

Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 21: Gender Politics

Asya Magazinnik (Professor)

Readings

Women in U.S. Government in 2020

- **Congress:** 127 women of 535 (23.7%)
 - 105 Democrats, 22 Republicans
 - House: 101 women of 435
 - Senate: 26 women of 100
- **Governors:** 9 women of 50 states
 - 6 Democrats, 3 Republicans
- **Statewide elective executive office:** 90 women of 311 total positions (28.9%)
 - 48 Democrats, 40 Republicans, 2 nonpartisan
 - 16 of these 90 women (17.8%) are women of color

Source: CAWP Rutgers

Why the gender gap?

1. Fewer women run

- Pipeline: fewer women in law, business, advocacy (no longer true)
- Party leaders recruit fewer women to run
- Women prefer not to run
 - Different interests
 - Anticipation of discrimination by voters/tough campaigns
 - Assessment of own qualifications
 - Socialized into different norms of behavior

2. Women who run are unlikely to win

- Incumbency advantage
- Women face more primary challengers and are less likely to run unopposed
- Women need to exert more effort in fundraising

What is the “right” number of women in office?

- Population parity? (51%)
- Recall Mansbridge: descriptive representation
 - Different policy preferences: education, welfare, health care
 - Ability to advocate for own unique needs (abortion, reproductive health, sexual harassment, pregnancy & workplace issues)
 - Symbolic function: presence in office signals “ability to rule”

1. Women choose not to run due to **differences in self-efficacy**

- Given the same qualifications, women view themselves as less qualified for office than men

2. This is for two reasons:

- Women genuinely see themselves as less qualified to govern
- Women think they're qualified but know they must overcome voter bias

Fox, Richard L., and Jennifer L. Lawless. "Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies: A Central Barrier to Women's Equality in Electoral Politics." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 1 (2011): 59-73. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

Does it follow that women who do run for office exceed a higher “quality threshold”?

Empirical evidence: performance in office

- Legislative performance: bringing resources back to your district (*federal outlays*)
- When a woman represents a district, 9% increase in federal spending compared to when a man represents the same district
- No pre-treatment trends in federal spending

Anzia, Sarah F., and Christopher R. Berry. “The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 3 (2011): 478–93. © Wiley-Blackwell for the Midwest Political Science Association . All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

How strong is gender bias really?

- Shifts focus away from the presidency: less unusual, more data
- Analyzes survey data on people who actually experienced either single-sex (man vs. man) or mixed-sex (woman vs. man) election
 - vs. surveys that rely on hypotheticals
- Concludes that gender stereotypes play less of a role than traditional political variables: partisanship, money

Dolan, Kathleen. "Candidate Sex and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections." Chapter 1 in *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. Oxford University Press, 2014. © Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

17.20 Introduction to the American Political Process
Fall 2020

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.