Women in U.S. Politics

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USAPP eCollections

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Introduction

As the Democrats consolidate around Hillary Clinton as the party's likely nominee in 2016, some are already beginning to question whether the nation is "ready" for a female president. Women have made enormous strides in politics in the 94 years since the Nineteenth Amendment granted them the right to vote—three out of the past five secretaries of state have been women and, in 2012, New Hampshire became the first state to be represented by an all-women delegation—but there is clearly still a great deal of progress to be made. While the 113th Congress contains a record number of women, men still hold 81% of seats and only five states currently have female governors.

A great deal of academic research has been devoted to understanding the unique challenges faced by women seeking elected office as well as their impact once in office. In this eCollection, USAPP has compiled a sample of some of our most interesting posts on this issue.
-   Natalie Allen, *USAPP Assistant blog editor, Spring 2014*

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Gender stereotypes mean that voters look for more information on women candidates' competence than they do for men

Published: 26 September 2013

Women are still massively underrepresented in public office, with less than a quarter of the House and Senate made up by women. But what role do gender stereotypes play in voters' consideration of female candidates? Using experimental studies, **Tessa Ditonto**, **Allison Hamilton** *and* **David Redlawsk** *tested what information about candidates voters searched for during presidential campaigns. They found that not only do voters, especially Republicans, look for more information about a woman's qualifications and competence for office they also look for more information about their handling of 'compassion issues' – issues that have been traditionally identified with women.*

The under-representation of women in political office is a well-documented phenomenon. While the number of women in office has risen slowly over the years, women currently comprise only about 17 percent of the House of Representatives and 20 percent of the Senate (and the numbers are even worse for executive offices). Despite this, it is still unclear how candidate gender contributes to this phenomenon and, more specifically, whether voters' stereotypes and biases toward women candidates play a role.

Certain elections seem to draw the public's attention to the existence of sexism and gender based stereotypes, which brings this question to the forefront of popular and scholarly discussions. The 2008 presidential election, for example, saw Hillary Clinton alternatively described as too masculine and aggressive to be likable and too likely to cry under pressure to be fit for office. At the same time, Sarah Palin was often portrayed in a hyper-sexualized manner and was also questioned constantly on her competence and qualifications. Both women ultimately lost their races, but to what extent did these sorts of stereotypes contribute to their respective defeats?

The current scholarship on candidate gender is largely inconclusive. Many studies of real-world elections find that overt bias toward women candidates is no longer a major obstacle to their electoral success, and that their gender can actually serve as an advantage in certain circumstances. At the same time, a large number of experimental studies find that women candidates are evaluated differently from (and often, more negatively than) men on dimensions such as character traits, perceived policy specializations, qualification for office, and electoral viability.

What does this contradictory evidence mean for women candidates, then? We argue that in order to better understand the relationship between candidate gender, voters' attitudes toward women political candidates, and electoral outcomes, we have to consider the importance of information. In other words, before they can form evaluations and decide whom to vote for, voters have to search for and encounter information about the candidates in a particular race. Only after gathering and processing a sufficient amount of information, can they reach any sort of conclusions about a candidate. At the same time, if voters come to the table with assumptions about women candidates in general, those stereotypes will likely influence the type and amount of information they seek out about the particular women running in a given race. These differences in search patterns could then ultimately influence vote choice. Rather than a direct relationship between candidate gender and vote choice, then, we argue that gender has an indirect effect on voting through information search.

In order to test this idea, we conducted a series of experimental studies using the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment, which is an online computer program that allows researchers to mimic the complex and constantly-changing nature of a political campaign's information environment. We use data from two sets of experiments, one of which was conducted in the mid-1990s and the other which was completed in the spring

of 2011. In each set of experiments, subjects were asked to participate in a "campaign" in which they were told that a number of invented candidates were running for president. We manipulated the gender of the candidates in the race, and participants were given the opportunity to learn a large amount of information about each of those candidates. Information included various policy positions, background

characteristics, endorsements from interest groups, and other politically-relevant information. After the campaign ended, participants were asked to vote for the candidate of their choice.

Our results suggest that gender matters for women candidates, and that common gender-based stereotypes may be leading voters to different search patterns when they see a woman running for office than when they see a man. For example, one common stereotype ascribed to female candidates is that they are less competent or qualified to hold office than their male counterparts. In both of our studies, participants paid more attention to competence-related information for female candidates than for male candidates. In other words, when subjects saw a woman running for office, they looked for more information that provides some cues about whether she has the qualifications to serve in office, how she has done in the past, and how she is expected to do if elected president. It seems, then, that participants in our studies were more likely to "check up" on a candidate's competence and qualifications if that candidate was a woman.

These differences in search patterns also seemed to influence participants' ultimate vote decisions. In our first set of studies, we conducted an analysis of participants' vote choice and found that the more positively a participant viewed a female candidate's traits, the more likely that participant was to vote for her. Voters did not search for more information about other traits in these studies—only competence. For this reason, we suggest that competence was a key factor in participants' voting calculations when they were presented with a female candidate.

Interestingly, while all participants searched for more competence related information for female candidates in the first studies, this trend toward more competence search was found primarily among Republicans in our later experiment (Figure 1). This suggests that, more contemporarily, Republican voters may be more concerned with a woman's competence than Democrats. There are many possible reasons for this, including differences in gender ideologies between the parties or, possibly, a residual effect from the focus on competence during Sarah Palin's candidacy.

Figure 1 – Number of items of information about candidates searched for by candidate gender
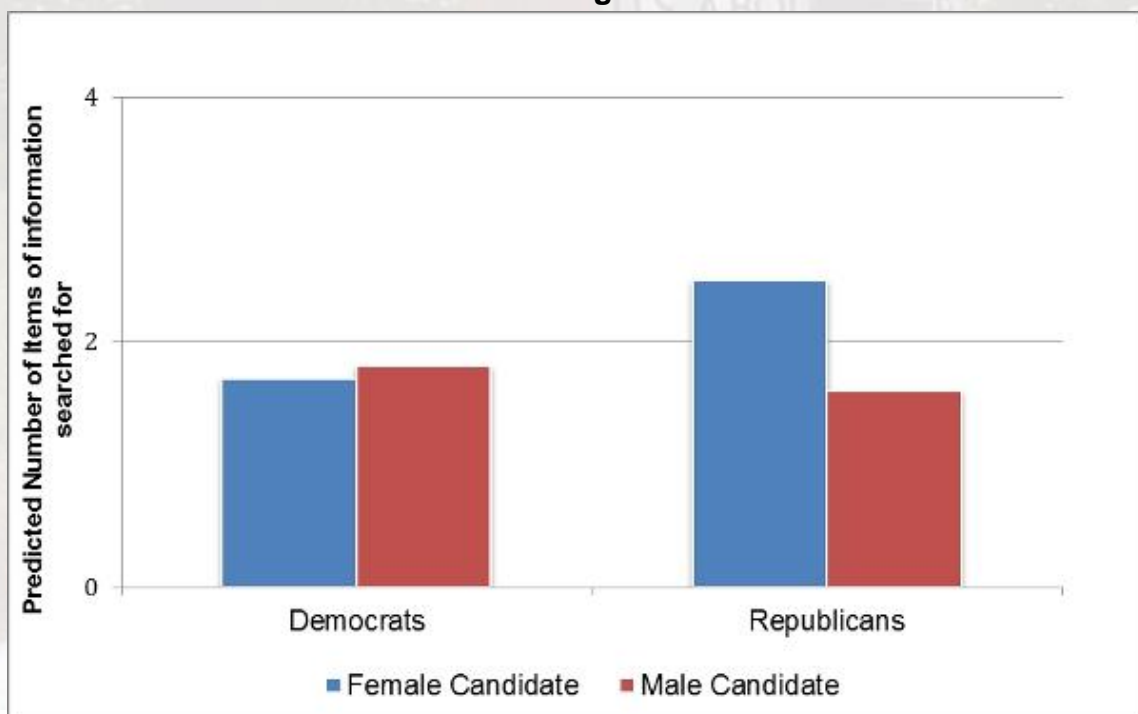
Along with an increased interest in competence, we also find that participants tended to search for more information related to "compassion issues," or policy issues that have traditionally been considered to be "women's issues," when they are presented with a female candidate than when a candidate was male (Figure 2). This makes sense given previous findings in the literature that women are considered to be more adept at handling these types of issues (such as education, child care, health care, and discrimination) than other, more "masculine" issues (like the economy, foreign policy, and crime). At the same time, male candidates received more search related to policy issues, more generally. This could serve to disadvantage female candidates in elections when compassion issues are not as salient as things like the economy and military engagements.

Figure 2 – Number of items of information about candidates searched for by issue and candidate gender
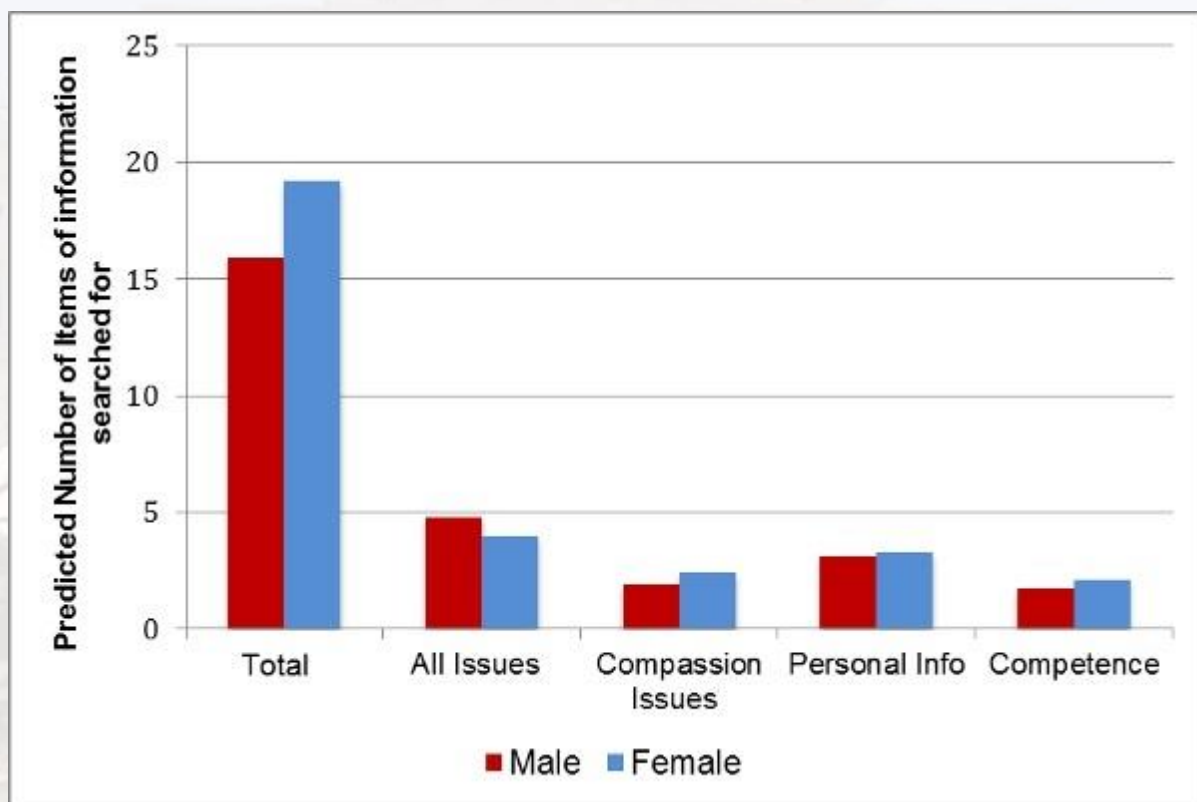
So do gender-based stereotypes affect women who run for office? Our results suggest that they do, though perhaps not in the straightforward manner we may have expected. Instead, it is through the information that voters gather during a campaign that we find a candidate's gender, and the stereotypes held by voters related to gender, to matter.

This blog post is based on the article "Gender Stereotypes, Information Search, and Voting Behavior in Political Campaigns"*, which appeared in Political Behavior.*

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There is much less gender bias against women candidates than election-year anecdotes would have us believe

Published: 26 February 2014

As the 2016 elections draw closer, discussions of how Hillary Clinton's gender will affect her presidential prospects have grown more frequent and frenzied. Using a two-wave panel survey, **Kathleen Dolan** *examines how gender stereotypes actually affect voters' decisions at the polls. She finds no evidence that beliefs about women in the abstract lead voters to evaluate individual candidates differently than their male opponents. Instead, the decision to vote for a female candidate depends on whether the voter shares her political party.*

In September of 2013, Christine Quinn, Speaker of the New York City Council, lost her bid for the Democratic nomination for Mayor of New York. The day after the primary, a *New York Times* article entitled "In Quinn's Loss, Questions about the Role of Gender and Sexuality," tried to determine how Ms. Quinn had gone from early front-runner to a third place finish. Despite saying that no one "blamed her loss wholly, or even mostly, on her gender," the reporters cataloged the ways in which being a woman might have hurt her, giving attention to the comments of voters who felt that Quinn's hair, clothing, and voice did not match their expectations of a woman candidate. Despite any number of explanations for her loss, the irresistible urge among many observers was to assume that the outcome was tied, at least to some degree, to how she was viewed as a woman.

In each election cycle, we can easily conjure up anecdotal examples of high-level women candidates who have been subjected to criticism and attacks because of their age (too young *or* too old), appearance (too beautiful *or* too plain), or family status (whether mothers *or* childless). Ask Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton, or Michele Bachmann

what it is like for women at times on the campaign trail. For support, consult the extensive literature in political science that demonstrates that people hold clear gender stereotypes about the policy competence and personality traits of women and men. Women are thought to be better able to handle "female" policies like education and health care, while men are assumed to be better at the "male" issues, like the

economic and national security. Women are seen as more compassionate and honest, men as stronger and more decisive leaders. Research often warns that gender stereotypes can work against women candidates if voters perceive them not to possess the "right" skills and abilities for office.

However, look closer and you will see that we have less evidence of the negative impact of gender stereotypes on women candidates than is assumed. For one thing, much of the work on the impact of gender stereotypes is experimental, asking subjects to react to "Susan" or "John" White or querying them about whether they support a hypothetical woman for president. While people might respond in gender stereotyped ways when asked to evaluate a hypothetical woman or man candidate, we can't assume that voters would approach real candidates in the same way. Also, assuming that gender stereotypes shape reactions to women candidates suggests that the usual influences on vote choice—political party, incumbency, spending—don't necessarily function in the same way in races that include women candidates.

These assumptions have taken hold because they are sometimes supported by anecdotal evidence from campaigns and because political scientists have long lacked appropriate data to examine whether the abstract stereotyped attitudes people possess actually shape their behaviors when they are faced with women candidates. In an attempt to gather data that would allow me to examine how people evaluate women candidates in real elections, I conducted a two-wave panel survey of 3150 U.S. adults in 29 states in 2010. The sample included respondents who had experienced either same-sex (man v. man) or mixed sex (woman v. man) races for the U.S. House of Representatives. One of the main goals of the survey was to determine whether voters employed their gender stereotypes when evaluating and choosing candidates. To allow for this, I used the two waves of the survey to separately measure respondent gender stereotypes about the policy competence (education, health care, economy, military, etc.) and personality traits (leadership, compassion, intelligence, etc.) of "women and men who run for office" as well as their evaluations of the policy competencies and traits

of the specific candidates in their elections. These data allow me to link the gender stereotypes people may (or may not) hold with their specific actions—candidate evaluations and vote choice—toward the specific candidates in their elections.

In examining the candidate evaluations and vote choice decisions people make in races where women run against men for the U.S. House, I find very little evidence that abstract gender stereotypes hurt or

help these women. There is no evidence that voter beliefs about the abilities and traits of women in the abstract lead voters to evaluate individual women candidates differently than their male opponents. In examining how people evaluate candidates, I find that none of the female and male policy or trait stereotypes people hold about women and men are related to their evaluations of Republican women candidates. Things are a bit different for Democratic women candidates, however, with voters who hold negative stereotypes about the ability of women to handle traditionally "male" issues being more likely to favor their male opponents on male policy issues. Beyond this, the most important influence on voter evaluations of all women candidates is political party, specifically, whether a voter shares the party of the woman candidate. In all circumstances, voters who share the party of a woman candidate are overwhelmingly likely to evaluate her as superior to her male opponent. This finding is perfectly in line with long-standing scholarship on the primacy of political party as an influence on electoral behavior.

The same patterns are evident when I examine the vote choice decisions people make. Despite past research that warns that gender stereotypes will cost women candidates votes, there is no evidence that this is the case. In my analysis, none of the female and male policy or trait stereotypes are significantly related to voting for or against women candidates. Instead, for both Democratic and Republican women candidates, voters rely on traditional political signals like party, incumbency, and campaign spending in making their vote choice decisions. Voters are overwhelmingly likely to support the candidate of their party, regardless of the sex of the candidate. This difference in the impact of gender stereotypes and political party correspondence on voting for women is evident from the example in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Impact of Party and Male Policy Stereotypes on Voting for Democratic Women in Mixed-Sex House Races
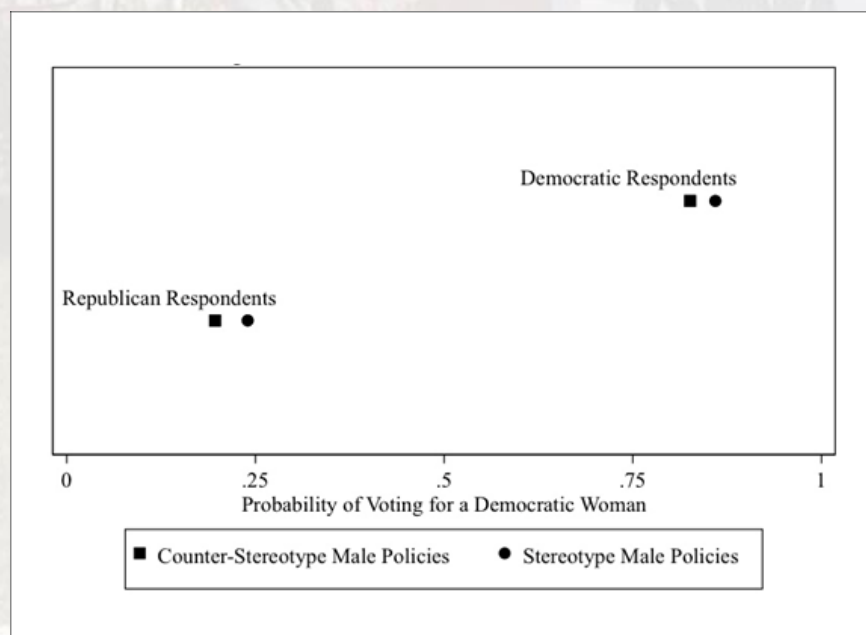
This figure compares the impact of one stereotype—ideas about men's superiority on male policy issues—with the impact of political party on a voter's willingness to vote for a Democratic woman running for the House. Here it is clear that sharing the political party of a woman candidate is vastly more important to a voter's decision to support her than are gender stereotypes that voter might hold. For example, Republican voters, regardless of their gender stereotyped ideas about who can best handle male policies, are much less likely to vote for a Democratic woman than are Democratic voters. Republicans who hold stereotypes about men's superiority on male issues have the same low likelihood (about 25 percent) of voting for a Democratic woman as do Republicans who see woman as capable of handling issues like crime and the economy. Democrats, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly likely to vote for the Democratic woman—more than 80 percent of the time—regardless of whether they see women or men as better at handling male policies. Given what we know about the centrality of party to shaping political decisions, this makes sense and demonstrates that the presence of women candidates does not disturb expected political relationships.

As we gear up to see whether Hillary Clinton, or some other woman candidate, seeks the U.S. presidency in 2016, we can be assured that, despite the occasional high-visibility example of sexism toward women candidates, there is little evidence that women are harmed by their sex.

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Kathleen Dolan is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Her research focuses on public opinion, elections, and voting behavior. Dolan is the author of *Voting for Women: How the Public Evaluates Women Candidates* and the forthcoming book *When Does Gender Matter? Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections* (Oxford University Press). Her work has also appeared in numerous peer-reviewed journals. She has served as co-editor of the journal *Politics & Gender* and as a member of the board of the American National Election Studies.

Voters only punish female candidates who use negativity if they are from the opposing party

Published: 18 March 2014

One of the widely accepted hurdles facing female candidates is navigating the fine line between seeming tough enough to hold office and appearing unfeminine and overly aggressive. **Yanna Krupnikov** *and* **Nichole Bauer** *examine whether voters actually punish female candidates for being "too tough." They find that voters' opinions of candidates from their own party were unaffected by aggressive behavior, but that they judged female opposition candidates more harshly than their male counterparts for such conduct.*

Every election cycle, more and more women run for political office and, post-election, a familiar narrative emerges about the campaigns that fail. The story usually goes like this: Voters don't like weak politicians, so female candidates must show they are tough enough to hold office. But some of the losing female candidates "acted tough." These women are labeled as overly aggressive, and voters don't like aggressive female candidates. Female candidates end up balancing on a thin tightrope—be tough, but not too tough. Be feminine, but don't be weak.

Take Linda McMahon's 2010 Senate race in Connecticut; when McMahon lost, the *Wall Street Journal* speculated that it was her "tough" image—which emerged through a series of negative ads—that cost her the race. In a post-mortem of Meg Whitman's failed gubernatorial campaign, the *Washington Post* [concluded](#) she got "tripped up by a Hillary-esque emphasis on being 'tough enough.'" And, of course, there is Hillary Clinton, the quintessential example of the "tough enough" double standard.

Linda McMahon

This is a compelling narrative, but does this hold up to closer scrutiny? Put another way, do voters systematically punish female candidates for being "too tough"? We considered this question using a national study. Our study presented people with possibly the most extreme case of a candidate "acting tough"—attacking his or her opponent. What we found suggests that female candidates certainly *could* be punished for displaying too much aggression during a campaign, but only in very specific, limited cases.

There is certainly reason to believe that the "tough enough" double standard could limit female candidates. Psychology research shows that gender stereotypes suggest women should be more nurturing, gentle, and sympathetic compared to men. When people encounter women who don't conform to this stereotype, they react negatively. Acting tough by attacking your opponent, being vocally critical, or even discussing national defense breaks with traditional stereotypes about women. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suspect that people might not like female candidates who behave in this way.

But, psychology also tells us this story might be more complicated. People need to be *motivated* before they will use stereotypes to make a negative judgment. This motivation often comes if people already dislike the person in question. Conversely, people are unlikely to use stereotypes to judge a person they like. So, if a voter actually likes a female candidate to begin with, it won't matter if she acts tough and breaks with gender stereotypes because the voter is not motivated to hold these breaks in gender stereotype against her.

We recruited 800 American adults to participate in a study that considers whether individuals actually punish tough and aggressive female candidates. We presented each participant with two candidates competing for a Senate seat. While in our full study we also consider same-gender races, here we focus on different-gender pairings. One set of participants were assigned to a simple control group where they merely learned the gender and party of the candidates, but were not told anything about the types of ads these candidates sponsored.

Another set of participants learned that both of the candidates aired negative ads, but one candidate was the instigator, meaning this candidate had "cast the first stone" and had gone negative first. The other candidate was the responder—meaning they merely responded to the initial attack. We randomly varied the gender of the instigator, sometimes a female candidate instigated, sometimes it was the male, and the party of the aggressor, sometimes it was a candidate of the participant's own party who instigated, sometimes it was the other party's candidate who went negative first.

This study lets us test the traditional media narrative that individuals do not like tough female candidates, or the alternative story we suggest. If the traditional media narrative is correct, the female candidate should suffer *every time* she goes negative regardless of her party or if she instigated the negativity. But, if the story is more complicated, then participants should only punish the female candidate if they do not like her. And, people should especially dislike an instigator of the opposing party.

We consider whether participants "punish" female candidates in based on their willingness to vote for her. One way to view punishment is to compare our participants' thoughts about the candidate when he or she is the instigator of negativity versus when that same candidate is the responder.

We use vote choice to show the level of punishment in Figure 1—the lower the bar, the fewer participants willing to vote for the instigator. We see some clear patterns. When the candidates are of the participants' own party, it doesn't matter whether they

instigated or responded to negativity. Sure, people prefer it when the candidates don't start the mudslinging, but when the candidate is of your own party the punishment is small and not statistically significant. What's more, the candidate's gender doesn't matter: people treat both female and male candidates of their own party in the same way.

Figure 1: Level of Punishment for Instigating by Candidate Gender
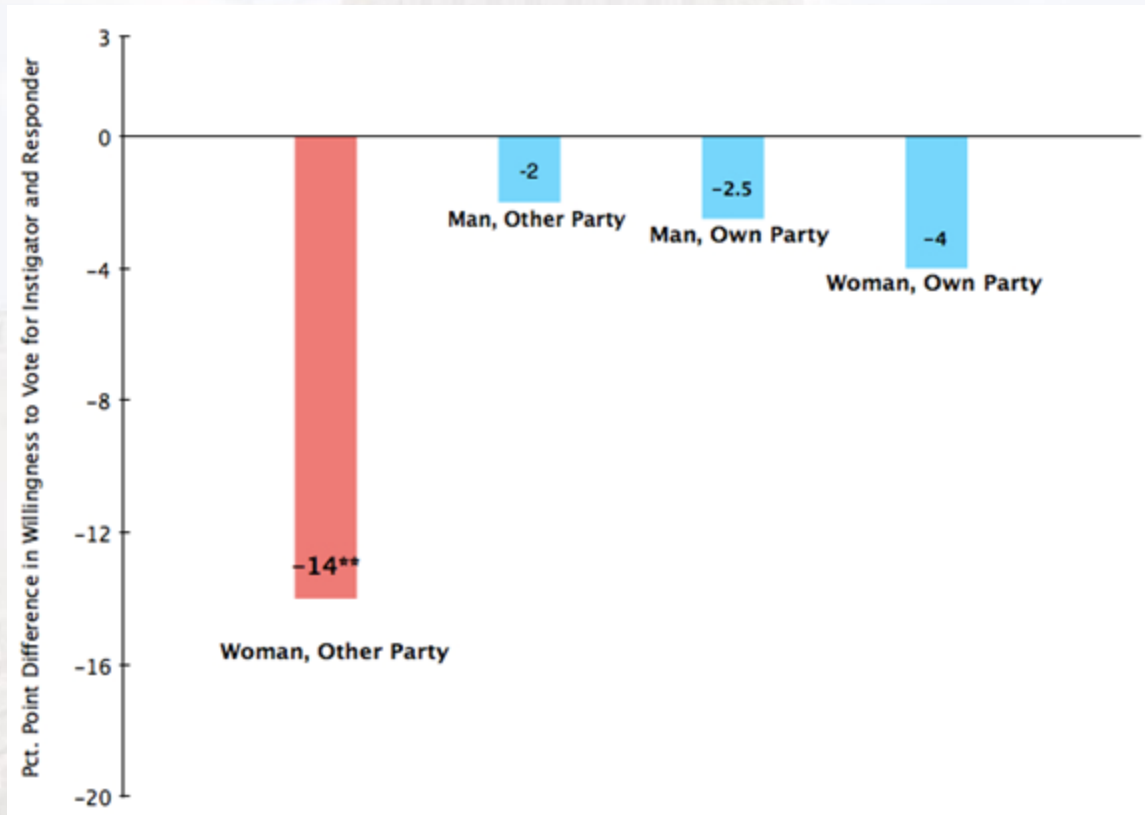
It is only when the participant is evaluating a candidate of the opposite party that gender becomes pivotal. Participants dole out the harshest punishment to a *female* candidate of the opposing party. As the Figure 1 shows, the punishment for female instigators of the opposing party is the single largest effect in our results. What's more, the participant's party didn't matter: Democrat participants harshly punished the Republican female candidate for instigating negativity and Republican participants harshly punished the Democrat female candidate for the same behavior.

Importantly, the participants are much more lenient toward the male candidate of the opposing party. Sure, they punish him when he instigates, but significantly less harshly than they punish the female candidate.

Are female candidates being punished because they broke with gender stereotypes? When we measure stereotype use, our results suggest that gender stereotypes do play a role, but only when participants didn't like the way the female candidate behaved. In

short, people were much more likely to focus on the fact that a female candidate broke gender stereotypes when that candidate was an instigator from the opposing party.

Put another way, our results suggest that voters are unlikely to punish a female candidate of their *own party* for, essentially, doing her job and trying to win an election for them. Although they may be may be more than happy to punish female instigators of the opposing party, people don't have any motivation to worry that their own candidate is breaking with gender stereotypes and acting "too tough" even when she's an instigator.

Negativity, of course, is only one example of "acting tough." Nonetheless, our study— the results of which have been replicated with an additional experiment—suggests that there is a limitation to the media story of acting tough. Sure, some people might judge female candidates for "acting tough" but its unlikely they will punish their own beloved candidate for this type of campaigning. Returning to the McMahon 2010 campaign, perhaps it wasn't that people disliked McMahon because of her negative ads, but that they judged her negative ads because they already didn't like her. After all, McMahon took a "softer approach" in 2012 and she still lost.

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Yanna Krupnikov is currently an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. Her research focuses on political communication, campaign effects and political psychology. Her work has been published in the *American Journal of Political Science, the Journal of Politics, Political Communication, Political Behavior* as well as other peer reviewed journals. As of summer 2014, Krupnikov will be on faculty at Stony Brook University.

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Photo Credit: Linda McMahon - Fortune Live Media (Creative Commons BY NC ND)

Public support for female politicians is contingent on economic and political contexts
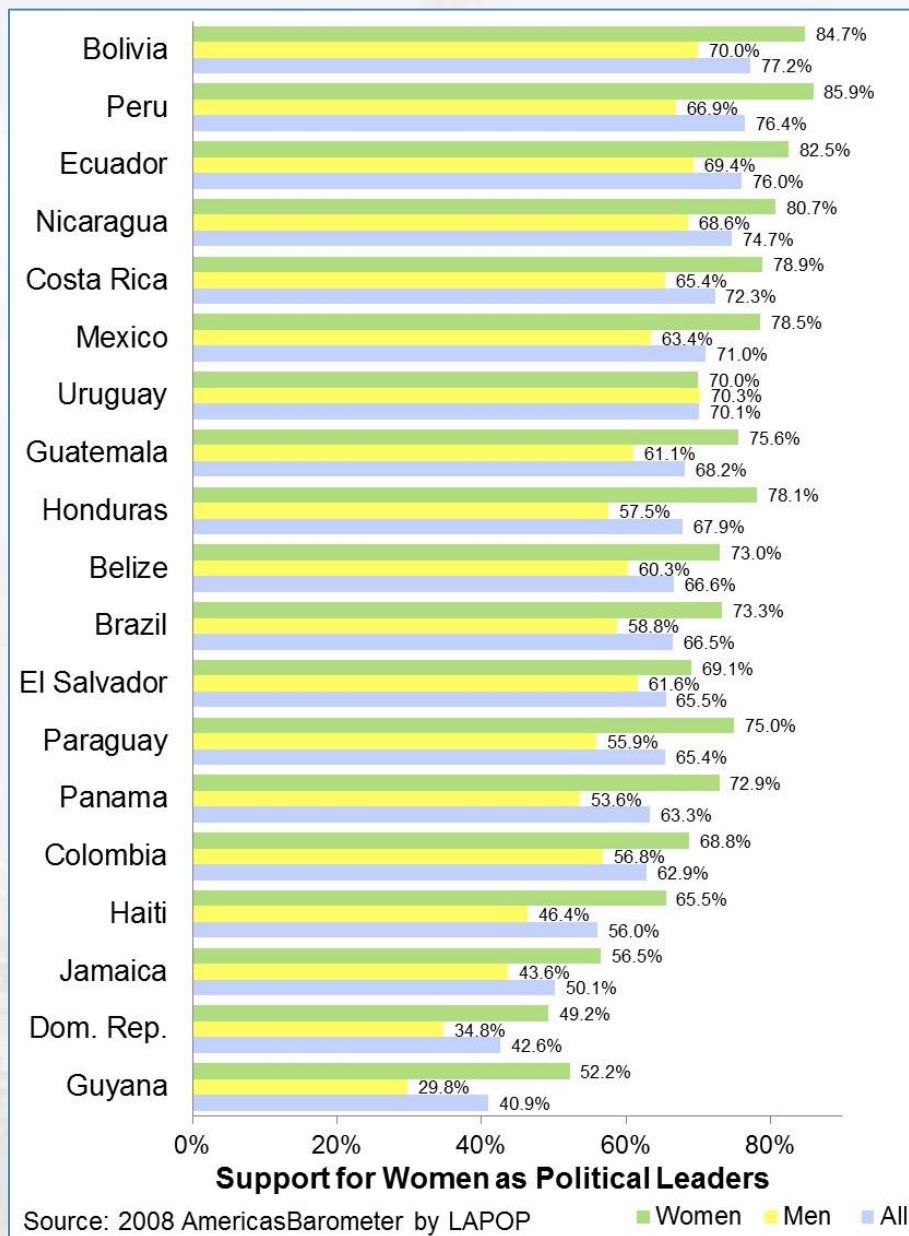
Published: 7 March 2014

While many speculate that the U.S. could elect its first female president in 2016 with Hillary Clinton, many countries in Latin America already have female leaders at the helm. **Jana Morgan** *examines if these advancements reflect wider support for female leadership or are conditional and subject to change. She finds that male attitudes towards women in politics are susceptible to elite cues and economic conditions, and that support for female leadership is higher among those who are frustrated with the status quo.*

Over the past decade, women have made significant progress in reaching national-level political office. Female presidents, prime ministers, and cabinet members now set policy in some of the world's most influential countries and fastest growing economies. Within Latin America and the Caribbean, where women have long been marginalized, five countries currently have female leaders at the helm as president or prime minister (Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago), and Chile's president-elect Michele Bachelet will be returning to office for her second term as president on March 11. Representation for women in national legislatures and cabinet offices has also been on the rise across the region.

In our recent research, Melissa Buice and I explore if these advances in representation for Latin American women are rooted in widespread, deeply held support for female leadership or if attitudes about women in politics are more contingent and thus more prone to reversal.

Figure 1: Percent who disagree that men make better political leaders than women, by country and sex

Country	Women	Men	All
Bolivia	84.7%	70.0%	77.2%
Peru	85.9%	66.9%	76.4%
Ecuador	82.5%	69.4%	76.0%
Nicaragua	80.7%	68.6%	74.7%
Costa Rica	78.9%	65.4%	72.3%
Mexico	78.5%	63.4%	71.0%
Uruguay	70.0%	70.3%	70.1%
Guatemala	75.6%	61.1%	68.2%
Honduras	78.1%	57.5%	67.9%
Belize	73.0%	60.3%	66.6%
Brazil	73.3%	58.8%	66.5%
El Salvador	69.1%	61.6%	65.5%
Paraguay	75.0%	55.9%	65.4%
Panama	72.9%	53.6%	63.3%
Colombia	68.8%	56.8%	62.9%
Haiti	65.5%	46.4%	56.0%
Jamaica	56.5%	43.6%	50.1%
Dom. Rep.	49.2%	34.8%	42.6%
Guyana	52.2%	29.8%	40.9%

Support for Women as Political Leaders

Source: 2008 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

Survey data from AmericasBarometer indicates that support for female political leadership varies considerably across Latin America and the Caribbean (see Figure 1). The Andean countries of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador express the highest levels of support, while the Caribbean countries of Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Guyana lag far behind. In all countries, except Uruguay, women have more egalitarian attitudes than men do.

In analyzing these attitudes toward female political leadership, we found that recent trends toward greater representation for women do not necessarily have their foundation in firm or immutable egalitarian values. Instead, support for female

leadership, especially among men, seems to be contingent and potentially vulnerable to reversals.

In particular, male attitudes about women in politics are susceptible to elite cues. In countries where women are nominated to and hold prominent positions in national cabinets, men are more favorable toward female leadership than in contexts where women lack ministerial influence. Thus, male attitudes are dependent upon the decisions made by political elites, and actions that undermine or ignore women's political credibility have the potential to erode men's support for female leadership.

Conversely, although we find that opportunities for female professional advancement heighten gender egalitarianism among women with professional jobs who benefit directly from this progress, we do not observe broader, society-wide dividends. Instead, we find that economic opportunities for women produce a backlash effect among men. In countries with more women in professional positions, male support for female political leadership is low. This result suggests that progress toward gender equality is not a self-reinforcing process in which women's advancement naturally promotes further gains. Rather, men seem to perceive economic progress for women as a threat to their own well-being or advancement, creating a cyclical dynamic in gender egalitarian attitudes instead of promoting steady progress (at least among men).

Attitudes regarding political equality for women are contingent in another respect as well. Namely, support for women in leadership is higher among women and men who are frustrated with the status quo. Because female candidates are viewed as outsiders who may disrupt entrenched hierarchies or reform failed institutions, those who are dissatisfied with the current state of affairs are more likely to support the idea of female leadership. However as women make gains in achieving national representation, female politicians lose this outsider status and no longer appeal to those seeking an alternative to the unsatisfactory status quo. Figure 2 shows this conditional relationship for female respondents. We observe the same pattern for males, but men have a slightly lower threshold at which they see female representation as sufficient to weaken their credibility as an anti-establishment option. (The threshold for female respondents is 34%; for men, it is 29%).

When women hold one-third or less of the seats in the cabinet (shaded in yellow), individuals who have less trust in government are more likely to support female leadership. However once women surpass one-third of the seats (unshaded) and are therefore no longer seen as outsiders who might be expected to combat the failings of existing institutions, this relationship disappears.

Figure 2: Effect of trust in government on support for female leadership, conditioned on women's presence in the cabinet (female respondents)
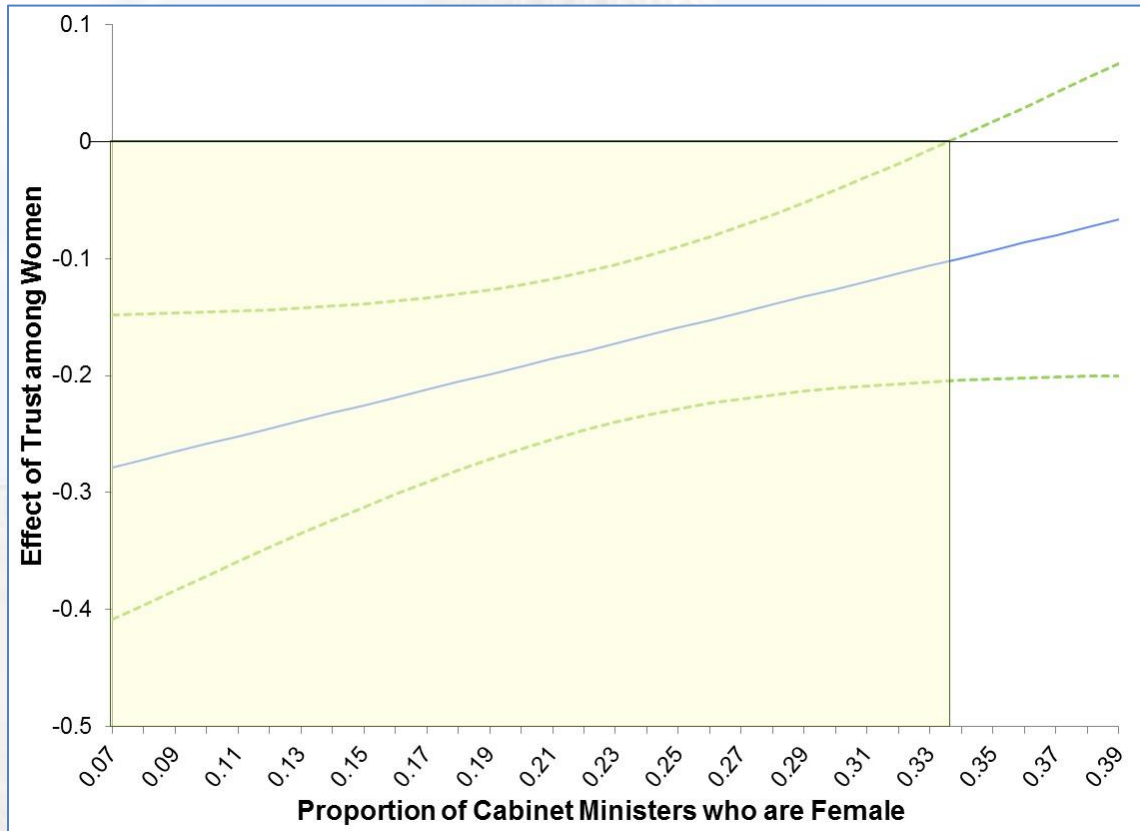
Thus, our analysis indicates that increasing support for female leadership is not an automatic process that will simply reinforce itself as a result of increased opportunities for women. Economic progress for women is actually associated with less support for female political representation. If elites exclude women from influential and visible positions within the government, public support for gender equality in politics will suffer. And somewhat disturbingly from a normative perspective, strengthening trust in government may actually undermine opportunities for women and other marginalized groups to reach power, because more satisfied citizens are less likely to be drawn to outsiders like women who may represent a challenge to the status quo.

These findings suggest several strategies for policymakers and activists who wish to promote gender equality. First, elite cues matter and politicians should take care that their actions uphold women's equality. More specifically, female representation in national government has the potential to serve as a catalyst encouraging male support for feminist goals, as having women in leadership generates positive cuing effects (provided their performance in office does not create the perception that they are just part of the failed status quo). Second, access to education and professional employment foster feminist consciousness among the women who benefit from these experiences. Thus, expanding female educational and employment opportunities may provide an avenue for strengthening gender egalitarianism, at least among women.

This article is based on the paper "Latin American Attitudes toward Women in Politics: The Influence of Elite Cues, Female Advancement, and Individual Characteristics" *which appeared in the American Political Science Review.*

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Jana Morgan is an Associate Professor of Political Science and the Chair of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the University of Tennessee. Her research focuses on issues of inequality, exclusion and representation, especially how economic, social and political inequalities affect marginalized groups and undermine democratic institutions and outcomes.

Women are more responsive to female senators' records, which may increase accountability

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Descriptive representation (being represented by someone who shares your demographic characteristics) and substantive representation (being represented by someone who shares your policy preferences) are both important components of the legislator-constituent relationship. Some have suggested that descriptive representation breeds blind loyalty to politicians, which can weaken accountability for their actions. **Philip Edward Jones** *evaluates the effects of descriptive representation of gender on female voters. He finds that while women are not more likely approve of a politician because of her gender, they are more knowledgeable about and responsive to female senators' records and adjust their assessments accordingly.*

Does the descriptive representation of gender affect how constituents respond to their legislators' substantive policy records? Previous research suggests two strikingly different expectations about how female voters respond to female politicians' records in office.

On the one hand, some argue that descriptive representation leads to "blind loyalty" — that women may inaccurately assume they agree with female politicians on policy matters, or support them for symbolic reasons that have nothing to do with policy. By this account, the descriptive representation of gender *weakens* accountability for substantive representation by lulling voters into a false sense of security about their representatives' actions.

On the other hand, some suggest that electing women may have an "empowering" effect on female voters used to being represented by male politicians. According to this theory, the
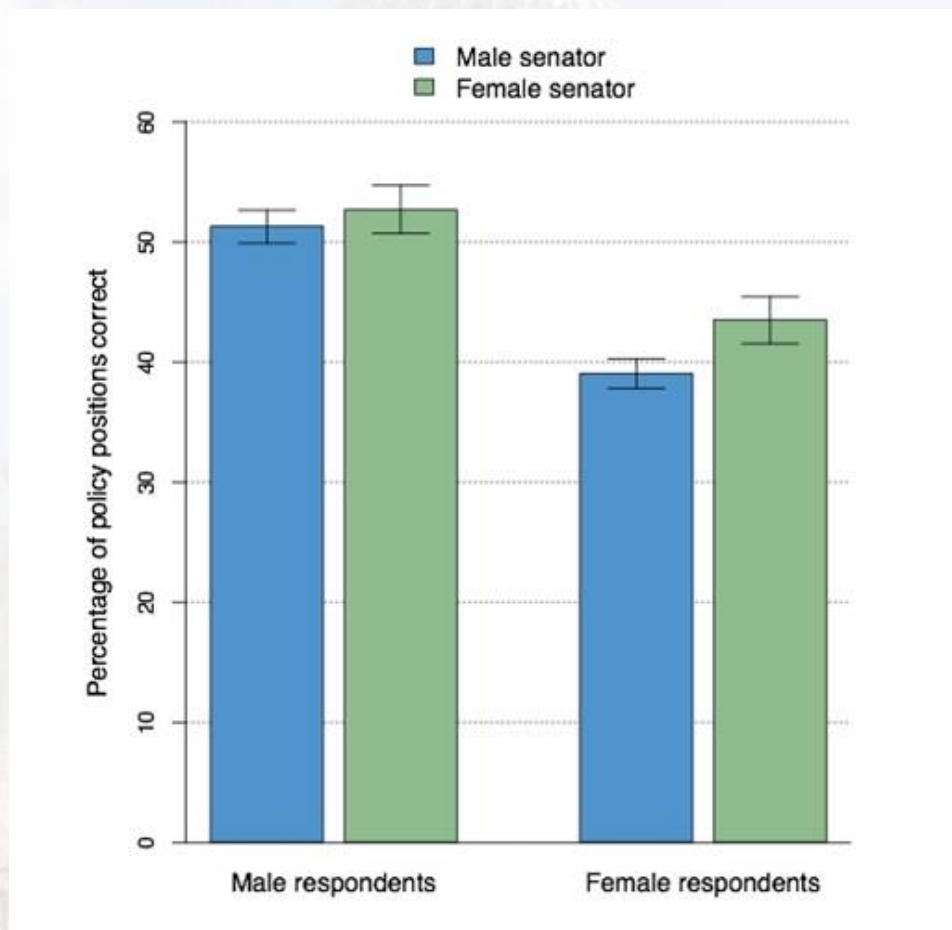
descriptive representation of gender *strengthens* accountability by engaging female voters, leading them to be more aware of and responsive to their representatives' policy record.

In my recent research, I assess these different theories using data from the 2010 CCES survey which questioned over 5,000 Americans about the policy positions their U.S. senators had taken on several high profile issues. This allows us to assess what respondents know about their senators' records, and how they use that information to evaluate them – and critically, whether female voters respond to substantive representation differently when also represented descriptively.

To determine how knowledgeable constituents are about their senators' records, I calculated the percentage of the senator's policy positions that respondents to the survey correctly identified, and used various features of the respondent, their senators, and the degree of agreement between them to predict their accuracy. This includes the party of the senator and its interaction with their gender, since it may be easier to guess the positions of female Democrats given stereotypes about their relatively more liberal voting record. It also incorporates a string of factors shown to predict general political knowledge, including education, partisanship, and interest in current events.

Figure 1 presents the predicted percentage of roll call votes correctly identified for an average respondent, given different combinations of gender and descriptive representation. The brackets around the estimates signify 95% confidence intervals. All else equal, women correctly identified a greater percentage of their senator's roll call votes when their senator was female (44%) than male (39%). In contrast, the percentage of positions male respondents correctly identified did not vary with the gender of the senator: the percentages are indistinguishable for male (52%) and female (53%) senators.

Figure 1: Predicted percentage of policy positions correctly identified, by gender of respondent and senator.


These results suggest a small, but significant, effect of descriptive representation on knowledge of substantive representation. Women represented by women were more likely to know how their incumbent senators had voted, a cornerstone of democratic accountability. Further, this result does not appear to be the effect of the "novelty" of female senators or differences between state electorates that chose these incumbents in the first place: only women, not men, are affected by the gender of the senator.

To assess whether descriptive representation influences how constituents evaluate their representatives, I fit regression models predicting approval of the incumbent's job. The models include the gender and party of senators and respondents, and the degree of policy agreement between them.

These models suggest there is no effect of descriptive representation on overall approval ratings. Holding policy agreement constant at 50% (meaning the respondent and senator agreed on half of the policies), women were equally as likely to approve of a male (probability=.32) as a female (.31) senator. Women were not more likely to approve of a politician simply because of her gender.

This does not mean that descriptive representation is irrelevant to constituents' evaluations. In Figure 2, I estimate the change in the probability of approving of the senator given a change in policy agreement from 25% to 75%. The bullets represent the estimated shifts in approval, while brackets show the 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2: Predicted changes in approval ratings given an increase in policy agreement, by gender of respondent and senator.
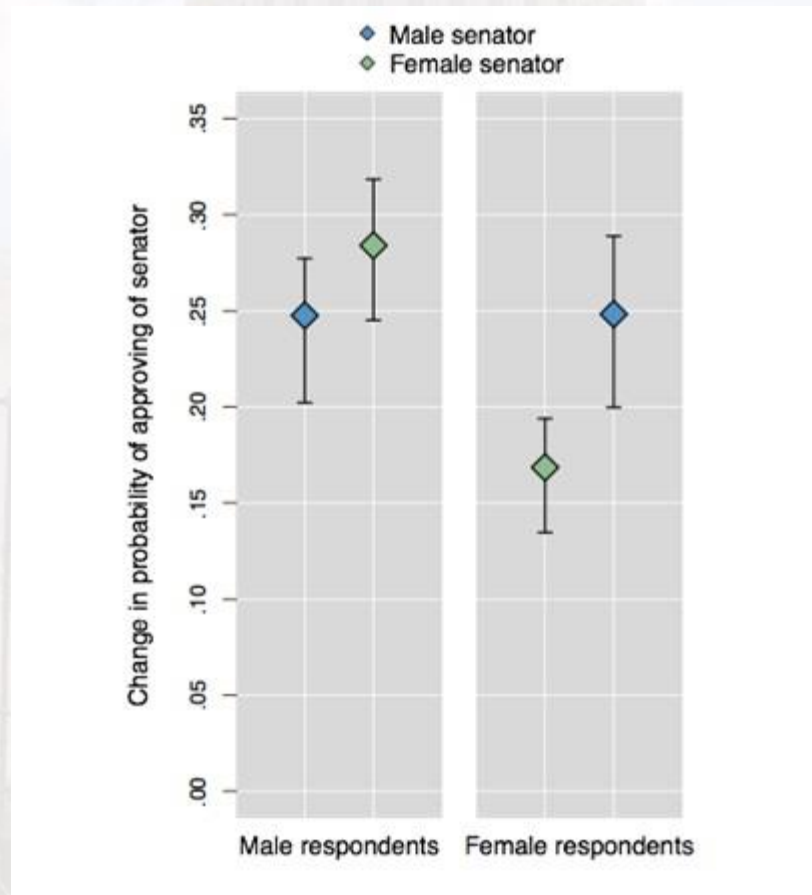
For all respondents, increasing the degree of policy agreement increases the probability of approving of the senator. Not much news there. *How much more likely* they are to approve, however, varies significantly with descriptive representation.

Female voters are more responsive to female senators' records. Shifting from 25 to 75% agreement is associated with a shift in the probability of approval of a male senator from .23 to .40, a difference of .17 [.13, .19]; for female senators the change is from .19 to .44, a difference of .25 [.20, .29]. Substantive representation has a bigger impact on women's evaluations of female senators than their evaluations of male senators.

Once again, male voters do not have different responses to male and female senators. The changes in their probability of approval are statistically indistinguishable. Women, but not men, are more responsive to female senators' records, suggesting that the

"empowering" effects of descriptive representation for under-represented groups are responsible.

Politicians have a particular interest in paying attention to the needs and interests of those citizens most engaged with politics. If descriptive representation leads to increased engagement amongst women, then it may also lead female politicians to be more responsive to their preferences. Descriptive representation in a legislature might lead to substantive representation in government policy not just because of the different priorities and positions of female legislators but also because descriptively-represented voters are more aware of and responsive to their record.

Ultimately, the descriptive representation of gender strengthens accountability for the substantive representation of policy preferences, another potential argument in favor of increasing female representation in politics.

This article is based on the paper, "[Does the Descriptive Representation of Gender Influence Accountability for Substantive Representation?](#)" *forthcoming in Politics & Gender.*

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About the author

Philip Edward Jones- *University of Delaware*
[Philip Edward Jones](#) is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware. His research is focused on public opinion and electoral behavior, and in particular how voters respond to political elites. His work on democratic accountability has appeared in numerous journals including the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, and *Political Behavior*.

In Mexico, women can take increased roles in local politics in response to the 'crisis' of migration to the U.S.

Published: 14 July 2014

Many communities in Mexico have been deeply affected by the large-scale emigration of workers to the U.S. **Abigail Andrews** *examines the effects of migration on one such village, San Miguel. She finds that far from a source of "freedom," for this community migration was a source of strain. She writes that with so many people having left the village to work in the U.S., the community's system of participatory self-government was in crisis. Meanwhile, in the U.S., migrants from San Miguel faced persecution and abuse, since most of them were undocumented immigrants. This drove several migrant women of the village to return home. When the women returned, they took on central roles in local politics, in order to protect their communal way of life and sustain an alternative to living in the United States.*

Until 1995, women in the Mixtec village of San Miguel, in the mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico, were not permitted to engage in politics. On the contrary, despite San Miguel's tradition of participatory self-governance, the village was known for excluding women. While their husbands and fathers conducted civic affairs, women were expected to stay in the home. Yet, today, as one resident put it, "It is the women who run things." In less than a decade, women, who previously could not even approach the town hall, came to be in charge of school committees, health committees, and government social programs – voting and voicing their opinions publicly for the first time. They did so in the context of mass migration to the United States. To understand the connection, I spent a year living in both San Miguel and among its migrants in California, and I conducted in depth interviews with more than 50 men and women, both in the home village and in the United States. I found that migration played a central role in driving women to take on these new roles. It did so not by inspiring them to echo US gender practices, but instead because they saw migration as a "crisis," threatening their valued ways of life. Changing gender roles offered them one way to respond.

Early in the research, I learned that every single woman who became a political leader in San Miguel had migrated to – and then returned from – the US. Like almost 90 percent of rural Mexican communities, San Miguel relies heavily on migrant work, mostly on Southern California farms. Its migrants have primarily gone to North County San Diego, an area notorious for its aggressive immigration enforcement. Because they began coming to the U.S. after the last date of legal admission, more than 70 percent remain undocumented (as of 2013), facing aggressive policing and remaining trapped in grueling, low-paying jobs. During my fieldwork in the area, migrants from San Miguel hardly left their homes for fear of arrest or deportation. Many longed to return to Mexico, and women were often the first to go back. Indeed, when I asked women about the connection between their return and participating in politics, they explained that their

difficult experiences in the U.S. gave them a renewed commitment to sustaining their village.

When these women got back to San Miguel, they realized that the village itself *also* faced a crisis. With so many people in the United States, and no one to run the many committees that made up the community's participatory self-government, it was in danger of falling apart. Even though the women had never been involved in civic affairs before – and even though they saw participation as a lot of work – they realized that someone would have to take responsibility for the village. Therefore, they began soliciting development funding from the state and taking responsibility for new "productive projects." As they got involved, women also started to challenge the longstanding corruption in the community. Given that government funding was one of their few alternatives to working in the United States, they would no longer tolerate the patterns by which a few village leaders pocketed crucial state funds.

Women did this, they explained, because they dreaded having to go back to California. As embarrassing or taxing as staffing village government might be, it provided their primary hope of sustaining a way of life they had reason to value – and a place where they could live calmly, free of the persecution and abuse that characterized their experiences in the United States. Perhaps surprisingly, men encouraged them in this effort. While men had never included women in politics before, migrant men wanted to return home from the United States as well. Yet they often stayed on as breadwinners. While men continued struggling in California to make ends meet, they realized they needed the women as allies on the ground in the village, to advocate for resources and redistribution in their absence.

The story of San Miguel helps us think differently about how migration can provoke changes in gender relationships. Most research suggests that coming to the United States gives migrant women new life chances: either, scholars argue, they may earn

new wages that finally let them stand up to their husbands and fathers. Or, they may see more egalitarian marriages among U.S. couples and be inspired to go home and ask their own male relatives to help do the dishes or sweep the floor. Yet in the example of San Miguel, migration was not a source of "freedom" for most women, but instead a cause of strain. Women and men changed their practices not by imitating people in the U.S., but instead, through their struggles to sustain an *alternative* way of life to what they saw North of the border. Thus, the story of San Miguel interrupts the idea that low-wage jobs – or exposure to US norms – are in themselves a source of "liberation." Here, it was the reverse: women gained leverage not because they assimilated, but because they *refused* to assimilate *downward*, into an undocumented underclass.

In turn, the process of development in rural Mexico was shaped and reshaped by women's active responses to the difficulty of living – excluded and exploited – as migrants in the United States.

This article is based on the paper, "Women's Political Engagement in a Mexican Sending Community: Migration as Crisis and the Struggle to Sustain an Alternative," in the August 2014 issue of Gender & Society.

A version of this article previously appeared on the Gender and Society blog.

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About the author

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Abigail Andrews is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and a faculty member in the Urban Studies and Planning Program at the University of California, San Diego. She studies the politics of migration, development, and gender, and the interrelationships between Mexico and the United States. She can be found at http://abigailandrews.com.

Photo: Emilia; San Miguel Piedras, Distrito de Nochixtlán, Región Mixteca, Oaxaca, Mexico Credit: Lon&Queta (Creative Commons BY NC SA)

Book Review: Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate by Michele Swers

Published: 2 March 2014

The current 113th Congress has the most women Senators in the body's 225 year history – 20. **Michele Swers'** *timely new book,* **Women in the Club: Gender and Policy Making in the Senate**, *is an in-depth look at the influence of gender on policymaking in government, which combines quantitative analyses of legislative behavior with qualitative interviews with senate staffers and Senators themselves.* **Elizabeth Evans** *finds the book to be a fascinating read, one that will be useful to scholars of policymaking and gendered institutionalism alike.*

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

It's been over twenty years since 1992 was hailed as the Year of the Woman, so-called because of an increase in the number of female senators elected to the US Congress. Progress with regards to women's numerical political representation, whilst not having ground to a halt, has been slow. Although it's no longer a case of Nine and Counting, currently there are just twenty women in the 100 strong chamber; put another way, 80 percent of senators are men. Of the twenty female senators, which represent the largest number elected to date, 16 are Democrat and 4 are Republican. This inter party difference is not unimportant and indeed as we might expect it shapes and influences the differing perceptions of women's issues amongst the women senators. With so few women members it's hard to make generalisations regarding the style and behaviour of the women 'in the club', which is why Michele Swers' painstaking analysis of the influence of gender on policymaking and the informal relationships and codes governing the Senate, makes for such an important and interesting book.
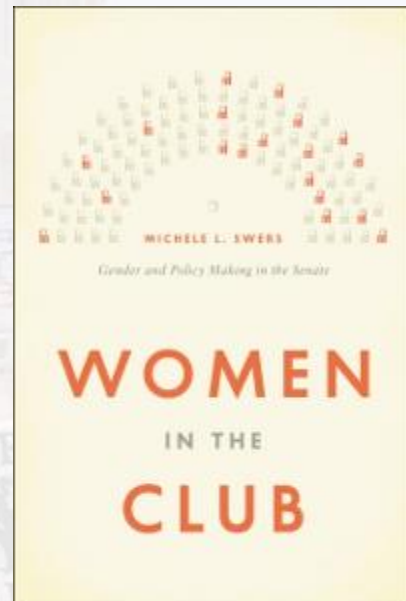
Swers, an Associate Professor of American Government at Georgetown University, explores whether or not women senators are more pro-active with regards women's issues and the extent to which gendered assumptions and expectations dictate the kinds of policy agendas that senators pursue once elected. Adopting a multi method approach, Swers analyses the often complex relationship between gender, party, seniority and electoral priorities that affect legislators' behaviour. Her research draws

upon quantitative analysis of bill sponsorship and co-sponsorship, voting records and amendments, a standard methodological approach for this type of legislative research. More interestingly, Swers supplements this data with interviews undertaken with Senate staffers and a few senators. The rich and illustrative data gleaned from these qualitative interviews adds an original and important depth to the book. In particular, the insights of staffers provide the reader with a greater understanding of the policy decisions and strategies adopted by senators including: partisan territoriality, "women's issues are not Republican issues" (p.51); collaborative partnerships between female senators, "they work together on preschool education and after-school programs, child-related issues" (p.65); and the significant constituent pressure placed on senators when it comes to votes on reproductive rights, "[Blanche] Lincoln is religious, but she is also a believer in women's rights […] she voted for the partial birth abortion ban because of the barrage of constituent input" (p.113).

The book's central claim, "that gender is a fundamental identity that affects the way senators look at policy questions, the issues they prioritize, and the perspective they bring to develop solutions" (p.3) is well supported by the quantitative data and successfully underscored by the qualitative research. The inter-party difference between Democrat and Republican women is also a key contention of the book, with Democrat women acting "as ambassadors to women voters, promoting how the party's policies help women." (p.16), whilst Republican senators frequently have to make personal compromises based on the often congruent demands of their constituents and party leadership.

The ways in which policy choices that women senators make is best illustrated through the fascinating analysis of the ongoing and high profile abortion debates. Chapter three provides a close reading of the various factors that shaped the responses of female

senators to the [Partial Birth Abortion Act 2003](#): including, constituent and party views, public opinion and the roles of the anti-choice and pro-choice lobbies. Swers observes that for Republican women, abortion is an issue that they don't want to be associated with:

> "Pro-choice Republican women seek to maintain voting records supporting reproductive rights, while avoiding alienating their pro-life colleagues. Pro-life republican women vote their preferences, while resisting efforts to elevate their role by becoming party spokespersons." (p.121)

Indeed, Swers observes that Republican men were the main proponents of the ban whilst four of the five Republican women supported positions that ran counter to the majority opinion of their party caucus.

The book covers a wide range of issues from equal pay, to national security and judicial nominations; and the breadth of the research does not come at the expense of depth. At times, the reader may find the amount of data presented somewhat overwhelming, particularly those that feature on pages 79-84 (this might have been more usefully included in an appendix), but it is useful to see the full regression tables nonetheless. The book might also have benefited from a clearer introduction to the Senate, especially for those readers not well versed in its workings. That said, for students and scholars of policy making, institutionalism and gendered institutionalism this book will make for a fascinating read. Although it confirms much of what we might have suspected vis-à-vis the competing tensions that Republican women politicians have to address, the thorough empirical analysis presented in this book allows us to more confidently think through the gendered claims frequently made by parties and politicians.

About the author

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Dr Elizabeth Evans is Lecturer in Politics at the University of Bristol. Her book, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats: Representing Women*?, was published by Manchester University Press in 2011, and she has published articles in *Parliamentary Affairs, British Politics, Representation, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* and *The Political Quarterly*. She is currently working on a comparative analysis of UK and US third wave feminism due to be published with Palgrave.

Photo: Senate Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Senator Barbara Mikulski hosts Secretary Chuck Hagel and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki for a Congressional roundtable discussion
Credit: Chuck Hagel (Creative Commons BY 2.0)

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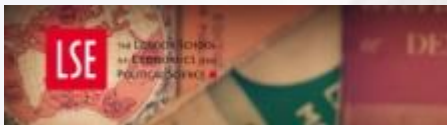
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