Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 21: Gender Politics

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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
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

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/.