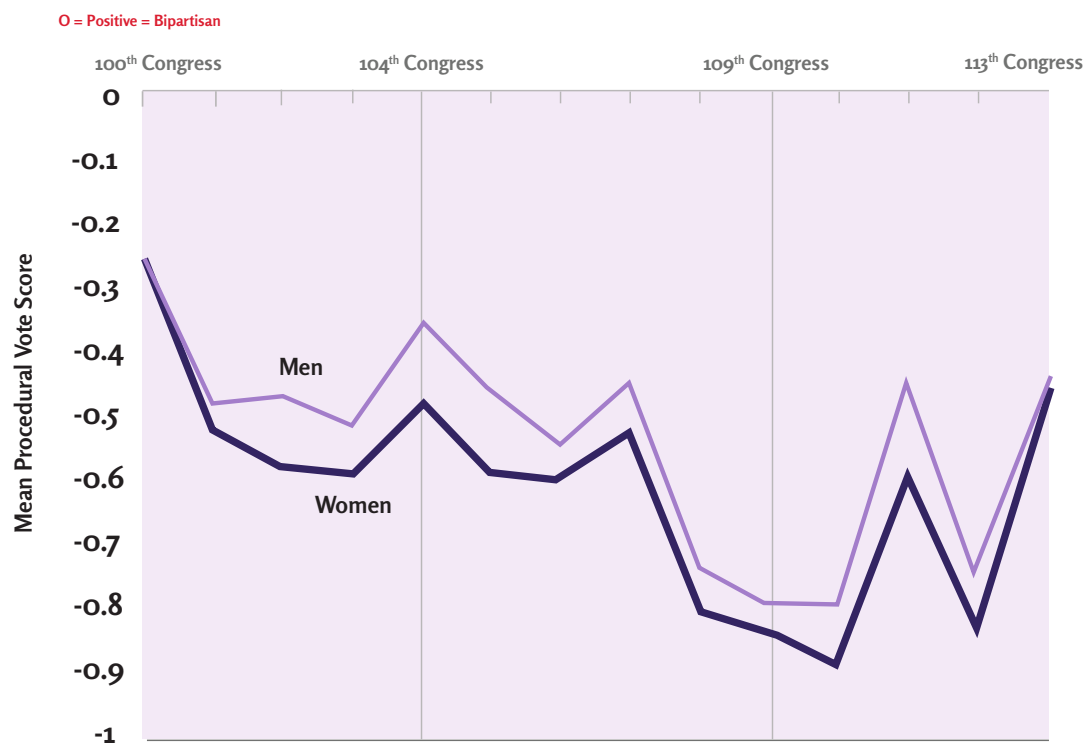
We uncover very little evidence that women and men are different when it comes to the procedural votes they cast.

The data set, therefore, allows us to determine whether women vote differently from men on procedural votes and, if they do, whether these gender differences have grown or dissipated over time. By analyzing the data separately for Democrats and Republicans, we can assess whether gender differences vary along party lines.

In short, we uncover very little evidence that women and men are different when it comes to the procedural votes they cast.

Let's begin with the House of Representatives. Figure 3 presents the mean procedural vote score for Democrats in the House from the 100<sup>th</sup> through the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>17</sup> Remember that Democrats' scores typically range from -1 to 0, with numbers closer to zero indicating a procedural vote profile that is more bipartisan. That is, the more positive a Democrat's vote, the more times the member voted with Republicans. The dark purple line tracks the mean score for women over time; the lighter purple line represents men's mean scores.

**Figure 3. Procedural Vote Scores, by Sex: House Democrats, 1987 – 2014**

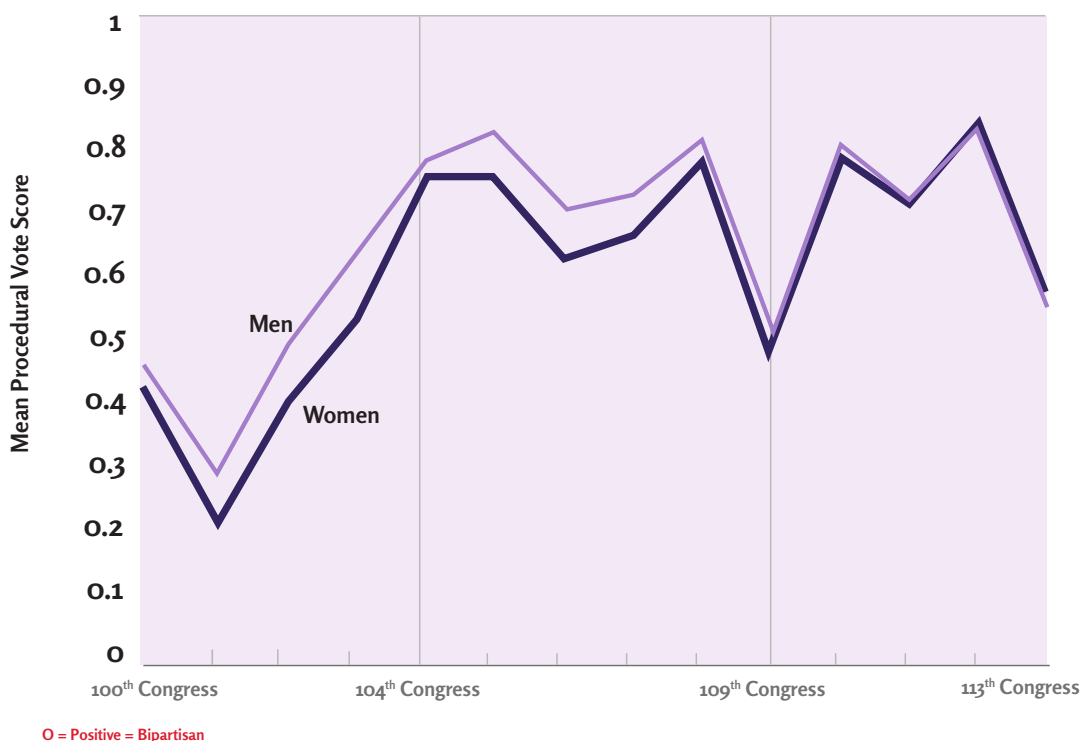


*Note: In no case is the gender difference statistically significant (at  $p < .05$ ) in a direction consistent with the conventional wisdom.*

The meaningful comparisons in Figure 3 are the differences between women and men at each point in time. (The algorithm does not standardize scores across time, so a dip in mean scores from one congress to the next cannot necessarily be interpreted as a shift in mean procedural vote scores.) Contrary to the conventional wisdom, in every single congress, the mean score for female Democrats is *more negative* than the mean score for Democratic men. In 11 of the 14 cases, the gender difference even reaches conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). At least among Democrats in the House, women are no more likely than men to vote with Republicans on measures that would move the legislative process along; in fact, Democratic women's votes may actually work to stymie the chamber more than Democratic men's votes.

For the most part, we uncover similar results when we analyze the House Republicans (see Figure 4). Because Republicans' scores normally range from 0 to +1, the graph is flipped. But the way to read it is the same. Numbers closer to zero reflect more bipartisan procedural vote scores. The more positive a Republican's score, the more often he or she voted with Republican colleagues.

**Figure 4. Procedural Vote Scores, by Sex: House Republicans, 1987 – 2014**



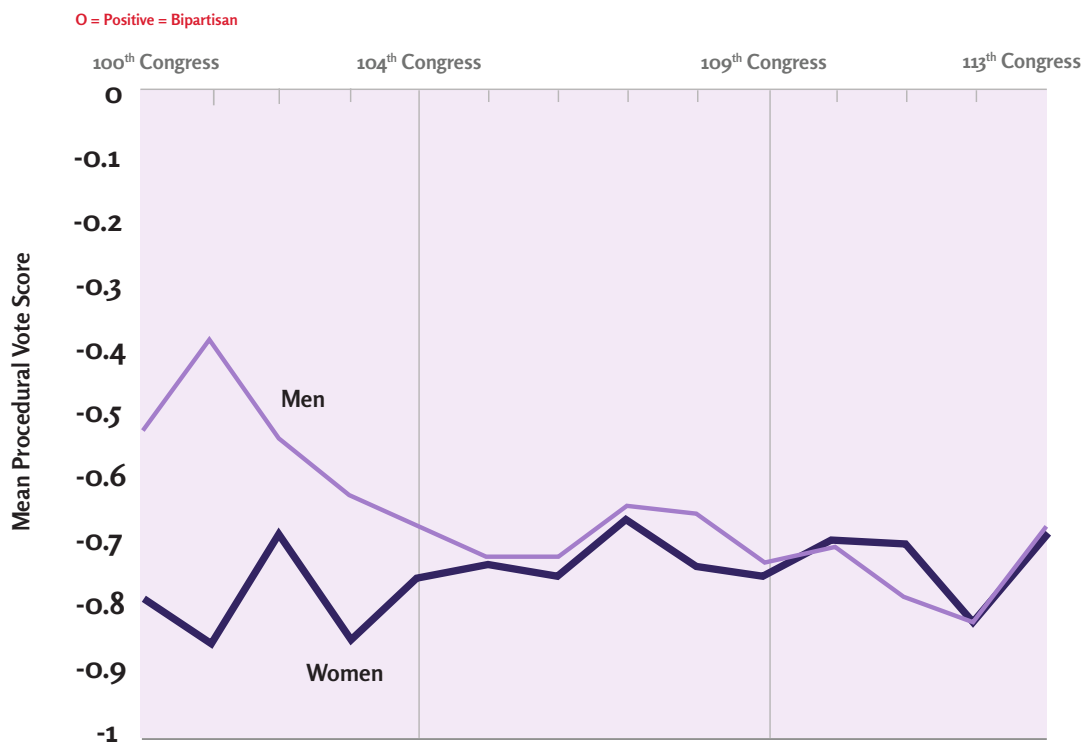
*Note: In the 103<sup>rd</sup>, 105<sup>th</sup>, 106<sup>th</sup>, and 107<sup>th</sup> Congresses, the gender difference is statistically significant (at  $p < .05$ ), consistent with the conventional wisdom.*

In 10 of the 14 congresses we analyzed, the gender difference is not statistically significant; women's procedural vote scores are no more negative than men's. But unlike with the Democrats, we do find four congresses (the 103<sup>rd</sup>, 105<sup>th</sup>, 106<sup>th</sup>, and 107<sup>th</sup>) in which women's scores are statistically distinguishable from men's in the way the conventional wisdom would predict. Of course, in the six most recent congresses, male and female Republicans voted very similarly on procedural matters. If they ever did, GOP women no longer hold a premium on procedural bipartisanship.

We conducted a similar analysis in the Senate. Here, it is important to recognize that the results are driven – especially among Republicans – by a very small number of women. Never have more than 20 women served in the U.S. Senate, and Republicans have never had more than six. Still, as long as we interpret the results cautiously, these data can shed light on the relationship between sex and procedural votes in the chamber.

Turning first to the Democrats, we find no evidence whatsoever that women and men vote differently on procedural matters. Only in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress is the gender difference statistically significant (see Figure 5). But as was the case for the U.S. House, the difference is one in which the mean score for women is more negative than the mean score for men. Democratic women in the Senate are not systematically more procedurally bipartisan than their male counterparts.

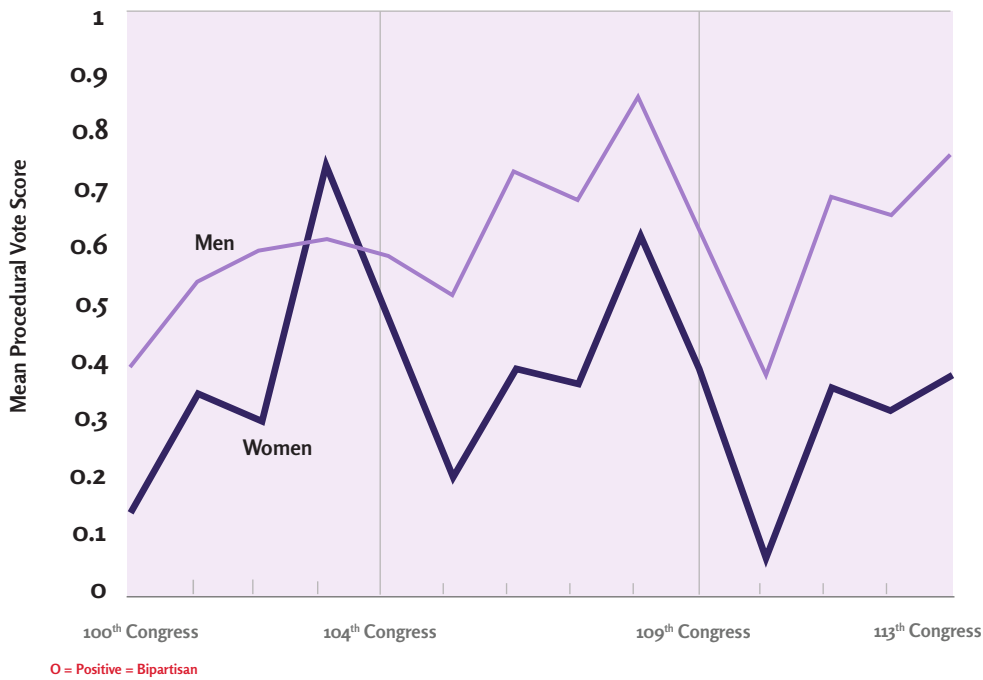
**Figure 5. Procedural Vote Scores, by Sex: Senate Democrats, 1987 – 2014**



*Note: In no case is the gender difference statistically significant (at  $p < .05$ ) in a direction consistent with the conventional wisdom.*

When we turn to Republicans in the Senate, it's a different story. In nine of the 14 congresses we analyzed, women's scores are more negative than men's, a pattern that has persisted since the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress (see Figure 6). These data provide at least *prima facie* support – albeit just on one side of the political aisle – for the veracity of recent headlines proclaiming that women in the Senate are more concerned than men are with working together to get Washington's business done. While it is the case that the Republican women are first and foremost partisans, they do seem to be a bit more likely than men to vote with their Democratic colleagues at least on procedural matters.

**Figure 6. Procedural Vote Scores, by Sex: Senate Republicans, 1987 – 2014**



*Note: In the 105<sup>th</sup> – 113<sup>th</sup> Congresses, the gender difference is statistically significant (at  $p < .05$ ), consistent with the conventional wisdom.*

Although the bivariate results are helpful for examining gender differences (or the lack thereof) in the procedural votes members of Congress cast, they do not account for any other relevant factors that could contribute to the decision calculus underlying a vote. A district's partisanship, after all, as well as a member's electoral safety and legislative experience, can shape the way he or she decides to vote. Thus, before we can draw any conclusions about the extent to which sex drives differences in procedural vote scores, we must rule out that the limited gender effects we uncovered are an artifact of institutional or district factors. And we can't.

In order to determine the relative effects of the sex of a legislator on his or her procedural vote score, we performed a series of regression analyses. In each equation, the dependent variable is the procedural vote score (on the -1 to +1 continuum). In addition to the sex of the legislator, we account for key variables that previous research has identified as relevant for legislative voting behavior: the Republican presidential candidate's vote advantage in the state relative to how he performed nationwide in the previous election, the legislator's win margin in the previous election, and the number of terms he or she has served in Congress. In the model for Republican senators, we also include a dummy variable for Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, the two female senators from Maine whose moderate voting records set them apart from their GOP colleagues. It's important to account for their presence so as to avoid sweeping conclusions about female Republicans based on two unusual senators.<sup>18</sup>

Table 1 presents the results, separated by party and chamber. In three of the four models, sex is not statistically significant; female legislators' procedural vote scores are no different than those of their male colleagues. For House Republicans, and for both parties in the Senate, the multivariate results suggest that women's procedural roll-call voting does not appreciably differ from men's. Only among Democrats in the House is the coefficient on sex significant at conventional levels. But it is negative, which means that women's procedural vote scores are less bipartisan than men's. The magnitude of the coefficient is small, so we do not want to make too much of it. But the fact that it is significant in a direction opposite what the conventional wisdom would expect is noteworthy (and consistent with the bivariate results).

**Table 1. The Effect of Sex on Procedural Vote Scores in the U.S. Congress, 1973 – 2014**

	House of Representatives		Senate	
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
Member Sex (female)	-0.065 * (0.018)	0.005 (0.020)	-0.047 (0.057)	-0.092 (0.099)
Republican Presidential Vote Advantage	0.477 * (0.031)	0.390 * (0.039)	0.573 * (0.010)	0.572 * (0.127)
Vote Margin in Previous Election	0.041 * (0.017)	-0.053 * (0.016)	0.037 (0.028)	-0.074 * (0.027)
Number of Terms Served	0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.016)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Olympia Snowe-Susan Collins Indicator				-0.304 (0.191)
Constant	-0.355 * (0.016)	0.520 * (0.014)	-0.621 * (0.030)	0.626 * (0.031)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.413	0.604	0.383	0.336
N	5,070	4,137	1,092	997

*Note: Cell entries are GLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All models include member random effects and fixed effects for each Congress. Level of significance: \*  $p < .05$ .*

The upshot of the regression analysis is that once we account for electoral performance and the partisan composition of the state, women and men look strikingly similar when it comes to voting on procedural issues. This is the case in both chambers and across political parties. The data simply do not support the notion that women are more likely than men to be “problem solvers” who vote with members of the other party when it comes to moving the legislative process forward.

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## Gender and Legislative Behavior: Assessing Amendment Introductions and the Propensity to “Problem Solve”

Procedural votes are one clear way to measure the extent to which women and men cooperate and collaborate on Capitol Hill. But they’re not the only way. Indeed, amending behavior in the Senate is an additional lens through which to assess these dynamics. Until very recently, for most pieces of pending legislation, any senator could offer any amendment to any part of a bill. The House, with its larger membership, has never enjoyed such a free-flowing amending process. As such, analyzing House amendments along these lines would be inappropriate.

Offering an amendment on the Senate floor can serve at least four potential purposes. First – and most basically – senators can attempt to re-word legislation so that it more closely aligns to their preferred policy. Second, because the Senate does not adhere to a germaneness rule, senators can attach unrelated provisions to a bill on the floor with the hope of skirting a legislative process that would normally require committee deliberation for their proposed policy. Third, offering amendments on the floor can place other senators on the record for controversial policies that might divide them from their constituencies or their parties. Finally, amendments can slow down, or essentially kill, the passage of legislation. As long as 20 senators agree, amendments must be disposed of through roll-call votes, which can take up to half an hour to complete, rather than a 10-second voice vote. Offering an endless amount of amendments and demanding roll-call votes is a relatively new strategy of stalling legislation. It is referred to as “death by amendment.”

Only the first goal is consistent with the legislative process as practiced when the Senate was a more revered institution. Those who regularly pursue the other three goals can be thought of as “problem creators” in the Senate; their amending tactics are geared to obstruct and stymie the legislative process. Teasing out the motivation for offering an amendment is exceedingly difficult. But systematic patterns can suggest who uses the relatively open amending rules in the Senate for worthy, as opposed to more nefarious, purposes. More specifically, the more amendments a senator offers can be a sign of being a “problem creator.” Members who are “problem solvers,” on the other hand, should offer fewer amendments in any given Congress because they will be less likely to offer amendments that are mere gamesmanship or tactical maneuvers. If the conventional wisdom about gender differences in legislative behavior is right, then women should offer fewer amendments than their male colleagues.

In order to analyze Senate amendments, we once again developed a multi-step data collection and configuration process:

1. We identified every amendment introduced from the 103rd to 113th Congress (1993-2014).
2. For each of the 4,488 amendments, we identified the senator who introduced it.
3. We merged into the amendment data set demographics about the senators who introduced them, their institutional standing, and their states’ partisanship.

Similar to the procedural vote analysis, we uncover no evidence that women and men are different when it comes to introducing amendments. Figure 7 presents the mean number of amendments that senators introduced from the 103<sup>rd</sup> through the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The top panel displays the data for Democrats, and the bottom panel presents comparable data for Republicans. The dark purple lines track the mean number of roll-call votes from amendments women introduced over time; the lighter purple lines indicate men. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, in no case – regardless of party – do women offer statistically fewer amendments that result in roll-call votes than men. Although the mean number varies across congresses, in all 22 comparisons (11 for each party), women and men are statistically indistinguishable. To the extent that roll-call votes on amendments are a good gauge of creating problems, then female senators are just as likely as men to present legislative obstacles in the chamber.

**Figure 7. Mean Number of Amendments, 1993 – 2014**



*Note: In no case do women offer statistically fewer amendments than men (at  $p < .05$ ).*



And these null results withstand controls for a state's partisan composition as well as a senator's previous vote margin and legislative experience.<sup>19</sup> Table 2 presents these results. In neither model is sex a statistically significant predictor; female senators' amendment behavior does not differ from their male colleagues'. This is true for both Democrats and Republicans. As was the case with the procedural vote analysis, the notion that women are more likely than men to be "problem solvers" who are less likely to stymie the legislative process simply does not hold water.

**Table 2. The Effect of Sex on Amendment Introductions in the U.S. Senate, 1993 – 2014**

	Number of Roll Calls Elicited by Amendments	
	Democrats	Republicans
Member Sex (female)	-0.607 (0.935)	-0.861 (1.448)
Republican Presidential Vote Advantage	-2.739 (2.630)	5.718 (4.360)
Vote Margin in Previous Election	0.705 (1.092)	1.618 (0.949)
Number of Terms Served	0.048 (0.041)	0.048 (0.053)
Constant	0.824 (0.709)	1.435 (0.817)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.212	0.092
N	548	547

### Explaining the Results: A Final Word about the Importance of Electing Women to Congress

Overall, our findings underscore the extent to which party polarization dominates legislative behavior. That is, the role the sex of a legislator plays in shaping policy is substantially constrained by the party of which she or he is a member. Women (and men) are first and foremost partisan creatures. Scholars have already noted that this is the case when it comes to substantive votes. In the Senate, for example, Swers (2013) finds that the stark differences between the parties on issues pertaining to women, families, and children far exceed any gender differences on these issues.<sup>20</sup> Schwindt-Bayer and Corbetta (2004) find that, controlling for party and constituency influences, member sex does not predict the "liberalness" of a representative's roll call behavior from the 103<sup>rd</sup> to the 105<sup>th</sup> Congresses.<sup>21</sup> And based on an analysis of roll call votes in the 108<sup>th</sup> and 109<sup>th</sup> Congresses, Frederick (2009) concludes that Republican women are ideologically indistinguishable from their male counterparts, even when the analysis focuses strictly on "women's" issues.<sup>22</sup> Our data make it clear that the same pattern persists when it comes to procedural votes and amendment introductions.

But this is not to suggest that women's presence in U.S. political institutions doesn't make a difference. Since 1992's "Year of the Woman" elections, politicians, pundits, and journalists have speculated that women in politics behave differently than men. They are more collaborative, more interested in building consensus, and more effective than their male colleagues. Although this conventional wisdom does not bear out in terms of legislative behavior or tactics, our evidence does indicate that women are more likely than men to value and contribute to a collegial work environment.<sup>23</sup> In times of gridlock, obstructionism, and inefficiency, we shouldn't underestimate the role that such collegiality and comity can bring to the legislative process. Even if it doesn't affect legislative outcomes or procedural steps through which a bill becomes a law, it can send a strong signal to the American public – and perhaps to potential candidates – that women's presence on Capitol Hill contributes to making the political arena a somewhat more civil and pleasant place to work.

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Moreover, even though gender now makes very little difference net of party when it comes to roll-call votes, meaningful differences remain on some important dimensions. Women in Congress deliver more federal spending to their districts and sponsor more legislation than their male colleagues.<sup>24</sup> Minority party women in the U.S. House of Representatives are better able than minority party men to keep their sponsored bills alive through later stages of the legislative process.<sup>25</sup> And when members have an opportunity to speak about issues of their choosing during one-minute speeches, congresswomen in both parties are significantly more likely than men to speak and to speak about women.<sup>26</sup> In addition, electing more women brings to political institutions a greater sense of democratic legitimacy.<sup>27</sup>

From our perspective, it's these benefits we should highlight when issuing a call for more female candidates and lauding the successes of female legislators. Given that women and men do not govern in systematically different ways – either in style or substance – we should be careful not to place heightened expectations on our female elected officials; institutional constraints make it difficult for any factors to trump party in the legislative process. The democratic legitimacy and simple justice that more women in Congress would bring to the political arena, however, are important in their own right, even if a different legislative style will probably not ensue.

## Endnotes

- 1 We thank Samantha Guthrie for research assistance throughout the various stages of this project.
- 2 *New York Daily News*, October 1, 2013.
- 3 *Washington Post*, October 1, 2013.
- 4 John Cassidy, “The Biggest Threat to the U.S. Economy? Washington Dysfunction,” *CNN.com*, October 31, 2013.
- 5 “Public Trust in Government: 1958 – 2014,” Pew Research Center for the People and Press. Accessed at: [www.people-press.org/2014/11/13/public-trust-in-government](http://www.people-press.org/2014/11/13/public-trust-in-government) (May 22, 2015).
- 6 Catalina Camia, “McCain Jokes about Low Approval for Congress,” *USA Today*, October 26, 2011.
- 7 Laura Bassett, “Men Got Us into this Shutdown, Women Got Us Out,” *Huffington Post*, October 16, 2013.
- 8 Jay Newton-Small, “Women Are the Only Adults Left in Washington,” *Time*, October 16, 2013.
- 9 Bridget Bowman, “Running the Bases while Running for Senate,” *Roll Call*, June 24, 2015.
- 10 Laura Bassett, “Men Got Us into this Shutdown, Women Got Us Out,” *Huffington Post*, October 16, 2013.
- 11 Office of Senator Susan Collins, “Senator Collins Named One of the 25 Most Influential Women in Congress by CQ Roll Call,” May 18, 2015.
- 12 Tamara Keith, “Senators Laugh and Joke during Secret Santa Exchange,” *NPR.org*, December 18, 2013.
- 13 Paul Bedard, “Suckers for Seersucker,” *U.S. News & World Report*, June 13, 2007.
- 14 Phone call with Trent Lott, June 24, 2015.
- 15 The only notable exception is 2004, which was the first time women were encouraged to participate. Four out of every five chose to do so. Even though women’s numbers have dropped off in the last decade, they are still far more likely than men to engage.
- 16 These determinations were made by consulting the Library of Congress’s website on congressional action ([www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)) and each chamber’s roll-call vote summary ([clerk.house.gov/legislative/legvotes.aspx](http://clerk.house.gov/legislative/legvotes.aspx) and [www.senate.gov/legislative/votes.htm](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/votes.htm)).
- 17 Although we have data going back to the 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress, there were too few women in the chamber to allow for meaningful comparisons. Thus, we focus on 1987 through 2014.
- 18 Each model also includes congress fixed effects to account for idiosyncratic factors unique to each congress, as well as variation in the congress-to-congress procedural vote score means. Without these fixed effects, the observations from a particular congress would not be independent. We also include random effects for members to control for the dependence among the observations from the same member.
- 19 Here, too, each model includes congress fixed effects for each congress and random effects for each senator.
- 20 Swers, Michele L. 2013. *Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 21 Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A. and Renato Corbetta. 2004. “Gender Turnover and Roll-Call Voting in the U.S. House of Representatives.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29(2):215-29.
- 22 Frederick, Brian. 2009. “Are Female House Members Still More Liberal in a Polarized Era? The Conditional Nature of the Relationship between Descriptive and Substantive Representation.” *Congress & the Presidency* 36(2):181-202.
- 23 Consider the relationship between the 319 procedural votes senators cast from 2011 through 2014 and their participation in the Secret Santa tradition. Participants were no more likely to engage in the legislative activities that lead to genuine problem solving on the Senate floor. They were just as likely to play the procedural games that so easily stymie the legislative process in the Senate. We also found, based on an analysis of 471 floor amendments, that Secret Santa participants were just as likely as non-participants to offer divisive amendments whose aims may have been political rather than legislative.
- 24 Anzia Sarah F. and Christopher R. Berry. 2011. “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3):478-93.
- 25 Volden, Craig, Alan E. Wiseman, and Dana E. Wittmer. 2013. “When Are Women More Effective Lawmakers Than Men?” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(2):326-41.
- 26 Pearson, Kathryn and Logan Dancey. 2011. “Speaking for the Underrepresented in the House of Representatives: Voicing Women’s Interests in a Partisan Chamber.” *Politics & Gender* 7(4):493-519.
- 27 See Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent ‘Yes’.” *Journal of Politics* 61(3):628-57; and Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California.



**For more information contact:**

Melissa Luna

617.995.1911

[melissa\\_luna@huntalternatives.org](mailto:melissa_luna@huntalternatives.org)

[www.PoliticalParity.org](http://www.PoliticalParity.org)

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