

The G_♀OP GENDER GAP

CLEARING
THE PRIMARY
HURDLES



AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FROM

Background

Political Parity, a nonpartisan program of Hunt Alternatives, supports research that tests innovative ideas and defines strategies to elect more women to high-level office. This summary captures some key findings from analysis conducted by five research teams engaged by Political Parity to explore why Democratic women are elected to Congress at far greater rates than Republican women. The full report will be released in January.

Working with some of the nation's top political consultants, pollsters, and researchers, we set out to understand the factors affecting the lack of female Republican candidates:

- Interviews with elected Republican women, Republican Party leaders, and fundraisers;
- An 800-person dual-sample national survey of Republican and Independent/Swing primary voters;
- Data on ideology scores and win rates of 10,000 candidates for Congress over the past two decades;
- A survey of Democratic and Republican Party and PAC donors;
- An analysis of the levels of funding, experience, and campaign approach of every female congressional candidates in 2014;
- And Federal Elections Commission data on direct party and leadership PAC support for congressional candidates.

Research Team

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Special thanks to Rachel's Network for its generous support of the Primary Hurdles project.

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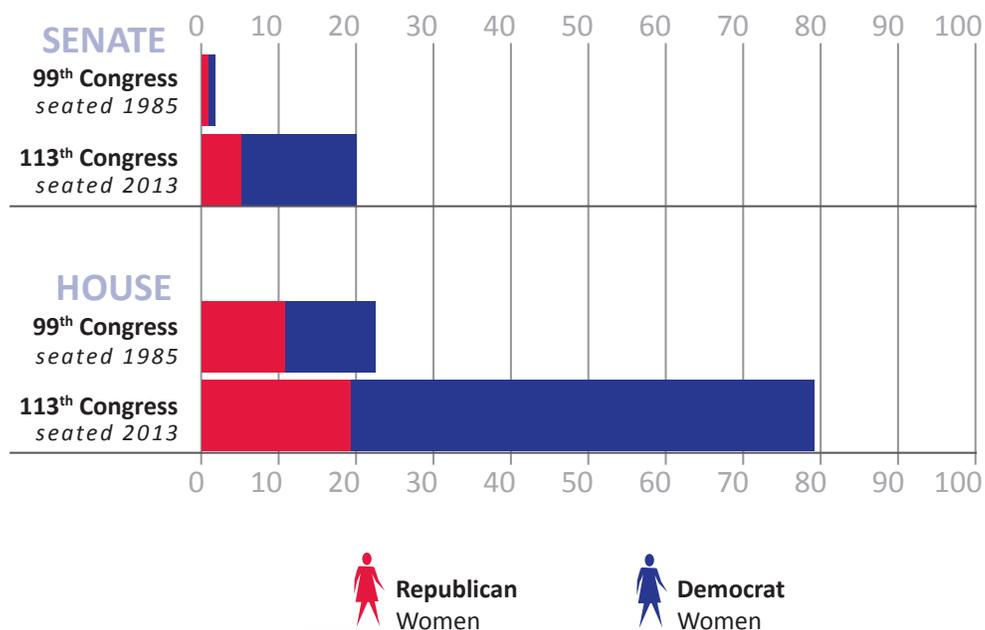
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Clearing the Primary Hurdle

Women are inching toward gender parity in Congress, but the gains are lopsided. The vast majority of congresswomen are Democrats; they outnumber Republican women three to one.

At one point, the breakdown was fairly equal. During President Ronald Reagan's second term, 25 women served in Congress; 13 Republicans and 12 Democrats. Today, 99 women are in Congress: 76 Democrats and just 23 Republicans. Democratic women have increased their numbers six-fold since the 1980s. Female Republicans haven't even doubled their seats.

Imbalance of Women in Congress



Our research reveals that the primary issue for Republican women is the primary itself. While many factors affect the emergence and success of female candidates in the race to high-level office, GOP women face higher hurdles, specifically: **Infrastructure, Indifference, and Ideology**. No single factor is make or break, but together they dramatically hinder Republican women's chances for electoral success.

Female Republican candidates are far less likely to enter or win a primary election than their Democratic peers. Those that do run are often stuck in the starting block without adequate training and fundraising support. In contrast to female Democratic candidates, Republican women don't benefit from a "gender advantage," leaving them outnumbered, outpaced, and out of office. In addition to highlighting their struggles, our research uncovers strategies for getting GOP women back on track.

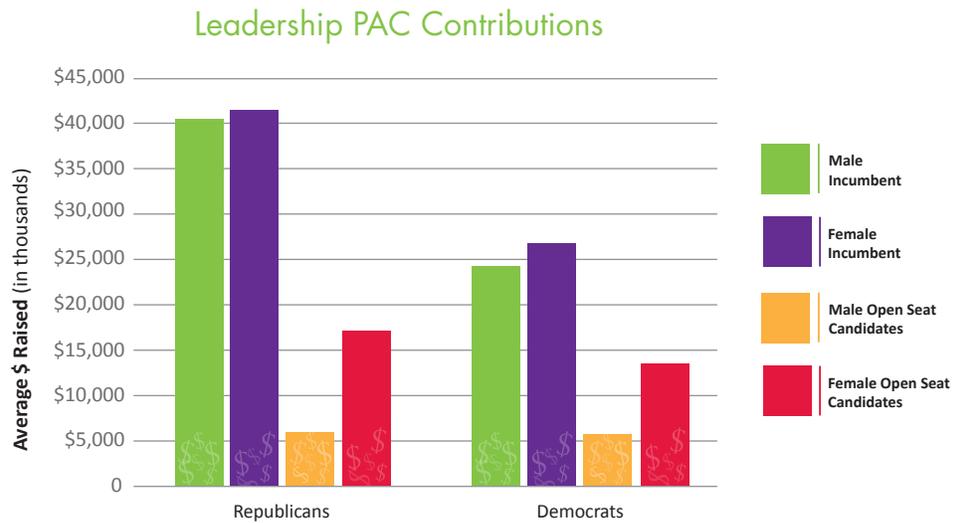
"We would benefit by having more women in office, especially in the legislature at the state and federal levels, for the different perspectives they bring... If they're as qualified or more qualified, we should be promoting women."

Female Republican State-Level Party Leader

INFRASTRUCTURE

Our research affirms that female Republican candidates have greater difficulty raising money than their Democratic counterparts, mainly because of fragmented sources of support. This hurdle becomes only harder to scale as the costs of running a political campaign rise – currently about \$1.5 million for a House seat and \$10.4 million for the Senate. (Source: *OpenSecrets.org*)

- The source of the money problem is not the parties. Our analysis of Federal Election Commission data shows few noteworthy differences in the allocation of party money to women versus men within parties. Where differences exist, for open-seat candidates only, they benefit women. The only significant differences we found in party funding were that through the second quarter of 2014, female candidates in open-seat races received more Leadership PAC money (funds from Congressional members’ PACs) than similarly situated men in both parties. However, the significance of the results is stronger for Democrats.

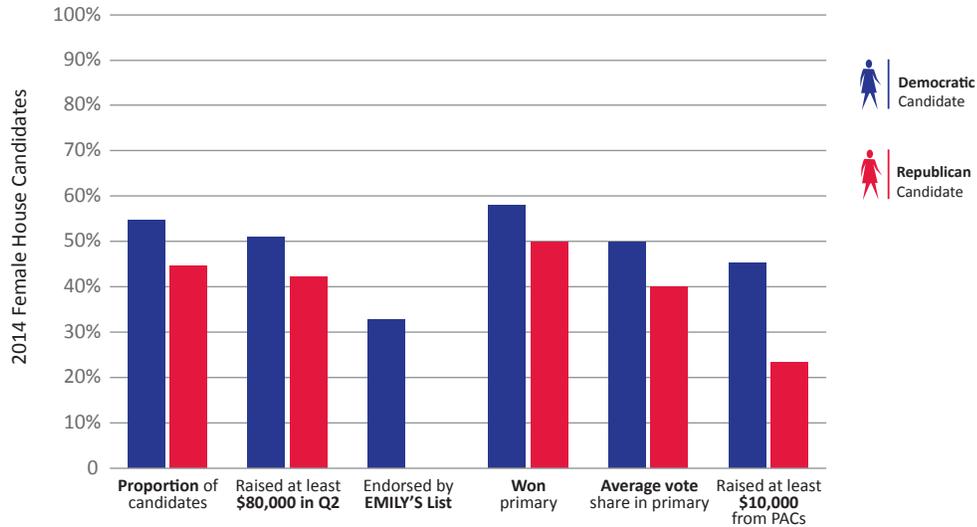


Source: CAWP and Center for Responsive Politics analysis of FEC data; analysis applies only to incumbents and candidates running for open seats, not to candidates challenging incumbents. Data through the second quarter of 2014 only.

- Women-focused PACs, especially EMILY’s List, are instrumental in electing Democratic women to Congress, providing early financial support, access to donors, and a “stamp of approval” that helps endorsed candidates leverage additional funding. Some 93 percent of Democratic Party donors have heard of EMILY’s List. In contrast, only 10 percent of Republican Party donors in our survey are familiar with the pro-life and conservative women’s PACs (Susan B. Anthony List, VIEW PAC, ShePAC, and Maggie’s List). Fewer than two in 10 donors are aware of the National Republican Congressional Committee’s Project GROW (Growing Republican Opportunities for Women), an initiative to recruit and fund female Republican House candidates.

On the GOP side, the absence of a comparably sized and well-known PAC, or other well-financed early funding streams dedicated to electing women, puts female Republican candidates at a severe disadvantage.

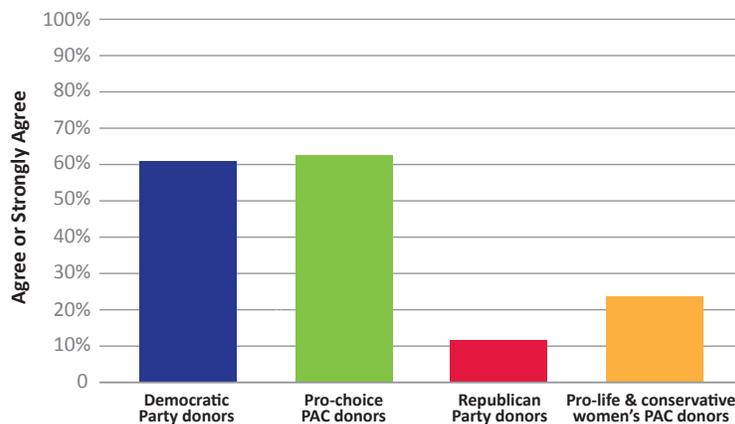
House Candidate Support



Source: FEC data collected and analyzed by Bob Carpenter

- The underrepresentation of women in politics is a compelling catalyst for funders on the Democratic side, but far less so for Republicans. Ironically, Democratic donors are significantly more likely than GOP donors to agree that women are excluded from political leadership. The same finding is evident among those contributing to pro-choice PACs versus conservative women’s PACs, although to a lesser extent.

Is Women’s Underrepresentation in Politics a Product of Fewer Opportunities?



Source: National Supporter Survey Data 2014

- Most political donors are men, yet female candidates usually rely more on women donors. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, professional women tend to contribute to Democrats, while homemakers (who give less often and in lower amounts) “mostly” donate to Republicans.

INDIFFERENCE

While the GOP is focusing more today on electing women, female representation isn't prioritized enough to move the needle, even though doing so could attract voters, engage minorities, and change public perceptions of the party from an out-of-touch "old boys club" to a more inclusive institution.

- Democratic candidates benefit from a "gender advantage," as their party tends to consider diversity in public office an important goal. Democratic women, especially, are eager to see more women elected, which is part of the impetus behind the founding and success of EMILY's List. Republican women don't have this advantage.
- Republicans consider candidate quality the most important factor in determining their support. But gender neutrality isn't a track to parity. Our findings reveal that candidate selection needn't be a zero-sum choice: in this 2014 cycle, Democratic female congressional candidates were equally, if not more, qualified than their Republican counterparts in terms of experience and fundraising ability.
- The GOP struggles to recruit, train, and retain women. There's no significant structure in place to shepherd women through a primary election. And with little candidate development at the local level or explicit party engagement in primaries, Republicans aren't establishing a pipeline of future federal office holders.

"We haven't spent time developing a farm team. The Democrats have done a better job encouraging women to run for municipal and state office, and it puts them in a position to run in congressional seats."

Female Republican Federal Party Leader

- Women need more encouragement to run in the first place. With Republican women far behind both Republican men and Democratic women in elected office, and thus much less likely than either to benefit from the advantages of incumbency, they're unlikely to gain ground without concerted efforts on their behalf.
- Republican congresswomen are adamant that more can and should be done to promote women leaders. This includes greater party involvement in primary elections, which some say has been taboo within the national committees.

IDEOLOGY

As Republican women fall farther behind in Congress, another major hurdle prevents their progress. In the past two decades, Americans, and even more so the candidates and elected officials representing them, have diverged sharply in ideology; conservatives are growing more conservative and liberals more liberal.

- The manner in which House districts are currently drawn, and the fact that primary voters tend to be the most ideological, make it nearly impossible for a Republican to run as anything other than conservative. Being pushed too far to the right in a primary election, however, hinders a candidate's chances at winning the general election in swing districts or state-wide races.
- Most people perceive women to be more moderate politicians. Surprisingly, the female Republican candidates we studied were not less conservative than their male counterparts. Scores for more than 10,000 congressional candidates over the past two decades reveal no significant "ideological-placement" differences by gender among Republicans. While they once were, GOP women candidates today are not more moderate than men. To realize more success, they need to communicate their conservatism in the primaries, and voters need to be more open-minded about candidate positions.

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- In some parts of the country, beyond their views on policy, primary voters’ conservatism extends to the appropriate role for women in society. Our analysis demonstrates that Republican men are more likely than other voters to say that female candidates are “emotional” and that men are “better suited emotionally” for politics.

“ You have to get through the gender barrier, and in some conservative areas of the country you have to battle and prove yourself to a male population. There is a pretty intense feeling when they’ve never been represented by a female.”

Republican Congresswoman

- Many involved in politics generally assume that older white men, who constitute a large portion of the GOP primary voting bloc, prefer candidates who “look like them.” Our data find some truth behind this assumption, particularly for older men and those in the South, who show a slight preference for male candidates (as do older Independents).

GAINING GROUND

While gender is not the GOP’s driving factor in identifying candidates, our research indicates that in some cases, both male and female voters may prefer women. Republican and Independent voters perceive them as more honest than male candidates, and honesty is the foremost quality voters seek.

“ Women are more collaborative, and right now people are very tired of the rhetoric and the inability of Congress to work together.”

Female Republican Federal Party Leader

- Running women candidates may be a way to appeal to Independent female voters. Twice as many Independent women as Independent men said they generally prefer a female to a male.
- We found that a quarter of Independent voters are leaning Republican in 2014, but most are still undecided. Independents rated Democrats and Republicans about the same on a “feeling thermometer,” suggesting the GOP can gain ground with this segment of the electorate.
- While candidates have diverged ideologically, more than one third of the electorate still falls in the moderate-centrist camp, a group that is typically less politically engaged than those at the ideological poles. Toning down ultra-conservatism in primary elections would help women candidates and help the GOP engage new support.

Conclusion: EVENING THE FIELD

Running for office is difficult for any candidate, but Republican women face higher hurdles in their races for high-level office. We can even the field for GOP women and build a more reflective democracy by lowering those hurdles.

Republican women need to be asked (multiple times), encouraged, and trained to run and win a primary election. The party must prioritize female candidate recruitment and development, as well as educate donors and voters about the benefits of electing women. GOP women’s PACs can coordinate efforts to engage their memberships and inspire a new generation of female Republican leaders.

Some predict we’ll be colonizing the moon before we reach gender parity. One thing is certain: we’ll never get to fifty percent without elevating women on both sides of the aisle. Democratic women need Republican female peers to break gridlock. The GOP’s concerted, collaborative prioritization of female representation can get more Republican women in the race and America back on track – potentially within election cycles, rather than centuries.



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